

ABSTRACT

The Empire Writes Back: Reconsidering British Discourse on the Macartney Embassy in the Narrative of Britain's Road to War with Qing China

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The Treaty of Nanjing (1842), which ended the First Opium War (1839-1842), represented the triumph of the British Empire's "universal" truth of free trade over the Qing Empire's "unnatural" restriction of foreign commerce. Popular and academic historians alike have upheld the Macartney Embassy (1792-1794), Britain's first failed attempt at diplomacy with the Qing Government, as a crucial step in the Empires' path toward War. In contrast, I argue that despite its roots in an intellectual tradition that valued free trade as the standard of cultural legitimacy, the Macartney Embassy gave rise to a discourse in which political figures conveyed optimism in the future of Anglo-Chinese relations and in which public discourse weaponized Lord Macartney's failure for domestic political criticisms. Thus, these positive images of China that circulated in the Embassy's aftermath suggest that notions of a linear, causal relationship between the Macartney Embassy and the Opium War should be reconsidered.

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THE EMPIRE WRITES BACK: RECONSIDERING BRITISH DISCOURSE ON THE
MACARTNEY EMBASSY IN THE NARRATIVE OF BRITAIN'S ROAD TO WAR
WITH QING CHINA

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A NOTE ON ROMANIZATIONS

Except for words with firmly established English spellings (e.g. Canton, Jehol), the Chinese names and words in my original writing are Romanized according to the pinyin transcription system. For example, the reign name of the sixth Qing Emperor will be stylized as “Qianlong,” as opposed to “Kien-Long” or “Chi’en-lung,” which are examples of various spellings that will appear in primary sources quoted throughout this thesis. However, when quoting primary sources, I have preserved authors’ original spellings of Chinese words. Significant problems with this approach are that authors may not maintain consistent spellings for Chinese words and that spellings will not be uniform across or even within texts. Despite these issues, I have decided that preserving authors’ words as written is ultimately more important than changing their words to prevent confusion. Instances in which there are noticeable discrepancies or inconsistencies have been marked with footnotes to provide clarity.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE MACARTNEY EMBASSY

- 1557: Beginning of Europe's maritime trade with China
1600: The English East India Company is chartered
1635: Unofficial beginning of England's trade with China
1657: Tea sales begin in England
1706: Publication of the issue of Daniel Defoe's *Review* dedicated to "The Circulation of Trade"
1713: The British East India Company gains access to Canton
1719: Publication of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*
1756: Publication of Jonas Hanway's *An Essay on Tea*
May 1757: Flint Affair
1757-1760: The Canton System formally established by series of decrees from the Qianlong Emperor
1776: Publication of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*
September 1783: The Treaty of Paris ends the War for American Independence
December 1783: William Pitt the Younger named British Prime Minister
1787: Lieutenant Colonel Charles Cathcart appointed British Envoy to China
1788: Death of Colonel Cathcart en route to China
1789: Beginning of the French Revolution
1790: Publication of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*
1791: Lord George Macartney consulted on the prospect of another mission to the Qing Court and appointed British Ambassador to China
September 1792-September 1794: The Macartney Embassy
1795: Publication of Aeneas Anderson's travelogue
1796: The Qianlong Emperor abdicates in favor of his son, the Jiaqing Emperor
1797: Publication of Sir George Leonard Staunton's official account of the Embassy
1798: Publication of Samuel Holmes's travelogue
1799: Death of the Qianlong Emperor
1804: Publication of Sir John Barrow's *Travels in China*
1808: Publication of Sir John Barrow's account of Lord Macartney's life and career
1816: Lord William Amherst appointed British Ambassador to China
1816-1817: The Amherst Embassy
1820: The Jiaqing Emperor dies and is succeeded by his son, the Daoguang Emperor
1833: Parliament abolishes the East India Company's monopoly on the China trade
1834: Napier Incident
1836: Publication of James Matheson's *The Present Position and Prospects of the British Trade with China*
1837-1839: Lin Zexu campaigns to purge opium from the Qing Empire
June 1839: Lin confiscates and destroys British opium at Humen
September 1839: Beginning of the First Opium War
1842: The Treaty of Nanjing ends the First Opium War

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The British

Lord George Macartney (1737-1806): British Ambassador to the Qing Court, 1791-1794; former Envoy to Russia, 1764-1768; MP for Armagh Borough and Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1768-1775; Governor of Grenada, 1776-1779; MP for Bere Alston, 1780-1781; Governor of Madras, 1781-1785

Lord Henry Dundas (1742-1811): Home Secretary of Great Britain, 1791-1794; President of the Board of Control, 1793-1801; formed and commissioned the Macartney Embassy

William Pitt the Younger (1759-1806): Prime Minister of Great Britain, 1783-1801

King George III (1738-1820): King of Great Britain, r. 1760-1820

Sir George Leonard Staunton (1737-1801): Secretary for Lord Macartney and author of the British Government's official account of the Macartney Embassy

George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859): Accompanied his father, Sir George Leonard Staunton, to China and would become a leading expert on China in Britain during the nineteenth century

Sir John Barrow (1764-1848): Comptroller for the Embassy and author of the popular *Travels in China* (1804) documenting his observations while in China with Lord Macartney

Sir Erasmus Gower (1742-1814): Commander of Lord Macartney's mission to China and commanding officer of the *HMS Lion*, the warship that accompanied the British delegation to the Qing Court; his papers served as source material for Staunton's official account of the Embassy

Aeneas Anderson (?-?): Lord Macartney's valet during the mission to China and author of *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China*

Samuel Holmes (?-?): Sergeant-Major in the XI Light Dragoons, which accompanied the British delegation to China, and author of *The Journal of Mr. Samuel Holmes*

The Qing

The Qianlong Emperor (1711-1799): sixth Emperor of China's Qing Empire, r. 1735-1796

Heshen (1750-1799): high-ranking Manchu official in the Qing Court and close advisor to the Emperor; despised by the British for his alleged corruption

Zhengrui (?-?): Qing Legate tasked with escorting Macartney to Jehol; drew the ire of Staunton

The Kowtow: component of the Qing Court ritual that required foreign embassies to perform a series of three genuflections and nine bows before the Emperor

Wang and Chou: Qing officials tasked with attending to the needs of the British Embassy; formed strong friendships with Lord Macartney

TIMELINE OF THE MACARTNEY EMBASSY

26 September 1792: Lord Macartney and his company depart from Portsmouth

1793

3 July: The British arrive at Zhoushan

15 August: Zhengrui introduces Lord Macartney to Qing Court ceremony and the kowtow

19 August: Lord Macartney reopens discussions of the kowtow with Wang and Chou

21 August: The British arrive at Beijing

24 August: The British delegation and Qing officials argue over whether the British manufactures were to be considered presents or tribute

29 August: Lord Macartney lists his objections to performing the kowtow

2 September: The British depart Beijing for Jehol

8 September: The British arrive at Jehol

8-9 September: Qing officials repeatedly urge Lord Macartney to perform the kowtow

10 September: Lord Macartney's request to dispense with the kowtow in favor of the genuflection he would perform before King George III is granted

11 September: Lord Macartney is granted permission to place the King's letter directly into the Emperor's hand

14 September: In his first audience with the Emperor, Lord Macartney presents the Emperor with the letter from King George III and notices the presence of other ambassadors offering tribute

17 September: The Emperor's birthday

17-18 September: The British attend festivities for the Emperor's birthday

21 September: The British depart Jehol for Beijing

26 September: The British arrive at Beijing

30 September: The Emperor returns to Beijing

1 October: The British delegation and Qing officials have another dispute over the status of the British presents

2 October: Macartney converses with Heshen and requests to stay at the Qing Court indefinitely and at the King's expense to negotiate

3 October: Macartney receives a letter from the Emperor and understands that the Qing desire his departure

3 October: Macartney sends a note to Heshen listing 6 requests

4 October: The British are asked to leave by 7 October

7 October: Macartney receives the Emperor's answer to the British requests; the British leave Beijing

19 December: The British arrive at Canton

5 September 1794: The British return to London

INTRODUCTION

In praise of Stephen Platt's *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age* (2018), a reviewer for *The New York Times* opined that because the Western world's increasing entanglement with China has rekindled curiosity about the Opium War (1839-1842), "every China-watcher will want to read Stephen Platt's fascinating and beautifully-constructed new book." The reviewer then explained that Platt's narrative of Britain's path to war with the Qing includes "the usual highlights, like Lord Macartney's trade embassy of 1793."¹ This conception of the Macartney Embassy (1792-1794) as an indispensable step toward war encapsulates the prevailing way of thinking about Macartney's mission to the Qing Court, whether by historians or "China-watchers." While the Embassy is important as the first diplomatic contact between the British and Qing Empires, this thesis argues that Britain's discourse on the Macartney Embassy between the Embassy's formation and the publication of John Barrow's *Travels in China* (1804)² failed to see the Qing as a natural enemy. Therefore, in contrast to both historiographic and popular perceptions, the Embassy was not a major stop along Britain's path to justifying war with the Qing less than fifty years later.

Despite the Macartney Embassy's intellectual roots in a discourse that promoted economic circulation and free trade as universal values, reactions to the Embassy both by those sent to China and by the British public contained a set of heterogeneous images that refused to view the Qing as an inevitable adversary. First, the journal Lord Macartney

¹ Ian Morris, "The Opium War and the Humiliation of China," *The New York Times*, July 2, 2018.

² For a discussion of why my study stops before Barrow's journal, see Conclusion.

kept during his time in China maintained a focus on diplomacy, not economics, that allowed him to preserve language of equality between the British and Qing even after his diplomatic failure and to promote optimism in Britain's future relationship with the Qing. The travelogues produced by others who accompanied Macartney conveyed positive messages about China in an attempt to promote the preexisting trade relationship in Canton. Then, in British public discourse on the Embassy, the British Government and Britain's European rivals, and not the Qing, were the most frequently criticized. Therefore, as Britain's immediate reactions to the Macartney Embassy ranged from promoting Britain's existing trade relationship with China to directing key criticisms at places other than the Qing, the variety of images and messages resulting from the Embassy were incapable of justifying war.

Historical Background

By the midpoint of the eighteenth century, the Qing Empire (1636-1912) had confined its foreign maritime trade to the port at Canton. Thus, the series of decrees by the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735-1796) in the late 1750s and early 1760s that established the Canton System and inaugurated the Canton Era (ca. 1757-1842) formalized what had already been happening in practice. Apart from officially confining the trade to Canton, two other elements of this formalization were fundamental to outsiders' views of the Canton trade.³ Under the security-merchant system, *Hong* merchant houses served as the trade's official mediators, monopolizing the commerce and limiting foreigners' choices

³ For a comprehensive analysis of the Canton Trade, its inner workings, and its interactions with foreign traders, see Paul Van Dyke, *The Canton Trade: Life and Enterprise on the China Coast, 1700-1845* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012); and Paul Van Dyke, *Merchants of Canton and Macao: Politics and Strategies in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Trade* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

of business partners to less than a dozen merchants.⁴ In addition, the Court restricted both the times of year at which foreigners were allowed to trade and reside in Canton as well as the locations they were permitted to travel while there.⁵

For the British trading in China, the East India Company (EIC) monopolized the trade and constituted a *de facto* sovereignty for the British Government in its Asian holdings.⁶ Although this sovereignty was most closely associated with Britain's increasing foothold in India, some of those associated with the EIC had attempted aggressive pushes into China. A group of British sailors had sailed northward along the Chinese coast in 1757 to open trade in Zhoushan.⁷ In 1759, James Flint (1720-?), a British sailor working for the EIC in Canton, took the initiative to sail through the interior of China to appeal directly to the Emperor in Beijing to address the Canton officials' alleged corruption.⁸

While the British were increasingly unhappy with the Canton System, they had no choice but to accept it. Diplomacy was initially the method by which the British attempted to seek changes to the Qing's trade policies. In 1787, the Pitt Government (1783-1801) organized a diplomatic mission to the Qing Court under Colonel Charles Cathcart (1759-1788). This mission ended before reaching China after Cathcart died in

⁴ William Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 141.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 142

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23. See also, P.J. Marshall, "Presidential Address: Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century: Reshaping the Empire," *Transactions of the Royal History Society*, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 1-18.

⁷ Van Dyke, *Canton Trade*, 17-18.

⁸ Stephen Platt, *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 2017), 3-5.

Sumatra. Subsequently, George Lord Viscount Macartney, Baron of Lissanoure (1737-1806), suggested to Home Secretary Lord Henry Dundas (1742-1811) that another mission be sent. Macartney himself was appointed Ambassador in 1791 to helm an embassy aimed at redressing various grievances stemming from the Canton trade. Lord Macartney was specifically tasked with

free[ing] from the restraints and extortions laid on and exercised by the officers [in Canton]... to trade to the ports nearest to the place of growth of the commodities wanted... to have the duties on imports and exports taken off, or reduced to the rate at which they were levied when trade commenced... to have the English traders put at least on the same footing as the Portuguese, and particularly that they shall be allowed, either on the continent of China, or on some adjacent island, a convenient depot... to procure an express edict from the Emperor... preventing in future the demand that an innocent man should be delivered up as a substitute to suffer the punishment due to a criminal... [and] to increase the imports into China from Great Britain... by procuring the repeal of such regulations as might tend to discourage the purchase of British manufactures.⁹

However, the Qing Government rejected all of Macartney's requests. Although Lord Macartney met with the Emperor three times between August 21, 1793, and October 7, 1793, the negotiations that Macartney and the British expected never occurred. The British and Qing possessed different views of how diplomacy was to be conducted. As James Hevia has elucidated, the British believed that diplomatic ceremony served as a recognition of state-to-state equality before conducting diplomatic "business," but the Qing believed that ceremony reinforced the Emperor's "supreme lordship" and established a "cosmo-moral dominion while extending Qing rulership spatially and

⁹ Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926-29), 2:214-215. Also see Henrietta Harrison, "The Qianlong Emperor's Letter to George III and the Early-Twentieth Century Origins of Ideas about Traditional China's Foreign Relations," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 122, no. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Oxford University Press for the American Historical Association, June 2017): 680-701; and E.H. Pritchard, "The Instructions of the East India Company to Lord Macartney on His Embassy to China and His Reports to the Company, 1792-4," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (London: Cambridge University Press for the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, April 1938): 201-230.

temporally.”¹⁰ Thus, while Macartney was granted an audience with Emperor, an alteration to the kowtow ritual, and permission to place his list of requests directly into the Emperor’s hand, the British had “served simultaneously their own king and the supreme lord” and participated in “appropriate ritual relations.”¹¹ In response to the Embassy’s requests, the Emperor asserted the Qing’s independence and self-sufficiency, declaring in his letter to King George III that

the Celestial Empire... does not value rare and precious things... we have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country’s manufactures... You, O King, should simply act in conformity with our wishes by strengthening your loyalty and swearing your perpetual obedience so as to ensure that your country may share the blessings of peace.¹²

Historiography

Most scholarship sees the Embassy and the conceptions of China that eventually justified the Opium War as inextricably linked. In other words, scholarship is consistent with *The New York Times* in labelling the Embassy as a step in the path toward war. The earliest notable example of this is in *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834* (1926-1929), in which Hosea Ballou Morse (1855-1934) commented on the documents and correspondences that shaped early Anglo-Chinese relations from a distinctively pro-British perspective. At the end of his discussion of Macartney’s Embassy, Morse declared that Britain’s requests in 1793 were “the modest Charter of Rights for the English trade, put forward in 1793 and won by force of arms in

¹⁰ James Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 55, 75-76.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹² “An Edict from the Emperor” in George Macartney, *An Embassy to China*, ed. J.L. Cranmer-Byng (London: The Folio Society, 2004), 253-254.

1842.”¹³ However, by not demonstrating the actual impact of the Embassy or Lord Macartney’s failure on British policy toward China, Morse simply assumed a relationship between the Embassy and the Opium War because some of Macartney’s requests, such as extraterritoriality, were mirrored in the Treaty of Nanjing (1842). The consequence of this assumption is that Morse’s claims impose the Opium War upon the Macartney Embassy by looking to the War as the fulfillment of the EIC’s requests. Yet Morse disregards the Embassy’s potential impacts on policy or public discourse.

In his postmodern assessment of Qing Court ritual during the Embassy, James Hevia places the Embassy within the periodization of the causes of the Opium War because of its rhetorical consequences. Hevia contends that “the British assault on China in the nineteenth century was a repetition of prior discursive violence; China was destroyed in writing well before a single British gun was leveled at a Chinese person.”¹⁴ Arriving at this conclusion, he correctly observes that Macartney believed himself to have been successful in not performing the kowtow, but he ultimately places too much of an emphasis on the differences between the British and Qing. Although Macartney highlighted these differences in the early parts of his journal, Hevia neglects to evaluate Macartney’s conclusion that those differences were not necessarily negative. He thus leaves room for a more complete evaluation of Macartney’s message and its potential policy ramifications. Furthermore, Hevia’s core argument that “actors on both sides of the encounter were quite aware that what was at stake were competing and ultimately incompatible views of the meaning of sovereignty and the ways in which relations of

¹³ Morse, *Chronicles*, 2:225.

¹⁴ Hevia, *Cherishing*, 73.

power were constructed” assumes that the Embassy exposed a fundamental truth about sovereignty that could only be arrived at through diplomatic relations.¹⁵ While conversations about national sovereignty would feature prominently in nineteenth-century discourse on China and opium, Hevia neglects to show how the Embassy itself directly changed or influenced conversations about sovereignty.

Literary scholar David Porter has similarly connected the Embassy and the War in his scholarship on Britain’s literary tradition of free trade by placing the Embassy’s travelogues within that tradition. He largely refers to the negative characterizations of China featured in *Travels in China*, written by the Embassy’s Comptroller John Barrow (1764-1848).¹⁶ Porter correctly argues that Barrow’s work maintains continuity with earlier perceptions of free trade in eighteenth-century Britain that increasingly saw free trade as a universal truth, but he largely omits meaningful discussions of the other travelogues. His primary use of Barrow both disregards the diversity of perspectives that could nuance his argument and potentially misrepresents the images of China conveyed by those present during the Embassy. His argument can be further nuanced by a consideration of the prominent satirical, anti-imperialist, and other fictional literature produced in response to the Embassy during the 1790s. Thus, Porter’s argument for a “consistency of images” between late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writings sidelines, and therefore oversimplifies, the specific and vibrant discourse on the Embassy in favor of larger discussions of commerce.¹⁷ In addition, Porter correctly observes in his

¹⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶ David Porter, “A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Eighteenth Century Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, Winter 2000): 181-199.

¹⁷ Ibid., 194.

book that “forceful means of opening China’s doors to foreign trade that would eventually prevail in the nineteenth century received little serious consideration prior to the Amherst embassy of 1816.”¹⁸ This perspective, then, can be applied to make an argument of larger historiographic significance by demonstrating how the discourse on the Embassy specifically deviated from the eighteenth-century discourse of free trade and what images it alternatively offered.

More recently, John Keay has assigned the Embassy a place of supreme importance in Britain’s path to war with the Qing. In his book that surveys Chinese history, Keay situates the Embassy at the beginning of his chapter entitled “Death Throes of Empire.”¹⁹ In doing so, he implicitly marks the Embassy as the inciting incident for the final act of imperial China. Accordingly, he argues that “Macartney’s Embassy would come to be seen as the harbinger of China’s humiliation.”²⁰ Though Keay could be referring to the Embassy’s impact on Qing policy, his version of events neglects any British perspectives on Macartney’s failure. Recognition of those perspectives should be critical to his implication that the Embassy resulted in a war because it would allow him to show how the British aggressors weaponized the Embassy to justify war. Moreover, his forty-year time jump from the Embassy to the abolition of the EIC monopoly in 1834 undermines his argument by seeming to suggest a shorter-term periodization of the War’s causes that would inexplicably exclude the Amherst Embassy (1816-1817). Keay, then, gives the Embassy outsized influence because it was Britain’s first diplomatic encounter

¹⁸ David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001), 203.

¹⁹ John Keay, *China: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 446-449.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 448.

with the Qing, ignoring both the Embassy's short-term ramifications as well as the other events that might have been important to Britain's eventual choice to go to war.

Arguing for a periodization of the causes of the Opium War based on changes and continuity in political attitudes toward the Qing, Hao Gao has positioned the Embassy at the beginning of this periodization because it was Britain's first encounter with the Qing. While he correctly contends that the Embassy resulted in little to no changes in British policy toward the China trade, he sees the Embassy, along with Lord Amherst's later embassy, as ultimately demonstrative of diplomacy's uselessness.²¹ While Gao has solid basis for arguing that the two failed embassies exposed Britain's inability to accomplish their goals through diplomacy, he fails to connect Macartney's Embassy directly with the Opium War. Specifically, despite his focus on political attitudes toward the Qing, Gao does not account for the absence of relevant references to Macartney in the Hansard during the 1830s, which would be crucial to determining the Embassy's specific impact on Parliament's decision to initiate a war. Thus, Gao's periodization fails to show how the Embassy directly impacted Britain's decision to justify war other than broadly associating a series of diplomatic failures with a resort to arms. Even within Gao's framework, the Amherst Embassy should be seen as holding a place of greater importance in the path toward the War because it was a later attempt at diplomacy.

In his recent book on the causes of the Opium War, Stephen Platt situates the Embassy within an increasingly aggressive movement to impose the British value of free trade upon the Qing. For Platt, Flint's journey to Beijing in 1759 marked the beginning of

²¹ Hao Gao, "Going to War Against the Middle Kingdom? Continuity and Change in British Attitudes towards Qing China (1793-1840)," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 45, no. 2 (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge Publishing, December 2017): 215.

the path that would inevitably lead to war against the Qing. Thus, Macartney's Embassy was simply another means by which the British attempted to impose their vision of economic policy upon the Qing.²² Yet Platt's highlighting of Macartney's personal bitterness and Britain's political embarrassment largely disregards the larger picture Macartney painted of China and the Qing. It also assigns outsized influence to Macartney's failure comparative to the other issues and perspectives prominent in conversations about the Embassy. More broadly, Platt's emphasis on the economic forces behind the War ignores the variety of other messages and critiques that circulated amongst the British public in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with little to no focus on economic policy. As a result, Platt's economic narrative is too simplistic.

The only previous scholarship on Britain's immediate post-Embassy public discourse is literary scholar Laurence Williams's article on the satirical literary discourse that the Embassy sparked. Williams argues that since British satire mocked the Embassy as an expensive folly and a distraction from more pressing concerns, "these texts turn the critical focus... onto Macartney and his officials."²³ While the purpose of this thesis is not to refute Williams's key findings, his scholarship can be built upon to construct an argument of larger historiographic significance by both placing satirical and fictional literature in conversation with periodical and other nonfictional discussions and considering conversations about the Embassy in the context of the French Revolution (1789-1799) and other simultaneously occurring events.

²² Platt, *Twilight*, 3.

²³ Laurence Williams, "British Government under the Qianlong Emperor's Gaze: Satire, Imperialism, and the Macartney Embassy to China, 1792-1804," *Lumen*, vol. 32 (Montreal: University of Montreal Press, 2013): 85-107.

Consequently, I propose that Britain's reactions to the Embassy should be contextualized by the Embassy's roots in the eighteenth-century discourse on free trade to determine how it deviated from the perceptions of China and the role of trade in a society that that discourse encouraged. This perspective preserves the idea that both the Embassy and the Opium War were instigated in an attempt to compel the Qing to adopt free trade policies. This approach also introduces to the scholarship a study of the Embassy that more prominently considers immediate reactions to the Embassy in both the political and public spheres as well as in fictional and nonfictional writings. As a result, this study frees the Embassy from having the Opium War, and therefore hindsight, imposed upon it and instead allows the Embassy to be contextualized by simultaneous events such as the French Revolution that influenced how Macartney's negotiations and failure were considered. Lastly, this study elucidates the places of writings on the Embassy relative to other eighteenth-century writings. An evaluation that incorporates this approach leads to the conclusion that while the road to the Opium War includes Britain's eighteenth-century discourse on free trade and the incorporation of those ideas into imperial policy during the 1780s, conversations about the Macartney Embassy refrained from arriving at a negative view of the Qing because of their trade policies and should accordingly not be thought of in the same way as the ideas that justified the War.

Overview of Argument

Chapter 1 argues that Britain's eighteenth-century literary discourse on free trade provided the background for, and manifested itself in, the Embassy's formation. In the early 1800s, writers such as Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) and Jonas Hanway (1712-1786) constructed body metaphors in their discussions of trade to portray societies with

restrictive trade policies as unnatural and backward. Similarly, in explaining his economic philosophy in *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith (1723-1790) utilized a linear conception of history to propose that the Qing's trade policies made the Chinese a stagnated people stuck in antiquity and requiring the help of an outside force. Then, as British imperial policy became more oriented toward capitalism and free trade in the 1780s, the planning of Macartney's Embassy reflected the eighteenth-century discourse's ideas about British superiority and the supremacy of free trade.

Chapter 2 contends that Macartney's journal placed diplomacy and diplomatic procedure, not economics, as central thematic elements of his journal. This thematic focus allowed Macartney to sustain language of equality between the British and Qing despite his diplomatic failure. Initially guided by the European notion that diplomatic ceremony functioned as a recognition of state-to-state equality, Macartney misunderstood the Qing's tributary system of diplomacy. In an attempt to understand these differences, Macartney normalized the Qing's apparently suspicious treatment of the British by referring to the dictates of their Court precedent. Moreover, despite his failure to open the negotiations he desired with the Qing Court, he continued to portray the British and Qing as equals, generating optimism in the future of Britain's relationship with the Qing.

Chapter 3 asserts that the other travel narratives published during the Embassy promulgated a positive view of China in an attempt to preserve Britain's preexisting trade with China. Aeneas Anderson defended the Qing against potential accusations of hostility toward the British, believing that their civilization was equally valid as Britain's and deserving of a fair hearing. Similarly, Samuel Holmes openly rejected notions of British superiority over the Qing by favorably comparing the Qing with other civilizations. Sir

George Leonard Staunton (1737-1801), writing the official account of the Embassy for the British Government, saw the Embassy as the first step in Britain's forging of a closer relationship with the Chinese and therefore advocated for patience with the Qing and their trade policies. These positive images of China thus promoted little to no change in Britain's preexisting relationship with the Qing.

Chapter 4 proposes that the satirical and periodical representations of the Embassy that the British public consumed during the 1790s were decisively critical of the British and Britain's European rivals while refraining from serious attacks on the Qing. Satirists Peter Pindar and James Gillray each criticized the ideas of British elitism and superiority that they believed motivated the Embassy. Abolitionist and anti-imperialist writer William Shepherd saw the Embassy as emblematic of imperialism's moral evils. Newspaper discourse on the Embassy deflected blame from the Qing by blaming the French Revolution, intra-European rivalries, foreign influence, or specific Qing officials for unjustly manipulating the Qing. Lastly, *Gentlemen's Magazine* leveled decisively inward-focused criticisms, repeatedly critiquing the EIC in portraying the Embassy as a costly and pointless folly.

The Conclusion argues that as a result of these various reactions to the Embassy, the narrative of Macartney's mission to the Qing Court was ultimately relegated to the periphery when considering the rhetorical trends that Britain used to justify war. To be able to justify a war, the British needed both negative images of China more broadly and consistently as well as discussions about national sovereignty. Barrow's *Travels in China* commandeered the narrative of the Embassy with its decisively negative imagery of the Qing as an arrogant and stagnated society. Then, the Amherst Embassy, Britain's next

attempt at diplomacy with the Qing, resulted in a greater embarrassment for the British than had the Macartney Embassy. Coupled with new attitudes of imperial supremacy in the wake of victories such as the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), this embarrassment was a key contributor to the British increasingly feeling that the Qing had disrespected British national sovereignty, especially after the abolition of the EIC monopoly in 1833.

Consequently, initial reactions to the Macartney Embassy lacked this negative imagery and these conversations about national sovereignty that justified war, warranting a reconsideration of the Embassy's place in the narrative of the causes of the Opium War.

CHAPTER ONE

Organizing the Mission to China: The Embassy's Intellectual Background and the Instructions of the East India Company

Introduction

In 1836, a pamphlet by James Matheson (1796-1878), a British trader in Canton who actively lobbied both for the abolition of the EIC monopoly (1833) and war with the Qing, attacked the Chinese for continually refusing to change their supposedly obstructionist and backward trade policies. For Matheson, the Qing's refusal to adopt free trade evidenced that the Chinese people were "characterised by a marvelous degree of imbecility, avarice, conceit, and hostility" who "shroud themselves, and all belonging to them, in mystery impenetrable... consequently exhibit[ing] a spirit of *exclusiveness* on a grand scale."¹ Matheson believed that trade policies were the standard by which China was to be judged more broadly. The "objective" truth of free trade meant that Chinese society was stagnated. He accordingly concluded that "the ancient but feeble framework" upon which China's government was constructed "cannot bear the rude concussions of modern times."² To arrive at these opinions, Matheson employed a standard of cultural legitimacy that placed free trade atop a hierarchy of universally applicable values. These ideas that Matheson expressed were the culmination of an increasing emphasis on free trade and what was considered the natural circulation of goods that became increasingly

¹ James Matheson, *The Present Position and Prospects of the British Trade with China* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1836), 1.

² *Ibid.*

predominant in Britain's eighteenth-century discourse. As Porter has argued, "familiar tropes of circulation and constraint... have identifiable roots in the eighteenth century."³ Thus, as the eighteenth century progressed, views that elevated economic circulation and free trade to a position of paramount importance featured prominently in literary discourse and manifested themselves in British imperial policy.

From this eighteenth-century literary discourse of free trade arose the Macartney Embassy. Early eighteenth-century literature consumed by British readers proposed that circulation was a necessary and natural force within a properly ordered society. Then, in the 1770s, this perspective on trade featured prominently in Adam Smith's economic philosophy that conceived of a linear view of history in which societal advancement was defined by economic stages and progress toward free trade. This framework rejected the Qing's standing amongst advanced civilizations because of their restrictive trade policies. As Smith's philosophy began to inform British imperial policy during the 1780s, his ideas exerted noticeable influence over the planning of the Macartney Embassy. Through the Embassy, the British intended to push for a freer and more open trade while displaying their innovative superiority to the Qing in an attempt to push the Qing toward "universal" ideas of civilization and free trade. Thus, the Embassy was planned and launched with the momentum of decades of discourse in which societal worth was inextricably linked to economic and trade policy.

The Embassy's Intellectual Background

Writing in 1706 in *The Review*, his triweekly opinion periodical, Daniel Defoe conceived of trade as cyclical in nature and emblematic of a fundamental vitality in

³ Porter, "Peculiar," 181-182.

society. In an issue dedicated entirely to “The Circulation of Trade,” he wrote that “circulation is the life of a general commerce... the circulation of trade in England is the life and being of all our home trade. By this means one man employs a thousand – and all the thousand employs him.”⁴ For Defoe, trade was comparable to a human body. Like blood within a body, circulation was natural and requisite for any functioning trade. Circulation signified health and was therefore a positive good. Defoe’s perspective represented an increasingly popular position conveyed to the British public as the Government’s imperial reach expanded and increased economic connections internationally.

In his 1756 *An Essay on Tea*, Jonas Hanway (1712-1786) expanded upon Defoe’s illustration, arguing that like organs within the body, each society was to play a certain role in the circulation of trade. Because of Hanway’s belief that tea was fundamentally harmful to the British character, China was complicit in that harm. He connected Britain’s physical and economic vitality in suggesting that tea “sucks our very blood; and, by exhausting our treasure, weakens the nerves of the state.”⁵ As Porter contends, Hanway’s treatise was part of a larger alarm to those “who saw the economy being drained away through the shortsighted folly of domestic tea sippers.”⁶ Because of the nation’s decreasing vitality as a result of economic transactions, the force on the other side of those transactions must be directly involved in the damage. Someone had to be

⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Review*, 6.42, July 1706.

⁵ Jonas Hanway, *An Essay on Tea, Considered as Pernicious to Health, Obstructing Industry, and Impoverishing the Nation: with a Short Account of Its Growth, and Great Consumption in These Kingdoms: With Several Political Reflections: in Twenty-five Letters Addressed to Two Ladies* (London: H. Woodfall, 1756), 2:182.

⁶ Porter, *Ideographia*, 195.

sucking the blood. As Porter emphasizes, Hanway's portrayal of the Chinese as a "many-headed monster" resurrected old fears of the Chinese government threatening European customs and ways of life.⁷ Now, Hanway had reincarnated that monster as an economic creature that was draining Britain's lifeblood through the tea trade. The natural conclusion to Hanway's argument, then, was that the Chinese were directly, intentionally antagonistic toward the British in eroding their vitality. Britain would be justified in retaliating,⁸ for the Chinese had to be destroyed.⁹ Because Hanway connected the tea trade and Britain's vitality to establish that the British were losing important national characteristics, his narrative "privileged circulation over stasis."¹⁰ Consequently, the Chinese's economic obstructionism not only directly harmed the British, but it also represented an unnatural view on its own. Porter adds that this obstructionism justified representations of the Chinese as "backward, corrupt, and tyrannical," attitudes that would lead "to the patronizing and imperious attitude toward China that took root at the turn of the nineteenth century and that ultimately set the stage for the Opium Wars."¹¹

Perspectives on economics and trade similar to Defoe's and Hanway's were also prevalent in eighteenth-century fictional discourse. Porter has argued that as these ideas gained widespread cultural acceptance in the early eighteenth century, they became "literary commonplace."¹² For example, Defoe's early eighteenth-century writings

⁷ Ibid., 196.

⁸ Hanway, *Tea*, 2:200-205, 276-277.

⁹ Porter, *Ideographia*, 197.

¹⁰ Ibid., 198.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

“accord[ed] a foundational, axiomatic status with respect to civilized society: the very principles of trade seem to originate in a divinely given natural order of things.”¹³

Because they considered these ideas of trade as universally true, Smith’s ideological predecessors placed those ideas atop an “objective” hierarchy of cultural values, judging a people’s civilization by examining their relationship to trade to establish “the universality of its principles.”¹⁴

Within this hierarchy, trade was inextricably linked to conceptions of social order and the government’s role in promoting stability. For example, Defoe assumed that free trade guaranteed that money and property would be earned fairly. Thus, restricting trade would cause a loss of fairness, eventually resulting in anarchy and a complete breakdown of the social order.¹⁵ This vision of trade weaponized developing conceptions of government as a result of Enlightenment political thought that reconsidered relationships between people and governments. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) based his governing philosophy on property rights, arguing that governments must exist because humanity’s natural state is anarchical and defined by people feeling entitled to steal from others in the absence of property rights in the state of nature.¹⁶ John Locke (1632-1704), in explaining that property rights predated governments, opined that “the great and chief end, therefore, of men's uniting into commonwealths and putting themselves under government is the preservation of their property.”¹⁷ While Hobbes and Locke disagreed

¹³ Porter, “Peculiar,” 185.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: The Penguin Group, 1982), 109.

¹⁷ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 2.31.

on the nature of property rights before formal governments were instituted, their emphases on the government's active role in protecting property rights solidified property's centrality to societal and political order. A strong connection between trade, property, and natural order implied that governments who restricted free trade restricted fairness and were ultimately agents of anarchy.

Adam Smith later expressed a similar belief, placing China among "those unfortunate countries... where men are continually afraid of the violence of their superiors," frequently having to conceal their financial gains out of fears that those superiors would steal them.¹⁸ Smith's natural societal order excluded this as a possibility. Circulation required that money be given freely instead of through coercion or force. His labelling of extortion as "a common practice among our ancestors during the violence of the feudal government" solidified the perception that China's practice of extortion signified their lack of progress.¹⁹ Extortion also had political implications, as Smith contended that coercive practices evidenced the character of a government and its relationship with its people. He concluded that "the freer and more general the competition," the more advantageous it would be to the public, and governments should play an active role in promoting competition by instituting policies conducive to circulation.²⁰ The inference of this conclusion, then, was that governments with policies detrimental to circulation actively hindered any advancement of public good or interest. Within this framework, the Chinese Government's history of refusing to follow "natural"

¹⁸ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (London: The Penguin Group, 1997), 380.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 429.

rules of circulation meant that they were directly and intentionally harming their people. Thus, in the context of developing ideas about people's relationships with governments, Smith was effectively suggesting that the Chinese's current regime was illegitimate.

Defoe had earlier pursued this line of reasoning more directly and explicitly against China in *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, depicting the Chinese government's unnatural restrictions of economic flow as an impediment to its people's happiness and prosperity. In framing Crusoe's perspective with commercialist concerns, Defoe used language of blockage to juxtapose European trade with Chinese trade. In the novel, Crusoe sees Europe as embodying a happy and vibrant society because of the "universal commerce." However, he considers the Chinese a miserable people whose condition was directly related to their lack of circulation, reflected in the poor quality of their possessions.²¹ Porter notes that Defoe's depiction of China did not simply see them as a weak or poor society, for he would have had little reason to make direct comparisons between them and the Europeans. Rather, Defoe was directly attacking the Jesuits' apparent idealization of China.²² For Defoe, China's lack of circulation and trade meant that they did not have access to the exchanges that the Europeans did and caused them to have possessions of noticeably low qualities. The Qing perpetuated this state by refusing to adopt free trade. Ultimately, the Qing were to blame, as reinforced by Crusoe's later attribution of China's poverty to their government's arrogance and narcissism.²³

²¹ Daniel Defoe, *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1974), 151-152.

²² Porter, "Peculiar," 195.

²³ Defoe, *Farther Adventures*, 157.

Casting doubts on China's ability to produce goods of any universal value or benefit, Crusoe's descriptions of Chinese goods manifest his perception of China's backwardness. While Crusoe initially expresses awe at a piece of chinaware, he eventually considers it a portrait of China's fragility and their relentless pursuit of meaningless objects.²⁴ He then entertains the notion that chinaware is emblematic of the Great Wall in that it was effective in keeping out the "Tartars" but would be of little use if confronted by the British military.²⁵ These pursuits resulted in what Defoe depicted as China's clear inferiority to the British. The Chinese perpetuated antiquity and vanity, refusing to adapt to the new standards of modernity. Porter thus concludes that Crusoe's assessment of Chinese culture definitively debunks the "reverential awe" that Chinese culture had once commanded.²⁶ In this way, Defoe served as one of the most important "ideological predecessors to Smith" in that he promoted a new standard of culture legitimacy that Smith would echo in his linear conception of history and progress.²⁷

These ideas of economics, trade, and China consumed by British readers in the eighteenth century took center stage in *The Wealth of Nations*. Smith's overarching framework in the introduction to his discussion of the division of labor established a dichotomy between civilized and uncivilized societies based on their trade practices. These policies would directly impact the rest of people's lives. According to Smith, while "every nation" maintained certain divisions of labor, the "savage nations" were those in which people were employed in "useful labor" but only to provide for themselves. By

²⁴ Porter, "Peculiar," 196.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Porter, *Ideographia*, 198.

contrast, civilized nations were ones in which people were employed in such labor to produce goods for other people to make money for themselves.²⁸ At the root of this contrast was the assumption that circulation and trade naturally promoted an improved quality of life, similar to Crusoe's description of the Chinese goods. Yet Smith differed from Crusoe by suggesting that uncivilized societies participated in productive labor. Smith rather implied that those societies' savagery was rooted in their lack of properly divided labor. As a result, those people lacked circulation because they produced only for themselves. Because of this lack of circulation, Smith concluded that they were "so miserably poor that, from mere want, they are frequently reduced, or think themselves reduced, to the necessity sometimes of directly destroying, and sometimes of abandoning their infants."²⁹ Self-sufficiency prohibited people from having diverse products from which to choose, leaving them to themselves to produce everything they needed. They would therefore lack the necessities to sustain life.³⁰ Furthermore, Smith's assessment of this quality of life utilized a body metaphor, suggesting that society required circulation to continue to function in a way similar to a body's need for blood. Lack of circulation within society in general ultimately meant a lack of life for certain individuals. Circulation was thus vital to preventing barbarism.

Imagery of infanticide was closely associated with China at the time of Smith's writing. Dating even to when the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) was in power, images of China that emphasized, and likely exaggerated, abandonment and killing of newborns

²⁸ Smith, *Nations*, 104.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

had become widespread.³¹ Thomas Malthus invoked this knowledge in his essay on overpopulation, referring to China as a place in which people felt compelled to resort to infanticide because they were otherwise unable to sustain themselves.³² Even a satire of the Macartney Embassy that was critical of the British referred to this practice of the Chinese as horrifying, comparing it to the seemingly pointless wars that Britain had fought in Europe.³³

Smith advanced a view that China, in particular, was stagnated because the Chinese had repeatedly failed to capitalize on what were once their innovative advantages and superiority. To Smith, certain agricultural and manufacturing advancements were evident in China thousands of years before his writing. However, China's vast networks of rivers, canals, and communications did not encourage them to promote foreign commerce, the next step after manufacturing within Smith's conception of a society's "natural" progress.³⁴ Internal trade could only sustain the Chinese for a certain amount of time. Their refusal to seek foreign trade signified that they were stuck. As a result, Smith considered the Chinese as similar to the ancient Egyptians, to whom he referred as "remarkable" for failing to capitalize on their waterways to establish foreign commerce.³⁵ Egypt had also been stagnated and was surpassed, and eventually conquered, by more

³¹ See Keith Wrightson, "Infanticide in European History," *Criminal Justice History*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982): 2; Rachana Sachdev, "Contextualizing Female Infanticide: Ming China in Early Modern European Travelogues," *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*, vol. 18, no. 1: 24–39; and R. Sauer, "Female Infanticide and Abortion in Nineteenth Century Britain," *Population Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1 (Taylor and Francis Publishing: Abington-on-Thames, 1978): 81-93.

³² Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London: J. Johnson, 1798), 41.

³³ Edward Church, "Dedication to the Emperor of China," in *The Inquisitive Traveller: A Poetic Essay* (London, 1802): 172.

³⁴ Smith, *Nations*, 125.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

advanced foreigners. Smith's implication was therefore that a people's failure to remain on a "natural" course would lead to their potential conquest. Smith further emphasized this stagnation by using Marco Polo's visit to China to highlight the considerable length of time during which China had been stagnated. Smith wrote that "more than five hundred years ago, [Polo] describe[d] its cultivation, industry, and populousness, almost in the same terms in which they are described by travellers in the present times."³⁶ Thus, the Chinese had not changed and likely would not change. Because of this stagnation, China had "acquired that full complement of riches which the nature of its laws and institutions permits."³⁷

He later solidified this perspective, arguing that China's stagnation hindered what potential they still had and made them definitively inferior to their European counterparts. Smith found value in China's considerable land mass and rich soil but argued they possessed "inferior... laws and institutions." This inferiority that caused them to reject foreign commerce meant that those geographic features could not be properly exploited.³⁸ Therefore, the Europeans were "a superior rank of people" because of their dynamic economic institutions.³⁹ By contrast, China had proven itself as "among the most barbarous nations" because they had the materials and products to conduct foreign trade but would not do so willingly nor fairly.⁴⁰ China's refusal to share freely their products and possessions signified what Smith considered to be their barbarity. He

³⁶ Ibid., 174.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 197-198.

³⁹ Ibid., 204.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 267.

thus applied his concept of division of labor within a society to interactions between peoples more broadly. Since China possessed items that others desired, the Chinese's refusal to provide those items meant that they were not fulfilling their natural role.

More broadly, Smith modeled history as a procession of economic stages with free foreign commerce as the "universal" endpoint. Alluding to "natural" economic "phases," "stages," or "states,"⁴¹ he associated these stages with definitive improvement; "every state of society" equals "every stage of improvement."⁴² Societies that did not improve remained in a state of inertia, implying that an outside force would be needed to help them move, justifying Smith's claim that "China seems to be standing still."⁴³ This conception of society's linear progression ultimately allowed a people to be judged by their economic state and relationship to economic change.

Clearly drawing on Smith's ideas, Dundas's instructions to Macartney referenced China's apparent stagnation in hopes that the Embassy would convey a certain idea of civilization to encourage the Chinese toward adopting free trade policies. He alluded to the "men of scientific and artistic arrangements" to be sent with Macartney "to impress the Chinese Court with the high degree of civilization attained in England."⁴⁴ This attempt to impress the Chinese suggested that if only the British could show the Qing what the Chinese were missing, then the Chinese would be receptive to the Company's requests. Consequently, as Peter Kitson has opined, "British understandings of Chinese scientific and technological proficiency were vital to their overall estimation of the Qing

⁴¹ Ibid., 280-281, 282, 284, 292-293, 342, 349, 350, 388, 434, 444, 479, 482, 483.

⁴² Ibid., 292.

⁴³ Ibid., 295.

⁴⁴ Morse, *Chronicles*, 2:215.

empire.”⁴⁵ If the Chinese were stagnated, then they would not possess items that the British had, and presumably, if the Qing Court were to see Britain’s innovative superiority, then they would choose to encourage foreign trade so that Chinese civilization could advance like Britain’s.

This idea that Chinese civilization required an introduction to progress was rooted in Smith’s use of positive imagery only when referring to ancient China. The most notable instance of this is situated within his remarks on “the natural progress of opulence” in which he praised ancient China for attaining a “very high degree of opulence” both before any Western peoples and without policies that encouraged foreign commerce.⁴⁶ While China eventually chose to maintain these restrictive trade policies past a point that Smith deemed acceptable, he found their accumulation of wealth under the circumstances impressive nonetheless.

Concluding that societies in which there were no divisions of labor were in a “rude state,”⁴⁷ Smith proposed that another fundamental characteristic of advanced societies was the degree of economic security they encouraged. He held that Europe embodied the proper order because there was “tolerable security” for each “man of common understanding,” but “in most other governments of Asia,” laborers were constantly given reason to fear violence from their superiors and were “at all times exposed” to disaster.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Peter Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 126.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Nations*, 483.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 380.

Smith's language evoked imagery of the Canton trade, which the British increasingly saw as corrupt because of the apparent extortions by the Chinese government upon the Chinese traders at Canton with the establishment of the *Co-hong* in 1760. As Van Dyke argues, EIC records consistently and overwhelmingly demonstrate beliefs that this institution was established to solidify Beijing's foothold on the trade and only allow certain merchants to be successful.⁴⁹ British merchants feared that they were the primary victims of a pyramid scheme that flowed all the way down from Beijing, which they believed perpetuated a system of corruption, bribery, and extortion at all levels of government.⁵⁰ However, "foreigners always had incomplete knowledge of what was happening at Canton."⁵¹

The overview that the EIC provided Macartney before his departure evidence this belief in apparent injustices against the British merchants at Canton. Dundas instructed Macartney that "the fair competition of the market is there destroyed by the Associations of the Chinese."⁵² Dundas saw the Qing Government as knowingly and routinely continuing unfair practices both toward its own merchants and the foreign traders while unnaturally restricting circulation. As a result, if Macartney were to fail to attain the Company's requests, he was to "turn [his] principal attention to the relief of our present embarrassments at Canton, by an extension of our privileges and a revision of the proceedings which have taken place to our prejudice and discredit."⁵³ Dundas was

⁴⁹ Van Dyke, *Merchants*, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵¹ Van Dyke, *Canton Trade*, 2-3.

⁵² Morse, *Chronicles*, 2:217.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 219.

ultimately suggesting that the supposed mistreatment of the British was solely the fault of the Chinese and that the Chinese's treatment of the British was indicative of larger and deeper societal problems for China.

More broadly, Smith's allusions to supposedly transcendent truths provided him, and later those planning the Embassy, the platform to speak authoritatively on what he thought was best for Chinese people. He directly faulted human institutions "in every political society" that stalled the progress that would eventually lead to free foreign commerce.⁵⁴ While some governments maintained stronger restrictions on economic policy, every society in existence had experienced artificial barriers to economic progress. Consequently, "the natural order of things" dictated that capital move from agriculture to manufactures to foreign commerce in such a way that was "so very natural" that every society had been forced to observe it in some degree.⁵⁵ Having explicitly established this standard for the movement of capital, Smith argued that societies should be judged based on the institution and pacing of that movement. Policies such as those in China that restricted the flow of capital to foreign commerce by confining foreign trade to one port set the Chinese against this natural progression and order.

Shift to the East

Almost simultaneous with the spread of Smith's philosophy, Britain's imperial policy turned eastward and assumed a distinctively economic character. Joyce Chaplin has contended that the natural move for European empires after losing territory in North America was a pivot toward Asia, suggesting that "the Pacific was now the center of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 482.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 483.

attention” and “represented an alternative to the Atlantic” as “the means by which commerce, Christianity, and civility might be expanded.”⁵⁶ P.J. Marshall similarly argues that the overall periodization of the British Empire hinges around 1783 because Britain’s loss of its American colonies with the Treaty of Paris gave them no choice but to focus more closely on Asia.⁵⁷ As the Government took this turn eastward, imperial policy became less centered on establishing overseas colonies and more concerned with expanding British influence through economics and trade. Ashley Jackson has summarized this transition by noting that “‘the swing to the east’ [was] the foundation of a second British Empire based on commercial and territorial expansion in South Asia.”⁵⁸ While attempts to reform the Empire’s workings primarily began after the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), “new imperial ventures” resulted in a different, more direct link between economics and empire in which the EIC became an active and direct agent of the British Government in their imperial ventures.⁵⁹

Planning the Embassy

These views of the relationship between economics and empire dominated the EIC’s planning of Macartney’s Embassy. In his letter to Lord Macartney days before the Embassy’s departure from England, Dundas explicitly condemned the Qing’s trade policies in a way that spoke into China’s overall societal state. He referred to how the

⁵⁶ Joyce Chaplin, “The Atlantic Ocean and Its Contemporary Meanings,” in *Atlantic History*, ed. Jack P. Greene and Phillip D. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 47-48.

⁵⁷ Marshall, “Presidential Address,” 2.

⁵⁸ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 72.

⁵⁹ Marshall, “Presidential Address,” 16.

Chinese had “destroyed... fair competition of the market” and denied “open access to the Tribunals of the Country, and to the equal execution of its Laws” that made them “scarcely compatible with the regulations of Civilized Society.”⁶⁰ He thus suggested that the British should expect to encounter a barbarous and hostile people similar to how Smith described them. For Dundas, China’s lack of civilization was derived from their inability to allow the British to trade more openly and in more places.

Moreover, the British Government’s letter to the Qing Court announcing Macartney’s arrival conceived of the Embassy as mutually beneficial in an attempt to justify introducing the Chinese to a “proper” version of civilization. The letter claimed that the Embassy had been dispatched to strengthen the friendship between the British and Qing Courts and to establish a freer commerce with trade at more ports than solely Canton.⁶¹ This view of expanding commerce demonstrated that the British felt that they knew what was better for the Chinese than did the Qing Government. Britain conceived of itself as the outside force that would act upon the Qing to change China’s restrictive trade practices. From this perspective, the British would be offering the Chinese a service by negotiating a trade more favorable to British interests. The Qing would be introduced to free trade, giving the British a more favorable idea of China’s ability to act in accordance with “civilized” society, while the British would have more places and opportunities to trade in China. As Porter argues, this mentality communicated that Qing policy failed “properly to appreciate the universalities of the advantages attending a more

⁶⁰ Morse, *Chronicles*, 2:233.

⁶¹ See George Leonard Staunton, *An Abridged Account of the Embassy to the Emperor of China, Undertaken by Order of the King of Great Britain, Including the Manners and Customs of the Inhabitants; and Preceded by an Account of the Causes of the Embassy and Voyage to China* (London: J. Stockdale, 1797), 30-31.

liberal attitude toward trade.”⁶² Through the Embassy, then, the British designed to impose a universal value upon the Qing, assuming that the Qing were receptive to their demands.

More specifically, Britain’s attempt to convey their innovative and technological prowess to the Qing to express their degree of civilization aligned with Smith’s delineation of history’s stages of progress. The gifts that the British constructed for the Emperor were intended to “excite at Peking a taste for many articles of English workmanship hitherto unknown there... and turn the balance of the China trade considerably in favour of Great Britain.”⁶³ Matthew Boulton, a leading British manufacturer directly involved in planning and constructing the Embassy’s gifts for the Emperor, believed that once the people in the interior of China who had never encountered a foreign manufacture were introduced to British technology, they would become more inclined toward trade and desire more frequent and expansive commerce with the British.⁶⁴ Britain’s attempt to demonstrate their abilities to the Qing directly stemmed from Smith’s idea that societies progress from the manufacturing stage to the stage at which it accepted and participated in foreign trade. Smith argued that peoples who remained in the earlier stages of agriculture and manufacture would eventually realize that they had not kept pace with others.⁶⁵ They would then desire to follow the

⁶² Porter, “Peculiar,” 187.

⁶³ Morse, *Chronicles*, 2: 215.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Maxine Berg, “Britain, Industry, and Perceptions of China: Matthew Boulton, ‘Useful Knowledge,’ and the Macartney Embassy to China, 1792-94,” *Journal of Global History*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 274.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Nations*, 111.

examples of those who were “more distinguished by their superiority.”⁶⁶ Britain’s expression of innovative advancement to the Qing would compel the Qing to become more receptive to foreign commerce. As Michael Adas has contended, “European observers came to view science and especially technology as the most objective and unassailable measure of their own civilization’s past achievement and present worth.... Few disputed that machines were the most reliable measure of humankind.”⁶⁷

Newspaper reports about the Embassy’s gifts affirmed the prevalence of such a belief. In July of 1792, a writer for the London *Star* stated that

a piece of English mechanism, a proof of our decided superiority over all the other nations, is now publicly shewn at Portsmouth. It is an imitation of an exquisite workmanship... It is to go out with Lord Macartney in the *Lion* to China... great numbers of all ranks crowd to view the curiosity, which, in point of brilliancy and magnificence, has seldom or ever been equalled, and must impress the people of the East with a high idea of our progress in the arts.⁶⁸

For this writer, the Embassy was directly concerned with conveying British advancement to the Chinese. The gifts, then, would serve a real diplomatic purpose. Similarly, a letter to *E. Johnson’s British Gazette and Sunday Monitor* in May of 1793 argued that “the Chinese Emperor possesses the best dispositions towards the British nation, which cannot but be increased to the utmost, when he is made acquainted with all the wonders of European skill and improvement, which the representative of the Court of London will display before him.”⁶⁹ The British public derived significant confidence in Macartney’s

⁶⁶ Ibid., 111-112.

⁶⁷ Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 34, 177-98.

⁶⁸ *Star*, London, July 18, 1792.

⁶⁹ *E. Johnson’s British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*, London, May 12, 1793.

success from the gifts and affirmed that the Emperor's perception of the Embassy and the British would be contingent upon the gifts.

As Maxine Berg shows, this technology carried larger diplomatic implications because of the way in which King George III portrayed himself and the Embassy to the Qianlong Emperor. Claiming that the overall importance Britain assigned to technology represented an application of "industrial enlightenment," itself an outgrowth of the Enlightenment emphasis on "useful knowledge,"⁷⁰ Berg argues that Britain's reliance on technology was not limited to their search for profits. Rather, it was intended more broadly to convey to the Emperor that the British desired to learn more about Chinese culture because of Britain's own interests in arts, knowledge, and manners that differed from their own.⁷¹ Thus, in his letter to the Emperor, King George III referred to a common interest in "extending the peaceful arts to the entire human race" to expand "knowledge of the world" and, specifically, to learn about "those celebrated institutions" of China, echoing Smith's praise of China's antiquity.⁷² In attempting to project this image of the British, the King suggest that the Embassy was fundamentally different from the British merchants that the Chinese encountered at Canton. Those whom the Emperor and his Court would encounter would be enlightened men of intellectual curiosity and taste, and therefore a group with whom the Emperor would want to interact.

⁷⁰ Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: Historical Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 28-77.

⁷¹ Berg, "Britain and Industry," 272, 275.

⁷² Quoted in Hevia, *Cherishing*, 61.

Conclusion

The literary discourse on free trade and the manifestation of those ideas in Smith's philosophy shaped a perception of culture and economics that was embedded into the Embassy's formation. Conceptions of free trade in both nonfictional and fictional discourse during the eighteenth century promulgated ideas that trade was tantamount to circulation within the body, believing circulation and trade to be natural components of society. Smith applied these ideas to an overall conception of history that saw circulation as such a fundamental principle that those who refused to promote its expansion were stagnated and required an outside force to help its progress toward free foreign trade. Shortly after the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, imperial policy catered to a more direct link between economics and imperial expansion. This new relationship then manifested itself in the planning of the Embassy, as the British believed themselves to be introducing the Chinese to the universal ideas of civilization based on economic principles and stages. Consequently, the ideas of trade that had circulated for almost a century before Macartney's audience with the Emperor directly informed Britain's approach to its first diplomatic encounter with the Qing.

However, as the next chapter shows, the images of China that resulted from the Embassy and Macartney's eventual diplomatic failure deviated from the mentality in which the Embassy had been rooted. In attempting to explain his diplomatic failure, Macartney advocated for a positive recognition of the distinctions between the British and Qing instead of forcing the Qing to acknowledge "universal" economic truths. He thus pushed for preserving the status quo in Britain's existing relationship with the Qing instead of villainizing the Qing for refusing to open a freer trade with the British.

Therefore, the image of China that Macartney constructed after his time in the Qing Court was largely unconcerned with the universal notions of free trade that had guided his Embassy's formation.

CHAPTER TWO

Centralizing Diplomacy and the Language of Equality in Lord Macartney's *An Embassy to China*

Introduction

Preparing to depart from China after failing to receive any of the British Government's requests from the Qing, Lord Macartney questioned what he considered to be the natural arrogance and superiority of the British, asking "is it not natural for the [Chinese] to be discomposed and disgusted by it?"¹ In questioning this disposition, he excused the Qing's suspicious disposition toward their British guests. It was the British, not the Qing, whose arrogance proved repellent. This approach that caused Macartney to reconsider British attitudes was later reflected in his overall appraisal of the relationship between the British and the Qing. He appealed to his firsthand experience to warn his readers that "nothing can be more fallacious than to judge of China by any European standard."² This message of relativity and deference toward the Qing with which Macartney concluded his narrative provides the framework for evaluating his journal and the messages he communicated about China and the Qing Government.

Despite the Embassy's economic goals and potential economic consequences, Macartney's focus on diplomacy both distinguished his journal from the discourse of free trade and allowed him to sustain language of equality to produce an optimistic appraisal of Britain's relationship with the Chinese. Having arrived in China with the

¹ Macartney, *An Embassy*, 167.

² *Ibid.*, 172.

understanding that diplomatic ceremony functioned as a mutual recognition of equality, Macartney initially viewed his Qing counterparts through the lens of equality. As the Qing increasingly demonstrated that they conducted diplomacy differently than Macartney had expected, his attempts to work toward compromise evidenced his desire for equality. Yet even after realizing that the negotiations he desired would not occur, Macartney advocated for optimism in the Canton trade and Britain's present means of engagement with the Chinese. Macartney's journal, then, prioritized diplomacy and equality in such a way as to render economics a peripheral theme and to preserve his perception of equality between the British and Qing.

The Composition of Macartney's Journal

Macartney's journal is distinguished from other Macartney Embassy travelogues by its unique editing and publishing history. Macartney himself made several edits to his journal while in China, having crossed out and altered sections when his opinions changed. As Greg Clingham has shown by using drafts and fragments from manuscripts contained in Cornell University's Wason Collection, "Macartney's journal conveys more nuanced, deeper thought that goes beyond describing and categorizing events." This thought process suggests "a thinking-through, a writerly consciousness that makes... for a richer historiography."³ Consequently, Macartney's time in China was defined not only by his reactions to external forces but also by lively internal dialogues. After Macartney's death, his journal took several forms. Parts of Macartney's overall message were

³ Greg Clingham, "Cultural Difference in George Macartney's *An Embassy to China, 1792-1794*," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 39, no. 2 (Durham: Duke University Press, April 2015): 3-4.

communicated in the British Government's official account of the Embassy in 1797.⁴ Sir John Barrow published sections of Macartney's journal in the second volume of his account of Macartney's life and career, released in 1808.⁵ One of Macartney's descendants, Helen Henrietta Macartney Robbins, included sections of Macartney's journal in her account of his life, published in 1908.⁶ J.L. Cranmer-Byng's edition of Macartney's journal, published in 1962 and the one used in this thesis, incorporated various documents and correspondences to produce a more complete and refined account because of papers that were not thought to exist or that were unable to be located.⁷

Expectations for Diplomacy and Equality

At the beginning of his journey, Macartney concerned himself most primarily with the diplomatic spectacle he hoped the Embassy would generate, relegating the British's ambitious economic policies and wish list to the periphery. Instead of delineating the advantages to Chinese civilization that he thought a free foreign trade would provide, Macartney speculated that a diplomatic encounter itself was desirable for the Qing:

News of an embassy from England had been received at Court with great satisfaction, that the Emperor considered it as no small addition to the glory of his reign that its close should be distinguished by such an event, and that orders had been despatched to all the seaports of China to give the most hospitable and

⁴ See Staunton, *Abridged Account*.

⁵ See John Barrow, *Some Account of the Public Life, and a Selection from the Unpublished Writings, of the Earl of Macartney*, vol. 2 (London: T. Caddell and W. Davies, 1808).

⁶ See Helen Henrietta Macartney Robbins, *Our First Ambassador to China: An Account of the Life of George, Earl of Macartney with Extracts from His Letters, and the Narrative of His Experiences in China, as Told by Himself, 1737-1806, from Hitherto Unpublished Correspondence and Documents* (London: John Murray, 1908).

⁷ See Robert Swanson, "On the Paper Trail of Lord Macartney," *East Asian History*, no. 40 (Canberra: Australian National University Press, August 2016): 19-25.

honourable reception to His Majesty's ships whenever they should appear on the coasts.⁸

Macartney's preoccupation with the theatrics of negotiations and power dynamics demonstrated that his optimism was fundamentally rooted in the power of diplomacy itself, implying that the Emperor stood to benefit simply from receiving the Embassy. In this regard, Macartney's perspective on the Embassy resembled that of Staunton, who insisted that the Embassy's success would come through communicating a more pleasant British character to the Qing than the one the Qing already knew.⁹ Macartney, then, believed that diplomacy itself would be a direct benefit of the Embassy because it would give the Qing an introduction to the British. Consequently, at the outset of his journey, Macartney concerned himself less with the economic potential in which the British Government and public were so confident. He rather looked to the procedure and behavior that comprised diplomacy as the center of his optimism in the Embassy.

Macartney's prioritization of diplomacy contrasted with the more restricted views of his superiors in the Government and EIC on how he should conduct his negotiations. Clingham has noted that "letters... from Francis Baring and John Smith Burges, chairman and deputy chairman, respectively, of the East India Company, indicate how focused they were on commercial matters. Macartney, by contrast, entertained a broader set of aims for the embassy."¹⁰ While Macartney's view of his tasks was not confined by the EIC's focus on economics, the Embassy's narrow economic aims also drew criticism

⁸ Macartney, *An Embassy*, 4.

⁹ See Chapter 3 for a more detailed analysis of Staunton's dispositions toward Macartney's negotiation with the Emperor. Also see Chapters 3 and 4 for how the Qing Court was seen as a battleground for intra-European rivalries.

¹⁰ Clingham, "Cultural Difference," 9.

from the British public before Macartney's departure. For example, in 1791, a writer in *Gentlemen's Magazine* claimed that Macartney would not be able to explore and acquire natural knowledge because he had been too narrowly confined by the Government and EIC.¹¹ A letter to the *Morning Chronicle* in London a week before Macartney's departure in September of 1792 similarly explained that the public would not benefit because the Government had constrained Macartney only to their bidding.¹² Reconciling these apparently discordant perceptions of Macartney's tasks and concerns, James Hevia has suggested that while "the motives behind the first British Embassy to China have usually been interpreted as fundamentally and almost exclusively economic," Macartney's role as an "idealized bourgeois gentleman" disposed him to valuing broader cultural and intellectual exchanges. Macartney was also interested in "presenting a particular facet of the national character" to the Qing Court.¹³ Consequently, despite the distinctively economic character of the Government's directions, Macartney and others saw that the Embassy could be more than simply an economic endeavor. Macartney's departure from economic aims and his alternative orientation toward broader diplomatic matters therefore distinguished his perspective from the voices which prioritized free trade in organizing the Embassy. His journal, then, should be seen as directly concerned with greater issues than the economic concerns.

More broadly, Macartney's approach to the Qing Court was based on implicit notions of equality between the British and Qing governments despite the Qing's

¹¹ *The Gentlemen's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 61, pt. I (1791), 63.

¹² *Morning Chronicle*, London, September 13, 1792.

¹³ Hevia, *Cherishing*, 57, 64, 67.

tributary system. Hevia argues that in the context of Enlightenment-influenced eighteenth-century Europe, “ceremony was a problem for enlightened reason... public sphere rationality pitted itself against ancient uses such as those to be found in royal pomp and splendor.”¹⁴ The evolving Western European belief was that through ceremony, “mutual recognition of sovereignty was asserted and state-to-state equality achieved.”¹⁵ This perspective suggested that ceremony was simply a means to the ends of substantive negotiations and agreements. In contrast to European diplomacy, the Qing Court adhered to a tributary system of relations. John Fairbank has argued that within this system, “ceremonial conduct was all important” because as the Son of Heaven, the Emperor was to mediate “between the people and the unseen forces.”¹⁶ Hevia has shown that the Emperor’s centrality in the Court ritual meant that “the emperor was accorded the position of supreme lord in relation to the lesser lords as guests.”¹⁷ These ideas of diplomacy were largely exclusive. Either, as the European model suggested, diplomacy functioned as a recognition of equality between sovereign nations and worked toward substantive business, or, as the Qing Court ritual held, diplomatic ritual was based on acknowledgement of subordination to the Emperor and was the business itself.

Expectedly, the British Government and EIC assumed a posture of equality between themselves and the Qing when commissioning the Embassy. As E.H. Pritchard has argued, “the British were well aware that the Chinese considered foreign embassies

¹⁴ Ibid., 74.

¹⁵ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁶ John K. Fairbank, “Tributary Trade and China’s Relations with the West,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Cambridge: Association for Asian Studies, February 1942): 131.

¹⁷ Hevia, *Cherishing*, 116.

as tribute-bearing missions.”¹⁸ Despite this awareness of the tributary system, Embassy correspondences suggested that a projection of equality between the British and Qing would convince the Emperor that the British had not come to acknowledge subservience as a tributary state. In his letter to the Emperor, King George III remarked that he and the Emperor were “Brethren in Sovereignty” and that “a Brotherly affection” existed between them.¹⁹ In the EIC’s official instructions to Macartney, Dundas permitted Macartney’s participation in “all ceremonials of that Court which may not commit the honor of your Sovereign or lessen your own dignity, so as to endanger the success of” his negotiation.²⁰ Macartney was thus to avoid any appearance of subservience to the Qing in an attempt to reinforce notions of equality. Therefore, while Macartney and the British were aware of the tributary system’s existence, they believed that they could work outside of it.

Subsequently, prior to his arrival in Beijing, Macartney’s error in assuming that the Qing Court approached and conducted diplomacy in the manner to which he was accustomed was indicative of his false expectation for recognition of equality. He first believed that the Qing’s hospitable reception of the British was unequivocal proof of the Emperor’s special favor toward the British.²¹ Based both on his personal experience as a British diplomat to other European courts and on general European ideas of equality, Macartney would have been justified in believing that hospitality and personal favor were

¹⁸ E.H. Pritchard, “The Kowtow in the Macartney Embassy to China in 1793,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Cambridge: Association for Asian Studies, February 1943): 1

¹⁹ Morse, *Chronicles*, 247.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

²¹ *Ibid.*

directly related.²² However, his inability to account initially for the diplomatic and ritualistic differences that distinguished the Qing from European governments resulted in misunderstanding.

Macartney additionally believed that the Qing could be convinced to recognize British equality if the Embassy placed itself in a position of strength by demonstrating British innovative prowess. Although ideas of using technology to display a certain cultural advancement were more broadly rooted in Smith's framework of societal progress,²³ Macartney applied those ideas to the Qing in assuming that they could be impressed and persuaded by British innovation. Thus, after several Qing officials asked a "thousand questions" upon the Embassy's arrival, he assumed that the Court would be disappointed in the presents the British had brought for them and purchased various items from some of his crew members to demonstrate their "immense value."²⁴ Macartney thus associated his confidence in his negotiations at least partially with the presents the Embassy could give. When fearing that the Qing officials would be disappointed, he reacted accordingly to compensate. His insecurity surrounding the items constructed for the Embassy undermined his overall confidence in his diplomatic success. Yet this panic he exhibited spoke more broadly to his perspective that the Qing could be more or less favorably disposed toward the British. To Macartney, then, gifts were bargaining chips to

²² Macartney had been the British Ambassador to Russia during the 1760s and oversaw trade negotiations with Russia's imperial government, and his diplomatic experience in Russia formed several of his fundamental ideas about diplomacy. Most pertinent to this specific discussion is his mentality that worthwhile diplomacy required dignified reception and ample time to become acquainted with his counterparts. See, for example, John Barrow, *Some Account of the Public Life, and a Selection from the Unpublished Writings, of the Earl of Macartney*, vol. 1 (London: T. Caddell and W. Davies, 1807), 7.

²³ See Chapter 1.

²⁴ Macartney, *An Embassy*, 10-11.

be used as demonstrations of strength to a Qing Court that he believed would be flexible based on what the Embassy had to offer them.

As Macartney prepared to open his negotiations with the Qing, his language of relatively maintained the equality he wished to convey between the British and Qing. After engaging in active dialogue with Qing officials who requested that he perform the kowtow before the Emperor, Macartney contended that not all ceremonies performed before sovereigns were the same.²⁵ His reaction to the kowtow demonstrated two important ideas that would both inform his approach to his negotiations and expose the tensions inherent to the conflicting visions of diplomacy.

First, performing the kowtow would violate Dundas's orders for Macartney not to participate in any ritual that would undermine the appearance of equality. The kowtow would communicate subordination to the Emperor because Macartney would not perform such a maneuver before King George III. While Macartney's doubts about the kowtow seemed an insurmountable obstacle to his negotiations, his perspective on the ceremony was distinctively oriented toward equality and reciprocity, not stubbornness. This orientation is demonstrated by his later claim that he would not perform the kowtow before the Emperor if an equally ranked Qing official did so before a portrait of the King.²⁶ For Macartney, then, equality between British and Qing could be established even within the framework of the kowtow. Yet this perspective assumed both that the Qing sought equality with the British and that the British could convince the Qing to recognize that equality.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

Secondly, Macartney's reaction to his discussions about the kowtow did not completely invalidate the Qing's diplomatic conduct. He instead created a difference and distance between the two without arriving at a judgment. His skepticism was rooted in his belief that sovereigns possessed different ceremonial and diplomatic preferences, not that the Qing's system was fundamentally invalid. Refraining from invalidating the Qing's approach cemented Macartney's desire for equality and resultingly created an equal relationship between himself and the Qing Court.

Macartney then solidified his position on the kowtow and the equality it would communicate after his conversations with the Qing officials attached to the Embassy, conflating compromise with progress toward equality. He communicated that despite the challenge of reaching an agreement regarding the ceremony, his sole desire was to distinguish "between the homage of tributary princes and the ceremony used on the part of a great and independent sovereign." He felt that he had accomplished this goal when the Qing conceded that he could genuflect before the Emperor in the same way he would genuflect before the King.²⁷ With this compromise, Macartney yielded no ground. His earlier proposition that he would kowtow before the Emperor if a Qing official would do the same before a portrait of the King emphasized equality. The Qing's concession that Macartney could genuflect before the Emperor would thus have the same effect for Macartney because performing an altered ceremony would not project the same image of subservience that the kowtow would.

²⁷ Ibid.

Realities of Diplomacy

Subsequently, when assessing the Qing's apparent suspicion toward the British, Macartney implicitly normalized the Court's present behavior by referring to their past behavior. He contended that the "same strange jealousy prevails towards us which the Chinese Government has always shown to other foreigners, although we have taken such pains to disarm it, and to conciliate their friendship and confidence."²⁸ While Macartney invoked negative characteristics in this description, his appeal to their past treatment of other foreigners allowed him to work within the Qing's own framework. He indicated that suspicion was the Qing's default starting point, meaning that they were treating the British no differently than they would treat, or had treated, other foreigners. Noting that "it is not intended that we should pass the winter here," Macartney resigned himself to having been unable to negotiate with the Emperor and the Court to the extent he had desired.²⁹ His use of the passive voice implied that the Qing had not made an active or calculated decision to shorten the Embassy's time at Court. Rather, his language indicated that the Qing had always expected the British to depart relatively early. Consequently, his disappointment was more closely linked to his perceived inability to capitalize on the short time he had spent at the Qing Court than to any active distaste for the British by the Qing. In portraying himself as a victim of a circumstance in which neither side was to be entirely faulted, Macartney recognized that this apparent conflict could not be attributed simply to Qing animosity toward the British.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

He reinforced this view when reflecting that the Qing did effectively all they could and that as a result, the Embassy should still be considered successful. Although he accepted that no substantial negotiations occurred, he affirmed that the Embassy would result in “very happy consequences” because it “has been so brilliant, and has made such an impression” in China.³⁰ Though the Qing might not assent to the British requests, Macartney emphasized what he regarded as the positive impression of Britain’s character on the Qing, suggesting his orientation toward diplomatic, not economic, aims. Because he considered himself successful in conveying a certain British character, he believed that a better relationship between the British and the Qing had been formed. For Macartney, this relationship would be predicated on trust and naturally lead to future diplomatic interactions.

Furthermore, Macartney’s attribution of his current inability to negotiate with the Court left open the possibility that the Qing’s treatment of the British could be more positive in the future. Despite his earlier understanding that the Embassy’s early departure followed Qing precedent, he speculated that “the personal character of some of the Ministers... especially at the Emperor’s late period of life... joined, perhaps, to a paltry intrigue” had also prevented any serious considerations of the Embassy’s requests by the Qing Court.³¹ Seeing his failure as having been precipitated by a few self-interested officials capitalizing on the Emperor’s age, Macartney implied that the Embassy could have met with more success at a later time. A new Emperor would presumably be less susceptible to manipulation by corrupt officials. Yet Macartney

³⁰ Ibid., 99-100.

³¹ Ibid., 101.

refrained from assuming that the Embassy would be guaranteed success in that hypothetical scenario. His speculation instead insinuated that a different Emperor at a different time would hold a more positive view of the British and be more inclined to negotiate with them, at the least. Framing his time at the Court in these terms, then, blamed the people within the Qing Court and not Qing institutions themselves.

To prove his claim about anti-British sentiment in the Qing Court, Macartney highlighted the competing personalities within the Qing Government to expose polarized sentiments toward the British. He wrote that Wang and Chou, Qing officials who worked closely with the Embassy, “expressed their being much pleased with us, and who wished that we had continued here longer,”³² while another official, “Fou-liou”³³ exacerbated and perpetuated a conspiracy against the Embassy.³⁴ Highlighting discord within the Qing Court between those who were welcoming of the British and those who wished to crush their aspirations, this comparison portrayed the Qing’s dealings with the Embassy as a conflict of personalities. It also normalized the behavior of the pro-British by portraying the conspiracy as having been against the British. This polarization provided Macartney reason to suggest that his attempts to negotiate fairly could be attributed to internal conflict within the Qing Court.

Then, in agreeing with Wang about the underlying causes of the Embassy’s failure, Macartney conveyed an understanding that the Embassy’s events had always been beyond his control. Macartney recorded that after Wang observed to him that

³² Ibid.

³³ Macartney’s journal is the only writing to refer to this official in this way. Given Macartney’s spelling and the lack of references to this official in other accounts, it is ambiguous as to whom Macartney is referring.

³⁴ Ibid., 103.

Britain's customs were noticeably different from the Qing's, he responded by acknowledging that the Emperor could not have accepted the British's requests without causing "significant scandal."³⁵ By agreeing with Wang, Macartney affirmed that the Embassy's outcome was predetermined, understood that differences in customs between the two were fundamental and insurmountable, and accepted that the Qing could not be faulted for their refusal because of the potential scandal it would have caused. He thus acquitted himself of any blame for his failure while also placing the Qing Court in a sympathetic position by referencing the potential problems they would have encountered by assenting to Macartney's requests.

Macartney's desire to convey equality despite his increasing understanding of differences in their perspectives on diplomacy is indicative of his overall attempt to understand the broader cultural differences between the British and Qing. As Clingham has argued,

we see that Macartney takes special pleasure in the *relativity* of cultural forms... The structure of expectation and experience thus provides one epistemological frame for Macartney's account: it leads not to gestures of cultural superiority, which characterize many travelogues... or intimations of racial superiority, as will occur in nineteenth-century sinology. Instead, it promotes ever-expansive reflections on cultural difference that open up a historical perspective and incorporate the particularities of Chinese culture, even when they feel foreign to Macartney.³⁶

Attempting to understand what he was experiencing in China, Macartney deviated both from Britain's eighteenth-century discourse of free trade and from the rhetoric that would soon come to characterize British writings on China. The tensions and intentional

³⁵ Ibid., 108.

³⁶ Clingham, "Cultural Difference," 16-17.

differences evident in Macartney's writing should thus be seen as deliberate dialogues and reflections instead of "confused"³⁷ and contradictory reactions.

Envisioning the Future of Anglo-Chinese relations

Macartney's failure even to begin negotiations with the Qing Court and his subsequent portrayal of their confinement within their precedent could have provided grounds to advocate for an inherent arrogance or backwardness in the Qing Court. Such was the view of John Barrow, who routinely implied that the Chinese were a stagnated people and that their Court ritual exemplified this stagnation.³⁸ Yet despite brief considerations of a complete upheaval of the Qing via military force, Macartney determined that Britain's preexisting relationship with the Qing would suffice, and if the Qing were to adopt European ideals, then they would have to do so slowly and deliberately. Thus, when presented with the choice between acting against the Qing in retaliation for their rejection of his demands or between adopting an intentionally patient approach, Macartney chose to advocate for preserving the status quo, severing his personal opinions from rhetoric that called for war.

Toward the end of his journal, Macartney contemplated a military strike against the Qing but decisively advocated against pursuing such a course of action. He explained that while the British could easily overrun several settlements and cities in China, "the blow would be immediate and heavy" to Britain.³⁹ Potential consequences could be that

³⁷ Hevia, *Cherishing*, 114.

³⁸ See John Barrow, *Travels in China, Containing Descriptions, Observations, and Comparisons, Made and Collected in the Course of a Short Residence at the Imperial Palace of Yuen-Min-Yuen, and On a Subsequent Journey Through the Country from Peking to Canton* (Philadelphia: W.F. McLaughlin, 1805), 125.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

other nations would become involved in China because of a disruption of trade, Britain would lose its trade with China, and British settlements in India would be endangered. For Macartney, then, “our interests, our reason, and our humanity equally forbid the thoughts of any offensive measures with regard to the Chinese.”⁴⁰ The posture toward the Qing for which Macartney ultimately advocated should be viewed through the lens of this peaceful disposition. As Gao suggests, “Macartney is very well-known for having suggested a violent line of action against China, [yet] Macartney was opposed to any hostile measures, and so he should be recognised as an advocate of peaceful relations with China, rather than an early agitator for a war against China.”⁴¹

Resultingly, instead of a violent posture toward the Qing, Macartney advocated for a patient approach based on the trust he believed had been established during the Embassy. He resultingly looked to the new Viceroy of Canton as the exemplar of the Embassy’s success and of the improvements to Anglo-Chinese commercial relations even within the Canton System. Macartney claimed to have left Beijing with assurances from the Court and the new Viceroy that the offenses the British experienced in Canton would be alleviated, meaning that the trade would become more mutually beneficial and less angering for the British.⁴² Macartney’s disappointment in not having been able to negotiate or receive his demands from the Qing Court ultimately did not surpass his excitement about the new Viceroy and the Viceroy’s potential to benefit the British’s standing in Canton. Thus, as Macartney believed that the Qing Court’s appointment of a

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Gao, “War,” 215.

⁴² Ibid., 118.

new Viceroy would address some of Britain's primary concerns in Canton, he provided a concrete, understandable reason for the British Government to remain unprovoked by the Embassy's seemingly disappointing results.

As Macartney's disappointment in his personal failure did not extend to, or alter, his perceptions of the Qing Government, his positive portrayals of various Qing officials underscored the patient approach he advocated the British to take. After having experienced the grandeur of the Qing Court, he affirmed that he had become "infinitely sensible of the Emperor's goodness."⁴³ He upheld the Emperor as well-intentioned and trustworthy despite what he could consider his negative experience with the Qing Court. His recognition of these virtuous qualities in the Emperor undermined the notion that the Emperor had conspired, or otherwise exhibited bias, against the British. Instead, Macartney's assumption of the Emperor's goodwill promoted trust in the Qing. Moreover, as the Viceroy claimed that the Emperor and the Court had been extremely flattered to have hosted an ambassador from such a distance, Macartney believed that another embassy to Beijing would be favorable.⁴⁴ His desire to send another embassy to the Qing Court further reinforced his optimism in the future of Anglo-Chinese relations, as he would not have suggested another embassy had he either been unsatisfied or suspicious of the Qing's intentions and motivations toward the British.

Macartney further promoted trust in the Qing when distinguishing between Qing officials favorable to the British and those conspiring against them by portraying the conspirators as a definitive minority. He observed that during his time at Court, a small

⁴³ Ibid., 122.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 126.

number of officials exhibited “shyness and jealousy” when dealing with the British, but he mentions that most of the officials, including the Emperor, did not demonstrate those qualities because they were hospitable and receptive toward the British.⁴⁵ In doing so, he depicted those who were less welcoming toward the British as anomalous and not indicative of the Qing Court’s overall sentiments, thereby normalizing the favorable attitude toward the British he wanted to depict the Qing Court as having.

Thus, Macartney referred specifically to the new Viceroy and his belief in the Viceroy’s ability to enact positive change even within the Canton system to demonstrate his trust in the new foundation of Britain’s relationship with the Qing he believed himself to have established. According to Macartney, the new Viceroy “was determined to do what was equitable and proper, to grant what was reasonable and deny what was not so.”⁴⁶ This expression placed significant faith in the Viceroy’s judgment and virtue, implicitly entrusting him to reject even British demands or proposals in the future if he judged it necessary. Regardless, Macartney believed that because of the Embassy, the British would be treated more equally in Canton than they had been in the past. He claimed that the Viceroy understood that a change of conduct toward the British “would be right, both for the sake of justice and the reputation of his country” and that the Company would receive “many advantages” as a result of the appointment of this new Viceroy.⁴⁷ Thus, in accordance with his instructions to “turn [his] principal attention to the relief of [the EIC’s] current embarrassments at Canton” if the Qing Court rejected

⁴⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 131.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 136.

Britain's formal requests, Macartney anticipated that the Qing's expected behavioral adjustment in Canton would halt injustices against the British at Canton.⁴⁸ Macartney's trust that the British trade in Canton would be conducted under more favorable conditions as a result of the new Viceroy underscored his attempt to preserve the trade's status quo if his attempts to negotiate were to fail.

Just as Macartney's willingness to work within the boundaries of the Qing's trade system contradicted the ideas of free trade that informed his Embassy's formation, his prediction about the overall ills pervading Chinese society similarly deviated from the eighteenth-century discourse of free trade. Through the use of body metaphors, writers such as Hanway, Defoe, and Smith argued that a society's relative health could be judged based on their economic policies.⁴⁹ However, Macartney identified the political threats posed by increasing insurrections and uprisings as the "disease" plaguing Chinese society and that would eventually lead to its collapse.⁵⁰ Notably absent from this discussion is any assessment of the Qing's potential adoption of free trade policies or how a lack of economic adaptation would threaten Chinese society. Instead, as Porter argues, "for Macartney the inevitability of the dynasty's demise stems more immediately from its attempts unnaturally to 'stifle the energies of its subjects.'"⁵¹ Consequently, although Macartney distinguished a major way in which Qing was "sick" or "unnatural," the distinctively political nature of his critique disregarded economic policy and free trade as the overarching standards of societal health and legitimacy.

⁴⁸ Morse, *Chronicles*, 219.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 1.

⁵⁰ Macartney, *An Embassy*, 143.

⁵¹ Porter, *Ideographia*, 234.

Despite this appraisal of the Qing's potential collapse, Macartney focused on ensuring a prosperous trade with the Qing for the future by affirming the need for trust in the Canton officials. He asserted that while the British had always been required to depend on the Qing in the trade, his time in China demonstrated that they could be assured of the "good faith and nature" of the Chinese with whom they came into contact.⁵² Based on his interactions with officials such as Wang, Chou, and the new Viceroy, Macartney determined that personalities, and not simply circumstances, would provide the foundation for the British's future relationship with the Chinese. In considering certain Qing officials as trustworthy counterparts, Macartney conveyed a belief that the Canton trade could become more favorable to the British now that he had firsthand experience in China.

Conversely, as Macartney credited the Embassy with correcting the Qing's perception of the British, he argued that the moral equivalency between the British and Qing would ensure Britain's prosperity in Canton. He believed that British interests would be more seriously considered in Canton now that "a most favourable idea has been formed" of the British in the Qing Court.⁵³ Understanding that the British could not station a permanent ambassador in Beijing, Macartney looked to the current arrangements and the ways in which they could be improved. The Qing officials possessed the moral qualities that would make them trustworthy trade partners, and the British had seemingly demonstrated a similar character to the Qing. As a result, the best way for the British to ensure and promote their interests in Canton would be to show repeatedly that British

⁵² Macartney, *An Embassy*, 162.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 166-167.

national character was more honorable and trustworthy than that of the French or the Portuguese.⁵⁴ The impression that Macartney believed the British had made on the Qing would cause the Qing to elevate the British above the other Europeans. This assumption implicitly demonstrated Macartney's faith in the Qing's abilities to discern what he saw as Britain's comparative moral superiority. Underlying that assumption, then, was Macartney's belief that the Qing's replacement of the other Europeans with the British would be indicative of the Qing's valuing of the moral qualities the British supposedly exhibited during the Embassy. Overall, Macartney's use of this moral equivalency indicated that the Embassy had solidified the necessary arrangements to improve their trading conditions in Canton.

In the closing pages of his journal, Macartney provided his readers with a definitively positive impression of the shared humanity between the British and Qing. As Wang and Chou departed the British's presence for the final time, Macartney wrote that they shed tears and that "if I ever could forget the friendship and attachment of these two worthy men, or the services they rendered us, I should be guilty of the deepest ingratitude."⁵⁵ While Macartney could be said only to be affectionate toward them because they agreed with him, his emphasis on the services they provided the Embassy emphasizes a more practical nature of their relationship. Moreover, Macartney's praise for them disregarded any agreements they might have had with his British ideologies or interests. In predicting that those officials would eventually ascend to higher positions within the Qing Government, Macartney expressed both trust that the Qing would

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

identify talent and faith that the Qing Court agreed with his definition of talent.⁵⁶ This perspective directly contradicted accusations that the Qing actively perpetuated corruption. It instead trusted their judgment of governing officials. As a result of his optimism in their future discernment, Macartney ultimately communicated that the Qing would be well-intentioned and effective in dealing with the British.

His overall conclusion reinforced this appraisal by arguing that the noticeably significant differences between the British and Qing should not warrant judgments or assumptions of superiority. He explicitly concluded that “nothing could be more fallacious than to judge of China by any European standard” because the differences between their society and the Europeans’ were so fundamental that Europeans could not appreciate it fully.⁵⁷ As Clingham argues about Macartney’s writing, “here we have an Enlightenment man of letters thinking his way through cultural difference armed only with his appreciation of ‘all the wonders of this charming place’ and a philosophy that reconciles him to his failure.”⁵⁸ Macartney’s conclusion was thus genuine because he was equipped with a philosophy that could explain his failure and allow him to be at peace with it. His conclusion also represented a limitation he placed upon himself and attempted to impose upon his readers. He derived from his experience in China that the negative mindsets about the Chinese were potentially rooted in failure to understand them. This failure would naturally result in condescending perspectives because understanding the Qing ultimately meant grasping how they differed significantly from

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁸ Clingham, “Cultural Difference,” 16.

the Europeans. Accounting for those differences, then, would result in measuring them by their own standards. Resultingly, as Clingham concludes, Macartney's writings "need to be read not only in the context of Macartney's immediate experiences, but also against the history of Anglo-Sino relations between 1793 and 1838" in which those relations increasingly deteriorated toward war.⁵⁹

Conclusion

The message that Macartney communicated as a result of his time at the Qing Court allowed him to communicate a positive message about China because of his deviation from the discourse of free trade. Macartney's initial promotion of broader diplomatic aims instead of economic ones allowed him to employ language of compromise and relativity when attempting to understand the Qing. Macartney then sustained his language of equality when explaining his diplomatic failure because he had succeeded in a broader mission to provide the Qing a more positive impression of the British character. His perception of this success ultimately allowed him to promote trust in the Qing and optimism in the future of British trade with China even within the framework of the Canton system. Therefore, as Macartney advocated for a friendly posture toward the Qing and for a continuation of the current trade despite his diplomatic failure, his opinions both departed from the Embassy's intellectual roots of free trade and could not have assisted in starting a war because the differences between the British and Qing, however fundamental, did not require a negative opinion of the Qing.

The approach that Macartney encouraged directly clashed with the conceptions of Chinese society under the Qing that would be expected in the context of the discourse of

⁵⁹ Ibid., 22.

free trade and the British Empire's new economic character. Macartney's subjective posture toward the Qing implicitly took focus away from the Qing's lack of free trade policies and instead advocated for collaboration with the Qing. This perspective contradicted the universal application of Smith's linear conception of history.

Macartney's expressions of optimism and patience in the Canton trade, specifically, conflicted with Smith's conceptualization of societies such as Qing China. If the Qing were backward and stagnated, as Smith believed, then they would be assumed to be undeserving of the British's patience with their trade policies. Regardless of his reasons for viewing the Qing with greater relativity, Macartney rejected Smith's hypothetical view of Chinese and Qing society. He consequently believed that acting upon the Qing to force a change in their trade system would be a mistake.

Macartney's explanation of his failure in such a way as to make it seem that it was not, in fact, a failure, resembled the tactics that the authors of the other travel narratives used when discussing what seemed to have gone wrong with the negotiations. While Macartney's journal stood out amongst the other traveler's accounts because of his emphasis on diplomatic procedure and overarching cultural differences, the next chapter will show that the other eighteenth-century travelogues arrived at conclusions similar to Macartney's. For various reasons, those writings conveyed positive messages about China and worked to promote optimism in the future of Britain's trade with China.

CHAPTER THREE

Principles of Justice and The Finest Country in the World: The Embassy through the Lens of the British Participants

Introduction

When the Embassy returned in late 1794, British newspapers moved away from providing coverage and commentary on the Embassy's events and toward speculating about the content and impact of the various travelogues proceeding from those who had accompanied Macartney. Between 1795, the year that Aeneas Anderson's travelogue was first published, and 1799, advertisements for the travel narratives appeared regularly in the major London newspapers.¹ By contrast, substantive discussion of the Embassy, Macartney's failure, and potential impacts on policy or perceptions of China during that time dropped significantly.² While this shift could have occurred for a variety of reasons, the space given to advertisements for the travelogues indicated a vibrant popular curiosity about China and the Embassy, warranting a closer examination of the ideas those narratives promulgated.

The travelogues ultimately expressed a positive and surprised reaction to what their writers witnessed in China, causing them to promote Britain's preexisting trade with China in a rejection of free trade as the overarching standard of cultural legitimacy. In the

¹ In the Burney Collection, *Times* Digital Archive, and the British Library Newspapers, advertisements solely for Anderson's book were featured 329 times in roughly a dozen major London newspapers between January of 1795 and December of 1799.

² Between January of 1795 and December of 1799, only 15 articles about the Embassy were not advertisements for a book. In contrast, the Embassy was the subject of 410 articles in those same newspapers between January of 1790 and December of 1794.

first of these narratives, Aeneas Anderson expressed consistent shock with his experience in China and defended the Qing to promote optimism and trust in the Canton trade. Next, Samuel Holmes employed a series of comparisons based on appearance and spectacle to create his own hierarchy of societal worth and concluded that the Qing were more advanced than the British had been led to believe. Then, Sir George Leonard Staunton's narrative, the British Government's official account of the Embassy, moderated Macartney's goals to see the Embassy as a trust-building endeavor that would likely not attain any substantive concessions. This outlook allowed Staunton to advocate for preserving the status quo of the Canton trade and gradually build on Macartney's success of gaining the Court's trust. Thus, these travelogues arrived at conclusions about China that considered a variety of factors apart from trade policy, allowing them to advocate for sustaining Britain's present means of engagement with the Chinese.

Aeneas Anderson's Narrative

Though Anderson's occupation as a seaman could suggest that he was unconcerned with diplomatic exchanges and political intrigue, his recordings of receptions of the British on their way to China provided the foundation³ for his repeated insistence on the Embassy's importance and, I suggest, the framework for deciphering his later interpretations of the Chinese's apparent hostility toward the British. For example, when the British stopped in Madeira, Anderson derived immense satisfaction from the distinction the local government gave the Embassy.⁴ He similarly considered the

³ The first edition of Anderson's journal was published in early 1795, making it unlikely that he performed serious edits in an attempt to craft an overarching narrative.

⁴ Aeneas Anderson, *A Narrative of the British Embassy to China in the Years 1792, 1793, and 1794* (London: J.J. Tourneisen, 1795), 2.

hospitality that the Portuguese showed the British in Rio de Janeiro as proof of the Portuguese support for the Embassy.⁵ Here, Anderson was suggesting that even non-British Europeans were actively interested in the Embassy's results. He equated the positivity of their reception of the British with encouragement of the Embassy's success. Thus, unwelcoming attitudes toward the British suggested jealousy and a desire to hinder their success. When the British stopped at Santa Cruz, he considered the apparent rudeness of the local Spaniards to be indicative both of their longstanding animosity toward the British and their jealousy of the British for having the idea of sending a delegation to the Qing Court.⁶ Although Anderson was not intentionally foreshadowing events that had not happened, these initial thoughts on reception established his criteria for the components of a favorable diplomatic relationship. To Anderson, hospitality was directly connected to support for the Embassy. The alternative was an active interest in impeding its success.

Therefore, as the Qing's hospitable reception of the Embassy assured Anderson of their favor toward the British, his determination that the relationship between the British and Qing was governed by rules of decency established equality between the two. After initially expressing concerns that the Qing would assume that the British had come to acknowledge subservience as a tributary state, Anderson associated the Qing's apparent readiness at providing accommodations and supplies for the Embassy as indicative of their "greatest civility."⁷ He thus rejected the notion that the Qing automatically

⁵ Ibid., 22-23.

⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁷ Ibid., 68.

considered themselves superior to the British. Instead, the Qing were fulfilling their role as friendly hosts, not as generous overlords to inferior servants. This recognition of civility and hospitality allowed Anderson to place the British and Qing on equal footing.

He stressed this equality in his portrayal of “Van-Tadge-In,”⁸ the Chinese official who worked most closely with the British, by upholding him as the embodiment of the Qing’s attitude toward the British and of how the British should see the Qing. Anderson proposed that the Qing’s appointment of this official to work with the British should provide the British with “a favourable opinion of the good sense of the Chinese government” because of this official’s friendliness toward the British.⁹ While reinforcing Anderson’s previous appraisal of the Qing’s seemingly positive reception of the British, this statement also added a dimension of friendship to the Embassy’s relationship with the Qing. Furthermore, as Anderson considered this official, specifically, as the embodiment of the Qing’s favorability toward the Embassy, he implied that potential anti-British conspirators in the Qing Court were the exceptions to the rule of friendliness and hospitality. Those conspirators, then, would not be indicative of the Qing’s sentiments toward the British. By describing this official in this way, Anderson emphasized the well-intentioned and personable nature of this diplomatic relationship.

Then, during the Embassy’s journey through the interior of China toward Beijing, Anderson’s discussion of the Qing Government’s structure and practices invoked inherently Western concepts to highlight what he saw as the Qing’s political sufficiency.

⁸ The spelling of this individual’s name varies both within certain travel narratives and between the different travel narratives. Since this spelling is the spelling used in this man’s first appearance in Anderson’s narrative, and since Anderson’s account was the first of the travel accounts published, this spelling will be used when needed. Anderson’s narrative is also the only one to use this spelling.

⁹ Anderson, *A Narrative*, 77.

He extensively praised their penal system, noting the order and stability it naturally provided.¹⁰ Whereas others, such as John Barrow, saw the Qing's legal system as harsh and tyrannical,¹¹ Anderson considered the Qing committed to preserving rule of law and societal order that worked even within the large expanse of the Qing Empire. He praised the Qing's bureaucratic and hierarchical government structure, which he considered the only effective way for them to maintain communication with all their subjects throughout such a vast territory.¹² Anderson implicitly utilized the increasingly popular Western concept of the consent of the governed, assuming that the Qing desired to be in frequent communication with all their subjects and that this communication would have political ramifications. In doing so, he portrayed the Qing in a positive light by depicting their governance in terms that his readers would favorably receive. In addition, his references to these concepts also reinforced the idea that the corruption within the Qing Government was not a largescale problem but was rather confined to certain individuals.

Upon arriving in Beijing, Anderson reduced the Embassy's status from confident and powerful negotiating partners to foreign guests stunned by the spectacle they witnessed and experienced. In a reversal of his former optimism about the British's posturing relative to the rest of the world, Anderson expressed humility in his reaction to Beijing, its architecture, and its number of people, reducing Britain to solely "the first nation in Europe."¹³ This deviation from the usual rhetoric of British superiority could be construed as to imply that Anderson considered that that conception was not entirely true.

¹⁰ Ibid., 114-115.

¹¹ See Barrow, *Travels*, 261 and elsewhere.

¹² Anderson, *A Narrative*, 120-121.

¹³ Ibid., 124, 127.

He rather contemplated the possibility that the British possessed an equal counterpart in the Qing. As Platt argues, Anderson, “a servant, had no vested interest in upholding the dignity of either the government or the Company,” leading him to paint a rather candid picture of Britain’s standing comparative to China.¹⁴

As Anderson’s further evaluations of the grandeur of the Qing Court eventually convinced him that the British might not be entirely successful in attaining their requests from the Qing, he utilized conspiracy theories to absolve both the British and Qing. First, as he gathered from the spectacle of the ceremony at Jehol that the British had underestimated the Qing’s power and perception of themselves, he concluded that the Qing’s cautious approach to their British visitors was justified because the British were new to the Qing Court.¹⁵ He thus acknowledged that the Qing had the power and justification to reject the British demands. The relationship between the two was not contingent upon British power. Rather, he saw the Qing, in their precaution, as placing themselves in a position of strength to ensure that the Embassy would not result in any damaging consequences. However, Anderson’s perspective on the Qing’s position did not necessarily require that they reject the British requests, only that they display their independence and power. Accordingly, he speculated that “the Grand Choulaa”¹⁶ was intensely prejudiced against the Embassy and manipulated the Qing’s natural caution into antagonism of the British despite the other Qing officials having been “polite and

¹⁴ Platt, *Twilight*, 45.

¹⁵ Anderson, *A Narrative*, 173.

¹⁶ No such title existed for the Qing, though it would take the British around fifty years to learn this (See Hevia, *Cherishing*, 136). For writings during the Embassy, the “Grand Choulaa” refers to Heshen, a high-ranking Manchu official and close partner of the Qianlong Emperor.

pleasant people, and of an agreeable appearance.”¹⁷ In intentionally distinguishing between this official and the others, Anderson blamed that one official for intentional harm to the British, implying that the rest of the Qing officials were simply exercising caution. In this reaction to the Embassy’s potential failure, then, Anderson theorized that the actions and biases of one official could prevail, and potentially spread, despite the sentiments of a significant majority. He thus provided a foundation for confronting the reality of the Embassy’s failure in a way that could maintain positivity toward China both for the preexisting commercial relationship and for future embassies.

Anderson’s subsequent discussion of the Emperor’s role in the negotiations invoked Western concepts to portray the Emperor and his Court of having been motivated by protecting their people’s interests, thereby excusing their refusal of the Embassy’s requests. He concluded that the Emperor was “ever attentive to the real interests of his own subjects,” even if that involved withdrawing “his favors to any foreign nation whenever it might be incompatible with the interests of his own.”¹⁸ This depiction of the Emperor relied on the assumption that the Emperor prioritized governing in accordance with the people’s will, and as a result, the Emperor would consider his own people’s interests even at the expense of British interests. Whereas Anderson could have proposed that the conflict between the Emperor’s will and the British vision of free trade indicated the Qing’s arrogance or backwardness, his language catered to a positive impression of the Emperor’s governing style, even despite the Qing’s rejection of the Embassy’s requests.

¹⁷ Anderson, *A Narrative*, 172-173.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

During the Embassy's preparations to depart from Beijing, Anderson corrected an erroneous perspective about the Chinese in such a way as to warn against overall generalizations about their character. He recorded an incident that occurred in Beijing during which some of the Chinese attendants expressed a lack of excitement and understanding about the various British instruments. Barrow and Dr. Dinwiddie resolved that this lack of interest was proof of the Chinese's overall ignorant and stubborn character.¹⁹ Yet Anderson confined this perception to these two men. He distanced himself and the rest of the Embassy from this viewpoint, specifically assigning them agency in their remarks by highlighting that "Dr. Dinwiddie and Mr. Barrow... immediately determined upon" China's overall ignorance.²⁰ His mention of this seemingly minor event indicated his desire to dispel that particular notion, warning against generalizing about the Chinese because of apparent differences in their inclinations and interests.

Then, when further addressing the circumstances surrounding Macartney's departure, Anderson provided another rationale for the Qing's refusal, depicting them as honorable in adhering to their longstanding traditions. He referred to a Qing policy that barred them from allowing foreign guests to stay for more than the several weeks that the British had been given.²¹ The Qing Court thus had no choice but to require the British to leave when they did, despite the Embassy's seemingly abrupt halt. Anderson normalized what would generally be seen as odd or unwelcoming behavior by the Qing toward their

¹⁹ Ibid., 217.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 221.

guests. The Qing were not maliciously motivated in quickly dismissing their British because they were simply following their laws.

As the British prepared to depart, Anderson upheld Van Tadge-In as the embodiment of the friendship between the British and Qing to solidify the humanity and personability he wished to associate with the Qing. He associated the Qing Court with positive characteristics through Van Tadge-In by including a lengthy description of the assistance this official offered the British and by concluding that his conduct and disposition aligned with those of the Emperor.²² Anderson thus looked to Van Tadge-In and his friendship with the British as not only emblematic of the current friendship between the British and Chinese more broadly, but as a source of optimism in the future of Anglo-Chinese relations. For Anderson, if the Qing Government were to be left in the hands of officials such as Van Tadge-In, in contrast to those who impeded the Embassy's success, then there was reason to believe that the injustices in Canton would be halted. While Macartney did not obtain the desired concessions, solving the problems the British experienced in Canton would encourage Britain's willingness to continue to trade because of an increased trust in the trade's fairness. Looking past disagreements over diplomacy and tradition, Anderson communicated the friendship and mutual respect he saw as fundamental to the relationship between the two empires. He then associated the large crowds gathered to witness the Embassy's departure with their acknowledgment of the dignity and honor that the Emperor wished to assign the British.²³ Anderson neglected the differences between the British and Qing to convey the mutual favor established

²² Ibid., 230.

²³ Ibid., 259-261.

during the Embassy. He thus relegated the failure in Macartney's negotiations to the periphery, considering the Embassy's more abstract achievements of gaining respect and trust to have been of more significance.

Concluding his journal, Anderson argued that the Embassy's time in China proved surprisingly more beneficial to the British than expected and used these benefits to advocate for a reassessment of how the British commonly thought of the Chinese. He first referred to the constant care that the Qing officials had exhibited toward the British to suggest that not all Chinese or Qing were openly hostile to foreigners, nor were all the officials complicit in anti-British conspiracies.²⁴ In attacking the negative characterizations and generalizations his audience made or could make about the Chinese, Anderson insinuated that those false conceptions were both unwarranted and harmful to the future relationship between the British and Qing. He alluded to a letter that the Emperor sent to all the Qing officials, instructing them to "fulfil the duties of your high and important office with justice and moderation."²⁵ Thus, despite the Embassy's failure, Anderson attempted to bolster the British's trust in the Qing Government perceiving a more positive, mutually beneficial future because of the trust and respect established during the Embassy.

Holmes's Journal

Published three years after Anderson's journal, Holmes's account focused significantly on appearance and spectacle to argue that China should be considered more civilized than popularly thought. Holmes's descriptions of encounters and occurrences

²⁴ Ibid., 316-317.

²⁵ Ibid., 336.

prior to landing in China provided the framework by which to evaluate his impressions of China. In Rio de Janeiro, Holmes characterized the city's inhabitants, including its governor, as "superstitious, ignorant, rich, lazy, proud, and cruel... like the inhabitants of most southern climates," while his time in Java convinced him that the native princes were slaves of the Dutch and exhibited a "savage disposition."²⁶ These appraisals are important in framing Holmes's narrative because of his tendency to make significant generalizations based on factors such as location and because of his willingness to distinguish between civilized and savage peoples as a result of his generalizations. Thus, his tendency to generalize implicitly created various hierarchies based on his ideas of what constituted civilization.

He similarly established parallels between people groups in the opening pages of his journal that indicated their place in his hierarchy. Describing what he considered to be the "rank odor" of the natives of Cochin China, Holmes informed his readers that these smells were similar to that of the Malays, paralleling two peoples Holmes considered less civilized because of their apparent lack of hygiene.²⁷ With this comparison and imagery, Holmes referred exclusively to negative qualities and closely associated those qualities with entire people groups. As a result of his description of their specific inability to maintain basic hygiene, Holmes inferred that the natives of Cochin China and, by extension, Malaysia, were inherently uncivilized.

Holmes's descriptions of the occurrences and spectacles after the Embassy's arrival in China, then, provided insight into the message he wished to convey about the

²⁶ Samuel Holmes, *The Journal of Mr. Samuel Holmes, One of the Guard on Lord Macartney's Embassy to China and Tartary* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1798), 17, 48, 52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

Chinese people. He first considered the cultivation practices as having enhanced the appearance of the natural sights in the rural areas through which the Embassy travelled. This caused him to express his delight at a beauty he considered indescribable.²⁸ While Holmes's description of these sights did not differ from similar descriptions in the other accounts, his opinion in this instance is notable because of his established pattern of emphasizing seemingly trivial factors such as smells or landscaping when considering levels of civilization. Therefore, his description of the captivating and charming style of cultivation, ground, and land as he praised the apparent attention the workers paid to ensuring proper upkeep associated rural China and its inhabitants with decisively positive characteristics.²⁹

His parallels between China and England elucidated China's position in his hierarchy of civilizations more generally. Alluding to "the most beautiful river I ever beheld," he asserted that "the Thames itself, in my opinion, does not exceed it."³⁰ Given Holmes's pattern of comparisons, his considering this sight beyond comparison with a similar feature in England gave an unequivocally positive impression of the Chinese. He thus admitted that, although he had arrived in China with tentative optimism, partially because of his encounters with other peoples on the journey there, everything had "exceeded [his] utmost expectation, in every point of view."³¹ While Holmes was most immediately concerned with altering his own perspective, his statement also rejected

²⁸ Ibid., 105.

²⁹ Ibid., 125-126.

³⁰ Ibid., 125.

³¹ Ibid., 126.

more broadly whatever information he previously had that aided in forming those notions.

Holmes reinforced this satisfaction and surprise when describing Jehol, praising the Emperor and the Qing Court for their grandeur and power and implicitly relinquishing claims to British superiority. He documented that those who had not been able to accompany Macartney to the Emperor's audience "returned mortified and terribly disappointed, as they had promised themselves great things from a sight of this favourite and famous residence of the greatest monarch on earth; nor could they forbear hopes of seeing his Imperial Highness, in both which, they were disappointed."³² Their expectations led them to promise themselves a certain experience, demonstrating the high regard in which they held the Qing Court. Furthermore, they willingly assigned the Emperor a title of power and supremacy, and in doing so, they rejected notions of British or European superiority and placed the Qing on the top tier of the hierarchy of world governments without having even seen the Emperor or witnessed the spectacle that Macartney had been able to as the Ambassador. By recording this disappointment, then, Holmes promoted the Emperor and his Court at the expense of the British. As a result, he established more broadly the Qing's reputation compared to the rest of the world in a way that considered them a serious power.

In the closing pages of his journal, Holmes referred to the newfound friendship between the British and Qing to promote more respect for the Qing following the Embassy. For example, as the British were departing one of the Chinese cities, Qing soldiers fired a salute with three cannon shots, an amount exceeding the normal

³² Ibid., 144.

procedure except for when saluting the Emperor.³³ To Holmes, had the Qing maintained hostility or resentment toward the British, they would not have made these types of gestures during the British's departure journey. He similarly capitalized on the apparent high regard in which the Chinese and Qing held the Embassy to demonstrate the intentionality of the Qing's respect for the British and its consequences for future relations. According to Holmes, when Chinese soldiers saw the British boats passing by, they saluted Macartney by "falling on their knees and giving a loud huzza" because they had been systematically ordered to do so by the Qing Court.³⁴ Since these physical actions could be interpreted as signs of submission or acknowledgements of inferiority to the British, Holmes recorded these instances to demonstrate the extent of the Qing's respect for the British and ultimately to solidify his portrayals of the Qing's humanity and equality.

Closing his journal, Holmes left his readers with the same impression he had constructed at the beginning of his narrative. He considered China to be

the finest country in the world with respect to its climate and production... there is nothing that is common in any other part of the world but is to be found here, and in equal perfection: it is peculiarly happy in the salubrity of the climate; and the inhabitants... are blessed with health, and live to a good old age.³⁵

Holmes saw the value that China possessed in the quantity and uniqueness of the items they offered, making them a worthy trading partner. His communication of these qualities derived uniquely from his personal experience, which required him to adjust his preconceptions about China. Thus, the overarching issue for Chinese trade policies was

³³ Ibid., 151.

³⁴ Ibid., 179, 184.

³⁵ Ibid., 186.

that China was not trading the right items, not that their entire system was invalid. Furthermore, Holmes seemingly upheld China as more advanced and vibrant than their place in Smith's conception of societal progress would suggest. In emphasizing China's productivity and potential, Holmes asserted that the Chinese were both more advanced and capable than the British presumed they were, indicating the need to continue to trade with the Chinese to receive the benefits they could offer.

The Official Account

In the introductory pages of his account of the Embassy, Staunton framed his narrative by alluding to broader, more abstract goals for the Embassy that would be more indicative of success than any economic concessions. Discussing his expectations for the negotiations, Staunton elevated the Embassy's symbolic progress above its potential benefits in the trade. He contended that the Embassy was only the first step in a larger process to redress the British's grievances. Although he alluded to the ultimate goal of "facilitating and extending" British commerce with the Chinese, he considered that goal within the larger context of having secured an audience to appeal directly to the Qing Court.³⁶ Receiving an audience with the Emperor provided them the platform from which to introduce him to their ideas. He similarly compared the British with other Europeans who had previously established themselves in China, referring to the amount of time the Dutch and Portuguese had been there to theorize that their relationships with the Qing had been built on consistency and trustworthiness.³⁷ In highlighting these qualities, Staunton implied that the relationship Britain desired with the Qing and the changes they

³⁶ Staunton, *An Abridged Account*, 13.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

wished the Qing would make could only be realized gradually over time. He was not advocating for overhauling the Qing's trade policies at this time, nor was he particularly interested in eradicating Britain's European competition. The Embassy's only significant progress, then, would be rooted in meeting with the Emperor.

Evoking conspiracies and fears of foreign influence, Staunton referred to England's past of dealing with governments of China to caution against seeing this affair as only involving the British and the Qing. Staunton asserted that England's attempt under Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603) to send a mission to "the Court of the Great Mogul" was terminated because the Portuguese and Spanish Jesuits at the Ming Court were antagonistic toward the English.³⁸ In Staunton's version of events, the Ming were innocent of conspiracy against the English but were swayed by the Jesuits' manipulation. Since the Jesuits still maintained a presence at the Qing Court at the time of the Embassy, Staunton's reference to this past event warned of the potential for Jesuits again to exert outsized influence over the and to play the roles of villains and spoilers. This narrative allowed Staunton to paint the Ming, the Chinese, and their relationship with the English in a more favorable light. A direct encounter with the Qing Court would gain influence in China for the British and begin a relationship free from outside interference.

As a result, Staunton's theories regarding the English's obtaining of trading privileges in China stressed the character he wished to assign the Chinese in the absence of English influence. Noting that the English had taken the initiative to attempt to sail up the Pearl River to Canton themselves, Staunton stated that some local Chinese, having been made aware of this attempt, decided to help direct the English as a reward for their

³⁸ Ibid., 14.

dedication in attempting to navigate the river by themselves.³⁹ While reinforcing Staunton's prior assertion that the British needed to display qualities of resilience to gain favor with the Qing, this narrative also rejected the notion that the Chinese were systematically jealous of foreign traders. Moreover, it validated Staunton's concerns of conspiracies against the British, since the Chinese willingly helped the English at a time in which political considerations, and the Jesuits, were non-factors. In this story, then, Staunton upheld the Chinese as benevolent trading partners.

Consequently, Staunton suggested that the British trade in China had always been plagued by foreign meddling that affected chances of a mutually beneficial relationship between the Chinese and English. His narration of the history of the British in Canton continued with his suggestions that although the Chinese and English initially forged a solid relationship, the Portuguese in the Ming Court turned the officials against the English to deny them trading privileges. Moreover, he asserted that the English's method of establishing permanent trade at Canton by gunpoint was justified because of continued provocations by the Portuguese.⁴⁰ Having persisted in attempting to stymie the English's attempts at trading in China, the Portuguese had proven themselves instigators of the English's continual woes and the damagers of the English's relationship with the Chinese. Staunton's implication, then, was that the Portuguese had forced the British to justify potential violence.

Thus, concluding his introduction, Staunton indicated that because of those past events and circumstances, the British had been left with no choice but to negotiate

³⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16-17.

directly with the Qing. He claimed that once the Qing took power, European Jesuits in Beijing had intentionally misrepresented the English's character to the Qing to influence their opinions.⁴¹ These unnecessary sentiments that the Europeans encouraged the Qing to harbor against the British resulted in the inequalities and injustices to which Staunton continually referred and which had ultimately provoked the Embassy's formation. For Staunton, these misrepresentations were the only elements of the British character that the Qing knew directly. Because of the Qing's unfavorable impression of the British, Staunton believed that they ignored British complaints. A direct interaction between the British and Qing was therefore necessary to dispel those misconceptions.⁴² Ultimately, in framing his narrative in this way, Staunton promoted the idea that the Qing could negotiate fairly with the British in a direct encounter because their mistreatment of the British stemmed largely from others' deliberate mischaracterizations.

Staunton's initial emphasis on preserving Britain's existing commercial relationship with the Chinese indicated that the British should not attempt to abandon the Canton System altogether but rather to negotiate around it. He acknowledged that the British must exercise caution when dealing with the Qing because any large missteps could result in an interruption or a complete halt in their trade in Canton.⁴³ For Staunton, the Canton trade was valuable insofar as it was clearly preferable to no trade. He accordingly sought only certain improvements while ensuring that Britain did not lose the current trade. Predicting that the Embassy, as the first formal contact between the two

⁴¹ Ibid., 17-18.

⁴² Ibid, 18.

⁴³ Ibid., 25.

empires, would likely result in little to no actual change, he warned that “to aim at too much, in the beginning, might occasion either a tedious delay, or a total failure.”⁴⁴ He reaffirmed the need for the British to make symbolic progress toward amicability with the Qing instead of expecting upheavals to the Qing’s established system.

Staunton’s later discussion of the role of the Canton Hoppo⁴⁵ in the Embassy’s formation further indicated his belief that the Embassy should aim for remedial and more realistic concerns. He vaguely asserted that the Hoppo became increasingly nervous after the Embassy’s arrival, claiming that

[The Emperor] had given orders for Mandarines to await his Excellency’s arrival... the Hoppo, or chief officer of revenue and inspector of the foreign trade, was the most alarmed. He stood self-convicted by his manifold acts of oppression, extortion, and injustice; and in viewing the intent of the Embassy in no other light than to procure a redress of grievances, he was terrified.⁴⁶

Staunton implied that the Hoppo was primarily responsible for the current mistreatments of the British in Canton. The Hoppo’s uneasiness resulted from his awareness that the Emperor could remove him from his position upon hearing the British complaints. His removal would thus signal an immediate improvement of the treatment of the British in Canton.⁴⁷ Staunton’s failure to mention any other Canton or Qing officials who might have been responsible for the injustices that provoked the Embassy suggested an expectation that the Court and Emperor would take action against the Hoppo. While Staunton’s purpose in mentioning the Hoppo was more immediately directed at

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Hoppo was the customs superintendents in Canton. See Van Dyke, *Canton Trade*, 1-2, 6, 8-12.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

discussing a way in which the Embassy could, and should, be instantly helpful, he also implicitly pinned a large portion of Britain's current problems on one official.

Similarly, Staunton claimed to have conversed with a Chinese merchant, whose sentiments mirrored those of Staunton. When speaking with the British, this merchant opined that Britain's complaints about their treatment in Canton resulted from the "intrigues and interested views" of the Hoppo, whose self-interests were executed by the other Canton officials simply following orders.⁴⁸ As this merchant critiqued the Canton government from a Qing subject and someone who also had an active interest in the Canton trade, he demonstrated that not all the Chinese or Canton officials were complicit in the alleged conspiracy. Furthermore, in referring specifically to the Canton officials, the merchant implied that the Qing Government on a larger scale was not encouraging, or aware, of the behavior in Canton. They were thus not to be faulted for those instances of malfeasance. Consequently, Staunton's recording of this incident evidenced his belief that the Qing Government would work with the British toward fairer treatment because the problems of corruption were exclusive to Canton.

Although Staunton believed that the Qing Government was largely not responsible for the abuses in Canton, his reservations about the Embassy's success were rooted in fears of new anti-British conspiracies in the Qing Court. The most immediately pressing of these conspiracies was the rumor that some of the British military had clashed with Qing troops around India in 1791.⁴⁹ This rumor could prove damning for the Embassy's aims because the Qing would be skeptical that the British did not possess

⁴⁸ Ibid., 134.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 170.

hidden motives or did not have larger ambitions. While he believed that Macartney successfully convinced most of the Qing officials that those accusations were false and based on misunderstandings, Staunton alleged that the Legate⁵⁰ refused to listen to the British's version of events and instead "evinced no disposition to make a favourable or just representation of the English or the Embassy."⁵¹ Since Staunton believed that one prominent Qing official refused to listen to the facts and reason the British claimed to offer, this official could serve as an impediment to the British. Staunton then magnified the urgency of this problem, claiming that the Legate was the only official "allowed to correspond with the government."⁵² To Staunton, then, the rest of the Qing officials, whom the British had convinced of their innocence, were neutralized because of the Legate's substantial influence.

Because of this belief that the Legate was directly and intentionally antagonistic toward the British, Staunton weaponized the kowtow to suggest that the Legate was intentionally exploiting controversy. From Staunton's perspective, Macartney's attempts to work with the Qing officials to modify the ritual initially met with acceptance and success, but the Legate's bias against the British necessitated his insistence that Macartney perform the ritual completely. Since the Legate possessed outsized influence in the Qing Court, his demands made the ritual a larger issue.⁵³ Staunton considered the Legate the sole official opposed to making the accommodation, demonstrating the

⁵⁰ The Legate, Zhengrui, acted as the liaison between the British Embassy and the Qing Court. See Hevia, *Cherishing*, 92, 139-142.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 193.

number of officials who sided with the British. Consequently, in Staunton's portrayal, the Legate was unreasonably obstinate, singlehandedly hindering the Embassy and dismantling Macartney's progress.

Simultaneous with the Legate's alleged scheming against Macartney, Staunton attributed the apparent collapse of the Embassy's relationship with the Qing Court to the arrival of whom he considered to be several more conspirators who were interested in swaying the Court's opinion against the British. When discussions about the kowtow had reached a stalemate, the Legate consulted with a Portuguese Jesuit who was "inimical to the British" and had decided to assist the Legate in antagonizing the British at the Qing Court. Then, the Viceroy of Canton, who had recently arrived in Jehol and was a "sworn enemy of the British" also worked with the Legate to alter the Court's perception of the British.⁵⁴ Because the antagonism toward the British was revitalized and expanded by these two, Staunton's accusations of intentional wrongdoing remained confined to individuals, and not the entirety of the Qing Court, implying that if the problem of biased officials were to be fixed, then the British could have more fruitful negotiations with the Qing.

This suggestion that only a few biased, but influential, characters in the Qing Court inhibited the Embassy's success in part inspired the optimism that would eventually encourage Britain to send the Amherst Embassy to negotiate with the Qing Court over two decades later. As Gao speculates in his article evaluating the political reception of the ideas of China communicated as a result of the Embassy, "probably as a result of the positive image of the Chinese emperor transmitted by the Macartney

⁵⁴ Ibid., 193, 206.

embassy, 22 years later, the Amherst mission arrived in China with the hope of establishing British trade with China” because Staunton promoted a notably patient approach “despite the failure of the present mission.”⁵⁵

Subsequently, when explaining the Court’s dismissal of the Embassy, Staunton distanced the Emperor and most of his officials from the negative and unjust dispositions toward the British. He first described the Emperor’s consultations with the Viceroy of Canton and a former Hoppo, a “declared enemy of the English” who had been previously convicted of embezzlement to foreshadow the Emperor’s response to the Embassy. He then alluded to a personal letter the Emperor had sent Macartney to assure him of his “more favourable inclinations.”⁵⁶ Because the British possessed the Emperor’s favor, Staunton saw the Emperor as validating the friendship between the British and Qing despite the various conspiracies. He had reason to claim that the Embassy had been at least partially successful in receiving friendship and trust. Thus, what he had established at the beginning of his account as the Embassy’s primary concern had been accomplished.

He then expanded these sentiments beyond the Emperor by recording interactions with Qing officials to establish what he considered the prevailing disposition toward the British and its relation to future dealings with the Qing. When conversing with a Qing official overseeing the Embassy’s departure, Staunton contended that the official and several other officials in the Qing Court had attempted to combat opinions promoting distrust of the British because, after having dealt with the British, they were aware that

⁵⁵ Gao, “War,” 213.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 231-232.

those opinions were misrepresentative.⁵⁷ Considering this apparent clash, Staunton constructed a dualistic narrative in which one side, the anti-British, prevailed over another. While the British were on the losing side in this instance, their loss did not necessarily preclude future success. Rather, Staunton promoted the idea that because of the Embassy, the Qing's disposition toward the British was more easily connected to a conflict of personalities. He thus rejected the notion that the Embassy had resulted in any permanent damage. Rather, the British could capitalize on what he perceived to be a solid base of support in the Qing Court.

Accordingly, in his final assessments of the Emperor and his Court, Staunton used his belief in their innocence to declare victory for the Embassy and spread optimism in Britain's commercial and diplomatic relationship with the Qing. He first accomplished this by arguing broadly that most Qing officials remained "perfectly convinced" that the British were well-intentioned in their attempts to negotiate. In fact, the British had gained esteem in the Emperor's sight, "notwithstanding the various surmises which had been made concerning" the British.⁵⁸ Staunton's use of the passive voice distanced the Emperor from negative assumptions about the British. As a result, the Emperor implicitly acknowledged that the British character had been misrepresented by the conspirators, meaning that Staunton's desire to correct misconceptions of the British had been fulfilled.

Subsequently, Staunton's discussions of the arrangements in Canton saw the Embassy as having been successful in redefining conceptions of British character and in acquiring a new Viceroy of Canton. For Staunton, these changes solidified Britain's new

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

relationship with the Qing. Before the British departed, the new Viceroy promised to extend the Emperor's "sentiments of justice and benevolence towards strangers."⁵⁹ Since the Emperor had outlasted several Viceroys, Staunton's close association of this Viceroy with the Emperor portrayed the Viceroy as an extension of the Emperor. Staunton then recorded that the Viceroy personally assured Macartney that he, like the Emperor, would maintain friendly sentiments toward the British.⁶⁰ As the Viceroy also considered himself an extension of the Emperor's sentiments, Staunton foreshadowed a strengthening of Britain's relationship with the Qing.

Staunton similarly saw the Viceroy's benefit to British trade through the lens of the Viceroy's distinctively pro-British sentiments. The Viceroy had allegedly told Macartney that fairer treatment of the British would be necessary both "out of a principle of justice to the English" and "for the honour of his own country."⁶¹ By referencing only the English, the Viceroy acknowledged that the injustices committed at Canton had disproportionately, if not solely, impacted the British. Eradicating those injustices would be favorable both to the British, who would receive justice and want to continue trading at Canton, and the Chinese, whose honor would be solidified in ensuring fairer treatment of the British. Then, Staunton alleged that after Macartney expressed doubts about the Qing Court's sincerity toward the British, the Viceroy gave assurances of himself and other high-ranking Qing officials despite "prejudiced enemies at Court" who would oppose the Qing's newfound favor for the British.⁶² Staunton therefore proposed that the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 244.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 246.

⁶¹ Ibid., 253.

⁶² Ibid., 253.

British now had defenders and supporters of their interests in Beijing, making the Embassy a success from his perspective.

Thus, Staunton's conclusion about the Chinese and their relationship to British interests going forward promoted the Canton trade as an acceptable engagement with the Chinese. As Gao concludes, "Staunton made clear suggestions on what course of conduct Britain should subsequently adopt towards China. In [his] opinion, there was nothing wrong in Britain's present means of engagement with China."⁶³ Staunton, then, derived from the Embassy a positive image of China that refrained from seeing them as problematic because of their restrictive trade policies. As Gao's conclusion about Staunton extends only to political consequences, his argument can be expanded upon to make a larger observation about Staunton's work. Staunton's acceptance of the preexisting trade arrangement not only discouraged aggression or change in policy toward the Qing, but more importantly, it places his text outside the eighteenth-century discourse of free trade.

Conclusion

Though each of the travel narratives provided a distinctive appraisal of the author's time in China, they conveyed more positive messages about China and the Qing than the literary tradition of free trade would suggest. For Anderson, the Embassy's time in China convinced him to adopt an accepting posture toward China that enabled him to defend them despite Macartney's failure. Holmes, concerning himself with evaluations of appearance and spectacle, experienced an awe similar to Anderson's. As a result, his comparisons granted China a high place in his conceptualizations of civilized nations and

⁶³ Gao, "War," 215.

peoples. Lastly, Staunton, even in his specific accusations of conspiracy and corruption, promoted optimism in the future of the British trade and relationship with China because of his belief that the Embassy had been successful in correcting the Qing's perception of the British character. Consequently, because the travel narratives portrayed China in such a way as to advocate for optimism, patience, and trust in the Qing, their authors contributed perspectives to the broader discourse that saw China in a more positive light than the significant cultural and economic differences between the two empires and Britain's prioritization of free trade would suggest.

In advocating for this positivity, then, the travel narratives subverted the expected reaction to a government that was not accepting of free trade practices. Whereas Smith and others who wrote in the decades before the Embassy considered Europe and the British as the most advanced civilizations while seeing China as having fallen behind, the strikingly different narratives produced by those who had experienced China firsthand instead focused on preserving the existing trade relationship, disregarding accusations of stagnation. These narratives, especially Anderson's, also complement Macartney's journal. As Macartney adopted a deferential posture toward the Qing, the writers of these accounts also promulgated opinions after their expectations were similarly surpassed that promoted an increased optimism in the Canton trade. Thus, when compared with the conceptions of peoples such as the Chinese and Qing presented in the discourse of free trade in the Embassy's buildup, the eighteenth-century travelogues can be viewed in conversation with Macartney's journal and as departing from the eighteenth-century discourse in which free trade was the overarching and "universal" measure of cultural and societal legitimacy.

Although completely altering the British perceptions of China was a task that those who participated in the Embassy were not likely to accomplish, their messages are consequential for several reasons. Most importantly, considering the influence and stature of experienced diplomats such as Macartney and Staunton, any decisively condescending or negative views could have been more impactful for the Pitt Government and later Governments in their approaches to Qing China in the early nineteenth century. While speculations surrounding these hypotheticals could extend to discussions of British national sovereignty or forcing free trade upon a “sick” society, consistent with popular rhetoric shortly before the Opium War, those present during the Embassy were not warmongers. They established a clear unpreparedness and a lack of necessity for war with both their calls for patience and optimism in the trade in Canton. The travelogues either circumvent or deny whether Macartney’s lack of success in attaining the requests of the EIC and Government meant that the Embassy was a failure. Yet as the next chapter will discuss, Britain’s public discourse on the Embassy during the 1790s was more concerned with inwardly focused criticisms to blame the Qing and their apparent arrogance or backwardness for what they considered Macartney’s failure.

CHAPTER FOUR

Weaponizing the Embassy as a Tool of Domestic Political Criticism

Introduction

In the closing lines of its coverage of the Embassy, an editorial in *St. James's Chronicle* proposed that since Macartney had neither attained the desired concessions from the Emperor nor damaged the preexisting trade at Canton, "Lord Macartney's Embassy should not, therefore, be considered as an event of any great importance."¹ The lack of changes to Britain's commercial relationship with the Qing, then, meant that the Embassy would soon become an afterthought because trade would continue as usual. The writer's overall claim about Macartney's failure featured a noticeably resigned tone, accepting the current arrangements despite Britain's attempt to change it. It also refrained from weaponizing Macartney's failure to critique Qing trade policies or diplomatic practices.² Instead, it portrayed the Qing's refusal as strictly a business decision, using a framework not exclusive to this single account. Nineteenth-century writings before the Opium War increasingly saw encounters between the British and Qing as battlefields for increasingly incompatible assertions of national sovereignty. Yet in Britain's late eighteenth-century public discourse on the Embassy, language that particularly

¹ *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, London, November 25-27, 1794.

² Immediately before the Opium War, a widespread perception of the Qing was that the kowtow ritual was emblematic of the Qing's arrogance and false sense of superiority. Consequently, a popular belief was that their attempts to force the British to perform it coupled with their conception of tributary relations (see: Hevia, "Multitude") to demonstrate that they were intentionally disrespecting British sovereignty. For examples on how the kowtow controversy was weaponized during the nineteenth century, see: Gao, "War," 216, 222-223; Platt, *Twilight*, 430-431, 435; and Pritchard, "The Kowtow," 198-200.

demonized the Qing for their trade policies or rejection of Britain's demands was largely absent.

Initial discussions of the Embassy and Macartney's subsequent failure in both fictional and nonfictional discourse directed their critical foci in places other than those that would portray the British as victims of Qing arrogance, backwardness, or resentment. In fictional representations, satirists Peter Pindar and James Gillray employed exaggerated portrayals of both the British and the Qing to project a definitive British humiliation. Abolitionist writer and activist William Shepherd narrated the Embassy's arrival from the Chinese's perspective to arrive at larger moral condemnations of British imperial policies. Newspaper discourse was more concerned with the role of the French Revolution, intra-European conflict, or other foreign influence than with the role of the Qing in precipitating Macartney's failure. Lastly, by repeatedly questioning the Embassy's justification and practicality, the *Gentlemen's Magazine* provided a markedly introspective evaluation in which criticism remained directed at the British Government and the East India Company. Consequently, the ways in which the Embassy was portrayed to the British public demonstrate that initial narratives of the Embassy did not create clear distinctions between winners and losers, nor did they provoke feelings of hostility toward the Qing Government for an apparent snubbing of Macartney.

Satirical Literature

In his initial characterizations of King George III and Macartney, Pindar highlighted their distinctively negative traits to portray the Embassy as an extension of its creators' incompetence. Notably, Pindar sarcastically praised the King's efforts in silencing Thomas Paine and excused the King's use of public funds for entertainment as

“not childish, for it pleases the King.”³ For Pindar, the King, on one hand, was unable to quell political unrest. On the other hand, the King was concerned with personal entertainment at the expense of others. This desire for entertainment despite his inability to handle political matters, then, was indicative of the King’s childlike character.

Associating the King with ineptitude, Pindar linked this character to the Embassy. He considered Macartney a natural choice for the King to select as Ambassador to China because of Macartney’s lingering health issues and past of “bold transactions”⁴ in his prior offices with the Government.⁵ This depiction of Macartney’s career both associated him with physical weakness and solidified his connection the King and the governing elite. As a result, these characterizations of the King and Macartney implied that the Embassy’s formation was rooted in incompetence and ignorance.

Subsequently, when envisioning the interaction between Macartney and the Emperor, Pindar portrayed Macartney as immediately exposing the Embassy’s true nature as a poorly planned scam designed to benefit Britain’s governing elite. After the Emperor asks him what the British desire, Pindar’s Macartney replies:

My court, inform’d that you were rich, Sublimely feeling a strong money-itch,
Across the eastern sea bade me fly; with tin and blankets, O great King, to barter,
And gimcracks rare for China-Man and Tartar, But presents, presents are the
things we mean: Some pretty diamonds to our gracious Queen, Big as one’s fist or
so, or somewhat bigger, Would cut upon her petticoat a figure – A petticoat of
whom each poet sings, that beams on birth-days for the Best of Kings. Yes,

³ Peter Pindar, *A Pair of Lyric Epistles to Lord Macartney and His Ship* (London, 1792), 3-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ See: Barrow, *Some Account*, vol. 1 for examples of Macartney’s health issues – he frequently suffered from pneumonia and gout; most notably, he was forced to depart his post as Governor of Madras prematurely because of a serious health complication (297) – and of the controversy surrounding some of his past diplomatic ventures – he personally acknowledged criticisms that his treaty of commerce with the Russian Government in 1764 was considered by some to be weak and potentially illegal (23).

presents are the things we chiefly wish – These give not half the toil we find in trade.⁶

Thus, in Pindar's narrative, the Embassy is based on hearsay for the sole purpose of obtaining wealth at comparatively little cost. Moreover, as Pindar's Macartney acknowledges that the British have nothing substantive to offer the Qing, he implies that the British had been relying on the Qing's gullibility instead of a fair negotiation. He then indicates that the Embassy existed for the sole benefit of the King and Queen, giving the Embassy a distinctively elitist character. Lastly, he asserts that laziness was an important factor in the Embassy's formation, as he had been sent to obtain presents without the British having to work for them in the trade. Pindar's Macartney thus embodies Pindar's representations of the Government's preoccupation with their own pleasure and their related incompetence.

Pindar's ensuing narration of the Emperor's embarrassment of the entire Embassy places the British in a position of subservience similar to that of children, undermining any ideas of equality between British and Qing. After Macartney's admission, Pindar writes that

in short, [the Emperor] behold with dread Macartney stare, behold him seiz'd, his seat of honour bare. The bamboo sounds – alas! No voice of fame: stripped, schoolboy like, and now I see his train, I see their lily bottoms writhe with pain, and, like his Lordship's, blush with blood and shame... I see a mighty Emperor gravely place fools-caps on all the poor degraded men – and now I hear the solemn Emperor say, "tis thus we Kings of China folly pay; now, children, ye all may go home agen.⁷

As Pindar's Emperor is reasonable enough to understand Britain's ridiculous plans, he assumes a position of authority. He humiliates Macartney by publicly exposing

⁶ Pindar, *Lyric Epistles*, 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

Macartney's rear. The Emperor's treatment of the remaining British mirrors that treatment of Macartney in such a way as to communicate their subjugation to his authority. For the Emperor, Britain's folly rendered them worthy of treatment as children. As this version of the Emperor embarrasses Macartney and the British for their scheme, Pindar implies that the Embassy was little more than an easily detectable scam by the British Government.

However, Pindar's representation of Britain's attempted scam does not necessarily mean that his other representations of the Embassy were consistently as progressive in criticizing the British. As Laurence Williams notes, this writing from Pindar speculates that upon arriving in China, Macartney will realize that the British were misled by images on imported porcelain into believing that China was a refined land of luxury goods. In fact, this image is notably corrected by "the cane Qianlong savagely applies to Macartney's bare buttocks."⁸ Furthermore, in a separate piece on the Embassy, *Odes to Kien Long, the Present Emperor of China*, Pindar satirized the Emperor's reputation as a poet, suggesting that "a literary commerce take place between the Great Kien Long, and the no less celebrated Peter Pindar" since he was a "brother poet" to the Emperor.⁹ These representations, along with others,¹⁰ suggest the need for additional nuance to understanding Pindar's depictions of the Embassy, but his role as a satirist necessitated various critiques through humor. In other words, Pindar's messages

⁸ Williams, "British Government," 92-93.

⁹ Peter Pindar, *Odes to Kien Long, the Present Emperor of China*, 3-4.

¹⁰ For examples, see: "A Panegyric on Tea, by Kien Long," and "Ode to Coffee, in the Manner of Kien Long," in *Pindariana; or Peter's Portfolio* (London, 1794-5): 24-28, in which Pindar writes a poem in "Chinese," then translating it, and satirizes the Emperor's writing poems about trivial items such as tea and coffee.

contained real criticisms that should be considered seriously regardless of his personal beliefs.¹¹

Pindar's representation of the Embassy in his *Pair of Lyric Epistles* expressed genuine a sentiment echoed in public discourse at the time. Other critiques of the Embassy doubted both the Government's motivations in sending the Embassy and the supposed economic benefits that could be gained by a successful negotiation. For example, John Freeth and other satirists also wrote about the economic fantasies underlying the Embassy's creation.¹² These economic critiques were not exclusive to the satirical literature, as some writers and traders feared the uncertainties and potential threats to the existing trade.¹³ Thus, there exists ample evidence to suggest that messages similar to those in Pindar's *Pair of Lyric Epistles* were not only featured in other satirical literature but were also genuinely held concerns.

These negative depictions of the British side of the Embassy were not exclusive to written literature during that time. One of the most notable caricatures of the Embassy's failure was a cartoon by James Gillray (ca. 1756-1810), considered the father of political cartoons. Created in September of 1792, Gillray's cartoon degrades the British and the gifts they had manufactured for the Qing, undermining a key source of confidence in Macartney's success.

Gillray's depictions of the postures and appearances of the members of the Embassy relative to their Qing counterparts suggests an open inequality between the

¹¹ For a notable example of a legitimate criticism echoed in Pindar's *Pair of Lyric Epistles*, see *Register of the Times*, 1:183, July 21-31, 1794.

¹² For examples, see: John Freeth, "Lord Macartney's Embassy to China," in *The Annual Political Songster, with a Preface on the Times* (Birmingham, 1794): 1-3.

¹³ For examples, see: *Register of the Times*, 1:183, July 21-31, 1794; and Hevia, *Cherishing*, 57-58.

British and Qing. Several members of the Embassy directly behind Macartney are double genuflecting with their faces buried into the ground. This posture, while communicating British submission, contrasts with Gillray's positioning of Macartney, who is presenting the list of requests to the Emperor and genuflecting before the Emperor in a similar manner as he would before King George III.¹⁴ Williams adds that "Macartney cuts a relatively dignified figure on one knee," but "the East India Company officials behind him, apparently ignorant that this is to be a meeting of equals, cower with their backsides in the air."¹⁵ While both these postures represent submission, this juxtaposition highlights Macartney as an outlier when compared with the British whose faces are on the ground directly behind him.

Another notable characteristic of Gillray's cartoon is his use of the French word *diplomatie* in the title. While this could be dismissed as the artist's personal choice, British uses of French words to make condescending observations in political and social critiques were common at the time of Gillray's cartoon. For example, Hogarth employed the French phrase "*à la mode*" in the title of his series *Marriage A-la-Mode* to critique the practice of arranged marriages by associating that practice with the French.¹⁶ However, patronizing sentiments such as these were not exclusive to art. Association with French words or customs was common for British attempting to cast others in a negative light

¹⁴ James Gillray, *The Reception of the Diplomatie and His Suite, at the Court of Peking*, 1792, hand-colored etching, National Portrait Gallery: London.

¹⁵ Williams, "British Government," 95.

¹⁶ David Bomford and Ashok Roy, "Hogarth's 'Marriage à la Mode,'" *National Gallery Technician Bulletin*, vol. 6 (Publication Department of the National Gallery: London, 1982): 47-49.

during that time.¹⁷ In associating Macartney with undesirable, French qualities, then, Gillray lessens Macartney's role as Ambassador.

Gillray reserves his most scathing attacks for the items that the British had constructed as gifts for the Emperor and others in the Qing Court. Although much of the optimism in the Embassy was derived from these gifts, intended to demonstrate British innovative prowess to the Qing Court, Gillray depicts the gifts as toys. The various items are all small enough to be handheld, some are scattered on the ground in front of the Emperor, and other items such as dice and a badminton racket feature prominently toward the front of the image.¹⁸ The cartoon reduces the gifts both objectively, since they are toys, and comparatively, as the Emperor's facial expression indicates that he is quite unimpressed with Macartney's cheap and childlike presents. More broadly, this portrayal of the gifts suggests that the British were too impressed with their own culture and manufactures, while comparatively, those innovations would be unremarkable.

Although Gillray provides ample negative characterizations of the British, he incorporates certain caricatures of the Chinese that demonstrate that his critiques were not completely one-sided against the British. Specifically, the Emperor is considerably overweight, has extremely slanted eyes, and appears to be smoking opium¹⁹ despite the

¹⁷ For examples on typical reasons and ways the British created negative constructions of others during the late eighteenth century, see, for examples, Colley, "Britishness;" or Tillman W. Nechtman, "Mr. Hickey's Pictures: Britons and Their Collectibles in Late Eighteenth-Century India," in *The Cultural Construction of the British World*, ed. Barry Crosbie and Mark Hampton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 180-197.

¹⁸ Gillray, *Reception*, National Portrait Gallery: London.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Qing's prohibition on opium sales that was instituted under the Yongzheng Emperor.²⁰ Yet it is significant to note that the Emperor remains unimpressed with the British and their presents despite this unflattering portrayal of him. As Berg demonstrates, the British were aware that the Embassy "was an opportunity for an industrial and scientific exhibition, a showcase of Europe's and especially Britain's 'industrial enlightenment.'"²¹ Considering this goal, Gillray's representation of the presents and the Emperor's dissatisfaction with them directly attacks one of the Embassy's core aspects and even intensifies that attack in suggesting that even an overweight, opium-addicted Emperor would be uninspired by the presents.

Anti-Imperialist Literature

While Pindar and Gillray utilized humor and exaggeration to question the Government's motives and abilities, William Shepherd, a Unitarian minister, weaponized the histories of British intrusions elsewhere to speak to the Embassy's larger moral implications. His poem depicts the Embassy as the vehicle by which the British would introduce imperialism to an innocent China, envisioning the Chinese's internal dialogue upon the British's arrival:

Athirst for prey, what ruffian band, dares approach this happy land? [...] 'Tis Albion's bloody cross that flouts the air, 'Tis Albion's sons that skirt this peaceful shore; Her cross, oppression's badge, the sign of war; Her sons that range the world, and peace is seen no more.²²

²⁰ Rowe, *Empire*, 166-167. See also: Platt, *Twilight*, 224, for a discussion on the nature of the opium ban under the Qianlong Emperor.

²¹ Berg, "Britain and Industry," 271.

²² William Shepherd, "Ode on Lord Macartney's Embassy to China," in *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Prose*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 787-788.

The Chinese immediately detect Britain's motivations in coming. They are aware of Britain's actions elsewhere and are worried about losing peace, since Shepherd implies that the British are incapable of peace. They continue, "insatiate spoilers! that, with treacherous smiles, in wreaths of olive hide their murderous sword... Hence! ye harbingers of woe – Too well your deeds of blood I know."²³ Acknowledging that the British have come under the pretense of peace, the Chinese can easily dismiss those notions because of their familiarity with the brutality of British imperialism. Reacting to the Embassy's arrival, the Chinese immediately remove credibility from the Embassy and the British, understanding the Embassy as a front for a complete takeover.

Shepherd then envisions the Chinese's awareness of Britain's foothold in India to depict the British as an oppressive force that, after depriving others of peace, disregards those peoples' well-being and basic quality of life. The Chinese first refer to Britain's desolation of plants in India to have food for themselves while the natives starved. Additionally, the Chinese's reference to the "misery" that the British brought to India contrasts with their first line of dialogue in which they refer to themselves as a "happy" people.²⁴ The British, then, will similarly eliminate China's happiness by bringing oppression and suffering into China to protect British interests and fulfill their own desires at any cost.

As Shepherd frames the Chinese's perception of British intrusions into Africa, he speculates that the Chinese could be the next victims of British exploitation. Noting that the British consider their successes in penetrating into Africa as "the triumphs of

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Britannia's race," the Chinese warn themselves against the allowing the British in.²⁵ Because they only brought violence and oppression, all the British needed was entrance to enslave the natives. The Chinese then refer to "shrieks of woe" that come from the "hapless slaves" that the British had actively sought in Africa.²⁶ Shepherd thus imagines that the Chinese are acquainted with the helplessness and horrors resulting from British intrusions into Africa. He then ends with a plea for the Chinese to save themselves from the British.²⁷

Shepherd's allusion to Britain's sentiments of racial superiority was consistent with anti-imperial attitudes at the time, cementing a place for critiques of the Embassy within that larger discourse. As Kate Fullagar notes, certain British magazines and pamphlets around the time of the War for American Independence criticized the Government's exploitation and mistreatment of Native Americans for their own benefit.²⁸ For those critics, the Native Americans' status as an indigenous people was directly connected to their treatment by the British. Furthermore, Shepherd's attitude toward the exploitation of populations in the East Indies reflected criticisms that the EIC was "setting the minds of thousands on fire to obtain wealth by any means," thereby corrupting Britain's moral character.²⁹ Horace Walpole echoed this sentiment in claiming

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kate Fullagar, "Popular Contests over Empire in the Eighteenth Century: The Extended Version," *History Australia*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Taylor and Francis: Abington-on-Thames, 2016): 67-79.

²⁹ Thomas Parker, "An Enquiry," *Evidence of Our Transactions in the East Indies, with An Enquiry into the General Conduct of Great Britain to Other Countries from the Peace of Paris, in 1763* (London: Printed for Charles Dilly, 1782): 10.

that the EIC's history of abuses in India had undermined any claims to the "moral superiority of British imperialism."³⁰ Wherever the British attempted to gain an imperial foothold, then, mistreatment of native populations seemed to follow. In imagining the Embassy as Britain's attempt to establish themselves as an imperial power in China, Shepherd sees this situation as no different from any of the others.

Likewise, while poems similar to Shepherd's were eventually used in the nineteenth century to incite British anger against the Chinese,³¹ his imagination of these events genuinely critiqued the Embassy and British policy. Shepherd echoed Jacobin publisher Daniel Eaton, who speculated that the British aimed to "usurp the dominion of China."³² Furthermore, Williams determines that Shepherd's writing was a "radical critique" of the Embassy by narrating the events in a way that imagined the British as having miscalculated the Qing, unaware that the Qing were themselves a powerful empire with the strength to reject Macartney's demands.³³ Situated within the context of anti-imperial discourse both on Britain's exploitation of others on racial bases and on Britain's relationship with China specifically, Shepherd's argument aligned with critiques of British policy even at a time at which economic potential had become an increasingly dominant motivation.

Shepherd's perspective on the Embassy also aligned with his profession and political activism throughout his career. He and William Roscoe, a leading British

³⁰ Quoted in Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (Taylor and Francis: Abington-on-Thames, 2003), 51.

³¹ See Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1983).

³² Daniel Eaton, ed., *Politics for the People* (London: 1794), 2.12:184.

³³ Williams, "British Government," 93.

abolitionist, were intimates, and Shepherd was involved with Roscoe's group known as the "Liverpool Jacobins," who supported various political reforms including freedom of worship, peace with France, relief for Ireland, and, most importantly, abolitionism.³⁴ Shepherd himself was known to advocate for radical political causes such as abolitionism and female suffrage as early as 1790, eventually publishing several works and making numerous speeches to promote these ideas.³⁵ In this way, Shepherd's career indicated his genuine support for seemingly radical causes, rendering his warning to the British about the Chinese both a serious critique of the Embassy and a moral reproach of British imperialism. Because the nature of Shepherd's career and his specific argument about the Embassy have roots in larger anti-imperial sentiment, writings such as Shepherd's cast doubts on conceptions of a direct connection between discourse on the Embassy and the rhetoric that ultimately justified the Opium War.

Newspapers

While those fictional accounts were openly critical of the British in such a way as to portray the Embassy negatively, newspapers circulating during and after the Embassy emphasized the French Revolution, intra-European rivalries, and other foreign influence as the primary driving forces behind Macartney's failure. Writers alleged that the French Revolution caused the Qing to be understandably wary of interacting with Europeans. One writer for the *True Briton* in the summer of 1794 exemplified this perspective by opining that since stories about the Jacobins had been unjustly dominating news from

³⁴ J.A.V. Chapple, *Elizabeth Gaskell: The Early Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 143.

³⁵ David Richardson, Anthony Tibbles, and Suzanne Schwartz, *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press: 2007), 283.

Europe, Macartney's negotiations were prematurely damaged by reports of the chaos in France.³⁶ Later that summer, a writer for the *Sun* expanded upon that framework, claiming that the Qing Court's approach to the British had been directly influenced by the Emperor's concerns that that conflict would spread into Qing territory if Britain's presence were to increase.³⁷ A writer for *St. James's Chronicle* insinuated that the Qing saw the Embassy as a Trojan Horse for the democracy and anarchy that precipitated the French Revolution, claiming that Macartney's failure was "to be imputed solely on the state of Europe."³⁸ Speculating that the Qing considered the British to have an interest or role in the tumult occurring in France, these writers assumed that the Qing desired to maintain stability through caution and implied that the Qing would potentially be more receptive to a British embassy after the Revolution or if the Revolution were not happening in the first place.

Similarly, contending that other foreigners had exerted undue influence over the Qing's decision-making related to the Embassy because of their strong bias against the British, other writers believed that the Embassy was stymied by momentary difficulties outside the control of the British or Qing.³⁹ For example, *Whitehall's Evening Post's* first report on the Embassy's outcome opened by asserting that "[n]othing can be so inveterate as the jealousy of the French nation towards this country." The report then alleged that

³⁶ *True Briton*, London, July 28, 1794.

³⁷ *Sun*, London, August 1, 1794.

³⁸ *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, London, January 15-17, 1795.

³⁹ While some of the travel narratives, most notably Anderson's and Staunton's, focused on foreign influence over the Qing, they seemed more concerned with the supposed jealousy of the Dutch and Portuguese. Newspapers, however, seemed to believe more that the French were more consistent and dominant antagonists.

French Jesuits in Beijing had promulgated rumors amongst the Qing officials out of jealousy of Britain's successes in India.⁴⁰ This report never accused the Qing as having actively schemed against the British. It implied that the Qing were rather manipulated into a false impression. An article in *Whitehall's* two months prior, in May of 1794, affirmed this perspective, reporting the apparent success of Macartney's negotiations with the Emperor and speculating about the nature of those successes.⁴¹ Thus, for *Whitehall's*, the Embassy's failure must have been the result of a sudden reversal due to outside influences, as Britain's relationship with the Qing proceeded as planned until ruined by French Jesuits. These versions of events, then, conceived of China as a battleground for intra-European rivalries.

In July of 1794, an article that appeared in the same newspaper reported that the Qing had been unjustly influenced by Indian Princes biased against the British because of Britain's increasing foothold in India. As the writer attempted to explain that Macartney's negotiations had not proceeded as smoothly as expected, he theorized that some "Native Indian Prince" had spoken with the Emperor and fabricated stories of British brutality in India to prevent the British from gaining more wealth in China.⁴² Consequently, the accounts that blamed the negative influence of foreign actors upon the Qing implied that the Embassy failed only because of outside voices that turned the Qing against the British.

⁴⁰ *Whitehall's Evening Post*, London, July 19-22, 1794.

⁴¹ *Whitehall's Evening Post*, London, May 27-29, 1794.

⁴² *Whitehall's Evening Post*, London, July 26-29, 1794.

Other writings that directed their attacks more directly on the Qing Court singled out one person or small group of influential people in the Qing Court. One account in *Whitehall's* described how a certain high-ranking Qing official was offended by the “misunderstanding respecting the mode of ceremony” and was therefore provoked to work against the Embassy’s objectives.⁴³ This version of events implied that Macartney had created the foundation for a favorable negotiation with the Qing before this incident angered the wrong person. Also, the writer’s characterization of Macartney’s refusal to kowtow as a misunderstanding implied that this incident was inadvertent and that neither side was at fault. Furthermore, the writer claimed that that Minister was the official who met with Macartney and refused the Embassy’s requests.⁴⁴ The writer’s description of this event, and his failure to mention the Emperor or any other Qing officials, granted a significant amount of agency to this official. The brevity of this description, while not explicitly placing all the blame on that official, indicated that this official possessed enough power to decline Macartney’s requests directly.

In other discussions about the role of Qing officials in the Embassy’s failure, writers speculated that these officials’ self-interests prevailed after determining what the British could gain from a favorable negotiation. For example, in late July of 1794, a writer for the *General Evening Post* contended that Macartney’s efforts were stifled by the jealousy of self-interested Qing Court officials who understood that the British were already a threat to their personal fortunes and power and would become a greater threat if

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

successful.⁴⁵ A similar article that appeared one week later in *E. Johnson's British Gazette* accused a handful of Qing officials of scheming to halt Britain's trade with China because of their understanding that the British were too successful in the trade.⁴⁶ Therefore, Macartney would have had greater, if not complete, success had various Qing officials not felt that the British threatened them personally.

The *Oracle and Public Advertiser's* reporting on the Qianlong Emperor's abdication revived this narrative that the Embassy had been unjustly impeded by corrupt Qing officials.⁴⁷ The writer expressed hopes that the Jiaqing Emperor (r. 1796-1820), who would rule the Qing Empire when the British sent the Amherst Embassy⁴⁸ as Britain's second attempt to establish formal diplomatic contact with the Qing Court, would begin to extinguish the corruptions and extortions of the officials who amassed outsized influence during the Qianlong Emperor's later years.⁴⁹ According to this writer, the new Emperor would detect the corruption and determine how best to eliminate those problems. Therefore, though certain newspapers constructed narratives that placed more of the blame for Macartney's failure on the Qing, they confined those accusations to corrupt, misguided, or offended officials who had become personally inclined against the

⁴⁵ *General Evening Post*, London, July 29-31, 1794.

⁴⁶ *E. Johnson's British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*, London, August 3, 1794.

⁴⁷ This account is quite similar to the arguments in the travelogues, discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. However, as this account was written in 1796, only Anderson's travelogue had been published.

⁴⁸ The second British mission to the Qing Court, the Amherst Embassy seemingly failed more than Macartney's Embassy, as the British were not even granted an audience with the Emperor. For more on the Amherst Embassy and its role in shaping British perceptions of China and the Qing, see: Gao, "War," 215-217; and Platt, *Twilight*, 156-184.

⁴⁹ *Oracle and Public Advertiser*, London, December 6, 1796.

British and depicted them as anomalies to the general rule of honest intentions by both sides in the negotiations.

Despite the relative moderation⁵⁰ of some newspaper accounts that directed accusations against the Qing, others were more explicit and less focused, fabricating stories to allege broad conspiracies against the British by the entirety of a completely evil Qing Government. The most notable and specific example⁵¹ of this appeared in an article in the *Morning Post* in September of 1794 that theorized that the Embassy had been defeated before its arrival because the Qing had always held the “greatest possible contempt” toward the British.⁵² The writer made several assertions not featured in any other narratives or reports regarding the Embassy: the Emperor repeatedly insisted that Macartney was a merchant and not an Ambassador from the British King; Qing soldiers injured one of the British soldiers and made him spit blood; the Emperor and Qing officials repeatedly expressed open bias toward the Portuguese; Qing police stole weapons from the British; and the British were carried around in leather boxes because the Qing were so concerned with maintaining secrecy.⁵³ Though these incidents never happened in the way that the author purported they did,⁵⁴ they nonetheless provided a decisively negative characterization of the Qing in their entirety.

⁵⁰ Newspapers each had a certain narrative they were attempting to promote. Combined with the incomplete or unverified information that the newspapers inevitably printed, their attempts to promote narratives sometimes meant that they printed false information, whether intentionally or not.

⁵¹ Although the only example of this contained in this chapter, this article was not the only instance of an article containing completely false information. For more examples of demonstrably false statements, see *Whitehall's Evening Post*, London, May 24-27, 1794; *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, London, June 17-19, 1794; and *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, London, May 31, 1796.

⁵² *Morning Post and Fashionable World*, London, September 23, 1794.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ There are no other reliable accounts that corroborate these claims.

Although this article was an outlier amongst its counterparts in other newspapers and from other writers, it attempted to communicate overtly negative ideas about the Qing. Whereas other newspapers narrated the Embassy in a way that refrained from making blanket, negative generalizations about the Qing, this account was an early example of negative depictions of the Qing that would become commonplace in the nineteenth century. This article thus contrasted with the other accounts that remained free from those depictions of the Qing, both highlighting variation in sentiments toward the Qing at the time and elucidating that perceptions of the Qing as an unnecessarily hostile force existed at that time.

Though the discourse on the Embassy and Macartney's failure that the newspapers promulgated were intended to provide basic information to their readers, they were also concerned with furthering narratives and crafting pictures about the British Empire. Gao contends that "these constructed images" of the Embassy suggest a calculated effort to shape a certain perception of China and "a specific line of action for the future."⁵⁵ Hevia similarly proposes that understandings of the Embassy and the ensuing discourse were "peculiar mode[s] of cultural production unique to late eighteenth-century Great Britain" and resulted from "interpretations placed on British self-identity by the planners of the embassy."⁵⁶ Thus, accounts in the newspapers were not necessarily presenting a positive picture of the Qing for the sake of arriving at "truth."

⁵⁵ Gao, "War," 214.

⁵⁶ Hevia, *Cherishing*, 59-60.

They were rather motivated by a desire to preserve a characterization of the British and further a certain image of empire.⁵⁷

Magazines

The types of narratives about Empire that newspapers constructed from the Embassy, Macartney, and the Qing were not universal across periodical discussions of the Embassy. In the *Gentlemen's Magazine*,⁵⁸ several writers took positions critical of the EIC that questioned the Embassy's practicality. Initial analyses of the Embassy in the magazine characterized it as a stunt by the EIC that would not justify the expenses it would incur, with two separate writers in the 1791 issue suggesting that the only party standing to benefit would be the EIC.⁵⁹ As a result, Macartney would be unable to explore and produce potentially valuable knowledge about agriculture, geography, and science that would appeal to wider audiences. The costs to the EIC and Government would not be worth the narrow goal of attempting to improve their trade relationship with the Chinese, especially considering the potential for failure. The implication of these assessments was thus that the EIC's self-interest drove the Embassy's formation and that Macartney was a tool of the Company, complicit in an economically unviable endeavor.

⁵⁷ These comparatively positive presentations of both the British and the Qing were not dissimilar to those featured in the conclusions of the travel narratives. Those conclusions portrayed a positive image of the Qing because of their interest in preserving the status quo of the trade. For more detailed analysis, see Chapter 3.

⁵⁸ Though other magazines circulated at this time, this thesis only uses *Gentlemen's* because of its outsized influence. For a more detailed discussion of this magazine's influence, see James Tierney, "Periodicals and Trade," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 5, ed. Michael Suarez and Michael Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 479-497.

⁵⁹ *The Gentlemen's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 61, pt. I (1791), 63.

Critiquing the Embassy as a way of criticizing the EIC was part of a broader movement during the eighteenth century of antipathy toward the Company and the Government's policies that supported it. Porter directly connects these criticisms, referring to a "widespread hostility towards the East India Company" that had been prominent even since Hanway's attacks on tea during the early eighteenth century and that was particularly evident in the Company's last decades.⁶⁰ Contextualizing the Embassy within these critiques of the EIC highlights the continuity these writers had with their predecessors. They saw the Embassy as emblematic of the EIC's longstanding problems. In doing so, they directed their criticisms inwardly. Consequently, they saw the Embassy not as stemming from complications with the Canton trade or the Qing Government, but as rooted in the EIC's own crises.

Writers for the 1792 edition were similarly skeptical in their appraisals of the Embassy and its chances at success, arguing that it was unnecessary, impractical, and comprised of incapable people. The first writer in this edition alluded to what he believed was the poor timing and great expense of the Cathcart Embassy in 1787 to argue that Macartney's Embassy was even more unwarranted because it was at a worse time and was more expensive.⁶¹ Later in the edition, another writer raised a similar question about the necessity for a mission at all, mentioning that most countries had been experiencing consistent increases in their trade at Canton.⁶² This appraisal insinuated that the EIC did not want to admit that the Canton trade was beneficial to the point at which the Qing

⁶⁰ Porter, *Ideographia*, 197.

⁶¹ *The Gentlemen's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 62, pt. I (1792), 276.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 375.

Court would have no desire to fix or improve it, signifying the author's belief that the EIC had no real reason to send Macartney. Therefore, the Embassy was not only unwarranted, but it could realistically run counter to British interests.

The only reference to the Embassy or China in the 1793 edition was a comparison between the Qing Emperor and the Antichrist because of Qing policies that barred Christian missionaries from proselytizing openly throughout their Empire.⁶³ This portrayal, directly villainizing the Emperor, was rooted in writings that predated the eighteenth-century discourse of free trade in which the Chinese were considered a menace of an economic character.⁶⁴ Instead, equating the Emperor with the Antichrist evoked imagery from the writings of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who oversaw the Jesuits' expansion into China during the time of the Ming. Ricci considered the Chinese's various religious practices and sects as a "many-headed monster" that stood in the way of the unified religious system of Roman Catholicism he wished to bring to China.⁶⁵ In creating a parallel between the Emperor and the Antichrist, this writer in *Gentleman's* returned to the perspective that the dangers China posed were of a religious and not economic character. Thus, while this writer still portrayed the Emperor in a negative light, his criticisms were continuous with earlier trends that were unconcerned with what eventually became the paramount ideal of economic policy. This writer's critique, then, possessed more commonality with earlier critiques of China than with those that eventually justified the Opium War.

⁶³ *The Gentlemen's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 63, pt. I (1793), 315.

⁶⁴ See Chapter 1.

⁶⁵ Porter, *Ideographia*, 196.

The magazine's 1794 edition omitted any discussions of the Embassy's outcome and instead emphasized the grandeur of the Embassy's experience in China and minimized Britain's importance. In a detailed narrative of the Embassy's events, one writer⁶⁶ described the various expensive items the Qing Court possessed that were wrongly assumed to be exclusive to the Western world.⁶⁷ He implied that the British gifts were not as unique or extravagant when compared to what the Qing already possessed, thereby undermining a key component of Britain's attempts to express their power to the Qing similar to Pindar's and Gillray's satirical representations. The narrator's expectations for China were clearly surpassed. He focused more on what he claimed to have seen than on substantive diplomatic details. Lastly, he referred to the Qing's assurances that they would fulfill any of the British's needs, their "daily ritual" of gift-giving, and their assisting the Embassy with packing for its departure by granting them "a great number of men."⁶⁸ By constantly emphasizing the Qing's hospitality toward the British, the writer communicated that the Qing seemed well-intentioned and friendly. He also omitted any references to forces that potentially precipitated Macartney's failure. Consequently, this portrayal of the Embassy's experience in China saw its outcome as largely irrelevant, rather emphasizing the wonder of the various experiences, interactions, and sights in China.

⁶⁶ Though this author remains anonymous, the details, events, and opinions in his account align closely with those in Anderson's and Holmes's travel narratives. It is thus likely that one of them wrote this account or that another individual who had participated in the Embassy or was familiar with their accounts wrote it.

⁶⁷ *The Gentlemen's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 64, pt. II (1794), 708-709.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 708, 710-711.

With the publication of Anderson's travel narrative in 1795, discussion of the Embassy in the magazine ceased, but a report in the magazine's 1803 issue affirmed the belief that Macartney's failure was caused by temporary, overly negative forces that would not exist at other times. In a section consisting of brief notes on international news, a writer reported that "the Grand Choula, who was lately executed by order of the Emperor of China, was the principal obstacle which prevented the successful issue of Lord Macartney's embassy. His successor has already manifested his friendship for the English."⁶⁹ This writer believed that the Jiaqing Emperor's execution of this official to mark the end of the Qing Court's hostility toward the British because this one official stymied Macartney's chances at success. This perspective, then, maintained faith in the Qing Court because of their expected turn toward friendship and receptiveness to the British, implying that a future embassy would likely meet with more success.

Conclusion

The set of images presented to the British public as a result of the Embassy could not possibly have been used to justify war because of their critiques that were aimed at places other than the Qing. Pindar and Gillray each satirized the British and the Qing in such a way that challenged British conceptions of their own superiority, while Shepherd established the Chinese as clear moral superiors over what he perceived to be the British's poorly concealed attempt to take over China. Newspapers, refraining from directly blaming the Qing for Macartney's failure, determined that the Embassy had been influenced by temporary forces of circumstance and time. In instances in which they blamed the Qing, newspapers exercised caution in assigning that blame. Moreover, as

⁶⁹ *The Gentlemen's Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, vol. 73, pt. II (1803), 679.

Gentlemen's Magazine offered criticisms of the Government and EIC, not the Chinese, it embodied an inward-focused approach in which critiques were routinely directed at the British. These reactions to the Embassy during the 1790s and early 1800s, then, used the Embassy for a variety of purposes that had little direct relation to what could be perceived as the Qing's hostility or stagnation.

Discussions of the Embassy in these writings also lacked any overt prioritization of free trade. They instead focused more on diplomacy, foreign influence, and spectacle when discussing the Embassy. This distinguishes these accounts from Smith's writings and the other literature circulating during the late eighteenth century. The ideas of China they communicated were not entirely informed by their perceptions of China's economic and trade policies and the resulting implications for cultural legitimacy. Any concerns with economic policy were primarily directed toward the EIC and the Pitt Government, as most clearly demonstrated in *Gentlemen's Magazine*. Moreover, their lack of overarching prioritization of the Qing's economic policies positions these writings within the framework of the travel narratives, which suggested that the British could, and should, continue to conduct business with the Qing regardless of the differences in trade policy. This mentality of patience and restraint toward the Qing signifies that the antagonism and dehumanization used to characterize the Chinese and Qing as a result of their economic policies were largely absent from the discourse sparked by the Embassy. Despite the absence of overtly dehumanizing rhetoric, these accounts foreshadowed certain characterizations that would eventually come to the forefront of perceptions of the Chinese and Qing during the nineteenth century before the Opium War. For the sake of humor, Pindar and Gillray both employed negative orientalist stereotypes that would

eventually become more commonplace and serious in portrayals of the Chinese. Furthermore, the newspapers' acquittals of the Qing seemed contingent upon the assumption that the Embassy had failed solely because of circumstantial constraints. They implicitly advocated for an understanding that the Qing would eventually accept the British's perception of how they should conduct trade while remaining silent on the alternatives if the Qing never did come around. Accusations of corruption within the Qing Government, regardless of how confined or rampant this corruption was, would also later play a large role in British perceptions of the Chinese. The British eventually considered this corruption within the Qing Government as further proof of China's stagnation. With these eventual sentiments seemingly foretold by representations of the Embassy in the 1790s, the Conclusion will demonstrate that the Embassy's narrative would eventually have to be commandeered to promote toxic ideas about the Qing.

CONCLUSION

As Britain's discourse on the Macartney Embassy both deviated from the precedent set by the eighteenth-century discourse of free trade and contained a variety of images of China, the Macartney Embassy could not have directly helped justify a war with the Qing. Responses to the Embassy failed to judge China solely by its trade policies. In upholding diplomacy and diplomatic conduct as the central theme of his journal, Macartney preserved the equality between the British and Qing to advocate for optimism in the future of Anglo-Chinese relations. The other travelogues similarly conveyed a positive message of China. Anderson and Holmes both focused on the surprise and uniqueness of their experiences to correct preconceived notions about China, while Staunton's focus on introducing the Qing to Britain's true character allowed him to see the Embassy as a success and to promote preserving the status quo of the Canton trade. The public's conversations about the Embassy aimed several critiques at the British Government, EIC, and other Europeans while largely ignoring the Qing's role in Macartney's failure. Thus, the discourse both by those who were present during the Embassy and by those in Britain who were writing about the Embassy was neither focused enough on economic and trade policies to arrive at the types of blanket condemnations of the Qing that would have seen them as irredeemably stagnated nor monolithic enough to conceive of the Qing as an inevitable and natural enemy.

The Path to War

Responses to any event are seldom, if ever, monolithic. Yet despite the various messages with which the British public was presented about China as a result of

Macartney's diplomatic failure, reactions to the Embassy notably contrasted with Britain's eventual rhetorical path to the Opium War in two crucial ways. It lacked both the broadly negative images of China that would be necessary to start a war and the conversations about national sovereignty that would view the Qing as a direct and inevitable adversary. In contrast to the immediate eighteenth-century reactions to the Embassy which contained a variety of messages and motivations, John Barrow's *Travels in China* (1804), as well as his later account of Macartney's life (1808), foreshadowed eventual justifications for war. Barrow was explicitly motivated by desires to dispel the seemingly idealized notions about China that the Jesuits had spread in the past, preferring accounts written by Englishmen,¹ and "to establish the rectitude" of Macartney in the face of criticism.² Laurence Williams has noted that Barrow's account was a direct response to what he saw as the public's unjust treatment of Macartney by satirizing him in literature, plays, and songs.³ Barrow's writing, then, should be seen more as a response to responses of the Embassy and thus outside the scope of the immediate reactions to the Embassy.

This perspective on Barrow's *Travels* has larger ramifications for studies of the Macartney Embassy and British attitudes toward Qing China after the Embassy. David Porter has used Barrow in his writings on the discourse of free trade as an example of the increasingly negative images of China within Britain's evolving views on free trade.

While Barrow's negative images of China place his works in continuity with the

¹ Barrow, *Travels in China*, 2.

² Barrow, *Some Account*, 1: viii.

³ Williams, "British Government," 104.

discourse of free trade, Porter implicitly upholds Barrow as the standard-bearer of reactions to the Embassy. He compares Barrow's writings with later writings on China after the Amherst Embassy and alluding to their "very consistency" as "the most revealing and the most troubling thing about them."⁴ Porter's use of Barrow, both as the mouthpiece of the Macartney Embassy and as consistent with later views on China, establishes a broader connection between views of China from the Macartney Embassy and the Amherst Embassy. However, because of his sparse use of the travelogues or other literature inspired by the Macartney Embassy, Porter allows Barrow to overshadow other reactions to the Embassy. As a result, Porter both oversimplifies the images of China from the Embassy's immediate aftermath and unjustly assumes continuity between the Embassies primarily because of Barrow's similarities with later writers.

However, Porter is correct in linking Barrow's *Travels* to nineteenth-century views of China. Though Barrow was motivated by a desire to protect Macartney's character from critics of the Embassy, conversations about British national sovereignty were eventually prevalent in Britain's discussions of policy toward Qing China as war became an option. As established in Chapter 1, Jonas Hanway proposed that Britain's continued participation in the tea trade with China resulted in what he considered to be the diminishing of British national character. Although this opinion seemed to identify more of a problem with the habits of British consumers than with the Chinese, Hanway's privileging of "circulation over stasis" meant that China's apparently obstructionist economic policies threatened Britain's way of life.⁵ While retaliation against the Chinese

⁴ See Porter, "Peculiar," 192-194.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

was justified at least as early as Hanway's *Essay on Tea*, antagonistic conversations calling for retaliation were absent from Britain's discourse after the Government's first attempt at diplomacy with the Qing.

The path from the Macartney Embassy to the Opium War is further convoluted when comparing the impacts of the Macartney and Amherst Embassies. Macartney's return in 1794 had occurred during the middle of the French Revolution. Yet by the time Prime Minister Robert Jenkinson (1770-1828) commissioned William Amherst (1773-1857) as British Ambassador to China in 1816, Britain had won the Battle of Trafalgar, inaugurating *The British Empire*, and had beaten Napoleon. Thus, when Lord Amherst failed to attain an audience with the Jiaqing Emperor, those who accompanied Lord Amherst to China advocated for a different, more aggressive approach after this apparent mistreatment. Platt accordingly contends that "a deeper sense of entitlement surrounded the British mission to China in 1816... With the post-Napoleonic surge of British national pride... some wondered why China did not seem to recognize this."⁶ Therefore, when arriving in China for the second time, the British were less inclined to the recognition and appreciation of difference for which Macartney had advocated in his journal. Platt further suggests that "one of the unintended outcomes of this ostensible mission of friendship was that the British came out of it seeming more sinister than they ever had before."⁷ Britain's sense of superiority, combined with their frustration at not having met with success during Lord Amherst's mission, sparked broader conversations about how to approach China. As Gao has noted, "Macartney's caution against an

⁶ Platt, *Twilight*, 163.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

aggressive policy toward China was gradually forgotten” after the Amherst Embassy.⁸ Thus, the embarrassment stemming from the failure of the Amherst Embassy, not the Macartney Embassy, encouraged a change in Britain’s stance toward China toward a firmer and more aggressive outlook.

Years later, the abolition of the EIC’s monopoly on the China trade in 1833 allowed British traders who expressed radical views in favor of free trade a greater platform from which to express their ideas. Britain’s new Superintendent of Trade, Lord Napier (1786-1834), instigated a naval skirmish with the Chinese because he was refused a meeting with Qing officials and reacted by deploying two warships.⁹ Napier, and increasingly more British, advocating for aggression toward the Qing because questions surrounding the opium trade and the Qing’s repeated refusal to embrace free trade seemingly demonstrated the Qing’s disregard for Britain’s national sovereignty. Such was the eventual view of James Matheson.¹⁰ An early advocate for war with the Qing, Matheson opined in 1836 that the Chinese possessed “contempt for other nations” and were the “scantiest and most ungracious.”¹¹ Matheson’s language granted agency to the Chinese, directly attacking them for their trade practices that ran counter to his vision. He continued by arguing that the Chinese’s treatment of the British had been “humiliating and dangerous” and “inconsistent with the national honour.”¹² He thus asked King William IV (r. 1830-1837) to act to protect British interests. He argued that “the

⁸ Gao, “War,” 218.

⁹ For discussions of this incident, see Platt, *Twilight*, 285-301, 324, 370, 429.

¹⁰ Platt’s *Imperial Twilight* provides an in-depth profile of Matheson and his career in China.

¹¹ Matheson, *Present Position*, 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 12-13.

preservation of the national honour, is in the hands of His Majesty's Government."¹³ Matheson would receive his wish for war three years later from the Government helmed by Lord Melbourne (1779-1848) and Lord Palmerston (1784-1865). However, his opinion that Britain's continued participation in China's restrictive trade system damaged Britain's national character differed drastically from the opinions of the Macartney Embassy's travelogues that worked to preserve Britain's trade relationship with China. The contrast between the opinions resulting from the Macartney Embassy during the 1790s and those of Matheson during the 1830s, then, provides another reason to sever links between messages in the aftermath of the Embassy and the ideologies that justified the Opium War.

Contemporary Significance

As the first attempt by a Western nation to "open" China to free trade, the Macartney Embassy remains relevant both to specific academic studies and to international relations more broadly. In May of 2013, shortly after the election of President Xi Jinping (1953-) in March of that year, *The Economist* released an edition of its magazine that was headlined by commentary on China's future. The cover references the Macartney Embassy while comparing President Xi to the Qianlong Emperor by photoshopping the Emperor's robes onto Xi.¹⁴ Its message, that China has still not opened its doors to the West and free trade, is self-evident.

An article in the magazine entitled "Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream" affirms this reading of the cover, arguing that "the vision of China's new president *should* serve

¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴ Cover. *The Economist*, 4 May 2013.

his people, not a nationalist state.”¹⁵ In using this language, the authors suggest that they possess a firmer grasp of what is better for China than Xi. Accordingly, the authors’ vision for China consists of their worry at “Mr. Xi’s emphasis on national greatness [that] has made party leaders heirs to the dynasts of the 18th century, when Qing emperors demanded that Western envoys kowtow.”¹⁶ This version of events not only distorts the narrative of Macartney’s negotiations with the Qing, since the Qing conceded that Macartney could genuflect before the Emperor, but also places the current regime in China in direct continuity with the supposedly backward and stubborn Qing leaders who refused to adopt Western ideas of free trade. These discussions about opening China’s doors to trade are still active and relevant. They continue to employ eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imagery and language and thus solidify the Macartney Embassy’s importance in discussions of Anglo-Chinese relations and China’s relations with Western nations more broadly.

Although free trade as a universal value has its roots long before the Embassy, Britain’s victory in the Opium War render it tempting to oversimplify the narrative and link the Embassy directly with the War. Such is the understanding proposed by *The Economist* in suggesting without reference to Lord Amherst’s Embassy or any of the nineteenth-century controversies surrounding opium that “in 1793, a British envoy, Lord Macartney, arrived at the court of the Chinese emperor, hoping to open an embassy... The British returned in the 1830s with gunboats to force trade open.”¹⁷ Yet because of the

¹⁵ “Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream,” *The Economist*, May 4, 2013. Italics mine.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

discontinuities with the eighteenth-century discourse of free trade that immediate reactions to the Embassy expressed, we should not see the Embassy as a “highlight,” per *The New York Times*’s suggestion,¹⁸ in Britain’s road to war with the Qing. It should rather be seen as a bump in that road.

¹⁸ Morris, “Opium War,” *New York Times*.

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