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To Yuanmingyuan, Reception and Dismissal

The final leg of the Amherst Embassy's slow, uncomfortable and often hazardous journey to the Summer Palace of Yuanmingyuan ended badly. The embassy's reception, its expulsion and the immediate aftermath of its dismissal on its return journey to Tongzhou had a profound effect on British perceptions of the Qing court, confirming the futility of any future diplomatic overtures to achieve British objectives in China. The diplomatic encounter underlined the political and cultural differences between an increasingly powerful British national state whose diplomatic practice was based on notions of equality, free advocacy, negotiation and international law, and those of an ancient civilisation based on empire, Confucian values, obedience and despotic rule. Qing values and codes of behaviour were reflected in the actions and attitudes of high-ranking mandarins who, in British terms, represented the elite of courtly and civil society. Amherst himself was a courtier at St James's whose familiarity with British and European courts would have raised expectations of at least a gracious reception at Yuanmingyuan. His experience, however, exposed the critical difference between the status of an ambassador within the Westphalian system of diplomacy and that in the Qing court where an ambassador was received as a mere messenger sent to deliver their sovereign's letter and bear their presents or tribute to the emperor.



Figure 8: Portrait of the Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796–1820).

Source: Wikipedia Commons.

28 August: Preparations for Leaving Tongzhou and the Journey to Peking

The sudden and unexpected summons for the embassy to pack up and proceed to Peking engaged the British and the Chinese in immediate preparations for the 12-mile journey to the Summer Palace. Chinese packers worked throughout the night unloading the British presents for the emperor. Chang-wei's arrival the following morning with instructions for the embassy to hurry its preparations in order to leave as soon as possible because the emperor was waiting only added to the 'bustle and confusion'. Amherst's splendid carriage was unpacked and the coachman took great care to prepare it for the trip to the imperial capital, but Morrison (1820) thought that Bengal palanquins would have been better suited to the terrible roads and advised they be used in any future embassy to Peking (p. 55). Chinese wagons, pulled by teams of five horses, carried the embassy's luggage, while individual members of the embassy travelled in small carts drawn by mules. These, the British said, were 'bone breaking', while Abel (1818) complained that his horse was a 'miserable looking

animal ... having all his bony points extremely prominent' (p. 98). Davis and two British officers of the guard had planned to ride to Peking, but they too were disappointed with the very inferior horses provided. Further, Chinese saddles were most uncomfortable and the stirrups were far too short (p. 98). Similarly, Amherst's London coachman was mortified at the appearance of the four mules assigned to pull the ambassador's magnificent barouche. The coachman, according to Davis (1841):

Having prepared the carriage ... with as much care and pains as for a birthday at St. James's ... gave an 'exclamation of despair' on first seeing the four mules provided to draw the carriage: 'Lord, sir, these *cats* will never do!' 'But they *must* do!' was the reply, for nothing better existed in the whole empire. The collars of the English harness hung down like mandarin necklaces, and the whole of the caparison sat like a loose gown. (p. 143, emphasis in original)

Jeffrey described the four mules as 'poor wretches [who] made a sorry figure, when caparisoned with the magnificent English harness ... which was made for horses sixteen hands high' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

Other circumstances held up the embassy's departure including the arrangements for the transportation of two sick embassy personnel. The Chinese had provided two small wicker baskets carried by porters for their use, but these were considered as most unsuitable and Amherst accordingly allocated two of the palanquins (Staunton, 1824, p. 110). The sick men were also given large doses of opium to ease their pain.

The Embassy Sets Off for Peking

The embassy eventually left Tongzhou at four o'clock in the afternoon. Amherst, Ellis, Staunton and Jeffrey led the procession travelling in the barouche 'drawn by four stout mules, the coachman driving on the box, and the postilion riding on one of the leaders' (Staunton, 1824, p. 110). Four palanquins followed, including the two with the sick men. Next in line were Abel, Somerset and Lieutenant Cooke on horseback followed by 'one-man' carts carrying the rest of the embassy personnel. Bringing up the rear were the wagons carrying the band, servants, marines and baggage. Surrounding the procession were the 'mandarins and soldiers in chairs and carts, on horseback and on foot' (Abel, 1818, p. 99).

Progress was at a snail's pace. After skirting the city of Tongzhou, the procession eventually reached the paved granite road that led to Peking. While the road looked impressive, deep ruts between the large blocks of stone marred its surface and presented a danger to the barouche's wheels. Despite a few jolts, Jeffrey pointed out, the passengers travelling in the barouche were more comfortable than the occupants of the covered Chinese carts who were 'jumbled' into 'Mummies' and whose journey was 'quite intolerable' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.; see also Staunton, 1824, p. 111).

The embassy had travelled only five miles before it grew dark. 'It was evident', Amherst wrote, 'that altho' no reason was alleged for its' [sic] necessity, that we were to be exposed to the inconvenience of a night journey' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 285). Abel's horse was so uncomfortable that he decided to walk but soon changed his mind when he was surrounded immediately by 'a crowd of Chinese soldiers and porters ... and peasants who had assembled from the neighbourhood' (Abel, 1818, p. 100). He was rescued from the crowd's attention with the appearance of Vincent, the black drummer, who diverted their curiosity:

This man, of a fine figure, six feet in height, of a jet black complexion, was an object of irresistible curiosity with the Chinese. Wherever he went, crowds followed, and left every other person of the Embassy to gaze upon him. To feel his hands, and to compare their colour with that of their own; to endeavour by signs to ascertain from what part of the world he came, was their frequent and eager employment. We always thought ourselves fortunate in our excursions when he had preceded us, and carried off the mob. (p. 100)

Walking in the dark, however, was difficult and after a couple of severe falls caused by holes in the road, Abel took refuge in the cart of a friend.

The procession came to a halt at an inn, described as a dilapidated building, at nine o'clock at night where the British were greeted by Guanghui and Sulenge and invited to dine. Amherst described the meal as 'a disgusting repast where a scramble was ... made for such food as extreme hunger only would have rendered palatable' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 286). Abel (1818) wrote of 'fowls served up whole, but without any instruments to carve them. We were consequently obliged, much to the amusement of the bye-standers, to

separate the limbs with our fingers' (p. 100). Morrison (1820) added that the food was 'an attempt at English cookery, [but] it was neither English nor Chinese' (p. 56). Hayne (n.d., vol. 2) was less diplomatic and complained of an absence of knives and forks and chopsticks. No wines were provided and the only thing to drink was some water in a bucket. The table was covered with some 'nasty trash that none of us could touch [where] some hard boiled eggs and some of their bread were the only eatables' (p. 82(a)). He added:

Nothing but L.A.'s [Lord Amherst's] extraordinary good nature & his natural incapability of doing a rude, offensive thing to another, would have induced him to attribute this reception to indifference on the part of Su & Quang [Sulenge and Guanghui] who had doubtless taken excellent care of themselves in a room behind, whilst we were in a place little better than a stable yard. (p. 83)

Rumours that the emperor was planning to receive Amherst the following day were circulating at the time of the dinner but were dismissed by the British as 'so strange and improbable ... [we considered it] merely as a story invented at the moment, for the purpose of urging us upon our journey' (Staunton, 1824, p. 112). Chang-wei informed Amherst that their late arrival at Peking meant the city gates would be closed but the governor was waiting to conduct the embassy through the city to the Summer Palace of Yuanmingyuan and orders had been given to 'illuminate the city as [the Embassy] passed through' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

After an hour's rest, the embassy entourage took to the road once more. Several carts had been moved in the interim and the Englishmen had trouble relocating them. Many 'wandered [in vain] about for some time in the dark, without receiving any assistance ... from the numerous Chinese ... who only grinned on witnessing [our] dilemma' (Abel, 1818, p. 101). Staunton faced the rest of the journey with some trepidation. He wrote:

Although to travel on during the whole of a dark night, on a strange and bad road, drawn by mules, never before harnessed to an English carriage, was not in itself a very agreeable or promising arrangement, it certainly seemed preferable to any longer stay at the dismal abode at which we had halted ... we were almost as anxious as our Chinese conductors ... to reach the termination of our journey. (1824, p. 113)

The Embassy Enters the Outskirts of Peking

British preconceived expectations of entering the Chinese capital in a grand style befitting the power and grandeur of the British sovereign were soon dashed. The embassy arrived at Peking's outer suburbs at 11 o'clock at night in darkness and in disarray, reaching the eastern gate an hour later. The governor was not there to greet them, but an immense though orderly crowd had gathered and Abel was worried about driving over people (Hayne, n.d., vol. 2, p. 85; Abel, 1818, p. 102). Some people held little red paper lanterns suspended on sticks in front of them, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Englishmen and were most impolite. Hayne (n.d., vol. 2) complained, 'If any of us spoke they endeavoured to repeat what we said which produced a loud laugh' (p. 85). Instead of entering the gate, the embassy was turned sharply to the right and proceeded northward to skirt the city wall on an outside track described by Amherst as 'a scarcely passable road between the wall and the ditch' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 286). Jeffrey expressed British perplexity at the detour: 'What could be the motive of old Chong [Chang-wei], in inventing such a bouncing falsehood, I don't know'. He complained that the road:

became worse and worse and we were in danger every moment of being upset. We were frequently obliged to get out of the carriage in order to lighten and enable the Chinese to lift [the carriage] out of the holes. (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.)

An accident was waiting to happen. Lieutenant Cooke rode alongside Amherst's barouche to warn of impending dangers and Amherst and the commissioners had to vacate their carriage every five or 10 minutes. Staunton (1824) wrote:

Our chief danger arose from the ignorance or inattention of our Chinese guides, who, not adverting to the precautions necessary with a carriage so differently constructed from theirs, often suffered us to quit the road, and then called upon us to attempt to regain it across steep banks, which were dangerous or impracticable. (p. 115)

The men travelling in the carts also suffered from the 'convulsive throes [of such a] primitive machine, without springs, on the rutted granite road' (Davis, 1841, p. 148).

The western road to Yuanmingyuan was ‘broad, soft, and unpaved’, but recent heavy rain had resulted in flooding that slowed the procession and caused vehicles to become bogged (Staunton, 1824, p. 115). Amherst and his commissioners had to leave their carriage on several occasions and wait on the side of the road while their carriage was pushed through the mud. He and his companions were tired and filthy while the mules pulling the carriage were exhausted.

29 August: Arrival at Yuanmingyuan

Yuanmingyuan came into view as dawn broke on the morning of 29 August 1816. The road improved and the weather had cleared. A scene of ornamental parks and gardens indicated the procession had arrived at the grounds of the Summer Palace. Abel (1818) wrote that, ‘All the descriptions which I had ever read of the paradisiacal delight of Chinese Gardens occurred to my imagination’ (p. 103).

The embassy came to a halt at the village of Haidian where accommodation had been arranged at a fine property owned by Sungyun, the viceroy previously at Canton and Macartney’s ‘amiable friend’ who was currently ‘absent in Western Tartary’ (Morrison, 1820, p. 59). Much to their dismay, however, Amherst and the commissioners were not permitted to alight but were informed they were proceeding directly to the palace at Yuanmingyuan where the emperor was waiting to receive them. The rest of the embassy, waiting at Haidian, became concerned over Amherst’s absence. Hayne (n.d., vol. 2) wrote:

I waited some little time with Yin, & he then sent a man back again with me to our quarters. I rushed in to hunt for L. A. [Amherst] and all the party ... Toone ... and one or two of the servants arrived, but they knew nothing of L. A. ... we began to fear some accident had happened, knowing, as I did, that he was only a quarter of a mile before I quitted him. (pp. 86–87)

Amherst’s carriage came to a halt at five o’clock in the morning before a ‘very large building in the best Chinese taste, seated in the middle of a park’ (Staunton, 1824, p. 116). A large crowd of mandarins in full ceremonial dress surrounded the carriage where Sulenge ‘begged’ Amherst and the commissioners to alight (Staunton, 1824, p. 116). The British were astonished that they had not been taken straight to their quarters. Staunton (1824) wrote:

Until now, it certainly never occurred to us, that the Chinese could think of taking us, after such an anxious, fatiguing, and sleepless night, spent in the carriage and on the road, to any other place than our intended lodgings; or that they would be guilty of such a breach of hospitality, and even common decency, as to attempt to call our attention to any kind of business until we had had some repose. (p. 117)

Sulenge was informed that Amherst wished to go straight to his apartment as he was tired and needed to rest, but this was not possible. Heshitai was waiting inside and wished to confer with Amherst briefly, after which, he would be free to retire to his accommodation. But for now, Amherst had to leave his carriage. He had no other option. Chinese insistence that Amherst follow the mandarins into the audience hall aroused British suspicion that 'the Chinese intended some treachery towards us' and that the date of reception planned for the following day was due to take place immediately (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). The British were conducted into a small room, 12 feet long and 7 feet wide, described by Amherst as 'a mean and dirty dwelling belonging to the Palace' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 287).¹

Amherst, accompanied by Staunton, Ellis, Morrison, Jeffrey and Lieutenant Cook who had escorted the carriage, took their seats on a hard bench covered in white felt. Crowds of princes and mandarins pushed towards them. Amherst complained of their 'rude and overwhelming curiosity' and of the 'wretched out-house' in which they were sitting (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 289). Ellis (1817, p. 178) referred to their 'brutal curiosity' treating the British more as 'wild beasts' rather than as 'mere strangers of the same species as themselves'. Jeffrey confirmed Ellis's view and described the mandarins:

who from their badges must have been of high rank, and who came to gratify their curiosity by having a good stare at the monsters such they took us to be. (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.)

¹ Platt (2018) gave a different impression of the reception. He wrote of Amherst being received 'into a small, elegant waiting chamber with windows on four sides, about seven by twelve feet' (p. 175). This misquotes Abel (1818) who wrote that the party was 'pushed into a room, which, if a fair specimen of other parts, might induce the supposition that His Chinese Majesty was king of the beggars' (p. 104).

It became apparent that the British arrival at the palace was a deliberate Chinese strategy aimed to coincide with the assigned time set for an imperial audience. Staunton found the exposure of the British embassy in all its dishevelled appearance before the Chinese court ‘mortifying’, while Amherst wrote of the difference between expectation and the reality of his arrival at Yuanmingyuan:

Instead therefore of the brilliant appearance which from its numbers and equipment the Embassy was calculated to make, it was intended to bring into the emperor’s presence four persons only, fatigued and exhausted from the journey, in their travelling dress, and . . . without attendants of any description. I was, besides, without my credential letters, and was consequently unable to present myself in my public character. I therefore determined if possible to avoid the intended interview. (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 288)

Matters grew worse when Chang-wei arrived and informed Amherst that the emperor had changed the day of their audience to that morning. Amherst was told to prepare himself to meet Heshitai who was waiting to usher him along with Staunton, Ellis and Morrison into the emperor’s presence. Amherst was outraged. He informed Chang-wei that he was deeply distressed, highly indignant and most surprised at the way the British had been treated and deceived. It was absurd to even contemplate seeing the emperor at this time. Besides, he did not have the king’s letter and the state of his appearance would be not only disrespectful to the emperor but ‘inconsistent with the dignity of the Embassy’ (Staunton, 1824, p. 119). Amherst, Jeffrey added, told Chang-wei that the audience had always been arranged for the following day and he was ‘not in the least prepared to appear in the emperor’s presence until that time’ (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

Chang-wei informed Amherst that it had never been their intention to deceive the British. Instructions to conduct the embassy directly to Yuanmingyuan had been received only on the road as the embassy was proceeding to Peking. But the emperor had given his orders and it was too late to remonstrate.

Following Amherst’s insistence that the emperor be informed that he was tired and ill from the journey and, accordingly, was totally unprepared for the honour of an audience, he also wished it to be made known that he had been ‘distinctly informed that the Emperor had consented

to postpone [his] audience to the following day' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 288). For the moment, the British were told, the emperor only desired to meet the ambassador and had no intention of conducting any business (Ellis, 1817, p. 178).

Heshitai next invited the British to follow him to his apartment to discuss matters. Amherst replied that he was too unwell to leave his seat and wished to postpone any discussions until the following day. Heshitai, on being joined by Muketenge, urged Amherst in a 'very pressing and ... indecorous manner for some minutes' to go with him to prepare for a meeting with the emperor. Heshitai, according to Staunton, said that '*your own ceremony* is all that will be required' (Staunton, 1824, p. 121, emphasis in original). Amherst was then asked if he had the Prince Regent's letter for the emperor in his possession (Morrison, 1820, p. 57).

Amherst pointed out his distress that the 'greater part of his suite had been separated from him' and that it was impossible to appear before the emperor at this time (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Heshitai, according to Jeffrey, departed with Amherst's message but returned soon afterwards—the emperor was insisting on an immediate audience. There followed, Ellis (1817) wrote, 'a scene I believe, unparalleled in the history of diplomacy' (p. 177). Heshitai, described by Morrison (1820, p. 57) as anxious with 'perspiration' on his face, reached down and grabbed Amherst's arm 'with the seeming intention of raising him from his seat, and leading him away' (Staunton, 1824, p. 121). Amherst, Jeffrey wrote, immediately 'released himself from [Heshitai's] grasp by shaking him off' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). This, according to Staunton, was not easy as Heshitai was a strong man of 36 years in contrast to the 'old and infirm' mandarins that the British normally dealt with. Amherst read the act as an attempt 'of transporting me thither [before the emperor] even without my consent' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 289). He added, 'I therefore shook him off, and prepared, as far as I could, to resist force by force; but I was glad to find that he desisted from further violence' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 289). Things became heated as the crowd of mandarins pushed forward and Lieutenant Cooke had to be cautioned by Amherst not to draw his sword (Staunton, 1824, p. 120). Staunton attributed the crowd's rude and uncivil behaviour to the fact that the mandarins and princes present were 'Tartars'. He added:

I doubt whether any assembly of the superior class, or indeed any class, of Chinese, would have shown themselves so totally regardless, not merely of the considerations of courtesy, but even of the common feelings of humanity. (1824, p. 121)

The British interpreted Heshitai's invitation to adjourn to his apartment as a trick to remove Amherst to an isolated place inside the palace where further resistance over the kowtow would have been difficult. The query about the Prince Regent's letter suggested that this was no casual encounter. Once in the emperor's presence, it was felt, Amherst would have no alternative but to kowtow. Jeffrey recalled:

This was a very critical moment for us. The Chinese from their numbers might have forced us to perform any ceremony they chose, and separated as we were from the greater part of the Embassy, might have inflicted any punishment on us, without our being able to offer any resistance. (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.)

Other stressful incidents occurred while Heshitai was running back and forth to the emperor. Staunton was approached by an old prince who remembered him from the time of the Macartney Embassy, but Staunton 'very prudently avoided any intercourse with him' (Ellis, 1817, p. 180). Another prince, with a long silver beard, came up to the British and 'uttered the words *Fa-lang-ke*'. Morrison told him, 'We are not French but English' (Morrison, 1820, p. 58). Some princes, distinguishable by round embroidered cloth badges on their robes, came into the room to stare rudely at the British and then left (p. 58).

Heshitai soon returned with a message from the emperor informing the British that he would see them the next day. In the meantime, it was arranged for the emperor's physician to call on Amherst at his quarters. Heshitai's manner towards the British became more civil. Amherst wrote that he:

not only acquiesced in my manifest determination to go ... to my own residence, but even assisted me ... by seizing a whip from one of the soldiers ... dispersing a crowd of Mandarins in their court dress and with buttons of elevated rank, who received this chastisement as if it were a discipline to which they were not altogether unaccustomed. (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 290)

Heshitai's energetic actions, Morrison (1820) thought, were due to his 'showing off his anxiety and zeal' before the emperor who was most likely watching the scene from a palace window. Alternatively, Heshitai was venting his anger on the crowd (p. 58). Jeffrey agreed, describing Heshitai as being in a state of 'a great rage' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). When Amherst and his party entered the barouche, Heshitai got into his chair and departed, never to be seen again by the British. The British were conducted immediately to their quarters, situated a mile and a half away, where they arrived at half past seven in the morning.

29 August 1816: The Day of Dismissal from the Qing Court

The villa assigned to the British consisted of several buildings situated around three courtyards decorated with shrubs and flowers. Staunton thought the accommodation was not as grand as that provided for the Macartney Embassy, but its aspect was more 'cheerful and airy' and the rooms were neat and clean (Staunton, 1824, p. 123). The house, in Jeffrey's view, was 'very spacious and [was] by far the most comfortable house we had seen in China' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). The British looked forward to spending several days at the compound, recovering from their journey in the pleasant surroundings and unpacking their luggage, which had been delivered.

The British were joined by two Cantonese interpreters at the compound, newly arrived after their own very tiring overland journey from Canton. One was a linguist that the British called 'A-chow' whom Staunton had recognised in the crowd at Yuanmingyuan and who had followed the embassy back to Sungyun's compound where he offered his services to the British. The other was a Cantonese silk merchant. Staunton discovered that the Canton Government had sent four interpreters, two of whom had been dispatched to Zhoushan in case the embassy had landed there as had been the case with Macartney.² Staunton, noting that the need for

2 The Jiaqing emperor had memorialised in an edict dated 25 June 1816 notifying the viceroys and governors along the China coast that 'England wishes to present tribute by way of the sea route, landing at Tianjin to enter the Imperial capital, [which] has already been approved. However, the windy season makes sailing uncertain, so that we cannot tell exactly where the ambassador will land ... The ambassador is not allowed to change his route. Nor is he allowed to land secretly. Both civil and military officials near the seacoast are ordered to take good care of their defence' (Fu, 1966, vol. 1, p. 403).

Cantonese interpreters on this occasion was superfluous, believed they were spies sent by the Canton Government. But he thought that, as it was not in their interests to jeopardise their standing with the British, it was unlikely they 'would willingly take a part against them' (1824, p. 124).

Amherst was soon paid a visit by the emperor's physician who felt his pulse and diagnosed that his patient's illness was due to the climate and strange food. He told the emperor, however, that Amherst was not sick and had only been pretending. Meanwhile, a very 'handsome and plentiful Chinese breakfast' was served, but only four members of the embassy turned up to the table. Amherst had some food in his room and tried to get some sleep, but this was impossible as curious mandarins kept entering his room trying to catch a glimpse of him (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Davis (1841) related that they 'peeped through the windows of [Amherst's] private apartment, making holes with their fingers in the coloured paper windows' (p. 154). Staunton (1824) also complained of mandarins 'prying and intruding into our very bed-chambers' (p. 124). Jeffrey managed 'a very comfortable nap' before being awakened by 'the sound of plates and dishes in the adjoining room'. He added, 'I found a capital Chinese breakfast prepared to which we all did ample justice' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

Chang-wei's arrival at the compound at around 11 o'clock in the morning further interrupted British rest. He came with the devastating news that because of the emperor's anger over Amherst's supposed feigned illness, the embassy was dismissed and was ordered immediately to leave for Tongzhou. A distraught Yin woke up Morrison: 'All has gone wrong! Kuang [Guanghui] wishes to see you; you are to go away directly' (as quoted in Morrison, 1820, p. 59). Yin and Guanghui were joined by Muketenge who was asked by Guanghui if it was true that the embassy had been ordered to leave. Muketenge, in a rare utterance, answered, 'They are to go' (p. 60).

Jeffrey had been informed by the servants soon after breakfast that the luggage carts were not allowed to be unpacked. His father's dismissal, according to him, was due to the emperor being offended that Amherst had failed to appear before him and had, therefore, determined that 'he should not see the light to the Sun's countenance' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

The British were astonished by this unexpected turn of events. They were denied access to their luggage, although some of the embassy managed to obtain a basin of water and a change of linen (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). The crowd, however, remained with several people persisting in 'rudely peering in the windows' and 'thrusting open the door to gaze on the foreigners' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Amherst deliberately took his time, hoping that the emperor would change his mind and permit the embassy to stay but was advised by Chang-wei to eat some lunch before embarking on the return journey to Tongzhou. Jeffrey wrote that it was his birthday and felt sure 'no one ever passed a birthday in so singular a manner' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

British preparations for departure were interrupted in the early afternoon by the arrival of a large blustering mandarin storming into the courtyard of the compound and demanding to speak to an interpreter (Morrison, 1820, p. 60). Received by Ellis and Morrison, as Amherst and Staunton were resting, the mandarin informed them that he had been sent by the greatest military mandarin in the empire, namely, the 'general of the nine gates' and one who 'commanded a million men', who insisted that the ambassador leave his domains at once. The King of England, the mandarin continued, was a respectful and obedient man, but Amherst was not. The emperor was writing to the king to complain about Amherst, especially over his use of disrespectful language. On being informed that the ambassador had not used 'disrespectful language' but had only requested a deferment of the audience, the mandarin replied that, 'The ceremonies of the Celestial Empire are unalterably binding' (as quoted in Morrison, 1820, p. 60). He added that there was still a chance of the embassy being received if the ambassador agreed to kowtow. Ellis, according to Staunton (1824, p. 128), 'very properly' declined any discussion on the subject. The embassy was ordered to leave immediately.

Return to Tongzhou

Several of the Chinese attendants accompanying the embassy were disappointed and sympathetic to the British. Yin, Abel (1818) wrote, 'walked from person to person, consoling with each as well he could, and attributing our difficulties to the will of heaven' (p. 109). The day was very hot and the British felt that the prospect of travelling at night was better than suffering the heat of the day. Abel described their departure from Sungyun's compound taking place as 'fast as possible' where the 'pomp of

imperial favour no longer attended us' (p. 110). The British had an early dinner, served in the Chinese style, and set out on the return to Tongzhou. Amherst gave up the barouche for the sick and he, Jeffrey, Staunton and Ellis each travelled by separate palanquins.

The embassy was no longer accompanied by mandarins or Chinese soldiers and the crowds that had been present on the road from Peking to Yuanmingyuan had disappeared. Night was falling, but on arrival at the western city gate some Englishmen left their carts and picked up a piece of the city wall as a souvenir. Their route skirted the walls of the city again and passed the eastern gate where the embassy re-entered the road to Tongzhou (Staunton, 1824, p. 130). Curious crowds had now gathered to see the British as they travelled through Peking's outskirts. Jeffrey described his palanquin being surrounded by numbers of inquisitive Chinese who had:

[come] out with their lanterns to have a look at me. Their lanterns were made of paper and thin Bamboo, and my amusement was to kick at them and break them when they thrust them into the Palanquin. (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.)

Heavy rain began to fall, making progress exceedingly difficult with carts upturned and luggage scattered on the side of the road. At ten o'clock at night, Amherst's bearers abruptly stopped in the middle of the road and insisted that they needed to rest. The withdrawal of imperial favour had resulted in no dinner or rest stop being provided and the British were hungry. Some kind bearers offered Staunton tea and cakes procured from a nearby farmhouse, which touched him greatly (Staunton, 1824, p. 131). Hayne (n.d., vol. 2) wrote that this and similar acts of kindness shown by the bearers 'showed more humanity than the Courtiers of His Majesty' (p. 97). Jeffrey was very relieved when he made contact with the palanquins carrying his father and the other commissioners. He wrote that he could not leave his palanquin because he had his writing desk and his father's robes with him (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). This is an important reference as it confirms that, while Amherst did not have his credentials with him at Yuanmingyuan, his robes were at hand, which in part contradicts historians who account for their absence as a major reason for Amherst's refusal to appear before the Jiaqing emperor.³

3 For example, see Napier (1995, p. 80) and Kitson and Markley (2016). Kitson and Markley wrote that Amherst arrived at Yuanmingyuan, 'Fatigued, separated from his diplomatic credentials and ambassadorial robes' (2016, p. 1).

British relief at meeting up with other members of the party at this time was expressed by Staunton (1824): 'for to be entirely alone, in such a road at night, without the means of being understood, and in a strange country, would have been indeed desolate' (p. 132). Jeffrey described one of the English coachman stumbling onto his palanquin during his search to find Morrison or some other person who could speak Chinese 'in order to procure assistance as he had left the carriage sticking fast in the mud' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Amherst was also hungry, but Jeffrey had some biscuits that he handed over to his father when his palanquin stopped alongside. The bearers, in turn, also gave Jeffrey some of their breakfast. 'A consequence of the emperor's displeasure', Jeffrey wrote, was that 'none of the marks of attention with which we had formerly been treated' were present (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

Davis (1841, p. 157) described the return to Tongzhou as the most wretched night of his life, 'except perhaps [for] the one immediately preceding'. Travelling in a Chinese cart without springs on the granite road was harder 'than the emperor's heart' and was equivalent to being 'pounded in a mortar'. Davis attempted to walk but found this exceedingly difficult due to torrential rain, puddles and the holes in the road.

Amherst's bearers, and those in charge of the palanquins carrying Staunton and Ellis, did not return to work until three o'clock in the morning. Staunton's arrival at Tongzhou three hours later surprised the boatmen who, nevertheless, received him 'joyfully and kindly' (Abel, 1818, p. 111). The barouche carrying the sick had arrived a little earlier as well as several carts whose occupants, according to Jeffrey, were 'almost jumbled to death' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Abel had arrived at four o'clock in the morning.

The British were dismayed to find that the houses where they had previously been quartered were boarded and shut up, while the triumphal arch that had been erected opposite Amherst's boat had been torn down. Jeffrey, no doubt reflecting his father's view, interpreted this behaviour as a calculated act 'by the Chinese to mark the difference of our present situation to what it had been before' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Some of the luggage did not reach the embassy for a couple of days, but its appearance without any loss drew praise from Staunton (1824, p. 131) who commented on the honesty and diligence of the Chinese porters.

A Partial Exchange of Presents

Guanghui and Sulenge paid a late visit to the British after their arrival at Tongzhou. Arriving at 10 o'clock at night, they were 'tired and forlorn' and were received by Ellis, with Toone and Davis acting as interpreters as Amherst, Staunton and Morrison were sleeping. Amherst was woken up and met the legates on his boat, but on this occasion made the point of refusing to offer his arm to Sulenge, which he had done on previous occasions out of respect for his age and 'supposed infirmities' (Staunton, 1824, p. 134). Imperial orders had been received, Amherst was informed, for a partial exchange of presents. The legates had three presents for the King of England, consisting of a white agate sceptre or *ruyi*, a string of sapphire beads referred to by Davis as 'court beads' and a box of embroidered purses. Three British presents had been chosen by the emperor: the portraits of the Prince Regent and his wife Caroline of Brunswick, a case of maps of the 'United Kingdoms', and a collection of prints and drawings (Minute of Conference between the Chairs and Mr. Barrow respecting Presents for China, in BL IOR G/12/196 (Reel 1) F 47). The British presents, according to Jeffrey, were more valuable, 'yet the Chinese with their usual impudence observed that the Emperor in this instance had followed his usual custom of "Giving much and receiving little"' (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.).

Davis (1841) agreed. He thought the emperor's presents were of 'paltry' value, but nonetheless was pleased that the gesture of an exchange of presents had been made considering the fact that the British were facing a journey through the whole length of the empire to Canton. Amherst thought the legates seemed apprehensive that he might not agree to the exchange as they eagerly forced the presents into his hands before explaining 'the object of sending them' (Amherst to Canning, 3 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 296). An exchange of presents, the legates hoped, would ensure that the king would not be angry with the embassy on its return to England. The king, Amherst reassured them, would give him a favourable reception, well aware that he had done his duty. He took the opportunity at this time, however, to inform them of his indignation at the manner in which his embassy had been treated in contrast to Macartney's (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Guanghui placed the blame on Heshitai. Deciding to pursue a conciliatory tone as one best suited to Company interests at Canton, Amherst told the legates that he consented to the exchange of presents and also had 'no objection ...

to extend the delivery of any other articles which might have attracted His Imperial Majesty's notice' (Amherst to Canning, 3 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 297).

The British presents chosen by the emperor were laid out in a temporary enclosure and unpacked the following morning in the presence of Guanghui and Sulenge. Amherst made a deliberate show of bowing before the portrait of the Prince Regent as it was being unwrapped. He explained:

I took care myself to be present; and having required that the rabble should be sent to a distance as unworthy to contemplate it, I approached the Picture, and in conjunction with those of my countrymen present, pulled off my hat, and made a low bow. This proceeding was evidently mortifying to the Legate, but it answered two good purposes. It shewed that the Emperor of China was not the only Sovereign in the world entitled to respect, and it was the best confirmation I could give of what I had all along proposed to be the European ceremony. I then enquired particularly as to the place where it was intended to hang the pictures of the King and Queen, and having received satisfactory information on that head ... I recommended them to Quong's [Guanghui's] care [and] took my leave. (Amherst to Canning, 3 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 298)

Davis (1841) wrote that Guanghui's face at this time looked as 'black as thunder' from Amherst's actions having 'so completely ... discomposed [Chinese] established notions of the universal supremacy of the great emperor' (p. 170). Davis added later, 'It might be well for Chinese assumption if lessons of this kind were more frequently taught it; and the increasing means of direct communications from the west seem calculated to multiply the opportunities' (p. 170).

The presents, once inspected by Guanghui and Sulenge, were repacked and placed in Sulenge's care who was leaving that afternoon for Yuanmingyuan. Staunton (1824) wrote, 'we finally separated from this old gentleman, who has obtained a dispensation on account of his age, from the duty of further attendance on the Embassy' (p. 135). Guanghui remained with the embassy until it left China, assisted for a short time by Chang-wei and Yin. The diplomatic part of the embassy, Davis (1841) noted, was now terminated.

Immediate British Reactions to their Reception at Yuanmingyuan

The stressful and confrontational nature of negotiations over the kowtow that took place on the journey of the embassy to Peking has been noted in the previous two chapters. The duplicitous conduct of the high-ranking mandarins appointed by the emperor at this time shocked the British and failed to measure up to British notions of civility and politeness. Events at Yuanmingyuan not only confirmed British perceptions of the imperial court as a site of rough, rude and uncouth ‘Tartars’, but firmly established the futility of any further British diplomatic overtures to the Qing court. British disappointment at being denied access to Peking, let alone making a grand entrance befitting the status and dignity of the British sovereign, helped reinforce notions of the impenetrable access to China’s society at this time (Sample, 2008, p. 32).

While Staunton had serious doubts about a successful outcome of the Amherst Embassy, he was always certain that ‘we shall be received as well at least as the former Embassy’ (*Staunton Letters*, on board the *Discovery*, Ladrone Islands, 12 July 1816). The ‘very favourable Edict’ received by Amherst while the squadron watered at Hong Kong confirmed that the ‘Emperor is very well placed to receive the Embassy’ (*Staunton Letters*, on board the *Discovery*, Ladrone Islands, 12 July 1816). His Imperial Majesty, Staunton informed his mother when the British arrived at the Gulf of Bei Zhili, was ‘particularly anxious to see us’. He added that the emperor:

even expressed his superior [crossed out] and ‘peculiar’ esteem for the British nation—on the other hand, it is already hinted that His Majesty does not calculate our making a long stay ... it is therefore probable that we shall quit Peking as soon, or sooner than the former Embassy—on this subject however I shall feel no kind of regret, provided our Entertainment while we are there, is gracious and friendly. (*Staunton Letters*, on board HMS *Alceste*, Gulf of Pechelee, 7 August 1816)

Their reception, it has been seen, was neither gracious nor friendly. Amherst noted the striking difference with the manner in which his embassy was received at the Qing court compared to Macartney’s reception. Hampton (2009) has written that an ambassador is first and foremost ‘a reader of signs’ who bases his interpretation largely on historical precedent where ‘what has happened before is placed at the scene and service of political

negotiation' (p. 5). The former embassy, Amherst noted, was marked by 'decency and regularity' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 284). Time was allowed for 'decorous preparation' and the needs of individuals were considered. Above all, not only Macartney's honour, but also that of the king and the emperor, was maintained and appearances were upheld. Amherst's reception, on the other hand, consisted of 'hurry and confusion' with a 'total disregard' for the comfort and composure of the individuals (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 285).

Amherst was adamant, understandably, that his treatment at Yuanmingyuan was 'inhospitable and inhuman'. He made it clear that his view of the Qing court as 'little better than a Tartar camp' was formed not from the 'practices of the polished courts' of Europe, but rather from Macartney's reception at the time of the Qianlong emperor (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 293).

The Importance of Appearances

The British emphasis on Western diplomatic protocol, courtly appearances and the importance of making a dignified, elegant and grand entrance, befitting the status of Britain's place in the world before the Qing court, was of vital concern to Amherst and his party and had been given prominence during the embassy's preparations. But the lateness of the hour, weather conditions and travel arrangements ensured that a proposed grand entrance into Peking and Yuanmingyuan was impossible. Rather, Amherst complained that the Qing court acted on, 'A pervading wish to remove away from us every thing that constitutes the splendour or even respectable appearance of an Embassy' (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 294).

A specific insult was the manner in which Amherst arrived at Yuanmingyuan, separated from the rest of the embassy, including the marine guard, the band and attendants. While his credentials were missing, his ambassadorial robes, it has been noted, appear to have been at hand, but the circumstances of an exhausting and rushed arrival at the Summer Palace left no time to collect them (Jeffrey Amherst, n.d., n.p.). Adding to British judgements that the Qing court had an ulterior motive in the nature of their reception was the fact that only Amherst, Staunton, Ellis and Jeffrey were proposed to be received by the Jiaqing emperor

at the time. Amherst was acutely aware that, owing to the absence of his credentials, packed away in the luggage that had yet to arrive, he was ‘consequently unable to present [him]self in [his] public character’ (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 294).

Amherst’s most damning assessment of his reception concerned the insult to Great Britain and the British sovereign in which, ‘The attempt to drag us before the Emperor in such a guise as would befit only his vassals from the meanest and most barbarous islands of the China seas’ (Amherst to Canning, 8 March 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 295).

The change in British status following its dismissal was humiliating and evidenced after their return to Tongzhou when a beggar remained standing and did not bow as Amherst passed by. Ellis (1817) commented that the ‘British Ambassador’ was no longer considered worthy of respect, ‘even from the lowest class of society’ (p. 191). The reason, of course, was that the embassy had dismally failed. Amherst’s failure to formally appear before the Jiaqing emperor ensured that the ritual cycle surrounding such a reception was never commenced, let alone completed. Amherst’s status, seen from the perspective of his rejection by the emperor at court, ensured that his position protocol-wise in China remained in a state of flux. His status as the representative of a powerful foreign sovereign required that he be placated and accommodated on the one hand, but he was not entitled to the respect normally accorded an anointed tributary ambassador. The British expected that they would be accorded the same respect as Macartney, achieved through his two receptions before the Qianlong emperor at Jehol, resulting in a further opportunity to build on the goodwill with the Chinese. However, it became clear following Amherst’s arrival at Tianjin that the Qing court was not prepared to grant him any dispensation based on the Macartney precedent, and that he was required as a new arrival to adhere to all the protocols of the Qing court, which were ultimately enforced without any concessions.

Amherst’s degrading treatment by the Qing court reinforced British group cohesion at this time and reaffirmed their belief that he had acted correctly in refusing to compromise British power to make an appearance before the Jiaqing emperor. Further clarification of Chinese actions came to light when the British received an account of the court’s view on the matter

from the judge of Bei Zhili province who was assigned as one of the early conductors of the embassy on its journey back to Tianjin. Staunton wrote (1824) that the judge was not a pleasant man; rather, he was:

Vain, boastful, professing to know a great deal about foreign countries, but puffed up with the most extravagant notions of the grandeur and importance of his own, and especially of the Tartar family now on the throne. He affected to consider the Embassy from England as quite a trifling concern to China. (p. 141)

The judge's view of the 'trifling' importance of the embassy to China is understandable; the Qing court regularly received tributary missions and the Jiaqing emperor was in a hurry to proceed to Jehol and the Amherst Embassy was not invited. The British, of course, were specifically irritated on hearing the judge's assessment of Britain and the status of their sovereign. Morrison noted that the judge had read only French missionary reports on European countries, resulting in outdated and inaccurate views. England's importance, the judge informed them, was not as great as other European nations and it was absurd that her king was 'pretending to compete with the Emperor of China' (as quoted in Ellis, 1817, p. 196). The judge thought England was dependent entirely on commerce and, although it had a strong navy, the French were a far superior land force. He also thought England was divided into four parts and had four kings (Abel, 1818, p. 144). While Amherst and Ellis did not comment on this false assertion, it suggests that the judge thought Britain was divided into a number of petty principalities similar to those found in maritime Southeast Asia, which traditionally sent tribute to the Qing court. Nevertheless, Abel (1818, p. 144) thought the judge was the most informed Chinese on European geography and history encountered by the British in China.

The judge conceded that the embassy had certainly been rushed to Yuanmingyuan, but he thought the emperor was far too reasonable to have dismissed it if he had known the true state of affairs. The performance of the kowtow, however, was essential and non-negotiable. Moreover, the judge offered his opinion that the performance of the kowtow would not have altered Britain's status in Chinese eyes nor relegated the British to tributary status. Rather, it would have permitted the British the honour of sitting on cushions in the presence of the emperor, thus according them with a privilege reserved for the princes and the highest mandarins, and one that was never given to envoys from tributary states. Amherst made

no comment on learning this except to remind the judge of the Kangxi emperor's dispensation given to the Russian envoy in 1721 where an alternative was suggested.

The British Learn of the Reception Intended for Them at Yuanmingyuan

A book published in 1865 written by the surgeon attached to the first British Legation at Peking, D. F. Rennie, contains a reference to Amherst's reception at Yuanmingyuan (p. 234). Rennie held a conversation with a 70-year-old assistant commissioner for foreign affairs, referred to as 'Tsoon-Luen', who remembered the morning in 1816 and said that the embassy 'miscarried through some unaccountable mismanagement'.⁴ Of interest is Tsoon-Luen's assertion:

The Emperor was actually sitting on the throne in the state apartment at Yuen-ming-yuen, waiting to receive the King of England's letter, when the announcement was brought to him that the Ambassador had departed. (Rennie, 1865, p. 235)

Rennie concludes that such 'mismanagement' refers to Amherst's refusal 'to appear before the Emperor immediately on his arrival at Yuen-ming-yuen, and also to perform the kow-tow in the presence' (p. 235).

Platt (2018) has also written that it had been the emperor's intention to have a successful meeting, even if it meant compromising on the protocol surrounding the kowtow, stating in an edict three days before Amherst's arrival at Yuanmingyuan that 'it is better to meet with them than to send them away' (p. 179). In a critical breakdown of communication, Heshitai did not relay this vital information to Amherst as apparently intended; rather, he tried in his own brusque way to 'deliver' Amherst before the Jiaqing emperor when the former was clearly in no condition to proceed. Given Heshitai's personality and reputation, it is not surprising that he misread or only gave lip service to the emperor's intentions and, by his own actions, missed what could have been a cordial meeting between Amherst and the emperor. It was only subsequently when the Jiaqing emperor found out the true circumstances under which Amherst and his

⁴ The present study has been unable to identify 'Tsoon-Luen'.

party had travelled overnight and been mishandled and mistreated on arrival at Yuanmingyuan that he issued a further edict severely punishing Heshitai and others involved (p. 178).

The members of the Amherst Embassy were given a different account at the time. Chang-wei told Morrison on 3 September that the emperor never intended to give the British an audience on the morning they arrived at Yuanmingyuan, but wanted only to pass by them seated in his palanquin to view their intended ceremony (Staunton, 1824, p. 139). If dissatisfied—in other words, if Amherst did not perform the kowtow—the emperor planned to expel them without any other reception. Heshitai had hoped that Amherst might have been persuaded ‘by the lure of promises’ to have then kowtowed the following day at a public reception (pp. 139–140). Staunton added that, if true, the British were particularly glad they had escaped such humiliation ‘so unworthy’ of Amherst’s public character (p. 140). Hayne (n.d., vol. 2) summed up British feelings:

It is a pleasant reflection to feel persuaded had LA [Amherst] given way in that fight at Yuangming yuan, it most probably would have led to more disagreeable scenes than which actually occurred—despite the Emperor’s presence ... a little persuasive violence might have been used to get those in His Majesty’s presence [to fall] on both knees ... So that all was for the best. (p. 115)

British relief at being spared a dishonourable reception was reinforced on 11 September when they learned of the intended program of three proposed receptions had they been formally received by the Jiaqing emperor.⁵ Handed to Morrison for translation by Chang-wei, the document revealed that the embassy’s reception was to have taken place in a hall with the emperor sitting at the upper end on a raised altar. Amherst was expected to enter and kneel by the altar while delivering the Prince Regent’s letter to a high-ranking mandarin who, in turn, would hand it to another mandarin who ascended the steps and gave it to the emperor. This was in contrast to Macartney who had delivered the king’s letter

⁵ For a full translation of the ‘Outline of the Ceremonies to be observed on the English Ambassador’s (Tributary Envoys etc.) presenting the Peaou-wan, or official document from his Sovereign’, see Morse (1926/1966, vol. 3, pp. 295–297). See Appendix F for a translation of the final ceremony, ‘Ceremonies to be observed at the Audience of Leave’, reproduced from Ellis (1817, pp. 499–500, Note No. 5).

directly into the hands of the Qianlong emperor.⁶ Amherst was then to be conducted down to a lower level where he would receive a gift of a *ruyi* or jade sceptre for the Prince Regent. At this location, Amherst would address the customary questions presented in the name of the emperor by a mandarin and would next be conducted to further down the hall where, facing the throne on the distant altar, he would perform the kowtow with nine prostrations. Following this ceremony, Amherst was to be led outside the hall where he was to kowtow once more behind a row of mandarins. At this point Amherst would be permitted to sit down but would be required to prostrate himself again, along with the princes, while the emperor drank milk tea. Two other prostrations were required: one at the time when Amherst was presented with milk tea and the other when he finished drinking (Morse, 1926/1966, vol. 3, pp. 295–297).

Predictably, the British were astonished on reading this document, although Ellis (1817, p. 215) assumed that it reflected what the Chinese ‘wished to have happened’ and not, therefore, what they insisted on. Nevertheless, the sheer audacity of the intended program was breathtaking and represented a reception for the Amherst Embassy that, when measured by previous European embassies, was marked as the most humiliating and degrading. The issue was the number of prostrations expected. Ellis confessed that his earlier support for one kowtow in the actual presence of the emperor and at a reasonable distance from him was very different from the four prostrations expected on this occasion. This expectation, Ellis admitted, placed the performance of the kowtow in a considerably ‘different character’ (p. 215). The reception would have been even more degrading than that experienced by the Dutch in 1795, especially the expectation that Amherst would kowtow behind a row of people out of view of the emperor. The extra ceremonies, Ellis thought, were more indicative and expressive of inferiority and more objectionable than the kowtow itself, and it was inconceivable for a British ambassador to submit to a reception less honourable than those given previously to other European monarchs (p. 217). Staunton (1824) summed up the British view: Heshitai had done them a great favour in sparing them from a potentially embarrassing and humiliating experience where Amherst’s status and character as a British ambassador would have been compromised leading to a ‘more disparaging’ scene than their actual dismissal (p. 140).

6 Macartney wrote that he delivered the king’s letter ‘into the Emperor’s own hands, who, having received it, passed it to the Minister, by whom it was placed on the cushion’ (Cranmer-Byng, 1962, p. 122).

On 14 September, Chang-wei called on Staunton to tell him that he was due to leave the embassy in a couple of days. He further informed Staunton of the latest news from Peking, published in the *Peking Gazette*, that the emperor had since learned the truth of the conditions under which Amherst had arrived at Yuanmingyuan. The emperor had noted in his letter to the viceroy of Canton at the time of the expected arrival of the embassy that Amherst would be received at his court within the context of bearing presents and tendering 'good-will with feelings and in a language respectful and complaisant'.⁷ Arrangements were made to receive the embassy in a 'liberal, gracious, safe and suitable manner' where it would 'graciously be presented with gifts'. Problems started, according to the emperor, from the time of the banquet at Tianjin when Amherst did not return thanks for the feast or banquet by obeying the regulated form of three kneelings and nine knocks of the head on the ground (Imperial edict in the *Peking Gazette*, 4 September 1816, as quoted in Ellis, 1817, p. 501, Appendix 6). If he had, the Jiaqing emperor made clear, the embassy would have been brought to Yuanmingyuan the same day (Imperial edict in the *Peking Gazette*, 4 September 1816, as quoted in Ellis, 1817, p. 501, Appendix 6; Vermillion edict, 'Paper respecting the Embassy', drawn up by the Emperor, in Ellis, 1817, pp. 506–508, Appendix 11). Guanghui and Sulenge should not have permitted the embassy to proceed to Tongzhou and matters were exacerbated by their connivance in allowing the clandestine departure of the British ships. The deception became even more apparent once the embassy arrived at Tongzhou where Heshitai and Muketenge sent a 'confused and obscure' report that Amherst had practised the ceremony (Imperial edict in the *Peking Gazette*, 4 September 1816, as quoted in Ellis, 1817, p. 501, Appendix 6; Vermillion edict, 'Paper respecting the Embassy', drawn up by the Emperor, in Ellis, 1817, pp. 506–508, Appendix 11).

The Jiaqing emperor reported that he ascended the throne at half past five in the morning and called the ambassador to an audience. Heshitai made three reports on this occasion; in the first, he told the emperor that Amherst was not able 'to travel fast'; he next reported that Amherst was ill and a short delay was necessary; finally, he confirmed that Amherst was too ill to present himself for an interview before the emperor. While Amherst was being escorted to his lodgings where he was afterwards called

7 The Jiaqing emperor's reply to the viceroy of Canton, respecting the embassy sent from the Prince Regent, which reached the viceroy on or around 12 July 1816.

on by the emperor's physician, the assistant commissioners (Staunton and Ellis) were also ordered to appear in an audience before the emperor but they too refused, claiming they were also ill and needed to defer their audience until the ambassador was well.

Their response caused the Jiaqing emperor to expel the embassy and send the 'Embassadors back to their own country, without punishing the high crime they had committed' (Imperial edict in the *Peking Gazette*, 4 September 1816, as quoted in Ellis, 1817, p. 501, Appendix 6; Vermillion edict, 'Paper respecting the Embassy', drawn up by the Emperor, in Ellis, 1817, pp. 506–508, Appendix 11). The emperor added that China was 'the sovereign of the whole world'. For what reason, therefore, 'should contumely and arrogance like this be endured with quiet temper?'

The emperor only discovered some days later that Amherst and his party had travelled overnight to Yuanmingyuan and that their 'court-dresses' had yet to arrive; he added that Amherst thought, 'how can I in my ordinary garments lift up my eyes to the great Emperor' (Imperial edict in the *Peking Gazette*, 4 September 1816, as quoted in Ellis, 1817, p. 501, Appendix 6; Vermillion edict, 'Paper respecting the Embassy', drawn up by the Emperor, in Ellis, 1817, pp. 506–508, Appendix 11). The emperor also blamed his courtiers, present at the time of Amherst's arrival at the anteroom at Yuanmingyuan, for not informing him of the true state of affairs, which would have seen the audience moved to a later date. The mandarins and princes, it has been seen, were more intent at gaping at the British than reporting to their emperor. He complained, 'yet they sat immoveable while the affair was going on' (Imperial edict in *Peking Gazette*, 4 September 1816, in Ellis, 1817, p. 501, Appendix 6). Heshitai was immediately blamed and was dismissed from his position in the court and lost the honour of wearing his yellow riding jacket. He and Muketenge were blamed also for allowing Amherst to proceed to Tongzhou without first rehearsing the kowtow and for sending confused reports on the matter to the emperor. Chang-wei, on the other hand, was promoted because he had told the emperor the truth that Amherst had no intention of kowtowing. Yin, meanwhile, was relieved that he was sufficiently junior in rank that he 'happily fell below the emperor's notice' (Staunton, 1824, p. 147). Guanghui and Sulenge were not so fortunate. Both were censored for allowing the embassy to proceed beyond Tianjin after Amherst had refused to perform the kowtow ceremony. Sulenge lost his position as president of the Board of Works and was degraded to a blue button of third rank. He also lost the rank of general in the army

and was ordered to pluck out his peacock's feather ('Substance of Imperial Edicts inflicting Punishments on Soo, Ho, and Kwang' in Ellis, 1817, p. 509, Appendix 12). Guanghui was reduced to a secretary of the eighth rank, dismissed from his position as salt commissioner and was posted to 'Man-chow Tartary' the following spring.

The emperor was 'much appeased' on learning the truth and decided to accept three presents from the British sovereign. To have accepted any more, Chang-wei said, would have been 'indecorous ... unless he had also determined to receive the ambassador' ('Substance of Imperial Edicts inflicting Punishments on Soo, Ho, and Kwang' in Ellis, 1817, p. 509, Appendix 12). Further, as the emperor was due to leave for Jehol, it was too late to recall the embassy and it would have been too costly to invite the embassy to accompany him. All these details, Chang-wei said, were printed in the *Peking Gazette* and he promised to obtain a copy and hand it secretly to Staunton. He begged Staunton not to tell Guanghui or any of the others that the British had received this from him ('Substance of Imperial Edicts inflicting Punishments on Soo, Ho, and Kwang' in Ellis, 1817, p. 509, Appendix 12).

The diplomatic encounter between the British and the Qing court formally ended with the embassy's departure from Yuanmingyuan. As preparations were made for the journey to Canton, paid for by the Qing Government, customary within the context of even a failed tribute mission, the emperor issued orders for it to proceed on the shortest route via Nanjing and the Poyang Lake and for his officials to treat it with civility 'and silence' thereby causing 'gratitude and awe' ('Substance of Imperial Edicts inflicting Punishments on Soo, Ho, and Kwang' in Ellis, 1817, p. 509, Appendix 12). It must not be forgotten, the emperor emphasised, that the embassy had come to his court with 'the intention of offering tribute' and must accordingly be treated with respect and honour on its journey to Canton ('Translation of an Imperial Edict addressed to the Viceroy of Kiang-nan (Jiangnan), respecting Treatment of Embassy, received October 8, 1816' in Ellis, 1817, pp. 502–503, Appendix 8). Amherst later told Canning in his official report that:

The precipitate and unwarranted rejection of the Embassy from the Palace Gates has left an injury to repair. Even in the eyes of the Chinese themselves the rules of hospitality have been violated. Possibly some apprehension may be entertained of the manner in which the transaction will be viewed in Great Britain. (Amherst to Canning, 21 April 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 379)

Chang-wei and Staunton thought there was now a need for conciliation between the British and the Chinese. The occasion of travelling together in a four-month journey to Canton appeared to offer a unique opportunity to repair relationships. Staunton (1824) wrote that he and Chang-wei 'agreed in sentiment, that the best thing now to be done, was to think as little as we could of the past, and to consult together from time to time, how matters might be placed on the most amicable footing for the future' (p. 168). The intended 'honourable treatment' of the embassy on its return to Canton was attributed by Amherst as 'a wish for reparation in the only way which the pride of the Emperor would allow' (Amherst to Canning, 21 April 1817, in BL IOR G/12/197 (Reel 2) F 379).

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