

# Appendix D: Ball's Secret Report (Commissioner of Teas at Canton)

A Secret Report on the Expediency of Opening a Second Port in China: 2 July 1816

Staunton's doubts of a successful mission in 1816 were not reflected by the author of a secret report written for Amherst and dated 2 July 1816 to coincide with the Amherst Embassy's arrival off Macao. Samuel Ball, Chief Inspector of Teas at Canton, was commissioned by the Select Committee to report on the *Expediency of opening a second port to British trade in China*. Reference to the document has not been made in any previous historical account of the Amherst Embassy and only a brief abstract is given here. The detailed report, printed at Macao, presumably on Morrison's press 'for private circulation only', is important for revealing Britain's ulterior motive for the embassy if negotiations had been permitted as well as making clear the very limited intelligence they had on the state of China's internal trade. Ball's sources were confined to the publications of Du Halde, Father Amiot, Sir George Leonard Staunton and John Barrow. The *Chinese Repository* refers to the report in an article published in July 1834 and a full copy was printed in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1845 at a time when the question of access to new ports in China was of paramount British importance.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The preamble to its publication written in 1845 reads, 'The time is now come when we are called upon to decide what new privileges we have to demand of the Chinese: and since a more unrestricted intercourse with that country is looked for, it becomes an object of the first importance to ascertain at what Ports these privileges may be best obtained' (Observations on the Expediency of Opening a Second Port in China, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1845, vol. 6, p. 182).

Ball's report focused on the Chinese port thought to be the most favourable for the tea trade. Canton, it was pointed out, was unsuited due to its distance from the tea-growing districts and its role as an emporium useful only for the consumption of foreign imports. Further, 'the Canton people are neither the carriers of the imports to the distant provinces, nor of the exports to Canton', while black tea had to be transported overland to Canton, which cost the Company an additional charge of £150,000 per annum (*Observations on the Expediency of Opening a Second Port in China, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1845, vol. 6, p. 214). Other teas were transported by sea, suggesting that it was far more economical for the British to be allowed direct access to the ports of the tea-growing areas of Fukien. The report advocated that the port of 'Fu-chew in Fo-kien' (Fuzhou) province was ideally situated to advance British trade in China, enabling the easy access of British woollens, lead and other products into the markets of the Chinese interior. Ball had a further vision, namely, a British monopoly of the lucrative Chinese coastal trade. To date, Ball argued, the coastal trade was in the hands of the numerous 'Fokien junks' that daily passed 'to and fro at Macao, and along every part of the coast of China' (p. 196). He thought:

Doubtless in a free and open intercourse with this country, the superior construction and security of European vessels, and knowledge of insurance, would enable foreigners not only to participate in, but perhaps monopolize, this branch of commerce, and even attract to the coast much of that still more valuable trade, which, from the risks and fears of a sea voyage, is at present conducted by inland carriage. (p. 196)

Ball concluded that the advantages of moving the bulk of British trade from Canton to Fuzhou were not remote and speculative but 'immediate and real' (p. 200). He considered this aim achievable:

Perhaps it might not be difficult to show [the Chinese Government] that a change would be mutually beneficial; and whatever may have been said of the jealousy and suspicion of these people, it may be doubted whether they are so bigoted to forms as to sacrifice even their smallest interests where a change seems to involve no radical injury to their institutions. They have no objection to trade, if it can be carried on peacefully; and nothing can appear more reasonable on our part, or more intelligible to them, than our wishing to carry it on where we can purchase the articles we require the cheapest. (p. 201)

Ball's misguided assessment of a likely Chinese response to such a plan reveals a significant British misunderstanding of Chinese attitudes and policy towards the British and other Western traders. The British belief in the mutual benefits of international trade as the engine for driving greater prosperity and progress for both sides was not shared by the Chinese. Ball's report reveals that there was no British appreciation of the rationale behind the Canton trading system initiated as a mechanism for controlling and restricting foreign contact with the Chinese people. The expectation that China would open a second port to British trade in anticipation of mutual benefit was certainly a British illusion, and one that lies at the core of the issues that Amherst was expected to be able to negotiate with the Chinese Government.

It is worth noting that the *Chinese Repository* in 1834 reported Staunton's opinion that British trade be withdrawn from Canton altogether and be re-established 'in some insular position on the coast, beyond the reach of acts of oppression and molestation; where it may be carried on securely and honourably' (*Chinese Repository*, July 1834, vol. 3, p. 132). British frustration at the absence of defined regulations embodied in a formal treaty governing the important trade, thereby leaving it vulnerable to sudden interruptions from the conduct of the Chinese Government, persisted.

This text is taken from *Britain's Second Embassy to China: Lord Amherst's 'Special Mission' to the Jiaqing Emperor in 1816*, by Caroline Stevenson, published 2021 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.