

Appendix H: Itinerary of the Amherst Embassy

August 1815

- 10 The British Government approves an embassy to the Qing court to be sent on behalf of the Prince Regent, paid for by the British East India Company (the Company). 'Its main purpose was—not to propose any innovation, but merely to secure and consolidate' commercial trade between China and Britain at Canton (Staunton, 1822, p. 239).

October 1815

- 2 Lord William Pitt Amherst's appointment as British Ambassador of the Special Mission to the Chinese Empire announced officially by the Prince Regent.

February 1816

- 8 The HMS *Alceste*, HMS *Lyra* and Company Ship *General Hewitt* depart Portsmouth.
- 18 One-day stopover at Madeira.

March 1816

- 10 Ships separate; the *Alceste* heads for Brazil, and the *Lyra* and *General Hewitt* for Cape Town.
- 21 The *Alceste* arrives at Rio de Janeiro.
- 31 The *Alceste* departs Rio de Janeiro.

April 1816

- 13 The *General Hewitt* arrives at Cape Town.
- 14 The *Lyra* arrives Cape Town.
- 18 The *Alceste* arrives Cape Town.

June 1816

- 7 The *Lyra* arrives Anjere Roads, Batavia.
- 9 The *Alceste* arrives Anjere Roads, Batavia, with the *General Hewitt* in sight.
- 10 Amherst sends a letter to Canton with an American ship.
- 12 The *Lyra* dispatched to China to announce the approach of the embassy to George Staunton at Canton with instructions for a secret rendezvous off Macao to be arranged.
- 18 Amherst attends a ball in Batavia held by the Dutch in honour of the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo.
- 21 The *Alceste* and *General Hewitt* depart Batavia for China.

July 1816

- 9 The embassy meets up with the HMS *Orlando* whose commander, Captain Clavell, informs Amherst that Staunton and other members of the Company had embarked on the Company ships *Discovery* and *Investigator* for the Lemma Islands off Macao where they and the *Lyra* were waiting for the *Alceste*.
- 10 Amherst arrives at the Lemma Islands and meets with the waiting ships and the Company men from Canton.
- 11 Squadron weighs anchor at Hong Kong Island. Staunton comes on board the *Alceste*.
- 13 Imperial permission received to proceed to the Yellow Sea. Embassy is informed that mandarins have been dispatched to Zhoushan and Tianjin to await Amherst's arrival and conduct him to the Court at Peking.
- 27 The *Lyra* arrives at the mouth of the Baihe River and anchors closer to shore because of her shallow draft.
Toone and Campbell visit some fishermen at sea and request that they take a note to inform the authorities of the arrival of the embassy. The fishermen refuse.
- 28 The rest of the squadron anchors off the Baihe River, further out to sea.
- 31 Two mandarins, Chang-wei and Yin, come on board the *Lyra* and take charge of Lord Amherst's letter to the viceroy. They comprise two of the four mandarins designated to escort the embassy after arrival at Dagou. Arrangements made for Morrison and Cooke to go ashore at Dagou to meet with the mandarins in charge of the embassy.

Morrison learns that the embassy would not remain long at Peking and that it was not invited to accompany the emperor to Jehol.

August 1816

- 4 Chang-wei and Yin visit the *Alceste*. The embassy was to receive high honours. First mention of the intended ceremony—the kowtow—that the British were required to perform before the emperor and that Amherst was to rehearse beforehand.
- 8 Preparations made for disembarking the embassy and landing on Chinese soil. Discussion among the British on the expediency of performing the kowtow. Staunton informs Amherst in a letter that to comply with the ceremony was inadvisable, even though its refusal might result in the total rejection of the embassy.
- 9 The embassy lands at Dagu. Amherst is informed that a higher ranked mandarin, Sulenge (President of the Tribunal of Works), was waiting at Tianjin to receive him. Twenty-three boats are provided to carry the ambassadorial party.
- 12 The embassy arrives at Tianjin. Amherst is informed that an imperial banquet is being given in his honour the following day.
- 13 The embassy attends an imperial banquet hosted by Guanghui and Sulenge. Long drawn out discussion on the ceremony the Chinese intend Amherst to perform before the emperor. Legates insist that Macartney had kowtowed before the Qianlong emperor and that Amherst should do the same. Amherst refuses to kowtow and performs the British ceremony of respect before an altar table, representative of the emperor, following the precedent of Macartney. The issue of compliance with the prostration ceremony is left unresolved.
- 14 The embassy proceeds up-river towards Tongzhou. Staunton pressured to use his influence to get Amherst to agree to kowtow. Sulenge and Chang-wei admit that Macartney had performed the British ceremony on the first reception but afterwards performed the kowtow.
- 15 The legates, Guanghui and Sulenge, arrive late in the evening in an agitated state. They ask, ‘What has become of the British ships?’
- 16 The legates demand a ‘yes or no’ answer on the kowtow. The embassy boats are turned back towards Tianjin after Amherst refuses to commit to the prostration ceremony.

- 18 The embassy boats permitted to proceed towards Tongzhou after Amherst agrees to present a written declaration of the ceremony he proposes to perform in the presence of the emperor. Amherst informed that two mandarins of very high rank will receive him at Tongzhou.
- 20 The embassy arrives at Tongzhou.
- 21 Heshitai, called 'Duke Ho' by the British, and Muketenge (President of the Tribunal of Ceremonies) arrive at Tongzhou to observe Amherst rehearsing the kowtow.
- Later that day, six high-ranking mandarins call on Amherst. Their rude manner is commented on by the British who refer to them as 'the Lads of Mougden'.
- 22 Conference with Heshitai—Amherst is informed that the kowtow could not be dispensed with. If complied with, the British would be conducted to the Qing court. Amherst hands Heshitai his letter for the emperor informing him of the proposed ceremony he plans to perform. The letter also contains a respectful and conciliatory approach to a solution on the ceremonial impasse.
- 23 Little official business takes place. Three Europeans dressed in Chinese costume from the Russian College at Peking visited the British boats but were treated with suspicion and ignored.
- 24 The emperor asserts he witnessed Macartney performing the kowtow. News received that Staunton is under suspicion by the Qing authorities.
- 25 News received that a letter is being prepared by the emperor for the king should the embassy be rejected, and that the emperor was particularly angry at the unauthorised departure of the British ships.
- 26 Affairs critical: Staunton fearing arrest, Amherst and Ellis still reluctant to close the door on negotiations regarding the reception of the embassy, and Amherst yet to make his final decision on the kowtow.
- 27 Meeting with Heshitai and Muketenge. Amherst stands firm—he is following his sovereign's orders to follow Macartney's precedent and will not kowtow. The British put forward their objectives for the embassy; these are not dismissed by Heshitai who offers his support on the condition that Amherst performs the kowtow.

On return from the meeting, Amherst and Ellis, following Heshitai's more agreeable and accommodating attitude, tend towards agreeing to kowtow. Staunton stands firm, concerned that recent intimidation might lead to a direct attack on him personally or Company interests at Canton. Staunton consults his Company colleagues—Toone, Pearson and Davis—who remain strongly against performing the kowtow. Morrison and Manning are prepared to consider kowtowing but only if concessions are made to the British. After weighing up the arguments, Amherst finally decides not to perform the ceremony.

That afternoon, the embassy receives a directive to proceed to Peking. The British confirm that their decision not to comply with the ceremony was understood. They are reassured by the mandarins that they will not be required to kowtow.

- 28 The embassy leaves Tongzhou for Yuanmingyuan at four o'clock in the afternoon.
- 29 The embassy arrives at Yuanmingyuan at daybreak after a very tiring overnight journey. Amherst, Staunton, Ellis, Jeffrey and Morrison, are separated from the rest of the embassy and conducted straight to the imperial compound. Requested to enter directly into the emperor's presence, Amherst refuses, pleading fatigue and the absence of his ambassadorial robes and credentials. Amherst is manhandled by Heshitai in an attempt to drag him into the emperor's presence where he will have no option but to kowtow. Amherst strongly resists.

Amherst retires to his quarters at the estate of Sungyun, considered a friend of the British from his time as the viceroy of Canton in 1811 and earlier from his role in the Macartney Embassy.

The emperor's physician arrives between 8 and 9 o'clock in the morning to examine Amherst. By noon, reports are received of the embassy's dismissal due to the emperor's anger over Amherst's 'feigned illness'. Orders arrive for the embassy to return to Tongzhou.

A mandarin wearing a red button visits the embassy and hints that assent to kowtow might still save the embassy, but this is dismissed by the British.

The embassy leaves the compound at four o'clock in the afternoon.

- 30 After a tedious night journey, the embassy arrives back at their Tongzhou base. Everything is shut, and indications make clear that the embassy is no longer being treated as a tribute mission.

At 10 o'clock at night, arrangements for a partial exchange of presents take place. Guanghui and Sulenge are dejected over events at Yuanmingyuan.

- 31 The formal exchange of presents from the King of England to the Jiaqing emperor, and from the emperor to the king takes place. Amherst performs the same ceremony as the Lords before the vacant throne of the king in the House of Lords, in front of a portrait of the Prince Regent.

Sulenge leaves the embassy. Guanghui, Chang-wei and Yin remain as its legates and conductors.

September 1816

- 2 The embassy sets out for Tianjin. The British are concerned over reduced provisions.
- 3 Chang-wei tells Morrison that the emperor had no intention of receiving the British on the early morning of 29 August; he only wished to view them from his palanquin to witness the ceremony the English proposed to perform before him. If he did not approve, the embassy was to be dismissed.

The British learn that the request for the embassy to proceed to Yuanmingyuan was a plot devised by Heshitai who hoped that Amherst, lured by his promises of support, would perform the kowtow at a public audience.

- 5 The British are informed that the emperor is now aware of the circumstances in which they had travelled overnight to Yuanmingyuan and is very angry with Heshitai who is deprived of his great offices at court. Muketenge and Sulenge are removed from their positions and Guanghui is reduced to the rank of a gold button.
- 6 The embassy reaches Tianjin but is not greeted with any ceremony.
- 8 News received that Chang-wei had been promoted to judge of Shandong province.

The embassy leaves the Baihe River and proceeds down a subsidiary stream towards the Grand Canal.

- 12 Several members of the embassy are very ill, including Abel and Toone.
- 13 The embassy is forced to leave ports of call at midnight or early daybreak to avoid access to towns.

- 14 Staunton notes a decline in prosperity compared to the time of the Macartney Embassy. Chang-wei informs Staunton that he is due to leave the embassy. News is received that the emperor is not cross with the British but with his own officers conducting the embassy.
- 15 The embassy arrives at Dongguan with its pleasing scenery of willows and poplars. Chang-wei (secretly) sends Staunton a copy of the *Peking Gazette* with an account of the embassy's dismissal.
- 16 Staunton meets the judge of Bei Zhili who provides him with an unflattering account of England and fears that the rejection of the embassy might cause the interruption of trade at Canton which would bring ruin to England. The judge asserts that the kowtow is indispensable and that the Chinese emperor is the sovereign of the world and the supreme head of all nations.

The treasurer of Shandong replaces the judge as the official overseeing the embassy.
- 17 The embassy enters Shandong province. There is a change in the officers attending the embassy. Guanghui visits the British for the first time since Tongzhou and blames Heshitai for the failure of the embassy. The British are informed that their route to Canton is to deviate from Macartney's and will go via Nanjing.
- 22 The embassy arrives at Linqing to an amiable reception. There is competition among provincial conductors of the embassy to provide the best supplies. The British squadron is made up of 50–60 boats of different descriptions.
- 23 The embassy enters the Grand Canal. The Chinese temporary forts are derided by the British.
- 25 The embassy journeys through well-cultivated open country; pleasant farm cottages surrounded by trees and distant mountains to eastward seen for the first time. Staunton notes that the lower orders are cleaner and more presentable than those of Europe.
- 26 Staunton informed that the emperor has instructed that every kind of public attention and honour be paid to the embassy as it travels to Canton.
- 30 The embassy enters Jiangsu province but deviates back into the Shandong countryside as Jiangsu is devastated by floods.

October 1816

- 1 Great numbers of grain junks (20,000) are observed by the British as evidence of a vast inland commerce.
- 2 Guanghui is noted as an infrequent visitor and not open in his communications with the embassy (in contrast to Sungyun and Macartney).
- 3 The judge of Jiangsu province joins the embassy.
- 4 Abel reported to be very sick—there is concern as to whether he will survive.
- 6 The embassy approaches the Yellow River. Huge number of boats observed, but nowhere near the amount observed in the Pearl River at Canton.
- 7 A sojourn ashore is undertaken due to danger of the boats' passage into the Yellow River. A rare meeting of Amherst, Guanghui and the other mandarins. There are problems of precedence in seating arrangements as both sides stand on their dignity.
- 8 The embassy makes good progress due to travelling under imperial orders that keep the channel cleared—innumerable boats detained under a temporary embargo while the embassy squadron passes. An increasing Chinese disposition of civility towards the British is noted.
- 9 An improvement in the appearance and habits of the people are noted by the British since crossing the Yellow River. Blue-brick houses and white-washed military barracks are seen and rice fields are noted for the first time.
- 10 The British received civil treatment by the local Chinese when out walking and are served tea. The British observe that they are restricted from landing at cities during the day due to an imperial order.
- 11 The most striking temple yet seen, the Temple of Gaomingsi. The British gain access to the temple through the obliging and civil kindness of two mandarins. Amherst given a conducted tour. Evidence of neglect noted. British go to the top level of the temple.
Change of boats carried out with good humour. From now on communal meals are not possible.
- 12 Guanghui visits Amherst; very affable, but no official talks.

- 13 Toone and Martin (a midshipman on the *Alceste*) take a walk to visit a temple four miles away. They cause much alarm among the Chinese, even though the pair are accompanied by Chinese soldiers. Morrison learns that the British ships had passed Zhejiang on their way to Canton and that the emperor had issued an edict to treat the embassy with civility and attention on their journey. One of the local officers said it was their duty to provide everything in their power and an honour to accommodate those ‘who have travelled from so vast a distance to honour our country. China is indeed a great empire, but yours ranks in the world next to it’ (Staunton, 1824, p. 230).
- 14 Amherst escorted around an imperial compound and garden (Garden of Wuyuan, last visited by the Qianlong emperor in 1780). Garden noted as very run down. Amherst is notified of the Jiaqing emperor’s birthday celebrations are due to be held at Nanchang and is asked if he was willing to participate in proposed ceremony. The British make it clear there will be no kowtow. The British were prevented from visiting the islands where the ‘Golden Mountain’ is located.
- 15 A long walk in the fields. Still prevented from visiting the island.
- 16 Ellis crossed a bridge and entered the streets of Guazhou—a bustling city with shops and attractive women ‘approaching our notions of beauty’, but only a hasty glimpse as the soldiers were most active in enforcing the imperial edict that Chinese women not look on the strangers.

The mandarins in conversation with Morrison mention a favourable edict concerning the embassy’s treatment and suggest that Amherst renew a direct intercourse with the Chinese Government, which was regarded as suspicious by Ellis. The British believed the emperor was obviously feeling dismayed by the treatment of the embassy, but none of these overtures were official. The British remained silent, which operated to keep Chinese apprehension alive of the possible effects of British resentment. The consent to exchange the few presents at Tongzhou was ‘enough for conciliation’ in Ellis’s (1817) view: ‘anything further, with ungenerous minds, might be mistaken for abject submission, if not positive alarm’ (p. 290). Should the proposed acceptance of presents be rejected, ‘the ground of dignified silence under provoked injury would have been lost, the regret of the Emperor for his conduct would have been removed’ (p. 290).

- 18 The British walk around the town of Guazhou, but soldiers prevent their entry.
- 19 The embassy enters the Yangtze River.
- 20 Morrison receives a private copy of an imperial edict addressed to the viceroy of Jiangnan regarding the treatment of the embassy. The edict made clear the emperor's position:
 - It was discovered that the ambassador had travelled overnight from Tongzhou and did not have his robes; because he dared not perform the ceremony in his ordinary clothes, he affirmed sickness.
 - Heshitai did not report this correctly—his mistake—and the embassy was sent back.
 - The emperor could not bear to reject the embassy, considering Britain had 'sent tribute of a sincere and devoted kind from so far in an expression of veneration and obedience' (as quoted in Ellis, 1817, p. 503).
 - The emperor decided to accept the most trifling articles of tribute and bestow the kindness of receiving them.
 - The emperor accepted maps, paintings and prints and conferred on the British sovereign a Jo-ee, purses and court beads to manifest the idea of giving much and receiving little.
 - The ambassador received these with extreme joy and gratitude as showed by his manner, contrition and fear.
 - The emperor instructed his officials to treat the ambassador civilly and appoint soldiers to conduct the safety of the embassy.
 - The members of the embassy were not permitted to land or make disturbances throughout the whole route.
 - The emperor instructed the military to have their armour fresh and shining, and weapons disposed in a commanding manner to maintain a formidable and dignified appearance.
 - The emperor concluded that the embassy had come to China with the intention of offering tribute and ordered that it be treated with civility 'and silently cause it to feel gratitude and awe' (Ellis, 1817, pp. 502–503).

- 21 The viceroy of Jiangsu province paid a visit to Guanghui. Ellis observes the ceremonial formalities of their meeting. While no notice was taken of the embassy, Amherst ordered the guard and band to be drawn up for inspection. The embassy proceeded on its way. The city of Nanjing is seen in the distance.

Ellis says we ‘may date our unrestrained liberty of excursion from this day’. It was promoted by Amherst’s resistance at the gate.

Nanjing is rapidly decaying and the British express disgust at the filthy communal baths.

The viceroy was called away on a visit to an outlying district in the province and did not meet Amherst.

- 25 Amherst has a conversation with Guanghui on the public life of the emperor.
- 27 The embassy anchors at a small island, ‘probably to render our intercourse with the inhabitants less easy’ (Ellis, 1817, p. 309). The treasurer leaves the embassy without paying Amherst a farewell visit. The military officers are friendly in contrast to the civilian mandarins. Two are aware of the Duke of Wellington; Amherst gives one a medal containing a series of drawings representing the duke’s battles.
- 30 Ellis (1817, p. 314) comments on the womanish appearance of the mandarins or total absence of manliness.

Another edict prohibiting the British from going ashore is issued.

November 1816

- 1 The British observe the beautiful variety of the banks of the Yangtze—mountains, hills, valleys, streams and woods—most picturesque combinations and delightful climate, ‘but this only pleases the eye for a moment, and leaves the mind unsatisfied’ (Ellis, 1817, p. 317).
- 3 The embassy arrives at Datong and stays for four days. Delightful walks noted.
- 4 Ellis much struck by the presence of the Chinese middling classes.
- 5 The embassy personnel see the tea plant for the first time. The local peasants civilly offer tea, although their exclamations at seeing the British are at first mistaken for insolence.
- 6 Another edict preventing the movement of the British is issued.

- 7 The embassy leaves Datong.
- 9 Despite the imperial edict, the shopkeepers of Anqing show no hesitation in selling the British any article they wish to purchase. There are lots of things to buy—necklaces, old china, agate cups, vases, etc.—but the British had neither money nor time to make purchases.
- 11 Heavy rain and boats leaking. A marine, Millidge, on duty at Morrison's boat, slips between the boats and drowns. Every assistance is afforded by the Chinese.
- 12 Funeral held for Millidge. Freshwater porpoises later seen.
- 14 Embassy leaves the Yangtze River and enters the Poyang Lake. The embassy reaches Dagu and stays for two days due to bad weather.
- 15 Rain delays. Purchases made at fine porcelain shops at very reasonable prices. British visit first halls or temples of Confucius and remark on their being no idols, but instead tablets bearing the names of 'deceased worthies'.
- 20 Embassy leaves Poyang Lake.
- 21 Guanghui sends Amherst a message requesting that no one enter the city of Nanchang because it is the emperor's birthday as well as the day of public examinations (the crowds would be disruptive).
- 22 Guanghui replies to Amherst's offer to fire a salute for the emperor's birthday: please decline because it is not the Chinese custom.
- 23 The embassy reaches Nanchang and resumes Macartney's route.

In shops it is observed that furs, porcelain, silks and glass paintings are not ill executed 'and interesting from the subjects being chosen in the scenes of domestic life' (Ellis, 1817, p. 352).

- 24 Guanghui expresses concern due to the presence of a military mandarin, second in command at Canton, who was passing through the city on his way to Peking and would report on what he had observed.
- 25 Guanghui, accompanied by the treasurer and judge of the district of Anhui, calls on Amherst. He voices regret at having to leave his friends in due course. Staunton expresses a hope that, like Sungyun, he would dine on board the British ships at Whampoa. He replied that although he was inferior to that distinguished mandarin, his feelings towards us were the same.

26 The embassy holds a cricket match.

27 The embassy leaves Nanchang.

New boats noted as inferior (mat coverings). Constant rain. The Fuyuan at Nanchang had taken no notice of the embassy and Amherst sends a message regarding such rudeness with Morrison to Guanghui. The embassy enters a picturesque part of China—camellias noted.

December 1816

1 The embassy holds a cricket match. The British are prevented from visiting the town.

2 Reference made to the personal character of the governor preventing the British from visiting the town.

3 Over the last few days, the British anchorage has been enclosed by a railing to keep the local inhabitants out.

5 Very difficult and dangerous conditions for the boatmen—submerged rocks and strong currents. Boatmen navigate freezing water with a diet of only rice and a small quantity of meat.

7 Beautiful scenery described—river flowing between mountain ranges, highly picturesque wooded views, terraced valleys, pine trees and orange trees.

8 Abel reported as feeling better and collects tea plant samples.

11 The embassy visits the city of Ganzhou. The British note recent repairs to the city wall, presumably in anticipation of their visit. The ‘commercial halls’ of the Fukien merchants trading with Canton are mentioned.

13 The Chinese ‘water-wheel’ is admired as an outstanding piece of technology.

14 Staunton refers to the fact that the embassy has seen 27 pagodas during its journey.

15 The British learn that the five ships of the embassy have arrived at the port of Canton.

17 Amherst has a rare meeting with Guanghui, but as there were no British interpreters present, only ‘A-chow’ the Canton linguist, Amherst refused to hold any conversation conducted through ‘that channel’.

- 18 The British leave the boats at Nankang for the land journey over the Meiling Mountains.
- 19 Noted in the town of 'Kong-quan' are several store houses through which all goods must pass into the Chinese interior. The 'invigorating influence' of European commerce is noted on the town and its people.
The British luggage and articles are in the process of being packed up for the journey over the mountain into Guangdong province.
- 20 Some of the British hear the term 'fan-quei' as well as other forms of rudeness directed at them, as witnessed at Canton.
Evidence of graffiti left by the Dutch embassy of 1795 seen engraved on the doors of a house.
- 25 The embassy reaches Shaoguan.
The British are outraged that the legate is assigned a much superior boat to that of the ambassador. Appearances are important as the British draw closer to Canton.

January 1817

- 1 The embassy arrives at Canton.
- 2 Guanghui pays a call.
- 3 Amherst holds a function attended by all the gentlemen of the Factory and the American Consul.
- 7 A formal ceremony with the viceroy is held where a letter from the Jiaqing emperor to the Prince Regent is handed to Amherst.
- 9 Amherst and the commissioners pay a formal call on Guanghui.
Afterwards, Amherst holds a function for the Hong merchants who attend wearing their 'state dresses'.
- 13 Staunton hosts a public breakfast for Guanghui at the British Factory.
- 19 Guanghui pays a final call on Amherst.
- 20 The ambassador, commissioners and suite embark at Whampoa, on board the HMS *Alceste*, to depart China.

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.