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Introduction

In early August 1816, Lord William Pitt Amherst, designated British Ambassador of the Special Mission to the Chinese Empire, arrived off the coast of northern China on board the man-of-war, HMS *Alceste*. Disembarking from the embassy ships with his suite on 11 August, Amherst, then 43 years of age, travelled in a procession of Chinese junks to the port of Dagu where he stepped onto Chinese soil. His primary mission, in his capacity as the second British ambassador to arrive in China, was to proceed to the imperial court at Peking to seek the assistance of the Jiaqing emperor with placing British trade at Canton on a reliable basis. Recent disputes between provincial Chinese Government officials and members of the Select Committee of the British East India Company had stopped the important tea trade, risking the supply of tea to Britain and threatening a substantial loss of revenue for both Company coffers and the British Treasury.¹ The personal intervention of the emperor was considered necessary to check the capricious and vexatious actions of the Canton Government and the Chinese Hong merchants who facilitated the trade. The embassy also sought to secure the means of a direct and official communication with the imperial court at Peking to facilitate negotiation and conciliation of any future disputes. Amherst's mission was an abysmal failure. He never appeared before the Jiaqing emperor and his embassy was expelled on the day it reached Peking.

¹ Sales of tea in Britain in 1815 amounted to 22,758,155 lbs worth £4,058,092 (Tuck, 2000, p. x, fn. 9). For the British at this time, tea is described by historians as an 'indispensable necessity of daily life' (Porter, 2001, p. 193).

Two earlier British embassies had been dispatched to China under the auspices of the British East India Company and authorised by the British Government. The first, led by Lt Col. Cathcart in 1788, was aborted on his death on the outward voyage.² The second was the famous Macartney Embassy to the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1796) that arrived in China in 1793. Armed with impressive gifts showcasing the latest cutting-edge advances in British science and technology to impress the emperor of British ‘excellence’, Macartney hoped to open the door to expanded trade with China. Despite Macartney being received with politeness and hospitality, his attempts to engage the emperor or his court in any negotiation were comprehensively rebuffed. Nevertheless, the Macartney Embassy has been the subject of extensive historical research and is a major topic in Anglo–Chinese history (see Bickers, 1993; Fairbank, 1942; Hevia, 1995; Peyrefitte, 1992; Pritchard, 1936). This is in contrast to the Amherst Embassy, which has received little scholarly attention, generally being relegated (at best) to a historical footnote as a follow-up to Macartney. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to present the first comprehensive and detailed account of the Amherst Embassy from its conception to its conclusion, and to reassess its historical importance for Anglo–Chinese relations and British perceptions of China in the period leading to the First Opium War.

In approaching an in-depth study of the Amherst Embassy and its aftermath, initial attempts to structure it around an overriding theme or themes started to distort or complicate the setting out of what actually happened. In the end, a detailed, largely narrative treatment proved critical in being able to make more reliable judgements about the roles played by its key members, especially its leader, Lord Amherst.

A central research question addresses why the British believed that the Amherst Embassy would succeed in its objectives at the Qing court³ where the earlier and better-prepared Macartney Embassy had failed. The importance of the precedent established by the Macartney Embassy during its diplomatic encounter with the Qianlong emperor becomes clear, as does its critical role in governing the Amherst Embassy’s reception

2 Charles Cathcart died of tuberculosis at Java. Amherst visited his tomb at the Anjere Roads on his outward voyage to China (*Journal of Jeffrey Amherst, son of Lord Amherst, on his father’s mission to China* (n.d., n.p.) in British Library (BL) India Office Records (IOR) MSS EUR F 140/37).

3 This study refers to the Chinese court of 1644–1911 as the ‘Qing court’. The Amherst Embassy is often referred to as being sent to the Jiaqing court, which refers to the Jiaqing emperor (r. February 1796 – September 1820) who was the seventh emperor of the Qing dynasty.

at the Qing court. The British belief that the Macartney Embassy had established a new basis for the conduct of Anglo–Chinese relations is a central argument of this study.

The carriage of the embassy is examined through Amherst’s leadership role and the embassy’s encounter with Qing officialdom. It seeks to reappraise Amherst’s performance, judged by historians to be inept and indecisive due to his decision to follow the advice of Sir George Thomas Staunton, the second commissioner in the embassy, not to kowtow before the Jiaqing emperor, thereby resulting in the premature dismissal of the embassy.

A full understanding of the Amherst Embassy is possible only within the commercial context of the Canton trade system whose rules governed all Western trade in China and the traditional tributary system that governed Chinese foreign relations. These are major scholarly themes in Anglo–Chinese historiography, outlined briefly in Chapter 2. This chapter also includes a short summary of the Westphalian principles of diplomacy that governed British diplomatic practice. Also included is a brief outline of the political instability of the Pearl River Delta—the maritime approach to Canton—resulting, in part, from international tensions at the time of the Napoleonic Wars.

The decision in 1815 to send another embassy is traced from the origin of the idea in 1800 through to its immediate causes resulting from events at Canton and Macao in 1814. These are discussed in Chapter 3, primarily through the activities of Staunton, an active advocate of a second embassy throughout his long service at Canton.⁴ Staunton had gained widespread fame in England as the 12-year-old boy who had held a brief conversation in Mandarin with the Qianlong emperor at the time of the Macartney Embassy. He had kept up his Mandarin studies on return to England and was the first Chinese linguist posted to Canton with the East India Company.⁵ He was also acknowledged as Britain’s leading sinologist.

The fourth chapter shifts attention to London. The response of both the British Government and the Secret Board of Directors of the East India Company to the dispatch of an embassy to the Qing court is

4 George Thomas Staunton is not to be confused with his father Sir George Leonard Staunton who was the Secretary in Lord George Macartney’s Embassy to the Qianlong court in 1793. References to ‘Staunton’ in this study always refer to the younger Staunton, while his father is referred to as G. L. Staunton.

5 G. L. Staunton returned to England from China with a Chinese servant engaged specifically to enable his son to practice his Chinese (De Gray, 1860, p. cxxiv).

examined, making clear John Barrow's key role as the instigator of the Amherst Embassy.⁶ Barrow, an influential senior official in the Admiralty, was not only a veteran of the Macartney Embassy, but was also an active commentator on China through his reviews in the *Quarterly Review* journal as well as a close friend and correspondent of Staunton. Of critical importance was his reliance on outdated intelligence, resulting from the 12-month turnaround in mail between London and Canton, for shaping both his arguments for another embassy in 1815 and for his assessment that it would be received positively by the Qing court and, thus, promise favourable outcomes.

Amherst's appointment as ambassador is examined in Chapters 4 and 5. This section is set within the framework of his personal life and professional experience, as well as his research and preparation for his mission. While the body of knowledge on European missions to China available to the British in 1815 appears meagre by modern standards, Amherst nevertheless assiduously set about the task of learning as much as he could from the experience of previous missions before his departure for China. Chapter 5 also describes the choice of presents for the emperor and his officials,⁷ as well as the fitting out of the HMS *Alceste* for its long journey to China.

The journey to China via Madeira, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town and Batavia outlined briefly in Chapter 6 also includes reference to initial British reactions to scenes at Brazil, providing an interesting contrast with their later reactions to China. Additionally, it looks at the manner in which the members of the embassy 'as Englishmen abroad' reacted to their mission and conducted themselves on the outward voyage in 1816.

The inclusion of several East India Company representatives based at Canton in the ambassadorial suite marked a major difference between the Amherst Embassy and the earlier Macartney Embassy. These men included Staunton, the Reverend Doctor Robert Morrison, John Francis Davis and Thomas Manning, who spoke Mandarin and had considerable local experience in dealing with the Cantonese authorities. They joined the *Alceste* and the other ships of the embassy squadron in the waters off Macao, out of sight of local Chinese officials, as a result of a prearranged

6 For an excellent short biography of Barrow, see Osborne's introduction to the reprint of John Barrow's *A voyage to Cochinchina* (1806/1975, pp. v–xvii).

7 A full list of the presents and their cost is provided in Appendix B.

secret rendezvous. The ships commenced their voyage northwards to Dagu on 13 July 1816, which is the subject of Chapter 7. Their arrival in the north of China marked a brief period of cordial and spontaneous encounters with local Chinese, revealing a relaxed social atmosphere in marked contrast to later official occasions.

Amherst was met by mandarins sent by the Jiaqing emperor to organise his reception at Peking within days of arrival in northern China, and their negotiations comprise Chapter 8. These are discussed in detail, which is essential to fully appreciate the stress and strain generated by the negotiations, not only for Amherst and his commissioners but also for the Qing envoys, over a period of several intense weeks. Such an understanding of the daily trials and tribulations of the diplomatic encounter reveal new insights and information on the progress of the embassy that challenges the accepted narrative that Amherst was inept and dependent on Staunton for its conduct. Attention is focused on two major diplomatic receptions arranged for Amherst. The first, examined in Chapter 8, is an imperial banquet held at Tianjin on 13 August 1816 within three days of his arrival in China that was critical for the outcome of the embassy. The second event was Amherst's arrival at the Yuanmingyuan Summer Palace on the outskirts of Peking in the early morning of 29 August 1816 from where he was expelled on the same day. The trauma of his treatment at Yuanmingyuan and his expulsion from Peking, as well as the unfolding repercussions from this event, are described in Chapter 9.

The only worthwhile activity remaining for the British after their premature dismissal from the Qing court was the opportunity to acquire new information about China as the embassy proceeded down the canals and waterways from Peking to Canton. Their impressions of Chinese culture, society and the environment gathered over a four-month period served to confirm and consolidate earlier British knowledge of China collected by the Macartney Embassy and are examined in Chapter 10. This analysis is followed in Chapter 11 by a discussion of the public reaction in Britain, including the media, to the treatment of the Amherst Embassy, while the concluding Chapter 12 provides a retrospective evaluation of Amherst and his embassy.

Secondary Sources on the Amherst Embassy

Scholars, it has been noted, have paid scant attention to the Amherst Embassy. Alain Peyrefitte's (1992) study of the Macartney Embassy has a brief chapter on the Amherst Embassy, while James Hevia's (1995) postcolonial anthropological analysis *Cherishing men from afar* devoted only a couple of pages to the mission. Hevia concentrated on the importance of the precedent of the earlier reception of the Macartney Embassy for the response of the Qing court to Amherst and blamed the failure of the latter embassy on British behaviour in the former embassy. Hevia argued that their misinterpretation of correct Qing ceremonial procedure signified by Macartney's refusal to kowtow ensured the impossibility of the British being incorporated into the 'centering process' of Qing guest ritual, which functioned to place foreign envoys into a hierarchy of desirable or inferior relations (p. 123). He concluded, correctly, that Amherst was received within the framework of stricter ceremonial protocols than those imposed on Macartney.

Staunton's career at Canton and on his return to England in 1817 is the subject of an unpublished PhD dissertation by Jodi Eastberg (2009).⁸ Her analysis of Staunton at Canton and his role in the Amherst Embassy is detailed and comprehensive, but failed to place the Anglo–Chinese diplomatic encounter within the wider context of the Chinese tribute system. Shunhong Zhang's (2013) book, *British views on China at a special time (1790–1820)*, presented a thorough coverage of extracts from contemporary British publications on the nature of British views on China formed in response to the Macartney and Amherst embassies, but provided no analysis of their failure.

Some recent publications have discussed aspects of the Amherst Embassy. Stephen Platt's (2018) wideranging account of the events leading to the First Opium War provided a colourful account of the personalities and events leading to the British decision to send an embassy in 1816. Platt covered the major issues surrounding the background and progress of the embassy but, like Peyrefitte (1992), dismissed Amherst by flippantly describing him as an intellectual lightweight and arrogant fool for 'fussing pointlessly over the kowtow' (p. 181). This assessment, due perhaps to

8 I thank Shih-Wen Chen for bringing this thesis to my attention.

the sweeping and general nature of his book, short-changes Amherst. Platt neither focused on the important context of the failure of earlier Western missions to the Qing court nor consulted Amherst's personal papers held in the British Library; these reveal Amherst's research and clearly indicate that he had a strong grasp of the complex issues involved. Platt also failed to place the diplomatic encounter within the crucial context of the Chinese tributary system and ignored the fact that, had Amherst kowtowed and placed himself and his monarch in the position of a tributary vassal, the Qing court would never have deigned to negotiate terms on a basis of equality.

Peter Kitson, Professor of Romantic Literature and Culture at the University of East Anglia, made several references to the Amherst Embassy in his book, *Forging Romantic China* (2013). His aim was not to present a historical account of the embassy, but to examine the process whereby knowledge of China entered the British Romantic imagination through the literary works of Lamb, Byron, Shelly, Coleridge and others, as well as discussion on *chinoiserie* influence in the form of porcelains and gardens. Macartney's and Amherst's refusal to kowtow before the Qing emperor is explained within the framework of a narrow cultural context of the British asserting their values of firmness and rectitude, equality and reciprocity. Once again, the fundamental political significance of such an act functioning to denigrate the status of the British sovereign and his ambassador to a tributary vassal is overlooked.

Another book edited by Kitson and Robert Markley, published in 2016 to mark the 200th anniversary of the event, contains two essays on the embassy. Kitson makes a serious historical error by suggesting that Amherst was a 'former Governor of Bengal' before taking up his assignment to China, thereby insinuating that Amherst had prior firsthand 'Asian' experience (p. 60); in fact, Amherst had been an ambassador to the Two Sicilies from 1809 to 1811, and was not appointed governor of Bengal until 1823. Kitson further asserted that the embassy of 1816 was 'a mechanism disguising Britain's involvement in the opium trade', but then admits, accurately, that there is no historical evidence in the records of the British Government or the East India Company to substantiate

such a claim (2016, pp. 56–82).⁹ The present study, which relies on extensive archival material, shows that the ‘opium trade’ was never raised specifically in any connection with the Amherst Embassy. Markley’s (2016) essay suggested that the impoverished state of the Chinese countryside seen by the British in 1816, resulting in an inaccurate assessment of poverty and backwardness, was caused by the effects of a volcanic eruption on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa in April 1815 that critically degraded the environment in northern China. Such a claim overlooks the long-term economic recession experienced during the Jiaqing reign, which was characterised by rapid population growth, food shortages, extensive ecological degradation of waterways and soil fertility, and inadequate government maintenance of canals and rivers (Rowe, 2011).

Kitson also published an article in 2017 on the Amherst Embassy, focusing on the ‘catastrophe’ of its reception, which provides a useful short overview of the published material and draws heavily on Hevia’s (1995) work in its concluding section on ‘The Kowtow Controversy’. Gao Hao has written two articles specifically on the Amherst Embassy. Gao (2014) referred to British reactions to China on their return journey from Peking to Canton, and argued that the embassy enjoyed unprecedented freedom to explore the countryside and Chinese cities—a point accepted unconditionally by Kitson (2016). Gao’s other article (2016, p. 610) claimed that the embassy was marked by a discordant ‘inner kowtow’ debate following a division of opinion on the kowtow among the senior members of the embassy. Both assertions are not supported by a detailed examination of the primary sources.

Eun Kyung Min’s (2004) thought-provoking article examined British responses to China at the time of the Amherst Embassy in the context of British concepts of commercialism and civility. She made an important distinction between the members in the embassy who travelled directly from England, who read the kowtow as a mere formality to achieve their goals, and the reaction of East India Company men from Canton who

9 Kitson (2016) stated, ‘Given the importance of the opium trade in funding the Company’s trade in tea with China ... it is surprising to note that there is no obvious mention of the trade and British participation within it, in any of the documents, published or otherwise, relating to the Embassy’ (p. 66). I have found a reference in the East India Company records dated 15 November 1815, where the Select Committee voiced its concern over the need for more money from the sale of opium ‘to meet our demands’, but this appears unconnected with both the initiative for, and the conduct of, the specific goals of the Amherst Embassy (Papers consultation with the President and Sir George Staunton, dated 15 November 1815, in BL IOR G/12/196 (Reel 1) F 2).

saw the kowtow in Chinese symbolic terms and interpreted it as a sign of servitude, unbecoming for a British ambassador to perform (Reverend Doctor Morrison, Chief Interpreter on the Amherst Embassy, as quoted in Min, 2004, p. 168). One of her themes, namely, Macartney's belief that a Chinese observance of the 'manners, tempers, and discipline' at the time of his embassy resulted in Chinese admiration for the British nation and a love for them as individuals, is developed in the present study as an important factor in shaping British perceptions of the likely reception of the Amherst Embassy.

Ulrike Hillemann presented a useful and insightful five-page summary of the Amherst Embassy in her book, *Asian empire and British knowledge* (2009, pp. 75–80). She concluded that, because of Amherst's treatment at the Qing court, British perceptions of the Chinese emperor changed from one of a dignified, rational and enlightened despot to an uncivilised Tartar (p. 80), but made no mention of the tribute system's significance in dictating Chinese terms during the diplomatic encounter.

Recent scholarship in English has resulted in several published historical accounts of both the Qianlong and Jiaqing reigns that draw extensively on Chinese archival sources. Matthew Mosca's (2013) examination of Qing foreign policy initiatives towards Tibet and British India at this time provided the background for the broader context of Anglo–Chinese international relations, including the decline of Qing military power noted during the Anglo–Nepal War (1814–1816) (p. 184). Similarly, Wengsheng Wang's (2014) examination of the internal turmoil confronting the reign of the Jiaqing emperor and his response to it in the immediate period before the Amherst Embassy was invaluable for illuminating the specific context in which the British were received at Peking.

Patrick Tuck's Introduction to the reprint of Sir George Thomas Staunton's *Notes of proceedings and occurrences, during the British embassy to Peking, in 1816* (1824/2000, pp. vii–xlii) remains the most thorough and comprehensive examination of the political context of the Amherst Embassy. Tuck's detailed and focused analysis falls on Staunton's role as the second commissioner in the embassy whose advice to Amherst not to kowtow before the Jiaqing emperor, Tuck argued, resulted in the embassy's failure (p. vii). His conclusion that the embassy was a 'fiasco' denigrates Amherst's reputation and dismisses the embassy as incompetent and historically insignificant (p. viii).

Primary Sources

The author's lack of Chinese linguistic ability has resulted in this study being based on English-language sources only and needing to rely on English translations of Chinese documents and edicts published in Lo-Shu Fu (1996) and Dun Li (1969). Within this context, this study seeks to provide a detailed and comprehensive account of the Amherst Embassy from a British perspective that nonetheless highlights the profound cultural differences that separated the West and, in this case, Britain from China at this time. It also underlines the continued failure of European-style diplomacy to engage the Qing court in this period as it had during the Macartney Embassy some decades earlier. As a corollary, it needs to be noted that the British in the first decades of the nineteenth century had very limited access to information on the Qing Government and its thinking beyond the immediate and very different environment of Canton. The information that they did have at hand is documented and presented in the subsequent chapters of this study. It is this body of knowledge, taken from British primary sources, that highlights the limitations and inadequacies of the 'intelligence' available to the British in the task they had set themselves. It is important to note that the assessments and value judgements about China referred to in this study are those of the British observers and commentators writing at this time.

Members of the Amherst Embassy published several accounts of their experiences in China on their return to England. Well known to scholars and referred to extensively in this study, these include the journal of Henry Ellis, Third Commissioner in the embassy, published in 1817 and acknowledged as the 'official' account of the mission. Clarke Abel, the surgeon and naturalist with the embassy, published his account in 1818, while Robert Morrison's *Memoir* of the embassy was published in 1820. Staunton's *Notes of proceedings and occurrences, during the British embassy to Peking, in 1816* was printed privately in 1824. John Francis Davis's account in his *Sketches of China*, published later in 1841, is also widely referenced. The ships of the embassy squadron departed for a survey of the Korean coast and the Ryukyu Islands after Amherst disembarked at Dagu, and their experiences were subsequently the subject of two published accounts. The first was by John M'Leod, the physician on board the *Alceste*, whose book the *Voyage of His Majesty's Ship Alceste* was published in 1818. Basil Hall, the captain of HMS *Lyra*, which accompanied the *Alceste*, wrote several versions of his experiences along the Korean coast

and at the Ryukyu Islands, including *Narrative of a voyage to Java, China, and the Great Loo-Choo Island* published in 1840.¹⁰ Reference to these are made in passing in this study, but no examination is made of either the surveys or British experiences at these places.

This study refers to three unpublished journals that have received little attention from historians of the Amherst Embassy. The first is by the Rt Hon. Jeffrey Amherst, Amherst's 14-year-old son who accompanied the embassy as a page to his father, found in the British Library.¹¹ Zhang (2013) listed this journal in his bibliography but made no reference to it in his text, although he does refer, in passing, to the second resource, namely, the 'Diaries' of Amherst's private secretary, Henry Hayne.¹² William Fanshawe Martin, who travelled with the embassy as a 'First Class Volunteer' and midshipman on the *Alceste*, also left an account of his experiences in China.¹³ This is also a rarely referenced resource, although Gao (2016) cited it in relation to the kowtow question. A resource that appears to be unknown to historians of the embassy is a volume of private letters sent to Amherst from his sister, Elizabeth Hale, who lived in Canada. While these contain little coverage of his appointment as ambassador to China, they are nevertheless valuable for the insight they provide into Amherst's private life (Hall & Shelton, 2002).

The official records of the Amherst Embassy are found in the British Library. Historians of the embassy have focused exclusively on the India Office Records (IOR) of the East India Company for China 1815–17 (referred to as the G/12/196, G/12/197 and G/12/198 files),¹⁴ which include the *Papers relating to the embassy to China in the year 1815/1816* and *Papers relating to the embassy to China in the year 1817/1818*. Further

10 Hall had previously published his *Account of a voyage of discovery to the west coast of Corea, and the Great Loo-choo Island* (1818). The present study refers to his *Narrative of a voyage to Java, China, and the Great Loo-choo Island: With accounts of Sir Murray Maxwell's attack on the Chinese batteries, and of an interview with Napoleon Bonaparte, at St. Helena* (1840/1865).

11 *Journal of Jeffrey Amherst, son of Lord Amherst, on his father's mission to China* (n.d.) in BL IOR MSS EUR F 140/37. Only a few pages of the original journal have survived. It was transcribed by Constance Amherst in February 1870 and is found in the Amherst Papers, BL IOR MSS EUR F 140/37.

12 'Diaries of Henry Hayne' in *China through Western eyes: Manuscript records of traders, travellers, missionaries and diplomats, 1792-1842* (Vols. 1–4) (1996). Hereafter referred to as 'Hayne, n.d.'

13 William Fanshawe Martin, 'Journal', *Martin Family Papers, 1793-1860*, BL ADD MSS 41346-41475.

14 *East India Company Factory Records Part 2. China: India Office Records* cited as BL IOR G/12/196 and BL IOR G/12/197 for April 1815–1817.

extracts of these files are found in H. B. Morse's *The chronicles of the East India Company trading to China, 1635-1834* (1926/1966, Vol. 3), covering the period 1805–1820.

The seminal reference for the historical context of the first Anglo–Chinese diplomatic encounter is Lord Macartney's *An embassy to China: Lord Macartney's journal 1793–1794*, first published in 1962.¹⁵ This volume contains Macartney's account of his visit to the court of the Qianlong emperor as well as Cranmer-Byng's detailed notes on Chinese officials and the places visited by the embassy. Earlier extracts of Macartney's journal are found in the second volume of Barrow's (1807) biography of Lord Macartney. Barrow's account of his own impressions of China at the time of the Macartney Embassy, *Travels in China*, first published in 1804, was instrumental for influencing the views of China held by the members of the Amherst Embassy.

The major primary resources for this study are two other archives, one that has received little or no previous attention from historians of the Amherst Embassy, and one that is referred to only by Eastberg (2009) in her study of Staunton and Platt, *Imperial twilight* (2018). The first consists of the papers of William Pitt Amherst, 1st Earl of Amherst, found in the British Library under the filing code of the BL IOR MSS EUR F 140.¹⁶ The collection includes official and private correspondence and official papers covering Amherst's appointment as envoy to Naples (1809–1811), ambassador to China (1815–1817) and his term as governor-general of Bengal (1823–1828).

The second archive is housed at Duke University and consists of Sir George Thomas Staunton's private letters sent to his parents from Canton during his stay in China in the period 1800–1817.¹⁷ These letters provide valuable insight into conditions at Canton and are similarly referred to extensively in this study in Chapter 3 in the period leading to

15 Cranmer-Byng (1962, pp. xi, 332) records that the original journal remained with Lord Macartney's descendants until sold in 1854. The journal of three volumes remained in a private library in England until sold to a private collector in Peking in 1913. In 1917, the volumes were sold again and taken to Tokyo where they remained in the Oriental Library. Cranmer-Byng's (1962) transcription represents the first time the journal was published in its entirety.

16 Amherst Papers, BL IOR MSS EUR F 140.

17 Letters from the Papers of George Thomas Staunton to his mother during his time working for the East India Company in Canton, Rare Book, Manuscript and Special Collections Library, Duke University. Retrieved from www.china.amdigital.co.uk. Hereafter referred to as the '*Staunton Letters*' with the place and date of writing provided where known. I thank Shih-Wen Chen for bringing this archive to my attention.

the dispatch of the embassy. Staunton's memoirs, printed privately in 1856, are an invaluable resource for his reflective insights into his experiences at Canton and his subsequent life in England. His other book, on China's commercial relations with Britain, published in 1821, contains a number of useful essays on the state of British trade at Canton.

A slim but interesting primary source not previously cited by historians is referred to in this study, namely, Lord Amherst's 'Dinner Book' (in Kent History and Library Centre, Amherst Manuscripts: Family Papers, U1350-E16), which lists the dinner guests invited to his Mayfair residence in the immediate period before and after his mission.

Selected direct quotations from contemporary sources and accounts of the embassy written by its members have been used liberally throughout this study to convey an accurate sense of period and especially the English reaction to an alien environment. One of this study's objectives is to depict as vividly as possible what the ambassadorial party looked like on its progress through China and how its members reacted to the daily challenges facing them. Direct quotations best achieve this goal. Inevitably, as noted above, this study is told from a British perspective, providing their views and opinions of China and the Qing court formed at the time.

Some of the personalities associated with the Amherst Embassy are notable for several firsts. Staunton's translation of a pamphlet on inoculation into Mandarin in 1805 was the first information on the medical procedure available to the Chinese and was later distributed to Chinese officials at the time of the Amherst Embassy.¹⁸ Morrison, the senior interpreter of the embassy who arrived at Canton in 1807, was the first Protestant missionary sent to China. He was also the author of *A dictionary of the Chinese language* as well as the translator of several biblical texts into Chinese.¹⁹ Accounts of the embassy also contain the first reference to 'Hong Kong' island in British sources, as the embassy used Hong Kong to replenish its supply of fresh water before sailing to northern China.

18 In May 1805, the Company's surgeon, Dr Pearson, received some smallpox vaccine from a Portuguese ship recently arrived at Macao (Morse, 1926/1966, vol. 3, pp. 16–17). Abel (1818, pp. 218–219) wrote that Pearson's first attempts at inoculation were 'pertinaciously opposed' but were accepted eventually by the Cantonese Government and were strongly supported by the Hong merchants.

19 These works included *Hora Sinica: Translations from the popular literature of the Chinese* (1812); *A grammar of the Chinese language* (1815); *A dictionary of the Chinese language: Chinese and English arranged according to the radicals* (1815); and *A view of China for philological purposes, containing a sketch of Chinese chronology, geography, government, religion & customs* (1817).

Travelling on board the *Alceste* was the wife of the boatswain, Mrs Loy, arguably the first European woman to visit northern China (M'Leod, 1818/1820, pp. 133–134).

The members of the embassy subscribed to the earlier views of Macartney who made a distinction between the behaviour of 'the Chinese' and their Manchu or 'Tartar' overlords.²⁰ Staunton (1824), for example, complained of the 'puffed-up Tartar family on the throne' whose uncivil and rude conduct was assessed as contrary to every 'Chinese' principle of conduct (p. 125). Amherst referred to the Qing court as the 'Tartar court' and the kowtow as the 'Tartar ceremony' in his official reports of the embassy. Morrison (1839, pp. 8–9) also made this distinction in relation to the kowtow ceremony. Similarly, the British attributed the actions of Qing court officials or mandarins towards them as governed by a fear of incurring the suspicion or disapproval of their superiors who reported directly to the emperor (Ellis, 1817, p. 202).

This study examines the Amherst Embassy using a traditional historical approach addressing causes, responses and outcomes resulting from a brief but intensive encounter between the British and Chinese. Timothy Hampton's (2009) book, *Fictions of embassy*, is referenced extensively in this study for the practices of Westphalian diplomacy and the protocols of diplomatic action. Some aspects of the encounter, however, lend themselves to inter-disciplinary analysis. Accordingly, the imperial banquet given for Amherst on his arrival at Tianjin is examined within an anthropological context as this was an occasion rich in ceremony and ritual. Consideration is also given to British sensory experiences as the embassy travelled through China where alien sights, smells, sounds, tastes and touch had a profound impact on the visitors' sensibilities.²¹ Reference to the work of sensory historians assisted in enabling a greater understanding of British reactions and perceptions of China at this time (e.g. Howes & Lalonde, 1991). Finally, Richard Sennett's (1994) book, *Flesh and stone*, explained the importance of bodily comfort as a major factor in the way people respond culturally to their environment. His theme that 'a stressed and unhappy experience of our bodies makes us more aware of the world in which we live' (pp. 24–25) is especially relevant, it will be seen, to the conduct of the Englishmen of the Amherst Embassy during their time in China.

20 Porter (2001, p. 234) referred to Macartney's view of the 'foreignness of the Qing Dynasty' whose rulers were not 'Chinese' but Manchu or 'Tartar'.

21 This study's main references for placing British reactions to the Chinese sensory environment are the essays found in Howes (2005).

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.

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