

## China and the Eighteenth-Century World

### 6.1 LORD MACARTNEY'S COMMISSION FROM HENRY DUNDAS, 1792

At the end of the eighteenth century, the expansion of foreign trade, and

Whitehall 8th September 1792  
My Lord.

Having to signify to your Excellency His Majesty's Commands and Instructions on the subject of the Embassy to which he has been pleased to appoint you, I shall introduce them by recalling to your attention the occasion and object of this measure.

A greater number of His Majesty's subjects than of any other Europeans, have been trading for a considerable time past in China. The commercial intercourse between several nations and that great empire, has been preceded, accompanied or followed, by special communications with its Sovereign. Others had the support of Missionaries, who from their eminence in Science or ingenuity in the arts, were frequently admitted to the familiarity of a curious and polished Court, and which Missionaries in the midst of their care for the propagation of their faith are not supposed to have been unmindful of the view and interests of their Country; while the English traders remained unaided, and as it were, unavowed, at a distance so remote, as to admit of a misrepresentation of the national character and importance, and where too, their occupation was not held in that esteem which ought to procure their safety and respect.

Under the circumstances it would become the dignity and character of his Majesty, to extend his paternal regard to these his distant subjects, even if the commerce and prosperity of the Nation were not concerned in their success; and to claim the Emperor of China's particular protection for them, with the weight which is due to the requisition of one great Sovereign from another.

A free communication with a people, perhaps the most singular on the Globe, among whom civilization has existed, and the arts have been cultivated thro' a long series of ages, with fewer interruptions than elsewhere, is well worthy, also, of this Nation, which saw with pleasure, and applauded with gratitude,

the several voyages undertaken already by his Majesty's command, and at the public expense, in the pursuit of knowledge, and for the discovery and observation of distant Countries and manners.

The extent and value of the British dominions in India, which connect us in some degree with every part of that Country, point out also the propriety of establishing sufficient means of representation and transaction of business with our principal Neighbourhoods there.

The measures lately taken by Government respecting the Tea trade, having more than trebled the former legal importation of this article into Great Britain, it is become particularly desirable to cultivate a friendship, and increase the communication with China, which may lead to such a vent throughout that extensive Empire, of the manufactures of the mother Country, and of our Indian Territories, as beside contributing to their prosperity will out of the sales of such produce, furnish resources for the investment to Europe, now requiring no less an annual sum than one million, four hundred thousand pounds.

Hitherto, however, Great Britain has been obliged to pursue the Trade with that Country under circumstances the most discouraging, hazardous to its agents employed in conducting it, and precarious to the various interests involved in it. The only place where His Majesty's subjects have the privilege of a factory is Canton. The fair competition of the Market is there destroyed by associations of the Chinese; our Supercargoes are denied open access to the tribunals of the Country, and to the equal execution of its laws, and are kept altogether in a most arbitrary state of depression, ill suited to the importance of the concerns which are entrusted to their care, and scarcely compatible with the regulations of civilized society. . . .

His Majesty from his earnest desire to promote the present undertaking and to order to give the greater dignity to the Embassy, has been graciously pleased to order one of His Ships of War to convey you and your Suite to the Coast of China. With the same view he has ordered a Military Guard to attend your Person, to be composed of chosen Men from the light Dragoons, Infantry and Artillery, with proper Officers, under the command of Major Benson, whom he has determined to raise to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel upon this occasion. This guard will add splendour and procure respect to the Embassy; the order, appearance and evolutions of the Men may convey no useless idea of our military character and discipline, and if it should excite in the Emperor a desire of adopting any of the exercise or manœuvres, among the Troops, an opportunity thus offers to him, for which a return of good offices on his part is natural to be expected. It will be at your option to detach one of the Lieutenants of the ship, or of your Guard, in His Majesty's uniform to accompany the Messenger whom you will send to announce at Peking [Peking] your arrival on the coast, you should approach that Capital by Sea.

Besides the Chinese Interpreters whom you have already procured you will

perhaps meet in your progress some Portuguese, Spanish, or Italian Missionary, or other intelligent Person free from national attachments or prejudices, who may be useful to be employed in your Service.

Should your answer be satisfactory, and I will not suppose the contrary, you will then assume the Character and public appearance of His Majesty's Ambassador Extraordinary, and proceed with as much ceremony as can be admitted without causing a material delay, or incurring an unreasonable expense. You will procure an audience as early as possible after your arrival, conforming to all ceremonials of that Court, which may not commit the honour of your Sovereign, or lessen your own dignity, so as to endanger the success of your negotiation.

Whilst I make this reserve, I am satisfied you will be too prudent and considerate, to let any trifling punctilio stand in the way of the important benefits which may be obtained by engaging the favourable disposition of the Emperor and his Ministers. You will take the earliest opportunity of representing to His Imperial Majesty, that your Royal Master, already so justly celebrated in Foreign Countries on account of the voyages projected under his immediate auspices, for the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge, was from the same disposition desirous of sending an embassy to the most civilized as well as most ancient and populous Nation in the World in order to observe its celebrated institutions, and to communicate and receive the benefits which must result from an unreserved and friendly intercourse between that Country and his own. You will take care to express the high esteem which His Majesty has conceived for the Emperor, from the wisdom and virtue with which his character has been distinguished. A like compliment may be made in the event of the death of Hien-long [Qianlong], to the Prince who will be his Successor, as he has been in the management of the Public affairs for some time.

It is not unlikely that the Emperor's curiosity may lead to a degree of familiarity with you, in conversing upon the manners or circumstances of Europe and other Countries; and as despotick Princes are frequently more easy of access than their Ministers and dependents, you will not fail to turn such contingency to proper advantage. I do not mean to prescribe to you the particular mode of your negotiation; much must be left to your circumspection, and the judgement to be formed upon occurrences as they arise; but upon the present view of the matter, I am inclined to believe that instead of attempting to gain upon the Chinese Administration by representations founded upon the intricacies of either European or Indian Politicks, you should fairly state, after repeating the general assurances of His Majesty's friendly and pacific inclinations towards the Emperor, and his respect for the reputed mildness of his Administration, first the mutual benefit to be derived from a trade between the two Nations, in the course of which we receive beside other articles to the amount of twenty millions of Pounds weight of a Chinese herb, which would find very little vent, as not

being in general use in other Countries, European or Asiatic, and for which we return woollens, cottons, and other articles useful to the Chinese, but a considerable part is actually paid to China in bullion.

Secondly, that the great extent of our commercial concerns in China, requires a place of security as a depot for such of our Goods as cannot be sold off or shipped during the short season that is allowed for our shipping to arrive and depart, and that for this purpose we wish to obtain a grant of a small tract of ground or detached Island, but in a more convenient situation than Canton, where our present warehouses are at a great distance from our Ships, and where we are not able to restrain the irregularities which are occasionally committed by the seamen of the Company's Ships, and those of private traders.

Thirdly, that our views are purely commercial, having not even a wish for territory; that we desire neither fortification nor defense but only the protection of the Chinese Government for our Merchants or their agents in trading or travelling thro the Country and a security to us against the encroachments of other powers, who might ever aim to disturb our trade; and you must here be prepared to obviate any prejudice which may arise from the argument of our present dominions in India by stating our situation in this respect to have arisen without our intending it, from the necessity of our defending ourselves against the oppressions of the revolted Nabobs, who entered into Cabals to our prejudice with other Nations of Europe, and disregarded the privileges granted to us by different Emperors, or by such other arguments as your own reflections upon the subject will suggest.

This topic I have reason to believe will be very necessary to enforce by every means in your power, as it is the great object of other European Nations to injure not only the Indian powers, but likewise the Emperor and Ministers of China with an idea of danger in countenancing the Subjects of Great Britain, as if it were the intention of this Country to aim at extending its territory in every quarter. As nothing can be more untrue than these representations it will not be difficult for you to find arguments which may counteract the effect of them.

If any favorable opportunity should be afforded to your Excellency it will be advisable that the difficulties with which our trade has long laboured at Canton should be represented; but in making such a representation you will endeavour to convince the Emperor that it is from His Majesty's design to attribute any fault of misconduct to persons employed under the Chinese Government but with a view only to appease his Imperial Majesty that such difficulties do exist, in full confidence that from his wisdom and justice they will not hereafter be perceived.

Should a new establishment be conceded you will take it in the name of the King of Great Britain. You will endeavour to obtain it on the most beneficial terms, with a power of regulating the police, and exercising jurisdiction over

our own dependents, for which competent powers would be given so as effectually to prevent or punish the disorders of our people, which the Company's Supercargos in their limited sphere of action must see committed with impunity. Should it be required that no native Chinese be subject to be punished by our jurisdiction, or should any particular modification of this power be exacted it is not material ultimately to reject either of these propositions provided British subjects can be exempted from the Chinese jurisdiction for crimes, and that the British Chief or those under him be not held responsible if any Culpit should escape the pursuit of Justice, after search has been made by British and Chinese Officers acting in conjunction. . . .

It is necessary you should be on your Guard against one stipulation which, perhaps, will be demanded from you: which is that of the exclusion of the trade of opium from the Chinese dominions as being prohibited by the Laws of the Empire; if this subject should come into discussion, it must be handled with the greatest circumspection. It is beyond a doubt that no inconsiderable portion of the opium raised within our Indian territories actually finds its way to China: but if it should be made a positive requisition or any article of any proposed commercial treaty, that none of that drug should be sent by us to China, you must accede to it, rather than risk any essential benefit by contending for a liberty in this respect in which case the sale of our opium in Bengal must be left to take its chance in an open market, or to find a consumption in the dispersed and circuitous traffic of the eastern Seas.

A due sense of wisdom and justice of the King of Great Britain, which it will be your business to impress, as well as of the wealth and power of this Country, and of the genius and knowledge of its People, may naturally lead to a preferable acceptance of a treaty of friendship and alliance with us, as most worthy of themselves; and in a political light, as most likely to be useful to them, from our naval force, being the only assistance of which they may foresee the occasional importance to them.

In case the embassy should have an amicable and prosperous termination, it may be proposed to his Imperial Majesty to receive an occasional or perpetual Minister from the King of Great Britain, and to send one on his own part to the Court of London, in the assurance that all proper honours will be paid to any person who may be deputed in that sacred character. . . .

During the continuance of the Embassy you will take every possible opportunity that may arise, of transmitting to me for His Majesty's information, an account of your proceedings, and also of communicating with Earl Cornwallis, or the Governor General of Bengal for the time being, with whose views and efforts for promoting the trade of India to the East, it is particularly desirable you should co-operate, as far as they may be consistent with the present instructions.

Sincerely wishing your Excellency a prosperous voyage and complete success

in the very important objects of it, I have the honour to be with great regard,  
My Lord,

Your Excellency's most obedient  
and most humble Servant  
Henry Dundas.

## 6.2 MACARTNEY'S AUDIENCE WITH QIANLONG

After his arrival in China in June 1793, Lord Macartney met twice with the Qianlong emperor at the Rehe summer palace. Although Macartney was treated with great courtesy by Qianlong, he was ultimately frustrated in achieving any of the concrete objects of his mission.

Despite failures in negotiating trade or diplomatic accords, Macartney was remarkably successful in piercing the veils of mystery and misconception that had hitherto prevented Europeans from grasping the nature of Qing China. The following document represents Macartney's assessment of the Qing state and is notable for its acute portrayal of many of the problems that would frustrate Manchu rulers until the abdication of Puyi in 1911. Especially prescient, in this regard, are Macartney's remarks on the frictions inherent in the system of Manchu/Han dyarchy<sup>1</sup> and his accurate comprehension of the dangers of peasant revolt.

*Saturday, September 14.* This morning at four o'clock a.m. we set out for court under the convoy of Wang and Chou, and reached it in little more than an hour, the distance being about three miles from our hotel. I proceeded in great state with all my train music, guards, etc. Sir George Staunton and I went in palanquins and the officers and gentlemen of the Embassy on horseback. Over a rich embroidered velvet I wore the mantle of the Order of the Bath, with the collar, a diamond badge and a diamond star.

Sir George Staunton was dressed in a rich embroidered velvet also, and, being Doctor of Laws in the University of Oxford, wore the habit of his degree, which is of scarlet silk, full and flowing. I mention these little particulars to draw the attention I always paid, where a proper opportunity offered, to oriental customs and ideas. We alighted at the park gate, from whence we walked to the Imperial encampment, and were conducted to a large, handsome tent prepared for us on one side of the Emperor's. After waiting there about an hour a speech was announced by drums and music, on which we quitted our tent and came forward upon the green carpet.

1. The system of double-rule practices throughout the Qing as Han Chinese and Manchus served together within many organs of the state bureaucracy.

He was seated in an open palanquin, carried by sixteen bearers, attended by numbers of officers bearing flags, standards, and umbrellas, and as he passed we paid him our compliments by kneeling on one knee, whilst all the Chinese made their usual prostrations. As soon as he had ascended his throne I came to the entrance of the tent, and, holding in both my hands a large gold box enriched with diamonds in which was enclosed the King's letter, I walked deliberately up, and ascending the side-steps of the throne, delivered it into the Emperor's own hands, who, having received it, passed it to the Minister, by whom it was placed on the cushion. He then gave me as the first present from him to His Majesty the *ju-eu-jou* or *giou-giou*, as the symbol of peace and prosperity, and expressed his hopes that my Sovereign and he should always live in good correspondence and amity. It is a whitish, agate-looking stone about a foot and a half long, curiously carved, and highly prized by the Chinese, but to me it does not appear in itself to be of any great value.

The Emperor then presented me with a *ju-eu-jou* of a greenish-coloured stone of the same emblematic character; at the same time he very graciously received from me a pair of beautiful enamelled watches set with diamonds, which I had prepared in consequence of the information given me, and which, having looked at, he passed to the Minister. Sir George Staunton, whom, as he had been appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to act in case of my death or departure, I introduced to him as such, now came forward, and after kneeling upon one knee in the same manner which I had done, presented to him two elegant air-guns, and received from him a *ju-eu-jou* of greenish stone nearly similar to mine. Other presents were sent at the same time to all the gentlemen of my train. We then descended from the steps of the throne, and sat down upon cushions at one of the tables on the Emperor's left hand; and at other tables, according to their different ranks, the chief Tartar Princes and the Mandarins of the Court at the same time took their places, all dressed in the proper robes of their respective ranks. These tables were then uncovered and exhibited a sumptuous banquet. The Emperor sent us several dishes from his own table, together with some liquors, which the Chinese call wine, not, however, expressed from the grape, but distilled or extracted from rice, herbs, and honey. In about half an hour he sent for Sir George Staunton and me to come to him, and gave to each of us, with his own hands, a cup of warm wine, which we immediately drank in his presence, and found it very pleasant and comfortable, the morning being cold and raw.

Amongst other things, he asked me the age of my King, and being informed of it, said he hoped he might live as many years as himself, which are eighty-three. His manner is dignified, but affable, and condescending, and his reception of us has been very gracious and satisfactory. He is a very fine old gentleman, still healthy and vigorous, not having the appearance of a man of more than sixty.

The order and regularity in serving and removing the dinner was wonder-

fully exact, and every function of the ceremony performed with such silence and solemnity as in some measure to resemble the celebration of a religious mystery. The Emperor's tent or pavilion, which is circular, I should calculate to be about twenty-four or twenty-five yards in diameter, and is supported by a number of pillars, either gilded, painted, or varnished, according to their distance and position. In the front was an opening of six yards, and from this opening a yellow fly-tent projected so as to lengthen considerably the space between the entrance and the throne.

The materials and distribution of the furniture within at once displayed grandeur and elegance. The tapestry, the curtains, the carpets, the lanterns, the fringes, the tassels were disposed with such harmony, the colours so artfully varied, and the light and shades so judiciously managed, that the whole assemblage filled the eye with delight, and diffused over the mind a pleasing serenity and repose undisturbed by glitter or affected embellishments. The commanding feature of the ceremony was that calm dignity, that sober pomp of Asiatic greatness, which European refinements have not yet attained.

I forgot to mention that there were present on this occasion three ambassadors from Tatzé or Pegu and six Mohammedan ambassadors from the Kalmucks of the south-west, but their appearance was not very splendid. Neither must I omit that, during the ceremony, which lasted five hours, various entertainments of wrestling, tumbling, wire-dancing, together with dramatic representations, were exhibited opposite to the tent, but at a considerable distance from it.

Thus, then, have I seen 'King Solomon in all his glory'. I use this expression, as the scene recalled perfectly to my memory a puppet show of that name which I recollect to have seen in my childhood, and which made so strong an impression on my mind that I then thought it a true representation of the highest pitch of human greatness and felicity.

### 6.3 MACARTNEY'S DESCRIPTION OF CHINA'S GOVERNMENT

The ancient constitution of China differed essentially from the present. Although the Emperor was styled despotic, and decorated with all the titles and epithets of oriental hyperbole, the power and administration of the state resided in the great councils or tribunals, whose functions were not to be violated or disturbed by court intrigue or ministerial caprice. It was government by law, and when attempts were made by their princes to render it otherwise, as often happened, rebellion was the consequence and expulsion the penalty. Hence according to history the regular succession of the crown was broken through, new sovereigns elected, and the former constitution restored. The present family on the throne is the twenty-second distinct dynasty whose hands have swayed

the sceptre of China. The government as it now stands is properly the tyranny of a handful of Tartars over more than three hundred millions of Chinese.

An uninterrupted succession of four Emperors, all endowed with excellent understandings, uncommon vigor of mind and decision of character, has hitherto obviated the danger of such an enormous disproportion, and not only maintained itself on the throne, but enlarged its dominions to a prodigious extent.

Various causes have contributed to this wonderful phenomenon in the political world. When the Tartars entered China a century and a half ago, the country had long languished under a weak administration, had been desolated by civil wars and rebellions, and was then disputed by several unworthy competitors. The Tartars availing themselves of these circumstances, at first took part as auxiliaries in favour of one of the candidates but they soon became principals, and at last by valour and perseverance surmounted every obstacle to their own establishment. The spirit of the Chinese was now effectually subdued by the weight of calamity; they were wearied with contending for the mere choice of tyrants among themselves, and they less reluctantly submitted to a foreign usurpation. The conquerors, however terrible in arms and ferocious in their manners, were conducted by a leader of a calm judgement as well as of a resolute mind, who tempered the despotism he introduced with so much prudence and policy that it seemed preferable to the other evils which they had so recently groaned under. A state of tranquil subjection succeeded for some time to the turbulence and horrors of a doubtful hostility; the government, though absolute, was at least methodical and regular. It menaced but did not injure; the blow might be dreaded, but it seldom was felt. . . .

The government of China, as now instituted, may not ineptly be compared to Astley's amphitheatre, where a single jockey rides a number of horses at once, who are so nicely bitted and dressed that he can impel them with a whisper, or stop them with a hair. But at the same time he knows the consequence of mismanagement or neglect, and that if they are not properly matched, hurried and fed, patted and stoked, some of them will be liable to run out of the circle, to kick at their keepers and refuse to be mounted any longer. Considering then all circumstances, the original defect of title to the inheritance, the incessant anxiety of forcible possession, the odium of a foreign yoke, the inevitable combats of passion in a sovereign's breast, when deceived by artifice, betrayed by perfidy, or provoked by rebellion, the doubtful and intricate boundaries of reward and punishment, where vigor and indulgence may be equally misapplied, the almost incalculable population, the immense extent of dominion, the personal exertions requisite in war, and the no less difficult talents of administration in peace—considering, I say, all these circumstances, the government of such an empire must be a task that has hitherto been performed with wonderful ability and unparalleled success. That such singular skill in the

t of reigning should have been uninterruptedly transmitted through a succession of four princes for upwards of a century and a half would be very difficult to account for, if we did not constantly bear in mind a fundamental principle of the state. All power and authority in China derive solely from the sovereign, and they are not only distributed by him in his life time, but attest their origin after his decease. The appointment of his successor is exclusively vested in him. Without regard to primogeniture, without the fondness of a parent, without the partiality of a friend, he acts on this occasion as the father of the state, and selects the person of his family, whom he judges the most worthy to replace him. Every choice of this kind as yet made has been unquestionably fortunate. K'ang-hsi proved as great a prince as his father; Yung-cheng was inferior to neither, and Ch'ien-lung surpasses the glory of all his predecessors. Who is the Atlas destined by him to bear this load of empire when he dies is yet unknown, but on whatever shoulders it may fall, another transmigration of Fo-hi into the next emperor will be necessary to enable him to sustain it on its present balance; for though within the serene atmosphere of the court everything wears the face of happiness and applause, yet it cannot be concealed that the nation in general is far from being easy or contented. The frequent insurrections in the distant provinces are unambiguous oracles of the al sentiments and temper of the people. The predominance of the Tartars and the Emperor's partiality to them are the common subject of conversation among the Chinese whenever they meet together in private, and the constant theme of their discourse. There are certain mysterious societies in every province who are known to be disaffected, and although narrowly watched by the government, they find means to elude its vigilance and often to hold secret assemblies, where they revive the memory of ancient glory and independence, brood over recent injuries, and mediate revenge.

Though much circumscribed in the course of our travels we had opportunities of observation seldom afforded to others, and not neglected by us. The genuine character of the inhabitants, and the effects resulting from the refined policy and principles of the government, which are meant to restrain and direct them, naturally claimed my particular attention and inquiry. In my researches I often perceived the ground to be hollow under a vast superstructure, and in places of the most stately and flourishing appearance I discovered symptoms of speedy decay, whilst humbler plants were held by vigorous roots, and mean edifices rested on steady foundations. The Chinese are now recovering from the blows that had stunned them; they are awaking from the political stupor they had been thrown into by the Tartar impression, and begin to feel their native energies revive. A slight collision might elicit fire from the flint, and spread flames of revolt from one extremity of China to the other. In fact the volume of the empire is now grown too ponderous and disproportionate to be easily grasped by a single hand, be it ever so capacious and strong. It is possible, notwithstanding, that the momentum impressed on the machine by the vigor

and wisdom of the present Emperor may keep it steady and entire in its orbit for a considerable time longer; but I should not be surprised if its dislocation or dismemberment were to take place before my own dissolution. Whenever such an event happens, it will probably be attended with all the horrors and atrocities from which they were delivered by the Tartar domination; but men are apt to lose the memory of former evils under the pressure of immediate suffering; and what can be expected from those who are corrupted by servitude, exasperated by despotism and maddened by despair? Their condition, however, might then become still worse than it can be at present. Like the slave who fled into the desert from his chains and was devoured by the lion, they may draw down upon themselves oppression and destruction by their very effort to avoid them, may be poisoned by their own remedies and be buried themselves in the graves which they dug for others. A sudden transition from slavery to freedom, from dependence to authority, can seldom be borne with moderation or discretion. Every change in the state of man ought to be gentle and gradual, otherwise it is commonly dangerous to himself and intolerable to others. A due preparation may be as necessary for liberty as for inoculation of the smallpox which, like liberty, is future health but without due preparation is almost certain destruction. Thus then the Chinese, if not led to emancipation by degrees, but let loose on a burst of enthusiasms of madness, and be found as unfit for the enjoyment of freedom as the French and the negroes.