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The Complications of People in Diplomacy

Individuals' Effect on Complicating the
Amherst Mission 1816–1817

Kiner Kwok

In the late 18th century and early 19th century, European embassies leagerly interacted with Qing China (1644–1912). In 1792, Lord George Macartney (1737–1806) led the first British mission to Qing China. During this mission, even though Lord Macartney met with the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735–1796), his goal of establishing free trade and diplomatic relations with the Qing court was rejected. A few years later, in 1795, a mission, sent out by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), arrived at the Qing court to congratulate the Qianlong emperor's 60th anniversary of his governance. Then again, in 1805, a Russian mission, led by Count Yury Golovkin (1762–1846), was sent to Qing China to establish more significant commercial trade. Unlike the previous two, Golovkin's mission was cut short on its way to Beijing because he refused to perform the kowtow ritual in front of a representation of the Jiaqing emperor (r. 1796–1820) (Stevenson 2021, 100). Finally, Lord William Pitt Amherst (1773–1857) led the second British mission to China in 1816. The Amherst mission shared similar goals as the Macartney mission: to establish free trade and diplomatic relations with China. Similar to its predecessor, the Amherst mission did not achieve its goals, and to make matters even worse, the emperor never granted an audience with the Amherst mission. While all four of these missions received different outcomes, the uniting feature was the kowtow ritual. Three of the four missions refused to perform the kowtow ritual, and one complied with it. The kowtow ritual was an essential but delicate matter in Chinese diplomatic transactions.

While the kowtow ritual within Chinese diplomatic history is a fascinating topic, and one can easily write a book on the matter, this essay will only investigate the kowtow ritual within the Amherst mission and how it became a matter that complicated the mission. Within the context of the kowtow ritual, this essay will also seek to answer how the men in the Amherst embassy and the Qing Chinese mandarins complicated the interactions of the two parties. This essay will argue that personal interests and individual beliefs drove the prideful East India Company (EIC) employees and the deceitful Chinese officials to complicate the potential for the Amherst embassy to interact with the Qing imperial court.

Very few English-language historical works have examined the Amherst mission compared to the Macartney mission. The subject of the Amherst mission only appears briefly while talking about the formal British interactions with China during the pre-Opium War eras. The Amherst mission received little scholarly attention because the Amherst embassy not only failed to establish trade and diplomatic relations with China, but the emperor dismissed the embassy without even an audience at the Old Summer Palace, Yuan Ming Yuan. In early scholarship, such as James Eames's 1909 publication, he argued that the "ignorance of the Chinese" was the sole cause of the mission's failure (Eames 1909, 151). Recent scholars challenged Eames's one-sided examination. A.E. Grantham's 1976 publication of *A Manchu Monarch: An Interpretation of Chia Ch'ing* portrayed the Amherst mission more neutrally within the context of the Jiaqing emperor. Grantham's book referenced British sources, but without a bibliography, notes, or works cited section, it is unclear whether she used any Chinese sources. In most recent scholarships, scholars have been highlighting and becoming more critical of the British involvement in the mission's failure.

In Gao Hao's 2016 research, he argued that instead of pointing out their contribution to the mission's failure, the British blamed the failure of the mission on the Jiaqing emperor's personality characteristics. Gao's extensive research on the Amherst mission also contributed to a better understanding of the cause of the First Opium War (1839–1842). In his 2020 publication, *Creating the Opium War*, Gao argued that the Amherst mission indirectly contributed to the genesis of the First Opium War because the information collected by the Amherst embassy regarding Qing China's decay helped the British government recognize that China was no longer as powerful as it once was (Gao 2020, 85). Like Gao, Peter Kitson used the Amherst mission to better understand the cause of the first Opium War. Kitson argued that negative writings of Henry Ellis's (1788–1855) travel journal about China along with his journal, being published by a well-respected publishing house and finally, his journal receiving a positive review by John Barrow (1764–1848), caused a "reversal of China's image in

Britain” (Kitson 2020, 162). Beyond using the Amherst mission to explain the start of the First Opium War, Caroline Stevenson’s monograph, *Britain’s Second Embassy to China*, examines the Amherst mission in detail. Stevenson’s work incorporated published travel journals from the embassy men, government memos, and archival letters Lord Amherst wrote to his family and the British government (Stevenson 2021, 317). Since the travel journal of Lord Amherst was lost in a shipwreck while leaving China, many of the narratives of the Amherst mission were primarily derived from travel journals by other members of the embassy that did not fully reflect Lord Amherst’s voice in the mission. Stevenson’s work restored some of Lord Amherst’s voice and role in the mission. Even though Stevenson’s monograph examines the Amherst embassy, her work largely seeks to restore the voice and characteristics of Lord Amherst. She argued against the traditional narrative that Amherst was a weak leader. Instead, she calls him a strong and honest leader of integrity (Stevenson 2021, 299–300). This essay will not attempt to explain why or how the Amherst mission failed. Instead, it will explore how individuals’ interests and actions complicated the interactions between the British embassy and the Chinese imperial court within the context of the kowtow debate.

Examining how individuals complicated the Amherst mission instead of how they have caused the mission’s failure provides a concise examination of the mission that works within the means of the available sources. First, to define the Amherst embassy as a failed mission is ambiguous. What would have constituted a successful mission in the first place? Maybe a successful mission was achieving the goals of free trade and diplomatic relations with China. Maybe a successful mission was improving the Canton trade. Maybe a successful mission was gaining an audience with the Qing emperor. Apart from George Thomas Staunton, the second commissioner of the embassy, many people considered the mission a failure. These mission evaluations were based on the government’s goals and did not represent the goals of the East India Company (EIC), which funded the mission. Staunton, an employee of the EIC, considered the mission a great success because he attributed the improvement of the Canton trade to the embassy’s refusal to kowtow (Staunton 1856, 67–68). Whether one can even call the mission a failure complicates the very examination of the Amherst embassy as a failed mission. This essay acknowledges the various opinions regarding the result of the Amherst mission, and does not examine the Amherst mission as a failed mission.

Second, even if the mission was to be evaluated as a “failed” mission, the sources available do not allow for a comprehensive evaluation. With few Chinese sources available, a complete evaluation of the embassy is complex when based solely on English sources. Just to list some examples,

English sources do not provide internal political problems that might have caused the emperor to dismiss the mission, nor do they provide clues of personal issues that the emperor might have experienced to cause him to dismiss the mission. Restricting the research within the framework of complicating factors on the individual level allows for detailed telling and examination of how people's actions, beliefs, and personal interests affected the interactions between the British embassy and the Qing imperial court. At large, this essay seeks to examine the complicated human factors within the Amherst mission's diplomatic interactions with the Qing court.

This essay will predominantly rely on primary sources written by members of the Amherst embassy, accompanied by parliamentary papers, poems, and other primary sources contained within secondary sources. Some primary sources are in the form of travel journals, and some are in the form of memoirs. While most of these journals were written by men with no Chinese language training, some of the journals were produced by people with Chinese language training, including EIC employees and one Protestant missionary. The Canton EIC employees in the embassy had become well-versed in the Chinese language and cultural understanding. While the sources were unclear about precisely what form of Chinese they were proficient in, one can safely assume it was Mandarin because they communicated more easily with the Qing officials than the local peasants they encountered (Hall 1851, 7). The primary sources used for this paper were produced by Canton EIC employees, George Thomas Staunton and John Davis. Staunton's translation of the Qing legal code, published in Britain, demonstrated his understanding of the Chinese language (Stevenson 2021, 35). Staunton also endorsed Davis's understanding of language and culture in China (Staunton 1824, 102). The main translator of the embassy was Dr. Rev. Robert Morrison, the first Protestant missionary in China (Grantham 1976, 163). His understanding of the language guided the rest of the embassy members to understand the situation well and record it accordingly in their journals. To better construct a cohesive narrative of the mission, this essay will also draw on letters, government documents, and unpublished private documents quoted in Caroline Stevenson's book that the author of this essay could not obtain. Stevenson provides good context for most of the letters and government documents used in her book. Sources from the British side do not provide a complete picture of an event between the two governments of vastly different cultures and languages. To better balance the narrative, this essay will also use some translated Chinese imperial edicts to provide a complete depiction of the mission.

Qing China's Social Conditions

The China that Lord Amherst set sail for differed from the one that Lord Macartney approached 24 years prior. Instead of the Qianlong emperor, the Amherst embassy interacted with the Qing court of the Jiaqing emperor. The Jiaqing emperor was enthroned on February 9th, 1796, while his father was still living. Due to his father, the Jiaqing emperor had little power and was not taken seriously during the first year of his reign. The Jiaqing emperor did not gain any real power until February 7th, 1799, after his father's death (Hummel 2010, 965). Disorder and corruption infested the Qing empire that the Jiaqing emperor inherited. From 1795–1796 the Qing empire experienced rebellion from the Miao tribe members in Guizhou and Hunan. Later the empire then experienced revolt from farmers in Hubei and Sichuan. In 1813 the imperial palace was stormed by corrupt Bannermen, eunuchs, and the Tian Li Jiao rebels (Hummel 2010, 966). These rebellions were expensive; just the rebellions from 1796–1801 drained the treasury of 100 million taels (Hummel 2010, 966). Unfortunately, the chaos continued with pirates infesting the South China coast and environmental challenges. Following the 1815 Mount Tambora volcanic explosion in Indonesia, the Yunnan province experienced erratic weather that led to crop failure, which then caused mass famine (Markley 2016, 83).

The Jiaqing emperor's Qing China rendered him no ease in governance. Regarding external military conquests, unlike his father, the Jiaqing emperor did not care for military glory; he regarded the military as a police force. The Jiaqing emperor even sought to reduce the military and disband the number of soldiers to save money (Grantham 1976, 139–140). Nevertheless, the Jiaqing emperor was diligent in his role as emperor (Hummel 2010, 976). The Jiaqing emperor was oddly obsessed with ritual ceremonies. As Grantham puts it, the emperor cared extensively about whether ceremonial officials knelt on the left or the right step of the throne. The emperor even once fined a chamberlain's salary for half a year because he failed to wear the small pouch obligatory on a particular occasion (Grantham 1976, 138). Jiaqing emperor's obsession with rituals suggests a lack of confidence in his rule. With his state infested with rebellions that he struggled to put down and to maintain prosperity, the means of ritual ceremony reinforced his status as the emperor of Qing China. The role of ritual ceremonies was a comforting alternative that gave the Jiaqing emperor the sense of authority he needed to live up to his father's rule. While the Qianlong emperor sought military glory as a sign of competent and robust governance, the Jiaqing emperor sought ritual ceremonies as a sign of competent and robust governance. The Jiaqing emperor's obsession with

ritual ceremonies became a roadblock to many diplomatic encounters with the West, including the Amherst embassy.

Overview of the Amherst Embassy's Travel to China

The Amherst embassy set sail from England on the 9th of February, 1816. The embassy sailed southwards in the Atlantic Ocean. The ships *Lyra* and *Hewitt* sailed straight ahead to the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, and arrived there on March 16th. The ship *Alceste* with Lord Amherst stopped at Rio Janeiro, Brazil, on March 21st, 1816 (McLeod 1818, 5–6). The three ships reunited at Java by early June (McLeod 1818, 16–17). Soon after the reunion, the ships parted ways again, with *Lyra* sailing to Macao to pick up George Staunton, Robert Morrison, and three other EIC employees (McLeod 1818, 19). The *Lyra* picked up Staunton and those with him on July 8th, 1816 (Staunton 1824, 3). Carrying the EIC employees and Morrison, the *Lyra* met up with the *Alceste* with Lord Amherst on July 10th, 1816, at Lamma Island outside Hong Kong (Ellis 1817, 54). On the 13th of July, the embassy sailed northward along the coast by Guangdong and Fujian provinces while passing through the strait of Formosa, modernly known as the Taiwan Strait (McLeod 1818, 21). On the 25th of July, the embassy arrived at the mouth of Beihe, modern-day Bohai, outside the Bei Zhili province, modernly known as the Hebei province (Staunton 1824, 16).

On the 31st of July, the Amherst embassy received its first representatives from the Qing government: Guang Hui 广惠 Daren 大人 (honorific title), the *qinchai* 钦差 imperial commissioner from Beijing; Chang Daren, a civil officer; and Yin Daren, a military officer (Ellis 1817, 64). Upon these early encounters, the atmosphere was light and friendly between the English and the Qing Chinese officials. Even though the matter of the kowtow ritual was brought up, mentioning that “the Ambassador should exercise himself in the practice of the Chinese ceremony some time beforehand,” no demand of the embassy to perform the ritual then occurred (Staunton 1856, 24). The embassy even entertained the Qing officials with cherry brandy on its ships (Hall 1851, 8).

On August 10th, the embassy boarded Chinese river boats with the assistance of Chang and Yin to travel from the mouth of Beihe towards Tianjin on the river modernly known as Haihe (Staunton 1824, 38). After most of the mission left, the ships also left the mouth of Beihe to explore the surroundings, including Korea. The British fleet was to meet Lord Amherst and the embassy in Canton for their return departure to Britain (Hall 1851, 10).

The embassy's arrival at Tianjin marked the start of the greater kowtow debates between the embassy and the Qing officials. The embassy arrived at Tianjin on August 12th, 1816. The imperial commissioner Guang and

Su Lenge 苏楞额 Daren, a former Hoppo of Canton, and now the *Gongbu Shangshu* 工部尚书, Minister of Works, welcomed the embassy (Ellis 1817, 83). On the 14th of August 1816, the embassy left Tianjin for Tongzhou, a suburb of Beijing, where the mission encountered their next set of Qing officials, Duke He Shitai 和世泰 and Mu Ketenge Daren. On August 20th, 1816, the embassy reached Tongzhou, where Duke He and Mu Daren received them and entertained the embassy for a few days before escorting the embassy towards its final destination, the Old Summer palace, the Yuan Ming Yuan (Ellis 1817, 105, 135). The embassy left Tongzhou on the 28th of August and traveled through the night to make it to the Yuan Ming Yuan palace on the morning of the 29th. The Qing officials demanded that the embassy meet with the emperor immediately the morning of their arrival but the embassy refused, which resulted in the embassy's dismissal later that day (Staunton 1824, 109, 116). Prior to the point of the embassy's dismissal, the Qing officials tried all sorts of ways to convince the embassy to kowtow.

The Imposing of the Kowtow Ritual

Guang and Su welcomed the embassy with a banquet the day after their arrival in Tianjin (Ellis 1817, 86, 91). Before the banquet, Guang and Su held a meeting with the embassy regarding the nature of the banquet. The Qing officials indicated that the entertainment the embassy was about to partake in was an imperial repast, and "it was an indispensable preliminary" that the embassy "should return thanks, by the performance of the ceremony of the Ko-tou" (Staunton 1824, 46). The officials announced that a table covered in yellow silk would be presented at the banquet representing the emperor. The embassy was expected to demonstrate gratitude for the entertainment by performing the kowtow ritual (Davis 1841, 67–68). The embassy responded that they wished to show their respect for the emperor by the same ceremony they would perform to their sovereign: a low bow (Staunton 1824, 46). The Qing officials were displeased, and to strengthen their case, Su claimed that he saw Lord Macartney of the former mission perform the kowtow ritual in Canton when he welcomed Macartney as a former Hoppo of Canton. Su then added that he also saw Macartney perform the ritual in the presence of the Qianlong emperor. Su even asked Staunton to testify of his claim knowing that Staunton was present at the previous mission (Ellis 1817, 92). Staunton avoided the discussion of his presence in the previous mission due to his young age and inability to recall much. Instead, Staunton used the reports of Lord Macartney to support their decision to refuse the kowtow ritual (Staunton 1824, 47). Staunton's claim of not recalling his experience could have been Staunton not wanting to witness Su's claims. However, it was most likely

that he could not remember much from his experience. In Staunton's later memoir, he did not have extensive personal accounts of his participation in the Macartney mission. When he did reference his participation, he quoted extensively from Lord Macartney, John Barrow, and his father's published journals (Staunton 1856, 11–15). The few firsthand recordings of Staunton's experience in his memoir showcased the lack of remembrance of his experience in the Macartney embassy, which supported his claim and act of avoiding the subject with Su. Su's claim of Macartney performing the kowtow ritual was not true according to British records according to Staunton and it did not move the embassy to comply with his wishes for the embassy to kowtow. However, the mission proposed to make as many bows at the waist as the Qing officials prostrated in front of the yellow silk-covered table. As a result, during the banquet, the Qing officials performed the kowtow ritual as prescribed, and the British embassy bowed nine times (Davis 1841, 69). To further show sincerity in wishing the success of the mission, Lord Amherst proposed to modify Lord Macartney's previous ceremony performed in front of the Qianlong emperor, where he knelt on one knee and bowed at the waist (Staunton 1824, 50). Lord Amherst proposed that upon meeting the emperor, he would kneel on one knee and bow nine times at the waist (Staunton 1824, 51). Ellis commented on Amherst's proposal saying, "The mode in which he proposed to manifest his respect to the Emperor of China was one which he would not adopt towards any Sovereign in Europe" (Ellis 1817, 100). Even though the British embassy tried its best to accommodate the Qing officials, the Qing officials were still unsatisfied. While Su's attempt to deceive the embassy failed at the banquet, Su continued to seek ways to deceive the mission into complying with the Qing officials' wish for the embassy to perform the kowtow ritual in the presence of the emperor.

Before reaching Tongzhou, having seen Su's lies carried no weight in making the embassy kowtow, the Qing officials admitted that Lord Macartney did not perform the kowtow ritual (Staunton 1824, 54). Nonetheless, Su desperately found new ways to make the embassy comply with the kowtow ritual before reaching the reception of Duke He and Mu Daren. To further push the mission to comply with the wishes of the Qing officials, Su hinted at the embassy that if it continued to decline the kowtow ritual, the embassy would be thrown out like the failed Russian mission of 1805. As a result, their commerce would be interrupted like Russian commerce (Morrison 1820, 38). The embassy again questioned Su's claim about the Russian mission because Staunton wrote that while the Russian mission did fail, it did not interrupt the commercial trade (Staunton 1824, 100–101). Despite Su's lies not being accepted by the embassy, he continued to find new ways to attempt to deceive the embassy.

On the voyage to Tongzhou, Su explained to the embassy that the kowtow ritual was merely a formality of greetings, and it did not mean the British were inferior subjects (Davis 1841, 104). Morrison pushed back on this argument. Morrison called the kowtow ritual an “expression of homage” (Morrison 1820, 9). Su’s claim was later proven to be false by Su’s unwillingness to submit a proposal to the emperor that indicated equal status between Britain and the Qing.

Without any progress in convincing the Qing officials that the embassy would not kowtow, the embassy proposed an agreement to kowtow but only under two conditions. First, a Qing official of equal rank as Lord Amherst would perform the kowtow ritual before a portrait of the British monarch. Second, the Qing emperor would issue a solemn edict that if there were a Qing embassy to Great Britain, they would perform the kowtow ritual in front of the British monarch (Staunton 1824, 62). Along with this proposal, the mission requested the Qing officials to send a letter to the Jiaqing emperor indicating the mission’s proposal of the modified Macartney mission ceremony described in previous paragraphs. According to Guang recorded by Morrison, they (Su and Guang) “did not dare to make any such proposal to Court; such a question could not be discussed as between equal states” (Morrison 1820, 39). Morrison explained, “The fact is that all such propositions, as they imply a perfect equality, are more offensive to the Chinese and Tartars than declining to perform their ceremony” (Morrison 1820, 39). Instead of sending a letter including both British proposals, the Qing officials only included Amherst’s proposal of the modified Macartney mission ceremony of respect (Morrison 1820, 41). The embassy’s proposal indicated its approach to diplomacy: a Western-style diplomacy that regarded an equal status when two or more nations interacted. The British proposal undermined Qing China’s superior status. This unacceptance of Britain’s proposal of equal status with Qing China proved Su’s false claim of the kowtow ceremony being merely a formality of greetings. The kowtow ritual indeed represented the Qing’s assertion of power. State representatives who performed the kowtow ritual indicated their homage to Qing China and their submission to Qing China as an inferior state. Su was not the only Qing official that was deceitful; Duke He, whom the mission encountered from Tongzhou to the Yuan Ming Yuan palace, proved himself as deceitful as Su.

Due to the embassy’s continual refusal to perform the kowtow ritual, they did not receive the warmest welcome upon their arrival in Tongzhou as Duke He and Mu Daren received them (Ellis 1817, 105, 135). Duke He and Mu were high Qing officials of great importance. Duke He was the emperor’s brother-in-law, and Mu was the *Libu Shangshu* 礼部尚书, Minister of the Board of Rites (Morrison 1820, 44). The burden of enticing

the embassy to kowtow now fell to the responsibility of Duke He and Mu. Duke He did not provide seats for the embassy men during the first official meeting. Duke He and his entourage of Manchu officials and princes took all the seats in the living room as he instructed the embassy while they stood (Staunton 1824, 79). Mu spoke little in these encounters with the embassy, and Duke He was the primary negotiator in these meetings with the embassy. In the first meeting, Duke He made his position clear; he declared, “As in heaven there are not two Suns, so on earth there are not two Sovereigns [*tian wu liang ri; di wu er wang* 天无两日; 地无二王]” (Morrison 1820, 48). Duke He called the emperor “the universal master of all nations” and stated, “None therefore could hold themselves exempt from the obligation of performing the homage required” (Staunton 1824, 79). Duke He’s statement again confirmed the Qing’s self-superior identity in regarding Britain as a subordinate nation. Duke He’s statement invoked the sentiment of the Qing emperor as the universal monarch under heaven to which all needed to pay homage. Duke He’s assertive tactics did not stop in Tongzhou. He continued to push the mission to conform to the kowtow ritual.

After arriving at the Yuan Ming Yuan palace on the morning of the 29th of August, the Qing officials demanded that the embassy meet with the emperor immediately (Staunton 1824, 109,116). After traveling all night, the embassy was fatigued. Lord Amherst himself was not only fatigued, but he fell ill on the way. Amherst asked to stay in his quarters to rest and wished to meet the emperor as soon as he felt better (Abel 1818, 104). At the same time, the embassy arrived at the palace before their belongings, which included their ceremonial clothing, their insignia of the official character, and the king’s letter (Staunton 1824, 118). With illness, fatigue, lack of proper attire, and proper documents, the embassy requested an extension before meeting the emperor. The embassy’s desires were transmitted to Duke He, but he soon returned, saying that the emperor desired to meet Lord Amherst immediately (Abel 1818, 105). Lord Amherst contested Duke He’s request. In response, as Ellis put it, “[the Duke] used every argument to induce him to obey the Emperor’s commands”; the Duke even said the embassy could perform their ceremony instead of the kowtow ritual (Ellis 1817, 179). With little success from his verbal convincing, the Duke grabbed Lord Amherst’s arm and tried to force him into obeying his will of meeting the emperor immediately (Abel 1818, 105). Lord Amherst protested with profuse dissatisfaction (Abel 1818, 105). The Duke became very anxious, and “perspiration stood on his face” (Morrison 1820, 57). Seeing little result from his verbal and physical assertion of his will, Duke He finally agreed to allow the embassy to stay in their resting quarters while he left to report the embassy’s will to the emperor (Ellis 1817, 180). Soon after, a message came from the emperor that he was

unhappy with the continued refusal of the embassy to meet with him, so he commanded the embassy to depart immediately (Abel 1818, 108). The embassy was utterly confused and could not understand why the emperor would do so under the given circumstances. However, it was made clear to them later by Su and Guang (Staunton 1824, 133).

After the embassy left Yuan Ming Yuan, Su and Guang came to send their condolences to the embassy with presents from the emperor. They explained that the emperor was “kept in ignorance of the circumstance” (Abel 1818, 112). The emperor was unaware that the embassy traveled all night without rest; he did not know that they did not have appropriate ceremonial clothes, insignia of their official character, or even the king’s letter. Lord Amherst’s illness was the only reason for the embassy’s refusal to meet with the emperor that was transmitted to the Jiaqing emperor (Ellis 1817, 179–180). It still did not make much sense why the emperor would dismiss the embassy based on only Lord Amherst’s illness. The issues were made clear by an internal imperial edict issued a day after the embassy was dismissed. The edict condemned and pointed out Duke He’s inconsistent claims (21:7:8, 406).

The internal imperial edict to the grand secretariat pointed out all the inconstancy of Duke He’s reports to the imperial court. The edict first stated that Duke He and Mu Daren transmitted information to the court “in a confusing manner” (21:7:8, 406). The edict stated that up until the day before the embassy, Duke He had not convinced the embassy to kowtow. However, Duke He promised the imperial court that the embassy would kowtow on the day of the imperial audience. On the day of the imperial audience, to delay the proceeding and buy time for himself, Duke He first informed the imperial court that the embassy was “unable to walk fast enough to reach the gate of the palace in time.” Then Duke He reported that “the ambassador was sick with diarrhea and must wait a little while.” Finally, Duke He reported that “the ambassador had collapsed and could not return to the hotel” (21:7:8, 406). Subsequently, the imperial court issued an edict to send the embassy back to the hotel with a doctor. All these statements by Duke He were false.

First, according to English sources, the embassy never left their hotel room within the palace upon arrival, so the first and third statements could have never happened. Second, while Lord Amherst was indeed sick, the English sources did not mention anything regarding diarrhea, perhaps out of discretion. Duke He’s second claim was, at the very least, partially valid, but no evidence to support the whole truth. After not being able to have Lord Amherst appear, the imperial court proceeded to invite the second commissioner, George Staunton, and the third commissioner, Henry Ellis, for an audience. However, Duke He told the imperial court that they were

all sick and could not attend (21:7:8, 406). The imperial court thought the whole embassy was pretending to be sick to avoid the imperial audience, so the mission was dismissed.

The emperor's decision to dismiss the embassy without an audience seems strange, but in James Hevia's *Cherishing Men From Afar*, he sheds some light on the matter. Hevia drew a parallel between Lord Macartney using the excuse of illness to avoid meetings with prominent Qing officials and Lord Amherst being ill to suggest that the imperial court saw Amherst's illness as a way to avoid an audience like his predecessor (Hevia 1995, 215). Regardless of what moved the Jiaqing emperor to dismiss the embassy, Duke He was responsible for complicating the mission's interactions with the Qing imperial court through his inconsistent reports to the emperor that differed from the embassy's own recording. As this essay has shown, Lord Amherst was the only one ill in the embassy, according to English sources. Duke He's report of Amherst, Ellis, and Staunton all being ill did not withstand scrutiny when a doctor from the imperial court was sent to investigate the matter. Duke He's claims served as lies to buy himself time because his promise hung on a thread. He promised the imperial court that he would be able to convince the embassy to kowtow, but the embassy had no intention to do so even up till the point of the 29th of August.

Another potential reading of Duke He's behavior was that he wanted the mission dismissed because he could not convince the embassy to kowtow. If the mission were to proceed to an audience with the emperor, Duke He would have not only embarrassed himself, but he would have also humiliated the emperor. The emperor seems to have believed the embassy would kowtow the whole time. This was later evident in a conversation between the emperor and one of his governors-general.

The Chinese primary source clearly expressed its expectation of the embassy to kowtow. However, it did not indicate whether the emperor was aware of the embassy's proposal for their bowing ceremony and the modified Macartney ceremony. In a later audience of the emperor with the governor-general of Hunan and Hubei provinces, Sun Yuting, 孙玉庭 explained to the emperor the British bowing ritual. Sun had a brief interaction with Staunton a few years prior to the embassy in Canton in 1804 when he was delivering gifts from the emperor to the king of Britain. Sun explained to the emperor that Staunton took off his hat, bowed deeply when listening to the imperial edict to receive the gifts, and then bowed again before Sun left. Sun asserted that the British bowing was the equivalent of the kowtow and that the British's refusal to kowtow did not mean any disrespect. Sun's explanation pleased the emperor very much (Hummel 2010, 684). Sun and the emperor's short discussion of the embassy shed light on how much the emperor was kept in the dark. The emperor was first unaware of

the meaning of the British ritual ceremony. Second, the significance of the bowing ceremony had equal status to the kowtow ritual in terms of it being an equivalent ceremony performed in the presence of monarchs. If the emperor was unaware that the English bowing at the waist was an equivalent ceremonial ritual to the kowtow, he was most likely oblivious of the British proposals of their modified Macartney ceremony that expressed elevated respect beyond what would have been performed to any other European monarchs. For the entirety of the journey from Tianjin to the Yuan Ming Yuan Palace, the Qing officials acted in a manner that suggested the imperial court's strong desire for the embassy to kowtow. Initially, the emperor's desire for the embassy to kowtow was most likely genuine. However, the emperor's will of the embassy kowtowing in his presence could have continued if he were made known first the meaning of the British bowing ceremony and, second, the modified Macartney ceremony.

As described in previous paragraphs, even though the Jiaqing emperor valued ceremonial rituals, he became more concerned with using ceremonial rituals to legitimize his authority. The Jiaqing emperor's pleasant reactions to Sun's response indicated again his recognition that the British's refusal to kowtow did not undermine his authority. Instead, it honored his authority differently. The Qing officials failed to recognize the function of ceremonial rituals for the emperor and only saw the form of ceremonial rituals for the emperor. The Qing officials' undying effort to convince the embassy to kowtow signified their fear of angering the emperor and appearing incompetent.

While the Qing officials kept the emperor in the dark, they worked to convince the embassy to kowtow, showcasing their self-interest of appearing competent and not embarrassing themselves in front of the emperor. The Qing officials likely were aware of the emperor's obsession with ceremonial rituals, and they made it their mission to entice the embassy to comply for their own interests that hung on the line. The Qing officials blindly followed the instruction of enticing the embassy to kowtow without considering the possibility of the emperor accepting the embassy's proposal, which suggested a sense of fear of angering the emperor. To suggest that the mission's unwillingness to kowtow or any alternatives to the kowtow ritual would have rendered them incompetent at their job. So, the most efficient way to keep both ends in check, as the Qing officials actively pursued the agenda of trying to convince the embassy to kowtow, they kept the emperor happy by having him think the embassy was willing to kowtow.

After traveling from Britain to Qing China and spending months on the road and at sea, the unexpected immediate expulsion of the embassy shocked Lord Amherst and the embassy members. The British, including men of the embassy, argued that the Chinese caused the mission's failure, especially the Jiaqing emperor. After learning about the mission's failure

through popular reports, the English satirist John Wolcot (1738–1819), who was known as Peter Pindar, published a poem in the *Monthly Review* in 1817 where he wrote, “fancying thyself all-mighty, Hast treated us with pompous scorn” (Pindar 1817, 223). Pindar evaluated the Jiaqing emperor as an entitled pompous ruler that demanded the embassy to follow his “pompous scorn,” referring to the demand of the kowtow ritual. This blaming of the Chinese for the failure of the mission was also expressed by the embassy men.

In Gao’s article, while using a letter from Lord Amherst to his friend George Canning, future foreign secretary and prime minister, Gao showed that Lord Amherst argued that the failure of the mission was due to the personal character of the emperor (Gao 2016, 606). Clark Abel also describes the Jiaqing emperor as weak by comparing his ability to govern to his father, the Qianlong emperor. Abel praises the Qianlong emperor for having an “active mind,” and one who did not simply accept what was reported to him. Instead, he traveled to see the country for himself and often “[scrutinized] the reports and actions of his ministers.” On the other hand, Abel depicted the Jiaqing emperor as one who relied on his officials and “through the representation of his favorites, whose falsehood or truth he is from all accounts too weak to estimate” (Able 1818, 118–119). While there might be some truth to the British reasoning of their evaluation of the result of the mission, these claims were overly simplified and irresponsible. The British narrative blamed the Chinese entirely. Their claims took away the responsibilities of themselves and even the responsibilities of individuals in the embassy that have contributed to the uncompromising stance towards the kowtow ritual.

The Divided Objectives Regarding the Purpose of the Mission

The EIC’s discontent with its treatment at Canton led to the genesis of the Amherst embassy. An 1813 report from the Committee of Correspondence to the Court of Directors of the EIC to the British parliament described the Chinese trade in Canton as restrictive. It called the conduct of the people and government abhorrent (Great Britain, Parliament, House of Commons, 1813, 11). Henry Ellis, the mission secretary and third commissioner, confirmed this sentiment concerning the Canton trade. Ellis’s writings regarding the genesis of the mission wrote, by 1815, with increasing difficulty in the trade in Canton with the oppressive local officials suppressing the EIC trade, the company submitted a report to the British government (Ellis 1817, 41). As a result of the rising opposition from the local officials towards the EIC’s Canton trade, a second mission to China was assembled and led by the British government but funded mainly by the EIC.

The tension between the government's interest and the EIC's interest became a dividing line from the very genesis of the mission. On one hand, due to its trade being stunted by Canton officials, the EIC called for the mission's assembly wishing to improve the Canton trade. On the other hand, the British government saw it as an opportunity to push for a European diplomatic system and greater trade relations with China beyond the Canton trade. The British approach to diplomacy in the 19th century was a Westphalian style that began at the end of the Thirty Years War in Europe with the signing of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The Westphalian style of diplomacy operated under the idea that "all sovereign nation states, regardless of size or power, being treated equally under international law and the ambassador's main task was to uphold his sovereign's honor at a foreign court" (Stevenson 2021, 22). Lord Amherst's preparation for the mission reflected the Westphalian diplomacy idea. In Stevenson's book, where she quoted from Lord Amherst's "Notes on policy to be pursued by the British Embassy to China," Lord Amherst desired to first, "renew the amicable relations" between Britain and China; second, to "solicit the emperor's protection to the subjects and commerce of England"; and third, to "bring forward propositions for the future regulation of trade." To achieve the three, Lord Amherst proposed first establishing a permanent British representative in Beijing and second, facilitating "open communication in the Chinese language between the Factory and a Tribunal at Peking or a Chinese minister in England" (Stevenson 2021, 120). These notes were based on instructions given by the Foreign Office. Lord Amherst, representing the government, saw more than the need to better the trade in Canton; his approach was much broader. Beyond trade, he wanted to install a permanent representative of the British government in Beijing, the capital. The EIC did not share Amherst's broad approach to establishing open trade and diplomatic relations with China. George Thomas Staunton, the second commissioner of the embassy who was also an EIC employee wrote in his memoir regarding the purpose of the mission: "It was sent out for the single purpose of settling the Canton disputes and re-establishing the trade" (Staunton 1856, 66). John Davis, another EIC employee who was also part of the embassy, expressed a similar sentiment regarding the embassy's purpose. Davis said, "Have most regard to the effect that the embassy is to produce at Canton; complain of the conduct of the local authorities to our trade" (Davis 1841, 56).

Staunton and Davis' view represented the EIC and due to the very different objectives of the EIC, Staunton did not consider the mission a failure. Staunton wrote in his memoir, "Although this mission has often been stigmatized as a failure, it was practically, perhaps, the most successful of any that had ever been sent to Peking by any European power; for it was

followed by a longer interval of commercial tranquility, and of freedom from annoyance, than had ever been experienced before" (Staunton 1856, 67–68). Staunton believed the embassy's refusal to kowtow showcased Britain as a strong sovereign nation that gained the Qing government's respect, improving the EIC's Canton trade. The ideological divide between the EIC and the British government was not simply institutional; individuals of the EIC reinforced the ideological divide between the EIC and the British government.

The Divided Embassy

Lord Amherst had no experience regarding China, but he became aware of the sensitive nature of the kowtow ritual while studying previous European missions to China. In the Foreign Office instructions given to Amherst, he was instructed:

In the pursuit of these objects, you will regulate your conduct, by such information as you may receive from the Company Supercargoes, on the habits and customs of the Chinese government and people; and I am persuaded that in the knowledge and experience of the Supercargoes you will find the means, under the exercise of your own judgment and discretion, of adapting a course, the best calculated to affect the essential purposes of your Embassy. (Stevenson, 118)

The instructions given to Amherst advised him to listen to the Company supercargoes, the "China experts" from the EIC including Staunton and Davis. However, at the same time, the government gave him the freedom to make decisions that he believed would best suit the result of the embassy even regarding the kowtow ritual. While this government instruction was quite broad and did not necessarily mention the kowtow ritual precisely, Davis confirmed this government sentiment. Davis wrote regarding the kowtow ritual, "It seemed . . . that the ambassador had received it in his instructions from our government, to consider the matter entirely as a question of expediency, with full authority to comply, should compliance be calculated to attain the substantial objects of the mission" (Davis 1841, 54). With the government's permission to kowtow if needed, Amherst considered complying. Staunton wrote in his journal, "It was the opinion of Lord Amherst, that it would be expedient to comply with the ceremony" (Staunton 1824, 99). Amherst did not stand alone regarding the compliance with the kowtow ritual possibly bringing success to the embassy. Staunton continued, "his lordship was strongly supported by Mr. Ellis" (Staunton 1824, 99). Henry Ellis, the mission secretary and third commissioner of the mission, also believed in complying with the kowtow ritual.

Henry Ellis did not like the kowtow ritual, but he also regarded achieving the mission's goals as most important. Ellis wrote:

Ceremonial observances required, as in the case of the Dutch embassy, for the obvious purpose of reducing us to a level with missions from Corea and the Lew-chew islands, should be refused, not only as degrading but inexpedient; however, should the reception or rejection of the embassy depend upon an adherence, on the present occasion... I should have no hesitation in giving up the maintenance of the single exception. (Ellis 1817, 53)

Ellis considered the ritual humiliating, undignified, and degrading to the status of Britain, but he saw the success of the mission as more pressing than one's national pride. However, his sentiment was not shared by Staunton. Staunton, on the other hand, believed the mission's success depended on the British holding fast to its values and national dignity.

George Staunton as the second commissioner of the embassy was the second most senior member in the embassy following Lord Amherst, and his opinions were well respected as a "China expert." The abundance of "China experts" was a defining aspect of the Amherst mission compared to its predecessor, the Macartney mission. Unlike the Macartney mission, the Amherst mission included six "China experts" including Thomas Manning, Dr. Alexander Pearson, John David, F. Hasting Toone, Rev. Dr. Robert Morrison, and Sir George Thomas Staunton. Except for Morrison, they all gained their expertise concerning China during their time as EIC employees in Canton (Ellis 1817, 61–62). Staunton was the most famous among the "China experts." As a thirteen-year-old boy, Staunton accompanied his father as part of the Macartney embassy to China. Staunton learned Chinese during the voyage to China, and then demonstrated his Chinese skill in front of the Qianlong emperor where he was complimented for his Chinese skills (Staunton 1856, 12–13). He became known as the boy who spoke to the emperor of China. After Staunton finished university, he returned to China in the early 1800s as an employee of the EIC. During his time in China, he perfected his Chinese and eventually even translated the Qing legal code (Staunton 1856, 44). Staunton's China experience, including his knowledge of the language and culture, made him one of the most credible individuals in the eyes of Lord Amherst. Nevertheless, his experience also complicated the progression of the mission to interact with the Qing imperial court.

Staunton was determined to convince Amherst that refusing the kowtow ritual would gain more respect for the mission and British sovereignty. On August 8th, 1816, to avoid direct conflict, Staunton gave Lord Amherst a letter that stated, "I feel strongly impressed with the idea that

a compliance therewith will be unadvisable” (Staunton 1824, 32). While his letter did not explain why he believed complying with the kowtow ritual would not help the mission, his journal explained that his reasoning was first based on his “general knowledge and experience of the Chinese character” and second it was based on the failure of the Dutch embassy of 1795 (Staunton 1824, 31–32).

In 1795 the Dutch East India Company (VOC) sent a mission to congratulate the Qianlong emperor on his 60th year of reigning on the Qing imperial throne. According to Stevenson, the Dutch embassy performed 30 to 50 kowtows during the entirety of the embassy. On one occasion, Andreas van Braam even humiliated himself with his hat falling off while kowtowing; the Qianlong emperor got a great laugh out of it (Stevenson 2021, 100). Despite all the kowtows and humiliating events, the Dutch embassy left with no reward (Stevenson 2021, 102). The mentioning of the Dutch mission was simply a one-line sentence with little detail of what it was, but this was enough for Staunton to make his point because Lord Amherst and other embassy men were all familiar with the Dutch mission. Staunton saw the Dutch mission as the pinnacle of European humiliation. While Staunton continued to defend his belief, he knew of the possibility of the dismissal of the mission.

When the mission arrived at Tongzhou, Amherst and Ellis were “determined to act accordingly” to the Qing officials’ demand of the kowtow ritual (Staunton 1824, 101). Staunton believed that “such compliance would not be detrimental to the interests of the East-India Company at Canton” (Staunton 1824, 101). Staunton based his reasoning on previous missions, his China experience, and the mission’s EIC employees’ China experience. In 1805, the Russian Golovkin embassy was sent to the Qing imperial court to establish greater commercial trade. While on the way to Beijing, 140 miles from the capital to be precise, Qing officials asked the embassy to perform the kowtow ritual in front of a table covered in yellow silk representing the Jiaqing emperor. After the Russian embassy refused, they were invited to leave and they proceeded no further (Stevenson 2021, 101–102). Even though the Russian embassy failed to proceed to Beijing, Staunton did not shy away from using it to make his point. He pointed out that even though the Qing officials rejected the Russian mission to proceed to Beijing for an audience with the emperor, their expulsion “did not occasion any interruption of the commercial intercourse between the two nations” (Staunton 1824, 100–101). Staunton’s statement concerning the Russian mission was indeed true. After the failure of the Russian mission, the Sino-Russian trade maintained the status quo with little changes other than an increase of illegal trading on the Sino-Russian borders (Fletcher 1978, 323). Staunton’s statement again illustrated that his objective for the

mission was to better trade in Canton and not necessarily to establish a Westphalian diplomatic system. The failure of the Russian mission did not discredit Staunton's argument for not complying with the kowtow ritual. It reinforced his argument by showing that, on the one hand, the Dutch mission complied with the kowtow ritual and achieved nothing. On the other hand, the Russian mission refused to kowtow but maintained trade relations despite it not being improved. To further fortify his argument, he drew on the credibility of EIC members' China experience.

Staunton's fellow EIC employees very much supported his argument. He contacted his five EIC colleagues regarding the mission's stance on the kowtow ritual to better credit his claim. Staunton wrote, "Messrs, Toone, Davis, and Pearson, were strongly and decidedly against a compliance with the ceremony" (Staunton 1824, 102). Staunton's EIC colleagues not only supported his advice regarding the kowtow ritual, but they also believed their China experience made them most fitting in advising Lord Amherst in dealing with Qing China and its officials. Davis wrote, "it was fair to conclude that the Company was the party most likely to give the best advice, their reasonings being founded on their past knowledge and experience" (Davis 1841, 56). The experience that Davis spoke of included "nine or ten years in China," which helped them to possess "acknowledged talents, judgment, and local experience," so much so as to "entitle their opinions to considerable weight" (Staunton 1824, 102). The EIC employees considered their China experience the greatest asset to the embassy. With the EIC employees being the only people with real experience in China, Amherst and Ellis became minorities in the kowtow debate in the embassy. As a result, Lord Amherst was firm in his response regarding the kowtow ritual. Even though Amherst was the ambassador, he did not receive the praises for the embassy's firmness in refusing the kowtow ritual; instead, Staunton received the praises. In a review of Ellis, and McLeod's published travel journals, the 1818 publication of the *Monthly Review* called George Staunton's advice to the Lord Amherst concerning the kowtow ritual as "statesmanlike" (*The Monthly Review* 1818, 9). While Stevenson would argue that the embassy "never split into factions, nor was the leadership group marked by jealousy or rivalry," this essay argues otherwise (Stevenson 2021, 300).

In Staunton's memoir, he wrote of a potential embassy proposed to him by John Barrow with Staunton as the king's ambassador to Beijing in 1809 to explain the recent British occupation of the Portuguese settlement of Macao. Later, Staunton, in his own words, wrote that he was "coolly informed" that even though the embassy was approved, but it was thought "most advisable not to include in it any person who was actually in the service of the East India Company" (Staunton 1856, 43–44). Needless to

say, Staunton was not pleased. He wrote, “It is impossible to express the mortification and irritation of mind which I felt”; he also added, “I still think I was extremely ill-used, and the victim of some unworthy intrigue” (Staunton 1856, 44). Staunton wanted the ambassadorship to make a mark for himself was evident in this early proposal of an embassy. His disappointment of being skipped over due to his EIC employment showcased his distrust and discontent with the government. However, Staunton’s opportunity to make his mark came again during the Amherst embassy. Staunton’s memoir highlighted his accomplishment of convincing the embassy to refuse the kowtow ritual. Staunton included quotes from Henry Ellis’s publication praising him for his local experience to make his case regarding his accomplishment. Regarding Ellis’s statements, Staunton called it “too flattering and gratifying” (Staunton 1856, 69). He also included a letter “accompanied by a splendid silver-gilt salver, valued at six hundred guineas” from John Davis, who became the Governor of Hong Kong, praising and thanking Staunton for his strength during the Amherst embassy regarding the kowtow ritual (Staunton 1856, 70–71). To finish it off, Staunton included newspaper and period articles’ quotes that praised him for his advice on refusing the kowtow ritual. Staunton included excerpts from the *Monthly Review*, *British Critic*, *British Review*, and *Eclectic Review* (Staunton 1856, 72–73). Staunton’s memoir showed great pride in his role in the mission. More importantly, he saw himself and his advice on the kowtow ritual as the most striking achievement of his role in the mission. Staunton greatly respected Lord Amherst, but he did not shy away from gaining certain status from within the mission. Staunton did not shy away from using the Amherst mission to make his mark and, in some way, made it the “Staunton mission.” Staunton’s pride in wanting to use his position and the mission to gain recognition complicated the possibility for the embassy to interact with the Qing imperial court as he imposed his personal views on the mission’s decision due to his personal ambition of using the embassy as a career marker.

Conclusion

This essay took a middle ground in evaluating the Amherst mission. Unlike the early 20th-century scholarship, this essay does not solely attribute the mission’s failure to the Chinese. Nor does this essay overly criticize the British like recent scholarship. This essay does not even evaluate the mission as a failure, considering the different interpretations of the results of the embassy, with some considering it a failure and some considering it a success. Nonetheless, this essay works within the different opinions regarding the result of the mission to examine how different personal beliefs, individual actions, and personal interests from both the Qing and British

sides complicated the potential for the Amherst mission to interact with the Qing imperial court.

The Jiaqing emperor's obsession with ritual ceremonies clouded Qing officials Su Lenge Daren's and Duke He Shitai's ability to engage reasonably with the embassy. Nevertheless, their deceitful actions directly complicated the potential for the Amherst mission to interact with the Qing imperial court. Motivated by the self-interest to appear capable and competent at their jobs, Su and Duke He omitted information regarding the significance of the Western bowing ceremony and the embassy's willingness to express their respect towards the emperor in a modified Macartney kneeling ceremony. Continuing to complicate the mission, Su and Duke He discredited themselves through their lies in convincing the embassy to kowtow. Duke He's lie to the emperor regarding the physical well-being of the embassy directly resulted in the mission's dismissal. While the deceitful Qing officials indeed complicated the possibility of the mission to interact with the Qing imperial court, they were not the sole cause.

George Staunton's prideful ambition of using the embassy as a personal career marker used his and his EIC colleagues' China expertise to will the embassy to reject the kowtow ritual, which complicated the interactions between the Qing imperial court and the embassy. Staunton's motive for recognition guided his participation in the mission to institute his belief that the kowtow ritual should be avoided at all costs. To support his position, Staunton solicited the support of his EIC colleagues, used previous missions as references, and employed the credibility of his own China experience. At last, following Staunton's advice, the mission refused the kowtow ritual, which frustrated the Qing officials and complicated the possibility of the mission interacting with the Qing imperial court.

To fully argue whether the British embassy's actions propelled the Qing officials to act the way they did or the Qing officials' actions propelled the British embassy to act the way it did is like arguing whether the egg came first or the chicken came first. It is hard to fully grasp who caused the Amherst embassy to not progress to the point of interacting directly with the imperial court. However, the involvement of individuals from the Chinese and the British complicated the advancement of the embassy.

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