

CHINA

AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM,
1840–1949

Power, Presence, and Perceptions in a Century of Humiliation



DAVID SCOTT

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DAVID SCOTT

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China is a sleeping giant.

*Let her lie and sleep,
for when she awakens,
she will shake the world.*

Napoleon Bonaparte,
(apocryphal)

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Contents

PREFACE

The “Century of Humiliation” as a Retrospective Icon	xi
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TRANSLITERATION AND WORD ORDER	xiii
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ONE	International Relations, History, and “Images”	1
	<i>The International System and China:</i>	
	<i>A Challenge of Topic and Disciplinarity</i>	1
	<i>Culture and Identity</i>	3
	<i>Race</i>	6
	<i>Images</i>	7
	<i>Sources</i>	9
TWO	Humiliations Established in the First and Second Opium Wars	13
	<i>Colliding Images</i>	13
	<i>The First Opium War (1840–1842)</i>	22
	<i>Humiliation and the Unequal Treaties System</i>	24
	<i>Chinese Responses to Defeat</i>	29
	<i>Chinese Emigration Becomes an International Issue</i>	32
	<i>The Second Opium War (1857–1860)</i>	35
	<i>Geocultural Politics and the Burning of the Summer Palace</i>	43
	<i>Russia’s Drive to the Amur Basin and Vladivostok</i>	47

THREE	Humiliations Maintained	49
	<i>Effects and Aftermath of the Second Opium War</i>	49
	<i>“Self-strengthening” Advocates in China</i>	52
	<i>Chinese Immigration Issues in the United States</i> <i>and the “Heathen Chinese”</i>	58
	<i>The “Chinese Threat” in Australasia</i>	63
	<i>Ongoing and New Threats to China in Asia</i>	65
	<i>Political Restrictions in California</i>	70
	<i>Chinese Diplomacy in the West</i>	75
FOUR	China’s Attempted “Awakening”	79
	<i>China’s Military Revival</i>	80
	<i>Australasian Invasion Scares and Political Debates</i>	84
	<i>American Social Darwinism and</i> <i>Anti-Immigration Politics</i>	96
	<i>Russian Responses to China</i>	103
	<i>An Anglo-Chinese Alliance?</i>	107
	<i>The “March of the Mongol” and</i> <i>“The Chinese Question”</i>	109
	<i>Chinese Voices on “China’s Awakening”</i>	114
FIVE	China’s Further Humiliations	117
	<i>The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895</i>	117
	<i>Eastern Perspectives on the Sino-Japanese War</i>	119
	<i>Western Perspectives on the Sino-Japanese War</i>	122
	<i>Reformist Analysis and Imperial Leadership</i>	127
	<i>“Sliced Like a Water-melon”</i>	132
	<i>The Boxer Revolt</i>	143
	<i>Autumnal Perspectives on the Boxer Revolt</i>	151
	<i>Chinese Perspectives</i>	154
	<i>Reemergence of a China Threat Perception</i>	155
	<i>Russian Geopolitics</i>	158
	<i>Xinzheng Reforms and Chinese Nationalism</i>	161
	<i>The Russo-Japanese War and a Sino-Japanese Axis</i>	171
	<i>Immigration and Trade Furors across the Pacific</i>	176
	<i>Fall of the Qing</i>	182

SIX	China Adrift in a Brave New World	189
	<i>Images of a New Republic, a New China</i>	189
	<i>Yellow Peril Incarnations (Fu Manchu and Others)</i>	192
	<i>China and "World" War I</i>	196
	<i>Diplomatic Betrayals and the May Fourth Movement</i>	205
	<i>Race and Culture, Pan-Asianism, and Chinese Nationalism</i>	209
	<i>The Soviet Factor</i>	218
	<i>Unequal Treaties Revision and Nationalist Agitation-Renewal</i>	220
	<i>National Reunification and Uncertainties</i>	235
SEVEN	Wartime Humiliations from Japan and the West	243
	<i>The Manchurian Affair and Aftermath</i>	244
	<i>The Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945)</i>	252
	<i>Yellow-Red Perils?</i>	258
	<i>Immigration and Extraterritoriality, Strategic Revisions</i>	264
	<i>Perceptions of China's Status as a Great Power and Military Ally</i>	268
	<i>Western Comments on China's Postwar Role</i>	274
	<i>Race, Population, and Immigration Resurface Across the Pacific</i>	280
	<i>Whose China?</i>	283
EIGHT	Legacies	293
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	299
	INDEX	347

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PREFACE

The “Century of Humiliation” as a Retrospective Icon

In 1994 the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League published its Patriotic Education Poster Set, to commemorate “victory” over Japan in World War II. However, the Sino-Japanese conflict of 1937–1945 was deliberately put into a much wider context in the poster *Women zen neng wangdiao* (How Can We Forget), indeed a good example of “the Chinese ‘victimization narrative’” (Landsberger 2007) generated during the “Century of Humiliation” (*Bainian guochi*). In this poster, China’s preceding Century of Humiliation—from 1842 to 1949—emerged as a powerful iconic theme. The poster’s central image was a ruined column from the Imperial Yuanming Yuan Summer Palace near Beijing, which was deliberately sacked by British troops in 1860, complete with a general aerial view of a section of the palace complex. In turn smaller pictures in the four corners encapsulated the Century of Humiliation. From top left going clockwise, the “Opium War” of 1840–1842 was shown through a picture of vessels on fire; the varied “Unequal Treaties” imposed during the nineteenth century were shown through some fifteen volumes on a shelf; the multinational outside intervention to crush the Boxer Revolt of 1900 was shown through photographs of marching troops; and the Nanjing Massacre carried out by Japan in 1938 was shown through graphic close-up photography. The images’ common characteristics were summed up by the accompanying text: “Why the descendants of the dragon [were] reduced to the ‘Sick Man of the East’ and subjected to endless bullying and humiliation.” The lesson, stated there, was “the hundred years of humiliation have told us that when you are backwards, you come under attack.”

This study follows that Century of Humiliation. It considers the power, presence, and perceptions at play during that period with regard to China’s

relations with the world, and with regard to the world's relations with China. The study is neither a study of China per se, nor a study of her internal history and politics during that time period. It is, though, a study of how, on the one hand, the outside world and the Western-dominated "international system" considered and so responded to China, and, on the other hand, a study of how China operated and tried to operate within that international system. It thus deals with what Charles Fisher once called "the great problem of China's place in the world" (1970: 534), a problem for China and a problem for the world. An initial overview of insights and approaches from IR International Relations and from History disciplines brings out the roles of culture, identity, race, and images. A chronological approach is then taken. Here, images and realities collided in a tangled relationship between China and the international system, leaving a substantial post-1949 legacy. China's national humiliation was played out on the international stage. To this period of national and international humiliation for China we now turn.

Transliteration and Word Order

Romanization of Chinese “Mandarin” presents some challenges, given the existence of the Wades-Giles system, first introduced by Thomas Wades in 1859 and modified by Herbert Giles in 1912. Both these figures were scholars, but also British diplomats in China. Their Wades-Giles system is still quite widespread in Formosa “Taiwan,” but generally this is gradually being superseded by the Pinyin system. The Pinyin system was first developed in the Soviet Union in 1931 for use by Chinese immigrants living there, with a slightly revised version then being adopted in the People’s Republic of China, where it was officially adopted by the government in 1979. Here, Pinyin transliteration is on the whole followed in the text for names; for example, Li Hongzhang rather than Li Hung-chang, Beijing rather than Peking. However, quotes are kept with whatever transliteration format they used—often Wades-Giles. A few names still remain more familiar under their older Wades-Giles form, and are so retained for pragmatic reasons (for example, Sun Yat-sen rather than Sun Yixian, Chiang Kai-shek rather than Jiang Jieshi, Canton rather than Guangzhou, Hong Kong rather than Xianggang).

In terms of word order in the main body of the text, Chinese names generally follow traditional Chinese rules of family name followed by personal name, such as Mao Zedong rather than Zedong Mao. However, in the case of Western Christian names, the text follows the Western system of personal name coming before family name—for example, Samuel Lin rather than Lin Samuel. Japanese names follow the Western order. Quotes retain the name format and transliteration system used in the original.

Such language matters reflect some of China’s shifting role within Western-dominated academic circles, and indeed within the wider international system.

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ONE

International Relations, History, and “Images”

*China is a giant screen
upon which outsiders project their hopes and fears . . .
where it might be going,
and what consequences that direction will hold
for the rest of the world.*

—David M. Lampton, 2004

*How China relates to the international system
has been a perennial issue
besetting both the Chinese nation and the world
since China was forcibly drawn
into the European-centred international system
in the mid-nineteenth century.*

—Deng Yong and Wang Fei Lang, 1999

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AND CHINA: A CHALLENGE OF TOPIC AND DISCIPLINARITY

FUTURE, PRESENT, PAST—China and the world matter for each other. From 1842 to 1949, images, attitudes, and structures were forged that shape much of the present debate about China’s place in the world after 1949, as the People’s Republic of China then stood up to, and in, the world (Scott 2007). China’s preceding Century of Humiliation involved both “perception” and “power” in the international system, by the world about China, and by China about the world. Talk of China’s “awakening” was interwoven with talk of China’s “death” (Fitzgerald 1994).

In the story of the West's expansion during the nineteenth century, China had an unusual fate. It did not become a direct Western colony, as did India and most parts of Southeast Asia and Africa. Yet it did not adapt and modernize enough, as did Japan, to enable it to survive intact. Instead, for about one hundred years, China limped along in the international system, neither one thing nor the other. It was the most populous state on the globe, accounting for one-quarter of the world's population, yet it also conceded territory and sovereignty rights to a plethora of outside countries, including even small European countries like Belgium and Portugal with a fraction of its population and size. China was neither a colony nor sovereignly independent. It was in the "Community of Nations," yet humiliatingly seen as the "Ward of [Western] Civilization." Part of the "international system" and its power distributions, it was not necessarily part of "international society" and its shared norms.

China's Century of Humiliation lasted from the First Opium War of 1840–1842 through to the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The changes in China's international fortunes were dramatic. As "a dominant majority civilization that rather suddenly found itself in a minority position in the world . . . in retrospect, China's nineteenth-century experience therefore became a stark tragedy, an unforeseen and certainly enormous decline and fall almost without equal in history" (Fairbank 1978: 3). It brought an extended period of pressure, dismissal, and "disrespect" from the West and later Japan toward China's territorial integrity, legal sovereignty, and civilizational value. As Wang Jingwei summed up in 1928, China became a "pariah among the nations" (1928: v). This situation was unusual for its length of time, in terms of an ongoing ambiguous semidependency.

China's presence in the international system, then and now, has been flush with uncertainties. As Deng Yong and Wang Fei Lang put it, "How China relates to the international system has been a perennial issue besetting both the Chinese nation and the world since China was forcibly drawn into the European-centred international system in the mid-nineteenth century" (1999: 11). Indeed, for Deng Yong, "the experience of China's interaction with the international system clearly shows there exists a fundamental uneasiness in how China relates to the world . . . a highly problematic relationship between China *and* the world" (2000: 42). China has been an ambiguous and unsettling, to adapt Kroestler, ghost in the international machine. China's very presence, in the abstract and in the flesh, was a challenge to the international system. In turn, the presence of the international system in and on China was often an extremely emotive and explosive issue. In part this was because China's weakness enabled outside pressures and humiliating conditions to be placed on it and consequent rivalries to spring up among those outside Powers. For China, an extra demeaning element lay in the Century of Humiliation having replaced and overturned the country's previous preeminence and prestige as the "Middle Kingdom."

That gave rise to a paradox throughout China's period of humiliation, where its "actual" weakness was juxtaposed with perceptions in China and in the West of its latent "potential" strength. Alongside China's ongoing Century of Humiliation as the decrepit Sick Man of Asia lay frequent talk of its awakening and, for some in the West, a lurking Yellow Peril threat. China was seen as a sleeping giant, a double-sided image. On the one hand, it was asleep and inert. On the other hand, if or when it awakened, it was perceived as having the ability to throw its weight around as a giant on the move. Behind these direct images have been the indirect images—for Lampton unwitting testimony now but also then, as to how "China is a giant screen upon which outsiders project their hopes and fears . . . where it might be going, and what consequences that direction will hold for the rest of the world" (2004: 163).

Meanwhile, the emotive ideational sense of "humiliation" had a longer effect across the Chinese political landscape. That period of humiliation and unfulfilled potential cast a long shadow that continues to affect Chinese foreign policy, strategic culture, and *weltanschauung* worldview. Collective memory is an acknowledged feature of national identity and national projection (Halbwachs 1992; Confino 1997). Certainly, the Century of Humiliation entered China's collective memory in a clear and central way. As Hevia put it, "the traumatic events of the last century live on, refracted and distorted through nightmarish dreamscapes about Oriental menaces and obsessions with national humiliation . . . Fu-Manchu phobias in the West and fixations on national humiliation in the People's Republic" (2003: 349, 350).

To deal with this large topic, various integrative analytical tools, approaches, and considerations can be followed from History and International Relations disciplines (Elman and Elman 2001). From their integration, certain overlapping themes become of noticeable significance for the presence and role of China in the international system during its Century of Humiliation—namely culture and identity, race, and images.

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Culture is, of course, difficult to define, though still recognizable in effect. Issues of culture and international power are important issues in History and IR discussions. Among historians, Iriye's paradigm of "International Relations as Intercultural Relations" (1979) is one in which a "cultural approach to diplomatic history can start with the recognition that nations like individuals . . . develop visions, dreams, and prejudices about themselves and the world that shape their intentions . . . the mind-sets of leaders and peoples" (1990: 100, 101; also Stephanson 1998). Lilley and Hunt's "cosmopolitan connection" (1987) deliberately considered social history, the state, and foreign relations together. Equally deliberately, Jespersen's *American Images of*

China from 1931–1949 saw him “bringing together cultural and diplomatic histories” (1996: xv). Strahan’s analysis of the evolution of foreign policy in Australia’s relationship with China also noted the danger of “ignoring or downplaying wider questions of national culture . . . It is necessary to read between and beyond the lines of official records,” for “decision makers did not act in a vacuum or in detached isolation, but in the context of a culture infused with conceptions of . . . place in . . . the world” (1996: 2). China’s normative sense of its own place in the world was diametrically opposed to the place allocated to it in the international system. Westad has argued, in relation to Sino-Soviet relations after 1949 that “the tricky concept of *culture* in international relations does have the advantage that it slips past *ideology* to form general patterns of behaviour, texts, myths, and symbols with an intrinsic value [and thus effects] to a social or ethnic group” (1998: 3). This is also true for various external relations that China was involved in before 1949.

IR scholars have also considered culture. Geoculture has emerged alongside geoeconomics and geopolitics. Dore argued that “cultural differences matter to the student of international order” (1984: 407). Questions of *strategic culture* at the general level (Lantis 2005) and with regard to China (A. Johnston 1995, Scobell 2002) point to China’s past, and to Chinese attitudes and worldview on war and peace generated from its culture. Meanwhile, Kratochwil and Lapid recorded *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory* (1996), and Tamamoto asserted that “culture and identity have been salient and obvious factors in shaping the history of international relations” (2003: 193). Here, Krause and Renwick have pursued *Identities in International Relations* (1996). Certainly national and international identity issues were prominent in China during its Century of Humiliation, as one-quarter of the world’s population grappled with dealing with the international system, and indeed the international system grappled with dealing with China. For Zhou there was the question of “the shift in the balance of power from East to West” impacting on “Qing ideals, sense of identity . . . and the conflicting systems of these two quite different civilizations” (2007: 447; also Zhang and Xu 2007). Certainly, *China’s Quest for National Identity* (Dittmer and Kim 1993) within the international system is considered in this study.

Moreover, China’s role and impact in the international system during its Century of Humiliation has also affected the national identity of other actors. To China’s north, Lukin argues, “for centuries the image of China has played an important role in Russian thought . . . has played a more general role as a reference point for Russian thinking about Russia itself, its place in the world, its future and the essence of ‘Russianness’” (2002: 86). To China’s south, Strahan argues, “the impact of China on Australia was to become profound, even if often negatively,” where “the encounter with China, an old, highly developed and apparently alien nation brought cultural differences and similarities into sharper focus, encouraging Australians to define themselves”

(1996: 6). Consequently, "Australian national identity gained definition and coherence in juxtaposition to China. Australianness was revealed through the articulation of opinions concerning Chinese, and the question 'What is China' also partly answered the question 'What is Australia'" (6). Similar national identity formations can be seen in the American encounter with China and the Chinese, on both sides of the Pacific.

China interacted with the international system both within its own borders and outside them as Chinese emigrants went out across the Asia-Pacific and became the Other in Australia, Canada, and, above all, the United States. Consequently, identity issues have also been in play across the Asia-Pacific, with Chinese "trans-Pacific . . . borderless family networks" (Liu 2002: 16) creating positive and negative images of the Other. San Francisco's Chinese community was, indeed, "trans-Pacific" (Y. Chen 2000). Ong's *The Cultural Logic of Transnationality* saw the Chinese diaspora as generating "tensions with imagined transnational collectivities . . . racial imaginaries that cut across state borders" (1999: 56, 59), something of relevance for the nineteenth century as well as more recent times. Perceptions were evident around "the potential of widely and dangerously innovative powers associated with Chinese diasporic mobility" (20), then as well as now.

Among IR analysts, cultural forces are highly charged. Pre-1949 China can be taken as a classical case to be examined in the studies of cultural and civilizational conflicts in the international system-cum-society, a theme that evokes Samuel Huntington's subsequent thesis *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996). Huntington's subtitle *The Remaking of the World Order* referred to the post-Cold War period of the 1990s, but an equally profound reordering of the world order in geopolitical and geocultural terms was in play between China and the international system during China's Century of Humiliation, and with equally potent fracture lines, "cultural conflicts . . . along the fault lines between civilizations" (1996: 28). Huntington's consideration of "the shifting balance of civilizations" (79) in the 1990s was also at stake in the nineteenth century with the Western impact on China and the shift in the international balance of power from a China-dominated East to a Europe-dominated West. Certainly "the conflict of civilisations" was discerned by Tang Liangli (1928: 218–34) in his portrayal of the West's relations with China.

Generally, Gaddis wonders if "international relations, in its preoccupation with measuring and quantifying military and economic power, did not leave out certain other forms of power" at play in the modern world—"namely the power of ideas . . . human rivalries . . . arguments about religion, ethnicity, language, culture, and race" (1996: 40–42). In IR terms, there may have been a multipolar international system during China's Century of Humiliation, and with it potential *balancing* opportunities for China. However, Western geocultural solidarity, shown most clearly in 1860 and 1900, hampered China's attempts to use geopolitical divisions among the Western

powers. Of relevance is Hoffmann's sense that "states' foreign policies are shaped not only by realist geopolitical factors such as economics and military power but [also] by forces such as xenophobic passions . . . and transnational ethnic solidarity" (2002: 107; also Crawford 2000). Talk of xenophobic passions and transnational ethnic solidarity leads to consideration of the presence and images of race at play in China's Century of Humiliation.

RACE

Talk of race and of racism as an operative factor in international relations can be uncomfortable. Motosada Zumoto, for one, rejected the role of race in IR dynamics, considering in 1927 that "racial affinity counts for little as a deciding factor in the alignment of nations for political purposes" (1927: 9) in the Asia-Pacific. There may, though, have been an element of the wishful thinking of IR liberalism-functionalism in his dismissal of race as a factor, given that his comments came from a speech at the Third Annual Congress of the International University League of Nations Federation at Geneva. In contrast, Tang Liangli was denouncing the operation of racism in the international system, arguing that "the time has now come for the white races to accept the Chinese as their equals" (1928: 229). Certainly racial stereotyping and dismissals abounded during China's Century of Humiliation, as, for example, in American foreign policy (Weston 1972; Krenn 1998a: 1998b; Horne 1999). Arthur De Gobineau, "the father of racist ideology" (Biddiss 1970), provided a running commentary on China's impact on the international system during the second half of the nineteenth century. Banton's "international politics of race" (2002; also Vincent 1984) was not just something to discern after 1945; it was embedded in the IR setting of previous decades.

China has been seen as a particularly significant nonwestern, nonwhite, race-associated presence in the international system. In part this arose from the size of its population, and with the cliché that "demography is destiny." China's population was a fact but it was also an image, a highly emotive image—a "spectre" (Connelly 2006: 302–04). It existed in a more emotive perceptual sense, Lyman's "longer history" of Yellow Peril "racial group positioning . . . a foundational, essentialist discourse on an entire geocultural area and its inhabitants" which was "composed out of a collage of fear-inspiring stereotypes" (2000: 686, 690, 687). For Dower, "The vision of the menace from the East was always more racial rather than national. It derived not from concern with any one country or people in particular, but from a vague and ominous sense of the vast, faceless, nameless yellow horde, the rising tide, indeed, of color" (1986: 156).

Rational perceptions of China's presence were entwined with an irrational counterpart, encapsulated in what the *Atlantic Monthly* once described as "that strange recurrent nightmare known as the Yellow Peril" (1899: 276). In such geocultural settings, "China as a land becomes tradi-

tionally the image of the ultimate Other . . . the unfamiliar and alien space of China as the image of the Other threatening to break up ordered surfaces” (L. Zhang 1988: 110) and international order. For Seel, the Yellow Peril was a “fantasy that projects Euroamerican desires and dread on the alien other. Consequently, as Western nations began to carve up Asia into colonies, their own imperialist expansion was in part rationalized by the notion that a militarily powerful Asia posed a threat” (1993: 10) in both racial and cultural terms. Similarly, for Marchetti, “The yellow peril combines racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West will be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East” (1993: 2). For Lyman, “The idea of America or the entire Occident, for that matter, being in peril from the ‘yellow’ people has something of a ‘geological’ character. It is deeply embedded in the Occidental consciousness of itself . . . an all-too-neglected element in the ‘American dilemma’ . . . the lair of the yellow peril’s firebreathing dragon is to be found in the winding labyrinth of the American psyche” (2000: 727). At the time, Robert Park saw it “as an abstraction, a symbol, and a symbol not merely of his own race but of the Orient and of that vague, ill-defined menace we sometimes refer to as the ‘Yellow Peril’” (1914: 611).

Talk of the Orient brings up Said’s *Orientalism*; “a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient . . . a discourse . . . by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically . . . militarily, ideologically,” and “imaginatively” (1995: 3; also 1993). In short, Said saw this as an attempt “to rub culture’s nose in the mud of politics” (1995: 13). Yet China evaded total control by the West. It always remained too large, not only geopolitically but also geoculturally. Nevertheless, Said still remains relevant, through his view of Western literature as reflecting and affecting, reinforcing and legitimating, political colonial-imperial power structures through such embedded imagery. This entwining of language, images, and power was well illustrated in Hevia’s *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (2003). All this points to consideration of “images” at play in the consideration of culture and power at the international level, and with specific regard to the relationship between China and the international system.

IMAGES

Questions of image have attracted some attention among international relations scholars—what Jervis called *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (1970; also 1976). Geopsychology joins geopolitics? In IR theory terms, the recent emergence of *constructivism* and its focus on the roles of constructed images and perceptions is particularly useful. Like culture and identity, image also matters in International Relations; even if only in Isaacs’ sense that

“images, feelings, prejudices . . . get somehow cranked into the process of policymaking” (1972: xxviii). Consequently, for Buszynski, “all too often images and symbols rather than cold logic and analysis are the [actual] currency of international relations” (2004: 7). Indeed, Sanders has judged that “it almost goes without saying that perceptions of the participants in international relations are often as important, often more important, than ‘objective reality,’ whatever that may be” (2001: v; also Jervis 1976: 28). Of course the perceptions can be very different. As Callahan argues, the IR English School treatment of Western intervention in China as showing “the ‘benefits’ of International Society” (2004a: 312) to China can be contrasted with Chinese views of the same period as one of national humiliation and international inequalities, as the imposition *on* one part of the international system (China) *by* another part of the international system (the West).

Some historians also advocate incorporating wider, “unofficial,” cultural-image approaches to international history alongside a narrower, “official,” political-diplomatic Rankean paradigm. Amid his analysis of foreign policy in Republican China, Kirby argues that “diplomatic history,” with its focus on formal state-to-state relations, was limited, for “foreign policy is but one part of foreign relations, and may in any event be a cultural construct. Hence the importance . . . of ‘images,’ ‘perceptions,’ ‘belief system,’ and ‘cognitive maps’” (1997: 434), so that “as important as the interests and actions of other nation states is the ‘set of lenses,’ through which information about them is viewed” (435). “Power” is itself affected by perceptions, as quantitative military and economic *hard power* is supplemented by consideration of cultural-ideational *soft power*. This brings in the extent to which a country—a civilization, its values, and norms—is estimated and found attractive by others, a matter of image and perceptions, and thereby of influence.

Specific applications have been made to bilateral aspects of China’s relationships. Iriye considers that Sino-American relations contained a mutual “storehouse of images” that could be given “privileged status” in times of “war, peace, or situations in-between” (1988: 39). Garver holds “the history of Sino-American relations is replete with [Jervis-wise] misperceptions and misunderstandings” (1999: ix–x). Hunt similarly argues, “Americans held to the reassuring myth of a golden age of friendship engendered by altruistic American aid and rewarded by ample Chinese gratitude” (1983: 299) during the pre-1914 period; but “what was ‘special’ was the degree to which two distinctly different people became locked in conflict, the victims in some measure of their own misperceptions and myths” (301) about each other. Jespersen’s study *American Images of China 1931–1949* closely followed the “images, conceptions and cultural constructions” at play during that period: “the beliefs, motions, stereotypes, opinions, mental pictures, and perhaps most importantly the hopes that were all a part of the intracultural dynamics of the popular thinking about China” (1996: xix). Such elements of public

opinion and public images affected public policy-making. All these elements in play from Jespersen can be used here, but also extended to bring in fears as well as hopes, to bring in pre-1931 as well as post-1931 developments, and to bring in Chinese images of America as well as American images of China. Lukin has noticed how "mutual perceptions play an especially important role in bilateral relations between neighbours with long and complicated histories, and Russia and China surely belong to this category" (2002: 86) and with it "the psychological problems plaguing their relationships" (10). For Strahan, in understanding Australian reactions to China, the "crucial point here is to note how various aspects of Chinese 'reality' were construed. Facts are not inert and neutral; perception transforms them into different shapes . . . truth was frequently so encrusted with myth as to bear little relation to China's 'actuality'" (1996: 8).

If one stands back, there were various images, hopes, and fears in play: the West's image of China, the West's images of itself revealed through its images of China, China's images of the West, and China's images of itself as revealed through its image of the West. The paired oppositional nature of these images is noticeable. China as threat or China the sick man; the West as evil or the West as savior? Said's *Orientalism* (Said 1995; also H. Hung 2003) can be juxtaposed with Buruma and Margalit's *Occidentalism* (2005: 38–39). In many ways China can be compared to the Ottoman Empire, China as the Sick Man of Asia and Turkey as the sick man of Europe, in which both posed Eastern Questions to international stability. Both had humiliating treaties and restrictions imposed on them during the nineteenth century, both had Saidian *Orientalism* images associated with them. Yet China remained territorially much more intact and with greater latent strength than the visibly fragmented Ottoman realm. China's image remained more enigmatic, as did her power position. Given the myriad levels of images of China, it is not surprising that sources for reconstructing them are likewise varied.

SOURCES

The final point to make here is that there exists a wide range of sources able to be fruitfully used for reconstructing these cognitive images at play between China and the international system during China's Century of Humiliation. This reflects the wider forces shaping international relations among states, where Johnson has noted how "foreign policy is not a neat, relatively technical activity [just] performed by the government"; it "also involves the sometimes uncontrollable elements of public emotion, invidious national comparisons . . . mass media of communications" (1986: 402). The rise of the press in the West affected perceptions and policies. In the United States, Randolph Hearst's Yellow Press was strident in its projections

about the Yellow Peril posed by China, and was capable of swaying both the public and politicians. The Shanghai press was a vibrant outlet for both Western “Shanghailanders” and Chinese commentators. “Media discourse” affected wider cultural and political trends.

Meanwhile, in any consideration of images held at large, the role of literature as shaping, mediating, and reflecting collective memory can feed in, recalling the old Chinese adage that “literature and history are subjects not to be separated” (wen shi bufen jia). Said’s analysis in *Orientalism* linked “a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts . . . scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description” entwined with the “power political . . . power intellectual . . . power cultural,” which “does not exist in some archival vacuum” (1995: 12–13). One can apply Rotter’s focus on nonofficial yet relevant “novels, films, plays, and travellers’ accounts to describe those ideas that shaped or influenced U.S. foreign policy,” in which diplomatic historians “increasingly recognize that realms of culture and politics, attitudes and behaviour, are related in important ways and are at least mutually constitutive” (2000: 1214). Novels, plays, poetry, and travel narratives are also used in this study.

Such high-brow literature operates and needs to be considered at the low populist level as well. Thus, for example, “the Yellow Peril was naturally the stuff of fantasy and cheap thrills, a fit subject for pulp literature . . . and there were many [media figures, analysts, politicians] who addressed the alleged threat from the East in a manner that made a significant impact” (Dower 1986: 156) in society and politics. Finally comes Hunt’s point that “the most influential work in the history of China’s foreign relations has always incorporated the private with the public, the official with the nonofficial, on a stage where ‘nonstate actors’ can steal the show” (1983: 434). Ranke’s “diplomatic archives” will be supplemented in this volume with Said’s “cultural archives.” Language itself matters, in that it reflects and affects images at play. Lydia Liu’s recent work on “the semiotics of international relations” (2004: 5–30) in her *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* comes to mind, as does Hevia’s *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (2003). Meanwhile, whereas earlier studies by Isaacs and others have tended to focus on literary images of China, this study embeds such material more directly into and alongside associated political images—the actions and policies of the day.

Since the international system was shaped and dominated by the West, many sources reflect Western response and projection toward China. In turn, China responded to this Western-dominated international system. Such Chinese responses became a further spark for Western reactions in turn. This use of Western sources is not intended to fall into Said’s constricts and constructs in *Orientalism*, their use is not to say that China was inert and passive, nor to

say that China was faced with an inherently dynamic West. Rather it is a matter of power distribution in the international system. China's autonomy, let alone projection, became circumscribed; it had much less room for action than did the West. Conversely, the West had more autonomy; indeed, it came to dominate the international system. It could and did project its power within the international system onto China in a way that China never was able to do onto the West. China was in the so-called family of nations, but it was also put in a straightjacket for much of the time—hence its humiliation. Yet paradoxically the West often feared China. This story of mutual but asymmetrical encounter now unfolds.

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TWO

Humiliations Established in the First and Second Opium Wars

*The fact of the matter
is that our China must be regarded
as the root of all other countries.*

—Li Ruzhen, 1827

*Imagined attractions of China disappear . . .
a nation so palsied, so corrupt,
so wretchedly degraded, and so enfeebled,
as to be already more than half sunk in decay.*

—Atlantic Monthly, June 1860

COLLIDING IMAGES

IN 1839 CHINA STUMBLED into war with Britain and with it the start of China's Century of Humiliation. What is striking is that the Century of Humiliation was all the more humiliating because it represented such a dramatic fall in international power from China's preeminence as the Middle Kingdom of old. The country's role abroad under the Han, Tang, Sung, Ming, and Qing dynasties had given China recurring preeminence, allowing it to dominate East Asia in a relatively self-enclosed international system. The United States was unknown, Europe but a distant semimythical land of little consequence. Within a restrained hierarchical system, Chinese power was preeminent and normative (D. Kang 2001; also Y. Zhang 2001), but her ritualized tributary system served as "controlled apartness between China and other communities participating in the Chinese world order" (Y. Zhang 1991: 8). Issues of respect, "face," and proprieties were central to such a

Sinocentric system (Zhou 2007; Zhang and Xu 2007: 412–15). In IR *hard power* terms, China's military and economic power dwarfed that of its neighbors, in what Frank has called a "Sinocentric world economy" (1998: 126). China's *soft power* cultural prestige was also high, as the font of civilized Confucian-based norms and standards.

This Chinese preeminence was clear enough. In Japan, Asami Keisai's *Treatise on the Concept of the Middle Kingdom* (c. 1700) acknowledged that "the nine provinces of China are a land where ritual propriety flourishes and morals are highly developed to an extent that other countries cannot achieve," so "for that reason it is natural for China to be regarded as the master (*shu*) and for barbarian countries to look up to China" (De Bary et al. 2005: 93), though Japan's ambiguous reservations over accepting such a hierarchy were already noticeable (Norihito 2003). In China, the neo-Confucian thinker Wang Fuzhi took it for granted in the late seventeenth century, following the fall of the Ming Dynasty, that "there are in the world . . . great lines of demarcation to be drawn between the Chinese and the barbarians . . . the people of China will suffer from the encroachments of the barbarians and will be distressed," though "the barbarians are separated from the Chinese by frontiers. One cannot but be strict in drawing the lines of demarcation" (De Bary and Lufrano 2000: 32–34). An irony was that Wang's Sinocentric nationalistic views were written in exile, and were only discovered in the latter part of the nineteenth century, in the middle of China's Century of Humiliation. He was then to be cited with admiration by nationalists and revolutionaries like Zeng Guofan, Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao, Zhang Binglin, and Mao Zedong! While Wang lamented the Ming's fall to a traditional nomad-originating "barbarian" group like the Manchus, who had crossed the Ming frontiers, in fact the Manchu "Qing" dynasty rapidly wrapped itself in Chinese cultural clothing. Chinese civilizational soft power absorbed much of the Manchu military hard power.

In its initial encounters with the West, China had been able to determine political, economic, and cultural issues on its own terms (D. Martin 2001; Mungello 2005). The Qing Empire blocked Russian attempts to occupy the Amur basin in the seventeenth century, reestablished its own sway across Central Asia (Perdue 2005), and expelled Christian missionaries in 1725. Chinese prestige, its soft power, in the West was also high, with Enlightenment Sinophiles like Voltaire and Leibniz extolling Chinese virtues and state efficacy (Ching and Oxtoby 1992; L. Zhang 1988: 116–21). As late as 1827 the novelist Li Ruzhen, in *Flowers in the Mirror*, wrote, "The fact of the matter is that our China must be regarded as the root of all other countries" (Mitter 2004: 26). As Mitter put it, "when the novel was written, China did not just believe that her own civilization was superior to that of any other country, she knew it for indisputable fact" (26). It was through such confidence and strength that China was able to block the British trade missions by

Macartney in 1794 and Amherst in 1816. In Japan Nobuhiro Sato agreed, in 1823, that “among the nations of the world today, no country compares with China in immensity of territorial domain, in richness of products, and in military prestige” (De Bary et al. 2005: 615).

Three caveats apply here though. First, Japan was still in its own shogunate isolation and so knew little of the West. Second, Sato was ready to argue in his *Kondo hisaku* (Confidential Plan of World Unification) that “[Japan] would inflict great damage on China . . . if our nation attempted to conquer China . . . with proper spirit and discipline on our part China would crumble and fall like a house of sand within five to seven years” (615). Consequently, “after China is brought within our domain, the Central Asian countries, as well as Thailand, India, and other lands, will come to us with bowed heads, and on hands and knees to serve us” (615). The end of the century would see Japan starting to do just that, at the expense of China. Third, with regard to China and the international system, China’s strength within East Asia did not impinge on wider international politics outside that region. According to Gelber, “For the great powers, therefore, the most important thing about China was its relative unimportance; for balance-of-power politics, China was barely a sideshow” (2007: 176). China had the power to make a difference but did not project such power outside East Asia. Thus, “seen from London, Paris, St. Petersburg, or even Washington, China was a far away . . . empire exhibiting an odd mixture of splendour and barbarism; huge but militarily insignificant; proud, but . . . quaint” (176).

Yet in little more than a decade Britain and China were at war. On April 7, 1840, Sir George Thomas Staunton stood up and told the British House of Commons that a clash of principles was at stake, a “breach of international law,” in which “if we submitted to the degrading insults of China the time would not be far distant when our political ascendancy in India would be at an end” (UK 1840: 739). Consequently, “this war is absolutely just and necessary under existing conditions” (745). The First Opium War was about to start. The reason why Staunton was listened to with some respect was because of his own connections with China, or, more precisely, his presence in earlier encounters between China and the West. In 1792, as a young twelve-year-old he accompanied his father, who had been appointed secretary to Lord Macartney’s mission, to China. Staunton had acquired a good knowledge of Chinese language, and in 1798 was appointed a writer in the British East India Company’s factory at Canton, and subsequently became its chief. In 1805 he translated a work of Dr. George Pearson into Chinese, thereby introducing the concept of vaccination into China. In 1816 he appeared as the second commissioner, in effect the deputy, on the Amherst mission to China. Two years later he had entered the British Parliament, where he was also a member of the East India Committee. His academic interest in the East was maintained. In conjunction with Henry Thomas Colebrook, Staunton

founded the Royal Asiatic Society in 1823. He translated into English many China-related materials. The *Fundamental Laws of China* was a translation in 1810 of the Qing Legal Code. This was followed by his *Narrative of the Chinese Embassy to the Khan of the Tourgouth Tartars* in 1821; his *Miscellaneous Notices Relating to China and our Commercial Intercourse with that Country* in 1822; and his *Notes of Proceedings and Occurrences during the British Embassy to Peking* in 1824. It is to that first abortive British Embassy to China, the Macartney Mission of 1792–1794, and a young Staunton, that we now turn.

The Macartney Mission of 1794 is an important prism through which to view the First Opium War of almost half a century later. The Macartney Mission operated “amidst a complex web of words, images, prejudices, and posturing . . . the matrix in which ‘China’ as a world presence and as a historical figment was formed” (Crossley 1997: 597–98), with its entwining of diplomacy, power, and rituals. Qing rulers insisted on *kowtow* (submission) ceremonies because such “ritual techniques established cosmo-spatial dominion, whilst extending Qing rulership spatially and temporally” (Hevia 1995: 55). At the time, Lord George Macartney had been instructed to open trade and diplomatic avenues in China and, particularly, Beijing. The directives given to Macartney by Henry Dundas, president of the East India Company, were clear enough to open contacts between “one great sovereign and another” (Cheng and Lestz 1999: 93), with, ideally, “a treaty of friendship and alliance” (97) to be shaped, “our naval force, being the only assistance of which they may foresee the occasional importance to them” (97). Moreover, Dundas instructed Macartney to make it clear that “our views are purely commercial, having not even a wish for territory” (97). Legal jurisdiction, extraterritoriality, over British subjects on Chinese soil was to be sought. Opium imports from British India “must be handled with the greatest circumspection” and “if it should be made a positive requisition or any article of any proposed commercial treaty, that none of the drug should be sent by us to China, you must accede to it” (97). In contrast, the First Opium War saw territorial annexation and forcible access to opium from British India.

The Macartney Mission indeed represented *The Collision of Two Civilisations* (Peyrefitte 1993). Hevia’s insights are important. Geopolitics was involved as well as geoculture; control over spheres of influence and peripheries was at stake. Etiquette over different forms of prostration (*kowtow*) (McCutcheon 1971), kneeling, and bowing rituals pointed to wider grounds of contestation between “two expansive colonial empires . . . each with universalistic pretensions and complex metaphysical systems to buttress such claims” (Hevia 1995: 25). At stake were “competing and ultimately incompatible views of the meaning of sovereignty and the ways in which the relations of power were constructed” (28). The Qing authorities viewed Macartney’s group as a subordinate trade tribute mission, while Britain considered it a meeting of politically equal states. With neither refusing to concede, the

Qing court had the upper hand, since it needed Britain less than Britain needed China. Ultimately, China could reject British terms, which it did, and could enforce such a rebuff from a position of strength. Young Staunton recognized this power situation: “this great Empire” was “too well assured of the competency of its own natural and artificial resources to be induced to seek . . . too distant and compactly united, to be liable to be compelled to enter into alliances and close connections with the Powers of Europe” (George Thomas Staunton 1810: iii).

The upshot of the Macartney Mission was rejection of British economic and political claims, with the famous edict issued by the powerful ruler Qianlong: “We possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country’s manufacturers” (Cheng and Lestz 1999: 105). This was from a ruler at the height of power; Qianlong’s armies were projecting Qing strength far afield in Central Asia, Burma, Vietnam, and Nepal. As to any missionary presence, Qianlong asserted that “the distinction between Chinese and barbarians is most strict, and your ambassador’s request that barbarians shall be given full liberty to disseminate their religion is utterly unreasonable” (Cheng and Lestz 1999: 109). As to the future, “the ordinances of my Celestial Empire are strict in the extreme . . . Should your vessels touch shore [outside of Canton], your merchants will assuredly never be permitted to land or to reside there, but will be subject to instant expulsion” (109). China was able to virtually throw the Macartney Mission out of China, with Qianlong’s dismissive document telling the British authorities to “tremblingly obey” (109). A half century later, the geopolitical and geoeconomic balance had shifted dramatically away from China and toward Britain.

One revealing voice in 1794 was that of George Leonard Staunton, the Secretary of the Embassy, second in command to Macartney, and the plenipotentiary minister. He was responsible for bringing his young son George Thomas along on the expedition. He also noticed the “avowed or affected notions entertained by the Chinese government, of the superiority or independence of the empire” (George Leonard Staunton 1798: 2.106–07). He recognized China’s influence in East Asia. In terms of regional relations, he profiled a functioning Middle Kingdom preeminence, which “induced the sovereigns of those states to send persons frequently to represent them at the court of Peking. Their dominions . . . vastly inferior to China in extent and population . . . were little able to cope with that great empire” (2.151). Coalition building advanced by international relations theories of *balance of power* and shifts among European states had become well established by the end of the eighteenth century; yet in China’s sphere different dynamics operated. In a soft, hierarchical, unipolar-leaning system, other Asian states could not “rely, for their support, upon the assistance of other princes, actuated by the jealousy of maintaining the balance of Asiatic power” (2.151). Consequently, “it was therefore, become generally a maxim of political prudence with them,

to acknowledge a sort of vassalage to China . . . in order to avoid a more direct interference and the danger, if they resisted, of entire subjugation in a contest so unequal” (2.151).

Macartney’s own comments on the encounter were thoughtful. He could not ignore the current strength of the empire: “The Empire of China is an old, crazy, first rate man-of-war, which a fortunate succession of able and vigilant officers has contrived to keep afloat . . . and to overawe their neighbours merely by her bulk and appearance” (Macartney 1962: 212). He also reckoned that “the project of a territory on the continent of China (which I have heard imputed to the late Lord Clive) is too wild to be seriously mentioned” (213). A century later, and China was in the throes of the actual carve-up of her territory by Japan and the Western powers. Macartney did wonder, though, if China’s very rise was about to bring its fall. In part it was a matter of internal politics: “The Chinese are now recovering from the blast that had stunned them; they are awakening from the political stupor they had been thrown into by the Tatar impression, and begin to feel their natural energies revive” (239). This was to bear fruit a hundred years later, in Sun Yat-sen’s nationalist upsurge on behalf of the Chinese race against its internal Manchu Qing overlords and also against the external fetters posed by the West. In addition, China’s very success seemed to be pointing to its eventual failure—the “imperial overstretch” syndrome later coined by Paul Kennedy in his *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (1988). For Macartney, “In fact the volume of the empire is grown too ponderous and disproportionate to be easily grasped by a single man” (239). In a landscape setting, China’s look was comparable to “the ground to be hollow under a vast superstructure, and in trees of the most stately and flourishing appearance, discovered symptoms of speedy decay” (239). All this lay in the future, but that future was to come in less than half a century.

Twenty-two years later, George Thomas Staunton had risen in the world of diplomacy and politics, appearing as the Second Commissioner—in effect, the deputy—on the 1816 Amherst mission to China. The mission itself came to an abrupt halt when Amherst refused to meet Chinese demands on *kowtow* prostration rituals. The Amherst group was immediately ejected from China, but on its return trip to England in March 1817 Amherst visited Napoleon in St. Helena. The recollection by Napoleon’s surgeon, Barry O’Meara, was one of Napoleon advising against any British attempt to forcibly open up China: “It would be the worst thing you have done for a number of years, to go to war with an immense empire like China, and possessing so many resources” (O’Meara 1822: 1.472). Any initial British naval incursions would be counterproductive; “they would get artificers, and ship builders, from France, and America, and even from London; they would build a fleet, and in the course of time, defeat you” (1.472). As to the issue at stake, Napoleon took the Chinese side: “An ambassador is for the *affaires*, and not

for the *ceremonies* of the country he belongs to. He becomes the same as one of the first nobles of the country, and should conform to the same ceremonies” (O’Meara 1822: 1.475).

As late as 1836, George Thomas Staunton had disparaged British proposals for the use of aggression against China to force trade concessions. In his *Remarks on the British Relations with China and the Proposed Plans for Improving Them*, he advocated treating China on a footing of equality with the other powers (1836: 20). However, he felt extraterritoriality was something to push for: “The Chinese laws, as specially applied, and endeavored to be enforced, in cases of homicide, committed by foreigners, are not only *unjust*, but absolutely *intolerable* . . . undoubtedly an intolerable grievance” (18).

Extraterritoriality had become a rising political demand in Britain. George Thomas Staunton introduced resolutions to the House of Commons in June 1833 calling for blocking the “operation of Chinese laws in respect to homicide committed by foreigners in that country . . . those laws being so unjust and intolerable” (UK 1833: 700). This resulted in an Act of Parliament in August 1833 authorizing the creation of a British court of justice with criminal and admiralty jurisdiction for the trial of offenses committed by British subjects in China. A still wider civil extraterritorial jurisdiction was mooted in a new bill introduced by Lord Palmerston in 1838. Palmerston admitted, on July 28, 1838, that “there was no consent on the part of the Chinese authorities, nor could they [the British government] obtain it without that intercourse with China which it was impossible in the present state of affairs” (UK 1838: 747). The logic was to change the state of affairs in the future. Palmerston may have argued “though the authorities of China had not given their consent, whether they would resent such an interference on the part of the country . . . he [Palmerston] thought it clear it appeared they would not, and that there was every probability of their being reconciled to that proposed exercise of power” (747). Though withdrawn, the matter was postponed rather than shelved, and it soon returned. Amid such debates, China had rejected any such claims from Britain. Such British extraterritorial claims remained abstract theory; they had not been implemented, and any implementation and “exercise of power” would need to overcome adamant Chinese rejection.

In terms of *power*, a crucial factor was that Britain’s Industrial Revolution was underway by the 1830s. As described by Pomeranz in *The Great Divergence* (2001; also B. Wong 1997), an economic and technological gap was opening up between China and the West. There was an increasing thrust to gain markets in China—in the case of Britain, its growing opium exports from British India. Political-territorial imperialism raised its head in the West, which in China and elsewhere went hand in hand with cultural imperialism. China was under threat, within an international system that was becoming global in extent and Western in direction. As a Great Power, to

evoke Paul Kennedy (1988), China was in a “fall” at a time when Britain was on a “rise.” Qianlong’s days of military might had gone.

Hugh Lindsay’s mission on the *Lord Amherst* was already showing these dynamics. He and Charles Gutzlaff were sent, in secret, to survey the Chinese coast during 1832. His instructions were to “to ascertain how far the northern Ports of the Empire may be gradually opened to British commerce,” but that he should allow opium neither on his ship nor allow it to “penetrate into the interior of the Country” (Lindsay 1833: 232). Close inspection was made of Hong Kong, Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, and Xiamen “Amoy.” Although Chinese officials told Beijing that Lindsay had been driven away, in truth he had come and gone as he had wanted, with court officials unwilling “to learn a lesson from the power and speed of the *Lord Amherst* which had proved time and again far superior to all the Chinese junks put together” (243). Faced with the Chinese use of the term *barbarian* (yi), Lindsay had protested, “The affront is intolerable, for by such conduct the respectability of my country would suffer. The great British nation has never been a barbarian nation, but a foreign nation. Its power, dignity, and extent of dominions is surpassed by none in the whole world” (I. Hsu 1954: 245). China had of course long been used to thinking of itself as the largest state, which in many ways it had been, certainly within its traditional Middle Kingdom horizons. However, in a world of global empire building, British imperialism was indeed spanning the world, and as such was unsurpassed by no other state in 1832. Certainly not by a now inward-looking China. Lindsay reckoned that a war to establish open commerce with China would be won in a short time and at short cost (1833: 86), as did his companion Gutzlaff (1834b: 410; also 1834a). China was seen as a paper tiger. Similarly, at Canton, Elijah Bridgman reckoned, “The discipline and the energies of the Chinese soldiery have been on the wane . . . land and naval forces have become so exceedingly enervated . . . they are in fact, for all purposes of defense, little better than dead men” (1834: 35–36).

Confrontation between Britain and China soon erupted when the Qing emperor decided in 1838 to ban the import of opium from British India. Lin Zexu was appointed to implement this Chinese exercise of power at Canton, with or without Western cooperation. Lin’s perception of China’s power in the international system was a confident one. His letter to Queen Victoria reiterated traditional Middle Kingdom assumptions of prestige and centrality: “Our Celestial Dynasty rules over and supervises the myriad states, and surely possesses unfathomable spiritual dignity” (CRW 1979: 25). Any Western exemptions were to be rejected: “The legal code of the Celestial Court must be absolutely obeyed with awe . . . show further the sincerity of your politeness and submissiveness” (25, 27). Trade with the West was not that necessary or desirable for the Empire: “The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians . . . the great profit is all taken from the rightful share of China,”

so “by what right do they then in return us the poisonous drug [opium] to injure the Chinese people . . . the outside articles coming from the outside to China can only be used as toys. We can take them or leave them” (25, 26). Stocks were seized, traders threatened, and European factories blockaded in the spring of 1839. Lin’s *Proclamation to Foreigners* (March 18, 1839) was a confident one, “with the majesty of our troops, and the abundance of our forces by land and water . . . we may sweep you off” (*Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 1840a: 370). There was a basic imbalance between “the power of the few and the power of the many” (372), a balance Lin saw as being in the favor of Qing China.

Colliding images were leading to a collision between states. For the novelist and thinker Thomas de Quincey, it was clear “we must have some sort of military expeditions against China” (1840: 733), in “a land open to no light” (730) and with “monstrous laws” (731), amid “horrible Chinese degeneration of moral distinctions” (730) and a people “incapable of a true civilisation” (732). A “demonstration of our power” (737) was the means, given “the condition of China—full of insolence, full of error, needing to be enlightened, and open to our attacks on every side” (738). Two ironies were involved here. De Quincey had already achieved notoriety with his own autobiographical *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, which had appeared in 1821. His son was to be killed in 1842, in the First Opium War with China.

De Quincey’s essay was not the only one to appear concerning China in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. Earlier that year, the March 1840 issue had seen extended treatment. China was seen by *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* as a target, “an empire, of proportions so unwieldy and almost unmanageable” (1840a: 368). Faced with British power, “the doom of China is staked” (369). British relations and earlier compliance with Qing restrictions were denounced: “We have been willing to crouch to tyranny in its pettiest and most degrading shapes—to invite slavish submission in every conceivable form” (369). There had been “prostration the most abject, to caprice and exactions the most outrageous and despotic” (369). This had been “the sacrifice, too long submitted to, of national honour” (369). Yet amid the blustering on “unheard of violations of international rights” (369) lay wider issues, of Britain’s power in Asia; “the consequences would indeed be disastrous to our Indian Empire” (381) if Britain “shrunk ignominiously from conflict . . . with the Chinese empire” (382). In turn, geopolitical shifts were apparent: “The Chinese have long viewed the progress of British arms and British conquest in Central India, in Burmah, in Nepaul, and in the Eastern Archipelago, with secret alarm” (384). Responsive shifts were already discerned by *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, “as British conquest extended to the frontiers of Nepaul, the astute Chinese overran Thibet, and secured in its mountains, among the most lofty and inaccessible in the globe, a commanding rampart against British aggression” (384). Elsewhere, “as the pride of the

Burmese was humbled before the victorious arms of British India, the observant and stealthy Chinese covered and subdued Cochin-China with their numberless hosts,” and “by this extension secured their natural frontier on the south more strongly against contact or invasion” (384). It was in this geopolitical scale of things that the magazine felt that “China has not remained stationary so far, whilst the world was in motion around her; but has long been arming for the inevitable fight and preparing for the hour of fate” (384).

Several things come to mind here. China’s demographic power—her numberless hosts—was a background feature. Moreover, while doubtful that China was preparing for war, it was true that British power was indeed lapping around the extremities of the Qing Empire. Finally, China may have had relatively secure land ramparts against any invasion from British India. What it did not have protection against was the mobilization of British naval power, and the projection of that into China’s own eastern waters. Certainly, though, China’s “hour of fate” had come. From the *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine’s* point of view, in its profile “The Vote of Confidence in Ministers,” it called for maritime deployment: “What would . . . Nelson, say to such an indignity” (1840b: 422) inflicted on Britain by the Chinese authorities at Canton.

THE FIRST OPIUM WAR (1840–1842)

For Britain, the preceding events at Canton were grounds, or pretext, for war. George Thomas Staunton reckoned (April 7, 1840), “This war was absolutely just and necessary” (UK 1840: 739), though one can wonder necessary for what and for whom. The issue of opium was skirted around: “The question between us and the Chinese government with regard to the opium trade was not a question of morality or policy, but a question of whether there had been breach of international rights or international law” (741). Some voices were raised against this in the Parliamentary debates. James Graham argued that, given China’s “vast importance, the great strength of the Chinese empire,” was it not “better to conciliate them by the arts of peace than to vex them with the threats and cruelties of war” (UK 1840: 669–70). Sidney Herbert thought that “we had proved ourselves to be the less civilized nation of the two” (UK 1840: 748). Charles Buller admitted that he “by no means regarded their fears for themselves as chimerical or absurd” and that China had “great reason to suspect us of aggressive designs” (UK 1840: 786). A young politician, William Ewart Gladstone, thundered that it was a war “unjust in its origins . . . this permanent disgrace . . . to protect an infamous contraband trade . . . this unjust and iniquitous war” (UK 1840: 818).

However, such moves toward war were widely accepted in Britain, its dignity having been attacked at a time when Britain’s position as “the workshop of the world” and sense of preeminence in the international system were on the rise. In this sense there were wider issues at stake, “other issues that