

British Understandings of Manchu–Chinese Relations in Qing China and Sino-British Diplomacy, c.1792–1842*

Until recently, most historians have assumed that the failure of George Macartney's famous 1792–3 embassy to the Qianlong emperor (officially r. 1735–96) signified the inevitability of the First Opium War (1839–42), almost half a century later. Articulated most notably by John Fairbank, the failure of Macartney's embassy was thought to represent the clash of two fundamentally different civilisations: a supposedly backward and traditional China against the progressive and modern British. Macartney's failure thus symbolised an inevitable need for China to open up to the modern world.¹ This interpretation has been dramatically challenged by James Hevia, who in his 1995 book rewrote the Macartney embassy not as a clash of civilisations but as a contestation between two empires with different but equal traditions of diplomacy.² Despite Hevia's critique of the Fairbank school, his work nonetheless still emphasised a certain inevitability to Macartney's failure and the coming conflict, except now it was arrogant Enlightenment Britain rather than a supposedly isolationist China which was to blame. Hevia's conclusion was supported by the established scholarship on late eighteenth-century British attitudes towards China, which saw them as having grown markedly hostile, in

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1. J. Fairbank, 'Tributary Trade and China's Relations with the West', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, i (1942), pp. 129–49; J.L. Cranmer-Byng and T.H. Levere, 'A Case Study in Cultural Collision: Scientific Apparatus in the Macartney Embassy to China, 1793', *Annals of Science*, xxxviii (1981), pp. 503–25; A. Peyrefitte, *The Collision of Two Civilisations: The British Expedition to China in 1792–4*, tr. J. Rothschild (London, 1993). Mao Haijian's classic revisionist account of the Opium War also sees the failure of the Macartney embassy as representative of the Qing's delusional belief 'that China was not just part of the world—it was the world', which contributed to their failure to avoid a conflict with Britain: *The Qing Empire and the Opium War: The Collapse of the Heavenly Dynasty*, tr. J. Lawson et al. (Cambridge, 2016), p. 7. Understanding the embassy's failure as a clash between a modern Britain and backward China leading towards the Opium War is still common in mainland China: see, for example, Ji Qiufeng 计秋枫, 'Majiaerni shi hua shijianzhong de yingjili "biaowen" kao' 马夏尔尼使华事件中的英吉利“表文”考 [An Examination of the English "Memorial" Presented during Macartney's Embassy to China], *Shixue Yuekan*, viii (2008), p. 55.

2. J. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC, 1995).

contrast with pro-Chinese sentiments expressed earlier in the century.³ This still widespread understanding of eighteenth-century British attitudes towards China was used by Hevia to argue that Macartney and his contemporaries had been indoctrinated into a cult of progress which disparaged all things Chinese as backward, with the consequence that ‘China was destroyed in writing well before a single British gun was levelled at a Chinese person’.⁴

Since the 2000s, studies of Sino-British diplomacy and pre-Opium War British understandings of China have brought this narrative of the inevitable hostility between Qing China and Enlightenment Britain into question, however. Robert Markley and Chi-Ming Yang have drawn on scholarship on Qing economic vitality in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to show the complex plurality of ways in which Britons responded to Chinese economic power: in Yang’s words, attitudes towards China in eighteenth-century Britain were not monolithically hostile but instead encompassed a range of both ‘positive and negative assessments’.⁵ Ashley Millar, meanwhile, has directly challenged the narrative of growing eighteenth-century sinophobia by showing that China’s reputation among European writers remained high throughout the century in a range of areas.⁶ In the wider imperial arena, Stan Neal has also dismissed the narrative of the growth of sinophobia as ‘overly simplistic’ and instead emphasised the extent to which the Chinese were viewed as ‘economically useful’ across the mid-nineteenth-century British empire.⁷ In the realm of diplomatic history, Stephen Platt has rewritten the history of early nineteenth-century Sino-British diplomacy to place greater emphasis on the contingency of the events leading up to the Opium War, arguing strongly against the view that Britain and China ‘were somehow always destined for war’.⁸ As for the Macartney mission itself, Henrietta Harrison,

3. The then most authoritative work on this topic, cited frequently by Hevia, was W. Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay: The Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York, 1951). Other scholars have since come to similar conclusions, notably D. Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, CA, 2001). This narrative of growing Enlightenment hostility towards China is still commonplace in histories of the Enlightenment, such as R. Robertson, *The Enlightenment: The Pursuit of Happiness, 1680–1790* (London, 2022), pp. 621–6.

4. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*, p. 73. See also H. Gao, *Creating the Opium War: British Attitudes towards China, 1792–1840* (Manchester, 2019), pp. 8–14, 25; J. Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams, and the Making of China* (London, 2012), pp. 78–81.

5. R. Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (Cambridge, 2006); C.M. Yang, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660–1760* (Baltimore, MD, 2011), quotation at pp. 24–5.

6. A.E. Millar, *A Singular Case: Debating China’s Political Economy in the European Enlightenment* (Montreal, QC, 2017); A.E. Millar, ‘Revisiting the Sinophilia/Sinophobia Dichotomy in the European Enlightenment through Adam Smith’s “Duties of Government”’, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, xxxviii (2010), pp. 716–37.

7. S. Neal, *Singapore, Chinese Migration and the Making of the British Empire, 1819–67* (Woodbridge, 2019), p. 7.

8. S. Platt, *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China’s Last Golden Age* (London, 2018), p. xxvii.

Wang Hongzhi, Hao Gao, Lawrence Williams, Greg Clingham and Andrew Bellamy have emphasised that the embassy was actually regarded by some of its British members, including Macartney himself, as a partial success, optimistically believing they had laid a solid groundwork for future diplomatic encounters.⁹ One prominent feature of this revisionism has been emphasis on the positive attitudes displayed by the embassy's members towards the Chinese they met. Williams, for example, writes of how even in the relatively hostile account of China presented by the embassy's comptroller, John Barrow, the work starts with a woodcut of the Chinese official 'Van' (Wang Wenxiong) who accompanied the embassy throughout, praising him and presenting 'the idea of the civil but oppressed Chinese subject who, when finally freed from the bonds of despotic government, will respond warmly to British [diplomatic] caresses'.¹⁰ As Williams's comment on Barrow suggests, favourable views of the Chinese were often presented in contrast to hostile views of the Qing government.¹¹

What has not been extensively investigated so far in this revisionist scholarship of Sino-British diplomacy, however, is that these views distinguishing the Chinese from their government were in fact often positing a distinction between the Chinese and their *Manchu* government: this was not merely a vision of domestic despotism, but of a foreign, ethnically derived 'Tartar yoke', established by the seventeenth-century Manchu conquest of China. This neglect is surprising, given that Qing historians have become much more aware of the central importance of Manchu-Chinese relations since the 1990s. In contrast to older accounts which emphasised the sinicisation of the Manchus following their conquest of China in the mid-seventeenth century, historians such as Evelyn Rawski and Mark Elliott have argued for the continued and central importance of distinct ethnic identities between Manchus, Han Chinese and other members of the Qing empire.¹² These historians have sometimes utilised European accounts of China in support of their claims about Qing ethnic divisions, including those of the Macartney embassy.¹³ Since historians have long acknowledged that Westerners were aware of the ethnic

9. H. Harrison, *The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators between Qing China and the British Empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2021), pp. 155–7; Wang Hongzhi 王宏志, *Long yu shi de duibhua: fanyi yu Majiaerni fanghua shituan* 龍與獅的對話: 翻譯與馬戛爾尼訪華使團 [Dialogue between the Dragon and the Lion: Translation and the Macartney Embassy to China] (Hong Kong, 2022), pp. 4–5; Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, ch. 1; L. Williams, 'Anglo-Chinese Caresses: Civility, Friendship and Trade in English Representations of China, 1760–1800', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxxviii (2015), pp. 277–96; G. Clingham, 'Cultural Differences in George Macartney's *An Embassy to China, 1792–94*', *Eighteenth Century Life*, xxxix (2015), pp. 1–29; A. Bellamy, 'Lord Macartney's Duelling Fates: Writing, Reading and Revising the Macartney Embassy, 1792–1804', *Britain and the World*, xv (2022), pp. 66–85.

10. Williams, 'Anglo-Chinese Caresses', p. 293.

11. See also Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, pp. 25–36.

12. J. Waley-Cohen, 'The New Qing History', *Radical History Review*, lxxxviii (2004), pp. 193–206.

13. For example, M. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA, 2001), pp. 218–19.

complexities of Qing China, it is surprising there has been no sustained attempt to analyse how Western, and particularly British, perceptions of the Qing's multi-ethnic empire might have influenced Sino-European diplomacy in the run up to the conflicts of the nineteenth century. Although there have been many brief discussions of British perceptions of Manchu–Chinese relations in broader works, there has not yet been a focused treatment of their influence on Sino-British diplomacy which examines their role in a developing sequence of encounters and conflicts, rather than as a peculiarity of isolated diplomatic events.¹⁴ Without this *longue durée* perspective, it is impossible either to trace how these British views on Chinese–Manchu relations developed over time or to evaluate how pervasive these views were.

This article shows that perceptions of hostility between Chinese and Manchus were consistently invoked as an interpretative framework for understanding the Qing regime and formulating British responses to it. Drawing on accounts from British diplomats, statesmen and soldiers involved with Sino-British diplomacy during the Macartney embassy (1792–3), the Amherst embassy (1816), the Napier Incident (1834) and the First Opium War (1839–42), I demonstrate that perceptions of Manchu and Chinese difference and hostility played a key role in how the British interpreted their contact with the Qing. Crucially, this created a cumulative effect whereby perceptions of Manchu–Chinese tensions from earlier encounters helped to reinforce perceptions of the importance of this same dynamic in later ones, increasingly being invoked as a justification for military intervention.

In highlighting the importance of British interest in the multi-ethnic nature of the Qing, this article contributes to the growing scholarly literature which challenges the idea that British hostility towards China in the late eighteenth century led directly to the imperialism of the nineteenth.¹⁵ For instead of growing hostility towards a straightforwardly monolithic 'China' driving Britain towards military intervention, this article reveals there was actually a significant amount of British sympathy for the

14. Peyrefitte, *Collision of Two Civilisations*, ch. 39; Porter, *Ideographia*, p. 234; Ouyang Zhesheng 欧阳哲生, 'Yingguo Majiaerni shituan de "Beijing jingyan"' 英国马戛尔尼使团的“北京经验”[“The Beijing Experience” of the British Macartney Embassy], *Beijing Shehui Kexue*, vi (2010), p. 14; U. Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 40–41, 80, 95–6; R. Markley, 'The Amherst Embassy in the Shadow of Tambora: Climate and Culture, 1816', in P. Kitson and R. Markley, eds, *Writing China: Essays on the Amherst Embassy (1816) and Sino-British Cultural Relations* (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 83–104, at 94; Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, pp. 43, 261–2, 274; G. Abbattista, 'Chinese Law and Justice: George Thomas Staunton (1781–1859) and the European Discourses on China in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', in G. Abbattista, ed., *Law, Justice and Codification in Qing China: European and Chinese Perspectives* (Trieste, 2017), pp. 1–138, at 77–9; Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, pp. 37–44; S.C. Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace: British Knowledge of China in the Making of the Opium War* (Hong Kong, 2017), pp. 58, 141; Neal, *Making of the British Empire*, pp. 60–61; Harrison, *Perils of Interpreting*, pp. 215–16; C. Stevenson, *Britain's Second Embassy to China: Lord Amherst's 'Special Mission' to the Jiaqing Emperor in 1816* (Canberra, 2021), pp. 14, 274, 286.

15. Harrison, *Perils of Interpreting*; Platt, *Imperial Twilight*; Williams, 'Anglo-Chinese Caresses'.

Chinese, whom some Britons viewed as a civilised people, akin to the British in their industriousness and love of commerce. In contrast, a significant part of the growing British hostility towards ‘China’ was in fact directed at the Qing government, explicitly construed as being driven by exclusively Manchu interests. Believing the Manchus to be hostile to trade and progress because of their barbaric ‘Tartar’ roots and their fearful need to suppress their more civilised and increasingly discontented Chinese subjects, some British diplomats came to see the Manchus as the greatest obstacle to British interests in China. Some even hoped that replacing the Manchus with a native Chinese regime which, freed from Manchu shackles and grateful for British aid in their liberation, would open China up to Western trade and progress. While it is important to note that there was never one single hegemonic view of Qing China in Britain, and that discourses deploying hostile views of the Chinese themselves, from stereotypes of Chinese close-mindedness to attacks on specifically Chinese (not Manchu) despotism, also played significant roles in the justification of the Opium War, it is nevertheless the case that this narrative of Qing China’s ‘Tartar yoke’ held considerable power and, as this article reveals, influenced the attitudes of a surprisingly large number of statesmen, diplomats and soldiers in China. By using the term ‘Tartar yoke’, a phrase used by Europeans to describe Qing rule from at least the late seventeenth century onwards, I intend to evoke the work of Robert Travers, who has shown how a narrative similar to the ‘Norman yoke’, re-directed towards supposed Mughal oppression of Hindus, was utilised by eighteenth-century East India Company writers to justify British rule in Bengal.¹⁶ In 1793, the very same year as the Macartney embassy, the East India Company sponsored the publication of *Historical View of Plans, for the Government of British India*, almost certainly written by John Bruce, which presented a narrative of how ‘absolute and oppressive’ Mughal rule had corrupted the ‘ancient purity and freedom’ of the Hindus, thereby justifying British rule as replacing Mughal tyranny with ‘a milder system under British government, laws and police’.¹⁷ Since the Mughals claimed descent from Timur, they were often called Tartars by Europeans; thus Mughal tyranny over India was, like that of the Manchus over China, a form of Tartar tyranny.¹⁸ This narrative of Indian history legitimising Britain as the liberator of innocent Hindus from the oppression of the Mughal Tartars quickly

16. R. Travers, *Ideology and Empire: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 26, 241. The first reference I have found to the Manchus imposing a ‘Tartar yoke’ on the Chinese is ‘les Tartares leur imposent le joug’ (‘the Tartars imposed the yoke on them’): Pierre Joseph d’Orléans, *Histoire des deux conquérans Tartares, qui ont subjugué la Chine* (Paris, 1688), p. 4. See also C. Hill, ‘The Norman Yoke’, in C. Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution—Revisited* (Oxford, 1997).

17. *Historicall View of Plans, for the Government of British India* (London, 1793), pp. 38–9. M. Fry, ‘John Bruce (1744–1826)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

18. See, for example, the claim that India was ruled by ‘Mongoll Tartars’ in Thomas Salmon, *A New Geographical and Historical Grammar* (London, 1749), p. 395. For the ‘Tartars’, see S. Gorshenina, *L’Invention de l’Asie centrale: Histoire du concept de la Tartarie à l’Eurasie* (Geneva, 2014).

consolidated itself in the public consciousness, as can be seen by the emergence of several literary works on this theme, including Francis Wrangham's 1805 poem on India, 'The Restoration of Learning in the East'—restored, of course, by the British after the destructions of 'the fire-eyed Tartar'.¹⁹ These striking similarities with the Qing 'Tartar yoke' suggest that both were part of a global and imperial application of narratives derived from British history to Asia in pursuit of British imperial interests.

The comparison with India also hints at a crucial context for the development of the Qing 'Tartar yoke' narrative. The patron, and even possible author, of the *Historical View* was Henry Dundas, who in 1793 was the Home Secretary and President of the Board of Control for Indian Affairs; he was also the central instigator of the Macartney embassy.²⁰ Macartney himself had served as president of Fort St George in Madras, which helped him secure his ambassadorship to China as a supposed expert on Asia.²¹ He himself drew an explicit comparison in his journal between the lack of integration by both the Mughals and the Qing: 'A series of two hundred years ... did not change the Mogul into a Hindoo, nor has a century and a half made Kien-Lung [Qianlong] a Chinese'.²² There is therefore an intimate connection between a state-sanctioned vision of Mughal oppression of the Hindus legitimising British imperialism in India and the conceptualisation of the Qing as a foreign Tartar tyranny which, as we shall see, was a central aspect of Macartney's account of his embassy. The implications of this had already been seized upon by those with East India Company connections who had even grander imperial ambitions for China than Macartney or Dundas. In a 1793 book dedicated to John Griffith, then chief of the East India Company factory in Surat, Elias Habesci advocated for the British conquest of Guangdong explicitly on the model of Robert Clive's conquests in India, advising Macartney to be 'firm and resolute' with the Qing government, since they were only a 'foreign conqueror' and the Chinese would obviously be more attracted to the 'justice and mildness' of British rule than the 'slavery' of the Qing 'yoke'.²³ The pan-Asian imperial context within which Macartney's embassy operated and his views on Qing ethnic divisions were promulgated, therefore, meant that despite his own personal disavowal of the use

19. Francis Wrangham, *A Poem on the Restoration of Learning in the East* (Cambridge, 1805), p. 6.

20. M. Fry, *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 196. For connections between Dundas's plans for British involvement in India and China, see *ibid.*, pp. 111–29.

21. T.G. Fraser, 'India, 1780–1786', in P. Roebuck, ed., *Public Service and Private Fortune: The Life of Lord Macartney, 1737–1806* (Belfast, 1983), pp. 154–215. See also P.J. Marshall, 'Lord Macartney, India and China: The Two Faces of the Enlightenment', in P.J. Marshall, *A Free though Conquering People: Eighteenth-Century Britain and its Empire* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 121–31.

22. George Macartney, 'A Journal of an Embassy', in John Barrow, *The Public Life of the Earl of Macartney* (2 vols, 1807; repr. Cambridge, 2010), ii, p. 444.

23. Elias Habesci, *Objects Interesting to the English Nation*, I (Calcutta, 1793), pp. 81 ff., quotations at 82, 90, 97, 105, 146–7. For Habesci, see T. Mörike, 'Elias Habesci', in D. Thomas et al., eds, *Christian–Muslim Relations Online II: 1500–1900* (Brill Academic Publishers), at https://doi.org/10.1163/2451-9537_cmrii_COM_30562 (accessed 1 May 2026).

of force in China, Macartney's account of Manchu–Chinese tensions was always liable to be put to violent, imperial ends.

This focus of this article on ambassadors, statesmen and soldiers, to the exclusion of British merchants in Canton, is partly due to reasons of space, and partly because merchant discussions have been well covered by Song-Chuan Chen and Stan Neal. The former has written on how some of 'the warlike party' of traders in Canton claimed that 'the Han Chinese ... oppressed by the Manchu, would join the British in overthrowing the Tartars' despotic regime', while the latter has examined how the extensive network of William Jardine and James Matheson helped create a narrative of Chinese industriousness and Manchu oppression with which to justify the 'liberation' of the Chinese by the British, either through migration to British territories or by British military intervention.²⁴ Studying ambassadors, statesmen and soldiers has its own virtues, as it focuses on how dynamics between the Chinese and Manchus were understood by official representatives of the British state, aside from the particular vested interests of the Canton trading community, but it should always be remembered that the writers we will examine were in close dialogue with these merchants. Some of them, notably George Staunton junior and John Francis Davis, had even been traders in Canton for a substantial period before and after their involvement in ambassadorial and state business.²⁵ Since this article analyses British *perceptions* of Qing Manchu and Chinese tensions, it does not explore in depth whether these perceptions in fact aligned with reality. Nevertheless, since Qing historians have utilised European accounts of China in support of their claims about Qing ethnic tensions, it seems necessary to clarify that the British perceptions of Manchu–Chinese tensions studied here did, to some extent, reflect a Qing reality. Mark Elliott, for example, has demonstrated that Manchu–Chinese tensions were continuously present in the banner garrison town of Zhenjiang from the Manchu conquest down to the First Opium War.²⁶ As is shown below, the ethnic tensions in Zhenjiang which Elliott has uncovered from Qing sources were also noted by the British Lieutenant Alexander Murray during the First Opium War.²⁷ British observations of Manchu–Chinese tensions could, therefore, reflect underlying Qing realities, at least on occasion. The Qing state itself was keenly aware of these tensions: the famous Literary Inquisitions of the eighteenth century were a product of Qing fear, often verging on paranoia, about anti-Manchu sentiment.²⁸ Despite the state's best efforts, however, anti-Manchu works

24. Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace*, p. 140; Neal, *Making of the British Empire*, pp. 58–66.

25. J. Carroll, 'The Amherst Embassy to China: A Whimper and a Bang', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, lxxviii (2020), pp. 15–38, at 17.

26. M. Elliott, 'Bannerman and Townsman: Ethnic Tension in Nineteenth-Century Jiangnan', *Late Imperial China*, xi (1990), pp. 36–74.

27. See n. 141 below.

28. The classic English-language statement of this, drawing on Republican-era anti-Manchu Chinese scholarship, is L.C. Goodrich, *Literary Inquisition of Ch'ien-Lung* (Baltimore, MD, 1935).

continued to circulate throughout the eighteenth century.²⁹ Forced underground, secret societies and sectarian movements became breeding grounds of Ming loyalist, anti-Manchu sentiment, even at times instigating active rebellion, such as the White Lotus uprising of 1796–1804 which used the slogan ‘Restore the Han and annihilate the Manchus’ (*xinghan mieman* 興漢滅滿).³⁰ The notable 1728 case in which an obscure local teacher, Zeng Jing, attempted to organise an anti-Manchu uprising, motivated by his reading of the late seventeenth-century Ming loyalist writer Lü Liuliang, is a good example of the continued circulation of anti-Manchu ideas even among non-sectarian groups in the eighteenth century, while the Yongzheng emperor’s significant personal involvement in the case demonstrates the extreme sensitivity of the Qing state to even the most minor and incompetent of anti-Manchu conspiracies.³¹ The Qianlong emperor’s paranoia about alleged queue-clipping, anti-Manchu sorcerers in the 1760s supports the latter point yet further.³² In this way, even the more extreme statements by British writers that the Qing government was likely to be overthrown by rebellious, anti-Manchu Chinese were not implausible, on the basis of the paranoia of the Manchu rulers as well as the genuine hostility of some Chinese themselves. These predictions of anti-Manchu revolt found fruition in the violent anti-Manchism of the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), during which several targeted massacres of Manchus occurred.³³ Finally, at the end of the Qing dynasty, anti-Manchism emerged as a powerful force of revolutionary Han nationalism, with its proponents laying claim to a lineage that went back to the seventeenth century: Sun Yat-Sen, among others, frequently invoked the ‘massacres’ of the Manchu conquest in his attacks on the Qing government.³⁴ When the Revolution broke out in 1911, the result, predicted by British observers over a century before, was widespread anti-Manchu violence, most bloodily at Xi’an, where the local Manchu banner garrison,

Although this one-sided picture has been challenged, even revisionists nevertheless accept that the campaign was ‘ignited by Manchu sensitivities’: R.K. Guy, *Emperor’s Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch’ien-Lung Era* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. 7.

29. W.M. Chan, ‘Qing Literati’s Quiet Resistance against Qianlong’s Condemnation of Qian Qianyi: A Study of the Ming-Qing Gazetteer Sources’, *Monumenta serica*, lxxviii (2020), pp. 369–92; K. Chiem, ‘Paintings, Peonies, and Ming Loyalism in Qing-Dynasty China, 1644–1795’, *Archives of Asian Art*, lxxvii (2017), pp. 83–109.

30. B. ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads: Creating an Identity* (Leiden, 1998), ch. 8, quotation at p. 254.

31. J. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (London, 2001).

32. P. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA, 1990). The queue was a traditional Manchu hairstyle imposed on the Chinese following the Qing conquest. Queue-cutting was thus a symbol of anti-Manchism.

33. H. Jin, ‘Violence and the Evolving Face of Yao in Taiping Propaganda’, *Journal of Religion and Violence*, vi (2018), pp. 127–44; T. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle, 2004), pp. 139–40.

34. Sun Yat-Sen 孫中山, *Sun Zhongshan Quanji* 孫中山全集 [The Complete Works of Sun Yat-Sen], I (Beijing, 1981), p. 220.

including women and children, were slaughtered by the revolutionaries.³⁵

Nevertheless, although it is clear that British observations of Qing Manchu–Han tensions were no mere fantasies, this does not necessarily mean that all these observations were equally reliable. Even though their writings did reflect genuine Manchu–Chinese hostility, British writers might still have had their own reasons for over-amplifying this phenomenon, as indeed has been suggested about certain accounts of the Macartney embassy.³⁶ Moreover, even if British writers were not deliberately over-stating the extent of Manchu–Chinese tensions, they did not always accurately understand them. For example, most of the British accounts examined here believed Manchu ‘barbarism’ made the Manchus suspicious of trade and thus hostile to the British, in contrast to the civilised Chinese who supposedly loved commerce and looked on the British as potential liberators. Modern scholarship has shown this was wrong on both counts: not only were the Manchus much more favourable towards commerce than British prejudices allowed for, but they were also the ones who tried most desperately to preserve and then make peace with the British, while the leading Qing proponents of the Opium War were Chinese literati.³⁷ British confusion is hardly surprising given the complexities of Qing notions of identity, especially among the Manchus, a people whose very identity was a creation of the seventeenth-century Jurchen state and relied on a banner system which included bannermen who might otherwise be described as Han Chinese.³⁸ It is necessary, therefore, to remain sceptical of all the British accounts discussed here and not accept their descriptions of Manchu–Chinese tensions uncritically. This is especially the case since, in one particularly interesting example examined below, a contemporary British soldier himself concluded that European reports of Chinese hostility towards the Manchus had been exaggerated.

The accounts we will examine at times employed a racial discourse to delineate differences between Manchus and Chinese. Macartney’s deputy, George Staunton, for example, explained that the Manchus were ‘universally regarded ... as Tartars’, not Chinese, because ‘Throughout Asia, men are not so much distinguished by the places of their nativity, as by the races from which they sprung’.³⁹ He likewise occasionally referred to specific individuals as belonging to the ‘Tartar race’ or the ‘Chinese race’.⁴⁰ At the

35. E. Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861–1928* (Seattle, 2000), pp. 190–93.

36. Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, pp. 30–32.

37. G. Zhao, *The Qing Opening to the Ocean: Chinese Maritime Policies, 1684–1757* (Honolulu, HI, 2013), ch. 3; J. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), pp. 209–17.

38. P. Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley, CA, 1999); Elliott, *Manchu Way*.

39. George Staunton, *An Account of an Embassy from the King of Britain to the Emperor of China* (2 vols, 1797; repr. Cambridge, 2012), ii, p. 270.

40. *Ibid.*, i, pp. 2, 488; ii, pp. 65, 123, 155.

end of our period, John Francis Davis, the second governor of Hong Kong, also employed racial terminology to distinguish between Manchus and Chinese, describing the Chinese as ‘a polished but unwarlike race’ and anti-Manchu Chinese triads as wanting to ‘exterminate the Manchow race’.⁴¹ A vision of civilised Chinese at odds with barbaric Tartars fitted conveniently into late eighteenth-century Enlightenment stadial theory, which Silvia Sebastiani has shown heavily influenced and was influenced by ideas of biological race.⁴² At the other end of our period, Stan Neal has highlighted how this vision of Chinese civilisational superiority over the Manchus mirrored similar discussions about Chinese comparative racial status across the mid-nineteenth-century British empire, in which ‘racial stratification’ based on assumptions about the superior industriousness and commercial aptitude of the Chinese led to them being ‘placed above other Asian racial groups ... but below Europeans’ on the developing racial hierarchy.⁴³

Nevertheless, the language of race was not the dominant one employed by our texts to describe Manchu–Chinese differences. Although Staunton and Davis occasionally employed race in the sense of biologically distinct peoples, they more commonly used it in its more archaic meaning as a dynastic lineage—a ‘race of sovereigns’—such as the ‘race of *Chow* [*Zhou*’] or ‘the race of *Han*’.⁴⁴ In fact, there are reasons to think that distinctions between the Manchus and Chinese did not fit easily within burgeoning racial discourses, for, as Michael Keevak has shown, nineteenth-century racial theory often collapsed distinctions between the Chinese and Tartars into the wider racial category of ‘Mongolian’.⁴⁵ Tellingly, although our writers did employ racialist physiognomy in their descriptions of Qing China—for example, Staunton’s comments on Chinese ‘small eyes’—they never invoked it as an explanation for perceived Manchu–Chinese hostility.⁴⁶

Instead of the language of race, our writers more typically discussed Chinese and Manchu differences in the idiom of ‘nations’. Macartney usually referred to the Chinese and Manchus in his journal as ‘two distinct nations’, only once referring to the Chinese ‘race’ and never referring to the Manchus this way.⁴⁷ Although Staunton did occasionally describe people with reference to race, his much preferred idiom also was nation, describing the ‘nations of Chinese and Tartars’ or the ‘Tartar and Chinese

41. John Francis Davis, *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and Its Inhabitants* (2 vols, London, 1836), i, p. 181; ii, p. 15.

42. S. Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, tr. J. Carden (New York, 2013).

43. Neal, *Making of the British Empire*, pp. 18, 60–62.

44. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, p. 55; Davis, *The Chinese*, i, p. 174–5, 177.

45. M. Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton, NJ, 2011), pp. 73–82.

46. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, p. 367.

47. Macartney, ‘Journal’, ii, pp. 412, 421.

nations'.⁴⁸ John Francis Davis likewise referred to the 'Chinese nation' and the 'nation of Tartars' more often than to racial groupings.⁴⁹ To this extent, if we were to use the terms of our writers themselves, it would be most appropriate to describe their delineation of 'national' differences between Manchus and Chinese. However, while it is important to note that this image of the Qing polity as consisting of different 'nations' partly reflects a nineteenth-century liberal nationalist discourse in which the Manchu government was construed as tyrannically denying national self-determination to its Chinese subjects, since in modern parlance talk of the 'national' invariably evokes the language of the nation state, which is clearly anachronistic for the Qing imperial polity, this article employs the term 'ethnic' as a compromise. 'Ethnicity' is here understood as a descriptor of group identity based on 'the social organization and political assertion of culture- or descent-based difference, actual or perceived'.⁵⁰ This matches well what writers like Macartney, Staunton and Davis meant by the term 'nation', which had been defined in Samuel Johnson's famous dictionary as denoting 'A people distinguished from another people; generally by their language, origin, or government' and which our writers used to describe a common identity derived from perceived cultural, linguistic, genealogical and partly racial similarities within the supposedly separate groups of Chinese and Manchu.⁵¹ While 'ethnic' is not a term used by our writers themselves, it seems better than using the emic terms of 'race', on the one hand, as it avoids over-stating the racial element of British discourses about Manchu–Chinese differences while nevertheless acknowledging their contributing role, and 'nation', on the other, by avoiding any confusion with regard to modern concepts of the nation state.

We shall start by examining the Macartney embassy, focusing chiefly on the accounts of its two leading figures, Macartney himself and his second-in-command, George Staunton. Close analysis of these two accounts reveals the central importance of Manchu and Chinese tensions to both men's visions of Qing China. We shall then move on to investigate how the narrative of Manchu–Chinese difference promulgated by Macartney and Staunton influenced and was replicated in the later Amherst embassy, particularly in the account of it written by Staunton's son, also called George. The 1834 Napier Incident marked the first time this narrative of Manchu–Chinese difference was used by a senior diplomatic official openly to justify war with China, and this narrative was then taken up by Lord Napier's successor as plenipotentiary of trade in Canton and the future governor of Hong Kong, John Francis Davis, in his

48. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, pp. 199, 271.

49. Davis, *The Chinese*, i, pp. 46, 188.

50. Elliott, *Manchu Way*, p. 16.

51. Quoted in A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 14. As Hastings shows, this concept of nation had deep historical and religious roots, which sit only in uneasy precedence to discourses of modern nationalism, *ibid.*, pp. 15 ff.

definitive work on Chinese history, published just three years before the outbreak of the First Opium War. During the war, the accounts of British soldiers show both the influence and, intriguingly, the limitations of the narrative of Manchu–Chinese divisions when faced with the reality of the war itself. Even after the war had concluded, several British newspapers drew on these earlier writings to reproduce the narrative of Manchu–Chinese difference and hostility as a way of justifying the war and calling for further concessions following the Treaty of Nanjing (1842).

I

Europeans had been commenting on ethnic differences within the Qing regime ever since the Manchu conquest in the mid-seventeenth century. Although Jesuit accounts of the conquest generated widespread belief that the new Qing dynasty had established relative ethnic harmony, mostly through the sinicisation of the Manchus, Europeans nevertheless believed the two peoples had fundamentally different pre-conquest ethnic identities.⁵² The Chinese were universally acknowledged, even by their European detractors, to be culturally sophisticated and materially wealthy.⁵³ The Manchus, mostly known to pre-modern Europeans as ‘Tartars’, were in contrast thought to be a simple, nomadic people, whose lives were dominated by warfare rather than the refined luxuries of the Chinese.⁵⁴ These characteristics were open to both praise and criticism: some praised the Manchus as examples of martial prowess and virtuous frugality while others criticised their barbarity and supposed propensity for violence; some praised the Chinese for their wealth, culture and long history, while others dismissed them as effeminate and close-minded.⁵⁵ Although these conceptions could be combined and employed in diverse ways, some of which were more sympathetic to the Manchus and more critical of the Chinese, they most readily lent themselves to a civilisational discourse in which the Manchu ‘Tartars’ were disdained as brutal barbarians while the Chinese were praised as polite and civilised. This seems to have been the view of Oliver Goldsmith, a founding member of Samuel Johnson’s influential literary club which Macartney himself would later join and even become president of, who wrote that the ‘Chinese and we are pretty much alike’,

52. E. van Kley, ‘News from China: Seventeenth-Century European Notices of the Manchu Conquest’, *Journal of Modern History*, xlv (1973), pp. 561–82, at 565.

53. Yang, *Performing China*, pp. 4–10.

54. S. Dong, ‘Tartars in European Missionary Writing from the Seventeenth Century’, in T. Weststeijn, ed., *Foreign Devils and Philosophers: Cultural Encounters between the Chinese, the Dutch, and Other Europeans, 1590–1800* (Leiden, 2020), pp. 82–103, at 96. This image of Manchu simplicity was promoted by the Manchus themselves: Tsai Ming-Che 蔡名哲, ‘Manzhouren de chunpu cong he tanqi: yige yanjiu gainian de tantao’ 滿洲人的淳樸從何談起：一個研究概念的探討 [‘When did discussions of Manchu simplicity begin: A conceptual inquiry’], *Chengda Lishi Xuebao*, xlix (2015), pp. 213–56.

55. Dong, ‘Tartars in European Missionary Writing’, pp. 94–9; Yang, *Performing China*.

while the Tartars were dismissed as being sub-human, mere ‘animals in human form’.⁵⁶ While they also undoubtedly drew on other, sometimes contradictory, traditions of understanding China, such as Jesuit conceptions of virtuous Chinese kingship and Montesquieu-influenced ideas of Chinese despotism, this dichotomous, civilisational view of the Chinese and Manchus nevertheless seems to have heavily influenced the accounts of the Qing government written by Macartney and his second-in-command, George Staunton.⁵⁷

Differences between the Chinese and Manchus were central to Macartney’s account of China. In his general notes, he wrote that ‘It should never be absent from our recollection that there are now two distinct nations in China ... the Chinese and the Tartars, whose characters essentially differ’.⁵⁸ Both he and Staunton frequently commented upon the ethnic backgrounds of those they met during the embassy, for example, referring to officials who accompanied them, such as ‘Chin ta gin’ (Zhengrui), as ‘the Tartar legate’ or ‘the Tartar Mandarin’, and Wang Wenxiong and Qiao Renjie as being ‘of a Chinese race’.⁵⁹ The general image of the relationship between the Manchus and Chinese presented by Macartney and Staunton was one of conflict and disunity, for which the Manchus were usually blamed. Macartney believed Wang and Qiao disliked the ‘perverse and unfriendly’ ‘Tartar legate’ Zhengrui, ascribing their feelings to the empire’s policy of preferential treatment for Manchus, stating that whenever ‘we have had opportunities of conversing with them [Wang and Qiao] in the absence of the legate [Zhengrui], they have scarcely disguised their sense of the emperor’s partiality to the Tartars in preference to his Chinese subjects’.⁶⁰ Later he tells an anecdote of how, after crossing the Great Wall, a Manchu servant accused of stealing refused to submit to punishment by Chinese officials, claiming that ‘a Chinese mandarin had no right to bamboo a Tartar without side of the great wall’. The servant was eventually punished and while this was being carried out, Macartney recorded that Wang Wenxiong ‘could not help saying to our interpreter, “A Tartar will always be a Tartar”’. Macartney concluded that this affair ‘strongly marks the jealousy that subsists between the Chinese and Tartars’.⁶¹ Staunton also gave an account of this episode and similarly remarked upon the seeming hostility between Zhengrui and the embassy’s

56. Oliver Goldsmith, ‘A Citizen of the World’, *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. A. Friedman (5 vols, Oxford, 1966), ii, pp. 13–14, 355. For Johnson’s club, see L. Damrosch, *The Club: Johnson, Boswell, and the Friends Who Shaped an Age* (New Haven, CT, 2019). Goldsmith and Macartney never crossed over at the club, however, as Goldsmith died in 1774 and Macartney joined in 1786; P. Roebuck, ‘Later Years, 1780–1806’, in Roebuck, ed., *Public Service and Private Fortune*, pp. 278–307, at 280.

57. J. Chen, ‘The British View of Chinese Civilization and the Emergence of Class Consciousness’, *The Eighteenth Century*, xlv (2004), pp. 193–206. For Montesquieu, see *ibid.*, p. 200.

58. Macartney, ‘Journal’, ii, p. 412.

59. Macartney, ‘Journal’, ii, p. 190; Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, p. 65.

60. Macartney, ‘Journal’, ii, pp. 191, 202.

61. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 245.

‘Chinese fellow-travellers’, Wang and Qiao, claiming they had no influence over the legate because they were ‘of a Chinese race’, there being ‘a secret but strong antipathy still subsisting between those two nations’.⁶²

These observations of Manchu–Chinese tension and hostility led Macartney and Staunton to believe that Manchu rule of China was alien, unjust, and even tyrannical. Staunton invoked a civilisational discourse to reject the old Jesuit narrative of Qing ethnic harmony, arguing that far from the Manchus being effectively sinicised, the Chinese still ‘consider the Tartars in general in the light of barbarians’.⁶³ Following up on this language of barbarism, Staunton concluded that, far from creating a harmonious multi-ethnic regime, nothing since the Qing conquest had been able ‘to overcome the opposition approaching to antipathy, which must have previously subsisted between a warlike people ever endeavouring to invade, and a civilised people always struggling to exclude’.⁶⁴ This foundational and seemingly irradicable civilisational divide meant the Qing regime was fundamentally unjust, since the conquest had established a ‘partiality in all differences between Tartars and Chinese’, in which the ‘balance of justice’ had been tilted towards the Tartars, as is natural in relations ‘between the conquerors and the conquered’.⁶⁵

While Staunton condemned the Qing regime as alien and unjust, Macartney openly denounced it as a foreign tyranny. He argued that ‘the ancient constitution of China’ had been over-turned by the Manchus who ‘introduced’ a ‘despotism’ which, although partially moderated by the early Qing emperors, nevertheless ‘differed essentially’ from ancient Chinese ‘government by law’ and instead transformed China into ‘the tyranny of a handful of Tartars over more than three hundred millions of Chinese’.⁶⁶ Explicitly criticising the older tradition of sinicisation propounded by the Jesuits which ‘confounds’ the Tartars and Chinese together, Macartney stated that fundamental differences between the two peoples persisted—‘the nature and character of each continue unchanged’—and that this had resulted in the Tartars lording it over their oppressed Chinese subjects: ‘superiority animates the one, depression is felt by the other’.⁶⁷ Echoing Staunton, Macartney decried the whole situation as fundamentally unjust: ‘it could scarcely be expected that the balance of justice should be held with an equal hand between the conquerors and the conquered’.⁶⁸

This vision of Manchu tyranny had an ambiguous relationship to more established visions of Chinese despotism. Although Macartney’s declaration that China’s ‘government by law’ ‘differed essentially’ from Qing

62. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, pp. 199, 65.

63. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 419.

64. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 271.

65. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 496.

66. Macartney, ‘Journal’, ii, pp. 441–2.

67. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 443.

68. *Ibid.*, ii, p. 449.

Tartar 'tyranny' might suggest he aimed to replace European conceptions of China's native despotism with a vision of purely Manchu tyranny, he did also call China's pre-Qing governments 'despotic'.⁶⁹ Ultimately, he declared that both Manchus and Chinese were 'subject to the most absolute authority that can be vested in a prince, but with this distinction, that to the Chinese it is a foreign tyranny; to the Tartars a domestic despotism'. Nevertheless, this 'foreign tyranny' was clearly a dramatic level of oppression above 'domestic despotism', since at least the Manchus 'consider themselves as ... partakers of their sovereign's dominion over the [Chinese]'.⁷⁰ Macartney thus issued a nuanced revision of European visions of Chinese despotism, maintaining its roots in supposedly native Chinese tradition while simultaneously arguing that the Qing Manchu government represented an even more oppressive 'tyranny' of an alien conquering ruler.

Consequently, Macartney and Staunton both detected rebelliousness among the Chinese towards their supposedly tyrannical Tartar rulers. Following his discussion of the civilisational differences and widespread hostility between the Tartars and Chinese, Staunton noted that it is a 'common saying' in China that 'no half a dozen natives [Chinese] are assembled for an hour, before they begin to clamour against the Tartars'. Because of this supposedly widespread Chinese discontent, Staunton predicted the Qing dynasty would not last much longer, since it had 'already lasted almost as long as the average' length of preceding dynasties.⁷¹ He also noted that the Manchus themselves were aware of this Chinese rebelliousness and consequently felt insecure in their position as rulers. According to Staunton, the 'mistrust' of the embassy on the part of 'almost every Tartar chief' was because they were concerned about the spreading of the 'new French principles' to China, instigating a Chinese revolution against Manchu rule.⁷²

Macartney himself drew this parallel with the French revolution in his general notes on China. He wrote that 'The Chinese are now ... awakening from the political stupor they had been thrown into by the Tartars' but also warned that if they are 'not led to emancipation by degrees, but let loose on a burst of enthusiasm, [they] would probably fall into all the excesses of folly ... and be found as unfit for the enjoyment of freedom as the French and the negroes'.⁷³ Although Macartney unsurprisingly disavowed the French and Haitian revolutions, his comparison of the situation in China to them demonstrates his belief that Manchu rule had created a similar revolutionary desire among the Chinese. Like Staunton,

69. Ibid., ii, p. 441.

70. Ibid., ii, p. 412.

71. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, p. 271.

72. Ibid., ii, p. 133. Staunton was supportive of the French Revolution: Harrison, *Perils of Interpreting*, p. 62.

73. Macartney, 'Journal', ii, pp. 447-8.

Macartney cast significant doubt upon the dynasty's long-term future, writing, 'I am very much mistaken, if all the authority ... of the Tartar government will be able to much longer stifle the energies of their Chinese subjects. Scarcely a year now passes without an insurrection in some of the provinces'.⁷⁴

Such a revolution would seem to be in the best interests of the British state. Macartney and Staunton both argued throughout their accounts that the chief opposition to the embassy's goals, particularly of expanding trade, was a result of the Manchu government and not the Chinese people. Indeed, the Chinese people themselves were consistently portrayed as passionate about commerce. Macartney praised 'The common people of China' as 'a strong hardy race, patient, industrious, and much given to traffic and all the arts of gain'.⁷⁵ Their love of 'the arts of gain' would seem to make them hospitable for commerce and receiving the English embassy, a perspective supported by Staunton's claim that the restrictions on trade in Canton were not a customary Chinese tradition but had been imposed 'since the Tartar conquest'.⁷⁶ Current opposition in the court towards commerce was said to be the result of the hostility to trade of 'several statesmen of China, especially Tartars', who were concerned by the potential for 'disturbance occasioned by the admission of foreign trade', another sign of possible Chinese rebelliousness.⁷⁷ British commerce was thus supposedly being held back primarily by the Manchu government's hostility to trade, not by the Chinese people, who had historically been more sympathetic to commerce. This conclusion is further suggested by an anecdote Macartney told about a Chinese merchant in Canton who wanted to build a ship on the 'English model'—in Macartney's eyes a sure sign of a desire for innovation and progress—but was punished for 'departing from the ancient established modes of the empire'. This is said to be a consequence of the policy of the 'Tartar government', which 'betrays the conscious fear and jealousy' that the Qing 'entertain of their subjects' taste for novelty'.⁷⁸ By preventing the Chinese from learning from the British, particularly in the commercially important area of shipbuilding, the 'Tartar government' was suppressing the Chinese people's natural commercial instinct out of fear that innovation and commerce would breed discontent and possible rebellion. The benefits for the British of such an anti-Manchu revolution are clear, however; instead of dealing with obstructive Tartars, they would

74. Ibid., ii, p. 365.

75. Ibid., ii, p. 421.

76. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, p. 563. This was a confused understanding of Chinese trade policy. In fact, the early Qing government had initially relaxed the maritime trading restrictions of the Ming: Zhao, *Qing Opening*, ch. 2.

77. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, p. 562.

78. Macartney, 'Journal', ii, p. 497. Recent scholarship suggests that late eighteenth-century Manchus were more interested in European science and technology than their Chinese counterparts: A. Statman, *A Global Enlightenment: Western Progress and Chinese Science* (Chicago, IL, 2023), pp. 86–106.

be able to deal with Chinese eager to trade and to learn from the 'English model'.

It is important to note, however, that other accounts of the embassy did not present the same vision of conflict between Manchus and Chinese. The popular account by John Barrow, for example, put less emphasis on ethnic tension, and was highly critical of the Chinese themselves, associating Qing despotism not with Tartar tyranny but solely with the traditions of the Chinese themselves.⁷⁹ Accounts of the embassy written by those outside of the embassy's upper echelons, such as Macartney's valet Aeneas Anderson and the sergeant-major Samuel Holmes, show little awareness of there even being any significant differences between Chinese and Manchus. As we have seen above, Macartney and Staunton continually highlighted ethnic differences and described the people they met in ethnic terms, such as 'the Tartar legate'. Anderson and Holmes, in contrast, very rarely distinguished between different Manchu and Chinese people and did not draw any distinction between an alien Tartar government and their oppressed Chinese subjects. Indeed, when describing their visit to the Great Wall, Anderson commented that the wall 'has lost its importance' because, since the Qing conquest, 'Tartary and China are become one nation', a cliché of the Jesuit narrative of ethnic harmony.⁸⁰ This contrasts dramatically with Staunton's description of how the wall 'continues still to be considered as a demarkation between the respective nations of Chinese and Tartars'.⁸¹

Hao Gao explains this disparity by arguing that Macartney and Staunton may have presented the Manchu oppression of the Chinese in the way they did as one means of excusing the embassy's failure, for which as the mission's leaders they were chiefly responsible.⁸² This may well be the case, but it might also be true that since the more senior members of the embassy had privileged access to the embassy's translator, Li Zibiao, they had better opportunities to understand the politics of Qing ethnic divisions. For example, the fact that Anderson's description of the Great Wall omits the above-mentioned dispute with the Manchu servant and Wang Wenxiong's comment on it, reported by Macartney and Staunton, suggests he was not privy to Li's interpreting, which in any case would have been in Latin which Anderson is unlikely to have spoken.⁸³ Could Anderson plausibly have understood the wall as symbolising the unification of the Tartar and

79. John Barrow, *Travels in China* (1804; repr. Cambridge, 2010); Peyrefitte, *Collision of Two Civilisations*, pp. 243–5; Chen, 'British View of Chinese Civilization', p. 201.

80. Aeneas Anderson, *Narrative of the British Embassy to China, in the Years 1792, 1793 and 1794* (London, 1795), p. 132.

81. Staunton, *Account of an Embassy*, ii, p. 199.

82. Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, pp. 30–32.

83. On Latin as the medium of translation, see Wang, *Dialogue of the Dragon and the Lion*, pp. 18–19. On the role of the embassy's translator Li Zibiao in mediating ethnic differences and his intimacy with Macartney and Staunton, see Harrison, *Perils of Interpreting*, pp. 115, 139–40. Li also spoke Italian with Macartney: *ibid.*, p. 67. Since the incident at the Great Wall was reported by both Staunton and Macartney, it is likely Li was using Latin instead of Italian on this occasion.

Chinese ‘nations’ if he had understood the ethnic significance of the event that was playing out before his eyes as Macartney and Staunton did?

The only time when Anderson does credit Manchu–Chinese difference with having a political impact is particularly suggestive:

We were not unwilling to believe, as it was propagated among us by some of the Chinese, that a Tartar mandarin had been able to prejudice the Emperor against the English people ... nor were many of the suite indisposed to believe that from such an unpropitious circumstance the embassy had been treated ... with such strange disrespect and peremptory dismissal.⁸⁴

That it was supposedly ‘the Chinese’ who spread this rumour about the ‘Tartar mandarin’ emphasises the mandarin’s ethnic status and might even hint at a belief that ‘the Chinese’ themselves were dissatisfied with the Tartar’s decision, and thus were more sympathetic to the British. This is further suggested by Anderson’s later comment that Wang Wenxiong, who Macartney reported was dissatisfied with Manchu preferential treatment, had protested to the emperor on Britain’s behalf. It seems plausible that Wang may have tried to mollify British disappointment at their rejection by blaming unfair Manchu influence, much as Chinese officials would later attempt to convince Lord Amherst to kowtow by presenting it as an arbitrary Manchu ritual.⁸⁵ That Anderson frames this as a collective belief on the part of the embassy—‘we’, ‘us’, ‘many of the suite’—rather than his personal opinion suggests he learnt about this rumour from others, probably Macartney and Staunton who had the easiest access to the ‘Chinese’ officials—almost certainly Wang—who had ‘propagated’ this reason for the embassy’s failure.

Macartney’s and Staunton’s greater familiarity with specialist works on Chinese history might also have had something to do with their greater sensitivity to Manchu–Chinese divisions. Macartney knew all about the overthrow of the earlier ‘Tartar’ (Mongol) Yuan dynasty (1271–1368) and was familiar with some of the most important sinological materials of the day, including the Jesuit Jean Baptiste du Halde’s *Description ... de l’Empire de la Chine* (1735), the *Memoires concernant ... des Chinois* (1776–1814), and John Bell’s 1763 travelogue, all of which contained plentiful information about Manchu–Chinese ethnic differences.⁸⁶ As has already been noted, it is possible too that Macartney’s and Staunton’s previous experiences in post-Mughal India made them more sensitive to the tensions between a conquering regime of ‘Tartars’ and their subjects.

Regardless of how we account for these differences between members of the embassy, if we focus on how Macartney and Staunton understood

84. Anderson, *Narrative of the British Embassy*, p. 187.

85. *Ibid.* For Wang’s dissatisfaction with the Manchus, see n. 62 above. For Amherst and the kowtow, see n. 99 below.

86. J.L. Cranmer-Byng, ‘China, 1792–94’, in Roebuck, ed., *Public Service and Private Fortune*, pp. 216–43, at 222 n. 17. For the Yuan, see Macartney, ‘Journal’, ii, pp. 271–2.

the ethnic dynamics of the Qing empire, we can conclude that, far from being Enlightenment sinophobes, their attitudes towards the Chinese themselves were often relatively positive, viewing them as a civilised people who, like the British, were industrious and commercially minded. Their attitudes towards China's government, however, were much more hostile: with a barbaric 'Tartar' heritage and fearful of rebellion by their oppressed Chinese subjects, the Qing government was thought to be the main obstacle to British interests, as well as the interests of the Chinese people. Macartney himself explicitly disavowed the use of violence in pursuing British interests in China—'our present interests, our reason, and our humanity equally forbid the thought of any offensive measures'—although he did fantasise about what might happen in the event of a British invasion.⁸⁷ Despite this professed disavowal, the framework he and Staunton developed for thinking about the relationship between the Manchus and Chinese could clearly lend itself to a military pursuit of British interests presented in terms of liberating the Chinese from oppressive Tartar rule. As we shall see, this was indeed the kind of language which was used by the British in the build up to and during the First Opium War.

II

Although the Macartney embassy has often been viewed as a failure by historians, at the time it was seen as only a partial one. While it did not achieve its concrete aims of opening more Chinese ports for trade or establishing a permanent British resident in Beijing, at least some Britons thought Macartney had done a good job at establishing first contact with China and laying the ground for future embassies.⁸⁸ This led to the Amherst embassy in 1816. Sent out to resolve disputes in Canton and to try and secure further trading privileges for the East India Company, Amherst's embassy was, compared with Macartney's, an unmitigated failure, with Amherst's refusal to perform the 'kowtow' ceremony meaning he was not even permitted an audience with the Jiaqing emperor (officially r. 1796–1820) and leading to the embassy's unceremonious early expulsion from Beijing.⁸⁹ Although Amherst's own journal detailing the embassy was lost, several other members of the embassy published their own accounts upon their return to Britain. They included George Staunton, the son of Macartney's second-in-command, who as a boy had accompanied his father to China and learnt to speak Chinese.⁹⁰ In all these accounts

87. Macartney, 'Journal', ii, pp. 397–9; Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*, pp. 201–2.

88. Williams, 'Anglo-Chinese Caresses', p. 289; Bellamy, 'Lord Macartney's Duelling Fates'. Gao argues that Macartney and Staunton's attempt to present the mission as a partial success was a deliberate strategy to cover up their failure: *Creating the Opium War*, pp. 32–3.

89. For a qualifying judgement, see Carroll, 'Amherst Embassy'.

90. See Harrison, *Perils of Interpreting*. The two Stauntons are distinguished hereafter by 'senior' to refer to the father and 'junior' for the son.

of the embassy, but in that of Staunton junior in particular, we can see the influence of Macartney and Staunton senior's vision of Chinese and Manchu hostility in understanding the ethnic dynamics of Qing China.⁹¹ The image that arises from these accounts is thus unsurprisingly a similar one of tension between barbaric 'Tartar' rulers and civilised but oppressed Chinese subjects.

George Staunton junior frequently drew parallels between the Macartney and Amherst embassies in his account of the latter. For example, he compared the two officials accompanying the Amherst embassy, Zhang Wuwei and Yin Bin, with Wang and Qiao, the officials who had accompanied Macartney.⁹² It is telling, therefore, that he followed his father and Macartney in noting the dislike shown towards high-ranking Manchus by Chinese officials accompanying the embassy, in part on account of the unfair favour shown to the Manchus by the Emperor.⁹³ For example, Staunton described how Zhang, a Han Chinese, felt 'annoyance' towards the legate 'Quang' (Guanghui), described as 'a Tartar of the emperor's own tribe'. It is hinted that Guanghui's ethnic background is the reason for 'the preference' of high office which he has obtained.⁹⁴ This dislike is also suggested to be caused by the differences which Staunton paints between the rude and barbarous Tartars and the polite and sympathetic Chinese. After Amherst was offended by a group of officials sent by the 'Duke of Ho' (Heshitai) to try to force him into performing the kowtow, Staunton writes that 'Chang [Zhang] and Yin endeavoured to prevail on us to overlook this last circumstance, apologizing for it, by saying that those officers were Mantchoo-Tartars by birth, ignorant of the world and never employed before out of Pekin'.⁹⁵ Later, when Amherst was in Beijing trying to negotiate a delay for his audience with the Emperor due to fatigue from travelling, several British accounts described how he was pressed around by a group of officials trying to persuade and even physically cajole him into attending the audience. Staunton suspected this group must have been 'nearly all of them Tartars' due to the rudeness and total disregard they showed 'not merely of consideration of courtesy, but even of the common feelings of humanity' in trying physically to intimidate Amherst so. He did not believe this kind of behaviour would be

91. Staunton junior was considerably more sympathetic to the Chinese than most other members of the Amherst embassy, which alongside his greater familiarity with the Macartney mission might explain his greater focus on ethnic differences to the favour of the Chinese: Harrison, *Perils of Interpreting*, pp. 208–10, 216.

92. George Staunton, *Notes of Proceedings and Occurrences, during the British Embassy to Pekin, in 1816* (1824; repr. Cambridge, 2013), p. 108.

93. Modern scholarship, in contrast, tends to view the Jiaqing reign as marking a move away from predominantly Manchu rule: M. Mosca, 'The Literati Rewriting of China in the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition', *Late Imperial China*, xxxii (2011), pp. 89–132, at 124–5.

94. Staunton, *Notes of Proceedings*, p. 107.

95. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–6.

shown by an ‘assembly of the superior class, or indeed any class, of Chinese’.⁹⁶

Staunton employed the same typology of barbaric Tartars and civilised Chinese when reflecting on the reasons for the embassy’s rejection, arguing that it was primarily due to the barbaric Tartar lack of politeness and common courtesy. Discussing the embassy’s hurried dismissal from Beijing after Amherst’s refusal to kowtow, Staunton wrote how ‘This violent, and, I may say, brutal order, considering the fatiguing journey our party had just performed, seemed wholly inexplicable upon any principle of Chinese conduct or manners with which we were acquainted’. Instead, the blame was laid upon ‘the personal caprice and folly of the Tartar sovereign’.⁹⁷ The ethnic epithet of ‘the Tartar sovereign’ is crucial here. Scholars such as Hao Gao and Caroline Stevenson have outlined how, in contrast to the Macartney embassy, the Amherst embassy saw a rise in direct criticism of the Qing emperor; however, it has not been noted that this criticism was given an explicitly ethnic tone, at least by Staunton, as seen here in the contrast between polite ‘Chinese conduct or manners’ and the barbarity of the explicitly ‘Tartar’ emperor.⁹⁸ Staunton’s account thus highlighted civilisational differences between the Manchus and Chinese, blaming the barbarity and rudeness of the former for the embassy’s failure as well as detecting a latent hostility among the Chinese towards the Manchus for the preferential treatment shown to them by the Emperor.

Other accounts of the embassy also highlighted divisions between Chinese and Manchus. Henry Ellis, the secretary of the mission, recalled how Zhang, one of the Han Chinese officials accompanying the embassy, ‘said that the pertinacity of the government’ on the issue of the kowtow ‘was to be attributed to Tartar feelings, which were very determined upon all points of ceremony’. This uncompromising high-handedness of the Manchus is in stark contrast to Ellis’s description of Zhang, whom he described as not only ‘moderate and conciliating’ but also ‘friendly and intimate’.⁹⁹ Later on, Ellis explicitly invoked the language of civilisational differences, describing how ‘Our Chinese friend, Chang [Zhang], frequently excused the pertinacity of his government upon the point of ceremony, from the influence of barbarous Tartar habits’, a language of barbarism which Ellis himself employed in his assertion that the ‘Tartar conquerors’ had introduced a regressive ‘barbarism’ into China.¹⁰⁰ That Ellis consistently referred to the sticking issue of the kowtow as ‘the Tartar

96. Ibid., p. 121.

97. Ibid., p. 125.

98. Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, pp. 78–9; Stevenson, *Britain’s Second Embassy to China*, p. 291.

99. Henry Ellis, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Late Embassy to China* (London, 1817), p. 161. The claim that the ceremony was a ‘Manchu ritual’ opposed by the Chinese was not entirely implausible: Harrison, *Perils of Interpreting*, p. 214.

100. Ellis, *Embassy to China*, pp. 387, 380.

ceremony' therefore suggests that he, like Staunton, to some extent blamed the failure of the embassy on the barbarity of the Tartars.

The embassy's interpreter, Robert Morrison, the missionary famous as the first translator of the Bible into Chinese and a long-time interpreter for the East India Company in Canton, presented a similar perspective on the Manchus in his account, also consistently calling the kowtow 'the Tartar ceremony'.¹⁰¹ Like Ellis, he described Zhang's opposition to the ceremony and hostility towards the Manchus, saying Zhang 'always called it "their Tartar ceremony"', and disdained the idea of its being Chinese'.¹⁰² He blamed the Manchus in particular for the hostility and rudeness shown towards the embassy, noting how the 'Tartars' passed 'from one insult to another' in trying to persuade Amherst to comply with their demands.¹⁰³ In the conclusion to his account, the high-handedness and arrogance of the Manchus is bluntly condemned in explicit contrast to the Chinese: 'The Tartars were generally more proud and haughty than the Chinese'.¹⁰⁴ This comes just after a declaration that 'China does not enjoy liberty. Her government is a military despotism', hinting at the Tartar tyranny which Macartney and Staunton senior had previously outlined.¹⁰⁵

Like Staunton junior, other members of the Amherst embassy also noticed the preference shown towards Manchus for high office, with Ellis describing how the government makes Manchus 'eligible for office at eighteen' in order to 'bring them early into employment'.¹⁰⁶ Morrison also noted how the 'responsible persons' dealing with the embassy 'were all Tartars' while the 'lower and laborious departments were generally filled by Chinese'.¹⁰⁷ At the end of the account written by Clarke Abel, the embassy's surgeon, there is a translated article from the Beijing gazette detailing an imperial edict enforcing Manchu naming practices among the imperial family, which Abel says he attached in order to show 'how assiduous the Tartars are to preserve the distinction between themselves and the Chinese'.¹⁰⁸ This translation is referenced in relation to recent discontent in China, especially the Eight Trigrams uprising of 1813, hinting at how the ethnic hierarchy imposed by the Manchus could lead to potential rebellion by their disgruntled Chinese subjects.¹⁰⁹

101. C. Daily, *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China* (Baltimore, MD, 2013), pp. 127–31.

102. Robert Morrison, *A Memoir of the Principal Occurrences during an Embassy from the British Government to the Court of China in the Year 1816* (London, 1820), p. 50. Unlike Ellis, however, Morrison noted the difficulty of distinguishing between Zhang's 'official' and personal opinions.

103. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 96.

105. *Ibid.*

106. Ellis, *Embassy to China*, p. 237.

107. Morrison, *Memoir*, p. 44.

108. Clarke Abel, *Narrative of a Journey in the Interior of China, and of a Voyage to and from that Country in the Years 1816 and 1817* (London, 1818), pp. 395–6.

109. The translated edict is under the appendices, described as explaining the problems in China mentioned 'in page 118', which includes the Eight Trigrams rebellion: Abel, *Narrative*, p. 393. This rebellion contained limited expressions of anti-Manchu sentiment: S. Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven, CT, 1976), p. 93.

For members of the Amherst embassy, the divisions and potential hostility between the Manchus and Chinese they noted were rooted in their understandings of the experience of the Macartney embassy. As preparation for the embassy, Amherst himself read Macartney's journal and Staunton senior's account, from which he noted the 'settled prejudice' of Zhengrui, 'the Tartar legate', as well as the suspicious nature of the 'Tartar chiefs' who were afraid the British wanted 'to insinuate ourselves into some share with them of the dominion over China'.¹¹⁰ Staunton junior had of course been a member of the previous embassy and the other writers mentioned above show a consistent engagement with the accounts and history of the previous embassy.¹¹¹ In this way the Amherst embassy shows a clear and direct line of influence from the understandings of Qing China presented by the Macartney embassy, and many of its members seem to have taken on board and reproduced elements of the understanding of Manchu and Chinese relations presented by Macartney and Staunton senior.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that none of the accounts from the Amherst embassy emphasise Manchu–Chinese divisions as strongly as Macartney and Staunton senior did. Indeed, Staunton junior seems ambiguous in his other sinological works on the nature of Manchu–Chinese relations. In his pioneering 1810 translation of the Qing legal code, for example, he wrote that 'none of the institutions and laws now in force in the Chinese empire, bear a more remote date than of the last Tartar conquest; notwithstanding which, this code ... carries with it ... an internal evidence of the antiquity of its origins and its prototype'.¹¹² In other words, although in appearance the Manchu conquest caused a dramatic break with the past, in practice the Qing had taken up and carried on earlier Chinese legal traditions. That this perspective clearly lends itself more to the Jesuit vision of Qing ethnic harmony and Manchu sinicisation than it does Macartney and Staunton senior's narrative of the Tartar 'yoke' is unsurprising, as in this work Staunton junior aimed to refute the image of Qing China as an oriental despotism by demonstrating the Qing legal system's 'spirit of rationality and liberality'.¹¹³ It thus appears that, at times and for particular polemical purposes, Staunton junior was willing to reject his father's vision of Qing China as a Tartar tyranny. Nevertheless, while Staunton junior and the other members of the Amherst embassy might not have made tensions between Manchus and Chinese as central to their understandings of the Qing regime as had Macartney and Staunton senior, as we have seen, there was still plenty within their writings which

110. London, British Library, MSS Eur F140/36, William Amherst, 'Notes on Policy To Be Pursued by the British Embassy to China'.

111. Abel, *Narrative*, p. 118; Morrison, *Memoir*, p. 29.

112. *Ta Tsing Leu Lee: Being the Fundamental Laws, and a Selection from the Supplementary Statutes, of the Penal Code of China*, ed. and tr. George Thomas Staunton (1810; repr. Cambridge, 2013), p. xvii.

113. L. Chen, *Chinese Law in Imperial Eyes: Sovereignty, Justice, and Transcultural Politics* (New York, 2015), p. 129. See also Abbattista, 'Chinese Law', pp. 110–15.

described Chinese and Manchu divisions, as well as possible hostilities. These accounts of the embassy thus helped to solidify British understandings of Qing China as divided between a ruling and barbaric Tartar elite and a civilised but oppressed Chinese majority, remaining an example to future British diplomats to China.

III

With the ending of the East India Company's monopoly of trade with the Far East in 1833, the British government decided to appoint William Napier, 9th Lord Napier, as the first chief superintendent of British trade in China, with the mission of resolving disputes and increasing British trade. Although Napier's chief qualifications for the job were his aristocratic pedigree and friendship with the king, he was also deeply sympathetic to those free traders most hostile to the Qing government and its trade restrictions.¹¹⁴ His intransigence immediately led him into conflict with the local Canton authorities, however, and he died from typhus after being expelled to Macao in October 1834.¹¹⁵

Manchu–Chinese relations were central to Napier's general attitude towards Qing China. He spent much of his long journey to Canton reading the accounts of the Macartney and Amherst embassies, as well as those of merchants in Canton, the most notable being Hugh Hamilton Lindsay's 'Report' on a 1833 voyage undertaken by British merchants up the north Chinese coast.¹¹⁶ Lindsay was a member of the 'warlike party' of merchants in Canton, who advocated for open conflict with the Qing; it is perhaps unsurprising therefore that his report portrayed the Chinese as natural British allies in their brewing conflict with the Qing government, reporting how the 'commercial energy' of the native Chinese people was straining against the 'Tartar yoke'.¹¹⁷ All these writings appear to have alerted Napier to the tensions between Manchus and Chinese: for example, he made a note in his journal about the 'rebellion and disturbances in the Provinces' against the 'Tartar adherents' of the 'present dynasty'.¹¹⁸ Before he had even reached China, therefore, Lord Napier had been exposed to a multitude of accounts about past British interaction with China which led him to the conclusion that the Manchu Qing emperors

114. G. Melancon, *Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis: Balancing Drugs, Violence and National Honour, 1833–1840* (Aldershot, 2003), p. 35; Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, p. 269.

115. Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, pp. 267–84.

116. P. Napier, *Barbarian Eye: Lord Napier in China, 1834: The Prelude to Hong Kong* (London, 1995), pp. 75, 81–2; Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, pp. 273–4.

117. Hugh Robert Lindsay, *Report of Proceedings on a Voyage to the Northern Ports of China* (London, 1833), p. 14. For Lindsay's relations to the 'warlike party' in Canton and their vision of Chinese–Manchu relations, see Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace*, p. 58. See also R. Bickers, 'The Challenger: Hugh Hamilton Lindsay and the Rise of British Asia', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., xxii (2012), pp. 141–69.

118. Quoted in Napier, *Barbarian Eye*, p. 102.

were 'Intruders, inimical to the great body of the Chinese'.¹¹⁹ He was even already beginning to fantasise about the possibility of British military intervention, using a British force 'to expel the [Manchu] Intruder *beyond the Wall* and restore the Chinese dynasty on our own terms'.¹²⁰

Once he had arrived in China, Napier was further exposed to the virulently anti-Qing rhetoric of the 'warlike party' of traders there—most notably William Jardine and James Matheson—many of whom had themselves been arguing that 'the Han Chinese were being repressed by the Manchus and that they would join the British to rebel once war started'.¹²¹ Napier's letters to Viscount Palmerston, the foreign secretary who had appointed him and who would also be foreign secretary at the outbreak of the First Opium War, demonstrate how this vision of Manchu and Chinese hostility had further solidified its grasp over his understanding of the Qing. For just like Macartney and Lindsay, Napier believed the Chinese themselves were a commercial people who would be happy to trade with Britain, writing of how 'every Chinaman ... is constantly at work; nobody seen loitering about and idle; and, in fact, every man is a merchant'.¹²² This Chinese enthusiasm for trade is, however, alien to the Tartar government, embodied in Canton by the hostility shown to the British by the 'Tartar viceroy', Lu Kun.¹²³ On the basis of this understanding of Chinese-Manchu relations, Napier advocated for taking a strong line against the Qing government if they refused to open up trade further, urging that the British should remind the Emperor 'that he is only an intruder; and that it will be his good policy to secure himself upon his throne by gratifying the wishes of his people'.¹²⁴ This was essentially warning the Manchu Emperor that refusing to trade with Britain would go against the wishes of his Chinese subjects and could result in rebellion. Napier thus encouraged the British government, in the case of further rejection at the Qing court, to embark on a course of military action against 'the government', while starting a propaganda campaign to inform 'the Chinese' of Britain's favourable attitude towards them. His resort to a military approach was a result of his belief that the supposed failure of

119. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 83. See also Melancon, *Britain's China Policy*, p. 37.

120. Quoted in Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, p. 274.

121. Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace*, pp. 17, 58.

122. *Correspondence Relating to China* (London, 1840), p. 12 (Lord Napier to Viscount Palmerston, Canton, 14 Aug. 1834).

123. *Ibid.*, p. 13. Lu was Han Chinese but since he hailed from Zhuozhou near Beijing, which had a far larger Manchu community than Canton, and his granddaughter would marry a Han bannerman, Napier's mistake perhaps reflected the ambiguities of Manchu identity: *Guangxu shuntianfu zhi* 光緒順天府志 [The Guangxu Shuntian Prefecture Gazette] (Beijing, 1987), vol. xiii, p. 4940. The flexibility with which the Qing treated the Napier Incident, in contrast to the more fervently aggressive response to the British in the lead up to the First Opium War, was in fact a product of the greater strength of the Manchu faction at court at this time, whose power was later undermined by rigidly anti-opium Chinese literati: Polachek, *Inner Opium War*, pp. 106–35.

124. *Correspondence Relating to China*, p. 13 (Napier to Palmerston, 14 Aug. 1834).

the Macartney and Amherst embassies meant diplomacy with the obstinate Tartar government was futile.¹²⁵

A similar attitude can be found in a letter from Napier to the British prime minister Earl Grey, in which he presents it as axiomatic that ‘the Chinese people are most anxious for our trade’ while it is ‘the Tartar government alone’ which is ‘anti-commercial’.¹²⁶ In his opinion, this has resulted in there being ‘not the slightest fellowship between the Chinese and the Tartars’. However, even though ‘all’ the Chinese ‘[do] not like the Tartars’ they ‘[can]not help themselves’ on account of their military weakness. Napier’s implication was that the Chinese would be grateful for and likely actively support British military intervention.¹²⁷ His letters thus marked the first time British understandings of Manchu and Chinese differences and mutual hostility were used to advocate for the use of military force by a senior government official. Under the influence of the Canton trading community and building on the observations of the Macartney and Amherst embassies about the hostility between the Manchus and Chinese, as well as the differing attitudes of the two peoples towards trade, Napier fashioned these understandings of Qing China into an argument for the pointlessness of diplomacy and the advantages of war. However, Napier’s premature death meant his warmongering was cut short and there was relatively little willingness on the part of the British state to undertake any military action at this time.¹²⁸ Nonetheless, Napier’s conjunction of imperialist militarism with the discourse of Chinese and Manchu relations would set an important precedent.

Napier’s successor was John Francis Davis, a future governor of Hong Kong, who had participated in the Amherst embassy, had long been involved in the Canton trade and was, along with Staunton junior, one of the most prominent sinologists of his day.¹²⁹ He published an account of his time during the Amherst embassy in 1841, aiming to exploit the market for knowledge about China generated by the First Opium War.¹³⁰ Like the other accounts of the Amherst embassy, Davis partly blamed its failure on the rudeness and arrogance of the barbarian Tartars—in contrast to the polite and friendly Chinese—while also noting the hostility which

125. *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

126. *Correspondence Relating to China*, p. 26 (Napier to Earl Grey, Canton, 21 Aug. 1834). Earl Grey had resigned as prime minister the month before Napier wrote this letter, but due to the long time it took for letters to reach China, Napier was not yet aware of the news.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

128. G. Melancon, ‘Peaceful Intentions: The First British Trade Commission in China, 1833–5’, *Historical Research*, lxxiii (2000), pp. 33–47, at 46–7; H. Gelber, *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals: Britain’s 1840–42 War with China and its Aftermath* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 17–18; Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, pp. 126–34.

129. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, pp. 106–7.

130. See the first line of the ‘Advertisement’: ‘To the deep and growing interest which the present crisis in our relations with China has excited in the public mind, this work owes its publication’: John Francis Davis, *Sketches of China* (2 vols, London, 1841), i, ‘Advertisement’.

was present in the relations of the two peoples.¹³¹ In the aftermath of the Napier Incident and immediately following his own resignation as chief superintendent of trade, Davis published *The Chinese: A General Description of the Empire of China and Its Inhabitants* (1836), described by Peter Kitson as the ‘definitive summary and statement’ of early nineteenth-century British sinology.¹³² Davis having been heavily involved with both the Amherst embassy and the Napier Incident, his work was a defining statement of British understandings of China published just three years before the outbreak of the First Opium War. It is thus unsurprising to find the opinions formulated by members of the Amherst embassy and Lord Napier on the relationship between the Manchus and Chinese given full airing in Davis’s work.

Davis, like Napier, Macartney and Staunton senior before him, maintained that the current restrictions on trade were entirely the product of Tartar rule, claiming that ‘The Tartars, from the very first conquest of China, have shown a great disinclination to foreign trade’.¹³³ He claims this is because the Tartars simply ‘have less esteem for it than the native rulers of the country’, as well as from ‘fear of some collusion taking place between the Europeans and their Chinese subjects’.¹³⁴ Here we see two key features of the British narrative about Manchu and Chinese tensions: an implicit civilisational hierarchy of barbarian Tartars and civilised Chinese, manifested in their attitudes towards trade, and the consequent hostility between the two peoples, with the Tartar rulers living in fear of rebellion by the Chinese against their tyranny. Like Macartney and Staunton, Davis therefore predicted the Qing dynasty would not last much longer, arguing that the ‘Manchow [dynasty] has already lasted much longer than the Mongol’ and concluding that ‘from all present appearances a bold Chinese adventurer might perhaps succeed in overthrowing it’. The example of the Yuan dynasty’s collapse further suggests that the ‘Chinese’ will ‘flock’ to join the rebellion.¹³⁵

Davis was clearly influenced by the preceding examples of British and Chinese interaction, going back to the 1790s. He not only drew on his own experiences during the Amherst embassy to underscore Qing ethnic tensions, but also made reference to the experiences of Macartney, at one point narrating the aforementioned story of the Manchu servant who refused to be punished by Chinese officials on the ‘Tartar’ side of the Great Wall.¹³⁶ Like Napier, Davis looked ahead to the possibility of British military action, outlining the concept of the Mandate of Heaven as useful

131. For example, Davis’s assertion that the ‘Tartar sovereign’ required the kowtow out of ‘the dread of diminishing, by submission, his power and influence over his own subjects’: Davis, *Sketches of China*, i, p. 189.

132. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, p. 108.

133. For the inaccuracy of this assertion, see n. 76 above.

134. Davis, *The Chinese*, i, p. 53.

135. *Ibid.*, i, p. 176.

136. *Ibid.*, i, pp. 259, 371.

information for ‘any European power’ who might desire to ‘gain an influence in China by expelling the Tartars’.¹³⁷ War was also an appealing option due to the military weakness of the Qing, since the ‘jealousy of the Chinese population’ towards the Manchus ‘prevents the Tartar government from making of it such efficient troops as it might’.¹³⁸ In this way, Davis painted a picture of Qing China as being riven by ethnic conflict between tyrannical and backward Tartars and civilised Chinese, the latter of which might rebel at any moment. For the British, the main obstacle to increasing their trade was the Manchu government, whose unpopularity with its own Chinese subjects and resultant military weakness made it vulnerable to the promotion of British interests by force. According to Davis, this use of force would hopefully be accepted, and perhaps even actively supported, by the majority of the Chinese population.

IV

Davis’s work, published only three years before the First Opium War began, encapsulated an understanding of Chinese and Manchu relations which would inform much British opinion during the war itself. This can best be seen in the accounts of the war written by British soldiers who participated in it. Regiment Major T.T. Pears, in his journal describing his service during the war, at times wrote with admiration of the Chinese as an ‘active, intelligent and enterprising people’, following the idea of Davis, Napier, Macartney and others that the Chinese were naturally commercially minded. In Pears’s eyes, it is because of these virtues that Britain was acting rightfully in freeing the Chinese from their ‘tyrannical rulers’, which would at the same time help Britain’s ‘own commercial interests’ by establishing a new Chinese government supportive of trade.¹³⁹ Although this account did not make the ethnic dimension of the conflict explicit, it nonetheless clearly drew on the opposition of tyrannical rulers and oppressed people outlined by Davis and others. Other soldiers did explicitly note the ethnic differences between the Chinese and Manchus. Captain Granville Loch, for example, noted the differences in their military dress, as well as attempting to judge the ethnicities of those he met by whether or not they appeared to have ‘Tartar blood’.¹⁴⁰ Lieutenant Alexander Murray meanwhile attributed the varying levels of resistance the British met with to ethnic differences, commenting sardonically that stiffer resistance at Zhenjiang must be attributed ‘solely to the Tartars, for the Chinese are much too afraid of bringing destruction on their cities,

137. Ibid., ii, p. 54.

138. Ibid., i, p. 216.

139. London, British Library, MSS Eur B368, T.T. Pears, ‘Journal of a Expedition to China 1840–41 and Letters’.

140. Granville Locke, *The Closing Events of the Campaigns in China* (London, 1843), pp. 115, 185.

by defending them'.¹⁴¹ Other accounts emphasised the hostility between the Manchus and Chinese. Duncan MacPherson, a doctor attached to the 37th Grenadier Regiment, attributed the chaos in Canton during the siege of the city in May 1841 to 'the Tartar and Chinese troops' stationed there 'carrying on a civil war', leading to a breakdown in public order and supply chains with the consequence that it was even reported that 'Tartar troops ate the flesh of the Chinese that were slain'.¹⁴²

An account of the early stages of the First Opium War published in 1841 by Lord Jocelyn, the military secretary to the British general Lord Saltoun, combined this view of ethnic hostility with Pears's opposition between commercially minded Chinese and their 'tyrannical rulers'. He claimed the restrictions on commercial enterprise in Qing China were a result of 'its present Tartar rulers' who are 'jealous of any influence that foreigners may gain over the people' and thus try 'to keep their subjects as blind as possible to the movements and feelings of all foreign nations'.¹⁴³ Just like Macartney, he blamed the lack of 'innovation' in Chinese society on this Tartar jealousy, stating that Chinese lack of progress is not caused by 'a deficiency of talent or energy, but from the systematic darkness inculcated by their rulers'.¹⁴⁴ Jocelyn emphasised the hostility which this created between Chinese and Tartars, writing that although 'so long as the military power rests in the hands of the Tartars ... the present rulers may hold their sway over the people ... should disaster and misery come down upon them, the downfall of the present weak government must be the consequence'.¹⁴⁵ He then listed several examples of recent Chinese resistance to the government as evidence.¹⁴⁶ Belief in Chinese hostility towards the Manchus seems even to have influenced Britain's strategic approach to the war, with Jocelyn writing that, because it was rumoured that 'the people of Fokien [Fujian] and Che-kiang [Zhejiang] were hostile to their Tartar rulers', British military command made 'cultivating their friendship' a priority so as to secure supplies and potential military bases.¹⁴⁷ Upon landing in Zhoushan, Jocelyn reported that the British read out a proclamation to the people there, stating that they intended no harm to them but only quarrelled with their Tartar government.¹⁴⁸

141. Alexander Murray, *Doings in China* (London, 1843), p. 185. Murray's assessment of the ethnic divisions in Zhenjiang was acute: Elliott, 'Bannerman and Townsman'.

142. Duncan MacPherson, *Two Years in China* (London, 1842), pp. 149–50. The charge of cannibalism was also levelled by John Elliott Bingham but is otherwise uncorroborated: Lovell, *Opium War*, pp. 155–6.

143. Lord Jocelyn [Robert Jocelyn, Viscount Jocelyn], *Six Months with the Chinese Expedition* (London, 1841), p. 2.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

146. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 23. European reports of Fujianese hostility to the Manchus went back to the seventeenth century: P. Rule, 'The Jesuits and the Ming–Qing Transition: How Did Boym and Martini Find Themselves on Opposite Sides?', *Monumenta Serica*, lix (2011), pp. 243–58, at 244.

148. Jocelyn, *Six Months*, p. 51.

This justification of British military action as being directed specifically against the Manchus, and not the Chinese people, was also articulated by an anonymous British officer in an account of the war's final year. The officer claimed that arguments against the British taking punitive measures in Ningbo were made on the basis that 'we profess only to be at war with the Emperor and his ministers; why then wreak our vengeance on the defenceless inhabitants of a conquered town?'.¹⁴⁹ This was given an explicitly ethnic basis in a later conversation which the officer recorded between himself and a Chinese envoy sent to negotiate with the British after Ningbo was captured. In the anonymous officer's account, the envoy suggested that 'Chinese soldiers have no wish to fight' but feared a British victory would result in China being ruled by an 'English emperor'. The anonymous officer rejected these fears, claiming, 'If we drive away Tartar emperor, we will give you a Chinese emperor', a prospect supposedly deemed 'good' by the Chinese envoy, who also revealed, suggestively highlighted in italics by the British officer, that '*I hear many say that*'.¹⁵⁰ Here we see British military intervention justified and promoted as a means of liberating China from Tartar rule, with supposed widespread support from '*many*' Chinese themselves. This justificatory narrative of liberation continued after the war's end and the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), with the officer proclaiming that 'For the Chinese there will be liberty and enlightenment, if they have virtue and sense enough to know and use their power' against their now discredited government. He claimed this 'immense revolution of opinions' was already in effect, evidenced by 'many Chinese boys in our service ... cutting off their own tails themselves', a reference to anti-Manchu queue-cutting.¹⁵¹ British victory thus supposedly inaugurated Chinese revolution against their Manchu masters. Interestingly, the anonymous officer shows a familiarity with Davis's work *The Chinese* (1836), suggesting that at least some British soldiers fighting on the ground were familiar with the understanding of Manchu and Chinese relations propounded in earlier texts by British statesmen in China.¹⁵²

There were, however, limits to how far this narrative could be taken. For although there were signs of Chinese discontent with Manchu rule during the First Opium War, there was no major anti-Manchu uprising supporting the British; indeed, many Chinese strenuously resisted the British invasion.¹⁵³ At least one British writer, the aforementioned Lord Jocelyn, noted this phenomenon with disappointment. He reported how, far from being inspired by the British to rebel against their Manchu rulers

149. *The Last Year in China, to the Peace of Nanking* (London, 1843), p. 95.

150. *Ibid.*, quotations at p. 118.

151. *Ibid.*, quotation at p. 158. For the queue, see n. 32 above.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

153. For Chinese hostility to the Manchus during the Opium War, see Lovell, *Opium War*, pp. 89–90, 220.

and support the British invasion, the anti-Qing proclamation read out at Zhoushan instead produced 'deep groans' among the Chinese who heard it. Their 'clenched hands and anxious faces' seemed rather to suggest to Jocelyn 'how false was the idea that we were come amongst a people who only waited for the standard of the foreigner to throw off a detested and tyrant yoke'.¹⁵⁴ Shaken by this reaction of 'the hostile multitude' of Chinese to Britain's claim to be liberating them, Jocelyn assumed they must hate 'the invading barbarians [the British] more bitterly than their Tartar rulers'. He concluded that the idea of a fundamental 'hatred and dislike of the natives in China to their Tartar rulers' was a 'fiction'.¹⁵⁵ The resistance shown by the Chinese to British imperialism thus seems to have given at least one British writer on the ground in China during the Opium War room for pause in their appeal to Qing ethnic tensions as a justification for British military intervention.

Jocelyn seems to have been alone in doubting the established understanding of Chinese and Manchu hostility, however. Instead, in the immediate aftermath of the Opium War, the multi-ethnic nature of Qing China continued to act as a justification for the conflict, influenced by the accounts of the diplomats and soldiers which we have examined above. *The Liverpool Mercury*, a weekly newspaper covering international as well as local affairs, published several articles towards the end of 1842, after the conclusion of the war, on the state of Britain's relationship with China. Explicitly drawing on the writings of Staunton senior, one article from 28 October 1842, entitled 'Commercial Disposition of the Chinese', reproduced the by then well-established argument that 'the Chinese people are especially devoted to foreign commerce' but are constrained by 'the selfish anti-commercial spirit' of their 'Tartar Government'.¹⁵⁶ This has resulted in a situation where 'the Chinese people are entirely opposed to their Government in respect of trade and emigration' and the current restrictions on trade are 'but the narrow policy of the Tartar dynasty', who are 'ever in a state of alarm at the increasing intelligence, wealth, and power of the people'. The article concluded with the hope that the Opium War might lead to a 'revolution' in Qing trade policy which would benefit Britain while also liberating the natural commercial sensibility of the Chinese themselves. A later article from 9 December 1842, entitled 'Trade with China', made similar points, hoping that the 'popular opinion' of the Chinese would triumph over their Tartar rulers and 'force an extension' of trade to other ports.¹⁵⁷ While the article professed 'regret' over the 'loss of life' sustained during the Opium War, it nonetheless concluded that 'the consequences of this short war will be extremely beneficial to the Chinese themselves, and no less to our own country' through the

154. Jocelyn, *Six Months*, p. 51.

155. *Ibid.*

156. 'Commercial Disposition of the Chinese', *Liverpool Mercury*, 28 Oct. 1842.

157. 'Trade with China', *Liverpool Mercury*, 9 Dec. 1842.

liberation of natural Chinese commercial instincts. The justification of the Opium War as beneficent imperialism, freeing the Chinese from their oppressive Tartar rulers, was thus still strong even following the end of the war and the beginnings of a critique of this narrative present in Jocelyn's work. The fact that the *Liverpool Mercury* had previously published speeches critical of the opium trade shows how widespread and convincing this narrative of Manchu oppression of the Chinese was, perhaps especially to those Britons who were sceptical of other, less supposedly humanitarian, justifications for the war.¹⁵⁸

This understanding of the relationship between the Chinese and Manchu was not restricted to the *Liverpool Mercury* but was also present in other British newspapers in the immediate aftermath of the Opium War. The *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, for example, argued in an 1843 article on 'The Tartars in China' that the British should ask for an improvement on the terms of the Treaty of Nanjing 'on account of the Tartars, who have no alternative but death in the event of a defeat', since the rebellious Chinese 'are everywhere on the watch to put the defenseless Tartars to death when they can do so with impunity'.¹⁵⁹ Two years later, the *Elgin Courant and Morayshire Advertiser* published an article arguing that the British government should have held out for more concessions in the Treaty of Nanjing since 'this Tartar dynasty, which does not date more than 200 years, is still an isolated race in China'. This isolation of the Tartars in a sea of hostile Chinese subjects meant that the dynasty was on the brink of collapse, the article claimed, proved by the fact that 'the late war with the British nearly led to its expulsion, for the Imperial family was about to flee into Mantchuria'.¹⁶⁰ In 1849, the *Daily News* carried a short article which predicted the 'overthrow of the Tartar dynasty', with the stirring up of 'old partialities' between the Chinese and Tartars likely to lead to an imminent 'political revolution'.¹⁶¹ All these newspaper articles demonstrate that the by then established understanding of Manchu and Chinese hostility continued to inform British attitudes towards Qing China throughout the 1840s, even after some doubts had been raised as a result of the lack of a pro-British Chinese uprising during the First Opium War. Despite this, newspapers continued to fantasise about the probability of a large-scale Chinese revolution against Manchu rule, a fantasy soon to be made real by the Taiping rebellion.

158. 'The Opium Traffic & War with China', *Liverpool Mercury*, 6 Mar. 1840.

159. 'The Tartars in China', *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 6 Jan. 1843.

160. 'British Prospects in China', *Elgin Courant and Morayshire Advertiser*, 5 Dec. 1845.

161. 'India and China', *Daily News*, 25 July 1849.

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The importance of British understandings of Manchu–Chinese relations to justifying their military aggression demonstrates that mere hostility towards China was not the only mode of legitimising the First Opium War. In opposition to still widespread scholarly assumptions which view late eighteenth-century Enlightenment sinophobia as discrediting China in European eyes and thus paving the way for nineteenth-century imperialism, this article has shown that many diplomats, statesmen and soldiers in China—from the Macartney embassy to the First Opium War—instead often held favourable attitudes towards the Chinese, believing them to be a civilised people, both ‘industrious’ and commercially minded. Instead, hostility was increasingly directed towards the Manchus, who were defined in opposition to the Chinese whom they were thought to be oppressing. Viewed as barbarous ‘Tartars’ uninterested in and even scared by the civilising benefits of trade, some Britons began to view the Manchu government as going against their own Chinese subjects in keeping China closed off and thus obstructing British commercial interests. Starting with Lord Napier, this narrative of Manchu oppression of their Chinese subjects and obstruction of Western progress was increasingly invoked as a justification for British military intervention in China, including during and immediately after the First Opium War itself. Although this legitimating narrative operated alongside other justifications, including ones which promoted a very hostile view of the Chinese, the consistency with which the narrative of the ‘Tartar yoke’ was invoked by Britons between the Macartney embassy and the First Opium War suggests it was an important and widely promulgated interpretative framework for understanding the Qing. This highlights the close links between imperialism and cross-cultural perceptions, underlining the practical uses to which British knowledge of China’s ethnic diversity was put in creating interpretative frameworks for Sino-British diplomacy and, eventually, military conflict.

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