

**The Impact of Anglo-Chinese Relations on the  
Development of British Liberalism,  
1842-1857**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

CMCS - Chinese Maritime Customs Service

## **Abstract**

Between 1842 and 1857, British interactions with the Qing Empire shaped and informed the development of British liberal attitudes. However, amid the widespread historiography devoted to uncovering international influences on British liberalism during this period, the impact of the Anglo-Chinese relationship remains a footnote. Instead, focus is given to how Europe, America and the British Empire assisted in the advancement of British politics and liberal thought. This thesis redresses this oversight – showing how Anglo-Chinese frictions in the mid-nineteenth century brought into question British notions of free trade, international law, diplomatic standards and non-intervention. Britain's determination to improve its trading network in China matched by the Qing's refusal to allow further Western expansion, informed British liberal debate and shaped political attitudes.

Most notably, it resulted in Sir John Bowring, the former Foreign Secretary of the London Peace Society, ordering the military bombardment of the port of Canton in late 1856. The bombardment – which resulted in the second Anglo-Chinese conflict (1856-1860) – is well-documented by historians. However, the development of Bowring's political convictions, which provided an ideological justification for war, has been overlooked. This thesis uncovers how interactions with China forced Bowring and the British expatriate community more generally to reconsider the meaning of free trade, the boundaries of international law and their commitment to non-intervention. In addition, it shows how Bowring's actions resulted in a heated debate that captured the attention of Britain's political elite and, through the General Election of 1857, the British public more generally. As a result, it facilitated an open and vibrant debate that queried whether, to secure British trade, military intervention could be deemed an acceptable diplomatic method – a discussion that forced the development of the nation's liberal attitudes.

This thesis tackles two relatively distinct areas of historical research that rarely interact. First, it sheds new light on the scholarship that has examined foreign influences on the development of British liberal ideas in the mid-nineteenth century. It shows that through an investigation of relations with peripheral nations such as China, historians can gain a fresh and more detailed perspective on how and why nineteenth century liberal attitudes developed. In addition, it challenges the existing framework adopted by Sinologists in their assessment of Anglo-Chinese relations. Recent studies remain focused on uncovering how nineteenth century Western expansion into the Qing Empire affected its political, legal and cultural development. This thesis reverses this approach – arguing that this relationship not only affected events within China but in addition, shaped British liberal debate and consolidated British political ideas. This thesis calls, therefore, for historians to reconsider the importance of relatively peripheral nations on the development of British ideals and liberal thinking in the mid-nineteenth century. By examining these new frontiers, it sheds new light on the making of British liberalism.

## Declaration

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# Introduction

The impact of Anglo-Chinese relations on the development of British liberalism has been largely overlooked. It remains a footnote in the world of scholarship that has examined global influences on British liberal values and ideas. The objective of this thesis is to redress this oversight – shedding light on how Britain’s interactions with China from 1842 to 1857 shaped the political thinking of British politicians, diplomatic officials and members of the general public. It argues that the hostile Anglo-Chinese relationship demonstrated the ideological divides in Victorian liberalism. Furthermore, it assisted in moulding Britain’s political values. In the mid-nineteenth century, British notions of international law, diplomacy, and the connection between free trade and non-intervention were still under formation. This thesis shows how a number of British politicians, diplomats, political commentators, electors and non-voters consolidated their convictions regarding these terms as a consequence of Anglo-Chinese frictions.

In mid-nineteenth century Britain, liberalism had emerged as the defining doctrine of the age.<sup>1</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini argues that during this period, ‘constitutional liberalism’ could be

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<sup>1</sup> Amongst a vast literature base, the following studies acknowledge the rise of liberal thought in Victorian Britain and its influence on the economic, political and social policies of the mid-nineteenth century: Ian Bradley, *The Optimists: Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980); Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan eds., *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006); Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth Century Visions of Great Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism, 1776-1988* (London and New York: Longman, 1997); Richard Bellamy ed., *Victorian Liberalism: Nineteenth Century Political Thought and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1990); Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).



considered Britain's 'national ideology'.<sup>2</sup> By the 1850s, economic liberalism in particular, which advocated freer international trade, had become the 'political commonplace' amongst Britain's establishment.<sup>3</sup> However, as demonstrated in the works of Duncan Bell, Anthony Taylor and F. Rosen among others, Victorian liberal thought was a multifaceted principle; it meant different things to different people.<sup>4</sup> Although a fluid, complex and diverse ideology, mid-nineteenth century liberal ideas were considered the benchmark of a civilised nation. Liberalism was thought to be the ideological champion of social, political and economic progress. To Jonathan Parry, it 'seemed to offer the best route to the moral improvement of the people'.<sup>5</sup> Associated with a reform agenda, the most ardent advocates of the liberal programme were instrumental in the success of free trade, the extension of the franchise and the anti-slavery campaigns, to name a few. The liberal agenda, although wide-ranging, has come to define the Victorian era and its political history.

As a consequence, a wide range of scholarship has been devoted to uncovering the political development of liberal principles. In the studies of Jennifer Pitts, C.A. Bayly and Eric Hobsbawm, the ideological foundations have been accredited to enlightenment thinkers such

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<sup>2</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, 'The Politics of Italianism: *Reynolds's Newspaper*, the Indian Mutiny, and the Radical Critique of Liberal Imperialism in Mid-Victorian Britain', in Tom Crook, Rebecca Gill and Bertrand Taithe eds., *Evil, Barbarism and Empire: Britain and Abroad, c. 1830-2000* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 103.

<sup>3</sup> J. P. Parry, 'Liberalism and Liberty', in Peter Mandler ed., *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 71-75.

<sup>4</sup> Duncan Bell, 'Empire and Imperialism', in Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys eds., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Duncan Bell, 'Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought', *The Historical Journal*, 49:1 (2006); F. Rosen, 'Nationalism and early British Liberal Thought', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 2:2 (1997); Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Anthony Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847 to 1865', *Journal of British Studies*, 33:2 (April, 1994); Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays in Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 195.

as Montesquieu, John Locke and later, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham among others.<sup>6</sup> In his 2016 study of liberalism and empire, Duncan Bell challenges this ‘canonical’ approach that favours the ideas of a few ‘exemplary figures’, claiming that by broadening our scope to other voices, we can gain a stronger reading of the complex nature of Victorian liberalism.<sup>7</sup> In recent scholarship focusing particularly on the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, significant works have identified global influences on British political thought and, in turn, Britain’s intellectual impact on the international community. In particular, Jonathan Parry has concluded that interactions with Europe were paramount to the development of British liberalism and the Liberal Party more specifically.<sup>8</sup> Outside of European relations, Uday Mehta, Catherine Hall and Duncan Bell have all examined how far Britain’s colonial experience drove the progression of Victorian political thinking, liberal ideas and the nation’s ‘self-imagining’. For Mehta, the focus is India, for Hall, the Caribbean, and for Bell, the settler colonies of New Zealand, Australia and Canada.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in recent scholarship, there has been a sustained effort to look to the wider world for explanations of how British liberal attitudes developed in the nineteenth century.

Amid this renewed interest in the global influences on British liberal ideals, Britain’s interactions with China demand attention. Between 1842 and 1857, Anglo-Chinese relations witnessed a dramatic transformation. By the end of this period, China was placed firmly in

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<sup>6</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 24; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 1. Pitts acknowledges the difference in eighteenth and nineteenth century liberal thinkers and their perceptions of empire. C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 300.

<sup>7</sup> Bell, *Reordering the World*, p. 30. Bell uses Comte and Cobden as examples.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007).

Britain's informal empire – where although not formally colonised, it was subject to Britain's economic and political demands.<sup>10</sup> In addition, its citizens were perceived as 'uncivilised' in the British imagination, a notion that indicated China's inferiority to Britain. However, in 1842 this was not the case. The British were optimistic about the possibility of an equal trading relationship with China. As a consequence of the first Anglo-Chinese war (1839 to 1842), Qing China was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing (1842) and the Treaty of the Bogue (1843), which were intended to open China's doors to British trade.<sup>11</sup> As Michael Greenberg, Yen-Ping Hao and Jürgen Osterhammel argue, British manufacturers and merchants were confident that these agreements would result in the growth of British trade in China.<sup>12</sup> British firms, Osterhammel asserts, were 'ready to exploit the new opportunities offered by a system of limited free trade'.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, as a former economic and political superpower in its own right, Qing China resisted this challenge to its superiority that these treaties posed. Before 1842, Qing China had an established international system that demonstrated its dominance, confining the foreign

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<sup>10</sup> The following offer descriptions as to the meaning of informal empire and its scope: John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, 6:1 (1953); P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longman, 1993); Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A Short History of British Imperialism 1850-2004*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Harlow: Longman, 2004), pp. 1-27; Bernard Porter, *The Absent Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 9-17; Andrew Porter, 'Introduction: Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth century', in Andrew Porter ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: 1999), pp. 8-9; John Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *The English Historical Review*, 112:447 (June, 1997), pp. 614-647; D.C.M. Platt, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations', *The Economic History Review*, 21:2 (August, 1968) pp. 296-306; Andrew Thompson, 'Empire and the British State', in Sarah Stockwell ed., *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 40-45.

<sup>11</sup> John King Fairbank, 'The Creation of the Treaty System', in John King Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China Volume 10: Late Imperial Ch'ing 1800-1911*, Part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 213-263.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-1842* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 210-215; Yen-Ping Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth Century China: The Rise of Sino-Western Mercantile Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 123-140; Jürgen Osterhammel, 'British Business in China 1860s-1950s', in R.P.T. Davenport-Hines and Geoffrey Jones eds., *British Business in Asia since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> Osterhammel, 'British Business in China 1860s-1950s', p. 191.

community to the borders of Canton (modern day Guangzhou) and insisting that all trade be offered as 'tribute' to the Emperor, rather than an equal commercial transaction.<sup>14</sup> Between 1842 and 1857, a nostalgic Qing China faced a British nation determined to improve its trading network and more importantly, be considered an equal and respected partner. The result was diplomatic friction, an underwhelming trade relationship and eventually, a second Anglo-Chinese conflict (1856-1860). This thesis documents how and why British optimism in 1842 faded and was replaced with overwhelming public support for military action by 1856. It shows that rather than this being a mere pragmatic answer to events, support for an armed intervention was a consequence of the China experience's effect on the political conscience of British officials, politicians and the general public, in regard to appropriate diplomatic tactics, the boundaries of international law and the programme of free trade.

In this period of inter-war Anglo-Chinese frictions, British liberalism was a broad church, encompassing a range of conflicting values. As a result, historians have placed the aristocratic Lord Palmerston; the Manchester Radicals, Richard Cobden and John Bright; philosophers such as John Stuart Mill; and numerous members of Britain's manufacturing

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<sup>14</sup> John King Fairbank and S.Y. Têng, 'On the Ch'ing Tributary System', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 6:2 (June, 1941), pp. 135-246.

community, all under the umbrella term ‘liberal’.<sup>15</sup> Their combined advocacy, or acceptance, of free trade economics has been a large factor in this assessment. By the 1850s, liberal economics was part of Britain’s national identity – altering economic legislation in Britain and forming part of the nation’s diplomatic rhetoric in correspondence with foreign states. Free trade advocates such as Richard Cobden and Sir John Bowring travelled to foreign countries, particularly in continental Europe, espousing the benefits of an international system of free trade.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the 1850s saw a growing consensus as to the advantages of free trade amongst the liberal spectrum – a term that will be used to describe the politicians, diplomats, political commentators and members of the general public that supported liberal principles. However, in regard to political enfranchisement, foreign relations and social policy, the spectrum remained divided.<sup>17</sup> The mid-nineteenth century represented a period of conflict regarding the broader programme of liberalism. This thesis argues that Anglo-

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<sup>15</sup> For works associating Palmerston with a liberal agenda and yet, acknowledging the limits of his domestic reform and his foreign policy see: Taylor, ‘Palmerston and Radicalism’, p. 157. Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 5. David Brown, ‘Palmerston and the 1850s’, in David Brown Miles and Taylor eds., *Palmerston Studies I* (Southampton: Hartley Institute, 2007), pp. 69-88. David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846-55* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2002); David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010). For Cobden and Bright’s brand of liberalism and free trade, in addition to their association with the Liberal Party see: Norman McCord, ‘Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857’, in Robert Robson ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1967); Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967); Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 85-146; Anthony Howe, ‘Two faces of British Power: Cobden vs. Palmerston’, in David Brown and Miles Taylor eds., *Palmerston Studies II* (Southampton: Hartley Institute, 2007); Anthony Howe, ‘Introduction’, in Howe and Morgan eds., *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism*, pp. xxi-xlv; Jean Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1879). For John Stuart Mill see: Georgios Varouxakis, *Liberty Abroad: J.S. Mill on International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Beate Jahn, ‘Barbarian Thoughts: Imperialism in the philosophy of J.S. Mill,’ *Review of International Studies*, 31:3 (July, 2005). For the manufacturing community see: Arthur Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade, 1850-1939*, Vol. I (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934); Arthur Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade 1850-1939*, Vol. II (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956); Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 179. Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp. 1-100.

<sup>16</sup> David Todd, ‘John Bowring and the Global Dissemination of Free Trade’, *The Historical Journal*, 51:2 (June, 2008). See also, Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>17</sup> Angus Hawkins, ‘British Parliamentary Party Alignment and the India Issue, 1857-58’, *Journal of British Studies*, 23:2 (Spring, 1984), pp. 86-90; Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism*, pp. 40-42; Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp. 170-179. Anthony Howe, ‘Free trade and the Global Order: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Vision’, in Duncan Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 27-32.

Chinese relations from 1842 to 1857 sparked an open debate in regard to British foreign policy and its connection to liberal ideas. These deliberations, as a result of Britain's interactions with China, assessed the impact that free trade would have on Britain's international relations. Moreover, it forced numerous members of the complex liberal spectrum to consolidate their positions on the wider agenda of liberal thought.

This thesis advances two main arguments that demonstrate the importance of the Anglo-Chinese relationship during the inter-war period (1842 to 1857) on British political attitudes. The first challenges the assumption – as demonstrated in the works of James L. Hevia, Richard Horowitz and Hao Gao – that Britain entered this new era in their relationship with China with a clear set of diplomatic guidelines, notions of international law and perceptions of the Chinese state and people.<sup>18</sup> Instead, it argues that the only constant throughout this period was the British determination to increase the Anglo-Chinese trade in their favour. However, when faced with a nation reluctant to engage in a supposedly mutually beneficial trade agreement, it became clear that new tactics to 'open' China would be needed. There was, though, no clarified diplomatic procedure on how to enforce China's assimilation into Britain's global trade network. It was Anglo-Chinese exchanges that forced a debate on how the British should act, outlined what this would mean for their role in East Asian affairs and influenced the nation's political development. Thus, the China experience was crucial in developing British notions of international law, free trade and foreign intervention.

The second contention of this thesis is that the impact of Anglo-Chinese frictions between 1842 and 1857 was equally prominent in Britain's domestic debate. In his examination of the

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<sup>18</sup> James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy in Nineteenth Century China* (London: Duke University Press, 2003); Richard S. Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation in China, Siam and the Ottoman Empire During the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History*, 15:4 (December, 2004), pp. 445-486; Hao Gao, 'The Amherst Embassy and British Discoveries in China', *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 99:337 (October, 2014), pp. 568-587.

aftermath of the ‘*Arrow Incident*’, an instance that sparked the second Anglo-Chinese conflict in November 1856, J.Y. Wong acknowledges how Britain’s relations with China captured the imagination of British political commentators and the general public.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Miles Taylor, David Todd and Stephen Conway among others have all recognised how the ‘*Arrow Incident*’ resulted in political instability, a vote of no-confidence for Palmerston’s ministry and a General Election in March 1857.<sup>20</sup> Yet, to Taylor in particular, although the 1857 General Election is considered an ‘inquest on the identity of the Liberal party’, the role of Anglo-Chinese frictions is downplayed in favour of domestic and local concerns.<sup>21</sup> Building on these studies, I will go further, arguing that the infamous ‘*Arrow Incident*’ and the inter-war Anglo-Chinese relationship more generally, resulted in liberal Britain consolidating its positions in regard to international law, free trade and intervention. Its prominence in domestic debate enabled the ‘China question’ to become a point of reference that informed the political thinking of numerous members of the diverse liberal spectrum and, in addition, assisted in the development of their principles and notions of foreign affairs.

## **Historiographical Review**

This thesis tackles two distinct areas of scholarly debate that rarely interact. The aim therefore, is to bridge the gap between the two research areas, shedding light on the China experience’s impact on British liberal ideas and notions of foreign affairs. The first area of scholarship concerns the Anglo-Chinese relationship in the mid-nineteenth century. The narrative of this historiography remains committed to uncovering the impact of Britain’s

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<sup>19</sup> J.Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism and the Arrow War (1856-1860) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 153-260.

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, pp. 269-279; Todd, ‘John Bowring and the Global Dissemination of Free Trade’, pp. 396-397; Stephen Conway, ‘Bowring in Government Service’, in Joyce Youings ed., *Sir John Bowring: Aspects of his Life and Career* (Plymouth: Latimer Trend and Co., 1993), p. 40; Bradley, *The Optimists*, p. 128; Taylor, ‘Palmerston and Radicalism’, p. 172.

<sup>21</sup> Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 276.

imperial agenda on Qing China throughout the nineteenth century and on the dynasty's collapse in 1911. During the inter-war period (1842 to 1857), which is the focus of this thesis, the impact of the China experience on the development of British ideas regarding international law, diplomacy, free trade and intervention remains unexplored. This thesis reverses the historical approach to analysing mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Chinese relations. It demonstrates that in addition to influencing the course of Chinese history, Britain's forceful demand for trade in China played an instrumental role in advancing the nation's liberal attitudes, particularly in regard to foreign affairs.

The second area of historical research focuses on the development of British liberalism and its connection to foreign affairs. In particular, this area of scholarship examines how the liberal spectrum rationalised British support for empire whilst simultaneously advocating economic, political, social and *moral* progress at home. Furthermore, historians have examined how liberal justifications for Britain's global expansion extended beyond the formal colonial project. This has been most notably considered in Gallagher and Robinson's 1953 seminal article, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', which explores the growth of Britain's informal empire.<sup>22</sup> Amid the scholarship examining Britain's relationship with countries that were considered part of its informal empire, there is a general consensus that in the nineteenth century, China became a part of this structure, subject to Britain's economic, political and legal demands. However, the impact of the inter-war China experience on the ideological justifications and formation of this system has been overlooked. This thesis redresses this oversight, demonstrating the integral role Anglo-Chinese relations played on the development of the liberal spectrum's justification for an imperial agenda outside the boundaries of the formal empire.

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<sup>22</sup> Gallagher and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', pp. 1-15.



The most important work assessing the origins of the ‘Arrow War’ (1856-1860) and indeed, mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Chinese relations, is J.Y. Wong’s *Deadly Dreams*. Using similar evidence to my own work, Wong aims to uncover the origins of the Arrow War. It demonstrates the central role of British imperialism, in addition to documenting that Britain’s China policy received mixed reviews at home. Wong shows that whilst the use of the ‘Arrow Incident’ as a *casus belli* by the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Bowring, was supported by Palmerston’s government, it also resulted in a parliamentary enquiry and a subsequent General Election.<sup>23</sup> Although Wong’s work, written from the outlook of a Sinologist, acknowledges how Britain’s China experience influenced the course of British political debate, the main objective of the work is to trace the conflict’s origins. As a result, the narrative and conclusions are framed to meet this aim. This project expands upon Wong’s research, showing that the Anglo-Chinese relations from 1842 to 1857 not only sparked a conflict between the two nations, but went on to shape the political convictions of liberal Britain.

For Sinologists, the Anglo-Chinese relationship is considered to be one of the defining features of nineteenth-century Qing China. It was influential in calls for Western modernisation and in the dynasty’s decline in 1911. In the 1950s, John King Fairbank suggested that China’s development in the nineteenth century was in response to the impact of the Western powers and, in particular, the influence of Britain.<sup>24</sup> By the 1960s, Joseph Esherick presented a Marxist view of the West’s impact in China – arguing that rather than being a ‘relationship’, China was subject to the West’s imperial demands and had little

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<sup>23</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*.

<sup>24</sup> John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: the Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1953); Fairbank, ‘The Creation of the Treaty System’.

agency in its nineteenth-century history.<sup>25</sup> In a revision of Fairbank and Esherick's paradigms, Paul A. Cohen sought to create a 'China-centred' approach to reading China's history, where the focus was internal and often ignored the impact of the West.<sup>26</sup> Twentieth century scholarship has thus moved away from the suggestion that China was a mere bystander in its own history, towards a framework which has granted the Chinese state more agency. However, scholarship still looks from West to East. The impact of the Anglo-Chinese experience on British political ideas is an understudied, yet important area of research that deserves attention.

Amongst recent scholarship assessing China's nineteenth-century history, a global reading has been adopted, documenting China's place in the political, economic and cultural international networks of the time. Yet, when examining the Qing dynasty's interactions with the West, it remains focused on its effect on China's internal development. The importance of Britain's China experience on British political thinking has gone unnoticed. Zheng Yangwen, Robert Bickers and Hans Van de Ven are among the most eminent scholars recording nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations. Zheng Yangwen's *The Social Life of Opium in China* shows how globalisation, in addition to China's culture of consumption, contributed to the outbreak of the first Anglo-Chinese conflict in 1842.<sup>27</sup> In *The Scramble for China*, Robert Bickers identifies tensions in the trading relationship between Britain and China, particularly in the inter-war period (1842-1857), and the gradual infiltration of British officials in China's state management. Bickers pays particular attention to Britain's control of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (CMCS) and Sir Robert Hart's tenure as its Inspector General,

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<sup>25</sup> Joseph Esherick, 'Harvard on China: The Apologetics of Imperialism', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 4:4 (1972).

<sup>26</sup> Paul A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: Recent American Historical Writing on the China Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Zheng Yangwen, *The Social Life of Opium in China, 1483-1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

showing how this institution enjoyed a great deal of autonomy outside the reach of London, allowing it to become instrumental in shaping Anglo-Chinese relations.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Hans Van de Ven has examined the history of the CMCS in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showing how this ‘curious institution’ became an instrumental part of the global trading market.<sup>29</sup> The missing step in these studies, however, is how British diplomats came to justify Britain’s increased involvement in the management of Chinese affairs; it was not a mere pragmatic development, but a result of an alteration in political convictions and a consolidation of a perception of the Chinese as weak and ‘uncivilised’. As this study shows, the independence afforded to British officials enabled them to reinvent Britain’s role in China – a decision that had ramifications for their notions of free trade, intervention and the boundaries of international law.

As expressed in the wide-ranging historiography, the two Anglo-Chinese conflicts (1839 to 1842 and 1856 to 1860) and British expansion in China were, in part, a result of Britain’s relentless demand for commercial growth, which was met by a reluctant and often hostile China. However, Qing China was not a newcomer to the world of mercantile trade. Its commercial networks throughout Asia made the nation a global superpower during the Ming and early Qing dynasties.<sup>30</sup> What the scholarship documents, then, is that in the nineteenth century, China’s position in international affairs had changed. They were now subject to the

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Hans Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 69-10; Zheng Yangwen, *China on the Sea: How the Maritime World Shaped Modern China* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2011); Kenneth M. Swope, ‘Deceit, Disguise, and Dependence: China, Japan, and the Future of the Tributary System, 1592-1596’, *The International History Review* 22:4 (December, 2002), pp. 757-782; John E. Wills Jr., ‘Relations with Maritime Europe, 1514-1662’, in Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644*, Part 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 333-375; William Atwell, ‘Ming China and the Emerging World Economy, c. 1470-1650’, in Twitchett and Mote eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8*, Part 2, pp. 376-416; Raymon. H. Myers and Yeh-chien Wang, ‘Economic Developments, 1644-1800’, in Willard J. Peterson ed., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 9: The Ch’ing Empire to 1800*, Part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 563-646.

demands and whims of the industrialised Western nations. In his seminal work *The Great Divergence*, Kenneth Pomeranz traces the point at which the West's industrial revolution resulted in their economic, political and military superiority over the Chinese Empire. Pomeranz argues that the nineteenth century represents the real point of divergence between China and the West. This is in contrast to E.L. Jones's assessment that such a divergence began in the sixteenth century, as a consequence of the rise of Protestantism and the 'Protestant work ethic'.<sup>31</sup> This thesis develops Pomeranz's argument, demonstrating that by the mid-nineteenth century, although economically and militarily more advanced, Britain's position in China was far from certain. The mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Chinese relationship was crucial in the formation of this divergence. Britain's China experience from 1842 to 1856, confirmed British perceptions of their superiority over the Chinese, validating the calls for further intervention.

Mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Chinese relations represented a clash of cultures. The British were determined to ensure their mercantile growth and imperial influence, whilst the Chinese remained convinced of their position as the supreme world power and refused to accept an international system dominated by the West.<sup>32</sup> As a result, the works of James L. Hevia and Richard Horowitz demonstrate how, in the nineteenth century, Britain attempted to assimilate China into a structure of foreign affairs that favoured British commercial, political and strategic interests. In *English Lessons*, Hevia argues that the British attempted to establish a 'new world order' in China based on their values, traditions and customs. So much so that Anglo-Chinese relations resembled Britain's colonial project.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in his comparison of British interactions with the Ottoman Empire, China and Siam, Richard Horowitz

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<sup>31</sup> Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*, pp. 1-111. E.L. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies and Geopolitics in the history of Europe and Asia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>32</sup> Brown, *Palmerston*, p. 402; Reşat Kasaba, 'Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History*, 4:2 (Fall, 1993), p. 226.

<sup>33</sup> Hevia, *English Lessons*.

examines how notions of international law enabled British policy makers to rationalise their nation's increased involvement in Chinese affairs.<sup>34</sup> Both these studies conclude that there were pre-existing ideological and theoretical justifications that enabled the British to establish what Horowitz determines to be a 'semi-colonial' system in China.<sup>35</sup> There is an assumption, therefore, that in their interactions with the Chinese in the nineteenth century, the British were armed with clear and defined aims. I will challenge this conclusion, arguing that Britain's interactions with China between 1842 and 1857 provided the ideological and theoretical justifications for the nation's increased involvement within the Qing Empire. It will shed light, therefore, on how the China experience 1857 informed British perceptions of the Chinese as 'uncivilised' and influenced the development of notions of international law, free trade and diplomacy.

The justification for Britain's imperial agenda in China was a result of a resounding conclusion that the Chinese were an 'uncivilised' state and thus, fell outside the boundaries of international law and civilised diplomacy, as would be conducted between European states. In recent years, numerous studies have been dedicated to assessing Western political and cultural opinions of China and its people, a framework deriving from Edward Said's *Orientalism* that explores Western perceptions of the 'East'.<sup>36</sup> However, as Nicholas Clifford and Ming Dong Gu argue, there are shortcomings to Said's paradigm for Chinese history, as its main focus is Anglo-French-American relations with the Middle East.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, examining Western perceptions of China is a growing field of inquest. Peter Kitson, Elizabeth Chang and Ross G. Forman among others, have examined how Anglo-Chinese

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<sup>34</sup> Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation', pp. 445-486.

<sup>35</sup> Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation', p. 446.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Pantheon, 1978).

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Clifford, *A Truthful Impression of the Country: British and American Travel Writing in China, 1800-1949* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), p. 15; Ming Dong Gu, *Sinologism: an Alternative to Orientalism and Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

relations in the nineteenth century affected representations of the Chinese people in British culture.<sup>38</sup> Further, Hao Gao's 2014 article on the Amherst Embassy in 1816, argues that after a failed attempt to meet the Jiaqing Emperor in Beijing, the Embassy's expedition back through China resulted in a resounding conclusion amongst the British officials that China was a barbarous, stagnating and weak nation.<sup>39</sup> Focusing on political and diplomatic opinions, rather than cultural perceptions of the Chinese in novels and artwork, this thesis challenges Gao's assumption that in the early nineteenth century, there was an overwhelming derogatory perception of the Chinese Empire amongst British officials, politicians and the general public. I will show that after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, British officials were optimistic in their ability to establish a new system in China based on equal commercial relations. Their viewpoint of China was positive and respectful. I argue therefore, that it was the inter-war period and the challenges it posed to British interests that consolidated the notion of an 'uncivilised' Chinese state in the British imagination and furthermore, the notion that diplomatic relations with China should be conducted outside the parameters of international law.

In all of the above works, the aim is to trace the course of nineteenth-century Chinese history and the impact of the West on its development. As a result, its influence on British political thought and the consolidation of notions of free trade, international law, intervention and diplomacy, particularly amongst members of the liberal spectrum, has been overlooked. I hope to add a new dimension to the field of Sinology – shedding light on the global reach of

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<sup>38</sup> Ross G. Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Peter Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Susan S. Thurin, *Victorian Travellers and the Opening of China, 1842-1907* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999); Fan-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire and Cultural Encounter* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>39</sup> Gao, 'The Amherst Embassy and British Discoveries in China', pp. 568-587.

Chinese relations and its impact on Britain's intellectual thought. Similarly, amongst historians of Victorian liberal ideas and imperialism, Anglo-Chinese interactions remain a relatively unexplored area of research. That said, much like Hevia and Horowitz, Christopher Bayly demonstrates how liberal ideas were transferred to China – in addition to other Asian, African, and Latin America nations – and were readjusted to fit Chinese needs, in his illustration of the 'global turn' of European political history.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, it is clear that Western, and specifically British expansion in China, had an important effect on Chinese institutions, the rise of nationalism, and the decline of Qing rule. Yet, its impact, as this thesis shows, was also felt on British notions of liberal thought; mid-nineteenth century British liberalism developed as a consequence of the China experience.

British liberal thought and the Liberal party more specifically, were subject to a range of global influences. As previously mentioned, in *The Politics of Patriotism*, Jonathan Parry shows us that European events in the nineteenth century had an impact on domestic Liberal policy and notions of foreign affairs during a period of Liberal political dominance. Parry argues that the international stage was crucial for the British to present themselves as a certain type of regime both domestically and globally.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, Parry suggests that those European nations considered to be 'un-English' were compared to liberal Britain, which was deemed to uphold notions of 'constitutionalism, law, inclusiveness, conscience and humanitarianism.'<sup>42</sup> This thesis adheres to Parry's methodological approach, arguing that international factors were crucial to domestic debate and the development of liberal policies. However, rather than focusing on the inner-workings of the Liberal Party itself, I aim to show how, particularly in regard to notions of free trade and its connection to Britain's foreign

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<sup>40</sup> Christopher Bayly, 'European Political Thought and the Wider World during the Nineteenth Century', in Stedman Jones and Claeys eds., *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth Century Political Thought*, pp. 835-883; Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*.

<sup>41</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 1-38.

<sup>42</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 4.

affairs, the mid-nineteenth century China experience informed the political attitudes of a number of people associated with the diverse liberal spectrum. It will examine those politicians, diplomats, political commentators and members of the general public that supported elements of liberalism.

Similar to Parry, recent scholarship features an examination of external forces and their influence on British thought and liberal ideas. There is a growing appreciation that Victorian political thought did not develop merely as a consequence of domestic concerns – although they must be treated with equal weight. However, the impact of ‘peripheral’ nations such as China, whose relationship with Britain was outside of European politics or the Empire, has gone largely unnoticed. I intend to rectify this problem. In particular, the development of notions of free trade as a consequence of Anglo-Chinese relations will be examined. In the mid-nineteenth century, the advocates of free trade were divided in their perception of the objectives of the doctrine.<sup>43</sup> D.A. Farnie argues that whilst Cobdenite liberals espoused the benefits of free trade as a mechanism to achieve international peace, for other liberal supporters, ‘free trade became an end itself rather than a means to a higher end.’<sup>44</sup> In *Free Trade and Liberal England*, Anthony Howe claims that Britain’s international affairs assisted in the development of the free trade doctrine in the minds of liberal Britain and demonstrated their divided opinions as to its meaning.<sup>45</sup> Further, Howe outlines in a later article that in addition to the British Empire, confrontations in China and Japan indicated the limits of this form of political economy.<sup>46</sup> I will expand on Howe’s conclusion that global interactions

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<sup>43</sup> Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp.33-100; Howe, ‘Free trade and the Global Order’, pp. 26-30; Howe, ‘Two faces of British Power: Cobden vs. Palmerston’, pp. 168-184; Richard Francis Spall Jr., ‘Free Trade, Foreign Relations and the Anti-Corn Law League’, *The International History Review*, 10:3 (August, 1988), pp. 405-432.

<sup>44</sup> D. A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market 1815-1896* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 44.

<sup>45</sup> Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*.

<sup>46</sup> Howe, ‘Free Trade and Global Order’, p. 31.



informed liberal opinion in regard to the meaning of free trade, providing explicit evidence to show how soured interactions with China between 1842 and 1857 highlighted and consolidated the diverse convictions of free trade's supporters.

Anglo-Chinese relations in the inter-war period shaped British convictions regarding free trade's connection to a policy of non-intervention. In his examination of the rise of pacific ideas in nineteenth-century Britain, Martin Ceadel argues that although it encompassed limitations, this period witnessed a change in the 'fatalistic' views of war – there was a growing hope that peaceful relations could dominate international proceedings.<sup>47</sup> For Richard Cobden in particular, free trade was considered a prerequisite to peaceful foreign relations.<sup>48</sup> To Parry, however, the widespread support for non-intervention in the mid-nineteenth century has been overstated.<sup>49</sup> Although the aim of international peace was always deemed beneficial, for many of Britain's liberal minded citizens, by the 1850s, they were open and accepting to the possibility of conflict in defence of British honour and ideas – a viewpoint that can be seen by the popularity of Palmerston and the Crimean War (1853-1856). The outbreak of war in China in late 1856, however, presented a different problem for the liberal defenders of free trade: did Britain have the right to militarily intervene in a sovereign state with the ultimate objective being an improvement in commercial relations? This question dominated public and political debate in March 1857. The attempts by members of the diverse liberal spectrum to answer it shaped their notions of foreign policy and free trade.

China's inclusion in the scholarship of Victorian Britain's imperial and political history is as

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Ceadel, *Semi-Detached Idealists: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 12-13. See also, Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730-1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>48</sup> P. J. Cain, 'Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden', *British Journal of International Studies*, 5:3 (October, 1979), pp. 229-246.

<sup>49</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 9.

a member of its 'informal empire.' Since Gallagher and Robinson's 1953 article documenting the growth of Britain's informal empire in the nineteenth century, this area of research has received widespread attention. The work of D.C.M Platt and, more recently, Andrew Thompson, questions the 'indirect political hegemony' Britain enjoyed in its international affairs.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, to P.J. Cain, A. G. Hopkins and Andrew Porter among others, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, there is evidence to suggest that British imperialism extended beyond formal boundaries. Britain had an integral role in the political, economic and often cultural development of a number of self-governing, non-Western European nations.<sup>51</sup> Amid this varied research, there is a general consensus that China was a part of this informal structure. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the gradual economic, political, and in some ways cultural authority the British enjoyed in Qing China meant that the former East Asian superpower – although operating outside of Britain's formal control – was subject to British interests. Furthermore, although John Darwin acknowledges differences in Britain's relationship with each state of the informal empire, there is an assumption that China's inclusion into this structure was following an established pattern of British foreign policy.<sup>52</sup>

This thesis challenges this conclusion, showing that China can not only be categorised as a member of Britain's informal empire, but that it assisted in shaping this system of foreign control. Moreover, whilst the historical periodisation of the rise of Britain's informal empire has been placed between 1870 and the turn of the century – with sceptics such as Andrew Thompson also focusing on this era – I will examine earlier roots.<sup>53</sup> In 1842, Britain's role in

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<sup>50</sup> Platt, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade: Some Reservations', pp. 296-306; Andrew Thompson, 'Informal Empire? An Exploration in the History of Anglo-Argentine Relations, 1810-1914', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 24:2 (May, 1992), p. 425. Thompson refers to Gallagher and Robinson's use of the phrase 'indirect political hegemony' here.

<sup>51</sup> Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*; Porter, 'Introduction', in Porter ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, pp. 8-9; Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians', pp. 614-647.

<sup>52</sup> Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians', p. 621.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Thompson, 'Informal Empire?', pp. 422-430. See also, Gallagher and Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', pp. 1-15.

China was unclear. There was no clarification either through the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), or diplomatic precedent, which explicitly indicated whether Britain's involvement in China was purely commercial, or whether it should play a more integral role in China's political, economic and cultural development. It was Anglo-Chinese interactions from 1842 to 1857 that forged the conclusion that the Chinese were 'uncivilised' and unaware of the benefits of free trade, leading the British to establish a new role in China, extending its political, economic and legal control.

To rationalise Britain's increased involvement in the Chinese state, by 1857, there was a shift in British notions of international law, non-intervention and civilisation. There was a growing consensus amongst many within the liberal spectrum that Britain had a right to intervene in China's internal affairs and conduct military campaigns to ensure the success of British interests within the region. Nonetheless, the impact of mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Chinese interactions on the development of notions of international law has been ignored. To Duncan Bell, Andrew Fitzmaurice and Martti Koskenniemi, nineteenth-century perceptions of international law were used to criticise and justify the British Empire, depending on the outlook of the individual.<sup>54</sup> Further, Casper Sylvest and Mark Mazower show us that the nineteenth century represented a period of uncertainty as to the meaning of international law.<sup>55</sup> As a theory it was in its infancy, with the phrase 'international law' being coined a generation earlier by Jeremy Bentham.<sup>56</sup> As a result, in her study of the liberal rationale for imperial expansion, Jennifer Pitts shows us that in the mid-nineteenth century, it was a

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<sup>54</sup> Bell, 'Empire and International Relations', pp. 286-295; Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'Liberals and Empire in Nineteenth Century International Law', *American Historical Review*, 117:1 (February, 2012), pp. 122-125; Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civiliser of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870 to 1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 98-178.

<sup>55</sup> Casper Sylvest, 'The Foundations of Victorian International Law', in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order Empire*, p. 49; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin, 2012), pp. 20-39.

<sup>56</sup> M. W. Janis, 'Jeremy Bentham and the Fashioning of "International Law"', *The American Journal of International Law*, 78:2 (April, 1984), pp. 405-418.

subject undergoing study, encapsulating the thoughts of the biggest philosophers of the day such as John Stuart Mill.<sup>57</sup> What this thesis shows is that during this period of intellectual progression, these debates were equally prominent in regard to Britain's informal empire. It was unclear what right the British had to militarily intervene or politically and culturally dominate a sovereign state in the aim of supporting their commercial growth. British policy makers entered this new era in their relationship with China without a fully formed notion of international law and its boundaries. As a result, the China experience in the inter-war period forced a debate as to its meaning and ultimately assisted in its development.

Therefore, Anglo-Chinese relations during the inter-war period informed British perceptions of the Chinese as 'uncivilised' and thus outside the parameters of Western notions of international law. As a result, military and political intervention was deemed an acceptable diplomatic method. In his article examining European perceptions of the international world order, Georgios Varouxakis shows us that there was a near consensus in Victorian thought that not all nations were equal.<sup>58</sup> However, this thesis argues that Anglo-Chinese relations in the inter-war period assisted in establishing British conceptions of their international power. Rather than the British entering their new relationship with China in 1842 with a pre-ordained notion of their right to politically and militarily intervene in Chinese affairs, their interactions informed the perception of Britain's international supremacy and determined the way in which they conducted diplomatic relations with Qing China.

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<sup>57</sup> Jennifer Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order Empire*, pp. 67-77. See also, Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*.

<sup>58</sup> Georgios Varouxakis, 'Great versus Small Nations: Size and National Greatness in Victorian Political Thought', in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order*, p. 136.

## Methodology, Sources and Terminology

The methodological approach of this thesis is to suggest that nations such as China, whose impact on Britain's nineteenth-century global history has been deemed peripheral, deserve greater recognition. Of course, there is no consensus as to the subject matter that should be analysed, as Jon Lawrence explains in his discussion of the discipline of political history.<sup>59</sup>

Whilst Maurice Cowling and Michael Bentley have stressed the importance of 'high politics',<sup>60</sup> others have assessed the impact of public opinion<sup>61</sup>, in addition to social, cultural and religious developments of the age.<sup>62</sup> The aim of this thesis is *not* to suggest that domestic, European, or colonial factors were any less integral to the development of political ideas and liberal thought in Victorian Britain. Instead, it argues that the China experience can offer a new interpretation of the formulation of liberal ideas. The contentious Anglo-Chinese relationship in the mid-nineteenth century demands attention in order to understand the global nature of Victorian political thinking.

Although focusing on members of the diverse liberal spectrum, it must be acknowledged that they did not hold a monopoly on the political development of the age. This study could have also included conservative political thought and a closer analysis of the Tory party. However, it must be acknowledged that the Liberal party and liberal ideas were the dominant force of the era.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, this thesis examines how Tory politicians and political commentators also engaged with the discussions regarding Britain's liberal agenda and notions of free trade,

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<sup>59</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Political History', in Stefan Berger, Heiko Feldner and Kevin Passmore eds., *Writing History: Theory and Practice* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), pp. 209-211.

<sup>60</sup> Maurice Cowling, *The Impact of Labour: The Beginning of Modern British Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Michael Bentley, 'Party, Doctrine and Thought', in Michael Bentley ed., *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain: Ten Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).

<sup>61</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963); James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c.1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>62</sup> A few examples include: J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867-1875* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*.

<sup>63</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 2.

international law and diplomacy. Further, the emphasis on the diverse liberal spectrum is a result of their determination during this period to understand what their advocacy of freer economic policies meant for the future of Britain's foreign relations. The mid-nineteenth century represented a period of development for British liberal values and this thesis shows how the China experience shaped their diverse perceptions as to the broader programme of free trade, notions of international law and non-intervention.

Rather than focusing on the political categorisation of the different members of the liberal movement, the aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how Anglo-Chinese interactions affected their political values. In the mid-nineteenth century, the Liberal party was a fluid and complex political group whose members were diverse in their objectives, customs and traditions.<sup>64</sup> The Liberal party as it took shape in the 1850s brought together those who associated with the Whig, Peelite, and Radical traditions.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, political allegiances and categories were often subject to change with politicians playing to win, making it difficult for historians to take their political actions at face value.<sup>66</sup> Thus, this thesis is less focused on the political manoeuvring of the age, but attempts to understand how the political convictions of those associated with the liberal agenda were influenced as a result of Anglo-Chinese interactions. As a result, it is not only discussing those who branded themselves as 'Liberal', but rather those who adhered to liberal values in the mid-nineteenth century –

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<sup>64</sup> For evidence of this political division in the 1850s Liberal party see: Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 124-129; Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government*, pp. 169-183; J. R. Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-1868* (London: The Harvester Press, 1966); Angus Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Act of Politics in Britain 1855-9* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), pp. 60-65; Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, pp. 47-55; Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, pp. 25-80.

<sup>65</sup> Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, pp. 36-65; Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 47; Margot Finn, *After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); A.J.P. Taylor, 'John Bright and the Crimean War', in A.J.P. Taylor ed., *Essays in English History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 87; E.D. Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855-65* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 66-67; Howe, 'Two faces of British Power: Cobden vs. Palmerston'.

<sup>66</sup> Lawrence, 'Political History', p. 211.

describing this diverse group as the ‘liberal movement’ or ‘liberal spectrum’. Thus, the political development of British diplomats, officials and the expatriated merchants who advocated freer trading networks, but were not associated with any specific element of the Liberal party, also feature as an integral part of this thesis. In his recognition of the influence of the Cantonese merchant community over British policy in China, Robert Bickers argues that Jardine Matheson & Co., and Hugh Lindsay in particular, advocated elements of freer trade and yet, saw their political convictions develop as a consequence of Anglo-Chinese relations.<sup>67</sup> I consider their perceptions of liberal thought equally valid. I argue, then, that rather than influencing their political categorisation, the China question influenced the political convictions of numerous members of the diverse liberal spectrum.

In regard to terminology, I have decided to refer to ‘British’ rather than ‘English’ political ideas.<sup>68</sup> This is simply because merchants and manufacturers based in Scotland and Wales in particular, were also interested in, and commented on, the formulation of notions of free trade and foreign policy in the China debate. Although in his work assessing the national identity of nineteenth-century Wales, Matthew Cragoe shows us that each country has its own traditions and values, the focus of this thesis would be lost if it was to accommodate for all differences.<sup>69</sup> Instead, it shows that the British liberal spectrum was already split in their political values and that furthermore, the China experience highlighted and consolidated these divisions. In addition, this thesis uses the terms ‘policy makers’ and ‘political commentators’ throughout the study. ‘Policy makers’ refers to the politicians and diplomats who constructed British policy and ideas during this period. ‘Political commentators’ however, refers to the various newspapers, thinkers and activists who offered their opinions on the political issues

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<sup>67</sup> Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832-1886* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

of the day in an attempt to influence public opinion. Although there was no uniform viewpoint in the politics or values of policy makers and political commentators, this thesis will follow general trends in opinion in regard to Anglo-Chinese tradition, in addition to examining the motions put forward in official correspondence from the Foreign or Colonial Offices.

To achieve this, I examine a range of sources that dissect the different opinions of the mid-nineteenth-century liberal movement. I have reviewed official records from the Foreign Office, in addition to Hansard records, in order to show how Government and political bodies reacted to events in China during the inter-war period. British and Chinese newspapers will also provide an interesting insight into the opinions of political commentators and, through letters to the editors, members of the general public. In British newspapers, this will be seen during the General Election, where public opinion on the 'China question' was given a national voice. In Chinese newspapers, the viewpoints of British merchants, diplomats and missionaries in regard to their perception of Britain's role in China, show how political values gradually developed as a consequence of the China experience. Some of the most interesting primary texts examined will be letters, diaries and correspondents from British officials and diplomats based in China during this period. In particular, Sir John Bowring's papers held at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, offer a personal account of how Anglo-Chinese relations influenced the development of liberal thought in the mid-nineteenth century. An ardent advocate of free trade and its ability to formulate a peaceful international system, his tenure as Consul to Canton and Governor of Hong Kong saw the alteration of his liberal convictions.



## Structure

This thesis is divided into four chapters. The first two chapters assess the impact of diplomatic frictions in China and the following two show how the China experience influenced domestic political debate and liberal public opinion. Chapter One demonstrates how Britain's demand for an improvement in their commercial relations with China resulted in an alteration in the political convictions of British diplomats and members of the merchant community. It shows how in 1842, after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, the British expatriate community were optimistic at the opportunities now open to them in China – they hoped this settlement would result in a relationship based on peace and trade. However, the reluctance of the Chinese to alter their system of foreign relations that had established Qing supremacy in international affairs resulted in diplomatic tensions. The refusal by Qing officials and the Cantonese community more generally to accept British entry into the port of Canton – as agreed in the 1842 settlement – indicated to members of the British community that notions of free trade, international law and non-intervention were incompatible with the Chinese state. It consolidated the notion that in order to achieve an improvement in their commercial and political interests in China, more aggressive diplomatic tactics must be employed. In particular, this chapter focuses on the political development of Sir John Bowring. His inability to affect change in China in favour of British interests as Consul to Canton or as Governor of Hong Kong, in addition to his difficult encounters with his Chinese counterparts, induced him to believe that free trade had its limitations. It rationalised his conviction that he could remain a defender of free trade and its larger peace programme in addition to being an advocate of military intervention and Britain's imperial agenda.

Chapter Two uses the case study of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) – a devastating civil war that brought the Qing to its knees – demonstrating how the early years of this conflict

from 1853 to 1856 constructed British notions of international law, civilisation and intervention. It argues that although the British had agreed terms with China in 1842, the nation's role within the country was uncertain. It was unclear whether they were merely a commercial partner or, whether they had a right to intervene in China's military and political affairs. The Taiping Rebellion provided an example that settled this argument in favour of British intervention. The failure of the Qing to suppress the Rebellion, in addition to its detrimental effect on British trade interests, led the expatriate British community to rationalise the need for a growth of British intervention in the governance of the Chinese state. Moreover, it shows how this enabled the development of British political thought. It examines evidence from diplomats and merchants debating what the increased involvement of Britain in Chinese affairs meant for British notions of international law, diplomacy and intervention.

Chapter Three shows how British frictions with Qing China, which culminated in the outbreak of a second conflict in late 1856, affected the course of British political debate. It argues that Britain's military intervention created legal, constitutional, moral and commercial problems for the British political class that were debated in the Houses of Parliament. It demonstrates that in 1857, notions of foreign policy and diplomacy were under reconstruction as a consequence of the growing advocacy of liberal economics and the growing global network. Therefore, the China question became an example used by Britain's policy makers to inform debate and consolidate their political convictions. By analysing Hansard debates and the personal memoirs of numerous political figures, it shows how the China question dominated political discussion and was instrumental in the development of liberal ideas amongst the political class.

Chapter Four demonstrates how the British domestic debate that the China question facilitated was not restricted to Parliament or the political class. As a consequence of Richard Cobden's successful vote of no confidence against Palmerston's support of Bowring and British intervention in China, the China question achieved national recognition. Palmerston's parliamentary defeat resulted in the Prime Minister calling a General Election, asking the British public to support British actions in China and his notion of foreign policy more generally. It shows, therefore, how the China question was an important issue that facilitated debate across the country and moreover, became the primary campaign topic manipulated by politicians. Indeed, in the rhetoric of Richard Cobden and Lord Palmerston – whose divided liberal ideals dominated the campaign – the China question was instrumental. It was central in their attempts to demonstrate why their notions of liberalism and foreign policy were best for the British nation. Further, this final chapter offers an in depth case study of the political development of the city of Manchester – a former beacon of the Manchester Radicals and Cobdenite liberalism. It argues that the China question was a key issue informing public opinion and assisted in the city's political progression away from a Cobdenite notion of free trade and foreign policy, towards a belief that free trade economics could be separated from a grander internationalist agenda.

## Chapter One - The Entry Question and the Limits of British Non-Intervention, 1842-1856

Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, Sir John Bowring's name was synonymous with pacifism, free trade and Britain's liberal agenda.<sup>1</sup> In addition to championing the economic and diplomatic benefits of freer commercial relations, Bowring was a committed member of Britain's peace movement – best displayed by his term as the Foreign Secretary of the Society for the Promotion of Permanent and Universal Peace (London Peace Society) from 1820 to 1823.<sup>2</sup> To Bowring, the adoption of free trade was the best method to achieve a system of peaceful foreign relations. He argued that the inter-dependence of global commerce promoted international harmony, international law and the end of military-driven competition – notions that have been linked to the term 'liberal internationalism' by historians.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Bowring's name is associated with the leading Radical figures of the age. To Stephen Conway, Bowring was 'no less a Radical' than Richard Cobden and indeed, 'shared many of Cobden's views'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 1856 and now the Governor of

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Bowring, 'Sir John Bowring: The Imperial Role of a Lifelong Radical', *Asian Affairs*, 42.3 (October, 2011), pp. 423-424; G.F. Bartle, 'Bowring and the Near Eastern Crisis of 1838-40', *English Historical Review*, 79:313 (1964), pp. 761-774; Eleanor M. Gates, 'John Bowring: a Nineteenth Century Kilroy', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 26:2 (Spring, 1995), pp. 103-106; Eleanor M. Gates, 'John Stuart Mill vs. John Bowring: A New Found Letter', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 25:4 (Winter, 1992), pp. 173-177; R.K. Webb, 'John Bowring and Unitarianism', *Utilitas*, 14:1 (May, 1992), pp. 43-58; F. Rosen, 'John Bowring and the World of Jeremy Bentham', in Joyce Youings ed., *Sir John Bowring, Aspects of his Life and Career* (Plymouth: Latimer Trend and Co., 1993), pp. 15-17. This collection of papers is from a conference held at the University of Exeter to mark the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of Bowring.

<sup>2</sup> David Todd, 'John Bowring and the Global Dissemination of Free Trade', *The Historical Journal*, 51:2 (June, 2008), pp. 373-397. See also, Martin Ceadel, *The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730-1854* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 245.

<sup>3</sup> The following offer descriptions of liberal internationalism in the mid nineteenth century: P. J. Cain, 'Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden', *British Journal of International Studies*, 5:3 (October, 1979), pp. 229-246. It is noted, however, that supporters of 'internationalism' did not always present a coherent message and had diverse conceptions of its meaning and scope: Per. A. Hammarland, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State: The Thought of Richard Cobden, David Mitrany and Kenich Ohmae* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 5; Duncan Bell, 'An Introduction', in Duncan Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order, Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Conway, 'Bowring in Government Service', in Youings ed., *Sir John Bowring 1792-1872*, p. 29.

Hong Kong, Bowring ordered the military bombardment on the port of Canton. Bowring's shift in principles was not unique; it was representative of a wider movement toward the acceptance of military intervention as a means to secure trade. As a consequence of Anglo-Chinese exchanges from 1842 to 1856, Bowring and his diplomatic compatriots altered their political convictions in favour of gunboat diplomacy. Their experiences in China forced a reformation in their notions of diplomacy, international law and the meaning of free trade.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Britain was determined to expand its commercial interests in China. On the 29<sup>th</sup> August 1842, the Chinese were forced to sign a peace agreement with the British – ending a conflict sparked by the opium trade in March 1839.<sup>5</sup> This accord, known as the Treaty of Nanjing, was first and foremost a commercial settlement, intended to improve Britain's ability to penetrate the Chinese market with their goods.<sup>6</sup> However, the failure of the Anglo-Chinese trade to match British expectations fuelled concerns over the Qing Empire's willingness to enter into a mutually beneficial trade partnership. In particular, the refusal to allow British expatriates to work and reside within the city of Canton (modern day Guangzhou), a term agreed in the Nanjing treaty, was viewed by Britain's diplomatic agents as China's rejection of a stronger commercial association.<sup>7</sup> This chapter documents British attempts to solve the entry question, a term used by British officials to denote the inability to gain entry in Canton. It shows that their failure to do so was considered an obstruction to a prosperous China trade and forced Britain's diplomats to re-examine their convictions in regard to diplomacy, international law and free trade. Thus, it reassesses the importance of mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Chinese relations and the impact of the entry question. In addition to contributing to the outbreak of a second conflict in late 1856, it contributed to the

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<sup>5</sup> Reşat Kasaba, 'Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History*, 4:2 (Fall, 1993), p. 217.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade, 1850-1939*, Vol. I (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), pp. 120-121

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Hsu, *Rise of Modern China*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 248.

development of British liberal ideals.

The way in which the entry question soured Anglo-Chinese relations is well documented by historians. However, its influence on British notions of diplomacy, international law and free trade remains unexplored. To J.Y. Wong and Robert Bickers, the unsettled entry dilemma was instrumental in the outbreak of war in 1856.<sup>8</sup> Both historians document how the refusal by Qing officials to grant access into Canton fuelled tensions between the two nations.

Moreover, John J. Nolde asserts that this decision confirmed China's 'uncivilised' status to British diplomats.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Frederic Wakeman argues that the entry dispute demonstrated the differences in British and Chinese legal procedures, trade policies and diplomatic methods, contributing to the outbreak of war in 1856.<sup>10</sup> In all these studies, it is evident that the entry question was integral to the origins of the second Anglo-Chinese conflict.

Nonetheless, they have overlooked how the determination to gain entry resulted in the intellectual development of Britain's diplomats in favour of gunboat diplomacy. Beyond the entry question, historical assessments of Anglo-Chinese relations follow a similar pattern; failing to recognise how exchanges with the Qing Empire shaped British ideas. Instead, in recent scholarship by James L. Hevia, Hans Van de Ven, Pär Cassel and Zheng Yangwen, attention is devoted to assessing China's economic, cultural, legal and political development as a result of British expansion.<sup>11</sup> Of course, these are important issues that demand consideration. However, this chapter reverses this narrative, arguing that the impact of

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<sup>8</sup> J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856-60) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 83-109; Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire: 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), pp. 113-116.

<sup>9</sup> John J. Nolde, 'The "False Edict" of 1849', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 20:3 (May, 1961), pp. 299-314

<sup>10</sup> Frederic Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China, 1839-1861* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966). p. 61-90.

<sup>11</sup> James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth Century* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003); Hans Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Pär Cassel, *Grounds of Judgement: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth Century China and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Zheng Yangwen, *The Social Life of Opium in China, 1483-1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Anglo-Chinese interactions on British ideas should not be underestimated. In addition to shaping Anglo-Chinese relations, the entry question forced a reconsideration of British notions of diplomacy, international law and free trade.

This chapter uses a range of sources that demonstrate the impact of the entry question on British ideals. The Bowring Papers, located at John Rylands Library, Manchester, are of particular interest. These letters trace Bowring's personal development, showing how his frustration with both British and Chinese bureaucracy led him to alter his liberal sentiments. His *Autobiographical Recollections* compliment these accounts, offering the former Governor's reflections of his life in China. Similarly, other pamphlets from jurists and British officials provide a window into British perceptions of China. In addition to these personal sources, Foreign Office papers demonstrate the growing support for intervention from British politicians, diplomats and the merchant community. The letters that are enclosed in these files also include translated correspondence from Qing officials to the British, giving the Chinese viewpoint on the gradual descent towards conflict. These sources, in addition to articles from the *Friend of China*, the *North China Herald* and the *Chinese Repository* paint a picture of friction, failed diplomacy and a battle for hegemony in East Asia – ultimately serving the argument that rather than following a diplomatic blueprint on their interactions with the Chinese, British foreign policy and liberal values developed as a result of government service in China.

In order to demonstrate the impact of the entry question on Britain's liberal development, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first demonstrates how poor trade returns, which were viewed by Britain's diplomats and merchants to be a consequence of the entry question, led them to question free trade's universal application. Britain's inability to establish a freer

commercial exchange with the Qing Empire confirmed for a number of Britain's expatriates in China, that military intervention, rather than the free trade doctrine, would assist British trade. The second shows how the entry question consolidated British conceptions of China as an 'uncivilised' nation that was unaware of its legal obligations, a conclusion that influenced Bowring's notion of international law. The final section argues that Britain's inability to secure entry, in addition to a stagnating trade, led Bowring to question his nation's diplomatic style and call for a reconfiguration of tactics in favour of military intervention. It shows that in addition to shaping British perceptions of the Chinese, the entry question informed Bowring of the weaknesses and inefficiencies in Britain's diplomatic structure, contributing to his conclusion that in China, military intervention was an acceptable method of diplomacy to secure trade.

## **The Limits of Free Trade**

Between 1842 and 1856 (the inter-war period), the entry question shaped British attitudes towards free trade. Throughout his early career, Sir John Bowring was an avid defender of this form of political economy and championed what he considered to be its wider benefits. An advocate of the Cobdenite brand of liberal thought, Bowring was convinced that freer commercial links promoted international peace.<sup>12</sup> As a result, he argued that Britain should make a strict commitment to international non-intervention which, he contended, would profit the nation's commercial interests. However, as a result of his tenure as Consul to Canton (1849-1854) and subsequently as the Governor of Hong Kong (1854-1859) – a

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Conway, 'John Bowring and the Nineteenth Century Peace Movement', *Historical Research*, 64:155 (1991), p. 344. For a description of Cobdenite liberal thought see: Martin Ceadel, 'Cobden and Peace', in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan eds., *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism: Richard Cobden Bicentenary Essays* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 189-208; Keith Robbins, 'Richard Cobden: The International Man', in Howe and Morgan eds., *Rethinking Nineteenth Century Liberalism*, pp. 177-187; David Nicholls, 'Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement, 1848-1853', *Journal of British Studies*, 30:4 (October, 1991), pp. 351-376; Camille Castorina, *Richard Cobden and the Intellectual Development and Influence of the Manchester School of Economics* (Unpublished Theses, University of Manchester, 1976), p. 23.



position that gave him Plenipotentiary powers in China and made him Superintendent of British trade – Bowring questioned the universal applicability of free trade and non-intervention.<sup>13</sup> The refusal from Qing officials to grant entry into Canton, which was considered harmful to Britain's mercantile interests, demonstrated to Bowring and the British expatriate community more generally, the limits of free trade and its connection to a programme of non-intervention. It was viewed as proof that the Qing Empire was unable to engage in reciprocal commercial exchanges, resulting in the widespread conclusion that in China, a relationship based on the foundations of *free* trade was impossible. By 1856, there was a general consensus amongst British diplomats and merchants that to secure trade in China, military intervention was a necessary evil.



(Fig. 1) Portrait of Sir John Bowring, by John King (1826). Source: Youings ed., *Sir John Bowring, Aspects of his Life and Career*, p. 18.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Britain's free trade ideals were under development. Jonathan Parry argues that for twenty years after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 – a symbol of

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<sup>13</sup> Bowring was officially the Governor of Hong Kong until 1859, yet, as a result of British uproar at his decision to bombard the port of Canton, Lord Palmerston relieved Bowring of many of his duties and replaced him with Lord Elgin, who managed Britain's war efforts after 1857. See: Bowring, 'Sir John Bowring: The Imperial Role of a Lifelong Radical', p. 424.

Britain's adoption of the free trade programme – there was a debate as to whether Britain should embrace an active and interventionist foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> To its most ardent campaigners such as Richard Cobden, free trade was destined to create an interdependent global system and as a result, would ensure international peace.<sup>15</sup> This conclusion, Anthony Howe asserts, 'ran deeply through the public mind and morality of Victorian Britain.'<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, after 1846, a number free trade's advocates challenged its connection to a new international structure committed to non-intervention. To Anthony Howe, relations with Europe in particular brought into focus different conceptions of free trade and led to popular support for Lord Palmerston, who challenged the 'peace-at-any-price policy'.<sup>17</sup> For Bowring and the British expatriate community in China, it was their experiences during the inter-war period that shaped their political convictions. As this section shows, the inability to secure entry, which was seen as confirmation of free trade's failure in China, facilitated their support for military intervention.

As a result of the Treaty of Nanjing, British politicians, diplomats and merchants were optimistic for the future of Anglo-Chinese trade. This agreement – forced upon the Qing as a consequence of the first Anglo-Chinese war – conceded the island Hong Kong, opened the ports of Canton, Shanghai, Amoy, Foochow and Ningbo to British commerce, brought an end to the tributary system and demanded that the Chinese pay a reparation of twenty one million dollars by 1845, implicitly blaming them for the conflict.<sup>18</sup> However, throughout the inter-war period (1842-1856), British optimism faded. The Nanjing treaty failed to live up to

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Anthony Howe, 'Free trade and the Global Order: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Vision', in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order*, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp. 70-92.

<sup>18</sup> Frederic Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 137; John King Fairbank, 'The Creation of the Treaty System', in John King Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett ed., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 10: Late Ch'ing 1800-1911, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 217.

expectations, since the Anglo-Chinese trade continued to rely on opium imports rather than British manufactured goods as was anticipated.<sup>19</sup> Determined to find a scapegoat for the stagnating returns, British expatriates argued that China's reluctance to engage in a closer commercial relationship was hindering import growth. In particular, the refusal of Qing officials to allow the British to reside and work within Canton confirmed China's complicity in their trade conundrum. Between 1842 and 1856, British diplomats and merchants focused their attention on the entry dilemma, convinced that in order to improve their commercial returns in China, access to the city of Canton was essential. The reluctance of Qing officials to enact this term impeded friendly relations and moreover, consolidated Britain's perception that there were limits to the ideals of free trade and non-intervention.

The entry question demonstrated the contrast in British and Chinese notions of international commerce. In mid-nineteenth century Britain, the nation witnessed the economic and political rise of the middle class and, after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the dominance of free trade policies.<sup>20</sup> To P.J. Cain and A.J. Hopkins, the growth of the 'capitalists' fuelled Britain's international expansion during this period.<sup>21</sup> Although China was not a newcomer to the world of commerce or international relations – its former superpower status was shaped as a result of its vast trading networks – the Treaty of Nanjing represented a shift in their control over commercial relations.<sup>22</sup> Prior to 1842, foreign countries were restricted to a strip

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-1842* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), p. 185; Robert Blake, *Jardine Matheson: Traders of the Far East* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999), pp. 107-129.

<sup>20</sup> C. Knick Harley, 'Trade: Discovery, Mercantilism and Technology', in Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson eds., *The Cambridge History of Modern Britain, Volume I: Industrialisation, 1700-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 176; Nicholls, 'Richard Cobden and the International Peace Congress Movement', p. 370; G.F. Searle, *Entrepreneurial Politics in Mid-Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 1-21; Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp. 1-106; Guido de Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 123-132.

<sup>21</sup> P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1993), p. 44.

<sup>22</sup> William Atwell, 'Ming China and the Emerging World Economy, c. 1470-1650', in Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368-1644*, Part 2

of land outside the city walls of Canton, known as ‘the Thirteen Factories’ (See Fig. 2). In addition, international trade was directed by the tributary system and conducted through the Hong merchants, who enjoyed a monopoly over the Qing Empire’s commercial exchanges.<sup>23</sup> This structure, designed to assert China’s supremacy, forced foreign merchants to present their goods as a ‘tribute’ to the Qing Emperor as a sign of submission.<sup>24</sup> Following the Nanjing treaty, although accepting Chinese duties at five per cent *ad valorem* (a dramatic drop from pre-1842), British diplomats sought to create a free trading system which favoured their notion of commercial relations.<sup>25</sup> However, Britain’s inability to gain entry into China, termed by British officials ‘the entry question’, demonstrated stark differences in Britain and China’s commercial objectives. It resulted in the consensus that establishing a relationship in China based on free trade and non-intervention was near impossible. By 1856, Britain’s expatriate community argued that an aggressive foreign policy, rather than the promotion of free trade, was the only way for British trade in China to succeed.

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 376-416; Kenneth M. Swope, ‘Deceit, Disguise, and Dependence: China, Japan, and the Future of the Tributary System, 1592-1596’, *The International History Review* 22:4 (December, 2002), pp. 757-782.

<sup>23</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, pp. 43-45.

<sup>24</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, p. 54

<sup>25</sup> Yu-Kwei Cheng, *Foreign Trade and Industrial Development of China* (Washington DC: University of Washington Press, 1956), p. 10; Francis Hyde, *Far Eastern Trade 1860-1914* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973), p. 3.



(Fig. 2) John Duncan, 'The Foreigners Quarter at Canton', 1789. Although this picture is from fifty years prior to 1842, the factories and waterfront remained relatively similar. Source: John Rylands Collection R23747, John Trusler, *The Habitable World Described: The Present State of the People in all Parts of the Globe, from North to South* (London: Literary Press, 1789), p. 339. Reproduced by courtesy of the University Librarian and Director, John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester.

Although British politicians, diplomats and merchants were confident for the future of British trade in China as a result of the Nanjing treaty, there was widespread disdain for the way in which this commercial agreement had been reached. The first Anglo-Chinese conflict (1839-1842), Robert Bickers argues, received mixed feelings amongst British political commentators – it represented 'an odd war and an odd peace.'<sup>26</sup> This is reflected in a report from the East India Committee, which argued that the conflict with the Qing Empire created uncertainty in regard to 'our public morals' and 'the character of our national acts.'<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, the agreement of 1842 provided an opportunity to achieve two main objectives in China: to extend Britain's international trading network and to place their nation on an

<sup>26</sup> Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, p. 86.

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the East India Committee of the Colonial Society of the Causes and Consequences of the Military Operations in China* (London: James Maynard, 1843), p. 1.

equal footing with the Chinese, who had for centuries claimed that foreign intruders were socially, culturally and spiritually beneath them.<sup>28</sup> It was lauded as the beginning of a new relationship with China, based on commerce and peaceful diplomacy. To Sir Henry Pottinger, the chief-signatory and first Governor of Hong Kong, the Nanjing settlement was the 'Treaty of Peace.'<sup>29</sup> The 1842 agreement, therefore, was treated as a break from the past and an opportunity to create a stronger and mutually beneficial relationship with the Qing Empire.

The agreement also received international attention and was perceived as a defining moment in China's relations with the Western world. The American periodical the *Chinese Repository*, which sought to inform Protestant missionaries of life in China, offered its perception of the impact of Britain's treaty:

The absurd claim of universal supremacy, long ago made clear by the Chinese in their books, and always avowed and maintained as far as their daring and power would admit, has been exposed and exploded.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, an American business publication, although sceptical of the commercial opportunities the Treaty of Nanjing had secured, observed Britain's optimism at the prospects for their trading interests in China:

The close of the China war, resulting in the opening of five large ports to the enterprise of the English merchants, has been, in England, the cause of great rejoicing, and of an increased buoyancy in the markets, arising from the anticipations of a largely increased trade between England and that country, growing out of an increased consumption of British manufactures by the Chinese.<sup>31</sup>

These foreign commentaries acknowledging British aims and positivity, demonstrate how widely held these views must have been. Nobody was more optimistic than Sir Henry Pottinger who, a year after signing the treaty agreement, reported to Qiying, the Qing official

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<sup>28</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, 'British Business in China, 1860s to 1950s', in R. P. T. Davenport-Hines and Geoffrey Jones eds., *British Business in Asia since 1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 191.

<sup>29</sup> The National Archives [TNA], Foreign Office Records [FO] 17/59, 'Pottinger to Aberdeen', f. 1 (Canton: 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1842).

<sup>30</sup> 'Present Condition of the Chinese Empire', *Chinese Repository*, Vol. 12, 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1843, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> 'Prospects and Character of the British trade with China. From Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, for March 1843', *Chinese Repository*, Vol. 12, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1843, p. 513.

in charge of China's foreign affairs, his delight at the state of trade in Canton: 'I am glad to say that everything relating to the trade of Canton seems to be going on prosperously and quietly.'<sup>32</sup> Thus, early perceptions of the commercial benefits of the treaty were extremely positive. The conclusion that Anglo-Chinese relations would be conducted on an equal footing, resulting in an improvement in trade returns, was widespread.

Over the course of the inter-war period, this initial optimism was replaced with feelings of disappointment, confusion and anger amongst Britain's diplomats and the mercantile community. They had overestimated the benefit of 'opening' China. The Anglo-Chinese trade remained in favour of the Qing Empire with their exports of tea, silk and other goods outweighing legitimate British imports (excluding opium). In 1849, details of the Anglo-Chinese trade since 1842 were published in the *Chinese Repository* (Fig. 3). It shows that although Canton remained the primary post for commerce, imports into the city gradually declined year by year. In 1843 to 1844, imports into Canton amounted to \$15,506,240. Yet, by 1847, this number dropped to \$9,625,760.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, although showing a small decline from 1843 to 1847 – possibly as a result of the growth in other treaty ports and the economic stagnation within Britain – exports from China continued to boast its dominance over imports.<sup>34</sup> In 1843 to 1844, exports from Canton came to \$17,925,360 and after a spike in 1845 to \$20,734,018, by 1847, the number remained steady at \$15,721,940. These figures demonstrated that *legal* Anglo-Chinese trade after 1842 continued to favour the Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> TNA FO 17/71, 'Pottinger to Qiyong', f. 2 (Hong Kong: 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1843).

<sup>33</sup> 'Valuation of the Principal imports and exports in British Vessels at the Ports of Canton, Shanghai, and Amoy, during the years 1834-4, 1845, 1846 and 1847, taken from the Official Returns', *Chinese Repository*, Vol. 18, June, 1849, p. 300.

<sup>34</sup> Blake, *Jardine Matheson*, pp. 105-108. See also, W. C. Costin, *Great Britain and China 1833-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), p. 122.

<sup>35</sup> 'Valuation of the Principal Imports and Exports in British Vessels', *Chinese Repository*, Vol. 18, June, 1849, p. 300.

**No. VI.—VALUATION of the Principal IMPORTS and EXPORTS in *British Vessels* at the Ports of CANTON, SHANGHAI, and AMOY, during the Years 1843-4, 1845, 1846, and 1847, taken from the Official Returns.**

DESCRIPTION OF GOODS.	1843-4.	1845.	1846.	1847.
<i>Imports.</i>				
Manufactures of Cotton, .. ..	\$ 4,039,182	\$ 2,450,482	\$ 2,755,223	\$ 1,470,296
Manufactures of Wool, .. ..	2,898,866	1,875,042	1,386,534	1,027,346
Raw Cotton, .. ..	683,654	313,835	792,876	830,756
Miscellaneous, .. ..	7,884,538	5,753,575	5,062,950	6,297,362
Canton, .. ..	\$ 15,506,240	10,392,934	9,997,583	9,625,760
Shanghai, .. ..	2,521,506	5,194,593	3,888,960	4,311,494
Amoy, .. ..	372,272	680,741	775,085	829,652
Grand Total, .....	\$ 18,400,018	16,268,268	14,661,628	14,766,906
<i>Exports.</i>				
Tea, .. ..	13,432,958	15,825,954	11,112,627	11,844,232
Silk, .. ..	2,172,263	2,424,897	1,344,286	2,007,770
Miscellaneous, .. ..	2,320,139	2,483,167	2,921,647	1,869,938
Canton, .. ..	17,925,360	20,734,018	15,378,560	15,721,940
Shanghai, .. ..	2,360,134	6,043,636	6,492,144	6,725,731
Amoy, .. ..	58,209	71,439	38,938	32,948
Grand Total, .....	\$ 20,343,703	26,849,093	21,909,642	22,480,619

(Fig. 3) 'Valuation of the Principal imports and exports in British Vessels at the Ports of Canton, Shanghai, and Amoy, during the years 1834-4, 1845, 1846 and 1847, taken from the Official Returns'. Source: *Chinese Repository*, Vol. 18, June, 1849, p. 300.

The widespread disappointment concerning British trade in China sheds light on the expectations of the Nanjing treaty amongst Britain's diplomats and merchants. In his correspondence with Pihkwei, a Qing official in the Cantonese government in 1852, Sir John Bowring claimed to support the freedom of commercial exchanges with China:

By the Treaty of Peace, China entered into commercial obligations with England as an equal and friendly power, and at the same time bound herself to abstain from any policy at all inconsistent with the new international relations of the two countries.<sup>36</sup>

However, with the trade continuing to favour the Chinese after 1842, British merchants considered the trade to be an 'imbalance' that needed addressing.<sup>37</sup> In his examination of

<sup>36</sup> John Rylands Library Manchester, Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Pihkwei', f. 73 (Hong Kong: 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1852)

<sup>37</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 333.



China's trade relations in *The Traditional Trade of Asia*, C.G.F. Simkin argues that the disappointing trade returns were a result of British attempts to sell the Chinese goods for which there was no demand. Simkin explains that the British imported grand pianos and stainless steel cutlery into China, which ultimately failed to penetrate the Chinese market and redress the trade 'imbalance'.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, although the British were oblivious to the demands of the Chinese market, there was a refusal to accept that the disappointing trade was a result of a lack of demand. Instead, the rejection of entry into Canton was perceived as the primary culprit harming British interests. In his 1857 investigation of the legal case for military intervention into China, the jurist Joseph Beaumont of Lincoln's Inn argued that the entry dilemma was instrumental to Britain's stagnating trade. Beaumont claimed that after 1842, there was a general consensus that although the Nanjing treaty did not grant 'perfect freedom and equality in China', it offered 'every facility for conducting an extensive trade with upwards of 350 million theretofore secluded and beyond our reach.'<sup>39</sup> However, as a consequence of their inability to secure Cantonese entry, Beaumont argued that in comparison to the optimism in 1842, the reality was 'a cause for great astonishment and chagrin.'<sup>40</sup> There was a belief, therefore, that China's population were eager to trade and yet, Britain's limited access to them, demonstrated by the entry question, was hampering stronger commercial links.

This notion was further exacerbated by the commercial growth of Shanghai since its establishment as a treaty port in 1842. As depicted in Fig. 3, whilst Canton's trade gradually declined, Shanghai witnessed a steady increase (albeit slowing down after 1845, representing an overall decline of imports into China). Throughout the inter-war period, year-on-year

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<sup>38</sup> C. G. F. Simkin, *The Traditional Trade of Asia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 276.

<sup>39</sup> Joseph Beaumont, *What is Lord Elgin to do? The Canton Dispute and our Relations with China Considered* (London: Longman, 1857), p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Beaumont, *What is Lord Elgin to do?*, p. 26.

imports into Shanghai represented a larger proportion of British trade into China. It blossomed into a city of international importance that would eventually become one of the world's leading commercial centres.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the Colonial Treasurer of Hong Kong, Robert Montgomery Martin, questioned whether Canton should be the focus of British interests in China:

Canton, however, has no intrinsic advantages to make it the seat of foreign commerce. So long as the Emperor restricted all foreigners to the most distant southerly port in the empire, tea, silk, or any other exportable produce, was obliged to be conveyed thither, however distant the place of production or manufacture; but the case now is totally different, when the northern ports in the immediate vicinity of the tea and silk provinces are, equally with Canton, open to British commerce.<sup>42</sup>

Shanghai's success as a trading port demonstrated the demand for British goods and in addition, accentuated the difficulties in Canton. To Gerald S. Graham, Canton's continued resistance of foreign infiltration, in comparison to the growth of Shanghai trade, meant that the merchant companies who chose to stay in Canton, such as Jardine Matheson & Co., did so 'at their own peril.'<sup>43</sup> By 1856, Bowring conceded that,

The trade of Shanghai has now - under the positive establishment there - grown to be of enormous interest that a stoppage at Canton is a minor consideration. I find that ten thousand Chinese junks will (so Mr Lay writes) have entered that port in 1856.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, although ecstatic at Shanghai's commercial growth, it shed light on the issues facing British trade in Canton and in particular, the contribution of the entry dilemma to the port's diminishing trade. This situation, which continued throughout the inter-war period, led Bowring to conclude that 'Canton must be humbled.'<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Bickers, 'Shanghaianders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai, 1843-1937', *Past and Present*, 159 (1998), pp. 161-211; Robert Bickers, *Empire Made me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> Robert Montgomery Martin, *Reports, Minutes and Despatches on the British Position and Prospects in China* (London: Harrison & Co., 1846), pp. 20-21.

<sup>43</sup> Gerald S. Graham, *The China Station: War and Diplomacy 1830-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 235.

<sup>44</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 15 (Canton: 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1849).

<sup>45</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 172 (Hong Kong: 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1857).

British optimism at the possibilities of freer trade links with China extended beyond commercial growth. It was viewed as a mutually beneficial objective that was advantageous to the Qing Empire. To Frank Trentmann, amongst nineteenth-century free trade idealists, this form of political economy was viewed as a civilising tool; it was a moral project that would create civilised markets and international trust.<sup>46</sup> In a global system built on free trade, Trentmann argues, the consumer was instrumental in improving foreign relations.<sup>47</sup> These notions were not lost in China. In 1846, Robert Montgomery Martin proclaimed that 'English interests are now therefore irrevocably interwoven with those of China' and thus, by extending commerce and strengthening British power in the Qing Empire, it 'is equally beneficial to China and to England.'<sup>48</sup> To Martin, Britain's global expansion and dissemination of free trade ideals was 'beneficial to all mankind, by enabling her to maintain the peace of the world, to promote civilization, to reclaim the savage.'<sup>49</sup> Thus, for Martin, the Treaty of Nanjing was treated as an opportunity to mould the Qing Empire into a nation that reflected Britain's commercial, political and legal principles. Through an improvement in trading links with China, Martin argued, it would ensure the nation's civilised status and make the prospect of further intervention 'a very remote probability.'<sup>50</sup>

By 1856, China's refusal to grant British entry became a symbol of the nation's 'uncivilised' and 'barbarous' nature. These terms, Jennifer Pitts asserts, were used by the British to describe countries that were unable to partake in a reciprocal commercial and political relationship, were most probably non-Christian, and did not adhere to Western standards of

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<sup>46</sup> Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Martin, *Reports, Minutes and Despatches*, p. 79.

<sup>49</sup> Martin, *Reports, Minutes and Despatches*, p. 79.

<sup>50</sup> Martin, *Reports, Minutes and Despatches*, p. 24.

law, diplomacy and trade relations.<sup>51</sup> The entry dilemma was perceived by the British to show the Qing Empire's inability to foresee the advantages of a freer commercial relationship. As Jonathan Parry concludes, amongst propertied Britons, there was a belief that their country was the 'greatest power that the world had ever seen.'<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Parry asserts that there was a widespread consensus that Divine Providence had given Britain its superpower status and thus, required the nation to give back to the global community.<sup>53</sup> It was, Richard Francis Spall Jr. argues, this context that led free traders to believe that this form of political economy was godly and civilised; because God had distributed resources unfairly, nations were intended to trade.<sup>54</sup> China's failure to appreciate the benefits of this system was viewed as evidence of its inability to engage with Britain on civilised terms. In Joseph Beaumont's summary of the inter-war period in 1857, the jurist argued that had the Chinese accepted an improvement in trade relations with the British, it would have been beneficial to their manufacturing community: 'a more intimate intercourse with us would infallibly introduce into China those numerous scientific and mechanical inventions, perfectly unknown there at present, and without which we ourselves surely would have remained in barbarism.'<sup>55</sup> To Beaumont, China's rejection of entry was also a rejection of Western standards of civilisation. The Qing's refusal to accept British expansion demonstrated their barbarous status. Beaumont concluded that the British should have 'measured more carefully the immediate prospect of an improved condition of Anglo-Chinese relations.'<sup>56</sup> Thus, in addition to providing the British with an explanation for their disappointing trade returns in China, the entry question was used as an example to highlight China's barbarism.

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<sup>51</sup> Jennifer Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order*, pp. 68-71.

<sup>52</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 387.

<sup>53</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 387.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Francis Spall Jr., 'Free Trade, Foreign Relations and the Anti-Corn Law League', *The International History Review*, 10:3 (August, 1988), p. 413.

<sup>55</sup> Beaumont, *What is Lord Elgin to do?*, p. 30.

<sup>56</sup> Beaumont, *What is Lord Elgin to do?*, p. 27.

The conclusion that China was unable to partake in a Western-styled commercial relationship shaped British opinions of the infamous opium trade. The sale of opium in China, which is considered a primary factor in the outbreak of the first Opium War in 1839, was widely viewed as a moral catastrophe amongst British politicians and diplomats.<sup>57</sup> In 1849, referring to the continued sale of opium, Bowring argued ‘we must put an end, if possible, to the frightful smuggling what is carried on here.’<sup>58</sup> However, by 1856, in the port of Shanghai, a half-year trade summary indicated that, whilst imports into the city were worth £1,881,310 6s. 9d, opium sales equalled £2,019,487 10d.<sup>59</sup> The trade imbalance in favour of China, exacerbated by the entry question, convinced Bowring among others that opium sales were a necessity to ensure British interests in China. Although arguing that the opium trade was a moral embarrassment in a letter to his son, Edgar, in 1854<sup>60</sup>, by 1856, Bowring defended its sale, arguing that ‘the importation of opium is not prohibited by treaty and that fact ought to be known.’<sup>61</sup> Thus, as a result of opium’s prosperity and the failure of entry, Bowring’s moral convictions and attempts to ensure the success of a free exchange of *legal* goods in China were brought into question. The Governor of Hong Kong had transitioned from an advocate of ending the opium trade to a realistic bureaucrat.

Bowring’s acceptance of the opium trade was, in part, a result of his ability to categorise the Chinese population as ‘uncivilised’ and thus, unable to partake in a system of free and equal commercial exchanges based on legal transactions. Rather than admitting Britain’s responsibility for the growth in the opium trade, in 1852, Bowring placed blame on Chinese

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<sup>57</sup> Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London: Constable, 1970), p. 460; David E. Owen, *British Opium Policy in India and China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934), p. 187-192; Frederic Wakeman, ‘The Canton Trade and the Opium War’, in Fairbank and Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 10*, Part 1, pp. 178-179.

<sup>58</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 15 (Canton: 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1849).

<sup>59</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1230, W. M. Lent, ‘The Annexed Return of the Import Trade at the Port of Shanghai, for the Half-Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1856 is published for General Information’, f. 244 (Shanghai: January, 1857).

<sup>60</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 105 (Mouth of the Peiho: 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1854).

<sup>61</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 147 (Hong Kong: 1<sup>st</sup> January 1856).

demand: 'I am quite sure that no legislation will stop the demand for opium in China.'<sup>62</sup> This perception was reiterated by Joseph Beaumont, who concluded, 'if the Chinese openly connive at the trade, it is not for the British Government to enforce for them their own laws.'<sup>63</sup> It was, Beaumont argued, 'official corruption and misconduct' of the Qing officials, in addition to the demand for opium amongst the Chinese population, which enabled the growth of the trade.<sup>64</sup> By concluding that the trade was inevitable in China, the British distanced themselves from the moral concerns of selling opium. Instead, impelled by his determination to redress the trade 'imbalance', Bowring's concern shifted to dominating China's opium market. In a letter to Edgar, Bowring argued that,

China will long become a formidable competitor by the growth of native opium – it is spreading widely and its quality is rapidly improving and the subject is a very grave one.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, as a result of his government service and inability to ensure the success of British manufacturing goods in China, Bowring's condemnation of the opium trade, in addition to his defence of free trade, were called into doubt. Bowring's advocacy of free commercial competition, a benchmark of free trade, diminished as a result of his China experience.<sup>66</sup> Spurred by the inability to gain entry, in addition to the stagnation of *legal* commerce, Bowring advocated a British monopoly on opium production – a trade that just three years prior, he was determined to abolish.

The determination to improve trade in China resulted in British expatriates challenging their nation's commitment to free trade and non-intervention. In an article published on the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1857 in the *North China Herald*, a British merchant writing under the pseudonym

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<sup>62</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 63 (Aboard the P & O Haddington: 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1852).

<sup>63</sup> Beaumont, *What is Lord Elgin to do?*, p. 32.

<sup>64</sup> Beaumont, *What is Lord Elgin to do?*, p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 63.

<sup>66</sup> Francis Spall Jr., 'Free Trade, Foreign Relations and the Anti-Corn Law League', pp. 405-420.

‘Young Dragon’ offered his support for Bowring’s decision to militarily intervene in Canton. ‘Young Dragon’ argued that ‘the policy adopted, and the measures enforced by the Civil and Naval Chiefs respectively are right.’<sup>67</sup> In the article, ‘Young Dragon’ championed the abolition of the East India Company’s monopoly on British commerce in China in 1834, a symbol of Britain’s adoption of free trade policies in China, arguing that this decision was taken to enable free and private enterprise to flourish.<sup>68</sup> However, as a result of Britain’s China experience during the inter-war period, he questioned the ability of free trade to secure British interests. ‘Young Dragon’ asked ‘Why is it that a commercial intercourse so long maintained has not produced its so called benign influences on the hearts and minds of the Cantonese?’ In the opinion of ‘Young Dragon’, a sentiment that the *North China Herald* claimed to share, the doctrine of free trade had failed to benefit British interests and alter the minds of the Cantonese in favour of Western-styled commerce.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to their dismay in regard to free trade policies in China, the *North China Herald* challenged Britain’s advocacy of non-intervention. In an editorial on the 9<sup>th</sup> August 1856, months before the bombardment of Canton, it argued that there are two possible policies available to the British:

There seems, indeed, to be but two courses to extend Western connection with such nations [China and Japan] one to require with firmness and determination such concessions as are manifestly for the advantage of both parties in the eyes of the civilised world, and to take them by intimidation and force if refused; the other, to wait for such opportunities as in the course of time present themselves, and, by taking advantage of their necessities, obtain what we require without the appearance of coercion. While the first is not to be condemned hastily when required by the necessities of advancing civilisation, the latter is recommended by policy and good feeling when the opportunity is not too far distant from the necessity to make the delay a greater evil than the resort to strong measures.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *North China Herald*, 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1857, p. 119.

<sup>68</sup> Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China*, p. 179.

<sup>69</sup> *North China Herald*, 21<sup>st</sup> February, 1857, p. 119.

<sup>70</sup> *North China Herald*, 9<sup>th</sup> August, 1857, p. 7.

To the *Herald*, Britain's diplomats had adopted the second position for too long and as a result, were unable to secure British interests. In a similar appeal for a change in Britain's diplomatic course, on the 26<sup>th</sup> May 1855, the *Herald* argued that whilst free trade and peaceful diplomacy were advantageous under certain circumstances, Britain's unwavering support for these ideals in China meant that 'we ourselves raise as insuperable a barrier to the extension and freedom of trade as could well be devised.'<sup>71</sup> Thus, as a result of the inter-war period, the British expatriate community accepted the limits of free trade and non-intervention. These ideals, which were intended to improve commerce and enable British expansion, were instead criticised as having the opposite effect.

To Sir John Bowring, his China experience and the entry question in particular, convinced the diplomat that the programme of free trade in China had failed. The inter-war period and disputes over entry confirmed to Bowring that the Qing Empire was unable to see the benefits of freer commercial relations and thus, he concluded that further intervention was necessary if British trade in China was to succeed. In his *Autobiographical Recollections* (1877), Bowring defended his use of military intervention in China in late 1856, arguing that 'I carried out the principles of Free Trade to their fullest possible extent.'<sup>72</sup> However, as a result of the entry dilemma, Bowring was convinced that there were limitations to the universal applicability of the free trade doctrine: 'It is not fair or just to suppose that a course of actions, which may be practicable or prudent at home, will always succeed abroad.'<sup>73</sup> Thus, through his China experience, Sir John Bowring – a champion of free trade and its connection to international peace – justified his advocacy of military intervention. As this section shows,

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<sup>71</sup> *North China Herald*, 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1857, p. 172.

<sup>72</sup> Sir John Bowring, *Autobiographical Recollections of Sir John Bowring: with a brief memoir by Lewin B. Bowring* (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1877), p. 218. This book was collected and published after Bowring's death by his son Lewin.

<sup>73</sup> Bowring, *Autobiographical Recollections*, p. 217.



Bowring's political development was indicative of a wider movement. The British expatriate community, in addition to British commentators such as Joseph Beaumont, accepted limits to the programme of free trade and its connection to a policy of non-intervention. Indeed, their free trade policies and diplomatic values were shaped by the entry question and the frustration over the disappointing Anglo-Chinese trade.

## **The Limits of International Law**

Anglo-Chinese disputes over the entry question shaped British perceptions of the Qing Empire. The refusal from the Qing officials, backed by the Cantonese population, to grant British access into Canton, as stated in the 1842 agreement, demonstrated to British diplomats the ideological differences between themselves and their Chinese counterparts. Specifically, it exposed differences in their notions of commercial relations, legal traditions and diplomacy. As a result, British officials questioned the application of international law in their diplomatic proceedings with China. This section shows how the entry question led Britain's diplomats to categorise the Chinese as 'uncivilised' which, in turn, consolidated their opinions that relations with China could, and possibly should, be conducted outside the boundaries of international law. As documented by J.Y. Wong and Robert Bickers, the entry dilemma was instrumental in causing a second military intervention into China in 1856.<sup>74</sup> However, they have overlooked a crucial step in the lead up to this conflict; the point at which war became rationalised in the minds of British diplomats and merchants. The entry question was fundamental in this intellectual shift.

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<sup>74</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, pp. 83-109; Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, pp. 113-116.

In mid-nineteenth century Britain, there was no codified understanding of international law.<sup>75</sup> It was a term, however, that represented notions of non-intervention, international co-operation, and reciprocal economic and political relations.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, due to the changing nature of global relations in the nineteenth century and the growing inter-dependence of the international community, there was a determination to clarify its meaning and what nations were to be subject to its terms. In *Elements of International Law* (1836), the American jurist Henry Wheaton offered one particular guideline that set the tone for international legal practices in the mid-nineteenth century. Wheaton argued that there must be an ordered international system that placed 'Western' Christian states at the top in the category of 'civilised', whilst the 'barbarian' and 'savage' countries of Africa and Asia were offered 'civilising tools', such as Western legal standards, to one day reach such a status.<sup>77</sup> To Wheaton, international law was reserved for 'civilised' states. Wheaton's thesis rejected the notion of 'natural law' and 'international equality' as advocated by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and Emer de Vattel (1714-1767), claiming that such concepts were defunct in the face of the complex nature of nineteenth-century international relations.<sup>78</sup> Wheaton's theory was popular in Britain, appealing to British notions of their nation's superiority in the mid-nineteenth century.

Wheaton's notion of international law gained widespread acceptance in the mid-nineteenth century, particularly amongst British liberals. As Casper Sylvest, Andrew Fitzmaurice and Duncan Bell among others argue, Wheaton's international law was used by British liberals to

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<sup>75</sup> Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civiliser of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', p. 71.

<sup>77</sup> Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Stevens and Sons Ltd., 1916), pp. 31-50.

<sup>78</sup> Richard S. Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation in China, Siam and the Ottoman Empire during the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History*, 15:4 (December, 2004), p. 453.

rationalise their nation's formal and informal imperial expansion.<sup>79</sup> In her study of this intellectual process, Jennifer Pitts argues that many within liberal Britain categorised nations as either 'civilised', 'barbarian' or 'savage', as justification to leave the latter two classes outside the boundaries of 'civilised' diplomacy.<sup>80</sup> This reasoning, Pitts argues, enabled many eminent liberals such as John Stuart Mill to validate their support of the British Empire, claiming that 'barbarian' and 'savage' nations – often countries in the non-Christian world – could not partake in a reciprocal civilised relationship.<sup>81</sup> To Bell, this perceived boundary of international law resulted in liberal-minded supporters of empire suggesting that colonial control could act as a 'civilising tool.'<sup>82</sup>

There was, however, no consensus as to what nations should be classed as 'civilised' – although there was a predominant belief that a 'civilised' state would embrace reciprocal relations and furthermore, was subject to Christian teachings.<sup>83</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century British imagination, China's place within this structure was uncertain. As Pitts asserts, its long history and former superpower status meant that its classification as either 'civilised' or 'uncivilised' was unclear.<sup>84</sup> As a result, in 1842, there was a determination to conduct affairs with the Qing Empire through the codes of international law. British politicians and diplomats advocated non-intervention and a mutually beneficial trade relationship. This section shows, however, that the entry question brought an end to this endeavour. It

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<sup>79</sup> Casper Sylvest, 'Our Passion for Legality': International Law and Imperialism in Late-Nineteenth Century Britain', *Review of International Studies*, 34:3 (July, 2008), pp. 404-410. For further discussion on international law and its development in the nineteenth century see: Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'Liberals and Empire in Nineteenth Century International Law', *American Historical Review*, 117 (2012), pp. 122-125; Bell, 'An Introduction', p. 9; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), pp. 30-67; John Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782 to 1865: The National Interests* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989), p. 266; Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 2-3.

<sup>80</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', p. 68.

<sup>81</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', pp. 68-71.

<sup>82</sup> Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays in Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), p. 35.

<sup>83</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', p. 71; Georgios Varouxakis, 'Great versus Small Nations: Size and National Greatness in Victorian Political Thought', in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order*, p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', pp. 71-75

confirmed for many of Britain's diplomats based in China that the Qing was 'uncivilised' which, ultimately, confirmed their notions that the loose doctrine of international law did not apply in China.

There is a common misconception that by 1842, British perceptions of China were mainly negative, viewing its citizens as 'uncivilised' and adverse to Western trade links. In Hao Gao's study of the Amherst Embassy of 1816, he argues that Britain's representatives – who gained unprecedented access to inland China – were convinced of its lack of progression; viewpoints that were in direct conflict with the complimentary eighteenth-century reports from Voltaire and Leibniz. To Gao, this expedition in 1816 enabled the British to feel confident in declaring war on China in 1839.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, Catherine Pagani and Ulrike Hilleman show how negative cultural representations of China in the nineteenth century justified Britain's imperial expansion in the Qing Empire.<sup>86</sup> However, these scornful discernments were *not* widespread. Bowring, for example, considered Britain's military actions in 1839 as an abuse of international law and the sale of opium, a moral embarrassment.<sup>87</sup> Further, after accepting the position of Consul to Canton in 1849, Bowring wrote to his son Edgar that he was positive he 'would do much good' in ensuring strong commercial relations in China, as he was 'anxious to show the Chinese that I desire the establishment of the friendliest relations with them and their government.'<sup>88</sup> Bowring's optimism was shared by members of Britain's political class. The former Governor-General of India and Whig politician, the Earl of Auckland, claimed that the British army had

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<sup>85</sup> Hao Gao, 'The Amherst Embassy and British Discoveries in China', *The Journal of the Historical Association*, 99:337 (October, 2014), p. 569.

<sup>86</sup> Catherine Pagani, 'Chinese material culture and British perceptions of China in the mid-nineteenth century', in Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn ed., *Colonialism and the object: Empire, material culture and the museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); Ulrike Hilleman, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>87</sup> Conway, 'John Bowring and the Nineteenth Century Peace Movement', p. 344.

<sup>88</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 9 (Canton: 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1849). See also, Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 10 (Canton: 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1849).

procured 'a peace which promised everything that could be desired from it.'<sup>89</sup> In 1842, there was a determination from the British to conduct affairs with China through peaceful means. The alteration in British perceptions of the Chinese, which led to a rationalisation of gunboat diplomacy, was a result of their China experience between 1842 and 1856. Exchanges with Qing officials over the entry dilemma forced British diplomats to reconsider the boundaries of international law and conclude that to improve British trade in China, military intervention was inevitable.

The demand for entry into Canton and the Treaty of Nanjing more generally, represented a shift in the balance of power between Britain and China. It demonstrated a significant alteration in the Qing's control over its international affairs. The Treaty of Nanjing, as James L. Hevia argues, signified Britain's attempt at establishing a 'new world order' in China, based on Western-styled trade relations, legal traditions and diplomacy.<sup>90</sup> Robert Bickers asserts that for the people of Canton – who won a victory over the British at San-yuan-li in 1841 and never surrendered throughout the first conflict – the 1842 treaty created 'bitter legacies.'<sup>91</sup> Their city, which had for so long quelled foreign expansion into China, was now expected to submit to the demands of the British. This notion was met with a refusal from both Qing officials and the Cantonese population and, as a result, during the inter-war period, the entry question remained unsolved.<sup>92</sup>

Soon after the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, it became apparent that entry into the port of Canton would be problematic. Qiying (1842-1848), Xu Guangjin (1848-1852) and Ye Mingchen (1852-1858), the respective Viceroys of Liangguang (Guangdong and Guangxi)

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<sup>89</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 66, col. 537 (14<sup>th</sup> February, 1843).

<sup>90</sup> Hevia, *English Lessons*, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, p. 86.

<sup>92</sup> John Carroll, 'The Canton System: Conflict and Accommodation in the Contact Zone', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Hong Kong Branch*, 50 (2010), p. 52.

and chief Qing officials for foreign relations, used the local population's opposition to British entry as an excuse for avoiding its implementation. Frederic Wakeman argues that claims of Cantonese 'xenophobia' towards the foreign community enabled Qing officials to avoid the execution of this deeply unpopular term and ensure the maintenance of the status quo.<sup>93</sup> In a letter to the newly appointed Governor of Hong Kong Sir Francis Davis, Qiying reiterated the concerns he expressed to the former Governor Sir Henry Pottinger regarding the opening of the port of Canton:

With regard to going into the city, I, the Great Minister, distinctly stated to your predecessor, Pottinger, that as soon as the trade was open, and everything on both sides quiet, there could be no reason for refusing or rejecting the proposal, whenever necessary, to enter the city...However, up to the present year, I have found it impossible for foreigners to go into the city, both from my conversation with the gentry and an inquiry into the disposition with the people. I, the Great Minister, have repeatedly ordered the local Mandarins to use persuasion, yet the public is strongly opposed to it.<sup>94</sup>

In contradiction to an earlier agreement with Pottinger – stating that the city walls would be opened in 1845 – Qiying further delayed entry.<sup>95</sup> Cantonese public opinion was manipulated by Qiying to stall the entry question and furthermore, to suggest that his own power was limited to the demands of the local community.

Similarly, this tactic was adopted by future Viceroy Xu and Ye who, in addition to reciting anti-foreign rhetoric, attempted to avoid Western advances in Canton. In his correspondence with the newly promoted Governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Bowring, Ye Mingchen replied to Bowring's declaration in 1854 that the city walls must be opened as stated in the Nanjing treaty. Ye argued,

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<sup>93</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, pp. 71-90.

<sup>94</sup> 'Qiying and Governor Hwang to Davis', Translated by German missionary Charles Gutzlaff (Canton: April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1845), *Correspondence Respecting Insults in China: Presented to the House of Commons by Command of Her Majesty, 1857* (London: Harrison, 1857), pp. 24-25. This collection of 'Insults' from the Chinese towards the British was collated by diplomats and presented as a Blue Book to the House of Commons in favour of Bowring's decision to bombard the port of Canton in November 1856.

<sup>95</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, p. 74.

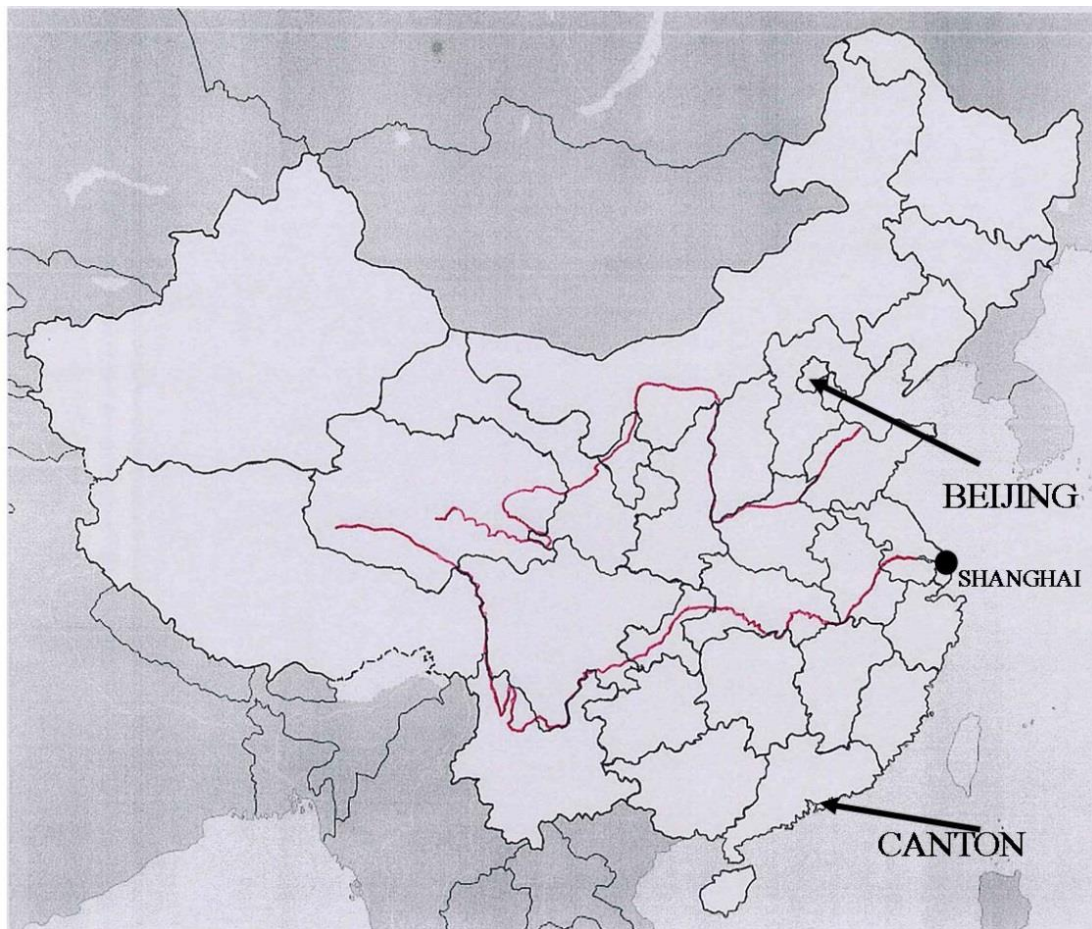
As regard to the admission of British subjects into Canton city, I have to state, that the true reason why Commissioner Seu discounted the proceeding was because the feelings of the entire population of Canton province was opposed to it; it cannot be averted.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, in correlation to Qiying's strategy in 1842 and 1845, Ye stood behind the Cantonese people and concluded that his hands were tied. There were, of course, elements of truth to Ye's statement. He was not only subject to the demands of the Xianfeng Emperor and the British, but also the restless Cantonese population. After the humiliating defeat at the hands of the British in 1842, areas of southern China including Canton, which were outside the reach of Qing power in Beijing (Fig. 4), witnessed an increase in social disorder orchestrated by local militias. These militias, backed by the Cantonese gentry, argued that the implementation of the entry term would result in violent hostility against the British and, in addition, against the Qing officials who affected the status quo.<sup>97</sup> As a result, by blaming the Cantonese population for their refusal of entry, the Qing officials distanced themselves from the decision and moreover, secured stability in Canton.

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<sup>96</sup> TNA FO 228/170, 'Ye to Bowring', Translated by British missionary W.H. Medhurst, f. 5 (Canton: 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1854).

<sup>97</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, pp. 71-90.



(Fig. 4) Map of Qing China. The proximity of Beijing to Canton is marked. Source: Fairbank and Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 10, Part 1*, p. 7 for the outline – Beijing, Shanghai and Canton have been inserted.

The insinuation from Qing officials that the Cantonese people were the main roadblock to British entry, in addition to claims of their xenophobia, resulted in Britain's diplomats concluding that the local people were ignorant, lawless, 'uncivilised' and unaware of the benefits of commerce and the legal obligations placed on China to open Canton. As a result, British optimism at the possibilities of the Nanjing treaty was quickly swept away. In his memoirs of his travels during the Amherst Embassy in 1816, Sir John Francis Davis offered a mixed opinion of the Chinese nation and its inhabitants, arguing that although stagnating,



China had a thirst for foreign trade and improved relations.<sup>98</sup> By 1845, and now the Governor of Hong Kong, Davis had acquired a disdain for the Cantonese people as a result of the entry question. In a letter to Qiying, he described the local population as an ‘ignorant rabble...disposed to act disorderly’.<sup>99</sup> Further, in his correspondence with the British Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Aberdeen, Davis argued that to improve relations with Canton’s population, its citizens must be exposed to foreign people and ideas. The failure to do so, Davis claimed, was facilitating Canton’s anti-foreign stance and made entry into the city even more difficult: ‘this of course feeds and keeps up the insolence of the Chinese, and perpetuates the degradation of strangers.’<sup>100</sup> The resistance to entry confirmed Davis’ perception of the Cantonese people as ‘ignorant’ and therefore, to secure entry, military intervention was a possibility. In his correspondence with his Chinese counterpart Qiying, Davis made this sentiment known: ‘To look for the continuance of friendship, without friendly treatment, is contrary to human nature.’<sup>101</sup> The entry question, then, influenced the Governor’s opinion of the Cantonese and furthermore, his viewpoint on aggressive diplomacy.

Soon after accepting the role of Consul to Canton in 1849, Bowring’s determination to secure entry swiftly challenged his advocacy of non-intervention. Bowring wrote to his son, Edgar, describing the fear amongst the British expatriates as a result of Cantonese resentment towards them: ‘I found people here in a state of alarm – anticipating an outbreak of the Chinese should we stress on the opening of the gates.’<sup>102</sup> The anti-foreign sentiments

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<sup>98</sup> John Francis Davis, *Sketches of China: Partly during an Inland Journey of Four Months between Peking, Nanking and Canton with Notices and Observations relative to the Present War*, Vol. II (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1841).

<sup>99</sup> ‘Davis to Qiying and Governor Hwang’ (Hong Kong: 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1845), *Correspondence Respecting Insults in China*, p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Davis to Aberdeen’ (Hong Kong: 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1845), *Correspondence Respecting Insults in China*, p. 23.

<sup>101</sup> ‘Davis to Qiying and Governor Hwang’, *Correspondence Respecting Insults in China*, p. 25.

<sup>102</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 4 (Hong Kong: 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1849).

harboured in Canton, exacerbated by the entry question, convinced Bowring of the ‘uncivilised’ nature of the Cantonese people, concluding that ‘they have no conscience, no code to which you can appeal.’<sup>103</sup> By doing so, it led the future Governor to admit as early as 1849 the possibility of further intervention into China, claiming that ‘The Chinese think they have beaten us by keeping us out of the city: But I fear a day of reckoning will come and it will bring great suffering with it.’<sup>104</sup> Determining whether international military intervention could coincide with British notions of liberalism and free trade received close review during the mid-nineteenth century, with no decisive conclusion formed amongst the British liberal elite.<sup>105</sup> For Bowring, his acceptance of gunboat diplomacy was, in part, a result of his categorisation of the Cantonese people as ‘uncivilised’ in light of the entry question. The refusal to grant entry, which was considered a rejection of reciprocal relations – a key criterion in determining a nation’s civilised status – shaped his degrading opinion of the Qing Empire and in particular, the Cantonese people.<sup>106</sup>

In addition to exposing the growing anti-foreign sentiment amongst the Cantonese population, which was considered evidence of their ignorance and ‘uncivilised’ nature, the entry question demonstrated the challenge the Qing bureaucracy posed to British interests in China. Prior to 1842, the Canton system, which legally confined British movement in China, was considered to be the primary restriction affecting Western trade.<sup>107</sup> Yet, as a result of the poor trade returns after the ratification of the Nanjing treaty, exacerbated by the continuous rejection of British entry, Qing officials were viewed as the main obstacle to British demands. In an attempt to appease the Cantonese population’s concerns over entry, in 1849, the

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<sup>103</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 14 (Macao: 13th August, 1849).

<sup>104</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 5 (Canton: 12th April 1849).

<sup>105</sup> For discussions on nineteenth century notions of free trade and its connection to British foreign policy see: Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p. 1-33, 70-106; Francis Spall Jr., ‘Free Trade, Foreign Relations and the Anti-Corn Law League’, pp. 405-432.

<sup>106</sup> Pitts, ‘Boundaries of International Law’, pp. 6-71.

<sup>107</sup> Carroll, ‘The Canton System’, p. 51.

Daoguang Emperor replaced the foreign-friendly Qiying with the anti-foreign Xu Guangjin as Viceroy of Liangguang and chief representative to foreign nations.<sup>108</sup> This decision reflected a significant shift in policy towards Western expansion in China; rather than pacifying the British, after 1849, the Qing attempted to strong-arm negotiations in their favour.

On his appointment, Xu ignored the terms of an agreement signed in 1847, known as the Bocca Tigris Convention, which stated that the port of Canton was to be opened within two years.<sup>109</sup> By rejecting this settlement, Xu was championed by the Cantonese population as the defender of their local interests.<sup>110</sup> His refusal was documented in a letter to his British counterpart, Sir Samuel George Bonham:

The banditti of the city have been louder and more active as of late. On enquiring into the ultimate causes we find that it proceeds entirely from the agreement that the barbarians should enter the city on the second month of the present year.<sup>111</sup>

To Wakeman, his rejection of this agreement demonstrated ‘Xu’s unfamiliarity with international law or concept of “full powers.”’<sup>112</sup> Thus, as a consequence of Xu’s dismissal of British entry claims, British diplomats consolidated their perception of the Qing officials as ignorant of Western diplomacy and notions of international law. The continuous rejection of this treaty term demonstrated to British officials that in China, it was possible to ignore the constraints of international legal agreements, a realisation that would eventually serve their own interests when advocating the use of military intervention in 1856.

In light of his refusal to accept the terms of the Bocca Tigris Convention, Xu’s appointment

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<sup>108</sup> Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, p. 140.

<sup>109</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, p. 84.

<sup>110</sup> Nolde, ‘The “False Edict” of 1849’, p. 314.

<sup>111</sup> TNA FO 228/100, ‘Extract from a Memorial of Seu, Governor General of the Two Kwang and Ye, Governor of Kwangtung to the Emperor informing him of the insurrection in the north of the Kwangtung province’, Translated by Charles Gutzlaff, f. 5 (Canton: April, 1849).

<sup>112</sup> Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, p. 90.

as Viceroy resulted in Britain's diplomats forming a nostalgic connection to his predecessor, Qiying, claiming that unlike Xu, Qiying had defended foreign interests. Bowring argued that Qiying was an 'enlightened' diplomat, and was 'a very different man from Seu [Xu], who is altogether opposed to Keying [Qiying] in policy.'<sup>113</sup> For Bowring, the appointment of Xu demonstrated a new challenge to British trade in China, leading the new Consul to Canton to conclude that Xu was 'English hating' and the 'cause of all the mischief'.<sup>114</sup> Xu's unabashed anti-foreign policies, emphasised by his strategy over the entry question, revealed a change in Qing policy; rather than working alongside the British to resolve any international disputes, they were now appointing officials whose main task was to thwart foreign advances.

After his appointment to the Governorship in April 1854, Bowring faced a new adversary: Ye Mingchen. Like Xu, Ye's commitment to stopping entry into Canton confirmed to Bowring that the Qing officials were ignorant to the value of commercial exchange and China's treaty obligations. In addition, his correspondence with Ye facilitated a debate regarding diplomatic recognition and Britain's status in China. In his attempt to discuss entry, Bowring hoped to engineer a meeting with Ye within the walls of Canton. In April 1854, Bowring wrote to Ye arguing that 'It would afford great satisfaction to meet in order that we might demonstrate publicly our friendly sentiments'<sup>115</sup> Ye, however, rejected the public meeting immediately, claiming that as a result of China's civil war, his time was 'completely occupied.'<sup>116</sup> Ye's consistent refusal to agree to this arrangement was considered an insult to Britain's international status and a failure on behalf of the Qing official to follow proper diplomatic

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<sup>113</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 17 (Canton: 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1849).

<sup>114</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 15 (Canton: 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1849).

<sup>115</sup> TNA FO 228/170, 'Bowring to Ye', f. 3 (Hong Kong: 25<sup>th</sup> April 1854).

<sup>116</sup> TNA FO 228/170, 'Ye to Bowring', Translated by W H Medhurst, f. 4 (Canton: 28<sup>th</sup> April, 1854).

protocol as conducted by two equal states.<sup>117</sup> Informing the British merchants of his anger at Ye's supposed insolence, Bowring wrote,

Far from receiving the representatives of the British foreigners as friends, access to the Imperial Commissioner has been difficult or impossible, and the many grievances of a very serious character have been met with no alteration or redress... Notwithstanding his [Ye] unsatisfactory conduct I renewed correspondence with him in the month of August, and he then answered that he had no power to make any but trifling changes in the Treaty.<sup>118</sup>

The entry question, then, shed light on numerous frictions facing the Anglo-Chinese relationship in the inter-war period. Here, Britain's status in China was brought into question, resulting in Britain's diplomats further consolidating their opinion that the Chinese were ignorant about Western standards of diplomacy and friendly relations.

By 1856, Bowring's determination to secure entry affected his diplomatic exchanges with Qing officials. It had become, J.Y. Wong argues, his 'obsession'.<sup>119</sup> After receiving news of the *Arrow* Incident in October 1856 – a controversial instance where a lorcha ship, with a questionable British register, was seized by Qing officials and the Chinese crew arrested on suspicion of piracy – Bowring stressed the importance of honouring the Nanjing treaty.<sup>120</sup> In a letter to the Consul to Canton, Sir Harry Parkes, Bowring stated,

I have conveyed to Sir Michael Seymour an opinion that if His Excellency and yourself agree on the fitness of the opportunity, it would be well if the question of our entry into the city should now be settled, and least as far as to secure us an official reception there.<sup>121</sup>

Energised by the possibility of manipulating the *Arrow* quarrel to secure entry, Bowring wrote to Ye Mingchen demanding the term be honoured. In his response, Ye questioned the link between the *Arrow* Incident and the entry dilemma:

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<sup>117</sup> J. Y. Wong, *Yeh Ming-ch'en: Viceroy of Liang-Kuang 1852-1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 35.

<sup>118</sup> TNA FO 228/170, 'Bowring Proclamation' f. 27 (Hong Kong: December, 1854).

<sup>119</sup> TNA FO 17/260, 'Bowring to Parkes', ff. 69-70 (Hong Kong: 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1856).

<sup>120</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, pp. 1-100.

<sup>121</sup> TNA FO 17/260, 'Bowring to Parkes', ff. 69-70 (Hong Kong: 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1856).

In reference to the admission into the city I must observe that in April 1849, His Excellency the Plenipotentiary Bonham issued a public notice at the Factories here, to the effect that he thereby prohibited foreigners from entering the city. The notice was inserted in the newspapers of the time, and will I presume have been read for Your Excellency. Add to this that exclusion of foreigners from the city is by the unanimous vote of the whole population of Kwangtung [Canton].<sup>122</sup>

However, to Bowring and his diplomatic agents, the two issues were inextricably connected. For Parkes, had the British been granted access, he was assured that he would have secured a meeting with a Qing official and ‘convinced them of the injustice and danger of their proceedings, and prevailed on them to adopt a more polite and becoming course.’<sup>123</sup> The *Arrow* Incident, therefore, was viewed as another example of Chinese insolence and proof that in order for Anglo-Chinese relations to improve in Canton, entry was a necessity.

Bowring’s inability to secure entry through his manipulation of the *Arrow* Incident resulted in the Governor of Hong Kong altering his political convictions in favour of military intervention. Ye’s determination to settle the *Arrow* quarrel, rather than entry, further fuelled Bowring’s perception of the Qing state as ignorant to their legal obligations and the benefits of trade. These conclusions led the Governor to determine that peaceful diplomacy would never result in the successful opening of the port. In a letter to Parkes, Bowring acknowledged his newfound support for military intervention:

I think there should be no delay in putting forth a declaration that we have taken no part in the quarrels of the Chinese people, but that the impudence and rashness of the Chinese authorities is most inexcusable, who have brought upon the people the misery of a quarrel with Western nations – who require and will enforce respect for the treaties entered into with the Emperor of China.<sup>124</sup>

Although the nuances of the *Arrow* Incident itself were also instrumental in Bowring’s support for intervention in late 1856, his continued focus on the entry question demonstrates how this concern shaped his contemptuous perception of the Chinese and his diplomatic

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<sup>122</sup> TNA FO 17/260, ‘Ye to Bowring’, Translated by Shanghai Vice Consul Thomas Wade, f. 134 (Canton: 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1856).

<sup>123</sup> TNA FO 17/260, ‘Parkes to Bowring’, ff. 77-79 (Hong Kong: 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1856).

<sup>124</sup> TNA FO 17/260, ‘Bowring to Parkes’, f. 130 (Hong Kong: 1<sup>st</sup> November, 1856).

convictions. Without the continuous friction over entry, it can be argued that Bowring would not have categorised the Chinese as ‘uncivilised’ and thus, would not have rationalised the use of gunboat diplomacy.

In his *Autobiographical Recollections* (1877), Bowring argued that his advocacy of non-intervention and international law remained intact, regardless of his decision to order the bombardment of Canton in November 1856. Bowring claimed that the ‘uncivilised’ nature of the Chinese meant he had not abandoned his commitment to free trade and peaceful diplomacy to which he had devoted his early career. In other words, to Bowring, the barbarian status of the Chinese, demonstrated by the entry question, meant that diplomatic exchanges with the Qing Empire were to be conducted outside the parameters of international law. Bowring argued that adopting military tactics to secure British interests in China should not be viewed as a breach of international law or an example of his treachery against the liberal internationalist cause. The former Governor argued that ‘The powers of reason fail when coming in contact with the unreasoning and invincible’, and that whilst there was nobody who was ‘a more ardent lover of peace than I... with barbarous-ay, and sometimes with civilised nations, the words of peace are uttered in vain.’<sup>125</sup> Thus, for Bowring, the entry question influenced both his perception of the Chinese people and his political convictions. In addition to demonstrating the ignorance of Qing officials and the xenophobia of the Cantonese people, it rationalised his use of gunboat diplomacy.

## **The Limits of British Diplomacy and Non-Intervention**

In addition to cementing an image of the Chinese as ‘ignorant’ and ‘uncivilised’, the determination to secure entry shed light on the inadequacies of Britain’s diplomatic system.

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<sup>125</sup> Bowring, *Autobiographical Recollections*, pp. 216-217.

The strategies employed by Britain's diplomats to gain entry came under increased scrutiny. For Bowring in particular, the entry dilemma exposed weaknesses in Britain's diplomatic procedures. During his time as Consul to Canton (1849-1854), Bowring witnessed the diplomatic inefficiencies of Hong Kong's Colonial Office. The Colonial Office, directed by the Governor of Hong Kong, performed a dual role during the inter-war period: in addition to managing the affairs of the island, it was the chief representative of British interests in their relations with the Qing, demonstrated by the Governor's position as Britain's Plenipotentiary and Superintendent of Trade with China.<sup>126</sup> To Bowring, the entry question uncovered problems in the Colonial Office's commitment to non-intervention. Britain's diplomatic inadequacies, highlighted by the entry question, informed the development Bowring's liberal ideas. The failure of peaceful mediation to secure entry, which had become the accepted diplomatic strategy in China after 1842, forced a change in Bowring's commitment to universal peace as demonstrated in his early career, convincing the diplomat that in order to promote Britain's commercial interests, there were limits to the policy of non-intervention.

In their exchanges with Qing officials, British diplomats enjoyed virtual autonomy to direct the nation's affairs. Until the 1870s, China's reluctance to install telegraphic communication prevented regular contact between the Home Government and Hong Kong.<sup>127</sup> As a result, although acting on behalf of the Foreign Office, Gerald S. Graham argues that diplomatic agents were given enormous independence to shape British policy in China, with limited input from Whitehall.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, there was no clear diplomatic blueprint dictating their actions. The mid-nineteenth century represented a period of uncertainty for British diplomacy. To John Clarke, this confusion meant that British foreign affairs had 'a tendency

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<sup>126</sup> Graham, *The China Station*, pp. 233-234.

<sup>127</sup> Arianne Knuesel, 'British Diplomacy and the Telegraph in Nineteenth Century China', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2007), pp. 517-530. Knuesel notes that the British diplomats had six to eight weeks of no instructions before letters could arrive from London.

<sup>128</sup> Graham, *The China Station*, p. 254. See also, Hevia, *English Lessons*, p. 4.



to hypocrisy and double standards.<sup>129</sup> As a result, rather than adhering to diplomatic precedent, during the inter-war period (1842-1856), Britain's diplomatic agents developed their policies based on their interactions with their Qing counterparts.

The impact of Anglo-Chinese relations on the development of mid-nineteenth century British diplomacy is overlooked. As demonstrated in the works of Jonathan Parry, Raymond Jones and David Brown among others, relations with Europe and the British Empire take precedent.<sup>130</sup> Of course, these exchanges were integral to British notions of foreign policy. By the 1850s, interactions with Europe and the Empire were instrumental to the growing support for gunboat diplomacy as a method to solve contentious international situations. This is demonstrated by the Don Pacifico Affair (1850) and the Crimea War (1853 to 1856). For those that engage in Anglo-Chinese relations, such as Jürgen Osterhammel and Richard S. Horowitz, there is a tendency to assume that British representatives entered diplomatic exchanges in China with a clear outline of protocol and objectives.<sup>131</sup> As a result, Sinologists such as James L. Hevia, Robert Bickers and Hans Van de Ven have disregarded how Anglo-Chinese relations shaped British diplomacy and instead, have focused on the impact within the Qing Empire.<sup>132</sup> This section reverses this narrative, arguing that as a result of their near-complete autonomy and the unclear state of British diplomacy, Bowring and others formulated their convictions in regard to foreign affairs and non-intervention as a result of their China experience.

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<sup>129</sup> John Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782 to 1865: The National Interests* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989), p. 220.

<sup>130</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 59-70, 388-389; Raymond A. Jones, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), p. 3; David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846-55* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2002), pp. 74-135; Anthony Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847 to 1865', *Journal of British Studies*, 33:2 (April, 1994), pp. 160-174; Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 48.

<sup>131</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, 'Britain and China, 1842-1914', in Andrew Porter ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 146-162; Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation', pp. 445-485.

<sup>132</sup> Hevia, *English Lessons*; Bickers, *The Scramble for China*; Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*.

Bowring's concern regarding British diplomatic procedure, as a result of the entry question, had a grave impact on his style of governance and diplomacy as Governor of Hong Kong (1854-1857). In an article examining the influence of Sir Harry Parkes, Consul to Canton at the time of the *Arrow* Incident, J. Y. Wong uncovers the surprising power Parkes was able to exert over his superiors in Hong Kong.<sup>133</sup> However, Wong's essay is unable to pinpoint why Parkes was able to exercise such authority, arguing that Parkes' personality and Bowring's reluctance to lead the investigation over the *Arrow* were contributing factors. This section offers a conclusion to this point, showing how Bowring's own tenure as Consul to Canton, led him, as Governor, to devolve to Parkes numerous responsibilities. Parkes' power as Consul lay in Bowring's experience in the Consulate. His inability to secure entry, frustration at his limited power and resentment toward the Hong Kong Colonial Office, culminated in Bowring calling for a reconsideration of British diplomatic methods in China. His support for intervention and thus, the acknowledgement of the limits to the liberal internationalist programme, were a reaction to these years in government service.

After his appointment to the Cantonese Consulate in April 1849, Bowring's opinion of the Hong Kong Colonial Office was quickly soured as a result of the entry dilemma. In particular, Bowring questioned the diplomatic methods of British officials in Hong Kong, who, in the Consul's opinion, had allowed their Qing counterparts to stall entry. By 1849, the entry question had become a diplomatic battle between Britain and China. To Bowring, it was the Qing officials that were winning this clash. In his examination of Qing officials during this period, Wong argues that Xu Guangjin's success at repressing British demands for entry, under the pressure of the Bocca Tigris Convention, was considered a diplomatic victory

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<sup>133</sup> J.Y. Wong, 'Harry Parkes and the "Arrow" War in China' *Modern Asian Studies*, 9:3 (May, 1975), pp. 305-319.

throughout China.<sup>134</sup> For Bowring, it demonstrated the weakness of Britain's officials and their diplomatic tactics. Incensed by Governor Bonham's inability to secure entry, the Consul wrote to his son Edgar questioning British methods of diplomacy:

It was a fatal mistake to re-open that question by visiting Seu [Xu] at the Bogue. If Mr Bonham had said, "I cannot and will not allow the matter to be re-agitated. The gates must be opened. It is a treaty engagement and must be fulfilled." Seu [Xu], I am sure, would have gracefully yielded. But they know nothing of what happens here.<sup>135</sup>

Thus, soon after his appointment to the Consulate, the entry question became a source of frustration for Bowring. It convinced him that one of the primary roadblocks to entry was the British diplomats themselves. The inability to secure entry confirmed to the Consul that it was the diplomatic mistakes of the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Samuel George Bonham, which had allowed the term to remain unsettled and furthermore, grant the Cantonese people a victory in favour of maintaining the status quo.

The entry dilemma led Bowring to retrospectively unpick the diplomatic policies of British officials since 1842. In particular, the tactics and strategies adopted by previous Governors came under scrutiny. Referring to the first Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Henry Pottinger, Bowring vented that he had 'never visited Canton at all.'<sup>136</sup> In addition, Bowring condemned Pottinger's successor Sir John Francis Davis for his decision to accept the Bocca Tigris Convention in 1847, further delaying entry for another two years, despite accompanying a British fleet to Canton to force Qiying to open the port. To Bowring, Davis had 'made a fool of himself – he took all the forts, had everything at his feet and went away doing nothing.'<sup>137</sup> Yet, for Davis, maintaining peaceful relations was more important than the symbolism of entry which, in a letter to the Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston, the Governor argued was

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<sup>134</sup> Wong, *Yeh Ming-ch'en*, p. 33.

<sup>135</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 17 (Canton: 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1849).

<sup>136</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 17 (Canton: 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1849).

<sup>137</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 17 (Canton: 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1849).

under threat in China due to the ‘constant spring’ of European expansion.<sup>138</sup> In support of his diplomacy, Davis’ Consul to Canton, Francis Macgregor, argued that whilst he continued to push the entry issue publicly, ‘I shall, as far as possible, privately discountenance all attempts to enter the city.’<sup>139</sup> However, in light of the failure to achieve entry by 1849, Bowring concluded that Davis’ decision to favour a policy of arbitration instead of further military intervention was a poor tactic. His diplomatic experience during his first year as Consul confirmed to Bowring that British support for non-intervention was failing their determination to secure entry.

The concerns voiced by Bowring regarding Britain’s diplomatic strategies resulted in the Consul to Canton consolidating a viewpoint of the Colonial Office in Hong Kong as ignorant of Chinese politics, history and customs. Bowring concluded that British misconceptions of the Qing Empire were harming Anglo-Chinese relations and Britain’s request for entry. In 1850, he argued,

There is no means of correcting the ignorance or improving the knowledge of those who carry on all our intercourse. There are no books, no resources – not an educated Chinese – not a school where the official language can be learnt.<sup>140</sup>

To Bowring, Anglo-Chinese frictions over the entry question exposed the ignorance of Britain’s diplomats towards the customs and goals of their Chinese counterparts. To combat this lack of understanding of the Chinese state and its people, the new Consul claimed that he should contribute to British knowledge on China in an attempt to improve his nation’s interests in East Asia:

I may perhaps write a book upon China, and contribute something to human knowledge. I have seen something which nobody else has seen – and have my own

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<sup>138</sup> TNA FO 17/123, ‘Davis to Palmerston’, f. 10 (Hong Kong: 27<sup>th</sup> January, 1847).

<sup>139</sup> TNA FO 228/61, ‘Macgregor to Davis’, f. 2 (Canton: 16<sup>th</sup> January, 1846).

<sup>140</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 20 (Canton: 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1850).

views with respect to Chinese matters which do not always agree with those who have taken to the subject.<sup>141</sup>

Here, Bowring considered an improvement in knowledge of the Chinese Empire as crucial to the successful resolution of the entry question and the progression of Britain's commercial and political interests in China. The limited knowledge of the Qing Empire amongst British diplomats convinced the Consul that a key problem stalling the British infiltration of Canton was, in fact, the ignorance of the British diplomats themselves. Thus, on the 13<sup>th</sup> July 1855, Bowring penned 'The Population of China', a pamphlet addressed to Britain's Registrar-General documenting facts and opinions of China and its people.<sup>142</sup>

During his years as Consul to Canton (1849-1854), Bowring witnessed a power struggle between British officials in Hong Kong and Canton in their attempts to solve the entry question. It confirmed the limits of his influence as Consul and shed light on the concentration of power in Hong Kong where, Bowring argued, diplomats were ignorant of how to conduct friendly relations with the Qing Empire. In his examination of Hong Kong's history, John Carroll argues that after 1842, the island became an important part of Britain's global empire. British policies in China were to be controlled from the island.<sup>143</sup> Nonetheless, the diplomatic inadequacies of the Colonial officials resulted in Bowring questioning Britain's diplomatic system: 'The truth is that China, and the Foreign Office, and treaties, and trade, are all subjugated to the influence of that miserable colony Hong Kong.'<sup>144</sup> For Bowring, the entry dilemma's impact far outreached the frictions it created for the Anglo-Chinese relationship: it demonstrated tensions between the Colonial Office and Consulate and led the Consul to question the structure of British foreign affairs in China. Describing a

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<sup>141</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 26 (Canton: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1850).

<sup>142</sup> Sir John Bowring, 'The Population of China: A Letter Addressed to the Registrar-General', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 20:1 (March, 1857), pp. 41-53.

<sup>143</sup> John Carroll, 'Colonial Hong Kong as a Cultural Historical Place', *Modern Asian Studies*, 40:2 (May, 2006), p. 529.

<sup>144</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 17 (Canton: 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1849).

fact-finding mission organised by Governor Bonham in Canton, Bowring remained critical of his superior:

Mr Bonham was here for a week. He is surrounded by his colonial clique – he did not see a single Mandarin. He did not open his eyes about the policy of government – asked no opinions on matters respecting which I really am in a condition to know.<sup>145</sup>

Thus, Bonham's visit to Canton convinced Bowring that the Governor of Hong Kong – who in addition to managing state affairs in Hong Kong, was Britain's chief representative in relations with the Qing Empire – was ignorant of the diplomatic expectations placed on him to improve British interests in China. Bonham's failure to hold meetings with Qing officials confirmed to Bowring the complicity of British officials in halting the implementation of entry into Canton and moreover, demonstrated how the Colonial Office was unfit to lead Britain's correspondence with the Chinese.

With power concentrated in Hong Kong, Bowring was convinced that the implementation of the entry term was impossible. The Consul concluded that British ignorance towards China's political system was, in part, a result of the Colonial Office's distance from Canton and its limited communication with Qing officials:

There is not even the shadow of personal intercourse between our functionaries and the functionaries of China – the impressions existing there (in Hong Kong) and of course conveyed home are most erroneous. It is not that Mr Bonham wants capacity – in that anybody who should in his position do better than him – but he is 100 miles off – on a barren island, surrounded by a pack of hungry lawyers.<sup>146</sup>

The restricted correspondence between Qing officials and British policy makers led Bowring to question Britain's diplomatic structure and the emphasis placed on conducting Chinese affairs through Hong Kong. Bowring claimed that 'the Superintendent at Hong Kong knew no men of China than if they were placed at Honolulu. How should they?'<sup>147</sup> Thus, as a result of the inability to force the opening of Canton's gates to foreign influence, the entry dilemma

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<sup>145</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 26 (Canton: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1850).

<sup>146</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 20 (Canton: 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1850).

<sup>147</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 20 (Canton: 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1850).

shed light on the inefficiencies of Britain's foreign relations and forced Bowring to reconsider the role and power of the Colonial Governor.

The entry dilemma demonstrated to Bowring the inability of Britain's diplomatic agents to shape the course of Anglo-Chinese relations. It led to the Consul's conclusion that Hong Kong's diplomats were unaware of the policies of the Qing state and too weak to secure British interests. In a letter to Edgar, he claimed that 'nothing goes to Peking but what the hostile Seu [Xu] decides to send and he sends nothing but what suits his own policy.'<sup>148</sup> The entry question was evidence that Qing officials were winning the diplomatic battle against the British. Moreover, as Consul to Canton, Bowring was convinced that he had a better understanding of the political machinations of the Qing state than the diplomatic agents in Hong Kong. During his time as Consul, the entry question confirmed to Bowring that 'Hong Kong is no more a part of China than Malta is of England and everything seen, heard and known at Hong Kong cannot but convey the most erroneous notions of this country.'<sup>149</sup> Thus, the entry dilemma led the Consul to challenge Britain's diplomatic structure in China, arguing that by centralising power in Hong Kong, where the diplomats were inexperienced and ignorant of China's political system, Britain was losing ground in their negotiations.

In addition to forming a perception of British officials in Hong Kong as weak and ignorant, the entry question demonstrated broader problems facing Britain's foreign relations. It shed light on a lack of communication between the Foreign Office in London and Colonial Office in Hong Kong, with detrimental consequences to Britain's chance of securing entry. Bowring argued that the Home Government was blindly following the policies of the Governor of Hong Kong, with little knowledge of Britain's progression in China. He claimed that 'if the

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<sup>148</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 15 (Canton: 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1849).

<sup>149</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 26 (Canton: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1850).

Government at home think that any communication made by them or the Plenipotentiary from Hong Kong is received by the Emperor they are quite mistaken.’<sup>150</sup> In addition, Bowring wrote to Edgar questioning the policies of the British government towards China and in particular, the unequivocal support for Hong Kong’s leading role in Anglo-Chinese affairs from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Grey. By putting faith in Hong Kong’s Colonial Office, Bowring argued that Grey was in the dark in regard to the difficulties facing Anglo-Chinese relations. He concluded ‘How can he know what is passing in China?’<sup>151</sup> The entry question, therefore, demonstrated to Bowring stark problems in Britain’s diplomatic intelligence. During his time as Consul to Canton (1849-1854), the failure to secure entry led the diplomat to question the international policies of his Home Government and the diplomatic structure that was dictating Britain’s foreign relations in China.

Britain’s failure to secure entry into Canton also demonstrated to Bowring the Home Government’s lack of interest in Chinese affairs. In a letter from 1850, the Consul claimed that although entry had been continuously denied, ‘I scarcely expect the Government at home to do anything.’<sup>152</sup> To Bowring, British indifference to Anglo-Chinese frictions made the Home Government complicit in the failure of the Treaty of Nanjing. In 1856 and now occupying the role of Governor of Hong Kong, Bowring argued that ‘they [the British Foreign Office] give me no encouragement’ and that furthermore, ‘If we in this country [China] do not get more support and our policy undermined, there must be division and difficulty.’<sup>153</sup> By 1856, the struggle for entry into Canton led Bowring to confirm that the Home Government was an obstruction to the success of Britain’s commercial interests. It

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<sup>150</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 20 (Canton: 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1850).

<sup>151</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 34 (Canton: 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1850).

<sup>152</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 20 (Canton: 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1850).

<sup>153</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 151 (Hong Kong: 25<sup>th</sup> April, 1856).



demonstrated that the impact of Anglo-Chinese relations in the mid-nineteenth century was not confined to the Chinese borders. Thus the entry question shed light on British diplomatic failures which, in turn, influenced the policies of Bowring himself.

The indifference of the British government towards Chinese affairs led Bowring to criticise Whitehall's commitment to improving Britain's commercial and political interests in East Asia. Troubled by his Government's ignorance of Anglo-Chinese relations, Bowring wrote to Edgar asking,

Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer ever think of China? Or the Board of Control?  
Does any Minister ever look at the export or import lists to and from Canton and  
Shanghai?<sup>154</sup>

As a result, in 1850, Bowring looked to the Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston to settle the entry question: 'I wish Lord Palmerston would look into matters – and be the head of our political and commercial intercourse. It is well worthy of his attention.'<sup>155</sup> Bowring's frustration over the entry dilemma, exacerbated by the inefficiencies of Britain's diplomatic structure, led to the diplomat's conclusion that Lord Palmerston held the key to the future of British success in China. After the death of Jeremy Bentham in 1832, Bowring was in need of a new benefactor. Lord Palmerston seized the opportunity and was instrumental in orchestrating Bowring's appointment to China in 1849.<sup>156</sup> Nonetheless, Stephen Conway argues that although Bowring and Palmerston had a strong personal relationship, throughout the 1830s and 1840s, Bowring continuously questioned Palmerston's acceptance of interventionist foreign policy.<sup>157</sup> However, by 1850 and as a consequence of his government service in China, Bowring viewed Palmerston and his position on foreign affairs as an answer

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<sup>154</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 34 (Canton: 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1850).

<sup>155</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 34 (Canton: 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1850).

<sup>156</sup> Conway, 'Bowring in Government Service', p. 35.

<sup>157</sup> Conway, 'Bowring in Government Service', p. 34; Anthony Howe, 'Two faces of British Power: Cobden vs. Palmerston', in David Brown and Miles Taylor eds., *Palmerston Studies II* (Hartley Institute: University of Southampton, 2007), p. 171.

to the problems facing British interests in China.

Bowring's criticism of Britain's diplomatic system reflected the diplomat's personal struggle to influence the direction of British diplomacy policy. During his occupation at the Cantonese Consulate, Bowring concluded that his voice was being ignored in favour of less informed diplomatic agents in Hong Kong. The Consul argued that the inflexibility of Britain's diplomatic structure was allowing British interests in China to stagnate. In 1851, Bowring argued that 'the strange contrast between my humiliation and their real influence is very disturbing to me', and that furthermore, 'I begin to despair – first because I imagine Hong Kong will not want to constitute Canton an efficient Consulate, since it would make the functionary at Canton more important.'<sup>158</sup> Thus, the entry question and the diplomatic clashes it highlighted, informed Bowring to the limits of his influence over Chinese affairs. It provided an insight into the inner workings of the British diplomatic system, a revelation that led Bowring to conclude that Britain's diplomatic procedures were complicit in allowing the entry dilemma to remain unanswered.

In an attempt to combat the inefficiency in Britain's diplomatic structure, Bowring offered his own blueprint of how power should be distributed amongst British officials, arguing that 'It would be better that the Superintendent of Trade reside at Canton, and the Consulate be supported.'<sup>159</sup> Here, Bowring's diplomatic experience provides a conclusion to J. Y. Wong's query as to why Sir Harry Parkes enjoyed such power during his tenure as Consul. Bowring's frustrations led him to conclude that alterations had to be made to Britain's diplomatic procedures and autonomy given to the Cantonese Consulate. In addition, the entry dilemma challenged Bowring's support for non-intervention which, after 1842, had become the

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<sup>158</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 45 (Amoy: 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1851).

<sup>159</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 45 (Amoy: 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1851).

prevailing diplomatic method adopted by British officials in China. Bowring argued that the diplomatic inadequacies of Hong Kong's Colonial Office, demonstrated by the entry question, proved that the Consul deserved more power to intervene in Cantonese affairs:

There is so much resistance at Canton that the Consul ought to be strong. In all the other ports the intercourse with the Mandarins is habitual – the access to them quite easy – the redress of grievances immediate – and the Consular authority respected as it ought to be by all the native authorities and by the people.<sup>160</sup>

Thus, as a consequence of the Qing's refusal to accept entry, in addition to his weak position as Consul, Bowring's support for non-intervention faltered. His criticism of the diplomats based in Hong Kong, who advocated non-intervention in China, resulted in Bowring distancing himself from such policies.

In April 1854, his promotion to the Governorship gave Bowring the opportunity to mould Britain's diplomatic system according to his vision. The new Governor took the position, optimistic that his knowledge of the Chinese state would enable him to affect the course of Anglo-Chinese relations and ensure the successful resolution of the entry question through peaceful means. Bowring argued that 'I believe nothing will be wanting but pacific action.'<sup>161</sup> Yet, soon after his appointment as Governor, this optimism was replaced with a realisation to the limits of his powers, in addition to the failures of peaceful methods of diplomacy to secure British interests. Bowring claimed, 'it is impossible to manage matters successfully in China – disturbed and distracted as it is – without ample authority to turn wants to account.'<sup>162</sup> As a result, in April 1856, six months before the *Arrow* Incident, Bowring considered military intervention as an acceptable method of diplomacy to support British demands: 'I ought already to be thinking of moving towards the North and a fleet should be

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<sup>160</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 45 (Amoy: 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1851).

<sup>161</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 105 (Mouth of the Peiho: 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1854).

<sup>162</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 106 (Bay of Pecheli: 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1854).

ready to accompany me.’<sup>163</sup> Thus, his government experience in China and inability to enforce entry both as Consul and as Governor, convinced Bowring that in order for Britain’s position in China to be improved, there must be an alteration of British diplomatic methods and moreover, in his own liberal convictions.

Through his China experience during the inter-war period, Bowring argued that British diplomats were complicit in denying British entry into Canton. As Consul to Canton, Bowring challenged Britain’s diplomatic structure in China, concluding that the officials in the Hong Kong Colonial Office were unable to secure British interests. Britain’s diplomatic inefficiencies, demonstrated by the entry question, facilitated his belief that there should be devolution of power to the Consulates. By 1856, this policy would have far-reaching ramifications as Bowring placed his trust in Sir Harry Parkes whose aggressive diplomacy was instrumental in the outbreak of war.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, his frustration at Britain’s diplomatic tactics to secure entry, in addition to limits in his own ability to affect change, resulted in Bowring’s conclusion that the policy of peaceful diplomacy had its limits. It led Bowring to reconsider his political convictions and confirm that under certain circumstances, military intervention was necessary in order to secure British trade. However, his support for military intervention was not a result of a preconceived notion of foreign policy, dictating Bowring’s attitudes and convictions. Instead, the refusal of the Qing officials to grant entry, in addition to the inability of Britain’s diplomats to secure this term through arbitration, led Bowring to reassess his liberal ideals.

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<sup>163</sup> Bowring papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 150 (Hong Kong: 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1856).

<sup>164</sup> Wong, ‘Harry Parkes and the “Arrow” War in China’, pp. 305-319.

## Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates, through its focus on the entry question, that Anglo-Chinese relations from 1842 to 1856 influenced the development of British liberal ideas regarding free trade, non-intervention and international law. Thus, it provides a new narrative for the study of Britain's interactions with China in the mid-nineteenth century. By analysing British frustration over the entry question, this chapter argues that the negative conceptions of the Chinese, the widespread support for military intervention and the acceptance of the limits of the free trade doctrine, were constructed as a result of Anglo-Chinese exchanges during this period. Although the focus has been on Sir John Bowring, whose personal story is of particular interest due to his association with the Anti-Corn Law League and the London Peace Society, this chapter documents a wider trend. Throughout Britain's expatriate community based in China, their China experience assisted in the development of their political convictions.

In the mid-nineteenth century, British notions of trade, international law, diplomatic methods and non-intervention remained under construction. During this period, Britain saw the domination of the liberal free trade doctrine and yet, as Duncan Bell argues, it also witnessed ideological friction within the liberal movement regarding the policy of liberal internationalism.<sup>165</sup> As a result, there was no clear blueprint dictating the actions of British diplomats and merchants. In light of this context, they were free to construct their own positions on British diplomacy, free trade and international law. For Bowring in particular, it led to his transition from an advocate of free trade's connection to international peace, to a diplomatic pragmatist that accepted the role of military intervention. Their China experience and attempts at establishing stronger commercial relations in their favour was instrumental in

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<sup>165</sup> Bell, 'An Introduction', p. 9.

the reconsideration of liberal ideals amongst the diplomatic community.

The entry question, as this chapter shows, shaped the Anglo-Chinese relationship in the inter-war period. To J.Y. Wong, Frederic Wakeman and Robert Bickers, the entry dilemma was instrumental in souring relations between the two nations, contributing to Bowring's decision to bombard the port of Canton in November 1856.<sup>166</sup> However, its impact on British liberal ideas has been overlooked. Yet, it was this development that led to the justification for military intervention. The continuous attempts to solve the entry question demonstrated to the British problems in their political convictions. It became a symbol of the failure of free trade programme in Canton, the uncivilised nature of the Chinese and frustrations with Britain's diplomatic structure. As a result, their notions of free trade, international law and non-intervention – ideals that were intended to drive British diplomacy in China after 1842 – were brought into question. For Bowring in particular, the entry question challenged the liberal principles that defined his early career. This shift, which was indicative of a wider movement amongst the British expatriates in China, reflects the need to reevaluate the Anglo-Chinese relationship. In addition to its impact on the Qing Empire throughout the nineteenth century, interactions with China prompted the development of British liberalism.

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<sup>166</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, pp. 83-109; Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, pp. 43-101; Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, pp. 113-116.

## **Chapter Two - The Taiping Rebellion and Britain: The consolidation of Britain's role in China's internal affairs, 1853-1856.**

During the inter-war period from 1842 to 1856, the Manchus – a foreign ethnic group that established the Qing dynasty in 1644 – witnessed numerous uprisings, the growth of secret societies and coastal piracy that threatened their claim to be the rightful rulers of China.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the Qing's humiliating defeat at the hands of the British in 1842, which undermined the legitimacy of Manchu rule, the Qing regime was continuously questioned by the Chinese people. The inter-war period reflected the loosening of the Manchus' grip on their control of the Chinese state.<sup>2</sup> This chapter examines the Taiping Rebellion (1853-1864), an uprising whose magnitude resulted in civil war, endangering the future of the Qing dynasty and resulting in the acceleration of British involvement in China's internal affairs.<sup>3</sup> It argues that China's political instability, which was highlighted by the Taiping Rebellion, sparked a debate amongst Britain's diplomats and politicians as to the role their nation should play in China's domestic struggle. The detrimental effects of the Taiping Rebellion on British trade and the security of its expatriate community, in addition to the inability of the Qing state to quell its threat, resulted in an intellectual shift in British notions of international law and the sovereignty of the Chinese state. It enabled the British to rationalise the suggestion that their nation had a *right* to intervene both militarily and politically in China's internal politics, in order to secure a system of government that favoured their interests.

Amid the scholarship investigating the Taiping Rebellion, its impact on Britain's intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> Wenshang Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 229. The Han Chinese ethnicity often led these rebellions, believing they were the rightful rulers of China.

<sup>2</sup> S. Y. T'eng, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 9. Although the book's focus is on the Taiping Rebellion, T'eng notes that there was a growing anti-Manchu sentiment across south China.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic story of the Taiping Civil War* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012), pp. 9-26.

development is overlooked. For the most part, as demonstrated by Jonathan Spence, Thomas Reilly and most recently, Carl Kilcourse among others, the religious foundations of the Taiping is the main focus.<sup>4</sup> However, in the works of Stephen Platt, John S. Gregory and S.Y. T'eng, the emphasis is on Britain's role in the development of the civil war between the Imperialists (Qing) and Insurgents (Taiping). They show how the Taiping Rebellion contributed to the extension of British powers within China, documenting British attempts to establish relations with the Taiping, the subsequent adoption of a position of 'neutrality' in 1853 and the eventual armed intervention led by Charles Gordon that ensured the Taiping's defeat in 1864.<sup>5</sup> However, the conceptual shift in values that enabled British officials to justify their increased involvement in Chinese affairs is ignored. This chapter redresses this oversight, arguing that the debate amongst British policy makers, which concluded in a general acceptance of Britain's right to intervene in the affairs of a sovereign country, was, in part, a result of the Taiping Rebellion. I will thus show how British notions of international law and diplomacy were formulated through practice in China. Anglo-Chinese relations and in particular, the concerns regarding the Taiping Rebellion, were crucial in the development of British intellectual debate and ideas about Britain's international role in the mid-nineteenth century.

The impact of inter-war Anglo-Chinese frictions on the construction of British notions of international law and non-intervention has been underestimated. Instead, encounters with Europe, the British Empire and America are emphasised as influential factors on their

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<sup>4</sup> Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (London: Harper Collins, 1996); Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), pp. 3-102; Carl Kilcourse, *Taiping theology and the Globalisation of Christianity* (Unpublished Thesis, University of Manchester, 2013); E. P. Boardman, *Christian Influence upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1952); John B. Littel, 'Missionaries and Politics in China – the Taiping Rebellion', *Political Science Quarterly*, 43:4 (December, 1928), pp. 566-600.

<sup>5</sup> T'eng, *The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers*. See also, Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*. John S. Gregory, *Great Britain and the Taipings* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), pp. 172-210.



development.<sup>6</sup> As a result, in recent scholarship acknowledging Britain's application of international law in China during this period, there is a tendency to assume that British politicians and diplomats had a clear understanding of its meaning and the Qing Empire's place within its structure. In his examination of China's 'transformation' in the nineteenth century, Richard S. Horowitz argues that international law and the categorisation of the Chinese as 'uncivilised', acted as a justification for Britain's increased involvement in China's internal affairs – a conclusion shared by Elliot Young.<sup>7</sup> Arnulf Becker Lorca goes even further, showing how nineteenth-century 'principles of international law' championed in the West, were disseminated to the Ottoman, Chinese and Japanese empires among others, and were developed by the indigenous populations to fit their needs.<sup>8</sup> Horowitz's conclusion in particular suggests that by the 1840s, British policy makers were armed with an established framework of diplomacy and international law that drove their interactions with the Chinese.<sup>9</sup> This chapter challenges this conclusion, arguing that rather than adhering to a commonly applied blueprint of international law or diplomacy, British notions of the law of nations, in addition to Britain's role in China's internal affairs, were formed through practice and, in part, as a result of the Taiping Rebellion.

To achieve this, this chapter examines the early years of the Taiping Rebellion: from the uprising's seizure of Nanjing in 1853 to the *Arrow* Incident, in 1856. These three years, as a consequence of the civil war, saw a diplomatic struggle amongst Britain's political elite, attempting to consolidate the future of their nation's role in China. It resulted in a general

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<sup>6</sup> Georgios Varouxakis, 'Great versus Small nations', pp. 136-158; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Richard S. Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation in China, Siam and the Ottoman Empire during the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History*, 15:4 (December, 2004), pp. 445-486; Elliot Young, 'Chinese Coolies, Universal Rights and the Limits of Liberalism in an Age of Empire', *Past and Present*, 227:1 (May 2015), pp. 123-131. Young refers to the 'ideological justification' the civilised vs. barbarian rhetoric provided British liberals in their quest for empire.

<sup>8</sup> Arnulf Becker Lorca, 'Universal International Law: Nineteenth Century Histories of Imposition and Appropriation', *Harvard International Law Journal*, 51:2 (2010), pp. 476-552.

<sup>9</sup> Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation', p. 447.

consensus that Britain now had a right to intervene in Chinese affairs both militarily and politically; a conclusion that not only enabled them to justify Britain's role in ending the Rebellion in 1864, but assisted in Bowring's rationalisation of armed intervention in late 1856. In this chapter, British Foreign Office records housed at the National Archives, Kew, are used to demonstrate how the Taiping Rebellion was a regular feature of discussion and was influential in the development of British foreign affairs. It shows how these official documents illustrate the gradual shift in British notions of international law and appropriate diplomatic methods in China, as various British officials attempted to form a clear and codified strategy of diplomatic policy. In addition, it explores the Bowring Papers, arguing that the Taiping Rebellion was equally persuasive in the reorientation of Sir John Bowring's liberalism in the 1850s. Further, the chapter examines British and Chinese newspaper reactions to the Taiping, in order to show how the civil war led British commentators and merchants to question the policy of non-intervention and call for a re-evaluation of Britain's role in China.

To tell this story, the chapter is divided into three parts. The first demonstrates how the Taiping Rebellion revealed the lack of consensus amongst British policy makers in regard to their nation's policy in China and their notions of international law. It shows how the incompetency of the Qing state to quell the uprising, in addition to the threat it posed to British interests in Shanghai, resulted in British policy makers offering disparate viewpoints on whether they should intervene to stop the conflict and on which side their allegiance should lie. The second section expands upon this, demonstrating the attempts by Britain's policy makers to consolidate their nation's foreign policy in China and moreover, their notions of international law and non-intervention. It argues that the civil war revealed Britain's vulnerability in China, culminating in a corrosion of support for the established

policy of non-intervention. The final section asserts that concerns for the safety of British merchants and the stagnation of commerce, as a consequence of the civil war, led policy makers to advocate a range of interventionist policies not just militarily, but, politically and geographically. By obtaining control of the Shanghai Municipal Customs House in 1854, as a result of the turmoil created by the civil war, the British made unprecedented steps into the state management of nineteenth-century China. Such acts consolidated Bowring's perception of the Chinese as unable to defend their own interests and moreover, a new role for Britain in East Asia – conclusions that assisted his call for further intervention in late 1856.

## **Britain's Divided Opinion on the Taiping**

In the inter-war period (1842-1856), British interactions with China were driven by their demand for trading networks. The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) was, first and foremost, a trade agreement, intent on opening China to British commerce. This point was reiterated by Sir John Bowring in 1852:

By the Treaty of Peace, China entered into commercial obligations with England as an equal and friendly power, and at the same time bound herself to abstain from any policy at all inconsistent with the new international relations of the two countries.<sup>10</sup>

However, in addition to acknowledging the agreement's trading requirements, Bowring's letter outlined the larger implications of the 'Treaty of Peace'. Its purpose was to promote a new structure of 'international relations' which, as James L. Hevia argues, attempted to assimilate the Qing state into a global system that adhered to Western notions of commerce, law and diplomacy.<sup>11</sup> Yet, what was not clear in the British plan to forge a new international system in China was *their* role in Chinese affairs. In other words, was the 1842 agreement

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<sup>10</sup> John Rylands Library Manchester, Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Pihkwei', f. 73 (Hong Kong: 20<sup>th</sup> July 1852). Pihkwei was in charge of the local government at Canton.

<sup>11</sup> James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy in Nineteenth Century China* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 5.

purely commercial, or did Britain now have the right to intervene in China's internal struggles either militarily or politically. This section demonstrates how the Taiping Rebellion and the anxieties it fuelled concerning British trade brought this debate to the fore. Moreover, the Rebellion highlighted the lack of consensus amongst British policy makers in regard to Britain's international role, the boundaries of international law and the sovereignty of the Qing state.

The Taiping Rebellion received little acknowledgement from the British after its establishment in 1850. As Stephen Platt asserts, it merely represented another example of local agitation against the Qing in the south of China.<sup>12</sup> However, the insurrection's seizure of Nanjing in 1853 caused widespread panic in the British port of Shanghai, concerned that the movement was in touching distance of their interests.<sup>13</sup> In a letter to the Governor of Hong Kong, Samuel George Bonham, the Consul to Shanghai, Rutherford Alcock, claimed that a long civil war would be 'disastrous alike to the prosperity of the country and the maintenance of any permanent commercial relations on the part of foreign powers.'<sup>14</sup> To the British, the primary aim was to protect and expand their commerce – an ideal that remained consistent with their original objectives in China. What was unclear, however, was the diplomatic process that the British could instigate in order to ensure the security and safety of their trading network. In 1853, Governor Bonham ordered the British navy, led by Captain Edmund Fishbourne, to travel up the Yangtze River to Nanjing in order to establish the objectives of the Taiping and moreover, the possible threat the Rebellion posed to their commercial aims. A year later, the newly appointed Governor Sir John Bowring accompanied a second meeting, in order to determine what role the British should take in influencing

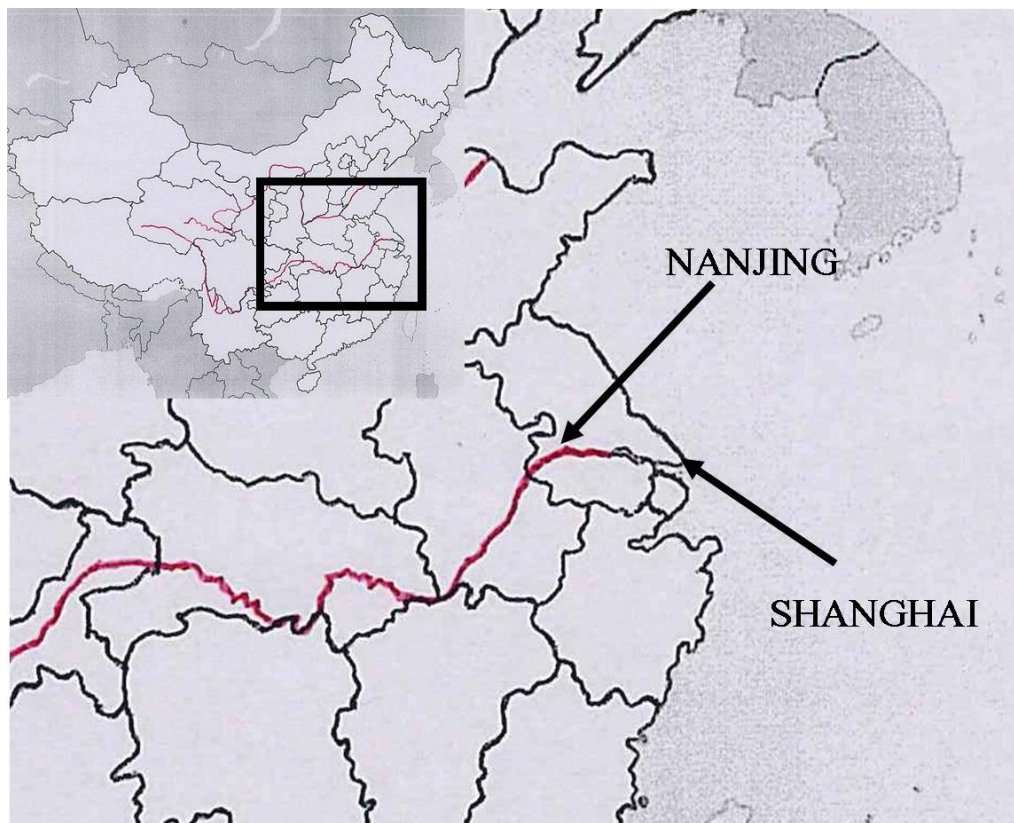
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<sup>12</sup> Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory, *Great Britain and the Taipings*, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> The National Archives [TNA], Foreign Office Records [FO] 17/200, 'Alcock to Bonham', f. 82 (Shanghai: 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1853).

Chinese affairs, in light of the civil war. Both meetings, which were sanctioned by the Foreign Office, consolidated British notions of an unstable Chinese state. Furthermore, they demonstrated the diversity in British opinion regarding their allegiance to the Qing and the possibility of an armed intervention that could alter the course of Chinese history in their favour.



(Fig. 1) Map of Qing China (1820). The proximity of Nanjing to Shanghai is marked, showing that it was a short journey up the Yangtze River. Source: John King Fairbank and Denis C. Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 10: Late Ch'ing 1800-1911*, Part 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 7 for the outline – Nanjing and Shanghai has been inserted.

These fact-finding missions in 1853 and 1854 educated the British of the Taiping movement. The Rebellion grew from the personal ambitions of a hopeful scholar-official called Hong Xiuquan. Hong's story rested on his continuous failure in the Imperial examinations that would have ensured his rise within China's bureaucracy, but instead fuelled his growing

contempt of Qing rule.<sup>15</sup> As a consequence, Hong grew restless of the status quo and after receiving a Christian tract and suffering hallucinations following an illness, Hong claimed that he was the son of God and had been given a new calling: to rid China of the Qing and turn it into a Christian nation with himself as its paramount leader.<sup>16</sup> To Franz Michael, this tract provided Hong, 'not only a doctrine that he was willing to accept but also what he believed to be an explanation of his own experience.'<sup>17</sup> Hong's Protestantism, Thomas Reilly asserts, did not represent a fully formed understanding of Christian teachings. His Christianity was a product of a limited knowledge of Christian values, in addition to his advocacy of an 'ancient classical Chinese faith' known as 'Shangdi', which claimed that China was to be ruled by 'one supreme God', a notion that granted Hong his authority.<sup>18</sup> However, the movement's aim was evident - to overhaul the Qing's control of China.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to this personal story, the Taiping's growth was reliant on its support from the oppressed Hakka ethnicity. The Hakka were originally from the north of China, but as a result of centuries of upheavals were forced to relocate to the southern provinces of Guangxi and Guangdong where they were treated as mere 'settlers'.<sup>20</sup> In the south, the Hakka community faced hostile Chinese officials who imposed high taxes and often redistributed their land.<sup>21</sup> The Hakka community was instrumental in Hong's attempt to establish a new order, which rejected Confucianism and the Qing. By January 1853, the *Peking Gazette* reported that in addition to taking Nanjing, the Taiping were heading north to the seat of power in Beijing. In a letter to Governor Bonham, Rutherford Alcock recited the article's

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<sup>15</sup> William James Hail, *Tsêng Kuo-Fan and the Taiping Rebellion, with a Short Sketch of His Later Career* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Franz Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents*, Vol. I (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom*, pp. 3-102

<sup>19</sup> Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 19.

contents: 'The rebel forces have advanced and up to the latest dates do continue to advance northward without let or hindrance from the constituted authorities or the Imperial troops.'<sup>22</sup> By 1853, it was clear that the insurrection represented a major threat to the Qing dynasty and the Manchu Emperor's 'Mandate of Heaven.'<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, by placing its capital in Nanjing, in close proximity to the port of Shanghai, it embroiled the British in an internal affair that consolidated their notions of the Chinese as 'uncivilised', the limits of international law and support for their nation's involvement in a sovereign country's internal struggles.



(Fig. 2) A statue of Hong Xiuquan in Haudu, Guangdong, China. Source: archive.armstrong.edu

As a result of these fact-finding missions in 1853 and 1854, British opinion of the Taiping, in addition to the appropriate diplomatic course their nation should take in the civil war, was

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<sup>22</sup> TNA FO 17/200, 'Alcock to Bonham', f. 80 (Shanghai: 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1853).

<sup>23</sup> Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom*, p. 107. Reilly argues that the progression of the Taiping resulted in the Xianfeng Emperor questioning the Qing dynasty's mandate to rule.

divided. In the merchant friendly Hong Kong based newspaper the *Friend of China*, numerous articles were published offering support for the Taiping and their supposed Protestantism. Lloyd Matheson, a principal owner of Jardine Matheson Co., argued that his company's imports were under threat as a result of the Qing's 'notoriously weak Government' and that instead, the Chinese people had the option to support a 'successful movement of a great leader, professing new principles, and appealing to the patriotic feelings of the true Chinese.'<sup>24</sup> In addition, an editorial suggested that the Insurgents should be considered 'patriots' and that due to the information gathered from the *Peking Gazette*,

We may soon expect to find, both Northern and Southern capitals being in the hands of the new dynasty, the duty first of our new Plenipotentiary will be to treat with the *de facto* government regarding our relations, speedily requiring, as they do, an effective amendment.<sup>25</sup>

In both these articles, Britain's objective of ensuring the success of their commercial interests was driving the *Friend of China's* opinions of the Taiping. For the *Friend of China*, in addition to members of Britain's merchant community, a Taiping victory was considered the best outcome for British trade and Anglo-Chinese relations.

In Britain, the civil war caught the attention of the nation's political commentators. On the 30<sup>th</sup> August 1853, *The Times* recorded its optimism at the possibility of a Taiping victory:

This is not mere speculation on the possible consequences of change, for it is evident that the successful Insurgents are as disposed to invoke the aid of progress and civilisation as defensive auxiliaries against the tyrannical bigotry of the Mantchoos [Manchus] as the latter were always disposed to rely on the fixedness of their institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Although the article proceeded to question the religiosity of the movement, it simplified the civil war into a battle between tradition (Qing) and modernity (Taiping). Anticipating a Taiping victory, the article suggested that after a few years, British citizens,

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<sup>24</sup> *Friend of China*, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1854, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Friend of China*, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1854, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *The Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> August, 1853, p. 6.



Shall all be running to the Chinese Consulate in Leadenhall-street or Bucklersbury to get our Foreign-Office passport *viséd* by a gentleman with small eyes, high-cheeked bones, and yellow skin, but without a tail, and dressed like everybody else in the city.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, to the editors of *The Times*, the success of the Taiping would result in China's assimilation into an international system based on law, diplomacy and commerce. This conclusion, the editorial believed, would result in a civilised Chinese population 'no longer imprisoned within its walls and shores.'<sup>28</sup>

In his letters to his son, Edgar, and in light of his visit to Nanjing in 1854, Bowring offered a different perception of the Taiping and thus, demonstrated the lack of consensus in British opinion in regard to China's civil war. In July 1854, Bowring questioned the Taiping's religious motives, in addition to the Rebellion's ability to support British trade:

It is a movement likely to be equally detrimental to our trade and disappointing to those who have anticipated a grand Protestant reform. As far as I can see the success of the Rebellion would destroy the trade – or at all events greatly diminish it.<sup>29</sup>

Bowring's objection to the Taiping's claim to be the rightful government of China was, again, driven by his concern that their victory over the Qing would be detrimental to British commerce. However, these letters also indicate Bowring's derogative assessment of the Taiping's notion of Christianity. He mockingly acknowledged to Edgar that, in his report to the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Clarendon, he had included 'the most extraordinary documents' from the Eastern King 'who calls himself the Holy Ghost.'<sup>30</sup>

Apprehensions regarding the Taiping's religiosity were not unique to Bowring. In his memoirs, *Impressions of China and the Present Revolutions* (1855), Captain Fishbourne – who led the first mission to greet the Taiping in 1853 – stated that 'It may be argued that

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<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *The Times*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 94 (Shanghai: 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1854).

<sup>30</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 94 (Shanghai: 12<sup>th</sup> July, 1854).

theirs is not a true religion, and it may be granted that there are grave errors amongst them'. Yet, to Fishbourne, their 'calm confidence in themselves and in the justness of their cause' would 'tend to success.'<sup>31</sup> Thus, both the supportive and dismissive reactions to the Taiping show that whilst there was a division in British perceptions, the aim of protecting British trade was a common goal. From 1853 to 1856, the determination to safeguard British interests in China would form the basis of the debate questioning whether Britain had the right to intervene in China's internal affairs.

As a consequence of the civil war, British policy makers were enlightened to the fact that their nation had the possibility to alter the course of Chinese history. By throwing their support behind the Taiping or the Qing, it was evident that the British could have an instrumental role in China's dynastic cycle. This realisation was also heeded by the Imperialists and the Insurgents, both of whom made attempts during the early years of the civil war to gain British support. In 1854, Bowring claimed that in an effort to gain merchant backing, the Taiping argued that if their movement was victorious, Britain's Shanghai community would not have to pay any duties on their trade into China. Under the current Qing regime, all imports were subject to five per cent *ad valorem* as stated in the Treaty of Nanjing.<sup>32</sup> In that same year, Bowring stated that Qing officials had requested British support 'in order to put an end to the horrible scenes which are daily occurring.'<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, concerned at the possible reaction from Emperor Xianfeng if he was made aware that his officials sought British assistance, they asked Bowring to 'promise that I will not compromise

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<sup>31</sup> Captain Edmund Fishbourne, *Impressions of China and the Present Revolutions: Its Progress and Prospects* (London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1855), p. 370.

<sup>32</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 90 (Shanghai: 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1854). For a description of the changes in British import duties into China see: Francis Hyde, *Far Eastern Trade 1860-1914* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1973), p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 93 (Shanghai: 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1854).

their heads by involving them with the Emperor.’<sup>34</sup> Therefore, as a result of the Taiping Rebellion, Britain’s position in China’s internal affairs was changing. There was a realisation from British policy makers, in addition to those on both sides of China’s civil war, that this Western nation, whose primary goal was establishing a strong trading relationship, could alter the seat of power in China.

Officially, in their correspondence with the Taiping during their fact-finding missions, the British adopted a position of ‘neutrality’ between the two sides, a policy that was the formal position of the British government even in the early 1860s. Yet, as Hans Van de Ven explains, Britain’s public mood was moving against the Taiping in favour of the Qing by the start of the decade.<sup>35</sup> In his interview with the Taiping leadership in 1853, Thomas Taylor Meadows, a British interpreter, explained that due to the ties of international law, their position in China must remain purely commercial:

I replied that it was an established rule of the British Government not to interfere with the internal struggles of foreign states; moreover, that though we had been at war with the Manchus [Manchus], we had concluded a treaty of peace with them, and could not therefore take arms against them without breaking our plighted faith.<sup>36</sup>

Although international law lacked codification in the mid-nineteenth century, Meadows’ message to the Taiping adhered to contemporary notions of the law of nations, such as that put forth by Henry Wheaton in 1836. Although Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* suggested that there was a need to determine a nation’s ‘civilised’ status in order to assess whether the law of nations applied, he did conclude that during a civil war in *any* state, a ‘civilised’ country (like Britain) must observe strict neutrality.<sup>37</sup> Thus, at first glance, it is easy to see why historical assessments have ignored the impact that the Taiping Rebellion

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<sup>34</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 93 (Shanghai: 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1854).

<sup>35</sup> Hans Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 27; John S. Gregory, ‘British Intervention against the Taiping Rebellion’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 19:1 (November, 1959), pp. 11-16.

<sup>36</sup> T.T. Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions* (London: Smith, Elder and CO., 1856), p. 275.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Stevens and Sons Ltd., 1916), p. 38.

had on British notions of international law. On the surface, Meadows' message to the Taiping leaders in 1853 suggests that the British officials merely followed established ideas.

However, regardless of Meadows' conviction in 1853, the civil war demonstrated to the British the inability of the Qing state to protect Western trade. This conclusion resulted in the corrosion of support for Wheaton's outline. The *Friend of China* reported in June 1853 that the Qing's failure to defend Shanghai confirmed its ineptitude in governing the nation:

Communication has come from Shanghai addressed to the Consuls of England, France, America, Portugal and Hamburg; requesting naval assistance, in order to prevent the fall of Nanjing to the insurgents; the Chinese forces therein confessed to being incompetent.<sup>38</sup>

This opinion was shared by Shanghai's Consul Rutherford Alcock, who, in a letter to Governor Bonham, claimed,

The Court of Peking is well cognizant of the truth and of all the molestation, inefficiency and cowardice of both Generals and troops, and, at the same time feels its inability to provide a remedy.<sup>39</sup>

The civil war, therefore, informed the British opinion that the Qing was unable to maintain control of China's internal affairs and provide security for Britain's interests. It became increasingly clear that if left to the Qing, the international system that Britain hoped to create in 1842 was in danger of destruction. As a result, it fuelled questions regarding the role of the West in China's affairs, prompting Alcock to conclude that without 'even greater blundering and cowardice on the part of the rebels than the Imperialists have hitherto displayed, or by Foreign Aid; it [the Qing] must fall.'<sup>40</sup>

In addition, the civil war consolidated British perceptions of the Qing as cruel despots, possibly unworthy of governing China. In his memoirs, Captain Fishbourne acknowledged

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<sup>38</sup> *Friend of China*, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1853, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> TNA FO 17/200, 'Alcock to Bonham', f. 79 (Shanghai: 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1853).

<sup>40</sup> TNA FO 17/200, 'Alcock to Bonham', f. 84 (Shanghai: 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1853).

how the Taiping Rebellion demonstrated the ‘cruelties of the Imperialists’: ‘Often during the operations, the poor people complained of the treatment of the Imperialists, and it was certainly pitiable to behold the needless destruction of property.’<sup>41</sup> In a more derogatory attack on the Imperialists (Qing), the *Friend of China* published an article describing their treatment of the rebels in Canton as ‘sickening’, alleging that 10,000 people were killed in the region with several ‘skinned alive’ and one ‘cut in twenty four pieces.’<sup>42</sup> These perceptions of the Qing further fuelled the British sense of their right to intervene in Chinese affairs and moreover, the notion that if they refused to do so, the British could be considered conspirators in upholding a tyrannical Manchu regime. This suggestion was made by L. Marquis, a British merchant residing in China, who penned an article for the *Friend of China* arguing,

Why should we now in support of a venal and bloodthirsty Government, whose every deed denotes cunning, selfishness and incorrigibility, contribute our share for the suppression of a national movement whose success gives the only hope for redemption of China from its present barbarous condition?<sup>43</sup>

In his conclusion, Marquis set the parameters of the debate that the civil war had created: ‘from the Imperialist’s rule, humanity and civilisation have nothing to hope but contempt, and treachery,’ and therefore, Marquis concluded that it would be morally reprehensible for the British to fall back on a policy of ‘do-nothingness’.<sup>44</sup> To L. Marquis, the British had to intervene not just for the safety of their own trade, but in defence of the Chinese people against a barbaric regime.

In many ways, the conclusion put forth by L. Marquis reflects twenty-first-century concerns regarding Western intervention in the affairs of sovereign nations, particularly countries

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<sup>41</sup> Fishbourne, *Impressions of China*, p. 311.

<sup>42</sup> *Friend of China*, 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1855, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> *Friend of China*, 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 1855, p. 3. This was a reprint of an article from the *China Mail*. The full name of the author is not provided in the newspaper.

<sup>44</sup> *Friend of China*, p. 3.

hostile to Western standards of law, trade and liberal ideology. As Casper Sylvest argues, the relevance of this debate to current affairs is a crucial factor in the growing historical interest in the origins and development of Western concepts of international law.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, amongst the liberal intelligentsia in the mid-nineteenth century, the acceptability of foreign intervention was a passionate and regular topic of discussion. Marquis' statement demonstrated the growing determination to codify the law of nations. This is supported by John Stuart Mill's examination of the policy of non-intervention in 1859. In *A Few Words on Non-Intervention*, Mill argued that foreign involvement in the affairs of a sovereign state could be deemed moral and necessary if the aim was to remove a violent, despotic and foreign regime, and if the citizens demanded it.<sup>46</sup> However, for Mill, such conclusions were not universal and his categorisation of the Chinese as 'barbarian' in 1859, would have excluded China from any intervention.<sup>47</sup> As late as 1859, one of Britain's most eminent liberal thinkers was trying to bring clarity to the confusing concept of international law. Thus, between 1853 and 1856, British responses to the Taiping did not succumb to a blueprint of diplomacy. British notions of intervention and international law developed through practice and, as a result, the early years of the Chinese civil war contributed to British liberal thinking in the mid-nineteenth century.

As a consequence of the early fact-finding missions, anxieties regarding British trade, and growing contempt for the Qing, the Taiping Rebellion captured the imagination of the British diplomats. They questioned established notions of international law which, as indicated in Wheaton's *Elements*, proposed limited intervention. In his correspondence with the Prime

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<sup>45</sup> Casper Sylvest, 'Our Passion for Legality': International Law and Imperialism in Late-Nineteenth Century Britain', *Review of International Studies*, 34:3 (July, 2008), p. 403.

<sup>46</sup> John Stuart Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention', in John Robson and Jean O'Grady ed., *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 21 (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 100-130. For an excellent examination of Mill's notion of non-intervention see: Georgios Varouxakis, 'John Stuart Mill on Intervention and Non-Intervention', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 26:57 (1997), pp. 57-65.

<sup>47</sup> Mill, 'A Few Words on Non-Intervention', p. 67.

Minister Lord Palmerston in 1856, the naval commander Major Vallancey demonstrated how perceptions of Britain's role in China were altering as a consequence of the civil war: 'No maritime nation can have so great a right as England to interfere to prevent the closing of the Chinese ports to European commerce.'<sup>48</sup> Thus, in addition to confirming Britain's ability to influence the course of Chinese history, the Taiping Rebellion resulted in a growing conviction that in defence of their trade, the British nation had a *right* to interfere in the affairs of a sovereign state.

However, such conclusions were laced with a clear problem: if the British were to militarily intervene in Chinese affairs, what side (Imperialists or Insurgents) should they take? The Consul to Shanghai, Rutherford Alcock, demanded that the British throw their support behind the Qing government and bring an end to the civil war that was fast approaching Shanghai. In February 1853, Alcock claimed that in order to maintain British trading interests in China, the timing was 'opportune for preserving the Empire from a threatening disintegration.'<sup>49</sup> In contrast and true to their criticism of the Qing government, the *Friend of China* claimed that it was a matter of time before the British offered their support to the Taiping and could expect some form of 'remuneration for their important service' in terms of territory or commercial advantages.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, whilst the aim of protecting British commerce remained a constant in the minds of the nation's policy makers, there was no consensus on what side should be offered their allegiance. However, calls for British intervention and hence, a challenge to established notions of international law, were growing in support.

In the first three years of the Taiping Rebellion, British perceptions of the Qing's sovereignty and their own role in Chinese affairs changed. The civil war and the possibility of its

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<sup>48</sup> TNA FO 17/259, 'Major Vallancey to Palmerston', f. 47 (South Sea: 14<sup>th</sup> October 1856).

<sup>49</sup> TNA FO 17/200, 'Alcock to Bonham', f. 84 (Shanghai: 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1853).

<sup>50</sup> *Friend of China*, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 1853, p. 4.

detrimental effect on Britain's commercial interests forced a reconsideration of British values regarding international law and their support for the Manchu regime. As a result, the British reaction to the Taiping Rebellion reflected and added to discussions within Britain regarding liberal ideology and non-intervention. However, whilst British policy makers remained committed to protecting trade, the early years of the civil war produced no consensus on whether their nation should intervene and moreover, what side they should support. What is clear, therefore, is that the early years of the civil war demonstrated the uncertainties of British foreign policy in China. There was no blueprint to follow, just outlines. In light of the Taiping Rebellion however, British policy makers sought to consolidate concepts of international law and the role of Britain in China.

## **Britain's Ideological Struggle**

After the initial confusion of *how* the British should react to the Taiping Rebellion, there were attempts to formulate a clear and concise policy in regard to Britain's role in China's domestic struggles. This section argues that as a result of the civil war, there was a determination to clarify Britain's military and political status in China which, in turn, affected British attitudes regarding international law and non-intervention. It will therefore challenge the conclusion put forth by Richard Horowitz, which suggests that during the inter-war period, the British nation had an established doctrine of the 'law of nations' that guided their interactions with the Chinese state.<sup>51</sup> Instead, it shows that the Taiping Rebellion not only demonstrated divisions in British values as expressed in section one, but furthermore, shaped British foreign policy and liberal ideas. In addition, this section documents how the official policy of neutrality was not ideologically driven, but instead, was adopted to ensure Britain's options remained open. Regardless of which side emerged victorious, they would be in a

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<sup>51</sup> Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation', pp. 445-487.



good position to improve their trading networks in China. As a result, the ideological debate continued, gaining momentum after numerous attacks, by both the Imperialists and Insurgents, affected British interests. The concerns for the safety of British merchants and trade, therefore, resulted in a vibrant discussion that queried whether the official policy of neutrality was appropriate – a conversation that led to a growing consensus that the doctrine of international law did not apply in China and as a result, the British had a *right* to affect the course of China's internal affairs.

In his correspondence with the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Samuel George Bonham, in 1853, the British Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Clarendon, pressed the need for the British to establish a clear policy in regard to the civil war in China and yet, provided no real clarity in his conclusion. Clarendon gave Bonham somewhat contrasting instructions, suggesting that the Governor of Hong Kong should observe 'strict neutrality between the contending parties' and in addition, should establish a strong relationship with both the Imperialists and the Insurgents. This policy, Clarendon argued, meant that regardless of the outcome, British interests in China would be protected, enabling them to 'take advantage of every opportunity.'<sup>52</sup> It was, S.Y. Těng argues, a policy of 'watchful opportunism.'<sup>53</sup> However, Clarendon argued that due to the little information that was known, it was 'difficult' to offer any further instructions.<sup>54</sup> Clarendon's letters demonstrate that the Foreign Secretary was not guided by any ideological notion of international law or foreign relations. Instead, he adopted an unmistakably pragmatic policy with the main aim of defending and improving British commerce. Although the position of 'neutrality' would become the 'official' policy of the Government, it was not the end of the debate. Aware that this was a pragmatic choice and still concerned about the effect of the Rebellion on British commerce, politicians and

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<sup>52</sup> TNA FO 228/153, 'Clarendon to Bonham', f. 75 (Foreign Office: 7<sup>th</sup> May 1853).

<sup>53</sup> Těng, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 230.

<sup>54</sup> TNA FO 228/153, 'Clarendon to Bonham', f. 80 (Foreign Office: 7<sup>th</sup> May 1853).

diplomats continued to debate the practicalities of a military or political intervention and moreover, what this meant for British notions of international law and foreign relations.

In light of the growing support for some form of intervention to protect British interests, as documented in the first section, the Taiping Rebellion contributed to an intellectual debate amongst British policy makers regarding the sovereignty of the Chinese state and the boundaries of international law. Although Clarendon contested that it would be ‘prudent’ to adhere to a policy of neutrality, this notion was unceasingly challenged by British officials and merchants as the effects of the civil war continued to stimulate discussions regarding Britain’s role in China and liberal policies more generally.<sup>55</sup> In his memoirs, the British interpreter Thomas Taylor Meadows documented the conceptual deliberations that the Taiping Rebellion created for Britain’s policy makers in a chapter aptly named ‘The Best policy of Western States towards China’. Meadows’ chapter demonstrates how concerns regarding the civil war contributed to the development of British foreign policy and liberal ideas. To Meadows, the Taiping Rebellion was such a prominent instance affecting British interests that it demanded a discussion of the boundaries and terms of international law. In the introduction, Meadows acknowledged the complexity of the debate facing British thinkers, politicians and officials:

Whether that political system, which renders such crises from time to time indispensable, is the best that could be devised, or is one of average goodness or is a very bad one, cannot be the question. The system is *there*. It exists, and exists deeply rooted in the mental nature of a large and homogenous people. When we have by moral agencies changed that mental nature, then we may speak of forcibly interfering with that system for the benefits of that people. We may then *begin to argue the question*.<sup>56</sup>

After setting the framework of the discussion, the chapter was devoted to uncovering *what* British policy in China should be and more importantly, *why* that was the case. Indeed, as a

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<sup>55</sup> TNA FO 228/153, ‘Clarendon to Bonham’, f. 75 (Foreign Office: 7<sup>th</sup> May 1853).

<sup>56</sup> Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, p. 464.

result of the Taiping, there was a determination to clarify the boundaries of international law and the policy of intervention.

Through his description of the British debate that ensued in light of the civil war, Meadows' memoirs indicate how these deliberations consolidated his personal notion of international law. In his attempt to formulate his viewpoint on British policy in China, Meadows acknowledged his support for non-intervention: 'there is reason to hope that the doctrine of non-interference, so understood, will in time have the authority of an international axiom in the world.'<sup>57</sup> However, the Taiping Rebellion forced Meadows to reconsider the universal application of this ideal. To establish whether a policy of non-intervention applied in China, as framed in contemporary descriptions of the law of nations, Meadows adopted a commonly used benchmark. He attempted to analyse China's 'civilised' status, a formula which, as Jennifer Pitts asserts, liberal thinkers used in order to rationalise Britain's imperial agenda.<sup>58</sup> Meadows examined François Guizot's *History of Civilisation in Europe* (1828) and John Stuart Mill's *A System of Logic* (1843) in the hope of formulating a definitive understanding of 'civilisation' and thus, Britain's right to intervene in the internal affairs of China. Yet, in response to both these works, Meadows noted the 'vagueness' in their ability to demarcate between 'civilised', 'barbarian' and 'savage'.<sup>59</sup> Critiquing the work of Guizot in particular, Meadows argued that there was a 'lack of a sound definition of civilisation.'<sup>60</sup> What the Taiping highlighted to Meadows, therefore, was the inconsistencies and problems with contemporary notions of international law in European thought. Concerned about the serious nature of the civil war's effect on China and British interests, Meadows offered his support for Mill's conclusion that it was 'imperative' to define the principles and boundaries of

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<sup>57</sup> Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, p. 467.

<sup>58</sup> Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, p. 133. Pitts is giving particular attention here to imperial rule rather than informal connections.

<sup>59</sup> Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, p. 498.

<sup>60</sup> Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, p. 499.

international law.<sup>61</sup> To Meadows, therefore, it was the Taiping rebellion that resulted in his ideological development and cries for a more codified structure of international relations.

In his investigation into the meaning of international law, as a result of the Taiping Rebellion, Meadows attempted to determine whether intervention in China could be justified. Meadows argued that as British objectives in China were purely commercial, they had little right to interfere in China's internal affairs:

If we now wanted to possess ourselves of portions of China, then we should interfere in her internal troubles, but we only wished to extend, as much as possible, a free trade, which brought great advantages to both nations.<sup>62</sup>

Meadows' conclusion suggests that it was, in fact, British aims in China that were restricting their right to intervene in the nation's internal affairs. By defining the Anglo-Chinese relationship as primarily a trading network, rather than an imperial acquisition, intervention in China's political struggle was deemed, by Meadows, to be inappropriate.

Meadows further claimed that the relative importance of China in Britain's global networks needed to be taken into account. To Meadows, because Britain would remain prosperous without the trade of China, intervention in the defence of trade, which acted as a surplus for British growth, was unreasonable. He stated,

British preservation does not absolutely depend on Chinese trade. Hence, if the protection of our commercial interests be (what is really *not* the case) at variance with the cause of humanity and civilisation in that country, most assuredly our commercial interests must go unprotected.<sup>63</sup>

For Meadows, the Taiping Rebellion and the problems it presented for British commerce enabled him to consolidate his viewpoint on British international law. Meadows concluded that whilst intervention could be justified, it would require a reconfiguration of British

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<sup>61</sup> Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, p. 499.

<sup>62</sup> Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, p. 295.

<sup>63</sup> Meadows, *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, p. 466.

demands from China. Unclear about the doctrine of non-intervention and the categorisation of a 'civilised' nation prior to documenting these memoirs, it was the early years of the civil war that influenced Meadows' ideological development.

In contrast, Rutherford Alcock's concern for British trade in Shanghai and the security of the expatriated merchants resulted in a wholehearted defence of military intervention. As Hans Van de Ven outlines, Alcock was educated in the liberal thought of Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and yet, the Consul to Shanghai remained in favour of 'muscular liberalism' in China.<sup>64</sup> It was his experiences in the treaty port that consolidated this viewpoint. To Alcock, the stagnation of British trade as a result of the civil war led the Consul to conclude that Britain must intervene and that the circumstances 'left no alternative but to call upon the Senior Naval Officer, to take such measures as he deemed requisite for the protection of life and the security of the settlement.'<sup>65</sup> Further, Alcock stated in a letter to Shanghai's merchant community that this mission should not include Britain alone, but demanded a collective Western response:

It seems desirable that the Consular Representatives of Foreign Powers at this port should be in communication; with a view to their acting in concert throughout the present crisis in defence of a common interest.<sup>66</sup>

Although there was a lack of foreign interest for such an intervention, these letters from Alcock indicate that his concern for British trade and interests in Shanghai had now manifested into his determination to alter Britain's role in China and even that of other nations.<sup>67</sup> The Taiping Rebellion demonstrated to the Consul that if British interests in China were to be secured, it would require a reconsideration of his nation's agenda and policies in

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<sup>64</sup> Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> TNA FO 228/176, 'Notification from Rutherford Alcock', f. 10 (Shanghai: 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1854).

<sup>66</sup> TNA FO 228/176, 'Alcock Address to Merchants of Shanghai', ff. 138-140 (Shanghai: 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1854).

<sup>67</sup> Têng, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 209; Gregory, *Great Britain and the Taipings*, p. 12. Têng documents the rejection from Western nations such as France and the United States of America to form an alliance to stop the civil war.

East Asia. For Alcock, to defend British commerce in China, a purely commercial relationship was not sufficient.

The advancement of the civil war from 1853 to 1856, and its close proximity to Shanghai, demonstrated the inadequacy of the policy of 'neutrality' in ensuring the safety of British merchants. It is well-documented that the position of 'neutrality' was, in fact, 'armed neutrality'. The British were convinced of their right to protect the treaty ports that they had acquired in 1842 with military force.<sup>68</sup> However, 'armed neutrality' also demonstrated stark problems. In his correspondence with Bonham in 1853, Clarendon argued that whilst the British had the right to defend the treaty ports, the military protection that could be afforded was limited. Clarendon explained that,

Where a state of things exists such as Amoy [Xiamen] where there is no regular authority, where the attacks of the Imperialists are likely to be prolonged and where the British factory not being distinct from the town, compensation under the circumstances can hardly be demanded for injuries done by fire or otherwise to British property. I should say that due notice should be given to the merchants by the Consular Authority, that protection against such accumulated dangers cannot be afforded beyond a certain time.<sup>69</sup>

To summarise this uninspiring conclusion, Clarendon claimed that 'it would be prudent that they [British merchants] remove themselves and their property, or run their own risk by remaining.'<sup>70</sup> Thus, the Taiping Rebellion not only revealed the incompetency of the Qing in protecting British merchants and trade but moreover, the military weakness of the British in East Asia.

The policy of 'neutrality' agreed by Clarendon and Bonham was not the end of the debate. It fuelled uncertainty amongst Britain's merchant community regarding their safety in China

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<sup>68</sup> T'eng, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 230; Gregory, *Great Britain and the Taipings*, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> TNA FO 228/153, 'Clarendon to Bonham', f. 81 (Foreign Office: 24<sup>th</sup> November 1853).

<sup>70</sup> TNA FO 228/153, 'Clarendon to Bonham', f. 81 (Foreign Office: 24<sup>th</sup> November 1853).

and posed more questions than it answered. It resulted in discussions regarding Britain's right to intervene in Chinese affairs both within and beyond the borders of the treaty ports and moreover, whether they were militarily equipped to do so. In 1853, the merchant community in Canton, led by Jardine Matheson & Co., and Dent & Co., addressed a memorial to Governor Bonham, asking for a clarification as to whether they had their Government's military backing to defend their businesses. The memorial requested 'the best instruction in your power of guidance' if, 'in the loss of property from violence on the part of Insurgents, Imperialists or Mob: Whether the British government will hold the present or any future government of China liable for all losses.'<sup>71</sup> The memorial concluded by stressing the need for Britain's policy makers to come to a clear and concise policy on the *right* and indeed, *ability* of the British not just to intervene in internal affairs, but to protect their commercial interests and the safety of the community.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the Taiping Rebellion shed light on the insecurity of the British merchants in China and moreover, the demand for guidelines on their international status.

By 1855, these concerns remained prominent. The Taiping Rebellion continued to threaten British ports and the surrounding areas and yet, British reactions were uncertain and unclear. As a result, the merchant community were more forceful in their demands. They questioned the policy of neutrality and contributed to the intellectual debate that attempted to define the role of Britain in China. In Whampoa, a British merchant, Charles Buckton, witnessed the fighting between the Imperialist and Insurgent camps and the danger in which this placed Britain's expatriate community. Buckton wrote to Governor Bowring, including a sketch of the violence (Fig. 3), illustrating the lack of protection afforded to British subjects in China

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<sup>71</sup> TNA FO 677/10, 'The British merchant community to Bonham', f. 43 (Canton: 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1853).

<sup>72</sup> TNA FO 677/10, 'The British merchant community to Bonham', f. 43 (Canton: 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1853).

and the close proximity of the British community to the conflict. In addition to depicting the clash, Buckton's letter questioned Britain's role and policy of neutrality:

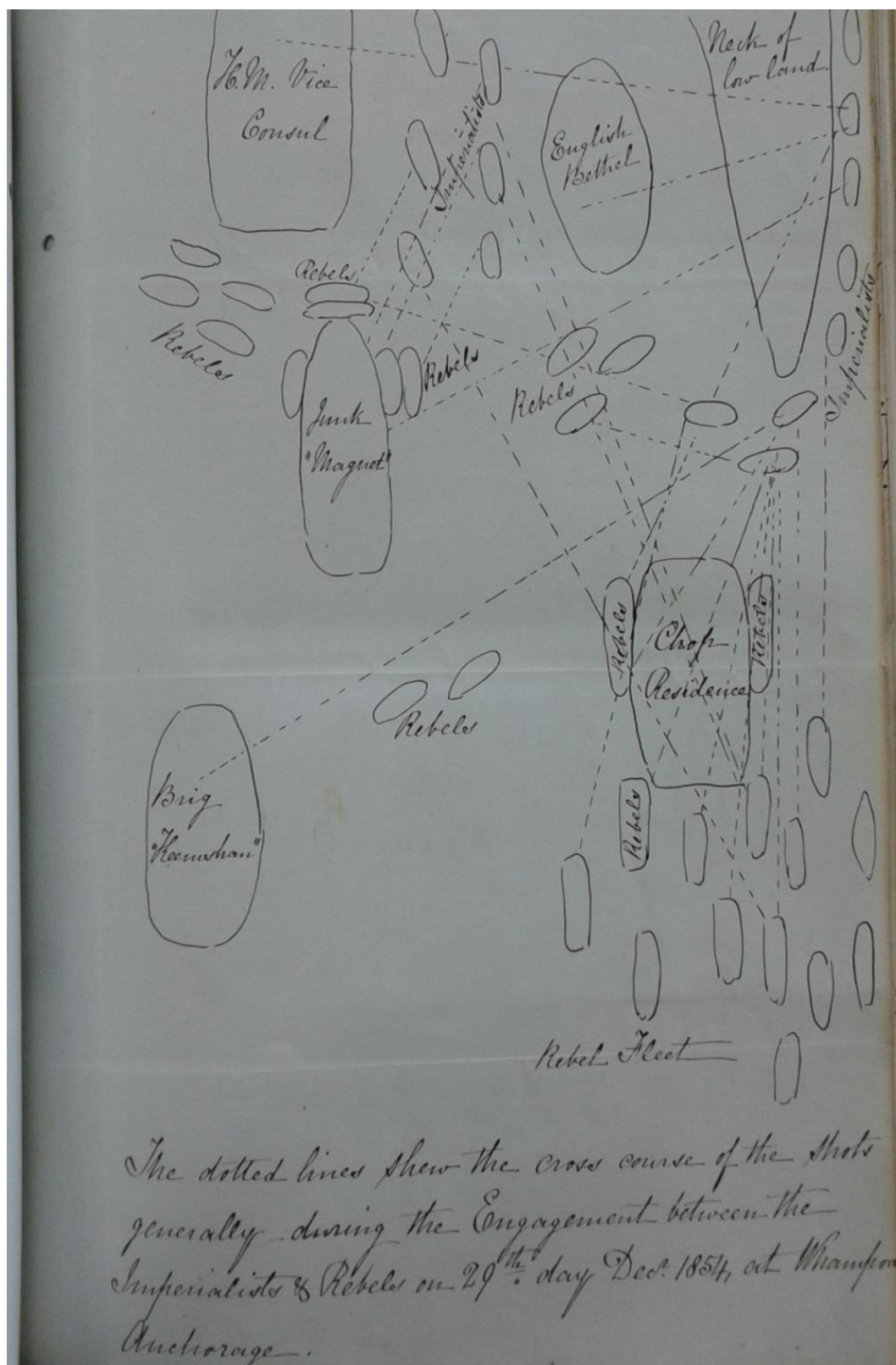
I wish your Excellency to understand that I was fired into by both Imperialists and Rebels and that each party may be considered as equal aggressors. In such a position as the Imperialists and Rebels placed me, with rebel boats lashed alongside my residence, they made us perfect targets for the shot from the Imperialists.<sup>73</sup>

In his letter, Buckton portrayed both sides as aggressors but more importantly, he noted the weakness of his position in the face of such violence. The Rebellion therefore, not only forced Britain to form a concrete position on the Qing and the Taiping insurgents, but moreover, demonstrated the questionable tactics of neutrality and the lack of security it offered to Britain's expatriate community.

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<sup>73</sup> TNA FO 17/227, 'Charles Buckton to Bowring', f. 196 (Whampoa: 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).





(Fig.3) TNA FO 17/227, 'Buckton to Clarendon', f. 34 (Whampoa: 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1855). Here, Buckton illustrates the attacks from both the Imperialists and the Taiping in Whampoa in late 1854. Britain's residents are in the middle of the conflict.

Referring to the same event, the merchants in Canton produced another memorial to the new Governor Sir John Bowring, ‘inquiring as to their claims to protection.’<sup>74</sup> First, the merchants queried whether ‘as British subjects, and in terms of the Treaty’, if their property or goods were damaged as a consequence of the war, ‘do we possess in general the right to claim for indemnity?’<sup>75</sup> In addition, the letter asked ‘what is the nature of the procedure and precautions required from us to entitle our persons and property to British protection?’<sup>76</sup> The threat of the Taiping Rebellion, therefore, demonstrated the limits of the guidelines provided in the Treaty of Nanjing and the codification of Britain’s foreign relations more generally. In a second letter to Bowring after a week passed with unsatisfactory and ambiguous responses, the merchants based specifically in Whampoa added their voice to the debate:

We respectfully inform you that during an engagement between the Imperialists and the rebels on Friday the 29<sup>th</sup> day of December last, our lives and property were placed in the most imminent danger; one vessel, British property being fired into by no less than thirty seven shots. Her Majesty’s ships “Winchester” and “Barracouta” were lying at this anchorage during the entire time of the engagement, neither vessel volunteered protection to the British subjects or British interests... It has now become a matter of serious importance to your memorialists to understand whether the British flag will protect us or not in our respective peaceful occupations.<sup>77</sup>

As described here, the Taiping Rebellion exposed the weakness of the British military in China and the problems with the policy of neutrality. It indicated that Clarendon’s pragmatic doctrine was failing to serve British interests. The expatriated merchants concluded that in order for their trade and livelihood to be properly protected, there must be a re-evaluation of Britain’s role in Chinese affairs in favour of military intervention. This represented an alteration in established notions of international law and diplomacy.

The chaos of civil war, in addition to the rise of smaller uprisings such as the Small Sword

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<sup>74</sup> TNA FO 677/11, ‘Memorial from the merchants at Canton inquiring as to their claims to protection to Sir John Bowring’, f. 21 (Canton: 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

<sup>75</sup> TNA FO 677/11, ‘Memorial’, f. 21 (Canton: 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

<sup>76</sup> TNA FO 677/11, ‘Memorial’, f. 21 (Canton: 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

<sup>77</sup> TNA FO 677/11, ‘Memorial from the merchants of Whampoa to Bowring’, f. 22 (Whampoa: 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

Society, not only prompted a re-evaluation of the protection afforded to British merchants. It also provoked a debate as to the role Britain should take in China's state management.

Following violent attacks in the port of Shanghai in 1853 and 1854, the Chinese Customs House, a Qing institution created for the collection of foreign duties, was looted and destroyed.<sup>78</sup> Taking advantage of this instance and the Qing's preoccupation with the Taiping, British merchants concluded that as Qing officials were unable to collect the five per cent duties on British imports, they were under no obligation to self-impose its payment.<sup>79</sup> The 'duty question', as it became known, split British opinion and demonstrated the necessity to determine Britain's commercial obligations in China. For Bowring, the refusal to pay duties was in direct conflict with the second term of the Treaty of Nanjing.<sup>80</sup> Convinced that the merchants should collect duties regardless of the civil war's chaos, Bowring described to his son, Edgar, the issue at hand: 'I have not only said [to the Shanghai merchants] "You shall pay duties – you are bound to pay by treaty", but I have taken most effective measures to ensure their payment.'<sup>81</sup> The merchants however, responded emphatically, suggesting that although 'bound' to pay, there they were not 'bound' to collect; in their opinion, this role was exclusive to the Qing officials.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the Taiping Rebellion placed merchants in contention with diplomats, revealing the demand for a clarification of Britain's role in Chinese affairs and their trading requirements.

This division of opinion in regard to Britain's trading responsibilities resonated at home. In

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<sup>78</sup> Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 30.

<sup>79</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1230, 'The Duty Question', *Overland Register*, f. 239, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1854. The newspaper gave the opinions of the majority of the merchants, who concluded that due to the 'mob' near Shanghai, they were not obliged to pay.

<sup>80</sup> Frederic Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p. 137; John King Fairbank, 'The Creation of the Treaty System', in Fairbank and Twitchett eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 10, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 217.

<sup>81</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 96 (Shanghai: 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1854).

<sup>82</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1230, 'The Duty Question', *The Overland Register*, f. 239 (Hong Kong: 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1854).

1853, Clarendon sided with the majority of merchants after Britain's legal officers concluded that there was 'an absence of any legal obligations' to collect duties on behalf of the Qing state.<sup>83</sup> Thus, amongst British politicians and diplomats there was no clarity in thought in regard to the Nanjing treaty and their nation's role in China's affairs. By 1854, Bowring reported to Edgar that there had been 'the most extraordinary and incomprehensible division of the Government in the matter of the Shanghai duties has compelled me to send home my resignation,'<sup>84</sup> (this was later rescinded) and that furthermore, he received 'no instructions as to the duty question at Shanghai.'<sup>85</sup> The duty question, then, caught the attention of the Foreign Office and demonstrated the demand for guidelines in regard to British foreign trade in China in order to consolidate their nation's commercial responsibilities.

On the surface, the duty question represented a disagreement regarding import tax. However, by examining this issue in closer detail, it sheds light on a wider debate concerning the status of the British in China's political system. It queried whether Britain's role in China was purely commercial, or whether the British have a *right* and possibly an *obligation* to interfere in China's internal affairs and the governance of the state. In other words, *should* and *could* the British replace the Qing officials as tax collectors for the Chinese nation and thus expand upon their current position as commercial partners. In addition to Bowring's verdict that the refusal to collect duties placed the British in a poor position to re-negotiate treaty terms, arguing that 'as to the future treaties with China that has been flung away in the dishonest games we are playing,' the duty question consolidated his conviction that the British had a right and indeed, a responsibility to manage aspects of China's foreign affairs in the absence

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<sup>83</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Memorandum relative to Customs duties provisionally collected by British Consul at the Port of Shanghai', f. 193 (Shanghai, Board of Trade: 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1854).

<sup>84</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 98 (Shanghai: 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1854).

<sup>85</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 97 (Shanghai: 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1854).

of Qing rule.<sup>86</sup> Thus, by 1855, Bowring concluded that the British needed ‘extra powers’ to deal with financial issues that the Qing state was deemed unfit to handle.<sup>87</sup> This notion was supported by Alcock, who, in 1854, concluded that the British should work alongside the Qing to ensure a smooth and fruitful trade relationship.<sup>88</sup> The Taiping Rebellion’s impact therefore, was not limited to the debate regarding British notions of military intervention and its association with international law – the vacuum of Chinese power in Shanghai forced British policy makers and Bowring in particular to reconsider Britain’s place in Qing affairs.

The attempts at consolidating Britain’s status in China as a consequence of the Taiping Rebellion resulted in two clear conclusions. First, amongst British policy makers and merchants there was a conflict of interests and divided opinions on what role their nation should take in China’s military, political and economic struggles. Second, the threat of the Taiping on British lives and commerce had resulted in a general consensus that Britain had a right to intervene in Chinese affairs. For the merchants, this was a military intervention and for Bowring, it was a political intervention. Within the first three years of Britain’s awareness of the Taiping, Clarendon’s 1853 policy of armed neutrality had fallen out of favour; much earlier than the estimations of Van de Ven and Gregory.<sup>89</sup> These alterations in British perceptions were a result of an open debate on Britain’s international policy and the boundaries of international law. The early years of the civil war demonstrated the incompetency of the Qing state, confirmed a derogatory opinion of the Taiping and exposed the military weakness of the British in East Asia. As a result, the call for an improvement of Britain’s position in China and thus, a confirmation that China fell outside the brackets of international law grew. This ultimately provided a rationalisation for the growth of British

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<sup>86</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 117 (Hong Kong: 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1855).

<sup>87</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 117 (Hong Kong: 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1855).

<sup>88</sup> Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 32.

<sup>89</sup> Gregory, ‘British Intervention against the Taiping Rebellion’, p. 13. See also, Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 27.

influence in Qing China that would have long-lasting consequences for the future of Anglo-Chinese relations.

## **The Corrosion of Neutrality**

During the early years of the Taiping Rebellion, Britain's attempts to formulate a clear and concise diplomatic policy had significant repercussions for Anglo-Chinese relations. It also impacted nascent British concepts of international law, foreign relations and intervention. The rationalisation of the need for Britain's increased involvement in Chinese affairs, resulted in the corrosion of Clarendon's 1853 policy of armed neutrality. From 1853 to 1856, the civil war witnessed China's loss of political, military and geographical sovereignty at the hands of the British and saw the emergence of a partnership with the Qing in the management of state matters. The early of the years of the Rebellion saw an alteration in Britain's status in China that went far beyond the terms of 1842. This section analyses Britain's political and military interventions into the affairs of the Chinese state during the first three years of the civil war and the ideological conclusions that enabled policy makers such as Bowring to justify Britain's new position within China. It thus shows how dispute regarding Britain's status in the Qing Empire resulted in practical and visible solutions. This provides concrete evidence to suggest that perceptions of Britain's relationship with the Chinese, in addition to their notions of international law and non-intervention, had changed.

In an attempt to resolve the on-going duty dispute, on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 1854, the British founded the Chinese Maritime Customs Service (CMCS), thus placing British officials at the centre of China's tax collecting system. This decision represented one of the grandest statements of change to Britain's position within China's state apparatus during the inter-war period. To John King Fairbank, it became 'no less important than the foreign consulates' and was one of

the ‘modern centres of Chinese life and trade in the treaty ports.’<sup>90</sup> Since his 1953 examination of the administrative systems in place in the treaty ports, Fairbank’s work has been criticised, particularly for his use of the term ‘synarchy’ to describe the joint management of these cities between British, Han and Manchu officials. From Joseph Esherick to Robert Bickers, there has been an overwhelming conclusion that Fairbank overlooked the forceful nature of Britain’s imperial goals in his assessment.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, in his 2014 study of the CMCS, Hans Van de Ven has argued that some of Fairbank’s conclusions need revisiting, particularly the notion of cooperation between the British and the Qing during the civil war.<sup>92</sup> Van de Ven demonstrates how the Customs Service was an independent body working outside the grasp of Britain’s imperial clutch and as a result, was officially recognised as a Chinese institution that encompassed both Chinese and Western workers.<sup>93</sup> This assessment is supported by Bickers, who has documented the semi-autonomous status of the CMCS, concluding that it resulted in the British appointees becoming ‘local actors in Chinese history’, rather than agents of Britain’s imperial agenda.<sup>94</sup> That said, between 1854 and 1943, the CMCS was led by a Briton in the position of Inspector General.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, as Bickers, Van de Ven and Fairbank agree, in 1854, Britain’s assistance in the administration of the CMCS demonstrated the growth of foreign involvement in Qing affairs.

These works and others have successfully uncovered what the near hundred-year history of

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<sup>90</sup> John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: the Opening of the Treaty Port, 1842-1854* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. 462.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Bickers, ‘Purloined letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 40:3 (2006), pp. 691-692. See also, Joseph Esherick, ‘Harvard on China: The Apologetics of Imperialism’, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 4:4 (1972), pp. 9-16. This is referenced in Bickers’ work. Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 8.

<sup>92</sup> Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 8.

<sup>93</sup> Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, pp. 8-40.

<sup>94</sup> Bickers, ‘Purloined letters’, p. 722.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Bickers, ‘Revisiting the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1950’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 36:2 (June 2008), p. 221. In 1943 the position of Inspector General was then given to an American.

this institution can tell us about the Anglo-Chinese relationship.<sup>96</sup> In particular, Sir Robert Hart, the Inspector General of the CMCS from 1863 until his retirement in 1910, has received a great deal of attention from historians.<sup>97</sup> They have attempted gain a sense of how far the Customs Service acted as a tool for Britain's informal empire – a term that denotes nations under the influence of Britain's economic and cultural power without being formally colonised.<sup>98</sup> It would, therefore, be a disservice to enter the debate on the history of the Customs Service in a few paragraphs. Instead, the aim here is to show how the formation of the new Chinese Maritime Customs Service, symbolises the development of British influence over the Chinese state in the early years of the Taiping Rebellion. Through its creation, there was an active decision taken by British policy makers to change their nation's position in China as a consequence of the civil war. The British used the chaos of the Taiping Rebellion, in addition to concerns over the growth of their commerce in China, to forge a significant role in China's tax management. As is documented in the scholarship listed here, this had a dramatic impact on Britain's future relationship with China.

The British cooperation with the Qing officials in the running of the CMCS after July 1854 is particularly poignant as a result of the conscious decision made by British policy makers to alter their nation's position within the Chinese state. Although, as noted by Van de Ven, in its early years, the agreement between British diplomats and the Qing was considered an

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<sup>96</sup> Examining the Anglo-Chinese relationship through the prism of the CMCS is a primary goal of the following texts: Robert Bickers, 'Purloined letters'; Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*. Bickers, 'Revisiting the Chinese Maritime Customs Service'; Donna Maree Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>97</sup> Robert Bickers, 'Purloined letters', p. 692. In addition to being the feature of the article, Bickers notes that it was a key goal of Fairbanks' work to understand the life and goals of Sir Robert Hart – directing research teams to co-edit his letters. See also, Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, pp. 64-102.

<sup>98</sup> John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, 6:1 (1953), pp. 1-10. D.C.M. Platt, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade, Some Reservations', *The Economic History Review*, 21:2 (August, 1968) pp. 301-302. John Darwin, 'Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion', *The English Historical Review*, 112:447 (June, 1997), pp. 617-619. David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Jürgen Osterhammel, 'British Business in China 1860-1950', in RPT. Davenport Hines and Geoffrey Jones eds., *British Business in Asia since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 190-191.



‘experiment’, it did represent a significant political intervention into Chinese affairs.<sup>99</sup> It demonstrated that the civil war prompted a shift in British ideas of international law and non-intervention. In a memorandum to Sir John Bowring entitled ‘Suggestions for an Improved Administration of Customs and the Equal Levy of Duties’, the Consul to Shanghai, Rutherford Alcock, made his sentiments on the issue clear:

The only remedy for the gross abuses and inequalities which deprive the honest merchant of all protection guaranteed to him by Treaty, appears to be in the introduction of a foreign element.<sup>100</sup>

Alcock concluded that although the ‘whole subject is beset under existing Treaties’, he was convinced after his communication with Wu Xu, the Shanghai Superintendent of Maritime Customs (*daotai*), that it was necessary to move towards ‘a foreign element of probity and vigilance with Chinese authority.’<sup>101</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> March, Wu Xu offered his opinion on the duty question:

It appears to me that the collection of the duties from Chinese merchants for the time being would be a most satisfactory arrangement... But until the establishment of the Pih-ho-këang and Min-hang-chin stations, shall have been effected, the duties on produce already arrived in Shanghai will have to be collected as heretofore from the foreign merchant.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, the duty question and indeed, the insurrections plaguing the Chinese state, indicated to both the British and Qing alike, the necessity of British intervention in China’s international affairs. This represented a dramatic shift in Britain’s position in China. It was no longer a mere trading partner, but was now invested in the governance of the Qing state.

This political intervention into China’s state management represented a break from the limits

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<sup>99</sup> Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 29.

<sup>100</sup> TNA FO 228/176, ‘Alcock to Bowring’, f. 56 (Shanghai: 6<sup>th</sup> July 1854).

<sup>101</sup> TNA FO 228/176, ‘Alcock to Bowring’, f. 56 (Shanghai: 6<sup>th</sup> July 1854).

<sup>102</sup> ‘Woo, Superintendent of Maritime Customs, Intendant of the Soo-Sung-Tae circuit etc., makes a communication’, ‘Wu to Alcock’, Translated by Thomas Wade (25<sup>th</sup> March, 1854), in Stanley Wright ed., *Documents illustrative of the Origin, Development, and Activities of the Chinese Customs Service*, Vol. VI (Shanghai: Statistical Department of Inspectorate General, 1938), p. 46.

of the Treaty of Nanjing and thus, an ideological realignment in the liberal values of Britain's policy makers. There was an accepted conclusion amongst the British that as a result of the Taiping Rebellion, their nation had the right to forge a new partnership with the Chinese. Bowring's delight at the establishment of the CMCS with a British Inspector General, demonstrated his liberal shift in favour of 'extra powers' and a political intervention into the Chinese state that, as a consequence of the civil war and duty question, he deemed to be weak and incompetent. Bowring concluded that British leadership in the CMCS would mean that 'our government will stand well for the future,' and that now the British merchants were forced to pay their duties, 'national honour [would] be preserved.'<sup>103</sup> That said, displeased that Bowring was attempting to use this newfound institution to enforce the payment of duties, the merchants of Shanghai argued that Bowring's actions were a violation of Britain's commercial position in China and an end of neutrality. In his letters to the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Clarendon, Bowring claimed that a 'Mr Gregson' had sent him a memorial on behalf of the merchants at Shanghai, stating that he had gone 'beyond his powers' and indeed 'had ignored neutrality' and thus, he must resign from his position as Governor and Plenipotentiary.<sup>104</sup> Whilst the merchants were in favour of a military intervention to ensure their safety as noted in the previous section, Bowring and Alcock's calls for political intervention were not received with enthusiasm from the merchant community. Nonetheless, Britain's control over the CMCS signified how the Taiping's impact on British notions of international law and intervention had practical consequences that affected the make-up of the Anglo-Chinese relationship.

During his tenure as Governor of Hong Kong, the Taiping Rebellion resulted in Bowring's growing advocacy of military intervention. In September 1854, Bowring attempted to

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<sup>103</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 117 (Hong Kong: 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1855).

<sup>104</sup> TNA FO 17/230, 'Bowring to Clarendon', f. 150 (Hong Kong: 14<sup>th</sup> May 1855).

manipulate the civil war in Britain's favour. He offered military support for Qing troops with the aim of renegotiating British concessions. Bowring acquiesced to Commissioner Ye's 'unprecedented request' of foreign assistance in suppressing the Taiping, in addition to other rebel groups, that were fast approaching Canton.<sup>105</sup> In his examination of the 'Bowring-Yeh alliance', S. Y. T'eng states that their combined military efforts took one million 'innocent lives'.<sup>106</sup> This number, T'eng asserts, led Bowring to shirk any responsibility for the campaign. The diplomat argued that British troops were merely there to protect foreign factories, rather than interfere in China's civil war which, he concluded, would have been incongruous with the principles of international law.<sup>107</sup> In the memoirs of John Scarth, a British merchant based in China throughout the inter-war period, Bowring's inconsistent application of international law received heavy criticism: 'Our own advantage has been the regulating principle of our policy; we make exactions when it suits us, and do not enforce them when inconvenient.'<sup>108</sup> Although Bowring stood behind the loose terms of international law to avoid any accountability for Britain's role in the Canton massacre, it is clear that the Taiping Rebellion reinvented Britain's position in China. By 1854, they had become a military partner of the Qing, a conclusion that was at odds with contemporary notions of international law as depicted in Wheaton's *Elements*.

Although this intervention failed to improve British interests as Bowring had hoped, he argued that it was a successful enterprise that had ensured British safety. On the 15<sup>th</sup> February 1855, Bowring claimed that he had received no new news from Canton of any disturbance as a result of the armed resistance of Britain's military in favour of the Qing. He confidently

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<sup>105</sup> J.Y. Wong, *Yeh Ming-Ch'en: Viceroy of Liang Kuang 1852-8* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 106; S. Y. T'eng, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 239.

<sup>106</sup> S. Y. T'eng, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 239. T'eng uses the Wade-Giles spelling of 'Ye' here.

<sup>107</sup> S. Y. T'eng, *The Taiping Rebellion*, p. 239.

<sup>108</sup> John Scarth, *Twelve Years in China: The People, the Rebels, and the Mandarins* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1860), p. vii.

concluded his despatch to Edgar stating that ‘the rebels will not be able to take the city of Canton.’<sup>109</sup> Thus, in addition to the civil war demonstrating the weakness of the Qing in protecting the treaty ports, for Bowring, it confirmed the need for British military intervention. This therefore represented a clear alteration in Britain’s position in China from a purely commercial, to a military partner. The civil war provided British officials the rationale to make military strides into Canton, as they concluded that they were merely performing a pre-emptive strike before the violence reached British interests. Thus, the demand for a form of intervention in the early years, and the intellectual debate regarding the scope of international law, had direct consequences over British policy and their role in Chinese affairs. It culminated in aggressive action and a break in the diplomatic elite’s advocacy of non-intervention and strict neutrality.

In addition to the Qing’s loss of complete political and military autonomy at the hands of the British, the Taiping Rebellion convinced the British that they had a right to undermine China’s geographical sovereignty. Although the Treaty of Nanjing granted the British the right to reside in Shanghai, the port had remained Chinese.<sup>110</sup> As seen in Fig.4, Shanghai in 1855 had a distinct ‘foreign quarter’ within the city, where British merchants and officials were likely to live. The proximity of the violence to Britain’s interests in Shanghai convinced merchants and officials alike that the British had a right to intervene in demarking the port’s territorial boundaries, even beyond the ‘foreign quarter’. In 1855, plans to build a wall around the entirety of Shanghai to protect British inhabitants nearly came to fruition. In a letter to Clarendon, Bowring expressed his support for Alcock’s proposition that in order for the British to remain properly neutral and protect their interests, they should impose a wall on the landscape of the city: ‘Mr Lane and I on our return from Tientsin concurred in the opinion

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<sup>109</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, ‘Bowring to Edgar’, f. 120 (Hong Kong: 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1855).

<sup>110</sup> Pär Cassel, *Grounds of Judgement: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth Century China and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 5-6.

that the building of a wall was in no violation of neutrality and in all other respects a most desirable measure.<sup>111</sup> Through their aim of remaining neutral, Bowring and Alcock were convinced that they had a right to partition Shanghai and thus, intervene in China's geographical make-up.



(Fig. 4) 'Shanghai in 1855'. This area along the river represents the British settlement in Shanghai. Source: F. L. H. Potts, *A Short History of Shanghai: Being an account of the growth and development of the international settlement* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1928).

Although this policy received support amongst the British officials in China, in their attempts

<sup>111</sup> TNA FO 17/227, 'Bowring to Clarendon', f. 34 (Hong Kong: 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

to gain sanction from the Foreign Office, it was greeted with little enthusiasm from the Earl of Clarendon. In a letter to Bowring, Clarendon concluded that,

Such a course could not be permitted without enforcing the settlement to be the sum of contest between the Imperial forces and their opponents, and without abandoning the neutral position we have hitherto occupied between the contending parties.<sup>112</sup>

To Clarendon, the construction of a boundary wall, whether surrounding the ‘foreign quarter’ or the entirety of Shanghai, would have protected both the British and Qing loyalists based in the city. Therefore, the project was deemed to counteract the official policy of ‘neutrality.’ Nevertheless, Bowring and Alcock’s strategy offers an insight into the civil war’s impact on British notions of Chinese sovereignty and perceptions of their nation’s role in Qing China. As a consequence of the Taiping Rebellion and its proximity to Shanghai, Britain’s diplomats no longer perceived their nation a mere trading partner. Instead, they concluded that they had a right and indeed, for some, a necessity, to interfere in the political, military and geographic planning of Qing China.

In addition to these practical instances of change, the Taiping Rebellion resulted in a conscious ideological shift in perceptions of the Chinese and international law. This ultimately resulted in the corrosion of neutrality and Bowring’s rationalisation of intervention. The Taiping Rebellion convinced Bowring of the benefits of military intervention, the uncivilised nature of the Chinese nation and Britain’s right to intervene in the governance of a sovereign nation. In January 1855, he wrote to Clarendon arguing,

Our neutrality, as it now in practice exists, has brought into full activity every element of disorder, and the attendant mischiefs and miseries are increasing which such disorder entails. The results cannot but be most pernicious to our interests in China. I am well aware of the difficulties in dealing with these embarrassing questions, amidst the subtleties and refinements of public and international law – little applicable,

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<sup>112</sup> TNA FO 17/224, ‘Clarendon to Bowring’, f. 19 (Foreign Office: 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

however, in my humble judgement, to the state of matters among semi-civilised populations.<sup>113</sup>

To Bowring, the chaotic effects of the civil war resulted in his conviction that China was indeed a 'semi-civilised' state and thus, was not protected by his concept of international law. As a result, the Governor of Hong Kong concluded his address stating, 'I must again call your Lordship's attention to the desirableness of giving Her Majesty's representative powers to cope with the increasing difficulties of our position.'<sup>114</sup> By late 1856, Bowring would take this case into his own hands and support a military intervention that would have lasting ramifications for the Anglo-Chinese relationship. Therefore, it is clear that Bowring's ideological development as a result of the confusion and chaos of the Taiping was instrumental in the events that led Britain into a second conflict with the Chinese.

The Taiping Rebellion and the intellectual debate that it created in regard to British notions of international law and intervention, culminated in a number of practical interventions in China's internal affairs during the early years of the civil war. Politically, militarily and geographically, the British attempted and, in some cases succeeded, in intervening in China's state struggles. Through the Customs Service, the British achieved a long-lasting intervention that, as noted, would become a semi-autonomous institution that has defined the Anglo-Chinese relationship in the nineteenth century in numerous historical studies. By assisting Commissioner Ye in his military exertions against the Taiping and other local uprisings, Bowring accepted Britain's position as military partner of the Qing. This represented a realignment of Britain's role in China's internal struggles. Although failing, the attempts at geographically intervening in China's city planning indicated an ideological shift that proved how the civil war affected British notions of international law and intervention. These practical instances were matched with a conscious ideological shift that was most notably

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<sup>113</sup> TNA FO 17/227, 'Bowring to Clarendon', f. 1-15 (Hong Kong: 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

<sup>114</sup> TNA FO 17/227, 'Bowring to Clarendon', f. 1-15 (Hong Kong: 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1855).

seen in Sir John Bowring who one year after his letters to Clarendon, would use his rationalisation of intervention to alter the balance of Anglo-Chinese relations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has re-examined the early years of the Taiping Rebellion from 1853 to 1856, demonstrating how this infamous event altered Britain's position in China. As a consequence of the civil war's proximity to British interests in Shanghai, which highlighted the inability of the Qing to ensure the safety of the foreign community, British policy makers advocated a distinct alteration in Anglo-Chinese relations. In an attempt to protect British merchants and to secure new trading terms, they sought to intervene militarily, politically and geographically in China's internal affairs. This represented a conscious effort to change Britain's position from a mere commercial partner, to a nation that took an instrumental role in China's state management. The Taiping Rebellion convinced a number of Britain's diplomats, including Sir John Bowring, that their nation had a right to interfere in the affairs of a sovereign nation. Thus, it influenced their notions of international law and non-intervention which, in the mid-nineteenth century, were fluid and developing concepts. This chapter, therefore, has documented the importance of the Taiping Rebellion on shaping British political attitudes in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1853, British politicians, diplomat and merchants offered different perceptions of how their nation should act in response to the civil war. By 1856, although they officially championed a position of 'neutrality' and non-intervention, there was a growing consensus that the British had a right to interfere in the affairs of a sovereign state.

The chapter has been divided into three sections that have highlighted the gradual stages of the ideological shift and processes that enabled British policy makers to justify intervention into the Chinese state. The first demonstrated the widespread panic that arose in British



Shanghai after the Taiping took the city of Nanjing in 1853. It highlighted the divided opinion amongst British policy makers in regard to their perceptions of the Taiping and what role their nation should have in the course of the civil war. After the overwhelming support for intervention in the early years, the second section assessed the ideological debate this created in regard to British notions of international law. As a consequence of the civil war, attempts were made to clarify the boundaries of the law of nations and non-intervention; for Meadows, this meant an alteration of the parameters of the Anglo-Chinese relationship altogether. Further, this section illustrated the failure of armed neutrality to protect British merchants and commerce and how these concerns further fuelled the demand for a change in British policy and concepts of intervention. The final section demonstrated how the calls for intervention and indeed, the intellectual shift in its favour, resulted in different levels of intervention that breached the political, military and geographic sovereignty in China. Therefore, it argued that the Taiping Rebellion resulted in a conscious shift in Britain's role in China that had repercussions for the future of the Anglo-Chinese relations and British liberal ideas.

The chapter has focused primarily on the early years of the Taiping Rebellion (1853-1856). It was in these early years that the fiercest debate regarding British foreign policy and the doctrine of international law took place. By doing so, it has documented the ideological shift of Sir John Bowring who, by 1856, used his derogatory perception of the Qing to justify military intervention to enforce the Chinese to improve Britain's commercial standing in China. On his appointment to the Consulate of Canton in 1849, Bowring was optimistic for the future of the Anglo-Chinese relationship and its commercial possibilities, concluding that 'the Chinese are a most remarkable people.'<sup>115</sup> However, an amalgamation of the entry

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<sup>115</sup> Bowring Papers GB 133 MS 1228, 'Bowring to Edgar', f. 4 (Canton: 26<sup>th</sup> March, 1849).

question and the Taiping Rebellion altered this conviction and his liberal outlook more generally. It convinced Bowring of the limits of the doctrine of international law and the necessity to also improve Britain's commercial position in China. By 1856, the Governor of Hong Kong concluded that in addition to the political and military partnership the British had created with the Qing as a consequence of the civil war, this must also be followed by a reorganisation of the trade partnership and Britain's access to China's interior.

### **Chapter Three - British reaction to the ‘Arrow Incident’: The Development of British conceptions of International Law, Diplomacy and the Character of the Nation, 1856-1857.**

*My conviction is, that even if the new Parliament should give a triumphant majority to Palmerston (as against Derby), Parliament itself has won a victory over itself and over the bureaucracy called the Crown: and, it may be, a future historian will date the commencement of a new Moral and Parliamentary control over foreign affairs from the vote which you had the honour to procure.<sup>1</sup>*

(Francis Newman writing to Richard Cobden regarding the Resolution Cobden brought to the House of Commons condemning British actions in China, 16th March, 1857)

As a consequence of his China experience from 1849 to 1856, Sir John Bowring was convinced of the ‘uncivilised’ nature of the Chinese. As a result, the Governor of Hong Kong argued that his advocacy of non-intervention remained intact after his decision to order the bombardment of the port of Canton in November 1856. In his *Autobiographical Recollections* (1877), Bowring asserted that he remained an avid defender of free trade and its connection to international peace. Yet, in the case of ‘barbarous’ China, Bowring concluded that such values were impossible to maintain.<sup>2</sup> In early 1857, Bowring’s decision to take military action in Canton dominated Britain’s political debate. As a consequence of the bombardment, the Radical politician, Richard Cobden, issued a parliamentary motion against the Government’s backing of Bowring’s diplomatic methods. Thus, within the political arena, it fuelled discussions regarding British notions of international law, the constitutional role of diplomats, the morality of military intervention and furthermore, the meaning of free trade. In the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-Chinese relations were instrumental in the development of Britain’s political convictions. It exposed concerns with

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<sup>1</sup> British Library [BL], Additional Manuscripts [ADM], 43669, Cobden Papers, ‘Newman to Cobden’, f. 87 (London, 16<sup>th</sup> March 1857).

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Bowring, *Autobiographical Recollections of Sir John Bowring: with a brief memoir by Lewin B. Bowring* (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1877), pp. 217-218.

the nation's foreign affairs and forced an open debate on the future of British diplomacy with countries outside of Euro-America and colonial control.

Historians have underestimated the influence of the bombardment of Canton on shaping British debate and developing liberal ideas. Instead, relations with Europe, America and the British Empire have taken precedent in historical accounts uncovering global influences on British values in the nineteenth century. Jonathan Parry, David Brown and Miles Taylor among others, have examined Britain's relationship with Europe to show how affairs on the continent affected British policy and debate.<sup>3</sup> In her examination of Anglo-American relations, Linda Colley adopts a similar framework.<sup>4</sup> For Andrew Fitzmaurice, Uday Mehta and Catherine Hall, the impact of the Empire is assessed to show the development of British convictions regarding international law and notions of civilisation.<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that Britain's bombardment of Canton has not featured in histories of Palmerstonian foreign policy or as an important event in the history of Britain's relationship with China. In particular, J.Y. Wong documents how the bombardment of Canton facilitated the Canton debate in the Houses of Parliament, which, subsequently, resulted in a General Election.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the impact of the Anglo-Chinese relationship on British liberal attitudes remains underdeveloped. From January to April 1857, the *Arrow* Incident forced a discussion regarding the acceptability of British military aggression and furthermore, what such actions

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<sup>3</sup> David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846-55* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2002); Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 1-4; Patrick K. O'Brien and Geoffrey Allen Pigman, 'Free Trade, British Hegemony and the International Economic Order in the Nineteenth Century', *Review of International Studies*, 18:2 (April, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'Liberals and Empire in Nineteenth Century International Law', *American Historical Review*, 117:1 (2012); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856-60) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 170-300.

meant for British notions of free trade, international law and diplomacy. This chapter sheds light on the influence of Anglo-Chinese relations in Britain, reversing a historical framework that has, for the most part, focused attention on its impact in Qing China.<sup>7</sup>

In 1850s Britain, liberalism was the paramount political theory, shaping its society and foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as rightly stated by Duncan Bell in his critique of Uday Mehta's *Liberalism and Empire*, Victorian liberalism was not a 'homogenous body of thought.'<sup>9</sup> It embodied a variety of contrasting visions of Britain's future. Nonetheless, loosely described, liberalism was tied to ideas of progress, resulting in mid-nineteenth century campaigns for economic, social and political reforms – albeit alongside notions of retrenchment.<sup>10</sup> Similar to its domestic project, British liberalism harboured contrasting visions of foreign policy, particularly in regard to free trade and international law. Concerning free trade, the 1850s witnessed a clash regarding the scope and intentions of this economic ideal. Its greatest advocate, Richard Cobden, argued that free trade intrinsically linked non-intervention, international peace and international law – concepts associated with the term 'liberal internationalism'.<sup>11</sup> He argued that a free trade economy would enable international peace to flourish. To other supporters, there was a limit to free trade's grander programme. Although unwanted, conflict in support of British interests was deemed a possibility. Similarly, in the

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<sup>7</sup> Works documenting Anglo-Chinese relations with a focus on its impact in Qing China include: Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011); James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy in Nineteenth Century China* (London: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*, pp. 1-11; F. Rosen, 'Nationalism and early British Liberal Thought', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 2:2 (1997), p. 178; Jonathan Parry, *Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Duncan Bell, 'Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought', *The Historical Journal*, 49:1 (Feb, 2006), p. 285; Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 2; Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 69; Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 53; Alan Sykes, *The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism 1776-1988* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> P. J. Cain, 'Capitalism, War and Internationalism in the Thought of Richard Cobden', *British Journal of International Studies*, 5:3 (October, 1979), pp. 229-247.

1850s, although a phrase often used to validate Britain's international affairs, there was no codified meaning of international law, or institution to regulate a nation's foreign conduct. It was not until 1873 that a clearer understanding of this concept came into existence with the creation of the *Institut de Droit International*.<sup>12</sup> As a result, although intended to procure international peace and relations of reciprocity, the boundaries of international law and its full meaning remained under construction.<sup>13</sup> In the 1850s, British liberalism, particularly in regard to foreign affairs, was a developing ideology.

From January to April 1857, the *Arrow* Incident and the subsequent bombardment of Canton constructed British liberal ideas concerning free trade and international law. Although it failed to bridge the divide in the political convictions of liberal-minded Britain, it instigated a discussion within the political arena and clarified individual positions. The lively debate regarding the scope of international law, in addition to the meaning of free trade, came as a result of a seemingly small incident in the port of Canton on the 8<sup>th</sup> October 1856. This became known as 'the China question'. A lorcha boat named the *Arrow* was seized and boarded by Cantonese officers, resulting in the twelve Chinese crew members being arrested on suspicion of piracy. This lorcha, as expressed by the Earl of Derby, was 'Chinese built, Chinese captured, Chinese sold, Chinese bought and manned, and Chinese owned.'<sup>14</sup> However, through a Colonial Ordinance passed in Hong Kong, the boat was supposedly registered under British protection and, as a result, the Consul for Canton, Sir Harry Parkes, demanded that all the crew be returned and Ye Mingchen, the chief Qing official for foreign

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<sup>12</sup> Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civiliser of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 143; Jennifer Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', in Duncan Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order, Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 67-71.

<sup>14</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1156 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

affairs, was ordered to conduct a public apology upon the lorcha for the offence caused.<sup>15</sup> Ye's refusal, pacified by his return of the crew that were deemed not-guilty, in addition to a written apology, was met with an obstinate British response from Parkes and the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Bowring. Bowring attempted to manipulate the event to gain further trading rights, in addition to the opening of Canton, and after failing to do so, used the *Arrow* Incident as a *casus belli*.<sup>16</sup> As news reached Britain in late 1856, the reaction amongst the political elite was explosive. It resulted in a parliamentary debate and a vote-of-no-confidence against Palmerston's Government. Moreover, it featured an energetic discussion over the nation's foreign policy and international conduct. In early 1857, Anglo-Chinese relations captured the imagination of a number of members of Britain's political elite and shaped their deliberations regarding the meaning of free trade, the boundaries of international law and the nation's diplomatic methods.

To demonstrate this, this chapter is divided into four sections. The first assesses legal problems that the *Arrow* Incident posed in Britain, showing how the dubious legal status of the *Arrow* lorcha created political confusion. It argues that this manifested into a conversation regarding the boundaries of international law and whether China was protected by its fluid terms. The second uncovers the constitutional concerns that Britain faced as a result of the actions by the Colonial officers based in China; a debate that has been overlooked by both historians of China and Britain. It argues that Britain's political thinkers deliberated over the power afforded to the nation's Colonial Officers and the compliance of the Home Government in the bombardment. The third considers the moral questions that grew out of British actions in Canton, showing that this debate cultivated a larger conversation regarding Britain's world status and what should be considered 'patriotic.' The fourth and final section,

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<sup>15</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 113; Douglas Hurd, *The Arrow War: An Anglo-Chinese Confusion, 1856-60* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), pp. 28-35.

determines how these discussions amongst the political elite fed into a conversation regarding the meaning of free trade and whether this doctrine automatically included a programme of international peace.

## **The Legal Problem**

As news reached British shores of the bombardment of Canton in late 1856, the legality of the conflict became a hotly contested topic. Within the Houses of Parliament, attempts were made to unravel the confusion over the *Arrow's* status and determine whether the decisions taken by Parkes and Bowring placed Britain in an illegal conflict on the other side of the world. This discussion, which resonated with the nation's press, fuelled a larger debate regarding the scope and boundaries of Britain's perception of international law. As a result of the outbreak of the conflict in Canton, a number of British politicians, jurists and political commentators queried the meaning of international law. They questioned whether exchanges with Qing China should be conducted under this loose and fluid system which, in the rhetoric of this debate, meant avoiding military intervention in a sovereign nation, particularly in defence of commercial interests. In his account of the *Arrow* Incident, J.Y. Wong outlines the subsequent parliamentary debate regarding the China question. However, Wong solely aims to uncover the origins of the war and the role of British imperialism.<sup>17</sup> This section goes further, arguing that the legal clashes in the Houses of Parliament contributed to the development of Britain's liberal thinking in regard to foreign policy and legal practices.

In mid-nineteenth-century Britain, a growing emphasis was placed on forging a codified meaning of international law. In his discussion of the history and development of 'the law of nations', Mark Mazower explains that during this period, 'Euro-American powers' were

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<sup>17</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, pp. 174-192.



determined to form a 'mode of conducting relations between states.'<sup>18</sup> As previously examined, Europe's expansionist aims in the nineteenth century, reflected the need for an alteration in the codes of global relations.<sup>19</sup> After the 1830s, there was a growing consensus that international law, a phrase coined by Jeremy Bentham, was based on a hierarchical global order linked to ideas of arbitration and reciprocal economic and political relations, among those nations deemed 'civilised'.<sup>20</sup> However, it remained a loose term, lacking in codification, meaning its definition was open to interpretation. Although strides were made by liberals attempting to validate Britain's colonial acquisitions, the 1850s marked a period of uncertainty in the definition and scope of international law. Its terms remained un-codified and moreover, a method to determine what nations were classed as 'uncivilised', particularly outside the realms of Britain's formal empire, was lacking. As this section shows, within British debate, the China question consolidated British attitudes towards international law and its boundaries.

As a result of the ambiguity of the boundaries of international law, China's status in the eyes of British liberals was unclear. Pitts supports this point, claiming that due to China's long history and years of civilisation, their categorisation in the mid-nineteenth century was vague. John Stuart Mill attempted to clarify in *On Liberty* (1859), describing China's 'barbarous' nature due to its stagnation in comparison to Europe.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, the impact of Anglo-Chinese relations on British notions of international law has been underestimated. The

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2012), pp. 35-66.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: Stevens and Sons Ltd., 1916), pp. 1-40.

<sup>20</sup> Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, pp. 1-40; Richard S. Horowitz, 'International Law and State Transformation in China, Siam and the Ottoman Empire during the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History*, 15:4 (December, 2004), p. 453; Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 21; Casper Sylvest, 'The Foundations of Victorian International Law' in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order*, p. 49; John Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782 to 1865: The National Interests* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989), pp. 14-23; Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', pp. 71-75; John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and Utilitarianism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), pp. 69-70.

application of international law by China, as demonstrated in Richard S. Horowitz, has been investigated.<sup>22</sup> Yet, China's influence on shaping British ideas on international law, rather than adhering to a preconceived notion of its codes and boundaries, has been ignored. Instead, relations with Europe and the British Empire have taken precedent in historical investigations of the development and application of this system of diplomacy. In particular, in his assessment of the application (or lack of) of international law in Africa, Casper Sylvest argues that the determination to forge a system of international law originated in Europe and in the nineteenth century, developed as a result of their colonial empires.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence of the bombardment of Canton, however, liberal Britain was faced with a new challenge to their loose notions of international law – could they justify military intervention into a sovereign nation with an aim of improving trading rights. In early 1857, this facilitated an open debate amongst Britain's political elite who attempted to clarify their positions on international law and the status of China within that framework.

The debate regarding British intervention in Canton, which became known as the China question, divided Parliament and created a make-shift alliance against the Government. Conservative members, in addition to the various factions of Liberals, joined forces in their criticism of Bowring's actions. In addition to Cobden, this cross-party coalition included Benjamin Disraeli, William Gladstone, Lord John Russell, Sir James Graham and John Roebuck among others.<sup>24</sup> Although in 1857 parliamentary parties were far more fluid associations than their modern successors – demonstrated by the various factions of the Liberal movement that included Liberals, Whigs, Peelites and Radicals – this union

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<sup>22</sup> Horowitz, 'International Law', pp. 445-486

<sup>23</sup> Casper Sylvest, "Our Passion for Legality": International Law and Imperialism in Late Nineteenth Century Britain', *Review of International Studies*, 34:3 (July, 2008), pp. 403-422.

<sup>24</sup> *Morning Star*, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1857, p. 3.

represented widespread support for Cobden's motion against Britain's military aggression.<sup>25</sup>

Cobden's penny newspaper, the *Morning Star*, reflected on the diversity of the politicians who disagreed with the actions taken in Canton:

It may, we think, be safely stated, that there never were a motion submitted to our Legislature which succeeded in carrying so much renowned statesmanship, and so many different parties against the advisers of the crown.<sup>26</sup>

In early 1857, the China question forged new and odd political alliances in the Houses of Parliament. It transcended loose party ties, creating a political division over notions of foreign policy and military intervention. Similarly, while many Tory MPs seized upon the China question as an opportunity to attack Palmerston, several within Tory ranks voted with their conscience. Like the Liberals, the Conservatives were divided in their support for Palmerston and used the China question to promote their diverse perceptions of British foreign policy, trade and international law.

The legal, constitutional and moral concerns Bowring's actions posed were the basis of support for Cobden's motion. To Angus Hawkins, this coalition, particularly in the lower house, was viewed as an opportunity to attack Palmerston's Government.<sup>27</sup> For many, however, regardless of their anti-Palmerstonian stance, it was the political issues facilitated by military aggression in China that dominated debate. In his campaign speech for the 1857 General Election, as a result of the China question, the Whig politician Robert Grosvenor claimed,

I concurred in it (the China Resolution) because I think that hostilities involve both moral and financial consideration of so grave a character that nothing but the urgent

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<sup>25</sup> Angus Hawkins, 'Parliamentary Government' and Victorian Political Parties, c.1830-1880', *English Historical Review*, 104 (1989), pp. 642-647.

<sup>26</sup> *The Morning Star*, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Angus Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Act of Politics in Britain 1855-9* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 59.

necessity of self-defence can justify a recourse to them without the sanction of the Government and Parliament of this country.<sup>28</sup>

To Grosvenor, the China question represented greater concerns than parliamentary connections. It shed light on issues facing British foreign policy that deserved independent thought. It clarified his position that a conflict must be for self-defence as a result of the moral and financial repercussions for the British nation, and must be sanctioned by Parliament. Furthermore, Grosvenor argued that this decision had placed him 'in opposition to almost all my political and personal friends.'<sup>29</sup> Thus, it was his personal convictions on the China question and notions of foreign policy that led him to defy his parliamentary allegiances. Although a supporter of Palmerston, the issues that the China question raised led Grosvenor to support of Cobden's motion.

The memoirs of the Duke of Argyll, the Lord Privy of the Seal at the time of the Canton debate, recount Palmerston's concern that Bowring had 'violated the principles of international law' through military intervention into a sovereign state.<sup>30</sup> As a result, Palmerston took an unprecedented step by inviting the Attorney-General, Richard Bethell, to offer his expert verdict during a meeting of the Cabinet. The memoirs express the exceptional nature of this development, claiming 'I had never seen this course taken before; the opinion of the law officers had always in my previous experience been given in writing, and circulated in a paper to the Cabinet.'<sup>31</sup> Thus, to Palmerston, the legality of the China question required a full investigation. Argyll's recollection continued by noting Bethell's conclusion that there would be 'a very serious case against us (Palmerston's Government) on the points

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<sup>28</sup> *Morning Post*, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1857, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Morning Post*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> George Douglas Campbell, Eighth Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, Vol. II (London: John Murray, 1906), p. 67.

<sup>31</sup> Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, II, p. 67.

of international law.’<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, Argyll claimed that although he ‘knew very well that a good case could be made against Bowring on the technical grounds of international law’, such issues should not have been taken into consideration as China could not understand the ‘highly-complex rules of so-called international law which govern the relations of the civilised nations of the Christian world.’<sup>33</sup> To Argyll, military intervention into a sovereign state, which would be considered a violation of international law, was deemed acceptable in China as a result of its uncivilised nature. Nonetheless, his memoirs demonstrate that in 1857, the boundaries of international law, in addition to its full meaning, remained a contested notion. It was, as Argyll demonstrates, the China question that brought it to the forefront of British debate.

The legal challenge to the China question received most attention within the House of Lords, as members of the chamber attempted to uncover the facts leading to the bombardment of Canton.<sup>34</sup> First, the leader of the opposition, the Earl of Derby, questioned the status of the *Arrow* as a British ship. Derby argued that in their defence of military aggression, Parkes and Bowring claimed that by forcefully boarding the lorcha, which was supposedly registered under ‘British’ protection, the Qing officials had acted unlawfully.<sup>35</sup> However, to Derby, the *Arrow* was not a British ship, having acquired its British registration through a Hong Kong Colonial Ordinance passed in 1855 – an Ordinance that was deemed unlawful by Britain’s Board of Trade. Derby reiterated the Board’s assertion that ship registrations were attained in Britain rather than individual colonies, meaning that the Ordinance of 1855, was ‘not only repugnant to the law of England, but it repealed and annulled the whole law of England with

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<sup>32</sup> Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, II, p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Duke of Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs*, II, p. 69.

<sup>34</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 174.

<sup>35</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1161 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

regard to the qualification of British vessels.’<sup>36</sup> In other words, as the Ordinance of 1855 was in violation of English law, the *Arrow* was not registered under British protection and therefore, the Chinese officers had not violated any restrictions, making the actions of Bowring and Parkes unjustified.

In addition to the concern over the *Arrow*’s register, Palmerston’s opposition in the Lords queried the emphasis Parkes and Bowring gave to the supposed ‘insult’ to the British flag. The Governor of Hong Kong and Consul to Canton claimed that British honour had been disrespected by Qing officials who, when aboard the *Arrow*, were accused of hauling down the Union Jack. Subsequently, this incident became a prominent feature in their justification for the bombardment of Canton.<sup>37</sup> However, in the Lords, this incident and its use as a *casus belli* was brought into question. The former Conservative Lord Chancellor, Lord Lyndhurst, who was considered by his peers to be the best legal mind in both Houses, based his challenge to the China question on this point.<sup>38</sup> He, like Derby, asserted that ‘in no respect was the *Arrow* an English ship’ and that therefore ‘you cannot give it the right to haul the English flag.’<sup>39</sup> To Lyndhurst, regardless of the actions of the Chinese and an ‘insult to the flag’, Britain’s own law rendered any ‘insult’ invalid. Derby however, questioned the validity of the claim that a flag had been flying at all, using Commissioner Ye Mingchen’s correspondence with Consul Parkes to support his case:

It is an established regulation with the lorchas of your honourable nation that when they come to anchor they lower their colours, and do not rehoist them until they again get under way. We have clear proof that when this lorcha was boarded her colours were not flying; how, then, could they have been taken down?<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1161 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>37</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, pp. 43-69.

<sup>38</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 175.

<sup>39</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1219 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>40</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1168 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

To Derby, even if the flag was flying, Britain's nautical protocol meant that it should not have been. To the opposition, the case before them was enveloped with legal holes that contested Bowring's decision to use the *Arrow* Incident as a *casus belli*.

The third element of the Lords' opposition to British aggression in China was focused on whether the British reaction would have been the same if such an event had taken place on the shores of America or Europe. Lyndhurst remarked,

I will change the scene of operations from the East to the West, and will lay them in America. I will take the case of an American subject residing in this metropolis, the owner of an American vessel. You may, by a law, allow that vessel to assume the English flag, and give it rights and privileges against your own country, but you cannot alter the character of that vessel as against the United States. You cannot change its character—you cannot prevent the Government of the United States exercising its ordinary dominion over it.<sup>41</sup>

Here, the debate regarding the China question steered Lyndhurst to challenge the inconsistencies within British diplomacy. To Lyndhurst, the British Government were adopting one form of policy for the West, whilst for the East, they 'have a kind of loose law and notion of morality in regard to them.'<sup>42</sup> Through its domination of Britain's political arena in early 1857, Anglo-Chinese relations shed light on the hierarchy of British foreign policy in relation to sovereign states from the West and East and furthermore, facilitated a debate as to whether this system was legally fair and morally just.

As a consequence of the legal flaws of the China question, the parliamentary debates questioned whether notions of international law should be applied in the case of China. To Derby, Bowring's actions demonstrated that the Governor had failed to adhere to international law, which championed reciprocal and mutually beneficial diplomatic

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<sup>41</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1216 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>42</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1216 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

relations.<sup>43</sup> As an example for his accusation, Derby claimed that whilst Bowring was soon made aware that any register supposedly protecting the *Arrow* was out of date, he continued to press Ye for an apology and demand Canton's gates be opened:

Sir John Bowring says it is quite true that the licence of the *Arrow* had expired, but the Chinese did not know that...if Mr. Consul Parkes had done his duty the Chinese Government ought to have known it.<sup>44</sup>

In response to Derby's statement, in the House of Commons, Palmerston acknowledged the expiration of the licence and yet, maintained his support of Bowring's actions:

The whole question is, what did the Chinese know and believe this vessel to be? Did they or did they not consider her to be a British vessel? I say that they did. The whole question turns upon that; and when it is said that it was a falsehood on the part of Sir John Bowring when he said that the Chinese Government did not know that the licence had expired, I say, on the contrary, that that is a correct statement of the real principle at issue between the British and the Chinese authorities, and in fact, contains the gist of the whole transaction.<sup>45</sup>

Palmerston's understanding of the events, which was reiterated by many of his Ministers, shows the abandonment of the debate concerning the legality of the *lorcha*. To Palmerston, whether Bowring was acting lawfully was irrelevant. In either case, the *Arrow* Incident was an affront to the British that demanded retribution. In his exchanges with Qing officials, Palmerston argued, Bowring was under no obligation to engage in honest and equal discussions. The Prime Minister's conclusion raised larger legal issues surrounding the *Arrow* quarrel: was China, as a result of its 'barbarian' status, protected by the flexible notion of international law and, moreover, did Britain have the right to bypass such laws and pursue goals of commerce and expansion if the aim was said to be 'civilising'? Thus, as a result of a seemingly peripheral incident in Canton, Britain's political elite engaged in a discussion regarding the scope of international law and the structure of their foreign policy.

In his defence of Bowring and Palmerstonian foreign policy, the Secretary of State for

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<sup>43</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', p. 71.

<sup>44</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1169 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>45</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1812 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).



Foreign Affairs, the Earl of Clarendon, shifted the debate in the Lords to a conversation regarding the principles and the boundaries of international law. Like the opposition, Clarendon used the example of America and Europe to make his case. He claimed that whilst it could have been argued that Britain would have acted differently towards the Western Powers, such a hypothetical situation was pointless, as these 'civilised' nations would not have boarded and seized the crew without corresponding with British authorities in the first instance. Clarendon argued,

Such a case as that could not indeed occur among highly civilized nations who respect international law; but these things do occur in China, and they therefore prove that there is not that amount of civilization there and not that respect for international law which exist among other nations; and, painful though it may be to admit it, and repugnant to our feelings as it is, I fear that we must come to the conclusion that in dealing with a nation like the Chinese, if we intend to preserve any amicable or useful relations with them, we must make them sensible of the law of force, and must appeal to them in the manner which alone they can appreciate.<sup>46</sup>

For the Foreign Secretary, his understanding of international law validated Bowring's actions and the Government's support of him. Although the 'law of nations' lacked codification and was constantly under reconstruction, as can be seen in the works of jurists who tackled its meaning and scope such as Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Emer de Vattel (1714-1767) and Henry Wheaton (1785-1848), Clarendon attempted to apply a clear reading of its terms and boundaries to support his case.<sup>47</sup> The China question upheld the Foreign Secretary's belief that international law need not apply in China. To Clarendon, international law, which favoured reciprocal relations and arbitration, was restricted to 'civilised' Western states.

The conviction that international law had limits and thus, excluded the Qing Empire, gained considerable support from members of Palmerston's Government and the British press, who saw a distinction between 'civilised' and 'barbarian' states. In *The Times*, which by 1857

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<sup>46</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1203 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>47</sup> Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civiliser of Nations*, p. 3.

championed Palmerstonian values, its commentary on, and perception of, international law was facilitated by the China question<sup>48</sup>:

A law equally obligatory and binding upon all – they simply demand that the foremost Powers of Europe should conform to all the caprices and tyrannies of Oriental barbarism. Above all, they forget that the first and fundamental condition of all such obligations of international law is reciprocity, and this in China is wanting. The Chinese do not know, neither will they recognize the obligations of international law, and they only outwardly conform to some of its more important provisions in so far as they are under compulsion.<sup>49</sup>

As the China question continued to encapsulate Britain's political debate, the question regarding the scope of international law broke free of the confines of Parliament and through the metropolitan press, became a national issue.

*Punch* magazine satirised the Cobdenite advocacy of applying the codes of international law to relations with China. *Punch* referenced the Blue Book presented to the House of Commons recording 'insults' from Chinese citizens towards British expatriates. In particular, it focused on the allegation that Ye Mingchen had put a price on the head of every Englishmen beheaded, using this claim to question China's inclusion in a system of international reciprocity and arbitration<sup>50</sup>:

Mr Cobden and Mr Phillimore complain of our Plenipotentiary for not proceeding with Commissioner Yeh according to the recognised rule of international diplomacy. We should like to know under what heads in Vattel, Grotius, or Pufendorf we are to look for the scale of prices to be put on the heads of our enemies, and what Wheaton has to say on the poisoning of flour?<sup>51</sup>

*Punch's* article offers an insight into the political debate that raged as a result of the Arrow Incident. It shows that during this period, there was no clear conception of international law or its boundaries and thus, politicians looked to different jurists, such as Vattel, Grotius and

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<sup>48</sup> Laurence Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times: Foreign Policy, the Press and Public Opinion in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 138.

<sup>49</sup> *The Times*, 24 January, 1857, p.7.

<sup>50</sup> 'A Hand Bill (Translation)', *Correspondence Respecting Insults in China: Presented to the House of Commons by Command of Her Majesty* (London: Harrisons and Sons, 1857), p. 213.

<sup>51</sup> BL LD 34 A 'A Chinese Puzzle', *Punch Magazine*, Vol. 32 (June, 1857), p. 108.

Pufendorf, for legal validity of their case. However, it reveals the common conclusion that China, due to its 'barbarian' status and actions, should be excluded from a Western-styled international diplomacy. Therefore, *Punch's* article demonstrates that the *Arrow* Incident brought the conversation surrounding the codification of international law to the forefront of British politics in the mid-nineteenth century.

The flexibility of international law is evident as the opponents of the Palmerstonian reading of the China question *also* used its fluid terms as a tool to demonstrate the illegality of intervention in China. In the House of Commons, Robert Phillimore – who in 1854 offered his own perception of the law of nations in his publication *Commentaries on International Law* – attacked the proceedings in China on this basis:

The Lord Advocate had alleged, indeed, that China was not entitled to be put into the category of nations which could be dealt with according to strict international law. But if such language had been held by Russia towards Turkey during the late war, it would have provoked most indignant disclaimers from all parts of the House. The despatches of Commissioner Yeh gave a better exposition of the principles of international law than, he was ashamed to say, could be found in the letters of the British Plenipotentiary... It was true, indeed, that as to minor matters of the comity of nations, a distinction might be made between Christian and heathen nations; but in all matters of the present character between State and State it was an unquestionable proposition that China must be dealt with on the principles of international law.<sup>52</sup>

The concept of international law, therefore, was used by both sides of the Commons to either support or denounce British actions in China. The *Arrow* Incident and the bombardment of Canton enabled the political class to put forth their contrasting notions of international law and, through the Canton debate, assist in its development. Thus, the parliamentary discussions surrounding the *Arrow's* legal status demonstrated the impact of the *Arrow* Incident. It not only influenced relations in China, but contributed to Britain's intellectual development during the mid-nineteenth century.

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<sup>52</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1595 (2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1857).

As a consequence of the China question, Cobden's *Morning Star* added to the debate on the codification of international law, demonstrating the *Arrow* Incident's contribution to the development of British foreign policy and ideas. The *Star* argued,

What a humiliating spectacle are we exhibiting to the world of the reckless indifference with which we can trample upon those very maxims of international right we so pharassically set forth, as binding obligations of other States?<sup>53</sup>

To the opponents of Palmerstonian foreign policy, Britain was ignoring the rules of law which they had enforced upon the international community. Yet, as can be seen by the Canton debate, there was no consensus as to what nations were protected by its terms. The *Arrow* Incident and the subsequent dispute did not result in conclusions regarding the scope of international law or how to codify the nations under its protection. Nonetheless, the bombardment of Canton influenced British debate regarding diplomatic exchanges with sovereign nations considered 'barbarous'. Rather than adhering to a codified and consensual blueprint of British diplomacy in the nineteenth century, Anglo-Chinese relations shaped attitudes towards foreign affairs and international law.

## **The Constitutional Problem**

The constitutional debate instigated by the bombardment of Canton has been ignored in histories of the *Arrow* Incident. In his examination of the origins of the *Arrow* War, J. Y. Wong claims that three main problems concerned the British politicians, thinkers and jurists: 'the legal technicalities, issues of justice and humanity, and trading matters.'<sup>54</sup> As this chapter shows, all of these issues were prominent concerns in British minds (as seen in the first section). Nonetheless, the constitutional problems the *Arrow* Incident created in Britain

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<sup>53</sup> *Morning Star*, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 174.

deserve attention. Spawning from the actions of Bowring and Parkes, British commentators debated the role and powers of the 'Colonial Official', the implication of Palmerston's Government in the affair, and the notion of 'secret diplomacy', which in the 1850s, was fresh in the public's mind as a result of the Radical David Urquhart's campaign against Palmerstonian foreign policy.<sup>55</sup> This section examines the constitutional issues that were brought under scrutiny as a result of the China question. It shows, therefore, the overall effect of Anglo-Chinese relations on Britain's diplomatic and intellectual development.

1850s British liberal thought was tied to notions of constitutionalism. The constitutional function of Parliament as a check to the power of the executive and the Royal Prerogative was, Angus Hawkins claims, championed by liberal Britain.<sup>56</sup> To David Brown, the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston, was one of the loudest advocates of liberal constitutionalism and its ability to assist the nation's progress. It became a symbol of his patriotism as he compared Britain's political structure to the despotism in autocratic Europe.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, whilst the victory for free trade economics in 1846 left liberal Britain optimistic about their nation's global role, for many, particularly those associated with the Radical agenda, there was a growing concern, facilitated by Palmerstonian foreign policy, that Parliament had little control over Britain's international affairs.<sup>58</sup> This section shows how the China question fuelled the debate regarding the role of British diplomats, the implication of the Government in forcing war and anxieties over a return to secret diplomacy. The actions of Bowring, in addition to the support given by Palmerston's Government, resulted in heated discussions both within Parliament and the public arena, regarding Britain's China policy and its impact

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<sup>55</sup> Anthony Howe, 'Introduction', in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan eds., *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume III 1854-1859* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. xxxii.

<sup>56</sup> Hawkins, 'Parliamentary Government' and Victorian Political Parties', p. 642.

<sup>57</sup> David Brown, 'Palmerston and the 1850s', in David Brown and Miles Taylor eds., *Palmerston Studies I* (Southampton: Hartley Institute, 2007), p. 75.

<sup>58</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 15.

on the nation's foreign affairs more generally. Through its parliamentary exposure, the China question became a concern that sparked a larger, more abstract discussion concerning the machinations of the nation's diplomatic conduct.

Governor Sir John Bowring and the Consul to Canton, Sir Harry Parkes, were instrumental in turning the *Arrow* Incident into a full-scale conflict that lasted until 1860. With no telegraphic communication, British diplomats in China received limited instruction from Britain and thus, were able to influence diplomatic proceedings without parliamentary oversight. To Arianne Knuesel, this meant that the Foreign Office and Palmerston could do little else but 'approve of Bowring's proceedings.'<sup>59</sup> In historical accounts of Bowring's time in China, it is widely accepted that the Governor of Hong Kong was obsessed with British entry into Canton and was determined to gain diplomatic recognition in China, pursuits that led to his support for the bombardment of Canton.<sup>60</sup> Sir Harry Parkes, who was familiar with life in China from his work as a translator for the British government, was also keen to improve Britain's status there.<sup>61</sup> As a result, Parkes often exceeded his portfolio as Consul to Canton, attempting to shape Anglo-Chinese exchanges to Britain's advantage. This practice led William Gladstone to argue that Parkes' China experience had turned 'a Consul into a Diplomatist.'<sup>62</sup> Thus, in the build-up to the conflict, the autonomy enjoyed by Bowring and Parkes over British diplomacy was far-reaching. The role this played in the bombardment of Canton was the spark for a parliamentary investigation.

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<sup>59</sup> Arianne Knuesel, 'British Diplomacy and the Telegraph in Nineteenth Century China', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 18:3 (2007), p. 521.

<sup>60</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, pp. 87-108. See also, Wendy Hinde, *Richard Cobden: A Victorian Outsider* (Connecticut, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 265; J. Y Wong, *Yeh Ming-ch'en, Viceroy of Liang-Kuang 1852-1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 161; E.W.R. Lumby and D. Bonner-Smith, *The Second China War 1856-1860* (London: Naval Records Society, 1954), p. xix.

<sup>61</sup> Wong, *Yeh Ming-ch'en*, p. 163. See also, Stanley Lane Poole, *The Life of Sir Harry Parkes* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894).

<sup>62</sup> Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, p. 145.

In their correspondence with Ye Mingchen, Bowring and Parkes actively ignored British diplomatic precedent in China, altering their methods in an attempt to secure entry into Canton and an improvement in Britain's status. Both representatives continuously changed the demands made of their Chinese counterpart, demonstrating their influence over Anglo-Chinese affairs and moreover, the lack of consistency in British diplomacy. In a despatch to Bowring, Parkes' power over the exchanges with the Chinese was evident:

I received the enclosed letter from the Imperial Commissioner [Ye], conveying a sort of assurance that the Consul should be applied to in future in cases of Chinese offenders being found on board foreign lorchas and offering to surrender ten of the men taken from the *Arrow*, I pointed out in my reply that all the men taken away must be returned, and that the course prescribed by the treaty must be followed in this as well as in future cases. Shortly before noon, twelve men were brought to me, but no officer of rank or letter of apology accompanied them, and I explained to the officer in whose charge they were that the latter was as indispensable as the men, and that they must be given up in the manner demanded in my letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> October.<sup>63</sup>

From Parkes' correspondence, it is clear that Ye was attempting to appease the British, all the while disagreeing with the charges placed upon the Qing officials, claiming,

I find that the party who was plundered by the pirates went and seized subjects of China on board a lorch built by a Chinese man in China. It is a matter therefore, in which from the first, foreigners have no concern.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, Parkes continued with his pursuit of reparation from Ye, which to Bowring meant settling the entry question, 'at least as far as to secure us an official reception there [Canton].'<sup>65</sup> In their communications with Ye, the aims and demands of Parkes and Bowring shifted, resulting in an ultimatum for the Qing official to reply within twenty four hours or 'ulterior measures will have to be adopted.'<sup>66</sup> Thus, rather than adhering to an agreed structure of diplomacy, Parkes and Bowring designed extra stipulations to provide a pretext for action that was, by November 1856, already decided upon.

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<sup>63</sup> The National Archives [TNA], Foreign Office Records [FO] 17/260, 'Parkes to Bowring', ff. 46-48 (Canton: 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1856).

<sup>64</sup> TNA, FO 17/260, 'Yeh to Parkes', Translated by Sir Harry Parkes, ff. 53-55 (Canton: 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1856).

<sup>65</sup> TNA, FO 17/260, 'Bowring to Parkes', ff. 69-70 (Hong Kong: 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1856).

<sup>66</sup> TNA, FO 17/260, 'Bowring to Parkes', f. 45 (Hong Kong: 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1856).

As a result of Bowring's decision to bombard the port of Canton, the role of British diplomats was brought under scrutiny within the House of Commons. Opening the Canton debate, Richard Cobden stated that he had no ill will toward Bowring personally, as he was 'an acquaintance of mine of twenty years' standing.<sup>67</sup> However, in Cobden's lengthy tirade against British actions in China, he argued,

I have only to ask, whether it is right that, with respect to a country with which we have treaty alliances, our representative should be allowed to declare war and carry on war without sanction from this country?<sup>68</sup>

Lord John Russell, who stood in favour of Cobden's position on the China question, offered his opinion of how affairs in China should have been conducted after sarcastically exclaiming 'it seems Bowring is deciding British foreign policy.'<sup>69</sup> Russell suggested,

You would, in the first place, necessarily proceed with the authority of the British Government at home. In the next place, you would give the Emperor of China a certain time within which to decide upon his course. I will not say that, if you said the decision must be made within a month, or six weeks, or three months, the Chinese Government would come to a determination to permit you to enter the city of Canton. It may be that they would so resolve. It may be that the question is not worth pressing; but this, at all events, would be in conformity with the usage of civilized nations, and would not be in contradiction to your own rights by treaty. But what has been done by Sir John Bowring, and Sir Michael Seymour acting in conformity with the wishes of Sir John Bowring?<sup>70</sup>

As seen in these statements from Cobden and Russell, in 1857, there was no clear blueprint regarding the power and function of the Colonial Officer. The China question shed light on the inefficiencies and lack of consistency in Britain's diplomatic procedures and as a result, it facilitated an open debate amongst the political elite about how their nation's officials should conduct foreign affairs.

In addition to the concern regarding Bowring's decision making in China, Parkes' role in the

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<sup>67</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1391 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>68</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1416 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>69</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1468 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>70</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1469 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).



proceedings faced criticism. In a letter to the military officer Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzmayer, Cobden asked,

What was Sir John Bowring doing all the while? He is Commander in Chief and representative of the English Government in China. Why did Mr Parkes, a young and inexperienced man whose only exploit that I have heard of was bring home the Treaty with Siam foresaw to call up the Admiral, and why did the latter mistaken to act without the formal and regular step by accessing information of Sir John Bowring?<sup>71</sup>

To Cobden, British actions in China demonstrated confusion in diplomatic protocol and a misunderstanding from Parkes of his position. In the press, Parkes' overzealous performance, in addition to the actions of Bowring, was satirised by *Punch*. In a mock letter from Bowring to Parkes, it stated 'I'm afraid you have been in rather too great a hurry to punch Yeh's head; but as you have got me into the mess, I suppose I must see you through it.' *Punch's* 'Bowring' continues, claiming 'The plain English of it is, that we haven't a legal leg to stand on, so I have ordered up Seymour and the big guns', and furthermore, 'have only given Yeh forty-eight hours to make his apology in.'<sup>72</sup> This article, aimed at ridiculing Bowring's abuse of his position, offers an indication of the constitutional concerns the China question created. The actions of Parkes and Bowring, as a consequence of the *Arrow* Incident, fuelled criticisms at the unchecked power of the Colonial Officer and the lack of diplomatic structure to monitor their actions, both in Parliament and more widely in the British press.

Lord Palmerston on the other hand, offered a whole-hearted defence of Bowring – a decision that resulted in Cobden's successful Resolution. In his justification of Bowring's actions before Parliament, the Prime Minister emphasised the 'uncivilised' nature of the Chinese, in addition to the Governor of Hong Kong's inability to improve Britain's commercial or diplomatic status through arbitration, as evidence to suggest that Bowring had little alternative but to instigate a second conflict:

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<sup>71</sup> BL ADM 43658, Cobden Papers, 'Cobden to Colonel Fitzmayer', f. 229 (Midhurst, 3<sup>th</sup> January 1857).

<sup>72</sup> BL LD 34 A, 'Sir John Bowring's Despatch to Mr Parkes (Private)', *Punch Magazine*, Vol. 32 (June, 1857), p. 32.

Sir John Bowring was, as we know, a member of the Peace Society. He was distinguished for his amiable qualities and for the mildness of his disposition; and I should say that if there be one man less likely than another to engage the country which he represents in hostilities, that man is Sir John Bowring.<sup>73</sup>

In a taunt to Cobden, a leading promoter of the peace movement in 1850s liberal Britain, Palmerston referenced Bowring's connection to the Peace Society in his early career, concluding that the Governor was forced to engage in military methods as a result of the behaviour and 'uncivilised' nature of the Chinese. To Palmerston, Bowring's China experience demonstrated the limits of non-intervention. In his defence of Bowring, the Prime Minister ignored the concerns surrounding the constitutional role of British diplomats, arguing that the actions in China were just. Nonetheless, due to the growing opposition to Palmerston's Government on the China question, a scapegoat was needed. Soon after the China debate, Bowring was dismissed from his role managing Britain's war efforts in China and replaced by Lord Elgin.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, whilst Palmerston was willing to defend the bombardment in Canton – convinced that such actions would improve Britain's commercial interests in China – his primary aim was to protect the legitimacy of the Government. As a result, Bowring became the figurehead of any wrongdoing on the part of Britain, bringing the role of British diplomats into disrepute.

The focus on Bowring, however, was considered by many to be escaping the real issue, the complicity of the British Government in the bombardment of Canton. As a result of the constitutional concerns that the China question demonstrated, Palmerston's parliamentary opponents queried whether the Prime Minister and his Government should be considered at fault for the actions of their diplomatic agents. The Peelite, William Gladstone, a prominent member of the House of Commons, who, after John Bright, was considered one of the finest

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<sup>73</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1811 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).

<sup>74</sup> Philip Bowring, 'Sir John Bowring: The Imperial Role of a Lifelong Radical', *Asian Affairs*, 42:3 (October, 2011), p. 424. Bowring remained as Governor of Hong Kong until 1859, but was replaced as the chief official conducting the war effort against China.

of its orators, rose to attack the Government's role in the proceedings.<sup>75</sup> Gladstone argued, 'I protest, against thus making Sir John Bowring a stalking-horse to divert our attention from the real matters.' To Gladstone, Bowring had not acted alone, but was following a policy of aggressive expansion supported by Palmerston's ministry: 'the policy which Sir John Bowring has clumsily chosen his opportunity for carrying into effect was a policy not unknown to Her Majesty's Government, nor by them disapproved.'<sup>76</sup> In support of his future political nemesis, Benjamin Disraeli added to Gladstone's critique, arguing that the British Government were not only complicit in the bombardment, but to blame for its development: 'the conduct of Sir John Bowring is not open to criticism, but that is the policy of the Government we are called upon to discuss.'<sup>77</sup> The parliamentary opponents to the bombardment of Canton, therefore, not only criticised the Governor of Hong Kong, but moreover, claimed that he was merely enacting Government policy. This theory gathers credence from Clarendon's correspondence with Bowring after the outbreak of the conflict, which instructed the Governor to forcefully push for an improvement in treaty terms.<sup>78</sup>

As a consequence of the Government's approval of Bowring's actions, parliamentary critics of the China question voiced their concerns at the standard that was being set. For many, it was viewed as an unwavering backing of British diplomats regardless of their actions. In his speech in opposition to the outbreak of war, the former Conservative Secretary of State for the Colonies, Sir John Pakington, acknowledged the dangerous constitutional precedent Palmerston's support for Bowring had created. Pakington asserted that whilst the Government *should* give their support to the 'servants of the Crown in distant dependencies',

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<sup>75</sup> BL ADM 43650 Cobden Papers 43650, 'Cobden to Bright', f. 243 (Midhurst, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1857). Cobden notes to Bright how good Gladstone's speech was in the China debate but argues that he was missed.

<sup>76</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1788 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857). See also, William Gladstone, *War in China: Speech of the Right Honourable W. E. Gladstone*, Corrected Report (London: Rivingtons, 1857), p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1836 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).

<sup>78</sup> TNA, FO 17/261, 'Clarendon to Bowring', f. 71 (London: 9<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

this should not be absolute. He suggested that ‘you can maintain no doctrine more dangerous to Government’ than supporting a Colonial Governor, ‘whatever the conduct of those officials may be’ and if ‘their misconduct compromised the interests of England.’<sup>79</sup> Such a doctrine, Pakington concluded, would be ‘disastrous’ to the nation’s international status.<sup>80</sup> Through the Government’s backing of Bowring’s actions, it brought constitutional concerns regarding the role and power of the diplomat to the forefront of British debate. Like the case of international law, the *Arrow* Incident did not culminate in conclusions to these questions concerning Britain’s constitutional system. Nevertheless, it allowed political commentators to transcend partisan politics and debate the greatest questions facing Britain’s imperial expansion and the nation’s diplomatic system.

In his correspondence with his friend Cobden, the political commentator and scholar, Francis Newman, raised another constitutional concern as a result of the China question. To Newman, the manner in which Bowring conducted affairs, in addition to Palmerston’s support for his actions, reflected the continuation of secret diplomacy. Newman claimed that ‘the events of the Russian war alike with the Persian and Chinese wars all point to one practical necessity, that of bridling or rather destroying secret diplomacy.’<sup>81</sup> To Newman, the *Arrow* Incident demonstrated that decisions affecting Britain’s international status and commercial relations were still being conducted behind closed doors, ignoring parliamentary or public oversight. He believed that the *Arrow* Incident represented a return to the ‘aristocratic diplomacy’ of the early nineteenth century, in which the great European families made diplomatic decisions on behalf of their respective nations.<sup>82</sup> The China question became

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<sup>79</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1634 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).

<sup>80</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1634 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).

<sup>81</sup> BL ADM 43669 Cobden Papers, ‘Newman to Cobden’, f. 97 (London: 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1857).

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 71; Raymond A. Jones, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), p. 11.

another example that proved to the Radical faction – spearheaded in the 1850s by David Urquhart – that Britain’s diplomatic relations were controlled by a handful of aristocrats, avoiding parliamentary scrutiny. As a result of events in China, Newman voiced to Cobden what he envisaged for the future of British diplomacy, stating that ‘the present seems like a favourable time for pressing this point.’ Newman claimed,

A question of war and peace should be debated, not merely on one side of the cabinet, but in a council which represents two sides, if not in open Parliament. The Privy Council is the *old constitutional* organ which *ought* to be made active by the Queen, if she knows the power of her duty.<sup>83</sup>

To Newman, the China question facilitated the development of his ideas regarding British diplomacy. It confirmed that the current system needed alteration to ensure parliamentary oversight. It can be argued, therefore, that the *Arrow* Incident and subsequent British reaction brought constitutional concerns to the forefront of British politics. As a result, the China question’s impact exceeded its influence within the Qing Empire. It contributed to Britain’s intellectual development in relation to its mid-nineteenth-century foreign policy and the roles of the British Government, the House of Parliament and diplomats within that structure.

## **The Moral Problem**

Arguably the greatest contention as a result of the *Arrow* Incident was whether the actions of Britain’s officials in China could be considered moral and just, and furthermore, how these decisions affected Britain’s national character. Both the varied opposition and the Government used the concerns over morality and national character to garner support for their opinion. For the opposition, Britain’s officials in China had placed their nation into a moral crisis, souring its reputation with the Euro-American powers. Palmerston however, used the China question to promote his vision for Britain’s international role, and to highlight

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<sup>83</sup> BL ADM 43669, Cobden Papers, ‘Newman to Cobden’, ff. 85-88 (London: 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1857).

his patriotism.<sup>84</sup> Using similar rhetoric to his campaign during the Don Pacifico Affair (1850), Palmerston referenced his famous *Civis Romanus Sum* speech, stating that any nation who was to persecute a British citizen would face severe consequences.<sup>85</sup> In his response during the Canton debate, Cobden criticised the use of the phrase *Civis Romanus Sum* by Palmerston. He argued that this represented Britain in an aggressive light, granting British expatriates a licence to behave however they wished in foreign countries, with assurances of British protection. Thus, in similar fashion to the legal and constitutional concerns, the opinion of Britain's political elite was divided. The parliamentary debate over the China question reiterated how this incident in the port of Canton, and the problems it posed to Britain's political leaders, assisted in the development of the nation's international identity in the mid-nineteenth century.

The development of Britain's mid-nineteenth-century national character, in addition to notions of international morality, is frequently examined by British imperial historians.<sup>86</sup> In his examination of Lord Palmerston's political ascendancy, David Brown notes that Palmerston used foreign policy to forge a vision of Britain as the world's leading power and himself as the 'most English Minister.'<sup>87</sup> Brown's conclusion, for the most part, rests on relations with Russia, Greece, the Ottomans and the Western Powers, ending his study in 1855. Additionally, to Miles Taylor, who attempts to trace 'the evolution of liberalism' to the 1860s, public and political debate regarding military intervention, in addition to exchanges with Europe and the colonies, was essential to liberalism's development.<sup>88</sup> It is Jonathan

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<sup>84</sup> David Brown, 'Compelling but not Controlling? Palmerston and the Press, 1846-1855', *The Historical Association*, 86:281 (2001), p. 42.

<sup>85</sup> Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, p. 103; Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1410 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>86</sup> Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, p. 39; Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Act of Politics in Britain 1855-9*, pp. 23-65; Anthony Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847 to 1865', *Journal of British Studies*, 33:2 (April, 1994), p. 154.

<sup>87</sup> Brown, 'Compelling but not Controlling?', p. 42; Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*.

<sup>88</sup> Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 2.

Parry, however, who claims that to understand the development of Victorian politics and ideas, one must look at relations with Europe (America and the Empire are also noted as important features). To Parry, these relationships were crucial for its leaders to 'project an image of Britain as a particular kind of regime.'<sup>89</sup> This section, which is continuing the study of Britain's mid-nineteenth-century liberal and international development, will insist that the Anglo-Chinese relationship had its own impact on British visions of its national character and the notion of international morality. These issues featured heavily in the China debates in early 1857 and assisted in an on-going conversation as to how Britain was to present itself to both the 'civilised' and 'barbarian' world.

As a consequence of Britain's aggressive intervention in China, sparked by the legally flawed *Arrow* Incident, the ethics of the nation's diplomacy was brought into question. Cobden's penny newspaper, *The Morning Star*, expressed horror at what the bombardment of Canton said about the morality of Britain's foreign policy. The *Star* exclaimed that 'as a nation, we have blood on our hands,' and that Bowring's reaction to the *Arrow* Incident had resulted in 'unnecessary and wholesale butchery.'<sup>90</sup> The article acknowledged that whilst questions of legality were central to the *Arrow* quarrel, there was another, possibly more pressing concern, as 'the far higher considerations of justice, humanity and civilisation...have been so monstrously and gratuitously outraged.'<sup>91</sup> The moral questions British actions in China posed were central to the opposition of Cobden, the editor of the *Star* Henry Richard, and many who voted against Palmerston on the China debate. As a result, they began to seek a greater understanding of the moral obligations Britain *ought* to have in their relations with other nations. Thus, Bowring's diplomacy brought the question of the morality of Britain's foreign policy to the forefront of British politics, developing British notions of their nation's mid-

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<sup>89</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *Morning Star*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Morning Star*, p. 2.

nineteenth-century international identity.

In his letter to Cobden in March 1857, Francis Newman praised the Radical MP for acknowledging the ‘moral judgements’ facing Parliament as a result of the China question. Newman argued, ‘even if peace now proves impossible, a great step has been gained, in getting a vote of Parliament on a purely moral ground censuring and reserving a ministerial act.’<sup>92</sup> In his letters to Cobden, Newman keenly observed that Bowring’s actions had facilitated a larger debate regarding the ethics of British foreign policy. In the House of Lords, Newman’s observation gained traction as the former Conservative Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Malmesbury, rose to question the morality of British actions. Malmesbury denied ‘that there was any justification for the horrible proceedings which were taken against the town,’ and asked for an explanation of British actions.<sup>93</sup> The Earl claimed that the Ministerial defence, which was based on the need to vindicate an ‘insult to a flag’, was absurd. Malmesbury stated that the flag itself was intended to act as ‘an emblem of liberty and civilization’ but that defending it in such way was beneath the status of Britain.<sup>94</sup> To the former Foreign Secretary, the ‘antiquated and barbarous Chinese’ did not understand the importance of the flag and as a result, Britain did not need to defend its honour.<sup>95</sup> As demonstrated by Malmesbury, in the House of Lords, the morality problem soon turned to a question of Britain’s national character. It was, in his opinion, not the Chinese who had insulted the British flag, but the diplomats. Their actions, he contended, were unworthy of a civilised nation.

In the *Morning Chronicle*, the morality of the China question was criticised to demonstrate a

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<sup>92</sup> BL ADM 43669, Cobden Papers, ‘Newman to Cobden’, f. 86 (London: 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1857).

<sup>93</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1345 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>94</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1345 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>95</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1346 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).



larger concern regarding Britain's 'national character'. The *Chronicle* stated that serious 'discredit' had been inflicted on the 'English character' as a result of the conduct of Britain's Colonial Officers in China. Furthermore, the editorial claimed that this behaviour was similar to the diplomacy of nations such as Russia, 'where official corruption is the recognised rule.'<sup>96</sup> The *Chronicle's* use of international comparisons in their editorial mirrors the rhetoric of Palmerston, who contrasted Britain's liberal constitutionalism with autocratic Europe to garner public support for his foreign policy. However, in contrast to the Prime Minister, rather than championing British ideals and methods, the metropolitan newspaper likened Britain to despotic Europe to stir patriotic passions against the nation's China policy.

The China question in 1857 was not only opposed in Britain, but worldwide. In particular, the German philosopher, Karl Marx, who was a regular contributor for the *New York Daily Tribune* during his time in London, offered his perception of Britain's China policy. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, as news reached England of Bowring's actions, Marx summarised the *Arrow* affair, claiming that 'we think... that the British are in the wrong in the whole proceeding.'<sup>97</sup> Further, in light of the Canton debate in Parliament, Marx launched a scathing attack on Bowring, in addition to Palmerston's support of the diplomat, arguing that the Governor of Hong Kong suffered from 'monomania' and asked 'why should he [Palmerston] single out just that moment to exhibit, for the first time in his political life, an unflinching fidelity to another man [Bowring].'<sup>98</sup> His most notable criticism, however, was that in his opinion, military intervention, as a result of the *Arrow* Incident, affected Britain's international standing with other 'civilised' powers, in particular, the United States of America. Marx asserted that Bowring's actions were as appalling as the behaviour of the filibuster General William Walker, who, in 1856, to the disdain of the Euro-American powers, usurped the

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<sup>96</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1857, p. 4.

<sup>98</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 6.

presidency of Nicaragua for himself.<sup>99</sup> The *Arrow* Incident's impact therefore, stretched far beyond the shores of China, sparking fierce debates regarding British diplomacy, morality and the nation's international status.

Both in Parliament and in the correspondence of Britain's leading political figures, the China question raised concerns surrounding the character of the British nation. In his opening remarks in the House of Lords Canton debate, the Earl of Derby contrasted the actions of Bowring to the diplomacy of the United States. Derby stated that when the Americans were faced with similar foreign threats, they 'merely dropped down the river and silenced the fort which had so offended them', and afterward, 'they quietly continued their trade on the footing on which it had always been carried on.'<sup>100</sup> To Derby, the public advocacy of Bowring from Palmerston's Government demanded parliamentary condemnation to vindicate 'the national character...in the eyes of all civilized nations.'<sup>101</sup> Cobden, however, was less enthused by the possibility of vindication, convinced that Britain's course of action was extremely harmful to their international reputation. In a letter to the editor of the *Morning Star*, Henry Richard, Cobden claimed the President of the United States, James Buchanan, would have offered diplomatic support for Britain's China policy if 'a moral demonstration had been applied.' Cobden argued, however, that as a result of Britain's 'uncivilised' actions, 'we are again presented to the world as unsuccessful suitors at Washington.'<sup>102</sup> To the leaders of the parliamentary opposition in both Houses, the *Arrow* Incident's impact was not limited to Britain and China. Their concern was how this instance appeared to other Western Powers. The China question, therefore, was considered by the opposition to be instrumental in shaping British international identity in a growing global system.

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<sup>99</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, p.4.

<sup>100</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1172 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>101</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1172 (24<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>102</sup> BL ADM 43658 Cobden Papers, 'Cobden to Richard', f. 317 (Midhurst: 26<sup>th</sup> April 1857).

The opponents of Britain's China policy also used notions of Christian morality to attack Palmerston's Government. In 1850s liberal Britain, a nation's devotion to Christian teachings was one benchmark that was often used to determine whether a country was considered 'civilised'.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, as demonstrated by Richard Francis Spall Jr. amongst others, the majority of free traders claimed that their economic ideals had the support of Divine Providence, arguing that as God had distributed resources unequally between countries, he intended them to trade.<sup>104</sup> Thus, free trade was godly and promoted peace. To the Liberal MP and naval officer, Charles Napier, however, British actions in China illustrated an abandonment of the nation's Christian values. In a letter to Lord John Russell, Napier argued,

If our Christianity be not a mockery, if international law be not a delusion, if the peak instruments of national justice be not an idea to mislead us, never was there a more indefensible pretext for a cruel and murderous attack on the people of Canton.<sup>105</sup>

In support of this opinion, Sir John Pakington professed in his address to the House of Commons that whilst Commissioner Ye displayed 'reason and 'calmness', Britain's Colonial Officers acted in a reckless, 'uncivilised' manner. Pakington asked the House in simple terms, 'which of those letters are the most becoming of a Christian?'<sup>106</sup> To these members of the varied parliamentary opposition, British actions in China challenged the nation's claim to be 'civilised' in the eyes of Christian teachings. In light of the actions of British diplomatic agents, which for some were deemed inconsistent with the ideals of free trade and Christianity, questions arose as to whether Britain deserved that status. Thus, as a result of

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<sup>103</sup> Pitts, 'Boundaries of International Law', p. 69; Georgios Varouxakis, 'Great versus s Small nations: Size and National Greatness in Victorian Political Thought', in Bell ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order*, p. 136; Horowitz, 'International Law', p. 447.

<sup>104</sup> Richard Francis Spall Jr., 'Free Trade, Foreign Relations and the Anti-Corn Law League', *The International History Review*, 10:3 (August, 1988), p. 413; Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 31; Stephen Conway, 'John Bowring and the Nineteenth Century Peace Movement' in Joyce Youings ed., *Sir John Bowring: Aspects of his Life and Career* (Plymouth: Latimer Trend and Co., 1993), p. 351. This was a series of essay published from a conference in 1992 based on the life and works of Sir John Bowring. Conway notes that Bowring used Christianity as a base for many of his arguments related to free trade.

<sup>105</sup> TNA Russell Papers 30/22/13/C, 'Napier to Russell', f. 59 (London: March 1857).

<sup>106</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1642 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).

Anglo-Chinese exchanges in late 1856, Britain's politicians attempted to define what it meant to be 'civilised'.

The concerns regarding Britain's national character, as a result of British actions in China, were not confined to Parliament. In *Punch* magazine, the treatment of Ye at the hands of the British was lampooned in order to show that the Qing official was bullied 'into submission' by Parkes and Bowring.<sup>107</sup> Fig.1 for example, depicts the poor treatment of Ye Mingchen by the British. Described as 'John Chinaman', Ye is dressed in the robes of a Qing official and is being pulled by the queue over the back of a smiling British citizen. Through such imagery, *Punch* challenged the aggressive diplomatic tactics employed by British officials. *Punch* demonstrated, then, that within Britain, and particularly amongst members of the press, the events in the port of Canton fuelled concerns regarding British foreign policy and the use of military intervention.



(Fig.1.) An image of 'John Chinaman' being carried by a British official. This is followed by a poem jokingly blaming Ye for the plight of the Chinese citizens at the hands of the British. Source: BL LD 34 A, 'John Chinaman', *Punch Magazine*, Vol. 32 (10<sup>th</sup> January, 1857), p. 18.

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<sup>107</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 162.

Palmerston and his supporters also drew comparisons between the British and the Chinese in their defence of Bowring's actions in Canton. Much like his opponents, Palmerston compared the behaviour of Bowring and Parkes to that of Ye Mingchen, but with conflicting results.<sup>108</sup> The Prime Minister attacked the character of Ye, asserting that the Governor of Guangdong had regularly insulted British citizens and the British character. In Parliament, Palmerston argued that Ye 'is one of the most savage barbarians that ever disgraced a nation,' and as a consequence of his diplomacy, Bowring, a former leader of the peace movement, was under pressure to use military force.<sup>109</sup> Palmerston concluded his speech stating that 70,000 'Chinese heads – have been struck off by the axe of the executioner of the barbarous Yeh [Ye].'<sup>110</sup> Thus, to defend his advocacy of intervention, Palmerston blamed the breakdown of peace and arbitration on the actions of Ye. He referred to examples of his brutality in order to suggest that military aggression was both necessary and in many ways, ethical. The bombardment of Canton, Palmerston suggested, was a diplomatic tactic used, in part, to remove an uncivilised and blood thirsty Qing official who not only threatened British interests, but the livelihood of the Cantonese population.

In support of Palmerstonian foreign policy, *The Times* continued the character assassination of Ye Mingchen. By doing so, however, the metropolitan newspaper not only hoped to gain public support for the Prime Minister's China policy but moreover, attempted to advocate the armed power at Britain's disposal. After suggesting that military intervention was a 'last resort', *The Times* championed the nation's ability to overpower 'brutal' officials like Ye. The newspaper argued that,

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<sup>108</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 462.

<sup>109</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1811 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).

<sup>110</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1822 (3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857).

Whatever may be the violence or bigotry of local governors, it seems impossible to imagine that the Supreme Government of China would resolve upon offering wanton indignities to a Power notoriously able in the last resort to not only protect its interests, but to enforce its will.<sup>111</sup>

By critiquing Ye's character, Palmerston and *The Times* attempted to demonstrate the difference between British and Chinese diplomacy in order to disprove the suggestion that the British character had been damaged. To Palmerston's supporters, the Qing officials were the problem. In comparison to the manly attributes of the British, who were defending their interests from a tyrannical official, Ye Mingchen was depicted as violent, cowardly and barbarous – notions that were intended to validate Bowring's actions. It is evident therefore, that in their portrayals of Ye Mingchen, British opinion was divided. Nonetheless, for Palmerston's supporters, Ye came to symbolise the excuse for Britain's intervention into China and moreover, was used to demonstrate the superior British national character and military power.

The British debate instigated by the *Arrow* Incident, therefore, was not confined to the legal or constitutional problems it created. It facilitated a discussion regarding the ethics of military intervention and what such actions said about the character of the British nation. There was no consensual opinion amongst the political class as to morality of Britain's China policy and furthermore, whether it made the nation look weak or strong before their competing Western Powers. Nonetheless, its ability to shape this discussion demonstrates the larger impact of mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations. It fuelled an open debate that was not confined to Britain's China policy, but the morality of intervention more generally.

Bowring's actions in November 1856 brought the ethics of an active foreign policy and its effect on Britain's international status into question. Furthermore, it was the China question that became the example used by both sides of the debate to confirm their position and argue

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<sup>111</sup> *The Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1857, p. 6. See also, Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 163.

in favour of their vision for the future of Britain's foreign affairs.

## The Commercial Problem

As a consequence of Bowring's decision to bombard the port of Canton, heightened by the diplomat's connection to the free trade movement in his early career, Britain's political class contested the meaning of the free trade doctrine.<sup>112</sup> The Canton debate in Parliament demonstrated the divisions within the liberal movement concerning their perceptions of free trade and furthermore, provided an opportunity to confirm their ideals on the national stage. For Cobden, the Government's China policy represented an attack on the economic principles of liberal Britain. For him and many of his liberal supporters, free trade economics was a prerequisite to peaceful international relations due to the commercial inter-dependence of nation states.<sup>113</sup> Cobden's free trade vision was part of a grander programme of liberal internationalism and British aggression in China presented an obstacle to that structure.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, for Palmerston's supporters, the China question aided their conclusion that when faced with a nation reluctant to engage in open commercial exchanges, there were limits to the Cobdenite vision of free trade. To Palmerston, one could remain in favour of freer economic relations and also accept the possible need for an active foreign policy, a conclusion that was assisted by events in China.

In mid-nineteenth-century Britain, there was a determination to conduct foreign relations through the lens of free trade.<sup>115</sup> British exchanges with China followed this pattern. After the repeal of the East India Company's monopoly on British trade with the Qing Empire in 1834,

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<sup>112</sup> Stephen Conway, 'John Bowring and the Nineteenth Century Peace Movement', *Historical Research*, 64:145 (1991), pp. 344-355.

<sup>113</sup> Hinde, *Richard Cobden: A Victorian Outsider*, p. 266.

<sup>114</sup> Cain, 'Capitalism, War and Internationalism', pp. 229-247.

<sup>115</sup> Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, p. 1.

Britain was hopeful that they could establish a freer commercial market in China.<sup>116</sup> Although faced with initial resistance, the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842 gave birth to a new optimism among British diplomats, merchants and politicians. However, the failure of this agreement to deliver the expected commercial profits during the inter-war period (1842-1856), resulted in a growing conclusion that the free trade doctrine had its limits. Through his China experience, Sir John Bowring, in addition to defenders of Palmerston's China policy, argued that the full implementation of free trade ideals was only possible amongst civilised (Western) nations that understood the benefits of trading networks. As free trade became an emblem of Britain's progression and civilisation, China's refusal to adopt this structure was considered evidence of their barbarian status. As a result, the China question confirmed for many of Palmerston's supporters that Britain's support of free trade could coincide with an interventionist foreign policy in defence of the nation's interests.

In numerous British manufacturing companies and institutions, Bowring's intervention was praised as a diplomatic tactic in defence of Britain's primary role in China – commercial intercourse. As soon as information of the bombardment reached English shores, the East India and China Association of Liverpool wrote to the Earl of Clarendon commending the actions of the Governor of Hong Kong: 'We consider the present disruption of our friendly relations with China, affords a fitting opportunity for a re-adjustment of our political and commercial relations with that country.'<sup>117</sup> Additional support soon came from the Manchester Commercial Association, whose director, Hugh Fleming, wrote to Clarendon stating that his members had a 'deep interest' in the proceedings. Fleming argued that in addition to supporting Bowring's aim of gaining 'free and unrestricted access' in China, they

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<sup>116</sup> Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-1842* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 179-184.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, FO 17/279, 'East India and China Association of Liverpool to Clarendon', f. 247 (Liverpool: 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1857).



hoped that Shanghai would be placed under British jurisdiction.<sup>118</sup> As a result of the China question, therefore, manufacturing institutions across the nation petitioned the Government clarifying the position of their members in regard to free trade and imperial expansion. Ignoring the legal or moral debate, many merchants demonstrated that their main concern was advancing their trading networks and thus, this objective should drive British diplomacy and policy.

Responding to the approval of his China policy by various Commercial Associations, Lord Palmerston noted that supporting British trade, in addition to vindicating the British national character, were of the upmost importance. In a letter to George Duncan, the director of the Chamber of Commerce of Dundee, Palmerston stated that he was happy to have the Association's support. He claimed that his foreign policy aims were to protect the 'persons and property of British subjects in foreign countries.'<sup>119</sup> For Palmerston, his position on the China question reflected far more than Anglo-Chinese relations. It was, as the Prime Minister stated, a policy in relation to 'foreign countries' more generally. The China question provided another example for Palmerston to campaign in favour of his notion of foreign policy, suggesting that rather than the Cobdenite free trade ideal, it was his vision for liberal Britain that best supported the commercial community.

In the parliamentary debates, Palmerston's Government came to the aid of the Prime Minister's notion of foreign affairs and its benefits to international trade relations. To Henry Labouchere, the Secretary of State for the Colonies and Liberal politician, intervention in China was viewed as a civilising mission that would result in the Qing Empire understanding the value of freer commercial relations. Labouchere argued,

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<sup>118</sup> TNA, FO 17/279, 'Fleming to Clarendon', f. 303 (Manchester: 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>119</sup> BL ADM 48580, Palmerston Papers, 'Palmerston to Duncan', f. 368 (Piccadilly: 12<sup>th</sup> March 1857).

I believe that immense benefit will accrue in the first instance to the trade of this and all other European nations, and ultimately to the Chinese Empire itself. I trust in God the time may come, and that we may see it, when the vast population of the Chinese Empire maybe brought into communication with the more fortunate races which enjoy the blessings of civilization, and that we may see them emancipated from the ignorance and thralldom of heathenism, and, above all, from that tyrannical and cruel Government which, like its Commissioner at Canton, seems only to exist for the misery and degradation of the human race.<sup>120</sup>

For Labouchere, the Government's notion of intervention was considered a beneficial diplomatic tactic that would improve Britain's commercial interests and assist China's progression into a civilised state. However, in China, to secure such a trading structure, military intervention was a necessary process in order to remove the 'tyrannical and cruel' elements of Qing rule. Through the parliamentary debates, the Palmerstonian Government questioned free trade's links to the 'peace-at-any-price' policy advocated by Cobden.<sup>121</sup> Instead, they and Labouchere backed an active foreign policy as a diplomatic tactic that would enable barbarous societies to transition into civilised nations that supported open commercial relations.

This opinion put forth by Palmerston's ministers in defence of the Government's backing of Bowring received severe criticism. The Conservative politician Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who ended his connection to the Whigs after Lord John Russell's repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, argued that the use of force would reap no beneficial consequences, particularly for British trade. Bulwer-Lytton claimed,

Your trade cannot prosper if you make yourselves an object of detestation to those you trade with. You may, indeed, force a road for your merchants to the market-place at Canton over the ruins of the city and the corpses of your customers—you may carry your tariffs at the point of the sword and surround your factories by armed garrisons and bristling cannon, but I warn you that your trade will fly the place, for commerce recoils from unnecessary bloodshed.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1433 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>121</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1502 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857). Warren refers to Cobden's supporters as the 'peace-at-any-price' party.

<sup>122</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1446 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

As a result of the China question, Britain's political class debated the best diplomatic method of securing an improvement of trade relations with foreign nations. Through the parliamentary deliberations, it became clear that there was a lack of consensus on the benefits of active foreign policy and on whether interventionist tactics assisted the establishment of freer commercial markets.

Among the supporters of Cobden's motion against the Government's China policy, there was a large Conservative contingent. Despite disagreeing with Cobden on a range of issues, the China question temporarily united this coalition. There was a general consensus that military intervention into China would not enhance, but diminish British trade. The Conservative MP, Samuel Warren, used his House of Commons address to distance himself from Cobden and his affiliates, arguing 'I am no member of the peace-at-any-price party.'<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless, for Warren, the actions in China which, he argued, had been reduced to a discussion of 'mere moneymaking and commercial enterprise', affected the honour of the British nation both in China and in relation to the 'civilised' Western world. As a result of their China policy, Warren argued, Britain's international status and ability to develop strong commercial bonds was brought into disrepute:

Sir, if we are bent blindly and obstinately on persevering in war for a sinister and unhallowed object, we shall attract to ourselves the reprobation of the whole civilized world. Let us look above the mists of passion, of selfishness, and love of gain, at the star of justice and then we need fear nothing.<sup>124</sup>

The constant demand for trade, Warren argued, was harming the status and honour of the British nation. For the Conservative MP, the China question shed light on the relentlessness of Britain's commercial pursuits and confirmed his viewpoint that such objectives were

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<sup>123</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1502 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>124</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1502 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

harmful to the country's international reputation.

To Cobden, Palmerston's conception of trade and intervention was damaging to Britain's reputation. Rather than make the nation strong, the Radical MP argued that it would lead to the country's isolation, destroying commercial bonds. In the House of Commons, Cobden denied the claims put forth by the Commercial Associations, criticising the fruitfulness of the China trade. Cobden argued 'there is not a great empire in the world where trade is so free.'<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the eminent free trader argued 'I only wish that we had, not five ports, but one port in France, Austria, or Russia.'<sup>126</sup> Continuing his speech, Cobden condemned Palmerston's diplomacy towards Britain's commercial allies, claiming that the Prime Minister was pushing the same patriotic rhetoric he had used during the Don Pacifico Affair (1850). He intended to display a message of British superiority and protection for the nation's expatriates. For Cobden, the situation they faced in China was nuanced, and an unnecessary show of strength was nothing but harmful to his conception of Britain's international identity. Cobden proclaimed,

"Civis Romanus sum" is not a very attractive motto to put over the door of our counting-houses abroad. Now, without wishing to do more than convey a friendly warning to a class with whom I have so great a sympathy... the same failings which have lost the footing of our merchants in the Mediterranean, may be also a disadvantage to us in China and elsewhere.<sup>127</sup>

Through his use of the China question as an example to demonstrate the basis of Cobdenite liberalism, Richard Cobden argued that his ideals were in support of the nation's commercial class. Its emphasis in Parliament enabled him to criticise Palmerstonian notions of foreign policy and free trade as beneficial models for strong, reciprocal relations. In Parliament, the China question became an issue that transcended Anglo-Chinese relations. It facilitated an open debate regarding diplomatic methods and their utility in assisting Britain's trading

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<sup>125</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1405 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>126</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1406 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>127</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1410 (26<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

interests.

The question of Britain's trade interests in China inevitably resulted in a discussion regarding opium. Opponents of Palmerston's China policy questioned the morality of the opium trade and used this discussion as a platform to query Britain's international reputation and methods of trade and diplomacy. Here, again, the bombardment of Canton was shaping British notions of trade relations and the ethics of their foreign affairs. In a campaign meeting at the Freemasons' Hall, Manchester, the Radical strand of the liberal movement – Richard Cobden, John Roebuck, Thomas Milner Gibson and Austen Layard – spoke in opposition to the morality of the opium trade. The *Morning Chronicle* reported that during the meeting, Roebuck exclaimed that the opium trade was an instrumental reason for the conflict and thus, was the problem that needed eradicating.<sup>128</sup> Similarly, in his correspondence with Henry Richard, Cobden argued that opium was a key problem facing British commercial relations with China but, in addition, was a moral calamity on the part of the British national character. Cobden wrote 'God help the Christians who think of making their religion acceptable to the war of opium.'<sup>129</sup> In March and May 1857, this notion was reiterated by George Smith, the Anglican Bishop of Victoria (Hong Kong) who, in two speeches delivered to the Exeter Hall, London, and Free Trade Hall, Manchester, criticised Britain's opium sales as unworthy of a Christian nation.<sup>130</sup> Thus, as a result of the British aggression in China, the opium trade was brought into public debate within Britain – forcing an investigation into notions of British morality, the aims and objectives of commercial relation and the national character.

As a consequence of the opium trade and its prominence in British parliamentary debate, the

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<sup>128</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>129</sup> BL ADM 43658, Cobden Papers, 'Cobden to Richard', f. 246 (Midhurst: 18<sup>th</sup> January 1857).

<sup>130</sup> George Smith, *Our National Relations with China: Being Two Speeches Delivered in the Exeter Hall and the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, by the Bishop of Victoria* (London: T. Hatchard, 1857), pp. 1-23.

suggestion that British commerce supported the progression of foreign nations was brought into disrepute. As previously documented, supporters of intervention in China argued that such diplomatic tactics would not only improve British trade, but assisted in ‘civilising’ China. This notion, Samuel Warren argued, was discredited as a result of the opium trade. Warren referred to a motion put forward by the Liberal MP James Graham on the 9<sup>th</sup> April 1840, demanding the opium trade be abolished in order to develop ‘friendly and commercial relations’ based on the ideals of free trade. The failure to do so, Warren argued, meant that ‘we have not clean hands. We have made the Chinese our deadly enemies.’<sup>131</sup> To Warren, the opium trade shed a light on a sinister side to Britain’s pursuit of trade – for some, commercial growth was almost worth any moral cost. The result, he argued, was that ‘in spite of their long-continued objections and resistance – we are corrupting their morals and their health, and destroying the internal strength and resources of the Celestial Empire—and all for filthy lucre.’<sup>132</sup> Thus, as a consequence of the China question and its emphasis in Parliament, the positive qualities of British trade were brought under scrutiny. As a result, it shaped parliamentary perceptions of the civilising mission of British foreign policy and in particular, the nation’s relations with the Qing Empire.

In 1850s Britain, although free trade ideals dominated the nation’s economic policy and shaped its foreign affairs, its meaning and scope remained under construction. As a consequence of the Canton debate, supporters of Palmerstonian and Cobdenite liberal values campaigned in favour of their notions of free trade, using the China question to gain support for their principles. This dispute resulted in a fierce discussion that challenged the conclusion that intervention would result in stronger commercial relations. Further, the morality of the consistent pursuit of trade, brought into contention as a result of the opium trade, was

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<sup>131</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1502 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

<sup>132</sup> Hansard, Parl. Debs. (Series 3) vol. 144, col. 1502 (27<sup>th</sup> February, 1857).

confronted. The civilising powers of British trade, in addition to the means of acquiring strong commercial relations, were contested because of the China question. As a result, whilst notions of free trade remained divided (the Cobdenite and Palmerstonian viewpoints continued to exist after 1857), the impact of Anglo-Chinese relations on British notions of trade and intervention are evident.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the tumultuous events of 1856, not only had far-reaching consequences for the Chinese, or the British expatriates in China, but also for numerous politicians and political commentators within Britain's domestic arena. The China question instigated a vibrant and passionate debate within Britain that challenged the legal, constitutional, moral and commercial basis for military intervention. Recent scholarship has acknowledged the impact of Europe, America and the British Empire on the formation of British liberal ideals. However, this debate in early 1857, and therefore, the impact of Anglo-Chinese relations, has been relatively overlooked. The events in Canton forced a public discussion regarding the meaning of free trade, diplomacy, international law and non-intervention, concepts that remained under development.

This chapter has shown that in the mid-nineteenth century, there was no consensus amongst Britain's political class in regard to the nation's liberal values and foreign policy. In early 1857, the China question exposed these differences in political thinking and facilitated a discussion in regard to what policies and ideals should govern Britain's foreign relations. It demonstrated that as a result of the China question, a range of parliamentary representatives and commentators from across the political spectrum offered their varied opinions on this

issue, using it to champion their vision for the future of Britain's liberal values and foreign policy. It became the key example that informed and developed their political attitudes on a variety of subjects regarding Britain's international relations that expanded beyond relations in China. Further, the China became the defining issue that shaped British political debate in early 1857, forging cross-party alliances that temporarily changed the make-up of Parliament.

It must be noted that no clear conclusions or answers were come by as a result of the fierce debates in early 1857. The interactions between Britain and China are one example of a wider trend of external influences that shaped the future of British expansion, in addition to legal and constitutional practice. This chapter has sought to shed light on its impact on Britain's intellectual development and identity, rather than focus on the domestic impact in China. By doing so, it exposes the influence of this peripheral relationship on the construction of British liberal attitudes in the mid-nineteenth century. As a consequence of the bombardment of Canton, political convictions regarding international law, the role of the diplomat, the morality of intervention and its effect on ideas of free trade were pushed to the front of public debate.



## Chapter Four - The ‘China Election’ of 1857 and the

### Development of British Liberalism

In 1857, the domestic impact of the China question on the development of British liberal ideas was not confined to Parliament. As a consequence of the General Election during March and April of that year, British actions in China became a national concern, capturing the imagination of a number of politicians, political commentators, electors and non-voting constituents. This chapter demonstrates the importance of the China question, a term used to denote the political discussion over Britain’s right to militarily intervene in Chinese affairs, in shaping the election campaign and its outcome.<sup>1</sup> It argues that Anglo-Chinese relations were instrumental in influencing the course of the election’s debate and moreover, informed the political development of the diverse liberal spectrum. Through the course of the election, a number of Liberal candidates, liberal-minded political commentators and electors, consolidated their ideological convictions regarding the limits of free trade, notions of ‘civilisation’ and foreign policy, as a result of their varied perceptions of British actions in China.

During the election campaign, the main ideological battle was fought between factions of the Liberal Party, rather than a clear Liberal vs. Conservative contest. This is demonstrated in *McCalmont’s Parliamentary Poll Book*, in addition to the *History of Parliament 1832-1868* entries, which show us that many of the candidates standing on a ‘Liberal’ ticket espoused a range of political views and contested the same seats.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the election placed the Palmerstonian and Cobdenite brands of liberalism in contention. The Prime Minister, Lord

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<sup>1</sup> E. D. Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism, 1855-65* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> J. Vincent and M. Stenton ed., *McCalmont’s Parliamentary Poll Book: British Election Results, 1832-1918*, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1971), pp. 21-196. Examples include: Berwick-on-Tweed, Chester (city), Clare, Coventry, Dundee, Finsbury, Frome and Manchester. Evidence of constituencies where candidates who stood as ‘Liberals’ had diverse policies include: Henry Miller, ‘Aberdeen’, in Philip Salmon and Kathryn Rix eds., *History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1832-1868* (draft entry); Philip Salmon, ‘Poole’.

Palmerston, a defender of Governor Bowring's decision to bombard the port of Canton, accepted the limits of the free trade doctrine and supported military intervention in defence of British ideas and commerce.<sup>3</sup> Richard Cobden, on the other hand, advocated an internationalist view of free trade, which suggested that rather than being a mere economic system, it was a prerequisite to a programme of international peace and arbitration.<sup>4</sup> To Cobden, therefore, British actions in China were considered unjust. As the *national* parameters of the election were set between these two notions of liberalism, the China question became the key point of reference by which a number of politicians, political commentators and electors advanced their liberal thinking. Cobden's defeat of Palmerston resulted in the Government's resignation and the Prime Minister securing the dissolution in order to hold a snap election. Thus, this election was a conclusion to Cobden's motion on the Canton question.

In their examinations of the 1857 General Election, historians have acknowledged its association with the China question. Nonetheless, its role in developing liberal political thinking during the election has been overlooked. Historians such as Miles Taylor, Angus Hawkins and K.T. Hoppen, have generally agreed that the China question allowed an opportunistic and short-lived alliance of Palmerston's enemies to defeat him in Parliament. However, Palmerston's popularity in the country enabled him to rout his opponents at the ensuing election.<sup>5</sup> That said, Taylor and Hawkins in particular have concluded that the

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 186-189; David Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy, 1846-55* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2002), p. 44, 101-112.

<sup>4</sup> Wendy Hinde, *Richard Cobden: A Victorian Outsider* (London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 266; Per. A. Hammarland, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State: The Thought of Richard Cobden, David Mitrany and Kenichi Ohmae* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 55-62.

<sup>5</sup> Miles Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism, 1847-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 275; Angus Hawkins, *British Party Politics, 1852-1886* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1998), p. 62; K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 202; May Caroline Chan, 'Canton 1857', *Victorian Review*, 36:10 (Spring, 2010), p. 33.

questions of local representation and constituency affairs were more significant in determining the election's results, reflecting an older view that mid-Victorian elections were essentially 'local affairs.' However, as this chapter shows, nineteenth-century elections saw an interaction between national issues, party labels and distinctive local political cultures.<sup>6</sup> In his detailed intervention into the impact of the *Arrow* Incident, J.Y. Wong has referred to this event as the 'China Election', outlining how Britain's imperial aims in China forced a national inquisition into British foreign policy – albeit concluding that the Government's campaign rested on their success in the Crimea.<sup>7</sup> Offering equal weight to the significance of Anglo-Chinese relations, E.D. Steele argues that the China question was used by the Liberal Party to 'publicise' their range of policies.<sup>8</sup> This chapter goes further, demonstrating that as a consequence of the China question's prominence in the debate, it shaped the liberal values of the elite and the electorate. It was used by numerous politicians to promote their brands of liberalism and indeed, became an example that enabled electors to solidify their liberal ideals.

Recent historiography related to nineteenth-century elections has had an important effect on the reading of the 1857 General Election. As Frank O'Gorman and James Vernon argue, early to mid-nineteenth-century elections were a different entity to its modern form. They reflected vibrant and diverse local political cultures, and as most electors had more than one vote, it encouraged candidate-orientated rather than party-orientated voting.<sup>9</sup> As Angus Hawkins documents, elections were not (before 1868) about electing a government, rather they were about electing parliamentary representatives. Between 1832 and 1868, it was Parliament rather than the electorate that made and unmade governments and thus, candidates

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<sup>6</sup> Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 275; Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>7</sup> J.Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856-60) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 235, 253.

<sup>8</sup> Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Frank O'Gorman, 'Campaigning Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1760-1860', *Past and Present*, 135:1 (1992), pp. 81-113; James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 163-173.

placed greater emphasis on their independence and looser party labels.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, as O’Gorman and Vernon assert national issues and party identities were also important, as they interacted with local political cultures.<sup>11</sup> As a result, historical assessments of the 1857 General Election have moved away from the traditional historical approach, viewing this event as a mere ‘plebiscite’ on Palmerston’s rule,<sup>12</sup> towards a stronger engagement in local affairs alongside national events.<sup>13</sup> As this chapter argues, through the prism of the election, the China question became a key national issue that influenced numerous local constituency debates. Moreover, it became a prominent example through which Liberal politicians and candidates, in addition to the liberal-minded electorate, consolidated their notions of free trade and foreign policy.

This chapter looks beyond the parliamentary Liberal party to Britain’s liberal movement more generally. It examines the political development of politicians, political commentators and the electors who advocated elements of liberalism, such as free trade economics and liberal constitutionalism, without necessarily having a strict affiliation to a faction of the Liberal party. In his examination of mid-Victorian Oldham, Vernon argues that the public’s political associations were heavily localised: one was a ‘Cobbettite, Fieldenite, O’Connorite, Foxite, Healdite, not a Radical, Liberal or Conservative.’<sup>14</sup> Although Oldham was not a typical constituency, Vernon was right in his scepticism of sweeping party labels. As

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<sup>10</sup> Angus Hawkins, ‘“Parliamentary Government” and Victorian Political Parties, c.1830-1880’, *English Historical Review*, 104 (1989), pp. 638-669.

<sup>11</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, pp. 163-173; O’Gorman, ‘Campaigning Rituals and Ceremonies’, pp. 81-113.

<sup>12</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, ‘Palmerston’, in A.J.P. Taylor ed., *Essays in English History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 110; Philip Guedalla, *Palmerston* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), p. 344.

<sup>13</sup> Angus Hawkins, *Parliament, Party and the Act of Politics in Britain 1855-9* (London: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 65; Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 275; Caroline Jackson, *The British Elections of 1857 and 1859* (D. Phil., University of Oxford, 1980); Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation*, p. 203.

<sup>14</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 168.

Angus Hawkins argues, Victorian parties (particularly in Parliament) were much more fluid and had looser alignments than their post-1868 successors.<sup>15</sup> As a result, this chapter is less concerned with categorising members of the liberal spectrum by Whig, Liberal, Peelite or Radical, but focuses on their political values and ideals as the key to understanding their diverse notions of liberalism. In particular, emphasis is given to Cobdenite and Palmerstonian liberal thinking, as their different perceptions of free trade and foreign policy dominated the campaign. For Jonathan Parry, the political career of Lord Palmerston must be analysed in connection to his biggest rivals: Lord John Russell and Lord Derby.<sup>16</sup> However, in the 1857 election, and with the focus on the China question, it was Palmerston's rivalry with Cobden that divided opinion and exposed friction in liberal values. Whilst Russell was at odds with Cobden on a number of issues, during the 1857 election, and particularly on the China question, the former Prime Minister was perceived to side with Cobden's outlook.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, this chapter shows that as a result of the China question, the primary liberal division was between the Palmerstonian and Cobdenite notions of free trade and foreign policy. As a result, the General Election asked Liberal MPs and candidates, in addition to the political commentators and electors, to make a choice as to which position they supported – and it was the China question that became the key example on which to base their decision.

This chapter is aided by the *History of Parliament 1832-1868* website. The *History of Parliament* includes numerous entries by Kathryn Rix, Henry Miller and Philip Salmon among others, documenting the political development of parliamentary constituencies and the careers of numerous parliamentarians. Although the site remains under construction and thus

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<sup>15</sup> Angus Hawkins, 'Parliamentary Government' and Victorian Political Parties, c.1830-1880', *English Historical Review*, 104 (1989), pp. 656-661.

<sup>16</sup> J. Parry, 'Review of A. Hawkins, *The Forgotten Prime Minister: The 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Derby*, volume I', *Parliamentary History*, 27 (2008), p. 302; Henry Miller, *Politics Personified: Portraiture, Caricature and Visual Culture in Britain, c. 1830-1880* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 169.

<sup>17</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 233.

does not include every constituency or politician, it offers information on a wide-variety of constituencies and Members of Parliament. For this chapter, I examined all of the constituency entries, in order to understand what issues were deemed important by the candidates and electors in 1857. In addition, through a 'keyword' search, I investigated constituencies where the China question featured as an important concern during the 1857 General Election. Using this search as a point of reference, I researched newspaper articles and campaign speeches that illuminated the impact of Anglo-Chinese relations on a range of constituencies across the country.

In order to show this, this chapter is divided into three sections. The first demonstrates how the China question was indeed a *national* concern, prompting debate in numerous constituencies. It argues that the focus on foreign policy during the election was a result of British actions in China, enabling both sides of the debate to discuss their positions regarding Britain's international relations more generally. The second examines in greater detail the national campaigns put forth by Palmerston and Cobden, highlighting how the China question was integral to their disputes and manipulated by both camps to illustrate their positions on a range of policies. The third offers a more in-depth case study of the constituency of Manchester, a city that symbolised mid-nineteenth-century liberalism. It shows how the China question exposed and consolidated the divisions in the city's liberal convictions. It argues that the General Election and focus on the China question resulted in the Cobdenite liberals losing their political dominance in Manchester, which they had enjoyed since the formation of the Anti-Corn Law League in 1838. Although many of the city's electors were already uneasy with the Cobdenite vision of free trade and foreign policy, as demonstrated by the popular support for Palmerston's Crimea policy between 1855 and

1856, the China question exacerbated this liberal divide to an irreparable state.<sup>18</sup> It illustrated to the Cobdenite liberals that they had lost the support of the city for their notion of free trade and foreign policy and furthermore, indicated to the city's population that Cobdenism no longer represented their political or economic ideals.

## The China Question and its National Impact

Throughout the election campaign, the China question stimulated debate across the nation's constituencies. The deliberations over Britain's right to militarily intervene in China were not confined to the Houses of Parliament but instead, through the framework of the General Election, became a national and public concern. This section, through an analysis of numerous constituencies in the *History of Parliament* records, newspaper editorials and campaign speeches, demonstrates the gravity of the China question in shaping the course of the election's debate and developing the liberal ideals of politicians, commentators and electors. In the *History of Parliament*, numerous constituency entries outline the China question's place in local campaigns. I will go further, using these entries, in addition to primary evidence, to show how candidates used this issue to illustrate their parliamentary intentions and liberal convictions. The China question, I argue, was instrumental in enabling politicians to clarify their positions on free trade and foreign policy and thus, in regard to British intervention in China, whether they adhered to a Palmerstonian or Cobdenite vision of liberalism. In addition, it shows that, in 1857, the political values of many Liberal politicians, candidates and liberal-minded electors across the country remained under construction. The China question and the open debate during the General Election provided an opportunity to consolidate their ideals and their place on the liberal spectrum.

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<sup>18</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 235; Norman McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', in Robert Robson ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1967), p. 108; Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, p. 192.

The focus on foreign policy and free trade across local constituencies during the election was a result of the China question. It could be argued that had the Government's opponents defeated Sir George Cornwall Lewis, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the question of income tax in February 1857, the election would have focused on the Government's tax system. To J.Y. Wong and David Brown, this missed opportunity by both Gladstone and Lord Derby, united in their desperation to oust Palmerston's ministry, resulted in the Prime Minister's opponents searching for a new issue on which to challenge the Government. The *Arrow* Incident provided that opening.<sup>19</sup> However, the influence of Anglo-Chinese relations in determining the course of the election and the discussion regarding British foreign policy has often been overshadowed by the emphasis given to the Crimean War in the historiography.<sup>20</sup> This section challenges the conventional reading of the election, arguing that the China question, rather than the Crimean War, fuelled the focus on foreign policy and the retrospective examinations of the Prime Minister's international record. Furthermore, it demonstrates how the China question shaped a broader debate than the patriotic focus of the Crimea. Anglo-Chinese relations also instigated discussions regarding the doctrine of free trade and commercial morality. Thus, in addition to igniting the patriotic sentiments of politicians, electors and non-voters, the China question and its use during the election was an examination of liberal values.

As word reached Britain of Bowring's decision to bombard the port of Canton in late 1856, it

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<sup>19</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, p. 289; Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 400.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Cain, 'Capitalism, War and Intervention in the Thought of Richard Cobden', *British Journal of International Studies*, 5:3 (October, 1979), pp., 242-243; Anthony Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism, 1847 to 1865', *Journal of British Studies*, 33:2 (April, 1994), p. 172; McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics', p.110; Anthony Howe, 'Introduction', in Anthony Howe and Simon Morgan eds., *The Letters of Richard Cobden, Volume III 1854-1859* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. xxxiii; D. A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market 1815-1896* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 44; Derek Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976), p. 205.



provoked immediate interest in the press. *The Times*, the most influential of British newspapers, and mouthpiece of Palmerston after 1855<sup>21</sup>, broke the story in December 1856.<sup>22</sup> In an editorial on the 5<sup>th</sup> January 1857, it placed blame on the Chinese, claiming that ‘the violence and bigotry of local governors’ was hindering Britain’s commercial aims and was the reason for the outbreak of the conflict.<sup>23</sup> By March, the impact of the China question on Britain’s political climate was evident through its wide-ranging press coverage. In the metropolitan liberal newspaper, the *Daily News*, an ‘elector of Westminster’ argued that the China question had captured the nation’s attention. The elector claimed, ‘the debates on the Canton hostilities have produced a profound impression on the English mind. The moral sense of the country is aroused; the common sense of the country is up in arms.’<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the radical *Reynolds’s Newspaper* offered their interpretation of events in Canton and a summary of Parliament’s reaction:

And to what awful results did this wilful perseverance in error lead? To a bloody massacre of the Chinese, the bombardment of Canton with red-hot shot, and a fearful destruction of human life! And yet we find peers, ministers, and legislators, having the effrontery to defend the abominable blood-thirsty conduct of their tool, Bowring! We are told that he has the reputation of being a humanitarian – a friend to the human race! If such be the case, his practice is in violent contrast to his theory.<sup>25</sup>

Through the coverage in these metropolitan newspapers, it is clear to see that Britain’s China policy facilitated press reaction, displaying a lack of consensus regarding British foreign policy. The anti-war viewpoint held by the radical newspaper *Reynolds’s* and the liberal *Daily News*, which remained a feature of their editorials throughout early 1857, placed these publications at odds with, among others, the *Morning Post* and the *Globe*, who had long been

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<sup>21</sup> Laurence Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times: Foreign Policy, the Press and Public Opinion in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 138.

<sup>22</sup> Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times*, p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1857, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily News*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1857, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1857, p. 9.

Palmerstonian mouthpieces, and *The Times*, which had become a supporter of Palmerston during the Crimean War.<sup>26</sup>

Further, as demonstrated in the article written by an elector published in the *Daily News*, the China question triggered public discussion regarding British international relations. To Laurence Fenton, although difficult to gauge the sentiments of the electorate, ‘newspapers were not shy about claiming to represent public opinion.’<sup>27</sup> Whilst acknowledging its shortcomings, due to the diversity of opinion in the public sphere, Fenton argues that nineteenth-century newspapers enabled voices to be heard.<sup>28</sup> Thus, through editorials and letters, newspapers offered a window into the public debate on the China question. In the build-up to the election, it became clear that it was becoming a national issue that instigated a national response.

The China question dominated the 1857 General Election debate in numerous constituencies. In Cocker mouth, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Suffolk East for example, it was the primary subject of debate used by candidates to promote their political convictions.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, in Aberdeen, Birmingham, Carlisle, Cumberland East, Cumberland West, Durham North, Durham South, East Retford, Elgin District, Evesham, Knaresborough, Leicester, Leicestershire North, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottinghamshire South and Stoke-on-Trent, it featured heavily in local hustings.<sup>30</sup> This shows that the China question facilitated debate in a

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<sup>26</sup> Eugenio F. Biagini, ‘The Politics of Italianism: *Reynolds’s Newspaper*, the Indian Mutiny, and the Radical Critique of Liberal Imperialism in Mid-Victorian Britain’, in Tom Crook, Rebecca Gill and Bertrand Taithe eds., *Evil, Barbarism and Empire: Britain and Abroad, c. 1830-2000* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 104-105; Wong, *Deadly Dreams*, pp. 236-238; Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times*, p. 136.

<sup>27</sup> Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Fenton, *Palmerston and the Times*, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> James Owen, ‘Cocker mouth’; Miller, ‘Newcastle-under-Lyme’; Owen, ‘Suffolk East’.

<sup>30</sup> Miller, ‘Aberdeen’; Miller, ‘Birmingham’; Owen, ‘Carlisle’; Owen, ‘Cumberland East’; Owen, ‘Cumberland West’; Owen, ‘Durham North’; Owen, ‘Durham South’; Owen, ‘East Retford’; Miller, ‘Elgin District’; Stephen Ball, ‘Evesham’; Rix, ‘Knaresborough’; Miller, ‘Leicester’; Miller, ‘Leicestershire North’; Owen, ‘Newcastle upon Tyne’; Owen, ‘Nottinghamshire South’; Miller, ‘Stoke-on-Trent’.

diverse range of constituencies drawn from across the country, including industrial towns, traditional small boroughs and large rural county seats.

In their electoral addresses, candidates used their stance on Cobden's motion to demonstrate their political convictions. For example, in Somerset East, the Conservative MP, William Miles, began his speech by stating that, 'Bowring was not a proper person to represent the country in China' and furthermore, 'on the subject of peace...he was not in favour of intermeddling too much with other nations.'<sup>31</sup> Thus, Miles' electoral address was used to make cross-party appeals in favour of Cobden's outlook. Conversely, reporting the campaign in Yarmouth, the *Norfolk Chronicle* claimed that the two Liberal MPs, William McCullagh and Edward Watkin, demonstrated their support for Palmerstonian foreign policy through the 'tone of their addresses.' After acknowledging the importance of the China conflict as an issue of contention, the *Chronicle* stated that both MPs 'expressed regret' at Palmerston's defeat over the China issue.<sup>32</sup> The debate over China, therefore, was a national concern used to demonstrate the stance of a number of individual MPs regarding foreign affairs.

Campaign speeches to constituents, published in metropolitan and provincial newspapers, indicated the dominance of the China question. These addresses, and their coverage in the press, became a tool by which to stir the passions of the electorate and demonstrate a candidate's personal convictions. In late March 1857, the *North Wales Chronicle* published the Radical MP Edward Miall's statement to his Rochdale constituents, alongside an editorial championing its support for Cobden's motion. A Congregationalist, editor of the *Nonconformist* and a champion of disestablishing the Church of England, Miall's sympathies were already likely to be agreeable to the nonconformist sentiments of north Wales and the

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<sup>31</sup> *Morning Chronicle*, 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1857, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

*North Wales Chronicle*.<sup>33</sup> Yet, in the editorial, entitled ‘To Liberals and Dissenters’, the publication based its advocacy of Miall on his views regarding the China question:

If there is one public man more than another, in England, whose political and religious opinions closely assimilate with those of a large proportion of the inhabitants of the northern counties of the Principality, it is Mr Edward Miall...his reasoning thereupon [the China question] appears to be worthy of the attention of those who consider him entitled to their confidence. Well may we ask what must have been the excitement and agony in Canton during the bombardment? Welshmen who give their votes in favour of such a mode of enforcing the extension of trading civilisation, ought never again to be heard declaiming the cruelties, barbarities and tyrannies of the ruthless Edward.<sup>34</sup>

Here, the *Chronicle* called upon Welsh constituents to consider their position on the China question, arguing that it was one of the primary concerns that should affect their vote. The publication attempted to appeal to their patriotism as ‘Welshman’, declaring that the treatment of the Chinese by the English resembled the conquest of Wales by Edward I. In the 1850s, there was, Matthew Cragoe asserts, a ‘new and distinctively middle-class version of ‘Wales’’, which advocated Welsh nationalism, non-conformity and Radical liberalism.<sup>35</sup> Thus, to the *Chronicle*, to vote in favour of Palmerstonian candidates, who supported intervention in China, was to champion English notions of conquest and imperialism.

In his speech to his Rochdale constituents, Miall based his address on the China question, using it as an example to demonstrate his political convictions regarding foreign policy, notions of constitutionalism and his concern for government expenditure. Miall’s remarks were met with a supportive crowd reaction: ‘Well, they tell me that is for the honour of the British flag. I believe that it is the disgrace of the British flag. (Hear, hear, and great

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales, 1832-1886* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Cragoe, *Culture, Politics and National Identity in Wales*, p. 2.

applause).<sup>36</sup> In his investigation of election rituals, Frank O’Gorman argues that campaign speeches enabled crowd participation, granting constituents (electors and non-electors) an opportunity to voice their concerns and support.<sup>37</sup> In Miall’s speech, the cheering and continuous heckling from the audience remained a feature of the news report in order to document, as well as possible, the views of the Rochdale populace in attendance. Miall continued, claiming his vote in favour of Cobden’s motion was as a ‘Radical’ and in opposition to higher taxes that could be installed as a result of British aggression in China. For Miall, British actions in China provided an opportunity to champion his political values in his attempt to gain the support of Rochdale’s electors.

The China question was deemed by Miall to be an issue that would galvanise public support. Further, it became a lens through which he viewed a number of concerns, including Britain’s diplomatic methods. He claimed that ‘this Canton affair has come out of secret diplomacy’. For Miall, it was a return to an aristocratic system of foreign affairs where the public and Parliament was left in the dark – a notion which had long been criticised by Radicals, especially during the Crimean War.<sup>38</sup> He concluded, therefore, that ‘it is time for us to assert out rights’, and that,

At all events Rochdale ought to do this [assert their rights] above all other constituencies in the world. You would rightly have turned me ought of my place if I had consented to any minister making war without first asking the consent of the people. This is the question upon which Lord Palmerston, makes this appeal to the people of this country. He asks, Will you back me against the House of Commons?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> O’Gorman, ‘Campaigning Rituals and Ceremonies’, pp. 81-82.

<sup>38</sup> For a description of this aristocratic system of diplomacy see: Hammarland, *Liberal Internationalism and the Decline of the State*, p. 60; Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 71-73; John Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy 1782 to 1865: The National Interests* (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 1989), pp. 23-3; E.F. Penrose, *The Revolution in International Relations: A Study in the Changing Nature and Balance of Power* (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1965), p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 7.

To Miall, Palmerston has become 'dictator of this country in foreign affairs.' The General Election, and the emphasis on the China question, presented the public with a clear decision:

Are you willing for that? If you are not willing for that, I hope you will respond to his appeal by sustaining the vote which I gave upon that question, telling the ministry that so far from objecting to the vote, you believe me to have done my duty. (Hear, hear, and tremendous applause, mingled with a few hisses, and hooting.)<sup>40</sup>

Thus, in his electoral address, Miall used the China question as the basis on which to appeal to his constituents and to demonstrate his stance on a range of policies regarding foreign affairs, taxation and the role of the Prime Minister. Similarly, his opponent, the Conservative Sir Alexander Ramsay, emphasised the China question, offering his support for Palmerstonian foreign policy, both in settling the war in Crimea and in protecting British interests in Canton.<sup>41</sup> In response, through the reactions of the populace that were published in the article, it is evident that the China question forced a passionate reaction that influenced local debate and assisted in Miall's electoral defeat.

In addition to its use by the Prime Minister's opponents, the China question became a focal point for defenders of Palmerstonian foreign policy in their election appeals. A speech from the Whig Home Secretary Sir George Grey, Member of Parliament for Morpeth, Northumberland, demonstrates how the China question was manipulated to champion diverse brands of liberalism. After describing the foreign policy successes of the Palmerston administration – most notably Crimea – Grey used the China question to frame his liberal convictions. He argued that the Government supported Bowring's actions 'by an earnest desire to uphold the interests and honour of the Country.'<sup>42</sup> Further, the Home Secretary suggested that military intervention was necessary for 'the protection of British Trade, and of

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<sup>40</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *The Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p.9.

<sup>42</sup> *Morpeth Herald*, p. 5.

the lives and property of our countrymen in China.’<sup>43</sup> In his address, then, Grey portrayed British aggression in China as ‘difficult to avoid’, and interventionist foreign policy as acceptable in defence of British commercial interests. Here, through the China question, Sir George Grey demonstrated to his constituents his reason for supporting British military action more generally and moreover, illustrated his broad political convictions regarding international affairs and the expansion of British trade.

In all constituency elections, local issues played a crucial part in the make-up of a campaign and the success of a candidate. That said, as a national concern, the China question was equally instrumental in the development of debate and in certain constituencies, acted as the defining campaign feature. In Richmond, for example, both Liberal candidates Henry Rich and Marmaduke Wyvill agreed on most policy areas. Both candidates advocated moderate franchise extension, education, an abolition of church rates and a general support for free trade.<sup>44</sup> It was the China question that divided their opinion. On the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1857, *The Times* reported their differences, claiming that Mr. Rich believed that Bowring had committed an injustice, but withheld his vote after the Canton debate concluding that it was not the fault of the cabinet. Mr Wyvill, on the other hand, approved of the Government’s measures – arguing that Bowring had no other course of action and Palmerston had to stand by his representative’s decision.<sup>45</sup> Thus, when other divisions in policy were unclear, candidates used the China question to define their positions regarding foreign policy, trade, and support (or lack of) for the incumbent administration.

Furthermore, most constituencies had more than one MP before 1885, and most electors had more than one vote, facilitating candidate-orientated voting. Whilst a constituency may have

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<sup>43</sup> *Morpeth Herald*, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Rix, ‘Richmond’.

<sup>45</sup> *The Times*, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 9.

had two candidates from one party, they often sought to differentiate themselves and appeal to a cross-party vote.<sup>46</sup> In these cases, the China question provided an excellent opportunity to demonstrate a candidate's personal convictions and differences from the rest of the field. In Southwark, the three politicians vying for the two parliamentary seats, John Locke, Sir Charles Napier, and Apsley Pellatt, all 'lay claim to the character of "advanced Liberals."<sup>47</sup> It was the China question that proved the difference: Locke and Napier expressed 'unhesitating approval of Lord Palmerston's foreign policy', whereas Pellatt voted in favour of Cobden's motion. *The Times* concluded that Pellatt's outlook had 'no doubt prejudiced him in the eyes of some of his former supporters.'<sup>48</sup> It could be argued, therefore, that the China question acted as the difference maker for the electors of the constituency, as Pellatt was turned out in favour of John Locke. Therefore, because of the political context of the time, the cross-party divisions created by the contentious China question, allowed this issue to play an instrumental role in the campaign and thus, the decision making of local electors.

The focus on the China question during the General Election led to a wider discussion amongst representatives and electors regarding liberal values. As a consequence of Anglo-Chinese relations, diverse notions of free trade and British foreign policy were championed and personal convictions consolidated. In the week following Palmerston's parliamentary defeat on the China question, a British merchant with the alias "Fair Trade", who insisted that he had first-hand experience of life in China, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Liverpool Daily Post* arguing in favour of intervention for the protection of British interests. The letter contended that the reluctance of the Chinese to engage in an equal-footed commercial relationship, and various insults to British dominance, meant that military intervention was

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<sup>46</sup> Michael Drake, 'The Mid-Victorian Voter', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 1:3 (Spring, 1971), pp. 473-490. See also, J. R. Vincent, *Poll Books: How Victorians Voted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968). Vincent discusses voting patterns and lists voting records across the country.

<sup>47</sup> *The Times*, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> *The Times*, p. 9.



necessary; the author was, he claimed, for ‘fair trade and no favour.’<sup>49</sup> In addition, he offered support to the demands of the Liverpool East India and China Association, who called for a new treaty that would readjust ‘our political and commercial relations’ by placing a British ambassador at the imperial court, gaining free access to China’s coast and securing favourable tariffs.<sup>50</sup> On coming to this conclusion, the author of the letter made it clear that ‘we are not dealing with a civilised nation,’ and that, therefore, it should not be a free trading treaty that would be conducted with fellow European states.<sup>51</sup> The China question, then, provided the commentator an opportunity to voice his free trade ideal and notion of foreign affairs. Through the platform of the General Election and the emphasis on the China, the author offered a public declaration of his convictions that contributed to the on-going national discussion.

In opposition to the letter’s assertion, four days later the *Liverpool Daily Post* published a counter-argument, indicating the extent to which the China question had fuelled a conversation regarding free trade and British intervention. The article, written by an elector and entitled ‘Commercial Morality’, criticised Bowring’s actions in Canton and the article defending British intervention. Whilst ‘Fair Trade’ had argued that actions in ‘uncivilised’ China were just, the letter asserted that such actions were incongruous with Christian teachings and Britain’s civilised status:

It is all very well to talk of the British flag and our splendid commercial marine, whose ships traverse the globe, and whose sails whiten every sea, &c. ; but if we, in our intense eagerness to increase our trade and wealth, as a nation forget the dictates of justice, and, instead of exhibiting the noble grandeur and happy results of Christianity to the heathen world, show them that, practically, we act but little better than themselves, we degrade Christianity in their eyes, and, whilst preventing the

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<sup>49</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, p. 3.

spread of its blessing among them , assume responsibility that is, indeed, fearful to think of.<sup>52</sup>

Here, the article criticises the determination of British agents to pursue trade networks at any cost, suggesting that such actions harmed the Christian values of the nation. In a sense, British aggression in China convinced the article's author that the national religion was changing – commerce was replacing Christianity. This notion was supported by the *Liverpool Daily Post* which, in an editorial, concluded that 'it is truly lamentable in high commercial society, to see the extent to which so many men allow their interests to override or nullify their Christianity.'<sup>53</sup> To Angus Hawkins, within the 1850s high political arena, Derby and Palmerston avoided the question of religion.<sup>54</sup> It was, as Jonathan Parry argues, the 1860s that witnessed a resurgence of religious conversation amongst the political elite.<sup>55</sup> However, for the British public, the advent of free trade and dominance of liberal thought, in addition to the moral complexities of the China question, forced a discussion as to the place of Christianity in the Government's decision making. The China question, then, acted as an example for the author of 'Commercial Morality' to conclude that British intervention was damaging to the nation's values and international status. Indeed, the author's notion of trade, foreign policy and British morals were expressed through British actions in China.

Similarly, Liberal politician Austen Henry Layard addressed the electors of his constituency, Aylesbury, on British aggression in China. Although other issues such as religion were prominent in the local hustings, in his campaign address, Layard focused on the *Arrow Incident*.<sup>56</sup> After offering a commitment to representing the constituency with the same values on which they elected him in 1852, Layard quickly focused the address on the Canton

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<sup>52</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> *Liverpool Daily Post*, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Hawkins, "Parliamentary Government' and Victorian Political Parties', p. 663.

<sup>55</sup> J.P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867-1875* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, p. 63.

debate. He used the China question to demonstrate his position on foreign policy, asking voters to support his assessment of events and ‘for a continuation of that cordial confidence and support which you have hitherto so generously honoured me.’<sup>57</sup> Layard asserted that he voted in favour of Cobden’s motion and that,

I recorded my vote as a protest against a doctrine which appears to be sanctioned by our policy in all parts of the East, but which I believe to be as repugnant to morality as it is to good policy – the doctrine that, in dealing with Eastern Nations, we are not bound by the same Laws of right and wrong that govern the relations of Christian States.<sup>58</sup>

Here, Layard argued that British actions in China demonstrated a larger pattern of the nation’s foreign policy to which he was in opposition. The China question, therefore, was an example through which to display his political sentiments regarding Britain’s international policy more generally.

Further, Layard made it clear that this election, held as a result of the Canton debate, demanded electors to consider their position on the future of Britain’s international relations, particularly with ‘Eastern Nations’ that were considered less civilised in popular rhetoric. Layard stated,

I am confident that the decision of the House of Commons will tend to raise the character of this country, and that the time will come when the people of England will unanimously admit that those, to whom they confided their honour and fair fame, faithfully discharged the trust reposed in them.<sup>59</sup>

To Layard, this was a national concern that should not be confined to Parliament. It was evident from his address that he was appealing to voters on his vision of British foreign policy and moreover, was asking for their support of this ideal. His subsequent defeat, it must

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<sup>57</sup> *Bucks Herald*, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Bucks Herald*, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Bucks Herald*, p. 1.

be argued, was, in part, due to his anti-Palmerstonian rhetoric and emphasis on events in China.

The China question was crucial in the election's emphasis on foreign relations. In his speech to the electors of Buckinghamshire, Conservative MP Caledon Du Pré demonstrated how the China question, although a concern regarding foreign policy, differed from the Crimean War. Du Pré, a colleague of Disraeli who was a fellow representative of Buckinghamshire, argued that although he supported the Government's actions in the Crimea, he was unable to do so during the Canton debate. He deemed 'the late transactions in China' to be 'rash and impolite, tending to involve us in a sanguinary struggle, on grounds wholly inadequate, and in violation of the principles of justice and humanity.'<sup>60</sup> In a similar retort against British actions, an editorial in the Conservative newspaper *Grantham Journal* criticised the secrecy of the nation's diplomacy in China. It claimed that similar to European relations, British diplomats were 'secretly concerting' a revision of the Treaty of Nanjing in an attempt to improve Britain's footing in China, with little information being exposed to the public. The use of military intervention, the article claimed, was part of British plans to advance their standing.<sup>61</sup> The editorial concluded that British diplomacy had returned to a 'mercantilist' system of foreign relations where, particularly in Europe, international affairs were dominated by aristocratic families and conducted away from the public eye.<sup>62</sup> The China question, therefore, posed serious questions regarding British foreign policy that expanded beyond the scope of the Crimean War. It asked whether secret diplomacy, intervention and the poor treatment of nation's considered less 'civilised', were acceptable in a new period of

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<sup>60</sup> *Bucks Herald*, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Grantham Journal*, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> Clarke, *British Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*, p. 33; C. Knick Harley, 'Trade: Discovery, Mercantilism and Technology', in Roderick Floud and Paul Johnson eds., *The Cambridge History of Modern Britain: Industrialisation, 1700-1860*, Volume I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 195-198; Stanley L. Engerman and Patrick K. O'Brien, 'The Industrial Revolution in a Global Perspective', in Floud and Johnson eds., *The Cambridge History of Modern Britain*, p. 452.

politics that witnessed the dominance of free trade values. To the political commentator, Francis Newman, it was British relations with China that was the primary issue of contention dominating the election debate. He concluded, 'If only Mr Cobden, Bright and Gibson had been rejected, the Russian War might have seemed to be the cause. But when Mr Layard and others have met the same, the nation and the world will ascribe it to the late Canton vote.'<sup>63</sup>

The China question was, therefore, one of the primary *national* concerns during the 1857 General Election, fuelling debate and informing liberal convictions across the British nation. It acted as an example by which politicians illustrated their political opinions to their electors, in addition to shaping the discussion amongst voters and non-voters. As a consequence of Cobden's successful motion, the China question set the tone for the campaign. It forced a national conversation regarding the meaning of free trade and foreign policy, to which both candidates and constituents were able to contribute. This section has demonstrated, then, the significance of the China question as an issue that stimulated a national exchange. It exposed and consolidated political positions beyond parliamentary players, including numerous political commentators, electors and non-voters in the discussion. Of course, other local and national concerns were crucial during the campaign – the Crimean War, in particular, received a great deal of attention. Nonetheless, it was the China question that enabled this focus on international affairs and moreover, it was the *Arrow* Incident that generated a much broader discussion regarding the meaning of free trade, the role of the Prime Minister and the morality of the nation's international affairs. Anglo-Chinese relations, therefore, were essential to the 1857 General Election campaign, illustrating divisions in liberal thinking, and solidifying political positions.

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<sup>63</sup> British Library [BL], Additional Manuscripts [ADM], 43669, Cobden Papers, 'Francis Newman to Richard Cobden', f. 97 (London: 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1857).

## **Palmerston vs. Cobden**

The most significant ideological conflict of the 1857 General Election was fought between two brands of liberalism, representing Palmerstonian and Cobdenite notions of free trade and foreign policy. With the election campaign as their battleground, the two politicians and their advocates clashed over their perceptions of the China question and what this issue signified for the future of liberal ideas. To Cobden, British aggression in Canton, which was intended to improve Britain's commercial and political standing, demonstrated a detrimental diversion from his understanding of free trade and its connection to international non-intervention. However, in his defence of Bowring's actions in Canton, Palmerston used the China question to conclude that there were limitations to Cobden's view of free trade. Although international peace was sought after, to Palmerston, the defence of British interests was the paramount concern. This section focuses on the ideological debate between Cobden and Palmerston and how this resonated widely across the country through different media. It demonstrates how the China question exacerbated contrasts in their liberal values and was a key feature in both Cobden and Palmerston's campaigns. Thus, it argues for a re-evaluation of Anglo-Chinese relations and its impact. In addition to influencing the course of nineteenth-century Qing politics, in March and April 1857, it shaped Britain's domestic debate, developing and consolidating mid-nineteenth-century liberal ideas.

The China question was the basis on which the campaigns of Palmerston and Cobden were orchestrated. It acted as a symbol to illustrate divisions in their notions of liberalism, with particular focus on free trade and foreign policy, and their hopes for the future. It was used as a tool by both sides to promote their liberal ideals, which were echoed through various forms of media, enabling them to appeal to a national audience. With the 1857 General Election as

their platform, both camps portrayed the Canton debate as a choice facing the electorate that would shape British trade relations, notions of intervention and the nation's international status. In addition, both Palmerston and Cobden considered it a valuable asset to their cause, manipulating its facts to pull at the patriotic heartstrings of voters. As a result, historians have confined the role of the China question during the campaign as a tool to stir the electorate's patriotic sentiments.<sup>64</sup> Using foreign affairs for political advantage was, David Brown and Jonathan Parry argue, a common tactic employed by Lord Palmerston.<sup>65</sup> The influence of the China question, however, extended beyond its patriotic value. It was used by both Cobden and Palmerston to display their liberal convictions in their attempts to secure electoral support for their contesting brands of liberalism. Through an analysis of their speeches, and how they were reflected through newspaper commentary, cartoons and election ephemera, this section shows how Anglo-Chinese relations surpassed a discussion regarding Britain's East Asian policy. It forced a conversation concerning the limitations of the Cobdenite vision of free trade, in favour of a Palmerstonian one, which remained committed to free trade but had fewer scruples about using British power and force to promote it.

In his address to the constituents of Tiverton, Lord Palmerston focused on foreign policy, emphasising his record on international affairs and in particular, the China question:

The honour of addressing you is one which concerns not simply myself as an individual, which concerns not merely the government of which I am a member, but which, in my opinion, involves a question of the highest national importance – no less a question than the honour, the dignity, the interests, and the fair fame of England. The nation is called upon to choose which set of men shall for the future be charged with the conduct of its affairs.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Jasper Ridley, *Lord Palmerston* (London: Constable, 1970), p. 468; Hawkins, *British Party Politics*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>65</sup> Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, p. 42. Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>66</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 1.

The Prime Minister indicated the seriousness of the decision facing Tiverton's electors, and through the speech's publication in other newspapers, Britain's electors across the nation. For Palmerston, they were choosing between contrasting ideological positions regarding the course of Britain's international relations. The speech acknowledged the parliamentary dispute over the China question as an example to differentiate between his and his opponents' ideals:

I say it is not fair – it is not in accordance with the spirit of the British constitution – it is not in accordance with the feelings of the British nation – to take as a trial of strength a question in which one party is to be arrayed in hostility to the honour, the interests, and the dignity of the country, and the other is called upon to maintain that honour, to watch over those interests, and to sustain that dignity.<sup>67</sup>

Here, Palmerston used the *Arrow* Incident to outline the differences amongst the political elite in their notions of international affairs, insinuating that whilst he was defending British interests, his opposition harboured convictions harmful to the nation. The China question, therefore, was used by Palmerston as evidence of his patriotism and to criticise the policies of his political opponents.

In his Mansion House speech on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1857, which received widespread coverage in metropolitan and provincial newspapers, Palmerston continued to focus his campaign on foreign policy and in particular, the China question. First, he criticised his opposition for politicising the bombardment of Canton for personal gain: 'In that lobby there were the elements of a Government which expected to succeed to power by making the humiliation and degradation of their country a stepping-stone to office (cheers).'<sup>68</sup> After this initial condemnation, he used the China question to promote his vision for British foreign affairs. The Prime Minister suggested that he, like his opponents, was an advocate of peace: 'We,

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<sup>67</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 3. This speech was also printed in the *Stirling Observer*, *Leicestershire Mercury* among others.



too, are for peace abroad and progressive improvement at home,' using the example of 'restoring peace to Europe' to demonstrate his record.<sup>69</sup> However, Anglo-Chinese relations were referenced to indicate his concerns with an unrestricted application of this ideal:

The peace which we want is peace with honour, peace with safety, peace with the maintenance of our national rights, peace with security to our fellow-country men abroad...If the day should come when a different doctrine shall prevail – when peace is to be sought by humiliation and degradation, the country must look elsewhere.<sup>70</sup>

To Palmerston, the notion of universal peace had its limits. It was second to the national interest which, he argued, was being ignored in China. Thus, the China question provided a double function for the Prime Minister. It enabled him to portray himself as a defender of Britain against a nation that he claimed was demanding the 'abject submission' of British merchants and, in addition, to champion his liberal values which challenged the Cobdenite programme for free trade.<sup>71</sup>

After the Don Pacifico Affair (1850) and the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Prime Minister's support for Bowring's aggressive tactics in China was the third major example of Palmerstonian foreign policy. It demonstrated the consistency of his notion of international affairs and in particular, his support for military action in defence of expatriated British citizens. This was best displayed in his '*Civis Romanus Sum*' speech in defence of Don Pacifico in 1850.<sup>72</sup> After being subject to anti-Semitic attacks in Greece in 1847, Don Pacifico appealed to Palmerston for assistance in gaining compensation from the Greek government, claiming that he was a citizen of Gibraltar and thus, the British Empire. As David Brown argues, Palmerston was happy to 'face down the Greek Government', ordering

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<sup>69</sup> *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> David Brown, 'Palmerston and the 1850s', in David Brown and Miles Taylor eds., *Palmerston Studies I* (Southampton: Hartley Institute, 2007), p. 71.

a blockade of Athens and asserting that British citizens must be protected in every country.<sup>73</sup>

Although it demonstrates striking similarities, the China question differed from these previous international encounters; it was, first and foremost, a dispute over Britain's right to militarily intervene to secure commercial markets and thus, it created a separate debate. In his Mansion House speech, the Prime Minister offered his depiction of the political situation Britain faced in China if the Cobdenite opposition were successful in their advocacy of free trade internationalism:

They were bound, therefore, in the event of their success, to have apologised to the Chinese barbarians for the wrongs we have done... and, at the same time, in order to complete the measure of redress, they must have paid the rewards which had been given for the heads of our merchants.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, the China question provided Palmerston an opportunity to champion his record, in addition to concluding that the notion of free trade advocated by his Cobdenite opponents was detrimental to Britain's international status. The China question was used to demonstrate his assertion that in defence of British interests, peace and arbitration had its limitations. Furthermore, through the platform of a General Election and the emphasis placed on this issue, Palmerston asked the public to consider their stance on liberalism and its boundaries.

Similar to his adversary Lord Palmerston, the China question defined Richard Cobden's election campaign. Cobden concluded that he could no longer win the West Riding constituency due to his demand for a national system of non-sectarian education and his opposition to the Crimean War. He therefore decided to run instead in Huddersfield, where he addressed the electors on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1857.<sup>75</sup> Cobden used the Canton debate to criticise

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<sup>73</sup> Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, p. 101.

<sup>74</sup> *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> John Morley, *The Life of Richard Cobden*, Volume I (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1903), p. 655.

Palmerstonian foreign policy and the Prime Minister's notion of liberalism. To Cobden, the Government's support for Bowring was considered 'so monstrous a doctrine.'<sup>76</sup> He argued that Bowring's actions were 'without legal ground or justifiable cause.'<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, Cobden claimed that this event could have serious repercussions for Britain's international status:

I hold that every life destroyed...whether it be in China or England is murder. I believe that both to individuals and nations the day for the 'requisition for blood' will come, and that they will be made accountable for every un-repent act of violence and injustice.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, to Cobden, the actions in China posed a threat to the British nation, stating that the 'murder' of Cantonese citizens would eventually result in some form of retribution. The China question, therefore, was used to frame his electoral address to the voters of Huddersfield. It became the key example through which he criticised the current Government and moreover, emphasised his stance on foreign policy and non-intervention.

Cobden concluded his address by adopting Lord Palmerston's well-versed tactic, comparing British behaviour to the regimes of continental Europe. However, unlike Palmerston, Cobden's speech was not in praise of the British nation. Instead, he claimed that if Britain continued to support such policies, the nation would soon resemble poverty stricken Spain, which had received 'righteous retribution for the merciless atrocities which she perpetrated upon the feeble tribes of Mexico and Peru.'<sup>79</sup> As Nicholas C. Edsall argues, Cobden is usually viewed as a secular thinker, who rarely used moral justifications to support his liberal ideals.<sup>80</sup> Here, however, he played upon ideas of Providentialism, arguing that the nation

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<sup>76</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> *North Wales Chronicle*, p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Nicholas C. Edsall, *Richard Cobden: Independent Radical* (Cambridge MA: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 233.

would suffer Divine retribution for sinful acts.<sup>81</sup> By doing so, Cobden suggested that his vision for British foreign policy, which promoted international peace and arbitration, was more progressive and commercially beneficial than the doctrine of Palmerston. In his electoral address, then, the China question formed the basis of Cobden's appeal to the electorate, enabling the Radical to champion a new course for British foreign affairs that advocated peaceful diplomacy, freer commercial relations and non-intervention in the affairs of a sovereign state.

Beyond the campaign speeches of the two protagonists, a variety of other sources, including editorials, cartoons and news reports, demonstrate that the China question was the dominant theme of the election and that the key contest was between Cobdenite and Palmerstonian liberalism. In an editorial in the *Blackburn Standard* on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1857, the China question was used to criticise Cobden's liberalism, with particular focus on free trade. The article compared the careers of Cobden and the Governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Bowring, suggesting that both were liberal-minded men and yet, Bowring, rather than Cobden, was the true defender of free trade, a notion made evident by the China question. It argued that,

There is something exceedingly contemptible in this petty animosity to Sir John Bowring. If we except the single question of the Corn Laws – which, by the bye, had very little to do with the Free Trade question in its broader and more comprehensive sense – Cobden stands in a very subordinate position as compared with Bowring. The efforts of the latter were really directed to the development of a *reciprocal* system of Free Trade – to the extinction of hostile tariffs – not on one article of commerce, but on every commodity forming the staple of commercial exchange. Cobden was and is merely a man of one idea, and that idea has been worn perfectly threadbare. Bowring had and has a more liberal comprehension of the question of a real Free Trade. To this question Cobden is a *traitor*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Andrew Porter, “‘Commerce and Christianity’: The Rise and Fall of a Nineteenth Century Mission Slogan”, *The Historical Journal*, 28:3 (September, 1985), pp. 597-621.

<sup>82</sup> *Blackburn Standard*, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 3.

Here, the editorial, which alludes to Cobden and Bowring's shared history of involvement in the Anti-Corn Law League, offered its perception of free trade and a criticism of the liberal programme put forth by Cobden. As a result, it gave its support to Bowring and Palmerstonian liberalism. The purpose of the article, however, extended beyond a discussion of the virtues of these individual personalities but, instead, was an investigation into the liberal policies they represented. As shown in the *Standard*, during the election campaign, the China question facilitated a larger debate regarding the meaning of free trade.

To combat this negative perception of his liberal position, Richard Cobden used his own penny paper, the *Morning Star*, as his mouthpiece for the election. The *Star*, which was first printed in March 1855 following the repeal of the stamp duty, published frequently on the China question.<sup>83</sup> The articles in the *Star* show us that for Cobden, Britain's actions in China were considered the perfect example to illustrate his political values and gain public support. Directing the newspaper's content, Cobden wrote to its editor-in-chief Henry Richard stating,

We have lately seen how easily these things [China question] are fabricated for electioneering purposes. The question should be steadily asked – what do you propose to gain by the war? Does anybody suppose that Englishmen will be safe in the interior of China after the slaughtering and burning than before?<sup>84</sup>

Through the *Morning Star*, Cobden presented a different view of the bombardment of Canton and offered the public a different notion of liberal foreign policy. Like Palmerston, Cobden suggested that his viewpoint was in defence of British trade and the mercantile community which, he hoped would resonate with the nation's electors. The *Arrow* Incident, then, acted as an example for the various camps to express the differences within liberal foreign policy and, because of the election, these ideals were put before the British public.

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<sup>83</sup> Howe, 'Introduction', p. xxvi.

<sup>84</sup> BL ADM 43658, Cobden Papers, 'Cobden to Richard', f. 300 (Midhurst: 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1857).

Although Cobden's aim was to present an optimistic and positive alternative for British commerce and foreign policy, his assessment of the China question received heavy condemnation due to its negative portrayal of the British nation. Through his criticism of British actions in China, with claims that 'as a nation we have blood on our hands', Cobden, and his supporters, were branded unpatriotic.<sup>85</sup> To J.R. Vincent, Cobden's politics had a negative 'function' that was often hostile (or appeared to be) towards Britain, and as a result, it harmed the success of his message.<sup>86</sup> In comparison to Palmerston's rhetoric, which defended British actions, Cobden's position on the China question received numerous critiques. His supporters were tarred as 'anti-English', an insinuation expressed in the *Manchester Guardian*: 'The English are in ill favour with this anti-national party, who are ashamed to find *Civis Britannicus sum* in their passports.'<sup>87</sup> In addition to the *Guardian's* condemnation, the *Morning Post*, a traditionally Tory metropolitan newspaper which, after 1849, became a supporter of Palmerstonian foreign policy, was equally critical of Cobden's liberal programme.<sup>88</sup> As news of Cobden's defeat in Huddersfield surfaced, the *Post* argued,

Mr Cobden had of late years sunk into the character of a member whose longest speeches had no great weight in the House. He was willing to retrieve his reputation, and took up the case of Governor Yeh [Ye]. Nobody can doubt that Mr Cobden is a clever man, and he seems to have bestowed all his cleverness on an attack on the policy of the English nation in protecting itself from the insults of the province of Canton.<sup>89</sup>

To the *Post*, Cobden's stance on the China question forged its perception of the Radical as unpatriotic and his foreign policy as hazardous to Britain's international status. Cobden was considered to favour the interests of China rather than his countrymen. As a result, the newspaper championed the electors of Huddersfield for rejecting Cobden, stating 'that body

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<sup>85</sup> *Morning Star*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1857, p. 2

<sup>86</sup> J. R. Vincent, *The Formation of the British Liberal Party 1857-1868* (London: The Harvester Press, 1966), p. xvii.

<sup>87</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, p. 30.

<sup>89</sup> *Morning Post*, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1857, p. 4.

[the constituency of Huddersfield] proved their intelligence by refusing utterly to accept the advocate of the Chinese. Theirs was the English, not the Canton side.’<sup>90</sup> Thus, through their use of the China question, numerous publications rejected Cobden’s brand of liberalism and furthermore, demonstrated their stance on foreign policy and attitudes toward free trade.

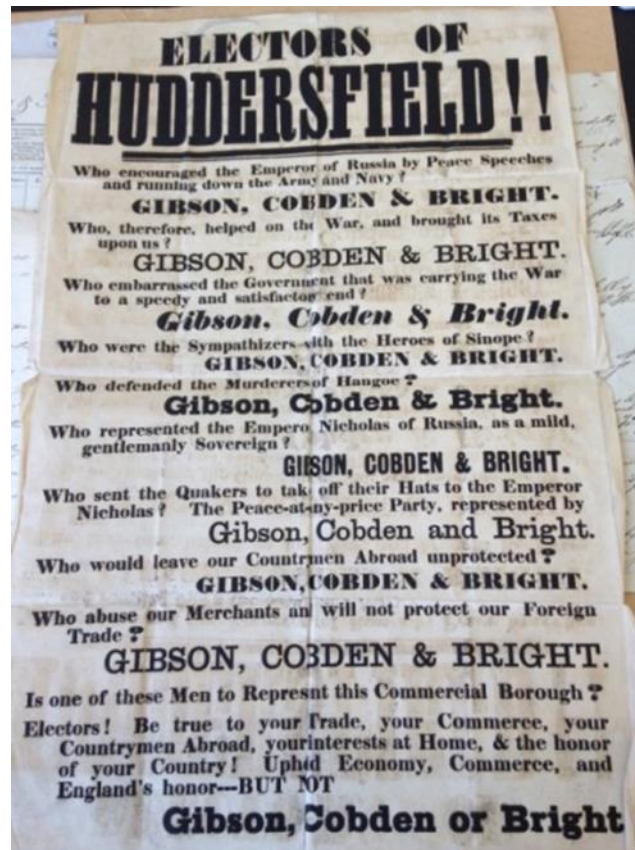
In Huddersfield, an election poster, Fig. 1, reveals the impact of foreign policy and the China question on the 1857 campaign. The poster denounces Cobdenite liberal attitudes and the personalities it considered to promote its values – Richard Cobden, and the two MPs for Manchester, John Bright and Thomas Milner Gibson. After its initial attack on their anti-Crimean stance, it insinuated that these Cobdenite liberals were kowtowing to Chinese and Russian demands and thus, were leaving ‘our countrymen abroad unprotected.’<sup>91</sup> The China question was perceived to be another example of an unpatriotic element in the Cobdenite notion of British foreign policy. Moreover, the poster used the China policy of the Cobdenite liberals to stress that they were unwilling to support British commerce and traders, claiming ‘Who abuse our Merchants and will not protect our Foreign Trade? Gibson, Cobden & Bright.’<sup>92</sup> The China question, then, enabled opponents of Cobdenite liberalism to criticise its convictions on two fronts; suggesting that, like their anti-Crimean stance, it was unpatriotic, but more importantly, it was harmful to British interests and detrimental to their nation’s commercial hopes.

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<sup>90</sup> *Morning Post*, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Manchester Central Library [MCL] M20, George Wilson Papers, Vol. 26, ‘Electors of Huddersfield!!’ (March, 1857).

<sup>92</sup> MCL M20, George Wilson Papers, Vol. 26, ‘Electors of Huddersfield!!’ (March, 1857).



(Fig.1) Campaign Poster 1857: “Electors of Huddersfield!!” The poster offers a list of all the reasons not to vote for the Richard Cobden who was standing in the Huddersfield constituency. Source: MCL M20, George Wilson Papers, Vol. 26, ‘Electors of Huddersfield!!’ (March, 1857).

In *Punch* magazine, publications from January to April 1857 were flooded with cartoons, poems and satirical prose regarding the China question. Like many newspaper reports, it concluded that the key national contest was between Cobden and Palmerston and their brands of liberalism. In his assessment of *Punch*, Henry Miller argues that this form of political commentary remains a ‘valuable source for scholars.’<sup>93</sup> There is, Miller asserts, an ‘unspoken and largely unexamined’ conclusion that the magazine was a ‘national institution’, reflecting the Victorian middle class.<sup>94</sup> Whilst Miller suggests that more attention should be devoted to *who* saw the cartoons, it is clear that it had an impressive readership. The 1840s saw a weekly sale of 40,000 copies with a readership five times greater and by 1865, its sales rose to 65,000

<sup>93</sup> Miller, *Politics Personified*, p. 185.

<sup>94</sup> Miller, *Politics Personified*, p. 185.



a week.<sup>95</sup> In its commentary on the China question, *Punch* imitated the derision aimed at Cobden by members of the press, joking that the Radical favoured Chinese over British interests. The magazine mockingly stated that Cobden believed that, 'The Chinese are the most humane of all the peoples in the world' and furthermore,

The earliest lesson inculcated on the mind of [Chinese] children is, exactly as in the Manchester School, the necessity of strict veracity; and the truthfulness of the Chinese can perhaps only be matched by that of their parliamentary advocates.<sup>96</sup>

These fabricated teachings of the 'Manchester School' – a term coined by Benjamin Disraeli to describe Cobden's ideological followers – were obviously farfetched.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, *Punch* reflected a real concern facing Cobdenite liberals. Similar to the widespread reception to his position on Crimea, Cobden was viewed as unpatriotic for criticising British intervention.<sup>98</sup> More damaging however, was that the Cobdenite viewpoint on the China question convinced many that this notion of liberalism was harmful to British interests and, in turn, favoured the objectives of foreign nations.

Like Cobden, the character of Palmerston was a regular feature in *Punch* and his position on the China question was used to frame their portrayal of the Prime Minister. Two striking images in particular demonstrate that as a result of events in China, *Punch* viewed the election as a debate regarding foreign policy and patriotism. Fig.2, an image published on the 9<sup>th</sup> May 1857, shows Palmerston whipping a Chinese man as Mr Punch observes the scene. The image is captioned: 'A Lesson to John Chinaman'. As expressed in his examination of *Punch* and Palmerston, Henry Miller argues that the cartoons often presented Palmerston

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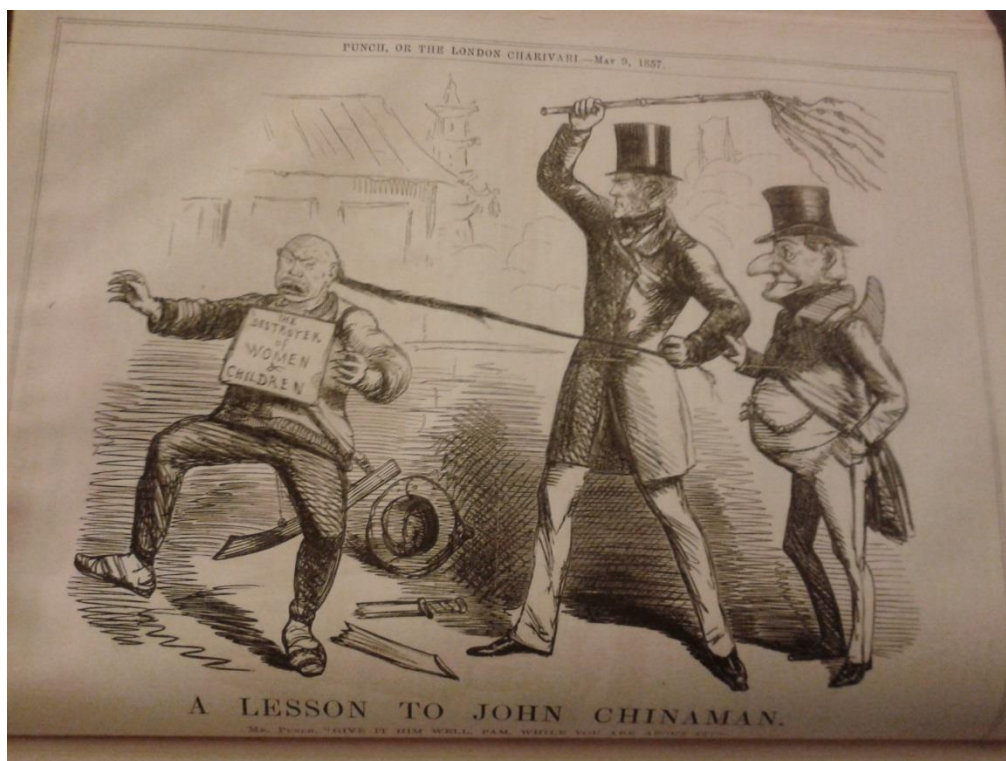
<sup>95</sup> Miller, *Politics Personified*, p. 185.

<sup>96</sup> BL LD 34 A, 'Cobdenisms on China', *Punch Magazine*, Vol. 32 (14<sup>th</sup> March 1857), p. 103.

<sup>97</sup> T. S. Ashton, 'The Origin of the Manchester School', *The Manchester School*, 1:2 (December, 1930), p. 22.

<sup>98</sup> Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, p. 192; Ian Bradley, *The Optimists: Themes and Personalities in Victorian Liberalism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 58-60.

with manly characteristics, particularly in comparison to his political opponents.<sup>99</sup> To Parry, the creation of Palmerston's masculine persona was tied to perceptions of his patriotism and foreign policy.<sup>100</sup> Fig. 2 reflects this perception of the Prime Minister, as he is depicted as the dominant figure, holding the man's queue and teaching him a 'lesson'. In comparison, the Chinese man has a board around his neck with the words 'The Destroyer of Women and Children.' This contrast attempts to legitimise Palmerston's foreign policy, as the Chinese man is depicted as abusive and uncivilised. In a sense, *Punch* suggests that Palmerston's decision to support British aggression is considered a moral necessity to protect China from its own people. *Punch*, like numerous political commentators, used the China question to represent wider Palmerstonian foreign policy and furthermore, indicate why gunboat diplomacy could be deemed appropriate.



(Fig. 2) 'A Lesson to John Chinaman.' Source: BL LD 34 A, 'A Lesson to John Chinaman', *Punch Magazine*, Vol. 32 (9<sup>th</sup> May, 1857), p. 185.

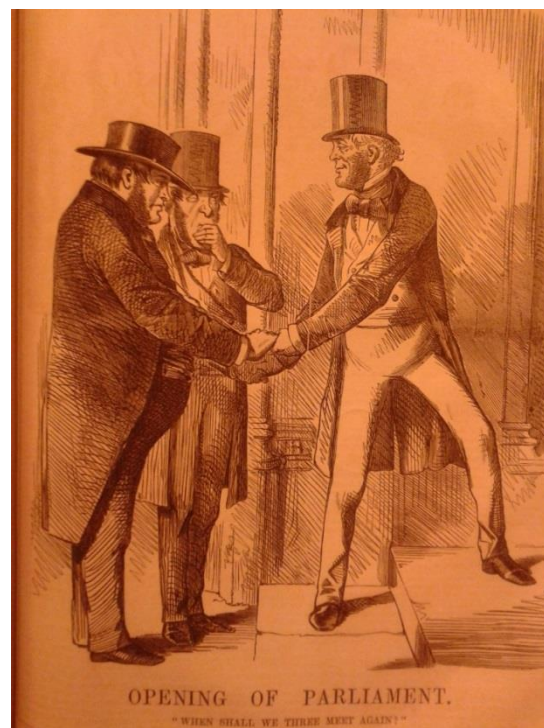
<sup>99</sup> Miller, *Politics Personified*, p. 180.

<sup>100</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 203-4; Miller, *Politics Personified*, p. 180.

Similarly, on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 1857, and as election results favourable to Palmerston started to come in, *Punch* printed a cartoon (Fig. 3) entitled ‘Pam – Winner of the Great National Steeple-Chase.’ The image demonstrates the dominance of the China question on the election campaign, showing how Palmerston’s convictions on this issue were paramount to his success. The picture depicts the Prime Minister riding a horse, victorious in a steeple-chase, wearing a Union Jack jersey. His political opponents Richard Cobden, Lord Derby and Benjamin Disraeli however, are unable to control their horses and are dressed in Chinese robes. Their allegiance to Britain over China is brought into question through this imagery. This poignant cartoon suggests that the election of 1857 was indeed the ‘China Election’. The primary battle amongst senior politicians was fought over Britain’s use of military methods in China. Furthermore, in a similar summary of the election results, Fig. 4 shows Palmerston saying farewell to Cobden and Bright at the opening of the new Parliament, with the Prime Minister asking ‘When shall we three meet again?.’ These images suggest, therefore, that in the election of 1857, the China question captured the nation’s attention and furthermore, that the divisions between Palmerstonian and Cobdenite notions of liberalism were at the heart of the debate.



(Fig. 3) 'Pam – Winner of the Great National Steeple-Chase'. Source: BL LD 34 A, 'Pam – Winner of the Great National Steeple-Chase', *Punch Magazine*, Vol. 32 (28<sup>th</sup> March, 1857), p. 125.



(Fig. 4) 'Opening of Parliament'. Source: BL LD 34 A, 'Opening of Parliament', *Punch Magazine*, Vol. 32 (2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1857), p. 175.

With the China question dominating the national debate, the election was fought between two brands of liberalism: one headed by Palmerston, the other by Cobden, it was their alternate views regarding British aggression in China that exacerbated their differences regarding free trade and foreign policy. Throughout the campaign, both candidates and their supporters used the China question to display their liberal convictions. Historical assessments of the impact of the China question on the election, have, as this section has shown, acknowledged its use as an international concern to stir the patriotic passions of the public. This method has been particularly attributed to the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston. However, the influence of the China question was far broader. It shaped the rhetoric of the debate, ensuring foreign policy and free trade ideals were issues of discussion, and became the key example through which both politicians championed their political convictions. In many ways, the debate was bigger than the two politicians but, was an inquest into their two brands of liberalism. It was the China question that instigated this discussion and constructed public opinion regarding these two liberal ideals.

## **The Liberal Realignment in Manchester**

The emphasis on the China question during the 1857 General Election prompted a political realignment within the city of Manchester in favour of Palmerstonian liberalism. This is of particular significance as, prior to the election, Manchester was considered a bastion of Cobdenite values.<sup>101</sup> So much so, that in 1848, Benjamin Disraeli described Cobden's followers as the 'Manchester School'.<sup>102</sup> As Asa Briggs argues, Victorian Manchester was

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<sup>101</sup> Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp. 5-36; Donald Read, *Cobden and Bright: A Victorian Political Partnership* (London: Arnold, 1967), pp. 6-10; Oliver Macdonagh, 'The Anti-Imperialism of Free Trade', *The Economic History Review*, 14:3 (1962), p. 490; P. F. Clarke, *Lancashire and the New Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 28.

<sup>102</sup> Read, *Cobden and Bright*, p. 103.

widely perceived as a symbol of modern society.<sup>103</sup> With its large merchant and manufacturing community, throughout the 1840s, it became the centre of liberal and often radical politics – leading the campaigns for the extension of the franchise, free trade and anti-slavery among others.<sup>104</sup> However, in the 1857 election, the two Cobdenite MPs, John Bright and Thomas Milner Gibson, lost their seats to Sir John Potter and James Aspinall Turner, both of whom stood as ‘Liberals’ but championed Palmerstonian foreign policy.<sup>105</sup> To Anthony Howe, this decision represented a significant turning point in liberal thinking and the success of Cobdenite values.<sup>106</sup> Although Manchester’s support for the Cobdenite liberals was wavering prior to 1857, as demonstrated in the scathing editorials against John Bright in the *Manchester Guardian*, it was the China question that confirmed to the constituents that the Cobdenite MPs no longer represented their notion of liberalism.<sup>107</sup> It convinced a large proportion of Manchester’s liberal-minded electors that in regard to free trade and foreign policy, they were at odds with the Cobdenite programme. The focus on the China question during the election thus facilitated the break between Manchester and Cobdenism.

Through an examination of the election campaign in Manchester, this section demonstrates the impact of the Anglo-Chinese relationship on the city’s political upheaval in 1857. It shows how the China question informed public opinion, resulting in the city’s shift in liberal allegiance. Historians have offered a variety of conclusions to explain Manchester’s dismissal of their Cobdenite representatives and yet, the impact of the China question has been

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<sup>103</sup> Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams Press Ltd., 1963), p. 93.

<sup>104</sup> Arthur Redford, *Manchester Merchants and Foreign Trade 1850-1939*, Vol. II (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), p. 7; Peter Harnetty, *Imperialism and Free Trade: Lancashire and India in the Nineteenth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), pp. 2-10; Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, pp. 5-36. An example of Manchester’s connection to the anti-slavery movement includes: John Rylands Library, REAS/5 Raymond English Anti-Slavery Collection, George Thompson’s lectures, debates, pamphlets and related correspondence (1834-1866).

<sup>105</sup> Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 131.

<sup>106</sup> Howe, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxiii.

<sup>107</sup> McCord, ‘Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857’, p. 100.

overlooked. To Norman McCord, Miles Taylor and Anthony Howe, the previous electoral dominance of the Cobdenite candidates was essential to the 1857 result. It created resentment amongst Manchester's constituents who refused to accept that their city was merely a stronghold of the Anti-Corn Law League, with no independence of thought.<sup>108</sup> In addition, Howe and McCord have accredited the Cobdenite stance on the Crimean War as decisive in their electoral loss.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, to Asa Briggs, Derek Fraser and David Brown, the 1857 election is considered concrete proof to conclude that Cobdenism and the League never really spoke for the political values of the city.<sup>110</sup> Whilst the election results were a consequence of a number of local and national concerns, the influence of the China question should not be underestimated. It confirmed to Manchester's electors that the Cobdenite vision of free trade was incongruous with their commercial interests and thus, their liberal convictions. By turning out the Cobdenite MPs, they were not only severing ties with Bright and Gibson, but concluded that Palmerston and Palmerstonian methods were better placed to further free trade and their interests, than Cobden's unilateral vision of peace.

Similar to its national impact, the China question dominated Manchester's campaign and was manipulated by both sides of the liberal debate in support of their cause. In his election appeal, the Cobdenite MP, Thomas Milner Gibson, focused on British actions in China. A report in the *Manchester Guardian* on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 1857 recounted Gibson's words:

It was his opinion that the doctrine of opening up China was one that, upon consideration, did not present itself to one's mind as likely to give any very great benefit to this country. He was as much an advocate as any man in England for extending our commercial relations with China. He should like to see the Chinese

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<sup>108</sup> McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', pp. 100-102; Taylor, *The Decline of British Radicalism*, p. 276; Howe, 'Introduction', p. xxxiii.

<sup>109</sup> McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', p. 110; Anthony Howe, 'Two faces of British Power: Cobden vs. Palmerston', in David Brown and Miles Taylor eds., *Palmerston Studies II* (Southampton: Hartley Institute, 2007), p. 178.

<sup>110</sup> Brown, *Palmerston and the Politics of Foreign Policy*, pp. 30-44; Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, pp. 127-129; Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England*, p. 203.

government in frequent and amicable communication with our own. He should like to see the prejudices of the Chinese overcome, and Englishmen permitted to go where they please in China. All these things would give him very much pleasure to see accomplished; but he very much doubted whether these desirable objects were to be attained by such acts as the bombardment of Canton. (Hear).<sup>111</sup>

In his campaign address, Gibson demonstrated the importance of the China question as an issue facing Manchester's electors and the mercantile interests of the city more generally. If British policy in China remained on an interventionist and aggressive course, the Cobdenite MP was assured that it would 'leave behind them permanent feelings of hatred and hostility.'<sup>112</sup> However, Gibson indicated that the issue at hand was greater than Britain's East Asian policy. It was an investigation into British international relations and the best diplomatic means of securing beneficial commercial relations. Thus, the China question instigated a larger discussion in Manchester regarding the future of British foreign policy and the nation's trading networks.

Addressing Manchester's Free Trade Hall a week later, Gibson reiterated this point, championing Cobden's brand of liberalism and its conviction that military intervention into any sovereign state would harm, rather than support British trade. Gibson argued that in defence of citizens or the nation's independence, 'he would be the first to call to arms,' – a statement that was met with both laughter and applause from the crowd of voters and non-voters.<sup>113</sup> However, the Cobdenite MP claimed that in China, military intervention was simply unjust and undeserved of the British nation, stating,

England was great and powerful enough not to be afraid to avow that she would be guided by justice in all her relations with foreign states. (Hear, hear.) Had we

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<sup>111</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 3.

<sup>112</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 3.



anything to gain the way of glory by slaughtering the defenceless inhabitants of a large and populous commercial city?<sup>114</sup>

In addition, Gibson argued that whilst he ‘had no personal claims whatever upon the electors’, his service for the city meant he ‘identified with the interests of Manchester’ and that therefore, ‘he was here to stand or fall by his public conduct.’<sup>115</sup> To Gibson, there was a belief that his position on the China question would resonate with Manchester’s voters. His use of the China question in his address to the city’s electors was a consequence of his estimation that it best demonstrated his liberal position on foreign policy and commercial relations – convictions that he assumed were harmonious with the people of Manchester.

Manchester’s Cobdenite MPs, John Bright and Thomas Milner Gibson, used the China question to shed light on other political concerns connected with the Radical agenda. In his electoral address, Gibson portrayed British aggression in China as the nation’s return to eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century notions of aristocratic diplomacy, where international affairs were conducted in secret and conflicts were justified to ensure the maintenance of a large military and navy – institutions that the Radical tradition considered to be at the heart of aristocratic power.<sup>116</sup> To Jonathan Parry, after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, free trade’s most ardent advocates – many of whom were linked to the Cobdenite vision of liberalism – remained suspicious of aristocratic involvement in diplomacy.<sup>117</sup> In this case, Gibson berated the ‘secrecy’ of Bowring’s actions and questioned the Government’s unwavering support for the Governor of Hong Kong, claiming that in regard to ‘quarrels in various parts of the world’,

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<sup>114</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 3.

<sup>116</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 3. For perceptions on aristocratic power, particularly in Radical thinking, see: Harley, ‘Trade: Discovery, Mercantilism and Technology’, in Floud and Johnson eds., *The Cambridge History of Modern Britain*, p. 186; Cain, ‘Capitalism, War and Intervention in the Thought of Richard Cobden’, pp. 229-235; Richard Francis Spall Jr., ‘Free Trade, Foreign Relations and the Anti-Corn Law League’, *The International History Review*, 10:3 (August, 1988), p. 406.

<sup>117</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 15.

The great interest there was in having an excuse for maintaining enormous establishments, military and naval; and also the excuse that it gave for upholding and maintaining a heavy system of taxation at home.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, the China question held a unique function during the campaign. It became the lens through which numerous other concerns were viewed, including the position of the aristocracy. This also enabled Gibson to resurrect a Cobdenite theme regarding taxation from the 1840s.<sup>119</sup> It expanded beyond the discussion regarding Anglo-Chinese relations and infiltrated a range of political issues that were prominent in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

In his campaign address on the 11<sup>th</sup> March, Gibson contended that the China question posed a threat to liberal constitutionalism. In the 1850s, Britain's constitutional parliamentary structure was championed as a national ideology, particularly by the country's Liberal, Radical and Peelite politicians, including Palmerston and Cobden.<sup>120</sup> Above all, Palmerston used liberal constitutionalism to construct a patriotic image of his leadership in contrast to the despotic regime and leaders of continental Europe.<sup>121</sup> Anthony Taylor argues that Britain's 'Russophobia', and Palmerston's patriotic language tied to his support for liberal constitutionalism, assisted in his 1857 electoral victory.<sup>122</sup> However, through his use of the China question, Gibson attempted to bring Palmerston's advocacy of this principle into question. Defending Parliament's right to criticise the Government's China policy, which was under scrutiny for the political diversity of Palmerston's opposition, Gibson compared the Prime Minister to the despots of Europe. Gibson argued that if Palmerston gained public

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<sup>118</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 57; Andrew Thompson, 'Empire and the British State', in Sarah Stockwell ed., *The British Empire: Themes and Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 43.

<sup>120</sup> Hawkins, 'Parliamentary Government' and Victorian Political Parties', p. 647; J.P. Parry, 'Palmerston and Russell' in David Brown and Miles Taylor eds., *Palmerston Studies I* (Southampton: Hartley Institute, 2007), p. 147.

<sup>121</sup> Parry, 'Palmerston and Russell', p. 151; Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 187.

<sup>122</sup> Taylor, 'Palmerston and Radicalism', p. 172.

support, the electors would ‘constitute Lord Palmerston the despotic ruler of this country.’<sup>123</sup>

To the Cobdenite liberal, the criticism he received from Palmerston’s supporters, as a result of his vote in favour of Cobden’s motion, represented a challenge to the principles of liberal constitutionalism and the function of Parliament:

If he is not to be checked by Parliament, - if the moment Parliament does check him, he dissolves, and, instead of sending up men who are independent, to assert their and your rights, you send up mere creatures of his will, what is that but investing him with the power of a despot?<sup>124</sup>

Although a dramatic reading of Britain’s future, it is clear to see the impact of the China question on the rhetoric of the election and on liberal debate more specifically. Gibson used the Government’s China policy to pose serious questions and asked the electors to consider the larger ramifications of Britain’s China policy. To Gibson, public support of Palmerston on the China question could create a precedent that would harm the fabric of liberal Britain.

Similar to his colleague Gibson, John Bright addressed Manchester’s constituents on the China question and the larger ramifications of Britain’s violent actions. He hoped to appeal to the public’s patriotic sentiments in favour of non-intervention. Although unable to attend Manchester’s hustings due to illness, John Bright penned a letter that was read to the crowd by the former Chairman of the Anti-Corn Law League, George Wilson, stating,

If we permit a Minister to declare war without the knowledge and consent of Parliament, we at once reduce ourselves, in our foreign policy, to the condition of those nations of the continent of people which have no Parliament, and which do not pretend to possess a free constitution.<sup>125</sup>

Although declaring war and peace were constitutionally part of the Royal Prerogative, here, the Cobdenite MP demonstrated the applicability of the China question as an issue that could

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<sup>123</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> MCL M20, George Wilson Papers, Vol. 26, ‘Bright to the Electors’ (Florence: 31<sup>st</sup> March 1857).

be manipulated for electoral purposes by all sides of the liberal spectrum. Similar to Palmerston's patriotic tactics, Bright indicated how the *Arrow* Incident affected the international status of the nation and furthermore, reflected the actions of despotic Europe. It was used to pull at the patriotic heartstrings of the electors and to indicate how his conception of liberal foreign policy was in defence of British interests across the globe.

The China question also inspired the campaigns of the opponents of the Cobdenite liberals. To these Manchester men, Bright and Gibson's focus on British relations in China was at the expense of local concerns facing the constituents. In a speech in support of Sir John Potter and James Aspinall Turner by Jeremiah Garnett, the editor of *The Manchester Guardian*, Garnett argued,

Those gentlemen [Bright and Gibson] were continually attending to matters other than the local affairs of the city...We had, and must have, bills before parliament every session; and the amount of parliamentary support we required was considerable. Where had we got that support? Not from our own representatives; but from the late worthy and deeply-lamented member for Salford [Joseph Brotherton].<sup>126</sup>

Thus, Manchester's Canton debate shed light on a range of concerns outside the realms of Britain's China policy. It demonstrated to the opponents of the incumbent MPs that their Cobdenite representatives were inattentive to local issues and instead, were fighting battles that did not resonate with the constituency. In his examination of the importance of the locality in mid-nineteenth-century elections, James Vernon argues that notions of party and Westminster allegiances 'played a limited role' in electoral politics. In order to become electable, one had to court the principles of the area. Although national issues were also important, to Vernon, having local appeal and credentials could often transcend other concerns.<sup>127</sup> As Garnett's speech demonstrates, local matters were central to his

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<sup>126</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 5.

<sup>127</sup> Vernon, *Politics and the People*, p. 163.

condemnation of Bright and Gibson. However, there are limits to Vernon's conclusion. In Manchester, the line between national and local issues was blurred. For Garrett, the China question demonstrated Bright and Gibson's lack of interest in local affairs – a conviction that contributed to his support for their opponents.

Prior to the 1857 election, concerns regarding Manchester's political representation were growing. After the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, Newall's Building, the political machine left by the League and run by George Wilson, began to dominate the city's politics. There was, by 1857, a heightened sense of resentment that Wilson, the former Chairman of the League, was hand-picking the city's representatives through the backing of the Newall's Building electoral agency.<sup>128</sup> An editorial in *The Manchester Guardian* reflected this apprehension:

It is commonly believed, then, and said, that there is less independence of thought in Manchester than in any part of the country. Political individuality is supposed to be dying out under a system which we have inaugurated.<sup>129</sup>

The opposition to Wilson's political 'monopoly' was, Anthony Howe argues, instrumental in the defeat of the Cobdenite liberals who were associated with the League.<sup>130</sup> This perception gained credibility in light of Sir John Potter's electoral declaration that his candidacy had a clear aim: 'to rescue the city from the thralldom of the Anti-corn law League.'<sup>131</sup> To Potter, the election was a chance to restore the independence of Manchester and remove the city from the vice-like grip of the Cobdenite liberals.

Historians have however, overlooked the impact of the China question in exacerbating this concern regarding political representation and presenting the opponents of the Cobdenite

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<sup>128</sup> McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', p. 101

<sup>129</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> Howe, 'Introduction', p. xxxiii.

<sup>131</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 5.

faction as an example through which to demonstrate their fears. An editorial in *The Manchester Guardian* provides evidence of this fact:

When questions arise involving the honour, influence, and substantial interests of England and its foreign relations, Sir John Potter and Mr Turner will not be found, with a set of wild and impracticable theories, opposing themselves to a sense of the people, the wisdom of every statesman, and the traditions of a long and illustrious national career.<sup>132</sup>

The article, written on the 28<sup>th</sup> March, continued by stating that the electors understood the ‘benefit’ of ‘transferring the care of their local interests in Parliament from gentlemen who have notoriously neglected them, to representatives actively connected with the trade of the city, and whose whole interests are bound up with its prosperity.’<sup>133</sup> Here, then, the multi-faceted use of the China question during the election campaign is clear. It fuelled discussions outside the parameters of Britain’s China policy, shaping the electoral rhetoric of Manchester and public opinion towards the local representatives.

Local representation was a focal point of the campaigns of Sir John Potter and James Aspinall Turner. To stress their local allegiances, both candidates used the China question as a point of reference to support their case. In his campaign speech at Manchester’s Corn Exchange, reported in *The Manchester Guardian* on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1857, Turner claimed that ‘the members [Bright and Gibson] do not in all respects represent the inhabitants of Manchester.’<sup>134</sup> This claim derived from Turner’s conclusion a week earlier where, in a speech concerning Cobden’s successful motion, the candidate argued that ‘that decision was not in accordance with the opinions of the majority of the electors of Manchester.’<sup>135</sup> As a result, Turner claimed that whilst he and Sir John Potter,

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<sup>132</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857, p. 3.

<sup>135</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 5.

May be two very undistinguished individuals – (“No, no”) – as compared with Mr Bright and Mr Gibson – (“No, no”) I suppose, however, that you will at all events believe that we know as much of the commerce, and the affairs – (applause), - and the interests of Manchester.<sup>136</sup>

As demonstrated here, the China question became an electoral focus not only by the Cobdenite MPs, but their liberal opponents. It surpassed its influence as an issue on Britain’s China policy and was used by Turner to champion his liberal politics and dismiss the Cobdenite MPs.

The emphasis on the China question in Manchester’s campaign enabled the opponents of the Cobdenite MPs to differentiate their liberal policies regarding foreign policy and free trade. It was used as an example to dispel the myth that the city held a coherent belief system based on Cobdenite values. This notion is demonstrated by William Nield, the Chair for Potter and Turner’s campaign meeting, who argued,

It had been said that certain opinions that had been uttered in the House of Commons by our representatives were the opinions of Manchester – that they came from the “Manchester School”. But....they had been misrepresented.<sup>137</sup>

The rejection of the viewpoint of the Cobdenite liberals on the China question signified the diversity in Manchester’s liberalism. So much so, that in the election’s aftermath, John Bright recognised the ‘upheaval of the School.’<sup>138</sup> In *The Manchester Guardian*, an editorial presented the local election as a battle between two contrasting liberal ideals, particularly in regard to foreign policy. For *The Guardian*, it was the China question that provided the primary example on which the electors should refer when consolidating their personal ideas on British foreign affairs:

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<sup>136</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857, p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857, p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> BL ADM 43384, Bright Papers, ‘Bright to Cobden’, f. 94 (Venice: 16<sup>th</sup> April, 1857).

It has to be decided by our votes today whether Manchester is to be cleansed from the stain of participation in delusive and degrading doctrines which, promulgated in her name, lower the character, and imperil the interests, of the country.<sup>139</sup>

This viewpoint indicates the importance political commentators placed on the China question. It represented grander notions regarding international affairs that were integral to the election. Moreover, it was used by the Cobdenite opposition to garner support and shape public opinion in favour of their brand of liberalism.

Similar to the press, this form of electioneering and manipulation of the China question did not escape Manchester's candidates. James Aspinall Turner provided his perception of British actions in China to display his position on foreign policy in an attempt to shape public opinion and defy the notion that Manchester adhered to Cobdenite liberal values. In his address to the city's constituents, Turner argued in favour of Palmerston's decision to support Governor Bowring, who, he claimed, 'believed that there was no other way of dealing with the Chinese.'<sup>140</sup> The China question granted Turner the opportunity to champion his notion of foreign policy, resulting in his assessment that 'whenever the Government were endeavouring to uphold the dignity and the honour of this country,' they would have his support.<sup>141</sup> To conclude his address, Turner contended that Cobden's successful motion 'was not in accordance with the opinions of the majority of the electors of Manchester,' and as a result, he expected the support of the voters.<sup>142</sup> In Turner's address, then, Anglo-Chinese relations were used to display his political convictions regarding Britain's international affairs, in addition to distancing himself from the values of the Cobdenite liberals.

The election's emphasis on the China question facilitated the *Manchester Guardian's*

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<sup>139</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 4.

<sup>140</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1857, p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 5.

<sup>142</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 5.



discussion regarding British notions of international law and civilisation. An editorial on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1857 criticised the ‘Anti-Corn Law League clique’ and their ‘preposterous doctrine on points of constitutional right and international law.’<sup>143</sup> Instead, it suggested that the behaviour of the Chinese towards British citizens and their mercantile interests demonstrated the limits of international law. To *The Guardian*, the ‘disposition’ of the Chinese – which it argued was ‘totally devoid of sympathy of feeling or community of principle with our section of the human race’ – meant that international law as conducted by ‘civilised’ states did not apply in China.<sup>144</sup> Anglo-Chinese relations led the newspaper to offer its opinion on the limits of international law and conclude that diplomacy between ‘people educated under European influences, partaking of the same civilisation, and amenable, in a great degree, to the same public opinion as ourselves’ differed from that of nations like China.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, in light of Bright and Gibson’s election defeat, it argued that ‘it would have been utterly in vain for the late members to have claimed the confidence of this constituency on the ground of the “peace-at-any-price” policy.’<sup>146</sup> As demonstrated in *The Guardian*, the China question fuelled a discussion regarding British notions of intervention, international law and notions of civilisation. It provided the opportunity to advocate an alternative foreign policy and criticise the ideals of the Cobdenite liberals who represented their city.

Throughout the campaign, the China question shaped public opinion regarding the meaning of free trade and its connection to foreign policy. With the General Election acting as a platform for public debate, Manchester’s electors focused their attention on British actions in China. It was used to clarify their liberal convictions and demonstrate their ideological break

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<sup>143</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

<sup>145</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1857, p. 2.

from the Cobdenite values which, after 1846, they were deemed to support. A Manchester businessman, James Dorrington, who was a supporter of Potter and Turner, spoke at their electoral rally to express this division in Manchester's liberal values and his backing for Palmerston's China policy:

When we passed free trade, we considered it as a settled future policy never to be reversed. Were we to bind ourselves for ever to men who, great as their services on that question, had ever since its settlement taken a course totally opposed to the feelings and interests of this great community?<sup>147</sup>

Whilst it would be unconvincing to place a date on this ideological split in Manchester's notion of free trade, the 1857 election resulted in a conscious campaign from the majority of the liberal-minded electors to distance themselves from Cobdenite values. To Turner, the China question assisted in his conclusion that a support for free trade did not mean an adherence to Cobdenite liberal thought. He argued that whilst he admired the work of John Bright and his associates for campaigning to repeal the Corn Laws,

That object was accomplished; and he thought that Mr Cobden and Mr Bright, as well as many other leaders of the Anti-corn Law League, might have retired upon their honours, and not have intruded themselves into every question of policy that had been brought forward.<sup>148</sup>

What the China question demonstrated, therefore, was the diversity of Manchester's free trade convictions and moreover, that for many of the city's liberal-minded community, their commercial ideals contrasted to the Cobdenite notion of free trade.

Manchester's emphasis on the China question, which prompted the election's results and liberal realignment, exposed to the Cobdenite liberals that their political ideals had lost popular support. In a post-mortem of the Manchester result, Cobden confided in Henry Richard, stating his shock in the alteration of the city's political allegiance. Cobden claimed

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<sup>147</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 5

<sup>148</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, p. 5

that as the electors knew that Bright was a Quaker, and thus a supporter of arbitration, they should not have voted for him in the first place.<sup>149</sup> In a second letter to Richard, Cobden aimed his criticism at Manchester's urban elite, arguing that 'this is the way of the world, - the Manchester people kick down the ladder by which they rose to affluence and gentility.'<sup>150</sup> The election's results, which were assisted by the China question, demonstrated to Cobden the political development of Manchester's middle class. In his correspondence with Cobden, the cotton manufacturer, Henry Ashworth, offered his analysis of the reason for Bright and Gibson's defeat, claiming that the manufacturing community wanted to 'pummel John Chinaman' in order to support the growth of their businesses.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the election results and indeed, the debate regarding the China question, offered definitive proof of the division in Manchester's liberal values. For many of Manchester's citizens, it was an example that indicated their loss of confidence in Cobden's free trade convictions. This conclusion ultimately severed links between Manchester and Cobdenism.

## Conclusion

In the 1857 General Election, the China question performed numerous functions. It assisted in the development of liberal ideas, instigated debates regarding the meaning of free trade and shaped numerous constituency campaigns across the country. It was, in many ways, 'the China Election'. As this chapter shows, historical accounts of this election have downplayed the role of Anglo-Chinese relations on the rhetoric of the campaign and its outcome.

Although numerous studies have acknowledged the Canton debate as an instigator of the election, its impact on the election's results, in addition to forging the issues of debate, has

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<sup>149</sup> BL ADM 43658, Cobden Papers, 'Cobden to Richard', f. 291 (Midhurst: 26<sup>th</sup> March 1857).

<sup>150</sup> BL ADM 43658, Cobden Papers, 'Cobden to Richard', f. 324 (Midhurst: 5<sup>th</sup> May 1857).

<sup>151</sup> BL ADM 43653, Cobden Papers, 'Ashworth to Cobden', f. 269 (New Orleans: 7<sup>th</sup> April 1857).

been overlooked. This chapter has corrected this oversight, showing how the *Arrow* Incident's aftermath shook British politics in March and April 1857 and fuelled domestic debate.

The key contest in the 1857 election was between Palmerstonian and Cobdenite notions of liberalism, particularly in regard to free trade and foreign policy. What this chapter has shown, is that the China question ensured that this was the primary electoral battle, as it fuelled a national debate regarding the meaning of free trade and its connection to British foreign policy. Both Palmerston and Cobden used the China question to champion their ideals which, over the course of the election, was a tactic employed by numerous politicians across the nation. Similar to other international events, most notably the Crimean War, the China question was used by both Palmerston and Cobden to stir the patriotic sentiments of the British public. However, its use during the election extended beyond this function. It provided a crucial example through which both politicians championed their liberal ideas, in the hope of gaining public support for their message.

In Manchester, the China question shed light on the political divisions within the city. Prior to the election, Manchester's reputation was as a beacon of Cobdenite liberalism. The election's results, which turned out the two Cobdenite MPs, John Bright and Thomas Milner Gibson, represented the end of the union in the city's liberal agenda. However, the importance of the China question in confirming this split, and convincing Manchester's public that they no longer shared the same free trade values as their political representatives, has been overlooked. Through an examination of the public speeches and editorials, this chapter has revealed the impact of the China question on Manchester's campaign in 1857. Moreover, it has demonstrated how the opponents of the Cobdenite liberals, used this issue to confirm and

validate their political break from their incumbent MPs. Bowring's decision to bombard the port of Canton, then, was a key moment not only in the story of Anglo-Chinese relations, but in the development of mid-nineteenth-century British liberal ideas. In the 1857 China election, it shaped discourse and influenced the political convictions of Liberal MPs and candidates, in addition to liberal-minded political commentators, electors and non-voters.

The legacy of the China Election should not be underestimated. Its ramifications were felt in both Britain and China. For the Cobdenite liberals, it signalled the loss of popular support for their ideals and severed their ties with the city of Manchester. After a brief interlude in the political wilderness, as Anthony Howe argues, Cobden and his Manchester School compatriots were 'somewhat resurrected', taking positions in Palmerston's Liberal Government.<sup>152</sup> Although Cobden turned down the Presidency of the Board of Trade in 1859 (a position taken by Thomas Milner Gibson), as Norman McCord asserts, he provided great assistance to Palmerston in securing an Anglo-French treaty in 1860, known as the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty.<sup>153</sup> Therefore, whilst Palmerston would lose power to Lord Derby in 1858 after a division over the India Bill (he regained power in 1859), until his death in 1865, the same year as Cobden, he dominated Liberal politics.<sup>154</sup> In regard to Britain's relationship with China, the General Election in 1857 and moreover, the development of attitudes towards the Qing Empire after 1842, provided validation for the second Anglo-Chinese war (1856-1860). The results of which included the sacking of Beijing's Summer Palace by British and French troops in 1860 and in addition, the imperialist expansion in China for the next fifty years. Without Palmerston's electoral victory, justifying the use of intervention to secure trade, it is possible that the Anglo-Chinese relationship could have taken a different course.

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<sup>152</sup> Howe, 'Introduction', p. xlv.

<sup>153</sup> McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', p. 111.

<sup>154</sup> Steele, *Palmerston and Liberalism*, pp. 215-243; David Brown, *Palmerston: A Biography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), pp. 430-480.

## Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated the impact of Anglo-Chinese relations on the development of British liberalism in the mid-nineteenth century. For a number of politicians, diplomats, political commentators and members of the general public who advocated liberal values, Britain's interactions with China forced the development of their political convictions. It fuelled an open debate regarding the meaning and scope of free trade, international law, diplomacy and non-intervention, and clarified British conceptions of these ideals. The mid-nineteenth century represented a period of development for all of these principles. In particular, the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 – an instance that signified the advent of free trade legislation in Britain – marked a change not only in the nation's economic programme, but in addition, its foreign policy. However, it was unclear what the introduction of free trade policies meant for Britain's international affairs. There was a lack of clarification as to whether the adoption of this form of political economy should represent a wholehearted advocacy of non-intervention, as championed by Richard Cobden, or, whether Britain could pursue an active and interventionist foreign policy. Although the liberal movement remained divided over this point, by the late 1850s, there was growing public support for Palmerstonian foreign policy, as Cobden, Bright and followers were forced into the political wilderness.<sup>1</sup> Between 1842 and 1857, Anglo-Chinese relations brought these two brands of liberal thought into question and asked the liberal movement to confirm their free trade and foreign policy convictions. Thus, this thesis sheds new light on the influence of British interactions with China in the mid-nineteenth century. It shaped Britain's political debate and forged liberal attitudes.

Britain's military bombardment of Canton in late 1856 provided the framework for this study.

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<sup>1</sup> Norman McCord, 'Cobden and Bright in Politics, 1846-1857', in Robert Robson ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1967), p. 108.

Through an investigation of the build-up to, and aftermath of this incident, this thesis has traced the construction of British liberal attitudes. It has, therefore, offered a new interpretation of the importance of the *Arrow* Incident and the bombardment of Canton. To J.Y. Wong and Douglas Hurd in particular, this instance sparked the second Anglo-Chinese conflict (1856-1860), altering Qing China's relationship with the West, a conclusion reiterated in numerous studies referring to this contentious event.<sup>2</sup> However, as this thesis argues, its impact should not be confined to this. It influenced the development of liberal ideas in regard to free trade, international law, diplomacy and non-intervention. In Chapters One and Two, I documented the intellectual origins of Bowring's decision to attack Canton, showing that interactions with Qing China between 1842 and 1856 shaped the liberal values of the British expatriate community overwhelmingly in favour of intervention. In Chapters Three and Four, I examined responses to these actions within Britain, arguing that it informed political debate and consolidated liberal attitudes both within Parliament and across the nation. Thus, this thesis has reconsidered the importance of this incident in the port of Canton. It has uncovered what the motives for military intervention, in addition to British responses to these actions, can tell us about the development of British liberalism.

To achieve its objective, this thesis has primarily engaged with two areas of scholarship. First, I have examined histories of mid-nineteenth century Anglo-Chinese interactions. For the most part, this area of research focuses on Britain's impact in Qing China. In recent works by Robert Bickers, Hans Van de Ven and James L. Hevia, the effects of Western expansion on the Qing Empire's political, social and legal development have been explored.<sup>3</sup> However,

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<sup>2</sup> J. Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium and the Arrow War (1856-60) in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Douglas Hurd, *The Arrow War: An Anglo-Chinese Confusion, 1856-60* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire: 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011); Hans Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past: The Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins*

its impact on British liberal ideas has been relatively overlooked. Similarly, in J.Y. Wong's *Deadly Dreams*, which documents the origins of the second Anglo-Chinese conflict, Wong's objective is to demonstrate the influence of imperialism on the outbreak of war.<sup>4</sup> Wong has considered similar subject matter to that covered in this thesis, however, I have explored different avenues and thus, have drawn different conclusions. This thesis shows how the *Arrow* quarrel and subsequent conflict provide a window through which to trace the development of British liberalism. Thus, this thesis has reconsidered the importance of Anglo-Chinese relations and what interactions between these two states can tell historians. Its impact was not restricted to China, but informed and shaped Britain's political attitudes.

In addition, this thesis has endeavoured to place Anglo-Chinese relations amongst the historiography of British liberal thought. As Duncan Bell argues, mid-nineteenth-century British liberalism was a developing ideology. There was, Bell asserts, no consensus in regard to the principles of liberal thought.<sup>5</sup> Recent scholarship has attempted to uncover both domestic and foreign influences on Britain's liberal development. For example, in the works of Jonathan Parry, Catherine Hall and Uday Mehta, attention has been given to understanding how Britain's relationship with Europe, America and the colonies affected political thinking.<sup>6</sup> This thesis has adhered to this methodological approach, showing how interactions with China also shaped British liberal attitudes. It has, therefore, reconsidered the importance of Anglo-Chinese relations, showing how their exchanges in the mid-nineteenth century can shed new light on the history of British liberalism.

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*of Modernity in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth Century* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Wong, *Deadly Dreams*.

<sup>5</sup> Duncan Bell, 'Empire and International Relations in Victorian Political Thought', *The Historical Journal*, 49:1 (Feb, 2006), p. 285.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).



This thesis has placed particular attention on the personal development of Sir John Bowring. Of course, this is in part because of his role in orchestrating the second Anglo-Chinese conflict. However, it is also a result of the dramatic reformation of Bowring's principles due to his China experience after 1849. In his early career, Bowring championed the doctrine of free trade and its connection to a wider programme of peaceful international relations; he was considered by many to be equal to Richard Cobden in his support for such values.<sup>7</sup> Yet, Britain's inability to secure entry into Canton, in addition to concerns regarding the Taiping Rebellion, forced an alteration in his commitment to the principles that dictated his early life. His notion of free trade, international law, diplomacy and non-intervention changed as a direct consequence of his China experience. Furthermore, as this thesis argues, Bowring's personal story was indicative of a wider trend. By 1856, the British expatriate community based in China – including diplomats, political commentators and merchants – advocated stronger diplomacy in China and questioned the universal applicability of free trade. In 1842, many within this community were optimistic for the future of Anglo-Chinese relations and moreover, espoused liberal values. From the representatives of Jardine Matheson & Co., to the Shanghai diplomat Rutherford Alcock, a number of Britain's expatriates in China backed liberal ideas.<sup>8</sup> However, like Bowring, their attitudes towards free trade, international law, diplomacy and non-intervention shifted in light of their China experiences.

Throughout the thesis, it has referred to Britain's diverse 'liberal spectrum' and 'liberal movement', showing how the China question informed its political thinking. This has enabled the study to look beyond the Liberal Party and examine the political development of those who advocated liberal principles in the mid-nineteenth century and yet, may have avoided a

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Conway, 'Bowring in Government Service', in Joyce Youings ed., *Sir John Bowring, Aspects of his Life and Career* (Plymouth: Latimer Trend and Co., 1993), p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, p. 88; Van de Ven, *Breaking with the Past*, p. 31.

strict political affiliation. As a result, it has documented how Anglo-Chinese relations formed the political attitudes of a number of diplomats, merchants, politicians, political commentators and members of the general public, who were associated with the liberal agenda. Of course, Britain's liberal movement was not a homogenous body of thought and as such, was divided in its perceptions of events in China. What this thesis shows, however, is that mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations instigated a debate regarding Britain's liberal values and influenced political thinking towards free trade, international law, diplomacy and non-intervention. Nonetheless, there are limitations to examining the diverse 'liberal movement'. Not every opinion has been represented and it is difficult to gauge the impact of Anglo-Chinese relations on the political attitudes of every liberal-minded British citizen. However, I have attempted to take a broad base of opinion in regard to the China question in order to demonstrate its wide-ranging influence on liberal values.

Each chapter has contributed to the overall aim of the thesis, offering different case studies to show how mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations informed political debate and developed liberal attitudes. Chapter One analysed the problematic entry question and documented the growing contention between Britain and China during the inter-war period (1842-1856). It demonstrated that the inability to gain entry into Canton forged a derogatory perception of the Chinese and moreover, facilitated concerns regarding British diplomacy. As a result, it forced a change in British policy toward free trade, international law and diplomacy. In particular, this chapter emphasised Sir John Bowring's personal reformation in favour of military intervention. Bowring's intellectual shift, I argued, symbolised a larger trend. By 1856, British optimism at the possibilities of the China trade faded. This chapter offered evidence to show how the China experience resulted in an alteration in the political thinking of Britain's expatriate community, which challenged the universal applicability of

free trade, international law and non-intervention.

Chapter Two examined the early years of the Taiping Rebellion (1853-1856), arguing that China's civil war was instrumental in shaping Britain's perception of the Chinese and moreover, its own position within the Qing Empire. It asserted that after the signing of the Nanjing treaty (1842), Britain's role in China was unclear. British diplomats were unsure whether their nation was a mere trading partner, or whether they had a right to intervene – either politically or militarily – to secure British interests. The Taiping Rebellion, which threatened British trade and safety, brought this concern to the forefront of debate. It fuelled discussions regarding international law and non-intervention, resulting in a growing support for an active British policy in China. As a result, the British took control of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service in 1854, arguing that the Qing Empire was unable to manage state affairs, which eventually rationalised further military intervention. Thus, as this chapter argued, the early years of the civil war shaped British attitudes in regard to their role in China and furthermore, assisted in justifying the bombardment of Canton in late 1856.

In the second half of this thesis, attention was given to examining British responses to the bombardment of Canton, demonstrating how this incident shaped domestic liberal attitudes. Chapter Three focused on 'high politics', documenting how Bowring's decision to attack Canton in light of the *Arrow* Incident facilitated a debate within the Houses of Parliament that questioned the legal, constitutional, moral and commercial rationale for war. Through these discussions, which sparked commentary through newspapers, it is clear to see how the China question was used to inform political thinking. It forced an open debate and shaped attitudes towards the meaning and scope of free trade, international law, diplomacy and non-intervention.

Chapter Four documented how the bombardment of Canton, which resulted in a vote-of-no-confidence against Palmerston's government, concluded in a General Election. British actions in China and what this meant for British liberal values, culminated in a national discussion during the 'China Election.' In particular, it placed the Cobdenite and Palmerstonian brands of liberalism in contention with one another, as both notions of liberalism offered contrasting views on the China question and as a result, free trade and non-intervention. This chapter demonstrated how actions in China shaped numerous local debates and was used by a number of candidates to confirm their political convictions regarding Britain's international affairs to their electors. In addition, this chapter argued that through the prism of the election, members of the British public engaged in this political debate and through newspapers, offered their opinions on Anglo-Chinese relations and their political convictions more generally. In Manchester, the China question prompted the liberal realignment of the city, resulting in electoral defeats for John Bright and Thomas Milner Gibson, both of whom advocated non-intervention. Although not the only issue concerning electors, the China question became the example through which electors based their criticism of their MPs and called for an alteration in their political representatives.

Between 1842 and 1857, Anglo-Chinese relations prompted an open and vibrant debate among members of the diverse liberal spectrum regarding the meaning and scope of free trade, intervention, diplomacy and international law. Nonetheless, by 1857, international intervention remained a contentious issue for liberal Britain. The China question, therefore, should not be considered a turning point in favour of aggressive foreign relations. Instead, it was part of an on-going discussion in the mid-nineteenth century that exposed the possibilities of liberal interventionism. The objective of this thesis is to foreground a

relationship that is largely overlooked in histories uncovering external influences on British political thinking. It suggests therefore, that in addition to assessing Europe, America and the British Empire, an analysis of Britain's exchanges with relatively peripheral nations can assist our understanding of how and why liberal attitudes developed throughout the nineteenth century. It calls for a re-evaluation of the way in which nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations is studied, arguing that its impact on British ideas and politics must not be overlooked.

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## **Appendix - Romanisation of Chinese cities and names**

<b>Pinyin</b>	<b>Wade-Giles</b>	<b>Imperial Postal System</b>
<b>Beijing</b>	<b>Pei-ching</b>	<b>Peking</b>
<b>Nanjing</b>	<b>Nan-ching</b>	<b>Nanking</b>
<b>Guangzhou</b>	<b>Kuang-chou</b>	<b>Canton</b>
<b>Tianjin</b>	<b>T'ien-chin</b>	<b>Tientsin</b>
<b>Ye Mingchen</b>	<b>Yeh Ming ch'en</b>	<b>Yeh Ming Chen</b>
<b>Xu Guangjin</b>	<b>Hsü Kuang-chin</b>	<b>Xu Guang Jin</b>
<b>Qiyang</b>	<b>Ch'i-ying</b>	<b>Keying</b>

This thesis uses Pinyin for names and places, except for Guangzhou – which will be referred to as ‘Canton’. ‘Canton’ is still used in current scholarship when referring to Guangzhou between 1842 and 1857 as it represents more than the city’s name – it signifies the trading system that dominated the port.

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Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *The Nanking Atrocity, 1937-38* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), xxi-xvi.

## Tables of British statesmen

<b>Prime Minister</b>	<b>Dates</b>
<b>Sir Robert Peel</b>	<b>1841-1846</b>
<b>Lord John Russell</b>	<b>1846-1852</b>
<b>The Earl of Derby</b>	<b>1852-1852</b>
<b>The Earl of Aberdeen</b>	<b>1852-1855</b>
<b>Lord Palmerston</b>	<b>1855-1858</b>

<b>Foreign Secretary</b>	<b>Dates</b>
<b>The Earl of Aberdeen</b>	<b>1841-1846</b>
<b>Lord Palmerston</b>	<b>1846-1851</b>
<b>The Earl of Granville</b>	<b>1851-1852</b>
<b>The Earl of Malmesbury</b>	<b>1852-1852</b>
<b>Lord John Russell</b>	<b>1852-1853</b>
<b>The Earl of Clarendon</b>	<b>1853-1858</b>

<b>Colonial Secretary</b>	<b>Dates</b>
<b>Earl of Derby (Lord Stanley)</b>	<b>1841-1845</b>
<b>William Gladstone</b>	<b>1845-1846</b>
<b>The Earl Grey</b>	<b>1846-1852</b>
<b>Sir John Pakington</b>	<b>1852-1852</b>

<b>The Duke of Newcastle</b>	<b>1852-1854</b>
<b>Sir George Grey</b>	<b>1854-1855</b>
<b>Sidney Herbert</b>	<b>1855-1855</b>
<b>Lord John Russell</b>	<b>1855-1855</b>
<b>Sir William Molesworth</b>	<b>1855-1855</b>
<b>Henry Labouchere</b>	<b>1855-1858</b>

<b>Governor of Hong Kong</b>	<b>Dates</b>
<b>Sir Henry Pottinger</b>	<b>1843-1844</b>
<b>Sir John Francis Davis</b>	<b>1844-1848</b>
<b>Sir Samuel George Bonham</b>	<b>1848-1854</b>
<b>Sir John Bowring</b>	<b>1854-1859</b>