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THE TAIPING REBELLION AND SINO-BRITISH
RELATIONS, 1850-1864

By

Margaret E. Hendershot

B.A., University of Montana, 1977

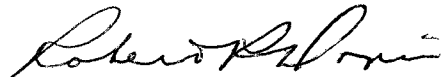
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ABSTRACT

Hendershot, Margaret E., M.A., Spring 1981

History

The Taiping Rebellion and Sino-British Relations, 1850-1864
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This work is an analysis of the Taiping Rebellion's influence upon the formation of British policy toward the Imperial government of China, 1850 to 1864. Documentation for the work consists primarily of the British Foreign Office correspondence on China.

The Taiping Rebellion largely, but not exclusively, determined British attitudes and conduct toward the Imperial authorities. The circumstances which led to the change in China's foreign policy in turn influenced the British response to the Chinese government. The alteration of Sino-British relations that resulted from the Taiping Rebellion exemplified "informal" British imperialism, and perfectly fitted Britain's Free Trade interests.

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INTRODUCTION

In the nineteenth century, the power of the enfeebled Ch'ing dynasty continued to decline. The government failed to resolve the social, economic, and political problems which arose during a century of rapid change. Western trading nations brought goods, ideas, laws, and technology disturbing to the Middle Kingdom, which worsened China's internal disruption. Amidst the confusion of change, the Taiping rebels instigated a civil war. The coincidence of the Taiping Rebellion and the growth of foreign influence in China indicated the exhaustion of the Ch'ing government, and led to the breakdown of the Confucian polity.

Dynasties of China frequently came to power through conquest; the Ch'ing were Manchus, a racial minority who conquered China in 1644. To rule China the government required a large retinue of bureaucrats to assist in administration. Although Han Chinese considered the Manchus an alien or "barbarian" dynasty, they served the Ch'ing government. The Manchus instituted many discriminatory practices which made them obnoxious to their subjects. The Manchu-style queue worn by all males was only one symbol of Chinese servitude. The governmental "hierarchy consisted of Manchu princes, noblemen and bannermen, all of whom were a charge on public funds. . . . Imperial clansmen could only be tried by their peers; Manchus in general could only be tried by Manchus. . . . There were separate codes of law for different races. . . ." ¹ The Manchus also systematically rotated district officials to guard against

disruptive localism.² While the Manchus attempted to utilize Chinese institutions, their exclusive and authoritarian policies proved divisive.

The Chinese economy was agrarian. By the nineteenth century, the population had increased enormously. The amount of land under cultivation was not proportionately expanded and the government's policies intensified the problems of the peasantry. Estates were consolidated at the expense of tenants and hired laborers,³ while the unequal burden of taxation fell increasingly on the poor.⁴ The government debased copper coinage.⁵ Opium imports expanded rapidly; the drug was purchased in silver, causing a drain of the metal and an increase in its value. The silver shortage made it difficult for officials to collect the land tax, and created hardship for the peasants who purchased silver with debased copper. As the court sold political offices, corruption spread among government officials, resulting in a decrease in the amount of revenue sent to the Imperial treasury.⁶ Court expenditures increased, but not to relieve the peasantry. "The Chinese peasant was also the victim of a series of natural calamities so devastating as to leave no doubt in the minds of the superstitious that the Heavenly mandate of the Ch'ing dynasty had been completely exhausted."⁷

The government's oppressive economic and political policies led to social unrest. Banditry was rife, necessitating formation of local militia. In the heavily-taxed southern provinces of Kwangsi and Kwangtung, the unassimilated Hakka minority battled the Punti, or local people, over unused land. In Kwangsi, disorder was so serious that the Punti used militia against the Hakkas.⁸ Military decentralization "made central military financing more and more difficult. As autarchy

spread, local resources became available only for local use; and so it grew difficult to send official troops from one province to another."⁹ While local revolts flourished and secret societies re-emerged, the central government's policies became increasingly irrelevant to Chinese society.

The presence of Europeans in China added to the problems of the Ch'ing government. In the nineteenth century, the Chinese found it necessary to formulate a coherent policy that accommodated the European "barbarians" who came to trade. The Ch'ing dynasty adopted the traditional Chinese method of managing barbarians. As they assumed their culture was superior, the Chinese thought that barbarians must follow the emperor's irresistible moral suasion. Through the rite of "tribute" or gifts to the emperor, the Chinese established their superiority and initiated barbarians into their culture.¹⁰ The tribute system functioned as a form of commerce and reinforced the government's prestige; trade and tribute fused into a system of foreign relations. "The important thing to the rulers of China was the moral value of tribute. The important thing for the barbarians was the material value of trade. The rub came when the foreign trade expanded, and finally . . . eclipsed tribute entirely, without changing the official myth."¹¹ As they sought to bring China into modernity to advance their trade interests, Europeans rejected the Sinocentric world-view. The assertion of Western trade principles, however, did not automatically lead to a change in China's foreign policy. Entrenched in their traditional attitudes, the Chinese long resisted Westernization.

The Chinese initially limited trade to the "factories" at Canton.

As the illegal opium traffic expanded and the attendant disorder became unmanageable, the system collapsed. "All the latent issues of diplomatic equality, commercial freedom, bad debts, legal jurisdiction, and Sino-foreign friction generally, combined in the late 1830's to poison the once genial atmosphere of Canton and create an explosive situation."¹² The breakdown of the Canton system strongly affected Great Britain, the most influential trading nation. In the Opium War (1840-1842), the Chinese and the British redressed mutual grievances. Defeated, the Ch'ing government settled on a policy of appeasement. In 1842, the Treaty of Nanking was signed, by which the Chinese ceded Hong Kong to the British and five treaty ports, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, Canton, and Shanghai were opened to trade. In 1843, the British Treaty of the Bogue was signed, which contained clauses for the most-favored-nation status (Article VIII) and extraterritoriality (Article IX). Through most-favored-nation status, the British would receive any privilege accorded to another treaty power, while extraterritoriality granted British officials jurisdiction over British subjects in China. Throughout the nineteenth century, treaties facilitated expansion of the China trade. "Versed neither in economics nor in Western law, the Manchu administration hardly realized what it gave away."¹³

The Imperial government lost much of its prestige and authority through the unequal treaties. While Western law was forced upon it, the treaty "provisions, by and large, were compromises. British desires had to be modified in the course of being realized."¹⁴ The English introduced Western law in China to promote regular commerce, but the treaties did not resolve the problem of opium. Although the British

sought to regularize the opium trade through legalization, they were thwarted by the emperor's ban on the drug and strong vested interests in the contraband drug trade. "The result was to split the foreign trade of China into two parts, legal and illegal. Two sets of foreign communities, two channels for trade, two codes of conduct, grew up as a consequence."¹⁵ The coasting trade expanded, and along with it, piracy. Illegal opium continued to balance the trade between Britain and China. The expected boom in English exported goods did not occur as China was self-sufficient. Chinese exports of tea and silk, however, rapidly expanded. Shanghai and Amoy became important commercial cities from their proximity to the tea and silk producing districts, eclipsing Canton as a center of trade. Despite British intentions, commercial expansion proceeded haphazardly. "The real hinderances to trade were not the statutory transit taxes but the officials who used them as an excuse for their private exactions. The organized corruption of the Chinese fiscal system applied to foreign imports as much as to the land tax or other aspects of internal economy."¹⁶ Regularization of trade through treaties and the expansion of British economic interests was impossible unless the Chinese responded to Western codes of conduct and law.

At mid-nineteenth century, the British considered the doctrines of Free Trade inviolable. Interference with the market was shunned, except to protect trade and maintain free competition. In 1834, the East India Company's monopoly in China ended, and through the treaties that followed the Opium War, the British gradually established the principles of Free Trade. "The Free Trade commercial treaty . . .

consisted ideally of only one clause--'the most-favoured-nation' clause. The object of the Mercantilist Treaty was to create and sustain monopolies; the object of a Free Trade Treaty was to throw open world trade for the benefit of all."¹⁷ Regardless of the lofty indifference the Chinese displayed toward commerce, Victorians considered opening China to trade a boon to Chinese civilization and the foreign trading nations. Free Trade provided more than material benefits. "The Free-trade principle . . ." Richard Cobden asserted, "shall act on the moral world as the principle of gravitation in the universe,--drawing men together, thrusting aside the antagonism of race, and creed, and language, and uniting us in the bonds of eternal peace."¹⁸

Yet the foremost considerations of British officials were "the national political interest and the fair and equal treatment of British trade and finance overseas."¹⁹ Commercial treaties, rather than force, were the usual means of extending British interests in foreign nations. An individual trader protected his own interests in fair competition ensured by treaty. The British government generally adhered to a course of non-intervention in the internal affairs of foreign nations or in the interests of private individuals. Government officials, however, "accepted that wars for trading opportunities might constitute a justifiable use of public resources provided they were in the interest of the nation as a whole . . . and that at least some notional diplomatic justification based on abuse of treaty rights or international law could be put forward."²⁰ British officials sought to extend trade, not authority, in foreign nations. They adopted a course of intervention with great reluctance.

The British hesitated to intervene in the affairs of China. They feared "another India." To begin by trading with China and to end by governing was expensive, problematic, and therefore undesirable.

"'Another India' would have been superfluous; all that could be achieved on behalf of expansion of trade by some political dominion in the east was in fact being achieved by India. There was no strategic reason for taking territory in China. China was not on the route to anywhere."²¹

The China market, though considered potentially fabulous by the "Old China Hands," did not justify large-scale territorial control to secure it. China's size would have made it difficult for the British to exert uniform control in the interior. Great Britain's commercial and naval supremacy made her confident of maintaining trade relationships. "Her leading position as a manufacturing nation and in the carrying trade, and not least her system of financial credit, made Free Trade especially convenient to her, and colonial markets and sources of supply, in the formal sense, almost totally unnecessary."²² Expansion of Free Trade, rather than a desire for territorial aggrandizement or political control guided British policy toward China.

By 1850, irregularities in the China trade again irritated the British. Foreign Secretary Palmerston abandoned responsibility for enforcing the tariff stipulated in the treaty,²³ and adopted a swaggering attitude. "The time is fast coming when we shall be obliged to strike another blow in China . . ." he wrote. "These half civilized Governments . . . require a Dressing every eight or ten years to keep them in order. Their minds are too shallow to receive an impression that will last longer than some such period and warning is of little

use."²⁴ Lord Palmerston left the Foreign Office in late 1851, however, and his successors followed a more cautious policy. In 1853, the Taiping rebels' advance into the rich Yangtze valley added a new complication to Sino-British relations: the problem of British policy toward the Taiping Rebellion.

In 1837, Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the future Taiping leader, experienced visions during a mental illness that followed his third failure to pass the Confucian-style civil service examination. Hung came from a poor family of Hakkas who resided near Canton. In his village, "he was regarded as a future scholar-official certain to repay all those who made [economic] sacrifices to help him attain office."²⁵ Upon recovering from his illness, Hung became the village school teacher, but in 1843, he again failed his government examination. In the same year he read a religious tract, Good Words to Admonish the Age, and interpreted his earlier visions in a Christian context. Hung converted to Christianity and began to preach his new faith. His reading of the Christian tracts was highly personalized. "Many passages he took to be a direct call to himself in particular. Similarly, he believed that the Heavenly Kingdom and God's chosen race were China and the Chinese, and he later appropriated the former term for the name of his own revolutionary state."²⁶

Hung converted his cousin, Hung Jen-kan, and a friend, Feng Yunshan. Feng organized the God-worshipping Society on Thistle Mountain, out of which grew the Taipings. Hung became an iconoclastic itinerant preacher. In 1847, after an American missionary refused to baptize him, he joined the God-worshippers on Thistle Mountain. Hung encouraged

iconoclasm among the God-worshippers. While the sect gained followers, its actions enraged the local population.²⁷ Hung left the group for several months but returned in 1849. He and Feng gathered leaders among the God-worshippers, who later commanded the Taipings. Adherents of the God-worshipping Society mainly were from the poorer classes. Hakka farmers, charcoal workers, smugglers, bandits, secret society members, army deserters, convoy guards, and a number of followers from aboriginal tribes joined the God-worshippers.²⁸ The shift of trade to Shanghai created an economic crisis around Canton; the resulting distress and discontent induced many to join the God-worshipping Society. Hunan and Kiangsi provinces, "full of unemployed boatmen and coolies; and the Yangtze valley, with its impoverished peasants and 'propertyless vagabonds,'" were areas in which the God-worshippers attracted large followings.²⁹

Membership of the God-worshipping Society rapidly increased as Hakkas joined the sect for protection against the Punti. "In the villages where they predominated, the Hakka congregations took over local control and forced others to join. The conflict between Hakka and non-Hakka was thus transformed into one between the God Worshippers Society and opposing militant organizations."³⁰ To fight the Punti who organized militia and received government military assistance, the God-worshippers formed military camps, manufactured weapons, and established a common treasury of goods.³¹ "Two parties emerged; one consisted of the militia, gentry, and government; the other of the God-worshippers and the oppressed Hakkas and outlaws."³² In late 1850, the chronic battles between the Hakka and Punti in Kwangsi province grew to

unmanageable proportions, beginning the Taiping Rebellion. In 1851, Hung Hsiu-ch'uan founded the T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo ("Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace") as a new dynasty of China.

The Taiping military government was consolidated under Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, the T'ien Wang or Heavenly King. Hung appointed five other wangs or kings: Yang Hsiu-ch'ing, the Eastern King and Taiping Prime Minister; Hsiao Ch'ao-kuei, the Western King; Feng Yun-shan, the Southern King; Wei Ch'ang-hui, the Northern King; and Shih Ta-k'ai, the Assistant King.³³ As second in command, the Eastern King controlled the other four kings. By allowing their hair to grow long and refusing to shave their foreheads, the Taipings defied Manchu tradition. They used religious dogma to discipline their army. "The Ten Commandments, baptism, the keeping of the Sabbath were believed in, practiced, and ruthlessly enforced. . . . The Biblical component was an effective instrument of mass control and an important factor in Taiping military success."³⁴ To rally the Chinese to their cause, the Taipings issued declarations against the Manchus in which they frequently referred to the Manchus' ethnicity.³⁵ Early in the rebellion the Western and Southern Kings were killed; however, the incompetence of the Manchu forces and the rebels' strategy, ideology, organization, and discipline enabled them successfully to march north, steadily gaining followers.³⁶ By 1853, the Taipings controlled several provinces and had established Nanking as their capital city.

Western historians generally agree that the Taiping Rebellion failed from its internal contradictions. The Taipings' Hakka origins, their battles with the local Punti, the Chinese and the Hakkas'

resentment toward the alien Manchus all contributed to the tangled ethnicity of the Taiping movement. The Taipings practiced an unorthodox form of Christianity; their religion and iconoclasm offended Chinese entrenched in Eastern beliefs, particularly the scholar-gentry imbued with Confucianism.³⁷ Western observers were repelled by the Taipings' modification of Christianity,³⁸ which nevertheless contributed to the movement's politicization.³⁹ Taiping Christianity was too Christian to enable the rebels to attract leaders from the scholar-gentry, but inadequately politicized for them to win enough followers among the ostensibly anti-Manchu Chinese.⁴⁰ While the Taipings formulated a system of communal goods in a "sacred treasury" and advocated land redistribution upon communistic principles, their land reforms largely remained unimplemented. The Taipings gave precedence to warfare, and the peasants were hostile to a revolutionary economic system that did not satisfy their desire for private land ownership.⁴¹ The rebels lacked supporters among the scholar-gentry and much of the peasantry, yet they represented the most formidable challenge to Chinese civilization in the nineteenth century.

Neither the Chinese nor the Western trading nations passively awaited the internal collapse of the Taiping Rebellion, which caused havoc throughout most of China, disrupted trade, and threatened Western interests. The Imperial government's green-banner army was utterly demoralized and corrupt. The Imperial forces largely consisted of local military units under gentry leaders such as Tseng Kuo-fan, who defended the Confucian polity, and incidently the Manchu dynasty, against the Taipings.⁴² The Imperial forces, however, received direct

military aid and training from the British, as well as indirect financial assistance from the Maritime Customs system under British supervision.

Historians continue to debate the cynicism of British intervention in the rebellion. They regard the war-indemnities owed by the Manchus to the British government,⁴³ the treaty provision for opening the Yangtze River after the rebels' defeat,⁴⁴ and the Manchus' permissiveness in the opium trade (as opposed to the Taipings' stance against the drug)⁴⁵ as primary motives for British support of the Manchus. While the British had established diplomatic ties to the Imperial government, they followed a cautious, reluctant, and inconsistent course toward intervention. British policy was neither rigidly pro-dynastic nor a deliberate attempt to weaken the debilitated Imperial government. Historians vaunt and disparage the importance of foreign intervention in the Taiping Rebellion,⁴⁶ but the internal failings of the movement played a significant role in the rebels' defeat.

The Taipings' warfare, foreign policy, pseudo-Christian government, and trade policy demonstrated to the English that their interests conflicted with the Free Trade interests of Great Britain. The rebels' policies and conduct, however, did not induce the British automatically to support the dynasty. After the dissolution of the East India Company's monopoly, British authorities continually experienced problems with the Imperial government. Throughout the Taiping Rebellion they exerted diplomatic pressure, and ultimately force, to exact the Manchus' compliance with the Nanking Treaty. While the British eventually supported the Imperial government, the Taiping Rebellion was not the

exclusive cause of the subsequent Sino-British alliance. The Manchus' adaptation to Western modes of diplomacy and trade principles significantly improved their relations with the British. Sino-British cooperation gradually developed from events and diplomacy influenced largely, but not exclusively, by the Taiping Rebellion.

FOOTNOTES

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²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 556.

⁴Ibid., p. 567.

⁵Ibid., p. 558.

⁶Ibid., p. 571.

⁷Ibid., p. 561.

⁸Frederic Wakeman, Strangers at the Gate: Social Disorder in South China 1839-1861, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 127.

⁹Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰John King Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964; reprint ed., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 31.

¹¹Ibid., p. 33.

¹²Ibid., p. 74.

¹³Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 309.

¹⁷D. C. M. Platt, Finance, Trade, and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815-1914, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 86.

¹⁸Extract from Cobden's Speech on Free Trade, Manchester, 15 January 1846. John Bright and James E. Thorold Rogers, Speeches on Questions of Public Policy by Richard Cobden, M.P., (London, 1870), i. 362-363, quoted in Kenneth Bourne, Foreign Policy of Victorian England, 1830-1902, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 269.

¹⁹Platt, Finance, Trade, and Politics, p. 72.

²⁰D. K. Fieldhouse, Economics and Empire, 1830-1914, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 223.

²¹Ronald Hyam, Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion, (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), pp. 361-362.

²²Bourne, Foreign Policy of Victorian England, p. 5.

²³Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, p. 372.

²⁴Great Britain, Foreign Office, General Correspondence, China, F.O. 17/173, marginal note by Palmerston, 29 September 1850. /Foreign Office General Correspondence shall hereafter be referred to as F.O. 17/.

²⁵P. M. Yap, "The Mental Illness of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, Leader of the Taiping Rebellion," Far Eastern Quarterly 13 (May 1954): 290.

²⁶Ibid., p. 294.

²⁷Ssu-yu Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 49.

²⁸Ibid., p. 55.

²⁹Wakeman, Strangers at the Gate, p. 131.

³⁰Franz Michael, The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents, vol. 1: History (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 30.

³¹Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, pp. 62-63.

³²Ibid., p. 62.

³³Ibid., p. 76.

³⁴Eugene Boardman, "Christian Influence Upon the Ideology of the Taiping Rebellion," Far Eastern Quarterly 10 (February 1951): 123.

³⁵Vincent Shih, Taiping Ideology: Its Sources, Interpretations, and Influences, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), p. 101.

³⁶Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, pp. 91-95.

³⁷Boardman, "Christian Influence," p. 124.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, p. 91.

⁴⁰Boardman, "Christian Influence," pp. 123-124.

⁴¹Taylor, "Taiping Rebellion," pp. 609-610.

⁴²Ibid., p. 608.

⁴³Ibid., p. 612.

⁴⁴Toshia Ueda, "The International Relations of the T'ai P'ing Rebellion," Japan Annual of Law and Politics, no. 2 (1953), pp. 141-142.

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CHAPTER I

REBELLION AND DIPLOMACY 1850-1855

Through rebellion in China, the British gradually became involved with upholding the Imperial government's sovereignty to protect their commercial interests. Free Trade required political stability, which the rebellions undermined. Although the British avoided assuming political authority in China, preservation of their economic interests necessitated cooperation with the central government to further their common interest, stability. Problems of treaty implementation and revision, as well as the British policy of neutrality in the civil war prevented complete Sino-British cooperation. In the early 1850's a tenuous Sino-British cooperation slowly developed from the circumstances of rebellion.

At mid-century, rebellions flourished in China, threatening the authority of the Manchu dynasty. While the Small Sword Society, an offshoot of the Triads, sought to re-establish the Ming dynasty, the Red Turbans disturbed the area around Canton. The Taipings constituted the greatest rebel force in China. They eventually controlled large provincial areas and captured more than six hundred cities. The various rebel groups seldom cooperated; their divergent aims kept them asunder. While the government's decrepit green-banner army faltered against the rebels, the local forces of the gentry were disunited until 1853, when Tseng Kuo-fan began to marshal them under his leadership.

Before 1853, the British ignored the rebellions developing in China. The Superintendent of Trade in China, Sir George Bonham, assured Foreign Secretary Palmerston that "there has never been adequate ground for investing their incursions with the title of insurrection. No person of respectability has joined them, and it is the habit of such marauders . . . to endeavour to lure the disaffected to their side by the assumption of rank, display of badges and similar artifices."¹ Bonham foresaw, however, that the unsettling effect of rebellion around Canton would depress British trade.² While the rebels remained a minor threat to British interests, officials concentrated upon improving trade relations with the Imperial government.

In the early 1850's, the British were concerned with implementing the Nanking and Bogue treaties. Bonham complained that "a greater degree of rigor has been exercised at the Ports for the purpose of curtailing to the narrowest limits the advantages gained by the Treaty. . . ."³ While illegal opium traffic and piracy remained problematic, the treaty system verged on collapse as traders evaded payment of tea and silk duties.⁴ Disgusted with the corrupt Chinese customs system, Palmerston abandoned efforts to combat smuggling, but his reaction was temporary. The British regarded legally-enforced trade as axiomatic and continued diplomatic pressure to remove irregularities from the China trade. The Imperial administration obstinately refused to Westernize its diplomatic intercourse, which meant recognizing barbarian envoys as equals. While the British considered direct diplomatic relations with Peking a sine qua non to regular trade, the Chinese studiously avoided this humiliation by dissembling and delay.

The "Canton city question" continued to irritate the British, as the Cantonese refused to open the city to foreigners. "Those responsible for the conduct of English affairs in China set up, as an article of faith, the dogma that the 'right of entry' was the keynote of success in Chinese affairs."⁵ After Palmerston's unfulfilled threat of force, Foreign Office policy became quiescent and official attention to the treaties was diverted to the Chinese civil war.

In 1853, the success of the Taiping and Triad rebellions made the English uneasy. Although the British knew little of the rebels' movements and purposes, Bonham conjectured that the Manchus might request assistance from the British naval forces to intimidate the Taipings at Nanking.⁶ He requested "to be informed of the views of Her Majesty's Government in regard to the whole of this question--and particularly to what extent, if assistance were given, it should be granted."⁷ Bonham assured the Foreign Secretary that he would not render aid to the Manchus unless the British obtained advantages in trade.⁸ Intervention temporarily appeared expedient. Consul Alcock at Shanghai warned Bonham that unless the Imperial government received foreign assistance, its downfall was imminent.⁹ Bonham decided to confer with the rebels at Nanking. His observations and decisions formed the basis of British policy toward the Taiping Rebellion.

While he obtained preliminary knowledge of the Taipings' religion, government, and military strength, Bonham observed the political element of their Christianity.

They have established a new religion, which may be called a kind of spurious revelation. The base of this structure is supposed to be founded upon the Old Testament and religious tracts; but they have superadded thereto a tissue of superstition and nonsense which makes

an unprejudiced party almost doubt whether it is not used merely as a political engine of power by the Chiefs to sway the minds of those whom they are anxious to attach to their cause.¹⁰

Bonham was not wholly cynical about the rebels' faith, but emphasized the political motives of the Taiping kings in using religious dogma to control their forces. He described the Taipings' puritanical discipline. "The whole army pray regularly before meals. They punish rape, adultery, and opium smoking with death. . . . The women captured in battle are lodged in separate buildings, as well as the children, who are at the same time clothed and educated."¹¹ Bonham explained the Taiping hierarchy of kings and ministers, and estimated their force to be less than 25,000 fighting men.¹² Upon meeting with the Taipings, Bonham inaugurated the policy of British neutrality.

Bonham cautioned the Taiping kings that interference with British persons or property would invite retaliation.¹³ To enforce neutrality, he forbade British subjects to engage in the civil war. His proclamation, however, was a tacit admission that some English had entered the war on an individual basis.¹⁴ Problems of maintaining neutrality multiplied as the rebellion continued.

Although neutral in the civil war, the British speculated about trade relations with the Taipings. In June, 1853, the Taipings addressed an open letter to the English in which they alluded to the difficulties of trade.

While we, on our parts, do not prohibit commercial intercourse, we merely observe that . . . the going to and fro is accompanied with inconvenience; and . . . we would deem it better to wait a few months, until we have thoroughly destroyed the Tartars [the Manchus], when, perhaps, the subjects of your honourable nation could go and come without being involved in the tricks of these false Tartars.¹⁵

The Taipings' overture met with Bonham's approval. He observed to

Foreign Secretary Clarendon that "more Political and Commercial advantages are likely to be obtained from the Insurrectionists. . . ."16

Although the Taipings were inexperienced traders, Bonham considered them more favorable to foreigners than the Imperialists, who were "proud, overbearing, and inimical to an extension of Foreign Intercourse."17

The central government's policies toward trade irritated the British, but they abstained from aiding the Taipings to overthrow the Manchus as a means of furthering their commercial interests.

The rebellion's adverse effect on trade at Shanghai negated the Taipings' diplomatic gestures. Bonham reported that "trade is in a languid condition. Imports of British goods at Shanghae [sic] are unsaleable, while at Canton they are forced off at some 20 or 30 per cent lower rates than a few months back. . . . Prices [of tea] at present rule from 30 to 35 per cent higher than they were last year, while its quality is said to be inferior."18 As the Chinese hoarded Carolus dollars and British goods remained unsold, a currency shortage developed, which necessitated large bullion imports. The currency problem was so great that even the opium traffic operated on a barter system.¹⁹ As British merchants found it difficult to pay the duties on their goods, Consul Alcock withheld duties for a short time, violating the Nanking Treaty. Bonham, however, strictly interpreted British legal obligations. He would not permit merchants to defer payment of duties without Chinese consent, which Alcock could not obtain.²⁰ Trade with the Manchus involved considerable difficulty, yet the British were committed to the Imperial government through the treaties.

In August, 1853, Bonham and the French representative in China,

M. de Bourboulon agreed upon a policy of cooperation. In accordance with Clarendon's policy, Bonham informed the French minister that the British intended to maintain neutrality while negotiating for a Free Trade treaty. He assured Bourboulon that "Her Majesty's Government seek no exclusive privileges for the British Trade in China, but that whatever commercial advantages they may . . . obtain . . . they are . . . anxious . . . to share with all the civilized nations of the world. . . ." ²¹ Extension of British Free Trade interests did not entail British paramountcy. The most-favored-nation clause ensured the other treaty powers fair competition in the China market. Although the French minister slightly favored the Imperial cause, ²² the British reiterated their policy of neutrality and Free Trade.

The Triads' capture of Shanghai in September, 1853, worsened the problems of trade and customs administration. The Chinese customs agent fled, the customhouse was destroyed, and government was in abeyance. To preserve a semblance of legal trade, Consul Alcock established a provisional system of duty payment by collecting promissory notes. With Foreign Office sanction, payment of back duties would be enforced. ²³ Clarendon informed Bonham that "if a Chinese government should be re-established at Shanghai, either by the rebels or by the imperial authorities, the duty payments held by Alcock in promissory notes should be paid over to it; otherwise, they should be given back to the merchants." ²⁴ In February, 1854, a Chinese customhouse was reestablished. Some merchants had escaped taxation under Alcock's system; non-treaty vessels were not subject to treaty regulation. "In these circumstances it was impossible to fulfill the conditions of equal duties upon all,

demanded by the Board of Trade."²⁵ The British government withheld its decision on the payment of back duties until 1854.

The Triads occupied Shanghai until February, 1855, assisted by some British residents of the foreign settlement, who supplied arms to the Imperialists and the insurgents. Clarendon admitted this was a breach of English neutrality. To enforce neutrality, he suggested that British naval officers aid the Shanghai consul in preventing "as far as possible either of the Belligerent Parties from penetrating . . . the precincts of the British settlement."²⁶ In April, 1854, the cautious Bonham was replaced by Sir John Bowring, former secretary of Jeremy Bentham and an ardent Free Trader.²⁷ When the Chinese authorities at Shanghai and Amoy requested British assistance against the rebels, Bowring adhered to the policy of neutrality. He insisted "that it is not the purpose of our Government to interfere . . . unless the duty of providing for the safety of British subjects or British property should require interference."²⁸ Bowring instructed Alcock to enforce neutrality rigidly and to punish those who supplied weapons either to the rebels or the Imperialists.²⁹ The Shanghai settlers established an "armed neutrality" and in the battle of Muddy Flat they drove the Imperialists from the settlement. Foreigners, Bowring observed, "have felt equally insecure from Imperialists and Insurgents---alike disorderly and lawless."³⁰

In July, Bowring mentioned the possibility of temporary intervention in the Shanghai crisis, fearing that "if the City is abandoned to the Imperial Troops frightful slaughter will accompany their entrance."³¹ Clarendon instructed Bowring not to interfere by force,

but approved his attempts to mediate between the belligerents.³² He gave a guarded endorsement of armed neutrality. If protective measures by the treaty powers and the Imperial forces failed, "it is competent for the residents [of Shanghai] to associate for purposes of self defence: as this however is an assumption of power independent of the Chinese Gov[ernment], it would not be right that H[er] M[ajesty]'s Superintendents or Consuls should be parties to such an association."³³ With French assistance, Consul Alcock constructed a barrier wall around the foreign settlement, "and by thus hindering foreign support of the rebels facilitated the imperial siege."³⁴ The Senior Naval Officer at Shanghai refused to assist in constructing and protecting the wall, as naval forces were to protect only British persons and property.³⁵ Clarendon concurred and sharply reprimanded Bowring for this breach of neutrality.³⁶ With French support the Imperial forces drove the rebels from Shanghai. The British twice compromised their neutrality during the siege, despite the home government's injunctions against interference.

Through the Triad occupation, the English reorganized the Shanghai customs system. In exchange for payment of the back duties represented by Alcock's promissory notes, the Imperial government sanctioned a Foreign Inspectorate at Shanghai. Although Bowring favored payment of the notes, Clarendon disagreed. "Under existing circumstances [at Shanghai in 1853] the Treaty arrangements with China must be considered as suspended, and . . . Alcock's measures should only . . . [have been] enforced as long as it was reasonable to suppose that the suspension of the Imperial Authority was of a temporary character. . . ." ³⁷ The

prolonged interruption in government at Shanghai meant that the Chinese lost their claim to the duties. Clarendon reprimanded Bowring and the notes were never honored. This was perfidy, but the new customs collectorate at Shanghai was far more efficient than the Chinese system, and brought the Manchus badly-needed revenue to wage war against the Taipings. The Foreign Inspectorate was not a step toward British rule in China, nor was it a purposive bias in favor of the Imperial cause. A local economic problem required a limited political solution. "Free trade and the most-favored-nation treatment, expressive of this commercial interest, were the *raison d'être* of the Customs Service, whose constant purpose was to provide equal terms of competition both among individual traders and among the trading nations in China."³⁸ Sino-British cooperation was part of the Sino-barbarian dyarchical tradition.³⁹

While the Triads occupied Shanghai, the simultaneous advance of the Taiping forces caused the British additional consternation. Established at Nanking, the Taipings embarked upon a two year northern expedition to attack Peking. They foolishly besieged Huai-ch'ing instead of directly advancing to Peking, enabling the Imperial government to summon aid from the provinces.⁴⁰ Despite some brave fighting against the Imperialists, the rebels were poorly prepared for the expedition, and suffered a humiliating defeat. The Taipings, however, tied up the government forces in North China and shielded their capital city from assault.⁴¹ In western China, Tseng Kuc-fan's Hunan Army was less successful against the rebels, although Tseng began a forceful propaganda war to attack Taiping ideology and reassert

Confucianism. Under Shih Ta-k'ai, the Taipings reversed Tseng's early successes. "As a good administrator and military commander, Shih received popular support, whereas the Ch'ing government troops were given a cool reception. . . . By 1856 the Taiping western campaign was a success."⁴² Although the Taipings' military strategy was flawed and their success uneven, they continued their course of destruction.

Bowring quickly formed an unfavorable opinion of the Taipings' ability to govern, should their march on Peking succeed. He observed that

one sees a disorganizing and destroying influence which is everywhere undermining authority, but which seems to furnish few materials for the establishment of order and good government. Even if the Nanking party should obtain the mastery at Peking, there is great reason to apprehend that a very large portion of the vast empire would not recognize nor obey its authority, and that it would not be competent to subdue the elements of sedition and disorder so universally scattered.⁴³

Like Bonham, Bowring remarked that no "person of rank, eminence, or influence" had joined the rebels, whose low origins made him doubt their quality of leadership.⁴⁴ He condemned the political tactics of Hung Hsiu-ch'uan, who "introduced enough of mystery to awe and interest an ignorant multitude,--enough of fanaticism to rouse their indifference,--and enough of despotism to control and subdue a people predisposed to obedience and servility. . . ."⁴⁵ Bowring considered the Taipings poorly qualified to provide mature, rational government in China.

The Americans and the British sent separate observers to Nanking to meet with the rebels. American Commissioner McLane described the bizarre aspects of Taiping Christianity. The Americans "were told that . . . [Hung Hsiu-ch'uan] had a mission direct from God, and from his

elder brother Jesus Christ to assume the sovereignty of the earth--that all who recognized his divine authority were to be his subjects and his brethren, and were to present to him tributes in the shape of 'precious gifts'. . . ." ⁴⁶ The Taipings "distinctly repelled" any suggestion that they receive religious instruction from missionaries, and insisted that foreigners acknowledge Hung's authority. "Except as 'brothers' or 'subjects' or 'tribute bearers' to the Celestial King, it appeared that the visits of foreigners would receive no encouragement, but would on the contrary be most unwelcome." ⁴⁷ "Brethren" of the Heavenly King were welcome to trade provided they submitted to Hung's authority. ⁴⁸ Reminiscent of the Manchus' attitudes toward foreigners, the Taipings' arrogance was uncondusive to cordial diplomatic relations with the British.

Although the English observers Lewin Bowring and W. H. Medhurst added new condemnations of the Taipings to those of Bowring and McLane, they praised the rebels' military spirit, which contrasted with "the inertness and imbecility of the Imperial soldiers." ⁴⁹ Bowring and Medhurst questioned whether Hung Hsiu-ch'uan existed. "The Taipings consistently spoke of "the pleasure of the Eastern King, his power, his majesty, and his influence." ⁵⁰ The English anticipated the growth of Yang Hsiu-ch'ing's authority, which later caused severe dissension among the Taipings. Despite Bonham's optimistic assessment, Bowring and Medhurst doubted that orderly trade relations with the Taipings could be instituted. The rebels' "position is not that of a consolidated power, anxious to foster commerce and bent upon the development of its resources, but simply that of a military organization at war with the

existing Government. . . . Trade . . . is utterly non-existent. . . ."51

To illustrate the Taipings' anti-trade policy, Bowring and Medhurst mentioned that the rebels prohibited foreign vessels access to coal deposits that facilitated navigation of the Yangtze River.⁵² This policy antagonized the British who wished to open the river trade. The Taipings' arrogant leaders, unstable government, and their impairment of British trade hardened officials' attitudes against them, and compelled the British to reassess their relationship with the Imperial government.

The British deprecated the Manchu administration for its military incompetence against the rebels, but resigned themselves reluctantly to continue diplomatic relations with the government. Although the Taipings "encountered a resistance from the Tartars, and a want of support from the native populations in the Northern Provinces," Alcock reported, ". . . the Imperial Government is as incapable of profiting . . . by causes of discouragement to the Insurgents, as these are of seizing the Seat of Government."⁵³ After reviewing the failures of the Taipings and the Imperialists, Alcock predicted an extended civil war.⁵⁴ Bowring found it difficult to maintain cordial relations with the Manchus. He complained to Foreign Under-secretary Hammond that "it is hard to get on with these stubborn Mandarins--and though stiff they are as subtle as otters."⁵⁵ In the same letter, he intimated using force to exact the Manchus' cooperation. Upon receiving accounts of the Taipings at Nanking, however, Bowring conceded that the Manchu administration was more conducive to British interests than the rebel government. "There is no great element at work in this disorganizing revolution which will

not be less favorable to the extension of commercial and political relations with foreigners than is the existing Imperial Government, bad, corrupt, proud, and ignorant though it be."⁵⁶ Clarendon agreed that the Manchus favored foreign interests more than the rebels,⁵⁷ but shared Bowring's distrust of the Imperialists.⁵⁸

Through the most-favored-nation clause, 1854 was the year for revision of the Nanking Treaty. Bowring considered opening Canton and establishing personal diplomatic relations with Chinese authorities the most important issues, but Commissioner Yeh refused to negotiate with him on terms of diplomatic equality. The British government demanded several treaty revisions: access to the interior of China or free navigation on the Yangtze River, legalization of the opium trade, elimination of inland transit duties, piracy suppression, establishment of satisfactory diplomatic relations with Peking and direct access to Imperial viceroys, as well as an interpretation of the treaties according to the foreign text.⁵⁹ When Yeh asserted that he had neither the power nor desire to revise the treaties, the British, French, and American envoys proceeded north to Peking. After some delay, low-ranking officials met with the diplomats, and announced that they possessed no power to negotiate. They insisted that the British had no right to demand treaty revision by virtue of clauses in the American treaty,⁶⁰ denying the British most-favored-nation status. "There seemed no hope of any successful result from negotiations conducted under such conditions, and the envoys returned south, convinced . . . that no revision of the treaties could be obtained, unless supported and enforced by a demonstration of armed force."⁶¹ By dissembling, the

Chinese forestalled negotiations, but their tactics exasperated the British.

In December, 1854, Commissioner Yeh applied to the British for assistance against the Red Turban rebels. British Consul Robertson optimistically reported that the traditional enmity toward foreigners displayed by Canton merchants had changed to pro-foreignism. Cantonese spoke "openly and unreservedly of the weakness of their Government . . . and their desire to see life and property guaranteed at the expense even of foreign intervention. . . ." ⁶² With Clarendon's approval, ⁶³ Bowring reiterated the Liberal policy of non-intervention; the British refused to protect any interests but their own. ⁶⁴ Like Bonham, Bowring forbade any British subject to enter the civil war or to provide material aid to either the rebels or the Imperialists. ⁶⁵ He instructed Robertson to warn the rebels that "if by any acts of theirs, British interests are sacrificed, we shall be compelled to visit such misdeeds with . . . punishment." ⁶⁶ Early in 1855, the Red Turbans attempted to blockade Canton, further antagonizing the British. Bowring warned the rebel chiefs that "any claim to the right of blockade will not be admitted, nor will they be allowed to bring their war into places peacefully occupied by Foreigners under Treaty guarantees, to interrupt lawful Trade, or to molest the persons or property of British Residents or Traders." ⁶⁷ The British indirectly aided Yeh's expulsion of the rebels by the intimidating presence of British naval power at Canton; ⁶⁸ this constituted another bias in favor of the Imperialists. ⁶⁹ Yet the British considered it essential to protect their trade rights guaranteed by the Nanking Treaty. Although Commissioner Yeh ordered as

many as 70,000 persons beheaded to purge the Red Turbans from the neighborhood of Canton, the trade situation remained unsettled.

Rebellion continued to disrupt trade, undermining the legal guarantees of regular commerce. In June, 1855, Interpreter Sinclair reported that the Taipings threatened Hang-chou. He feared that if they took the city, the rebels would upset the tea market by blocking the trade route to Shanghai.⁷⁰ At Canton, restoration of trade remained problematic as bands of robbers interfered with the transit of goods.⁷¹ Piracy at Whampoa considerably strained Sino-British relations. Consul Robertson berated Commissioner Yeh for permitting piracy, which compelled the British to maintain a large naval force in the Whampoa area to protect their subjects.⁷² The English resented disregard of their right to Free Trade. Reluctant to miss a new commercial opportunity, Clarendon informed Bowring that "if Whampoa becomes a place of trade from events with wh[ich] H[er] M[ajesty's] Gov[ernment] or Brit[ish] subjects are not connected, [there was] no objection to engage in de facto legitimate Trade."⁷³ While they wished to ensure the legality of trade, the English were reluctant to sacrifice their interests and were not adverse to adopting pragmatic solutions to problems of trade.

After the establishment of the Foreign Inspectorate at Shanghai, the British experienced new difficulties with customs regulation, which necessitated diplomacy with the Manchus. The government proposed an interior transit tax on tea which the British considered injurious to the expanding trade at Foochow. Bowring instructed Medhurst to "show that the export duties fairly and equally levied will be far more

productive to the Imperial revenues. . . . Take this very appropriate opportunity of offering your cooperation for the establishment of a system of Inspectorship and control, such as exists at Shanghai. . . ."74

Clarendon strongly desired that the Manchus extend the Shanghai customs system to other ports as British merchants protested against irregularity in customs collection. He sought to end these complaints while tempering the Manchus' anti-foreignism. "When the Chinese Government finds its revenues increased, as they will be largely, by the strict enforcement of legal duties, it will become more reconciled not only to foreign trade but to the foreigners engaged in it. . . ."75 Clarendon's policy was calculated to serve British economic interests; it was not an attempt to gain political authority in China. His policy was a response to a local economic problem that gradually assumed political importance in Sino-British relations.

Throughout 1855, Bowring sent unfavorable reports of the Taipings to the Foreign Office. He informed Clarendon that the rebels' Christianity received little attention,⁷⁶ and that Taiping influence contracted after the failure of the Peking expedition. Although the rebel cause weakened in the north and several maritime provinces, "throughout the rest of China . . . there is more or less insurrection or disorder of a kindred character."⁷⁷ The British attributed the continuation of the Taiping movement to the weakness of the government forces and the rebels' tendency to abandon cities after exhausting their resources.⁷⁸ The Taipings, Bowring concluded, "appear to be losing all popular sympathy, and generally [seen] to be regarded as marauders."⁷⁹ As the Taipings failed to settle in the provinces and establish a stable government,

their cause continued to fall in British estimation.

At the close of 1855, Bowring's disgust with the rebel movement superseded Bonham's tacit favor of the Taipings, but British attitudes toward the Manchus altered less markedly. The rebels' initial trade policy represented a novel acceptance of foreign relations which the Manchus significantly lacked. Their subsequent trade policy and their seeming inability to govern deflected British attention to the Imperial administration. Although Sino-British relations seldom were cordial, they improved through the establishment of the Foreign Inspectorate. As a result, the English were drawn into further diplomatic negotiations with the Manchus. While the rebellion disrupted established trade routes and impaired the transit of English imported goods, it stimulated exports of tea and silk, which the Chinese could not afford to buy as a result of the havoc in China's interior.⁸⁰ The British developed new trade interests during the early phase of the rebellion, which they strongly desired to expand. This necessitated diplomacy with the Manchus to regularize the trade and customs system. Yet the Imperial government resisted diplomatic pressure for treaty revision, and from the British perspective, it represented only a slight improvement over the Taipings.

Despite the home government's injunctions against interference, British neutrality in the rebellion was flawed. Breaches in neutrality committed by British subjects supplying arms to the rebels and joining their ranks did not constitute the official response to the rebellion; nevertheless, these activities undermined British policy and embarrassed the British government. Delay in communication between England and

China caused a lapse between Foreign Office policy and the actions of British officials in China, which led to inconsistencies in the British response to the rebellion. The primary concern of the British was to secure the safety of trade, not to render support to the Imperial government. While protecting their trade interests against the rebels, the British provided coincidental, indirect assistance to the Manchu authorities, which created a tenuous Sino-British alliance. In 1856, the Second China War destroyed the precarious relationship between the British and Manchu governments.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹F.O. 17/170/125, Bonham to Palmerston, 29 October 1850.
- ²F.O. 17/169/85, Bonham to Palmerston, 23 August 1850.
- ³F.O. 17/187/26, Bonham to Palmerston, 20 February 1852.
- ⁴Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, p. 347.
- ⁵Hosea B. Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1: The Period of Conflict, 1834-1860 (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Limited, 1910), p. 377.
- ⁶F.O. 17/200/17, Bonham to Malmesbury, 10 March 1853.
- ⁷Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
- ⁸F.O. 17/200/19, Bonham to Malmesbury, 11 March 1853.
- ⁹F.O. 17/200/17 Enclosure 1, Confidential report of Rutherford Alcock, 26 February 1853, in Bonham to Malmesbury, 10 March 1853.
- ¹⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Papers Respecting the Civil War in China," 1852-1853, LXIX, [1667], Number 5, Bonham to Clarendon, 6 May 1853.
- ¹¹Ibid., Number 4, Bonham to Clarendon, 22 April 1853.
- ¹²Ibid., Number 5, Bonham to Clarendon, 6 May 1853.
- ¹³F.O. 17/201/34, Bonham to Clarendon, 6 May 1853.
- ¹⁴F.O. 17/203/72 Enclosure 2, Proclamation by Bonham, 7 July 1853, in Bonham to Clarendon, 22 July 1853.
- ¹⁵F.O. 17/203/63 Enclosure, Excerpt from the North-China Herald, 13 June 1853, in Bonham to Clarendon, 6 July 1853.
- ¹⁶F.O. 17/204/81, Bonham to Clarendon, 4 August 1853.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸F.O. 17/203/63, Bonham to Clarendon, 6 July 1853.
- ¹⁹Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, p. 403.
- ²⁰Ibid., pp. 404-405.
- ²¹F.O. 17/204/81, Bonham to Clarendon, 4 August 1853.
- ²²Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, p. 414.

- ²³Ibid., pp. 417-418.
- ²⁴Ibid., p. 420.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 436.
- ²⁶F.O. 17/220, Foreign Office to Admiralty, 23 January 1854.
- ²⁷G. F. Bartle, "Sir John Bowring and the Arrow War in China," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library 43 (March 1961): 293-294.
- ²⁸F.O. 17/213/34 Enclosure 6, Bowring to Medhurst, 11 May 1854, in Bowring to Clarendon, 15 May 1854.
- ²⁹F.O. 17/214/56, Bowring to Clarendon, 14 June 1854.
- ³⁰Ibid.
- ³¹F.O. 17/214/74, Bowring to Clarendon, 6 July 1854.
- ³²F.O. 17/211/127, Clarendon to Bowring, 25 September 1854.
- ³³F.O. 17/211/158, Clarendon to Bowring, 25 October 1854.
- ³⁴Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, p. 452.
- ³⁵J. S. Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 32.
- ³⁶F.O. 17/224/93, Clarendon to Bowring, 9 April 1855.
- ³⁷F.O. 17/224/36, Clarendon to Bowring, 30 January 1855.
- ³⁸Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, p. 463.
- ³⁹Ibid., pp. 464-465.
- ⁴⁰Teng, The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, p. 131.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 134.
- ⁴²Ibid., p. 138.
- ⁴³F.O. 17/213/17, Bowring to Clarendon, 28 April 1854.
- ⁴⁴F.O. 17/214/52, Bowring to Clarendon, 5 June 1854.
- ⁴⁵F.O. 17/214/61, Bowring to Clarendon, 17 June 1854.
- ⁴⁶F.O. 17/214/53, Bowring to Clarendon, 10 June 1854.
- ⁴⁷Ibid.

- 48 Ibid.
- 49 F.O. 17/214/25 Enclosure 1, Medhurst and L. Bowring to J. Bowring, 14 July 1854, in Bowring to Clarendon, 14 July 1854.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 F.O. 17/215/95 Enclosure 1, Alcock to Bowring, 21 July 1854; in Bowring to Clarendon, 22 July 1854.
- 54 F.O. 17/219 "Separate", Alcock to Hammond, 21 October 1854.
- 55 F.O. 17/213, Bowring to Hammond, 18 May 1854.
- 56 F.O. 17/215/95, Bowring to Clarendon, 22 July 1854.
- 57 F.O. 17/211/133, Clarendon to Bowring, 25 September 1854.
- 58 F.O. 17/211/151, Clarendon to Bowring, 24 October 1854.
- 59 Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, pp. 414-415.
- 60 Ibid., p. 416.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 F.O. 17/216/17, Robertson to Hammond, 10 October 1854.
- 63 F.O. 17/224/50, Clarendon to Bowring, 9 February 1855.
- 64 F.O. 17/218/230 Enclosure 2, Bowring to Yeh, 11 December 1854, in Bowring to Clarendon, 11 December 1854.
- 65 F.O. 17/226/38 Enclosure, Ordinance passed by the Legislative Council of Hong Kong, 17 January 1855, in Bowring to Clarendon, 20 January 1855.
- 66 F.O. 17/218/226 Enclosure 6, Bowring to Robertson, 7 December 1854, in Bowring to Clarendon, 26 December 1854.
- 67 F.O. 17/228/108, Bowring to Clarendon, 28 February 1855.
- 68 Compare Gregory's account in Great Britain and the Taipings, p. 36, with that of Teng in The Taiping Rebellion and the Western Powers, p. 239.
- 69 Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, p. 36.

⁷⁰F.O. 17/231/205 Enclosure, Report of Charles Sinclair, n.d., in Bowring to Clarendon, 7 June 1855.

⁷¹F.O. 17/233/297, Bowring to Clarendon, 13 September 1855.

⁷²F.O. 17/228/108 Enclosure 3, Bowring to Yeh, n.d., in Bowring to Clarendon, 28 February 1855.

⁷³F.O. 17/224/87, Clarendon to Bowring, 9 April 1855.

⁷⁴F.O. 17/230/165 Enclosure 4, Bowring to Medhurst, 15 May 1855, in Bowring to Clarendon, 16 May 1855.

⁷⁵F.O. 17/224/193, Clarendon to Bowring, 8 September 1855.

⁷⁶F.O. 17/233/296, Bowring to Clarendon, 10 September 1855.

⁷⁷F.O. 17/235/403 Enclosure 1, Wade to Bowring, 13 December 1855, in Bowring to Clarendon, 14 December 1855.

⁷⁸F.O. 17/231/201 Enclosure, Memorandum from M. C. Morrison, 8 June 1855, in Bowring to Clarendon, 9 June 1855.

⁷⁹F.O. 17/233/296, Bowring to Clarendon, 10 September 1855.

⁸⁰Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, pp. 466-467.

CHAPTER II

TREATY REVISION AND THE TAIPING CRISIS 1856-1859

A temporary waning of the Taiping Rebellion coincided with the worsening of Sino-British relations over the issues of entry into Canton and treaty revision. While British policy toward the rebels became increasingly biased in the Manchus' favor, the Taipings failed to sustain their threat to Western interests and the Imperial government. The hiatus in the Taiping movement indirectly hastened the ultimate clash between the Chinese and English governments. Relieved from the strain of rebellion, the Imperial authorities directed their energies toward repelling the Europeans' persistent efforts to revise the Nanking Treaty. The Western powers, unhampered by rebel threats to their interests, were free to focus their attention upon exacting new treaties from the Manchus.

Throughout 1856, the British consuls (with the exception of T. T. Meadows), and Sir John Bowring continually deprecated the Taiping movement. The rebels' Christianity worsened British opinion of them. Consul Robertson commented upon the imperiousness of the Taipings, who adopted "the name of a liberal religion without yielding one step of the exclusiveness they have been educated in. . . . The Dynasty . . . may be superseded by that of Taeping [*sic*], but the policy will be the same. . . ." ¹ The rebels' arrogance closely resembled that of the Manchus, and correspondingly diminished British sympathy for them.

Robertson considered Taiping Christianity hopelessly decadent. "There is no Civilization in it beyond the assumption of Holy names, which are desecrated for the material purpose of forming a new Dynasty . . . it is a watchword and nothing more."² While disgusted with the rebels' use of Christian doctrine to advance their cause, the British were more concerned by the Taipings' inability to govern.

Although the Taiping movement revived, Bowring reported, it merely disorganized Chinese society.³ He considered the rebels' lack of an effective system of government a serious deficiency. Bowring, however, coupled his denunciation of the Taiping movement with an equally unfavorable report of the Imperial administration. "I find nowhere any growing confidence in or affection for the Imperial Government," Bowring wrote. "It is utterly unable to grapple with the difficulties of its position. . . . These revolutionary bands shake all confidence in the Peking Government, whose blindness, pride and obstinacy seem impervious to all lessons of experience."⁴ Neither the rebels nor the Imperialists held a strong political ascendancy in China, and the civil war reached a stalemate, which briefly permitted the English to regain their position as neutral observers.

In May, 1856, the Taipings routed the Imperialists at Chinkiang and threatened Shanghai. The prospect of another occupation and siege dismayed the British. After ejection of the Triads at Shanghai, British commercial interests had expanded, and British officials strongly reacted against a new threat to trade. Consul Robertson suggested that the policy of neutrality was obsolete. "Times and circumstances may occur when that policy can be carried a little too far . . . and our

tacit declaration of non-intervention be construed into weakness. . . ."5

He proposed that the British use their naval forces to intimidate the rebels, and that the city of Shanghai be placed under a joint protectorate of the treaty powers to avert attack.⁶ Bowring remained complacent about the safety of British subjects, but feared the stagnation of trade. He offered "to concur in any arrangement by which all parties would be interdicted from making the Five Ports the seat of hostilities" and favored Robertson's recommendations.⁷ Clarendon agreed that British interests could not be sacrificed in the civil war. He instructed Bowring to cooperate with the Americans to defend their common interests at Shanghai. Bowring was to inform the rebels that "any attack upon the City of Shanghai which is full of British Subjects and property will be repelled by force of arms; but that the British Government will in no way interfere in the Civil War if the Ports in which British commerce is carried on and to which British Subjects are committed are respected by the insurrectionary forces."⁸

Clarendon did not consider his policy on the defense of Shanghai a breach in neutrality. "It would be unjustifiable to allow the great amount of British Property at Shanghai to be exposed to plunder. . . . It appears to Her Majesty's Gov[ernmen]t that a bona fide observance of neutrality . . . does not require . . . such a sacrifice of British Interests."⁹ The American representative, Dr. Parker, hinted at joint Anglo-American assistance to the Manchus. Bowring rejected any suggestion that the British compromise their neutrality. He informed Parker that "if the Imperial Government should make the armed intervention of Great Britain in its favor, the condition of concessions

political or commercial I . . . advise your Excellency that I am not authorized to promise such intervention. . . ."10 Clarendon approved Bowring's response to the American.¹¹ Although the British continued to avoid direct assistance to the government, they compromised their neutrality in favor of the Manchus by extending their protection to all the treaty ports. They had expanded their scope of interest to include the port cities rather than the foreign settlements alone. As a result of this alteration in British policy, a greater amount of incidental aid to the Manchus was inevitable, but the British regarded themselves as neutral in the civil war.

In the latter months of 1856, internecine strife ruined the Taipings' organization and leadership. The Eastern King's steadily-growing power and arrogance led the jealous Hung Hsiu-ch'uan to order his execution. The Northern King and his followers murdered the Eastern King and twenty thousand of his adherents.¹² The Northern King's ambition grew in turn, and he attempted to assassinate the Assistant King Shih Ta-k'ai. In November, the Northern King was decapitated. Taiping leadership disintegrated. "Only Shih Ta-k'ai, the Assistant King, remained to share power with the Heavenly King, who withdrew more and more from the real world and left near relatives to speak in his name."¹³ Bereft of capable leaders, the rebel cause faltered.

While they knew of the Taiping purges, the British doubted that strife among the rebels would end rebellion in China. After the death of the Eastern King, Bowring observed that "on the whole, the reports are more favorable to the Imperialists," but he saw "no present prospect . . . of anything like the restoration of tranquility."¹⁴ Chinese

Secretary Wade predicted the collapse of the Taiping movement from its internal dissent.¹⁵ Like Bowring, he did not foresee restoration of peace from dissolution of the Taipings. "An attractive precedent of the facilities and privileges of sedition has been established, and . . . the multitude who have tasted the sweets of a change . . . will be slow to accept again the inglorious condition of the working man."¹⁶ Proliferation of rebel groups led the British to anticipate a prolonged civil war in China.

The crisis in the Taiping movement continued through 1858, providing the Chinese and British authorities some respite from the problems of rebellion. The Taipings refused to establish diplomatic relations with foreigners,¹⁷ removing potential distractions to Sino-British negotiations. The British increasingly discounted a rebellion that failed to defeat the incompetent government forces. Bowring forwarded several reports on the disorganization rampant among the Imperial armies.¹⁸ "The weakness and corruption of the Mandarins," he observed, "serve to counterpoise the progress of the Insurrectionists. What appears most to menace the rebel cause is the dissensions and defections among its principal leaders at Nanking. . . ."¹⁹ He pinpointed the Taipings' greatest weakness: inadequate leadership.

While Shih Ta-k'ai remained at Nanking until May, 1857, he failed to assume administrative authority.²⁰ He left the Taipings and formed an independent campaign. "With him went some of the best military commanders, and his departure was thus another grave setback to the Taiping movement."²¹ Although the Heavenly King appointed a number of new officials to the Taiping hierarchy, none were as capable as the

Eastern or Assistant Kings. The Taipings floundered in battle. While they retained forces in the cities along the banks of the Yangtze, they lost control of the river to Tseng Kuo-fan's army. Supplies for the Taiping army became difficult to obtain without the navigation of the Yangtze, further weakening the rebel cause.²² "The Taipings were thus on the defensive. Their military moves were worked out in conferences by the commanders of the main Taiping units themselves without regard to the government of the Heavenly King. . . . These commanders thought in military terms and were no longer truly concerned with . . . the revolutionary purpose of the Taipings."²³ The rebels lost the central organization necessary for concerted warfare. They won intermittent victories against the government, but they lacked their previous unity and ideological fervor. The movement steadily deteriorated. Disorganization of the Taipings made English neutrality easier to implement, and enabled the British to concentrate upon improving their trade and diplomatic relations with the Imperial government.

The recession of the Taiping Rebellion led to a revival in trade. The import trade expanded, and exports reached new heights.²⁴ Consul Robertson reported that "the shipments of Tea and silk will be this year as large as in any former season. . . . As long as the Imperialists and Rebels confine their operations to the Yangtze Kiang and leave the tea and silk producing districts . . . free from their ravages, they may go on fighting until one or the other is worn out."²⁵ The clandestine weapons trade continued.²⁶ Importation of weapons at Shanghai was forbidden²⁷ until Clarendon informed Bowring that he possessed no legal power to halt the trade.²⁸ The weapons trade was only one source of

profit derived from the rebellion. The rebels blocked certain transit routes to Shanghai, diverting a large proportion of the tea trade to Foochow. As a result of the Taiping Rebellion, the treaty port system began its long-awaited development. The currency situation remained problematic, and the British continued imports of bullion to pay for tea and silk. The currency system remained chaotic until 1857, when the Shanghai tael became the universal coin of exchange.²⁹ Although trade expanded in 1856, it remained irregular. Dissatisfied with Sino-British commerce, the Foreign Secretary contemplated new efforts to renegotiate the treaties.

As the American and French governments had specified 1856 as the year for revision of their treaties, the British had allies in their attempt to improve the trade system. Clarendon suggested sending a legation of American, French, and British representatives to Peking, noting that "the negotiations for this purpose are more likely to be successful if supported by the presence of a considerable naval force."³⁰ The American government instructed Dr. Parker to negotiate for residence of foreign diplomats at Peking, unlimited trade in China, freedom of religion in China, and reform of the Chinese courts.³¹ Bowring concurred only on the need for residence of envoys at Peking. He favored the limited objective of opening the Yangtze River to trade, and considered the other points of Parker's instructions chimerical.³² Parker received French and British diplomatic support. He departed for the Peiho in July, but Chinese authorities delayed him at Shanghai with promises of negotiation. "Conference succeeded conference, talk was drowned in talk, and the skilled Chinese diplomats kept . . . [Parker] in leash

from day to day, until it became too late to go to the Peiho."³³ Diplomatic relations remained unsatisfactory; the American mission had accomplished nothing.

The Canton city question and violation of their treaty rights through piracy led the English into war with the Imperial government. In 1856, anti-foreignism at Canton re-emerged. Cantonese threatened foreigners with death for entering the city, ³⁴ denying to the British what they considered a fundamental right. The Imperial government insisted that foreign diplomats confer with Commissioner Yeh to discuss treaty revision. Yeh annoyed the foreign representatives by refusing diplomatic intercourse.³⁵ The mutual hostility between Yeh and the foreign representatives intensified over the issue of piracy. Rapid development of piracy around Canton and Hong Kong, along with constant attacks upon Kowloon necessitated British ordinances which granted Chinese-owned vessels colonial registration, permission to fly the British flag, and the right to British protection.³⁶ The Imperial government's chronic inability to suppress piracy forced the British to assume the unwanted responsibility of police power in the China Sea. To protect their interests, the British had resorted to an expedient which soon created new problems of jurisdiction.

In late 1855, the Chinese seized two lorchas flying the British flag, on charges of salt smuggling. At Bowring's request, British naval authorities intervened, and Clarendon approved his decision.³⁷ By 1856, Clarendon was exasperated with the Imperial government. "It is hopeless to expect co-operation from the Chinese authorities," he wrote, "and it appears impossible to create any mixed Tribunals for the

trial of pirates. . . . Those Authorities though they will not ask for the assistance of H[er] M[ajesty]'s Ships of War are content that it should be afforded. . . ."38 The Imperial government's inadequate measures against piracy, its intransigence over treaty revision, and the anti-foreignism inherent in its policies increasingly aggravated the British. The Arrow incident exhausted British patience with the Manchu government.

On 8 October 1856, Commissioner Yeh ordered the lorcha Arrow to be seized. A Hong Kong merchant owned the vessel, which was mastered by a British subject. "An act of aggression on an individual ship thus granted British papers could be considered only as a means of administering a slap to the responsible British authorities."39 Yeh claimed that the lorcha was owned by another Chinese merchant, that a notorious pirate was aboard the vessel, and that contrary to English assertions, the British flag was not flying at the time of seizure.40 He did not know that the vessel's sailing license had expired. He arrested the crew without the British consul's warrant, and "a British ship in Chinese waters is British soil, and all on board, persons or property, are under British protection."41 English jurisdiction applied through extraterritoriality. Consul Parkes requested Yeh to apologize, release the twelve-man crew, and in future to respect the British flag. Yeh insisted upon detaining three of the crew for examination, and berated the English for their colonial registration of Chinese vessels, which created confusion.42 Clarendon regarded expiration of the vessel's license "a matter of British regulation" and thought Parkes's demands "very moderate under the circumstances."43 Yeh's actions outraged

Clarendon, who approved retaliation to obtain redress of British grievances.⁴⁴ With the Crimean War over and the India Mutiny yet to begin, the British adopted a belligerent policy toward China.

The problem at Canton remained local for several months after the Arrow seizure. After Yeh refused to meet Parkes's demands, the English seized an Imperial war-junk. Yeh finally released the twelve prisoners, but upon conditions that Parkes found unacceptable. "Mr. Parkes therefore refused to receive them, and, as there had been no apology offered, the question passed into the hands of the naval authorities."⁴⁵ British Admiral Seymour rapidly seized several forts around Canton and destroyed a fleet of war-junks. For three months the British sporadically shelled Canton, but Yeh refused to submit. Redress for the Arrow incident constituted only part of the motives behind the Sino-British conflict. "The fundamental cause of the ensuing war was the desire of the Western Powers to perfect the work inaugurated as they imagined in the treaties of the forties."⁴⁶

At the end of 1856, the rupture between the British and Chinese governments remained minor. Clarendon continued to instruct Bowring upon diplomacy for obtaining regular duties collection, as the British government would "admit no obligation to supply the vigilance which the Chinese Authorities ought themselves to exercise."⁴⁷ Clarendon regarded the Chinese prejudice against the system as a formidable barrier to its extension, and authorized Bowring to end the Shanghai system if a general Foreign Inspectorate could not be established.⁴⁸ The earlier work toward regularizing the customs system was useless without Chinese cooperation. While the British preferred diplomacy to war with the

Manchus, they were impatient for substantial treaty revision rather than local reforms. The Arrow war provided the final justification to redress diplomatic grievances.

Determined to exact a new treaty from the Manchus, the British government appointed the Earl of Elgin High Commissioner and Plenipotentiary to China. Elgin was instructed to demand redress and compensation for losses and injuries sustained by British subjects, residence for the British envoy at Peking, and direct written communication with Chinese officials.⁴⁹ Clarendon enjoined Elgin

to induce the Chinese Government to consent to throw open the ports of China generally to foreign commerce, and to allow the subjects of foreign Powers freely to communicate with the great cities in the interior, but more especially with those which are situated on the large rivers and those lying immediately within the sea-board of the north-eastern coast. . . . It would be desirable that your Excellency should include the important city of Nankin [sic] by name, as one of the places to which British merchants should have access; but as that city is now in the hands of the insurgents, it might be best to obtain in general terms permission to frequent the Yang-tze-keang river, and to trade with the cities on its banks.⁵⁰

The British sought to expand and to regularize the China trade. Elgin was to negotiate upon trade duties, internal taxation, and legalization of the opium trade. The British claimed no exclusive advantages for their trade; Elgin cooperated with the French and the Americans.⁵¹

Regardless of the court's hostility to foreign trade and its opposition to treaty revision, the British persistently asserted their Free Trade interests.

In June, the Chinese and the British agreed to localize the hostilities at Canton, a policy that the home government approved.⁵² The India Mutiny delayed settlement of the China problem, as troops bound for China were diverted to India. Bereft of military support for

his journey to the Peiho, Elgin waited. Clarendon had mentioned an attack upon Canton as an unfavorable alternative to a demonstration of force at Peking. Elgin decided that "he must follow his instructions and make at least an attempt to induce the Peking government to settle outstanding questions by . . . diplomacy, but that, in the case of a diplomatic repulse, he must be prepared to strike promptly at Canton."⁵³ In August, the English blockaded Canton. Delays in coordinating meetings and resolutions among the foreign envoys, and lack of sufficient military force destroyed the opportunity for the journey to Peking. The British settled upon the limited objective of subduing Canton. Although the blockade induced considerable distress at Canton by halting trade, the English observed that the Cantonese made no preparations for war.⁵⁴ In December, Admiral Seymour completed the blockade with newly-arrived supplementary forces. The envoys informed Commissioner Yeh that if he yielded to the British right of entry, and provided compensation for British losses at Canton, the city would be spared.⁵⁵ Yeh refused. In reply the English and French bombarded Canton, seizing it on 29 December 1857.

While the Cantonese passively resisted the allied occupation, in February, Elgin thought it safe to suspend hostilities against China.⁵⁶ Yeh was arrested and exiled to Calcutta, where he died. "Canton being thus disarmed and held, the ambassadors were free to turn their attention to the principal object of their mission, negotiating with the court of Peking, and securing a revision of the treaties."⁵⁷ Elgin requested the Imperial government to send an accredited plenipotentiary to Shanghai by the end of March.⁵⁸ The Manchus failed to respond. In

his determination to break the impasse between the British and Chinese over treaty revision, Elgin was prepared to use force. He requested Admiral Seymour to ensure that a fleet of gunboats would be available at Peking.⁵⁹ Elgin departed for the Peiho. At Tientsin, the English, French, Russian, and American envoys launched a diplomatic onslaught against the Manchus.

On 20 April, the foreign envoys assembled at Taku. Elgin requested to confer with a Chinese representative empowered to revise the treaties. On 10 May, the Chinese envoy announced that his government refused to enlarge his powers of negotiation.⁶⁰ Elgin had warned the Chinese that such a delay would invite hostilities.⁶¹ He accordingly directed Admiral Seymour "to summon the Commander of the [Taku] forts to deliver them temporarily into your hands, on the assurance that you will return them when the negotiations in which the Plenipotentiaries are engaged shall have been brought to a satisfactory issue, and if the summons . . . be disregarded, to take them by force."⁶² As the Chinese refused the English demand, Seymour captured the forts. The envoys proceeded inland to Tientsin and the Chinese acceded to their request for accredited negotiators. "The appointment of these high officials was evidence that, at last, the court of Peking realised the seriousness of the situation, and was resolved to free itself, by negotiation, from the pressure of an armed occupation of the portal of the capital."⁶³ To open negotiations, the Chinese met with the foreign envoys separately. While Elgin's brother, Lord Frederick Bruce, nominally headed the English negotiators, the interpreters Mr. Wade and Mr. Lay performed the work of revision. Helpless under the determined browbeating of Mr.

Lay, the Chinese acquiesced to British demands.

The Chinese consented to the toleration of Christianity, measures to suppress piracy, revision of tariffs and customs duties, and the use of English in official correspondence. They reluctantly conceded the opening of the Yangtze River to trade. To forestall the opening of China, the authorities requested that Europeans refrain from claiming their right of access to the Yangtze until it was freed from rebel influence.⁶⁴ The Chinese resisted granting envoys residence at Peking,⁶⁵ which entailed a drastic change in their system of foreign relations. The English insisted upon this point, as they had long considered it essential to proper diplomatic intercourse between China and England. Unable to resist, the Chinese yielded. The final treaty draft contained five clauses that strongly affected future Sino-British relations. Under Article III, the British diplomat was granted the right of residence at Peking, and in Article V, the Chinese acknowledged British claims to diplomatic equality. Britain received most-favored-nation status through Article LIV, and the right of tariff revision through Article XXVI. Article X contained provisions for opening the Yangtze to trade.⁶⁶ On 26 June 1857, the English Treaty of Tientsin was signed, subject to ratification one year later at Peking.

The treaty represented a major step toward opening China to foreign influence. Chinese and British alike realized the importance of permitting envoys residence at Peking; China would lose its traditional status as a tribute-nation. Opposition to Westernization of their diplomatic relations was not merely Chinese "arrogance". The dynasty sought to protect a political and cultural heritage against

foreign encroachment. Determined to establish Free Trade in China, the British demanded diplomatic access to Peking as a means of resolving commercial problems. The treaty was an instrument for regularizing commerce and preventing the Imperial government from wielding arbitrary authority over British traders. Although reluctant to permit Western influence in China, the Imperial government was too weak to resist.

Prior to the Treaty of Tientsin, duties levied on goods in transit varied among districts, an irregularity irksome to British traders. The English resolved this problem by requiring publication of transit duties at the ports, and obtaining the right to commute the duties by paying a small percentage of the value of goods in transit.⁶⁷ When the British completed the negotiations for tariff reform, a five-percent general duty was levied on commodities not specifically mentioned in the tariff. Opium, legalized under the treaty, commanded a duty of approximately seven percent. French authorities preferred a low duty on silk, as they were most interested in that commodity; the duty remained well below the standard five-percent ad valorem.⁶⁸ The Chinese retained the duty previously levied on tea. Although the tea duty was considerably higher than the standard rate, the English levied duties on tea in England that compensated for the rate paid in China.⁶⁹ The duties were compromises designed to satisfy both the Chinese and the treaty powers. The English and Chinese appended rules to the tariffs as additional safeguards to regular trade. In consideration of the rebellion existing in China, munitions and implements of war were declared contraband goods, while a uniform customs administration based upon the Shanghai system was to be established at each port.⁷⁰ After years of futile diplomacy,

the British achieved treaty revision through force. Trade was regulated by law, and the channels of diplomatic intercourse opened. The English thought that they finally had induced the Manchus to recognize their right of Free Trade.

Two problems remained that marred the English success in treaty revision: the continued agitation against foreigners at Canton, and the difficulty of opening the Yangtze to trade. Foreign Secretary Malmesbury was dissatisfied with the mixed government of French, English, and Chinese authorities at Canton. He ordered the city placed under martial law,⁷¹ but then gave Elgin discretion to modify his instructions.⁷² By the end of 1858, the city was comparatively tranquil. Upon receiving the right to navigate the Yangtze, the British were eager to reconnoiter the area and select new ports to be opened. In exchange for permission to navigate the Yangtze up to Hankow, Elgin agreed to recommend that the British government establish its envoy outside Peking. This agreement was not recorded in official documents,⁷³ but in a despatch to Malmesbury, Elgin referred to the problems associated with his proposed mission.

The Treaty-right to navigate the Yang-tze, and to resort to ports upon that river for purposes of trade, was . . . made contingent on the re-establishment of the Imperial authority in the ports in question; because, as we have seen fit to affect neutrality between the Emperor of China and the rebels, we could not . . . require him to give us rights and protection in places actually occupied by a Power which we treat with the same respect as his own.⁷⁴

Elgin knew that he had no right to navigate the river until ratification of the Treaty of Tientsin. He thought it necessary, however, to publicize the opening of the river to foreign trade by an ostensible tour of inspection among the ports.⁷⁵ Elgin's mission on the Yangtze

River refocused British attention onto the Taiping rebels, long-ignored as a waning influence during the period of treaty revision.

Elgin considered it "essential to the proper appreciation of our position . . . that we should obtain . . . more accurate information than we possessed as to the situation and prospects of the parties to the civil war. . . ."76 While he observed a lack of popular support for either the rebels or the Imperialists, Elgin reported that the government forces held more of the Yangtze district than the rebels.⁷⁷ The Taipings' control of their districts was precarious. "The rebels do not appear in any part to command . . . [the Yangtze] beyond the range of their guns. Nowhere did we see any rebel junks, and both Nankin and Ngan-ching were closely beleaguered by Imperial fleets."⁷⁸ The river cities were decimated by rebels and Imperialists; Elgin found little evidence of thriving commercial activity. He reported that Chinkiang "has been taken and retaken and has experienced therefore the tender mercies both of rebels and Imperialists. I never before saw such a scene of desolation. . . . With certain differences of degree, this was the condition of every city which I visited on my voyage. . . ."79 Elgin's trip up the Yangtze and his lengthy report on the Taipings were not preparatory for subsequent British intervention in the rebellion. The British sought only to gain information on the prospects of the river trade, and to reassure the Chinese of their goodwill. The rebel occupation, however, clearly was uncondusive to the security of trade.

In spite of Elgin's wish to avoid a confrontation with them, the Taipings fired upon a British ship bearing the flag of truce.⁸⁰ The

British returned the fire and the following day, they renewed battering the Taiping forts. In his despatch to Malmesbury, Elgin explained his actions.

Although the rebels had had a good deal the worst of it in the transactions of the afternoon [of the first exchange], it was impossible to say what view they might take of the result, if . . . we were to proceed quietly on our voyage. . . . It was equally impossible to say in what guise we might present ourselves on our return, or what inconveniences might arise if the rebels had any doubt as to whether we or they were the stronger party. It was therefore determined that we should re-descend the river .⁸¹ . and punish severely some of the forts which had fired upon us.

Although the British exchanged fire with the Taipings, Elgin was prepared to assure them that the British had no intention of intervening in the civil war.⁸² Except for a minor incident, the British remained unmolested for the rest of their journey. Despite the Taipings' destruction of the river cities, the British selected three new ports to be opened: Chinkiang, Kiukiang, and Hankow. By provision of the Treaty of Tientsin, only Chinkiang could immediately be opened as a port of trade. Kiukiang and Hankow would be opened to trade when the river was cleared of the rebels. Although the Taipings impaired the expansion of trade, the British had no desire to intervene in the civil war to advance their interests on the Yangtze River.

Before receiving Elgin's report on the Taipings, Malmesbury instructed Lord Frederick Bruce on his conduct toward the Manchu authorities if they requested assistance against the rebels. Bruce's diplomatic status enabled him to assume Bowring's position as Superintendent of Trade, and to negotiate with the Chinese. Malmesbury carefully explained his views on the rebellion. "It would certainly be desirable," he acknowledged, "that peace should be restored to the interior . . .

[of China] and . . . navigation of the Yangzekeang . . . opened to foreign intercourse; but . . . it is impossible to judge whether any attempt to serve the purposes of the . . . [Imperial] Government by contributing to suppress . . . [the rebellion] might not do more harm than good."⁸³ Although it was difficult to use British naval power against scattered rebel groups, Malmesbury thought that capturing a few rebel strongholds might constitute adequate assistance to the Imperial government.⁸⁴ Malmesbury, however, cautioned Bruce that "Her Majesty's Government would not be disposed to enter upon such a course without previous concert with and without the assured cooperation of its allies."⁸⁵ He admitted that the British had little knowledge of the rebels' position, but decided that the rebellion was too widespread for the allied powers to quell. "At the present state of our knowledge," he concluded, "it would not be proper . . . to encourage any expectation of material assistance on our part."⁸⁶ As they awaited further information on the rebels, the British returned to the problem of treaty ratification.

In accordance with Elgin's suggestion, the British government established its envoy at Shanghai, but required that the Chinese occasionally receive him at Peking. Malmesbury insisted that Bruce "make the Chinese authorities . . . understand that Her Majesty's Government do not renounce the right of permanent residence [at Peking], and . . . will instantly exercise it, if . . . difficulties are thrown in the way of communications between Her Majesty's Minister and the Central Government . . . or any disposition [is] shown to evade . . . the Treaty."⁸⁷ On 26 April, Bruce arrived in Hong Kong. In June, he

reported that the Chinese were using tactics to delay treaty ratification.⁸⁸ Instead of going to Peking to receive Bruce and the French envoy, M. de Bourboulon, the Imperial commissioners lingered at Soochow. Bruce expressed his displeasure with the Chinese authorities and emphasized his determination to exchange treaty ratifications at Peking.⁸⁹ He anticipated the problems Elgin experienced the previous year. Bruce requested that Rear-Admiral Hope ascertain if preparations were made to receive the French and British envoys at Tientsin. "Should the reply be in the negative," Bruce said, "I would suggest that . . . [the Chinese] should be called upon to transmit the intelligence to Peking, warning them at the same time that if a reply is not received within a certain fixed period, the Imperial Government will be held responsible for the consequences."⁹⁰ The Chinese commissioners left Shanghai for Peking. On 20 June, the foreign envoys, joined by the American plenipotentiary John Ward, arrived at Taku.

The Chinese closed the Peiho River. "The rabble on the shore asserted that there were no officers in the [Taku] forts, which were manned solely by militia, and had been reconstructed by the people as protection against rebels, not by order of the Government for the purpose of keeping the Allied forces out of the river."⁹¹ Bruce ignored these assertions, recognizing the fortifications at Taku as an attempt by the court war-faction to halt the envoys' progress. He considered it imperative to proceed to Tientsin, which entailed defeating the forces at the Peiho. Bruce sought to discredit the war-faction and "impress the Chinese with a just idea of our national power and equality."⁹² The envoys requested Rear-Admiral Hope to open the Peiho. On

24 June, Hope sent an ultimatum to the Chinese, which they ignored. The Chinese successfully resisted the subsequent British attack. "The prestige of British arms suffered a serious blow, while the credit of the war party among the Chinese was now fully established."⁹³ Ward left the French and British envoys to conclude ratification of the American treaty at Peitang. As the French forces were in Annam, the French minister relied upon British military power to enforce his government's claim to treaty ratification. Embarrassed, the English and French envoys returned to Shanghai.

Chinese resistance to treaty ratification placed the British in a difficult situation. The English persistently regarded China as a sovereign state, attempting to draw the Imperial government into Western modes of diplomacy. Bruce observed that "in China international relations have been always studiously ignored by the Government, and in no single instance has a Foreign Minister succeeded in obtaining admission to the capital, except on performance of the 'kotow,' or ceremony of vassalage, or in the character of tribute-bearer."⁹⁴ The British rejected Chinese modes of diplomacy and became increasingly determined to humble the government. Bruce urged the new Foreign Secretary, Lord John Russell, to send a large force to China to exact treaty ratification from the Manchus. "The more manifest our superiority the shorter will be the contest, and the more inclined will be the Emperor to abandon those pretensions of superiority which form the real obstacle to amicable relations with the Government and the people of China."⁹⁵ In conjunction with the French, Russell agreed to dispatch military aid to achieve ratification.⁹⁶ The British, however, sought

a limited campaign against the Imperial government. "There are no reasons," Russell asserted, "for interrupting friendly relations with the Chinese at Shanghai, Canton, and elsewhere."⁹⁷ The Foreign Secretary thought that news of British preparations for war might deter the Chinese from further hostilities.⁹⁸ While anxious to ratify the treaty, the English cautiously avoided an expensive large-scale war, which would disrupt trade.

Before resorting to force against the Manchus, the British decided to apply diplomatic pressure. They demanded that the Chinese apologize for the Taku incident, permit the British minister to arrive at Tientsin in a British vessel, and convey the minister to Peking with due honor to ratify the treaty.⁹⁹ The British revoked their agreement with the Chinese on residence of foreign envoys in China. "It rests henceforward with Her Majesty . . . to decide whether or not she shall instruct her Minister to take up his abode permanently at Peking."¹⁰⁰ In January, 1860, Bruce received a despatch from Russell, instructing him to inform the Chinese of the British demands and to insist upon the emperor's assent within thirty days.¹⁰¹ If the Chinese refused to cooperate, "the British naval and military authorities will proceed to adopt such measures as they deem advisable for the purpose of compelling the Emperor of China to observe the engagements contracted for him by his Plenipotentiaries at Tien-tsin. . . ."¹⁰² Russell also instructed Bruce to exact a large indemnity from the Chinese if they failed to comply with his demands.¹⁰³ Secure from internal threat to its authority by the waning of the Taiping Rebellion, the Imperial government could resist treaty ratification. The British, however, were thoroughly

aroused against the government, and the Taipings were about to stage their last great offensive. The Manchu dynasty was in grave danger of collapsing under the strain of war and rebellion.

British policy toward the Imperial government was fraught with inconsistencies. Although they wished the government to subdue the Taiping Rebellion, the British simultaneously weakened it by demands for treaty revision. As the authorities failed to tranquilize China, the British incurred unwanted responsibility for maintaining the security of trade, which worsened their relations with the Imperial government. Weak in central military organization, the Chinese government was powerless to act concertedly against the Taipings or the European barbarians. The Manchus were forced to delay treaty revision for as long as possible, but this only hardened British determination to exact new treaties.

British negotiations with the Manchus marked their continued acceptance of Imperial authority. When the rebellion subsided and the threat of ratification became imminent, the Manchus resisted British demands. The British, however, had exacted important diplomatic and trade concessions from the Imperial government, which they insisted the Manchus honor by ratifying the treaty. The arrangement for Elgin's journey up the Yangtze constituted the last vestige of cordiality between the Chinese and British. The India Mutiny ended in 1859, enabling the British to coerce the Manchus into complying with their demands. The Chinese triumph over the British at Taku, the culmination of resistance to the treaties, compelled the British to adopt sterner measures to exact the Manchus' cooperation.

FOOTNOTES

¹F.O. 17/224/17 Enclosure, Robertson to Bowring, 31 December 1855, in Bowring to Clarendon, 12 January 1856.

²Ibid.

³F.O. 17/246/120, Bowring to Clarendon, 12 April 1856.

⁴Ibid.

⁵F.O. 17/248/208 Enclosure, Robertson to Bowring, 28 June 1856, in Bowring to Clarendon, 5 July 1856.

⁶Ibid.

⁷F.O. 17/248/208, Bowring to Clarendon, 5 July 1856. Emphasis in the original.

⁸F.O. 17/243/78, Clarendon to Bowring, 8 September 1856.

⁹F.O. 17/258, Clarendon to Admiralty, 8 September 1856.

¹⁰F.O. 17/249/260 Enclosure 2, Bowring to Parker, 21 August 1856, in Bowring to Clarendon, 21 August 1856.

¹¹F.O. 17/243/219, Clarendon to Bowring, 4 November 1856.

¹²Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, p. 69.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴F.O. 17/251/328, Bowring to Clarendon, 13 October 1856.

¹⁵F.O. 17/265/129 Enclosure 1, Wade's summary of the rebellion, June to December 1856, utilizing reports from the Peking Gazette, in Bowring to Clarendon, 14 March 1857.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷F.O. 17/263/15 Enclosure 1, Robertson to Bowring, 2 January 1857, in Bowring to Clarendon, 12 January 1857.

¹⁸F.O. 17/263/15 Enclosure 1, Robertson to Bowring, 2 January 1857, in Bowring to Clarendon, 12 January 1857, and F.O. 17/269/244 Enclosure, Robertson to Bowring, 11 May 1857, in Bowring to Clarendon, 13 May 1857.

¹⁹F.O. 17/265/129, Bowring to Clarendon, 14 March 1857.

²⁰Michael, The Taiping Rebellion, vol. 1, p. 117.

- ²¹Ibid., p. 118.
- ²²Ibid., p. 122.
- ²³Ibid., p. 130.
- ²⁴See Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, pp. 466-467 for trade statistics.
- ²⁵F.O. 17/244/17 Enclosure, Robertson to Bowring, 31 December 1855, in Bowring to Clarendon, 12 January 1856.
- ²⁶F.O. 17/244/10, Bowring to Clarendon, 5 January 1856.
- ²⁷F.O. 17/246/124, Bowring to Clarendon, 12 April 1856.
- ²⁸F.O. 17/243/165, Clarendon to Bowring, 9 August 1856.
- ²⁹Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, pp. 467-471 *passim*.
- ³⁰F.O. 17/256 "Secret and Confidential", Clarendon to Admiralty, 9 April 1856. Clarendon noted that "Lord Palmerston sh~~ou~~ld see this."
- ³¹Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 417.
- ³²Ibid.
- ³³Ibid., p. 418.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 420.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. 421.
- ³⁶Ibid., pp. 410-411.
- ³⁷F.O. 17/242/82, Clarendon to Bowring, 22 March 1856.
- ³⁸F.O. 17/257, Clarendon to Admiralty, 18 July 1856.
- ³⁹Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 423.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 422-424.
- ⁴¹Ibid., p. 425.
- ⁴²Ibid., pp. 426-427.
- ⁴³F.O. 17/243/243, Clarendon to Bowring, 10 December 1856.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 428.

⁴⁶William C. Costin, Great Britain and China, 1833-1860, (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 205.

⁴⁷F.O. 17/243/234, Clarendon to Bowring, 9 December 1856.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 487.

⁵⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to the Earl of Elgin's Special Missions to China and Japan; 1857 to 1859," 1859, XXXIII, [2571], Number 4, Clarendon to Elgin, 20 April 1857.

⁵¹Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 488.

⁵²F.O. 17/270/279, Bowring to Clarendon, 5 June 1857, and Clarendon's reply, F.O. 17/262/171, Clarendon to Bowring, 6 August 1857.

⁵³Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 494.

⁵⁴F.O. 17/272/390 Enclosure, Memorandum from student interpreter Mr. Alabaster to Bowring, 4 October 1857, in Bowring to Clarendon, 5 October 1857.

⁵⁵Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 497.

⁵⁶Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to . . . Elgin's Special Missions . . .," Number 101 Enclosure 2, Elgin to Rear-Admiral Seymour and Major-General Van Straubenzee, 6 February 1858, in Elgin to Clarendon, 8 February 1858.

⁵⁷Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 506.

⁵⁸Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to . . . Elgin's Special Missions . . .," Number 102 Enclosure 1, Elgin to the Senior Secretary of State at Peking, 11 February 1858, in Elgin to Clarendon, 12 February 1858.

⁵⁹Ibid., Number 120 Enclosure 2, Elgin to Seymour, 2 March 1858, in Elgin to Clarendon, 2 March 1858.

⁶⁰Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 514.

⁶¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to . . . Elgin's Special Missions . . .," Number 146 Enclosure 1, Elgin to the Prime Minister of the Emperor of China, 24 April 1858, in Elgin to Clarendon, 25 April 1858.

⁶²*Ibid.*, Number 155 Enclosure 5, Elgin to Seymour, 19 May 1858, in Elgin to Malmesbury, 20 May 1858.

⁶³Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 519.

⁶⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to . . . Elgin's Special Missions . . .," Number 168 Enclosure 1, Commissioners Kweiliang, Hwashana, and Kiyung to the Earl of Elgin, 11 June 1858, in Elgin to Malmesbury, 14 June 1858.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, Number 181 Enclosure, Treaty between Her Majesty and the Emperor of China, in Elgin to Malmesbury, 12 July 1858.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, Number 181, Elgin to Malmesbury, 12 July 1858.

⁶⁸Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 534.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to . . . Elgin's Special Missions . . .," Number 222 Enclosure, "Tariffs", 8 November 1858, in Elgin to Malmesbury, 8 November 1858. See Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, pp. 533-535 for a discussion of the tariff rules.

⁷¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to . . . Elgin's Special Missions . . .," Number 171, Malmesbury to Elgin, 9 September 1858.

⁷²*Ibid.*, Number 188, Malmesbury to Elgin, 25 September 1858.

⁷³Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 537, especially footnote 117.

⁷⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence Relative to . . . Elgin's Special Missions . . .," Number 216, Elgin to Malmesbury, 5 November 1858.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Ibid., Number 228, Elgin to Malmesbury, 5 January 1859.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³F.O. 17/311/5, Malmesbury to Bruce, 1 March 1859.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence With Mr. Bruce, Her Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in China, Between March and September 1859," 1860, LXIX, [2587], Number 1, Malmesbury to Bruce, 1 March 1859.

⁸⁸Ibid., Number 8 Enclosure 3, Commissioners Kweiliang, Hwashana, &c., to Mr. Bruce, 28 May 1859, in Bruce to Malmesbury, 14 June 1859.

⁸⁹Ibid., Number 8 Enclosure 4, Bruce to Commissioner Kweiliang, 8 June 1859, in Bruce to Malmesbury, 14 June 1859.

⁹⁰Ibid., Number 8 Enclosure 6, Bruce to Rear-Admiral Hope, 11 June 1859, in Bruce to Malmesbury, 14 June 1859.

⁹¹Costin, Great Britain and China, p. 292.

⁹²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence With Mr. Bruce . . . Between March and September 1859," Number 9 Enclosure 2, Bruce to Rear-Admiral Hope, 21 June 1859, in Bruce to Malmesbury, 5 July 1859.

⁹³Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 579.

⁹⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence With Mr. Bruce . . . Between March and September 1859," Number 10, Bruce to Malmesbury, 13 July 1859.

⁹⁵Ibid., Number 18, Bruce to Russell, 3 September 1859.

⁹⁶Ibid., Number 12, Russell to Bruce, 26 September 1859.

⁹⁷Ibid., Number 14, Russell to Bruce, 10 October 1859.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Further Correspondence With Mr. Bruce, Her Majesty's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary in China, August, October, and November, 1859," 1860, LXIX, [2606], Number 2, Russell to Bruce, 29 October 1859.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Ibid., Number 3, Russell to Bruce, 10 November 1859.

CHAPTER III

THE COURSE TOWARD INTERVENTION 1860-1861

While the Taiping Rebellion affected Sino-British relations far more strongly after 1859, the British maintained their precarious, flawed neutrality for another two years. Suspicion of the Manchu and Taiping policies placed them in the awkward position of balancing the competing claims of the central government and the rebels. Although Sino-British relations slowly improved after ratification of the Treaty of Tientsin, the British followed a cautious policy toward the government that had long resisted Western influence. As the Taipings simultaneously reversed their foreign policy, the British viewed this change with little enthusiasm. It merely worsened their problem of maintaining neutrality while establishing better relations with the Imperial government. The anomalous position of the English in the civil war could not last indefinitely; both the Manchus and the Taipings acted to draw the British toward a course of intervention.

Although the Manchu court resisted treaty ratification, the British were committed to the central government through diplomacy and the hard-won treaties. The humiliation at Taku strengthened British resolve to exact the Manchus' compliance. To ensure success in humbling the Manchus, Bruce delayed his ultimatum to the Imperial government until he could act in concert with the French, and obtain adequate military assistance. Despite the Anglo-French alliance and the threat

of force, the Chinese refused to comply with Bruce's ultimatum. Foreign Secretary Russell had prepared instructions for war against China. The naval and military "forces were to rendezvous in Hong Kong, an Anglo-French occupation of Chusan was to be effected, grain junks to be stopped, and points on the Gulf of Pechili as the Admirals might desire for bases were to be seized and the Takoo forts attacked."¹ Russell also ordered a blockade of the Yangtze River and the coast north of it.² In February, 1860, Lord Elgin was reappointed as the special ambassador to China, completing British preparations for war. It was not until June, however, that the English began their military campaign in China to achieve treaty ratification.

The Taiping Rebellion complicated the proposed mission to Peking. Under the guidance of Hung Jen-kan, Taiping Prime Minister, the insurrection regained enough ardor to threaten the dynasty. The English feared that excessively harsh measures against the Manchus, coupled with the Taiping Rebellion, would precipitate the dynasty's fall and invite chaos in China. Russell expressed his concern over the problems that might arise from an allied assault on Peking.

Abandoning his capital upon the advance of European troops, condemned to admit the superiority of Powers whom the Court of China, in its fatuity, has hitherto treated with contempt, the Emperor would suffer greatly in reputation.

The rebels would take heart; the great officers of the Empire might find it difficult to maintain the central authority; the Governors of Provinces might hardly be able to quell insurrection. . . . The bonds of allegiance, once loosened, might never again be firmly united.³

As the rebellion entered its final and most intense phase, it increasingly affected British policy toward the Manchus.

In 1859, Hung Jen-kan began to reorganize and revitalize the

dissipated Taiping movement. He revised Taiping theology and encouraged biblical studies as part of the civil service examination.⁴ While rationalizing Taiping Christianity, Hung Jen-kan broadened rebel ideology to gain support from the Chinese scholar-gentry.⁵ He attempted to reorganize the rebel government, and suggested reforms for China's modernization.⁶ His program entailed a shift in the rebels' foreign policy. While the Heavenly King insisted upon exacting homage from foreigners, Hung Jen-kan recognized the importance of national equality in diplomacy.⁷ To win support for the Taipings, Hung Jen-kan attempted to reverse the Heavenly King's policies. He cultivated the favor of missionaries and tried to open foreign relations with the Western Powers. His reforms were doomed to failure. The Chinese scholar-gentry and Western officials were entrenched in their prejudice against the rebels. Hung Jen-kan's program nevertheless reinvigorated the Taiping movement and renewed British interest in the rebel cause. The Taipings' emergence from Nanking, and their new foreign policy complicated the British position in the civil war.

Desperate for supplies, the Taipings began to move outward from Nanking, capturing Soochow, Hangchow, and Changchow. Their invasion coincided with the opening of the silk season, a period in silk-culture that requires continuous labor. Consul Sinclair informed Bruce that "Much inconvenience is apprehended from this temporary and possibly prolonged interruption to that trade."⁸ The Taipings' advance into Chekiang province began the ruin of China's silk trade and renewed British alarm for the safety of Shanghai. To protect the city, Chinese authorities requested foreign assistance. Bruce, having heard of the

rebels' destructiveness at Hangchow, agreed to defend Shanghai in concert with the French. He thought that

without taking any part in this civil contest . . . we might protect Shanghai from attack, and assist the authorities in preserving tranquillity within its walls, on the ground of its being a port open to trade, and of the intimate connection existing between the interests of the town and of the foreign settlement. . . . We accordingly issued separate proclamations to that effect in identical terms. . . . I have declined all suggestions to extend the protection further than to the city itself.⁹

Bruce's policy represented an unmeditated revival of Clarendon's plan to protect Shanghai in 1856, and constituted no dramatic break in British policy toward the rebels.¹⁰ British officials' primary consideration was protection of their trade interests. Bruce was confident that news of the Anglo-French protection of Shanghai would deter a rebel assault,¹¹ but he underestimated the Taipings' determination to attack the city.

Bruce knew that defense of Shanghai would place the allies in an anomalous position. At war with the Imperial government in the north, the British simultaneously would be defending its interests in the south, if the Taipings assaulted Shanghai. Bruce viewed the problem with trepidation as he realized that intervention in the civil war might endanger the Peking expedition. He refused "to intervene beyond the legitimate protection of foreign interests, without a previous statement of our differences with the Court, and a distinct understanding with the Government as to the extent and nature of the assistance that is to be rendered."¹² Bruce was concerned that England would lose prestige if the British appeared to serve the Imperial government in repulsing the Taipings. "No course could be so well calculated to lower our national reputation," he wrote, "as to lend

material support to a Government, the corruption of whose authorities is only checked by its weakness."¹³ The solution to this dilemma lay in regeneration of the Imperial government under British guidance. Until the Manchus were amenable to foreign influence, however, the British avoided intervention.

As the Imperial authorities and the Taipings beset them with diplomatic overtures, the British position in the civil war became increasingly difficult. The mandarins again requested intervention, arguing that this would reassure the emperor of British friendliness toward China. Bruce coolly responded that if the Chinese wanted assistance, they should immediately settle their differences with the English, and send their own troops from the north to the southern provinces.¹⁴ He wished to avoid incurring responsibility for quelling the rebellion, and to conclude the Sino-British war. Under Hung Jen-kan's influence, the Taipings reversed their policy of non-intercourse with foreigners, and renewed attempts at friendly diplomatic relations with the treaty powers. Bruce enjoined Consul Meadows against responding to Hung Jen-kan's invitation to confer at Soochow, considering such action "inexpedient and objectionable on principle."¹⁵ He feared that if foreigners displayed sympathy for the rebel cause, they would encourage the Taipings to approach Shanghai.¹⁶ He notified the rebels that the Anglo-French forces were instructed to hold the city in a military occupation. Defense of Shanghai would constitute "a purely military measure, whereas any declaration . . . would be neither quite consistent with the state of . . . our diplomatic functions at present . . . nor could it be framed to avoid some . . . opinion on the desire

the Insurgents have manifested to enter into relations with us."¹⁷

While diplomatic and strategic considerations prevented Bruce from openly rejecting the rebels' offer of friendly intercourse, he expressed contempt for their religion, leadership, and policies. "The prospects of the extension of pure Christianity . . . and the success of the insurrection . . . have suffered materially from the religious character . . . [Hung Hsiu-ch'uan's] leadership has imparted to it."¹⁸ The Taipings' religious dogma, Bruce observed, deprived them of support among the Chinese, transferring "to the Tartars . . . the prestige of upholding traditions and principles against the assaults of a numerically insignificant sect."¹⁹ He deplored the inability of the Taiping leaders to organize a system of government in their captured cities.²⁰ The Taipings' destructiveness increasingly conflicted with British trade interests, which depended upon security of property. Bruce dismissed Hung Jen-kan's reform of Taiping administration. "Every day shows more strongly that no principles or ideas of policy animate . . . [the rebel] leaders. Even the extermination of the Tartars . . . seems rather a pretext for upsetting all government and authority . . . than . . . a step toward establishing a . . . national government."²¹ Like Bowring, Bruce considered the Taipings incapable of ruling China. As he feared that the rebels' occupation of Shanghai would ruin trade, Bruce was "little inclined to attach weight to their assurances of respecting foreign persons or property or to allow them if it can be helped to obtain possession of the city."²² Although they wished to avoid conflict with the Taipings, the British were prepared to defend their trade interests.

On 19 August, the rebels assaulted Shanghai. British and Indian troops repulsed them. After three days of fighting, the Taipings withdrew. In his despatch to Russell, Bruce explained that "some persons advocated taking the offensive against the Insurgents, but the Commander . . . considering the smallness of our forces, the season, and the danger of insurrection in the city, decided on maintaining a strictly defensive attitude. Politically speaking . . . this was the . . . course . . . least calculated to fetter the proceedings of the Ambassadors in the North."²³ The French and British assumed a military occupation of Shanghai, warning the rebels against further assaults.²⁴ While Bruce had no wish to disturb Sino-British relations at Peking, he proposed to take offensive measures against the rebels if they renewed attacks on Shanghai.²⁵ Upon receiving requests for assistance against the rebels, however, he cautiously declined to extend British protection beyond the city.²⁶ Lord Russell entirely approved Bruce's conduct toward the rebels.²⁷ In view of the anomalous situation with the Imperial government and the Taipings' retreat from Shanghai, Bruce adhered to the policy of protecting British trade, although it involved serving the Manchus' interests.

While the British prepared to defend Shanghai, they began their campaign against the Imperial government. Bruce declined to blockade the Gulf of Chihli, considering the seizure of grain-junks detrimental to trade. Russell agreed that "the more the pressure is put upon the Government of China, and the less it is made to bear on those engaged in trade (provided the object is attained) the better."²⁸ Early in the year the allies had occupied Chusan, and in June, they hastened final

preparations for war. In August, the Anglo-French forces landed at Pehtang and prepared to assault the Taku forts. On the same day that the British repulsed the Taipings in the south, the Taku forts fell. Strained Anglo-French relations, and the anomalous defense of Shanghai, led the allies to seek a speedy resolution of the China problem. They prepared a draft convention to be settled at Tungchow. Treaty ratifications were to be exchanged at Peking. The Chinese, however, objected "to three points in the proposed arrangements: the indefiniteness in the date of withdrawing the [allied] troops, Lord Elgin's intention of taking to Peking the full escort which he would take to Tungchow, and the delivery of the queen's letter to the emperor at an audience. They chiefly insisted on their objection to the last."²⁹ Diplomacy might have settled these issues, but the Chinese committed a gross error. Indifferent to their flag of truce, the Chinese captured the British delegate Mr. Parkes and several others, wrongly assuming that Parkes possessed diplomatic authority, and could halt the allied advance on Peking.³⁰ This action enraged Elgin, and seriously impaired Sino-British relations.

Prince Kung, brother of the emperor, insisted upon retaining the hostages until the allied forces withdrew and peace negotiations began. While French forces sacked the Imperial summer palace, Elgin threatened to take Peking if the prisoners were not released. Under persistent military threat, the Chinese surrendered the Anting gate of Peking. "So peaceable a solution was welcome to the higher officers in the allied camp, who realised that, with the means at their disposal, it was no slight task to breach the mighty walls of the Chinese capital."³¹

The Chinese had killed several of their captives, but Parkes and twelve others were released. Elgin ordered the burning of the summer palace in retaliation for the Chinese insult. His action was calculated to reassert British prestige. He "had reason . . . to believe that it was an act which . . . [would] produce a greater effect in China, and on the Emperor, than persons who look on from a distance may suppose. It was the Emperor's favorite residence," Elgin explained, "and its destruction could not fail to be a blow to his pride. . . ." ³² Humiliated and defeated, the Imperial government ratified the British Treaty of Tientsin on 24 October 1860. On the same day, Chinese authorities signed the Convention of Peking, by which they apologized for the Taku incident, and agreed to pay a large indemnity to the British. Kowloon Point was ceded to the British crown and Tientsin was opened to trade. British occupation of Taku, Canton, Shantung, and Tientsin would continue until the indemnities were paid. ³³ By undermining the dynasty's sovereignty, the British achieved their long-sought diplomatic and trade concessions.

Prior to ratification of the Treaty of Tientsin, the emperor fled to Jehol with the court war-faction. The British had long-anticipated his flight, and feared the dynasty would collapse under such humiliating circumstances. The emperor's flight, however, eased Sino-British relations. It "served to maintain the new political equilibrium in which the peace party was now able to have a decisive voice. . . . The ad hoc machinery for peace negotiations under Prince Kung was . . . institutionalized as a formal standing organ for foreign affairs." ³⁴ The Tsungli Yamen, or the Office of General Administration, placed

Sino-British relations on terms of diplomatic equality. Establishment of the Tsungli Yamen in 1861 did not dispel the court's anti-foreignism, nor did it complete the Imperial government's adaptation of Western modes of diplomacy. Yet it created "an institutional change in . . . [China's] conduct of foreign affairs, ending the traditional principle of inequality between the Chinese empire and all other states, which had been institutionalized in the tribute system."³⁵ Prince Kung's diplomacy slowly improved Sino-British relations.

In 1860, there was no agreement between Manchu and British officials to subdue the Taiping Rebellion. The British preferred to place the responsibility of tranquilizing China upon the Imperial government. In a meeting with Prince Kung, Bruce "urged upon him the necessity of immediate steps being taken to restore the authority of the Imperial Government . . . and represented to him that he was misled in supposing that our interest would lead us to hold Shanghae for the Imperialists. . . ."³⁶ While they wished to protect their trade, the British were reluctant to incur expensive military obligations in China. The emperor's war-faction at Jehol represented a continued resistance to European influence, which Bruce resented. The British remained in their anomalous position of defending the interests of a hostile government "against the insurgents whose professions and declarations at all events were couched in a friendly spirit."³⁷ In his earlier correspondence, Bruce had expressed disgust with the rebels. He used an oblique threat of favoring the rebel cause as a means of exacting the Manchus' cooperation. Anxious to draw the Manchus into Western diplomacy, Bruce suggested that they establish an ambassador in England "as a pledge

of . . . [their] intention . . . to conduct their foreign relations in a different spirit."³⁸ British reluctance to intervene, coupled with their suspicion of the Manchus' policies prevented Sino-British cooperation against the Taipings.

Although British concern for the security of trade intensified in 1861, they remained uncommitted to a policy of direct intervention against the Taipings. The defense of Shanghai was an embarrassing compromise of British neutrality. The English, however, justified their action as a defense of their interests, and affected neutrality elsewhere in the civil war. Bruce insisted upon protecting Shanghai "until the Insurgents have sufficiently established their superiority to enable us to consider the contest as respects that part of China at an end."³⁹ With Russell's approval, Consul Meadows rejected the French proposal to extend the radius of military protection at Shanghai.⁴⁰ When the Taipings threatened the treaty port of Ningpo, Bruce enjoined Consul Sinclair from extending British protection to the city. He instructed Sinclair "to take such measures as may appear expedient . . . for the security of foreigners. Your language should be that we take no part in this civil contest,--but that we claim exemption from injury and arrogance at the hands of both parties. . . ."⁴¹ Russell approved Bruce's policy.⁴² With the exception of Shanghai, Clarendon's earlier instructions on defense of the port cities remained in abeyance. While there was no distinct break in their policy toward the Taipings, it became increasingly difficult for the British to separate their interests from those of the Manchus, which led them closer to direct intervention.

The Taiping Rebellion continued to disrupt trade, forcing the English into contact with the rebels to ensure security of their interests. Although supplies of silk remained constant, the import trade considerably slackened.⁴³ The rebels' capture of Soochow "rendered it most desirable to find an uninterrupted channel of communication with the Western Provinces of China."⁴⁴ Bruce therefore proposed that the Yangtze be opened to trade, although this was contrary to provisions of the Treaty of Tientsin. Prince Kung assented. In February, 1861, Admiral Hope undertook his first expedition up the Yangtze to meet with the Taipings.

The rebels agreed not to attack Shanghai for one year, and allowed British traders access to Hankow and Kiukiang. The British pledged their neutrality.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the conference confirmed the official British view of the Taipings' aversion to commerce. "They don't in any way encourage trade, excepting in fire-arms and gunpowder. These, as well as steamers, they are anxious to buy. They pretend a willingness to facilitate trade . . . but . . . these soft speeches were merely to gain our goodwill."⁴⁶ Absorbed in war with the Manchus, the Taipings paid attention to trade only to avert English hostility. Their destructiveness appalled the British. "They are too ignorant to conduct war on scientific principles, and [to] aim at becoming masters of the country with the least possible injury to the great centres of trade. . . . Experience shows us that the insurgents in taking possession of a commercial city ruin it as an emporium of trade."⁴⁷ Although Bruce was adverse to diplomatic relations with the Taipings, expansion of British interests necessitated limited intercourse with them. He

simultaneously wished to exempt the treaty ports from attack, and to avoid endangering Sino-British relations by appearing too friendly toward the Taipings.⁴⁸ Bruce was in a most awkward situation, to which the home government offered no immediate solution.

While awaiting developments in the civil war, Russell avoided the appearance of collusion with the Manchus. He instructed Bruce to enjoin the Chinese authorities against further payment of British troops at Shanghai. "This arrangement may lead to misapprehension and may induce the Imperialists to suppose that we are prepared to quit our neutral position and take part with them in the Civil War."⁴⁹ In July, Russell instructed Bruce to establish the neutrality of the treaty ports, and to refrain from using force against the Taipings except to protect British subjects and property.⁵⁰ In September, he suggested that "it might be expedient to defend the Treaty Ports if the Chinese would consent not to use those Ports for purposes of aggression."⁵¹ Russell's proposal to exclude the Chinese from direct involvement in defense of the treaty ports nevertheless compromised the British in favor of Manchu interests. Resolution of this chronic dilemma lay in the unification of Chinese and British interests, which began under Prince Kung's influence.

The emperor's death at Jehol in August, 1861, initiated a power struggle between the war-faction of Prince I and the peace-faction of Prince Kung. With the emperor's concubine Yehonala, Prince Kung achieved a coup d'etat, establishing her as Empress Dowager, a title she shared with the emperor's consort. Yehonala assumed the name Tz'u-hsi, and ruled in the stead of her young son, T'ung-chih. To retain

her power, Tz'u-hsi reversed her anti-foreign stance to accord with Prince Kung's policy of conciliation. Tz'u-hsi alone could not have enabled Prince Kung to achieve the coup d'etat or unification of the Grand Council and the Tsungli Yamen. "Had there not been Western support for the conciliatory conduct of foreign affairs by Prince Kung and his associates, they might not have dared to take bold measures. They would also have found it difficult to stabilize the political situation after the coup d'etat."⁵² The Imperial government increasingly depended upon the treaty powers to maintain its authority. Although the British avoided assuming direct political control in China, their interest in trade compelled them to develop closer ties with the Imperial government. With Prince Kung as the arbiter of foreign policy, the tension inherent in Sino-British relations gradually diminished.

Foreign legations were established at Peking in March, 1861, facilitating diplomatic intercourse with the Chinese. The Imperial authorities accepted extension of the Foreign Inspectorate system to the treaty ports. By 1861, the Inspectorate was established at Canton, Shanghai, Swatow, Chinkiang, Ningpo, Foochow, Kiukiang, and Hankow. In subsequent years other ports were provided with Foreign Inspectorates.⁵³ Sino-British relations greatly improved through the influence of Robert Hart, director of the Foreign Inspectorate. Hart supported the Tsungli Yamen and advised Prince Kung on political matters. Under his management, the Foreign Inspectorate system provided the Imperial government with the revenue necessary to consolidate its authority. Indirect assistance to the government perfectly fitted with British interests.⁵⁴

English trade interests required establishment of peace and

regular government throughout China. The Tsungli Yamen represented a considerable improvement in Chinese foreign relations, which strengthened the government's domestic situation. Yet the Taiping Rebellion continued to undermine the dynasty's authority. To consolidate the government, the Taiping Rebellion had to be quelled. "I do not think that order . . . can be permanently restored," Bruce wrote, "unless the Imperial Government regains its [sic] prestige among the people by some proof of its vigour and power as would be afforded by its successful action against the Insurgents."⁵⁵ Bruce wanted no part in directly assisting the dynasty.⁵⁶ Nevertheless the government's military weakness was evident. "Neither in equipment nor in organization are their troops better than the banditti and rabble who . . . set the Imperial Authority at defiance."⁵⁷ The incompetence of the Manchu forces resulted in difficulties for British traders. The Taipings held the silk districts and levied duties on silk brought into their territory. British merchants complained that duty payment afforded them no protection, nor did it exempt them from further duties en route.⁵⁸ While the British avoided military commitments to the Manchus, it became increasingly clear that the government could neither subdue the rebellion with its own resources, nor afford adequate protection to British trade.

In December, 1861, the Taipings captured Ningpo. The British took no immediate action against them, but waited to ascertain if they would establish a government and allow trade. Consul Harvey's reports, although biased and inaccurate, confirmed the official British view of the rebels' destructiveness and failure to govern.⁵⁹ After a second

trip to Nanking in December, Admiral Hope received no promise from the Taipings to abstain from attacking the treaty ports or disrupting British trade on the Yangtze River.⁶⁰ Hung Jen-kan's policy of conciliation toward Westerners fell into disrepute, and he was demoted. As the autonomous Taiping commanders ignored Hung Jen-kan's policies,⁶¹ their military campaigns brought them closer to collision with the British. At the end of 1861, the British verged on intervention.

While the British gradually became reconciled to the Imperial government after ratification of the Treaty of Tientsin, essentially they maintained their established policy toward the Taipings. Indemnities and the treaty bound the English closer to the central government, but they avoided displaying their anxiety about the dynasty's future if rebellion continued. Their cautious policy enabled the British to evade significant military commitments to the dynasty, while they awaited a change in the Manchus' foreign policy. Although the coup d'etat and reforms of Prince Kung greatly improved Sino-British relations, the British avoided intervention, as they feared an anti-foreign reaction among the Imperial authorities. The Taipings' conduct forced the British to assume greater responsibility for defense of the dynasty's interests. The rebels' antagonism and the Manchus' conciliation led the British to favor the Imperial cause, in spite of the defects they observed in the central government.

The defense of Shanghai in 1860 was not a turning point in British policy. The primary considerations of British officials continued to be protection of the foreign settlements and their trade interests.⁶² British neutrality had been imperfect for several years, but defense of

Shanghai marked a greater bias in favor of the Imperial cause. Although the Shanghai crisis constituted another step toward intervention, it was a local solution to a local problem. Only when the Taipings' repeated threats to British trade became intolerable, and the Manchus showed themselves amenable to European influence in their armies, did the British directly assist the Imperial government.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Costin, Great Britain and China, p. 308.
- ²Ibid.
- ³F.O. 17/329/1 "Confidential", "Seen by Lord Palmerston and the Queen", Russell to Elgin, 17 April 1860.
- ⁴Kwan-wai So and Eugene Boardman, "Hung Jen-kan, Taiping Prime Minister, 1859-1864," Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 20 (June 1957): 289.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 290.
- ⁶Teng, The Historiography of the Taiping Rebellion, pp. 24-25.
- ⁷Michael, The Taiping Rebellion, vol. 1, pp. 150-151.
- ⁸F.O. 17/337/78 Enclosure 1, Sinclair to Bruce, 20 March 1860, in Bruce to Russell, 31 March 1860.
- ⁹F.O. 17/337/119, Bruce to Russell, 30 May 1860.
- ¹⁰Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, pp. 72-73.
- ¹¹F.O. 17/337/119, Bruce to Russell, 30 May 1860.
- ¹²F.O. 17/337/123, Bruce to Russell, 10 June 1860.
- ¹³Ibid.
- ¹⁴F.O. 17/338/124 Enclosure, Memorandum of a conference between Mr. Bruce and Commissioner Ho, 9 June 1860, in Bruce to Russell, 12 June 1860.
- ¹⁵F.O. 17/338/151 Enclosure 3, Bruce to Meadows, 31 July 1860, in Bruce to Russell, 1 August 1860.
- ¹⁶F.O. 17/338/158, Bruce to Russell, 17 August 1860.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸F.O. 17/338/151, Bruce to Russell, 1 August 1860.
- ¹⁹Ibid.
- ²⁰Ibid.
- ²¹F.O. 17/339/163, Bruce to Russell, 4 September 1860.
- ²²F.O. 17/338/158, Bruce to Russell, 17 August 1860.

- ²³F.O. 17/339/163, Bruce to Russell, 4 September 1860.
- ²⁴F.O. 17/339/163 Enclosure 2, Notification, in Bruce to Russell, 4 September 1860.
- ²⁵F.O. 17/339/163, Bruce to Russell, 4 September 1860.
- ²⁶F.O. 17/339/170, Bruce to Russell, 20 September 1860.
- ²⁷F.O. 17/334/157 "Seen by Lord Palmerston and the Queen", Russell to Bruce, 23 August, 1860; F.O. 17/334/187, Russell to Bruce, 20 October 1860; F.O. 17/334/196, Russell to Bruce, 7 November 1860.
- ²⁸F.O. 17/334/126 "Seen by Lord Palmerston and the Queen", Russell to Bruce, 8 June 1860.
- ²⁹Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 600.
- ³⁰Ibid., p. 601.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 607.
- ³²F.O. 17/331/74, Elgin to Russell, 25 October 1860.
- ³³Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 1, p. 615.
- ³⁴Masataka Banno, China and the West, 1858-1861: The Origins of the Tsungli Yamen, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 218.
- ³⁵Ibid., p. i.
- ³⁶F.O. 17/339/193, Bruce to Russell, 16 November 1860.
- ³⁷Ibid.
- ³⁸Ibid.
- ³⁹F.O. 17/350/3, Bruce to Russell, 3 January 1861.
- ⁴⁰F.O. 17/361/41, Meadows to Russell, 18 February 1861, and F.O. 17/348/62, Russell to Bruce, 22 April 1861.
- ⁴¹F.O. 17/350/3 Enclosure 2, Bruce to Sinclair, 21 December 1860, in Bruce to Russell, 3 January 1861.
- ⁴²F.O. 17/348/52, Russell to Bruce, 28 March 1861.
- ⁴³F.O. 17/339/181, Bruce to Russell, 17 October 1860.

⁴⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Further Correspondence Respecting Affairs in China (Expedition up the Yang-tze-Kiang)," 1861, LXVI, [2777], Number 1, Bruce to Russell, 2 December 1860.

⁴⁵F.O. 17/353/73 Enclosure 2, Bruce to Hope, 16 June 1861, in Bruce to Russell, 23 June 1861.

⁴⁶Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Papers Relating to the Rebellion in China, and Trade in the Yang-tze-Kiang River," 1862, LXIII, [2976], Number 4, Enclosure, Mr. Michie to Mr. Antrobus, 8 March 1861, in Bruce to Russell, 6 April 1861.

⁴⁷Ibid., Number 17 Enclosure 2, Bruce to Hope, 16 June 1861, in Bruce to Russell, 28 June 1861.

⁴⁸F.O. 17/353/72, Bruce to Russell, 22 June 1861.

⁴⁹F.O. 17/349/108, Russell to Bruce, 5 July 1861.

⁵⁰F.O. 17/349/114, Russell to Bruce, 24 July 1861.

⁵¹F.O. 17/349/145 "Seen by Lord Palmerston and the Queen", Russell to Bruce, 7 September 1861.

⁵²Banno, China and the West, p. 240.

⁵³Stanley F. Wright, Hart and the Chinese Customs, (Belfast: William Mullian and Son, Limited, 1950), pp. 217-219.

⁵⁴Banno, China and the West, p. 244.

⁵⁵F.O. 17/353/73 Enclosure 2, Bruce to Hope, 15 June 1861, in Bruce to Russell, 23 June 1861.

⁵⁶F.O. 17/350/14 Enclosure 5, Bruce to Wade, 26 January 1861, in Bruce to Russell, 12 March 1861.

⁵⁷F.O. 17/351/45, Bruce to Russell, 9 May 1861.

⁵⁸F.O. 17/353/90, Bruce to Russell, 22 July 1861.

⁵⁹Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, pp. 107-108, and Stephen Uhalley, Jr., "The Taipings at Ningpo: The Significance of a Forgotten Event," Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, no. 11 (1971), pp. 20-23.

⁶⁰F.O. 17/370/15, Bruce to Russell, 4 March 1862.

⁶¹Michael, The Taiping Rebellion, vol. 1, pp. 156-158.

⁶²Ueda, "International Relations," p. 144.

CHAPTER IV

INTERVENTION AND REFORM 1862-1864

In 1862, the British openly became partisans of the Imperial cause, considering an alliance with the central government the best means of advancing their trade interests. Confirmed in their view that rebellion was inimical to trade, the British hesitantly adopted a course of intervention. British officials attempted to place responsibility for subduing the rebellion upon the central government. Although regeneration of the Imperial government enabled the dynasty to regain its sovereignty, primarily it served British Free Trade interests.

The Taipings appeared unable to govern or guarantee the safety of trade. British interests rested upon security of property, which the Taipings did not afford. "We cannot look upon the advance of the Insurgents with any feeling but that of regret," Bruce wrote, "as long as their conduct to the native population is such that every respectable Chinaman flies from the places occupied by them, and declines to put his person and property within their power."¹ While occupying Ningpo, the Taipings threatened Shanghai, despite their agreement to avoid attacking the city. They assured the treaty powers they would respect foreign settlements, but insisted that occupation of the Chinese city was vital to their cause.² The British had long considered the city of Shanghai an integral part of their trade interest; they were most anxious to maintain its security. The rebels' promises to them

increasingly met with disbelief.

As Shanghai's vulnerability increased, British alarm intensified. The rebels stopped the flow of supplies into the city, and Bruce feared that "the insurgents will be emboldened by our passiveness and their success at Ningpo, to press us still closer. . . . In my opinion," he stated, "we are perfectly justified in taking the offensive against the insurgents . . . provided we can deal such a blow as is likely to keep them at a respectable distance."³ Russell concurred.⁴ In February, Admiral Hope had provided naval support to the Imperial authorities at Shanghai. At the end of April, British, French, and Chinese forces combined to clear the rebels from a thirty-mile radius around Shanghai. Bruce insisted that the Chinese take defensive measures to protect Shanghai from subsequent attacks.⁵ To avoid rendering large amounts of military aid to the government, Bruce urged the Chinese to assume as much responsibility as possible in the civil war. He was reluctant to go beyond protection of Shanghai, and Russell approved his conduct.⁶ In May, British and French naval forces bombarded Ningpo, routing the Taipings and delivering the city to the Imperialists. The home government approved the taking of Ningpo.⁷ Russell had lost patience with the rebels. "The Taipings," he wrote, "are incapable of establishing a regular authority, or of giving protection to peaceable inhabitants of the country they over-run with their savage hordes. . . . Her Majesty's Government therefore consider it a duty . . . to favour the restoration of order."⁸

British officials, particularly Lord Bruce, sought a limited engagement against the Taipings, based upon protection of British

interests. Russell instructed Bruce to ensure defense of the treaty ports, adding that "British commerce should have the aid of Her Majesty's Ships of War."⁹ More cautious than Russell, Bruce was troubled by the obvious bias in favor of the Manchus which defense of the ports entailed.

If the Ports are only to be neutral in this sense,--that they are not to be attacked, and that the Imperialists are not to make them the base of operations, but . . . may continue to use the resources to be derived from the possession of these towns . . . it is clear that they would be gainers by the arrangements and that we would be open to the charge of unfairness, in proposing, under the mask of neutrality, an arrangement decidedly advantageous to one Party.¹⁰

Bruce apparently considered the thirty-mile radius of Shanghai a purely defensive measure serving only British interests, and saw no evidence of bias in that expedient. The offensive action later taken at Ningpo confirmed the British in a course of intervention, which Bruce reluctantly endorsed. Russell adopted a simple, pragmatic policy. "The only rational course," he wrote, "is to defend our own trade, to protect the Treaty Ports, and to encourage the Chinese Gov[er]nment to arm a sufficient force . . . to dislodge and rout the Rebels."¹¹ It necessitated increased diplomatic and military commitments to the central government, however, to prod the Chinese into action against the Taipings.

The British approved Prince Kung's initial reforms, and became more confident of the government's ability to subdue the rebellion. Bruce wished the authorities to continue their reforms to strengthen the government. "If the Imperial Government can be induced to enter boldly on the path of military and financial reform," he wrote, "it will be successful in crushing the existing anarchy which has its' [sic]

origin in its' weakness even more than its' corruption."¹² Bruce's policy was calculated to lessen the problems of foreign governments dealing with Chinese authorities. It was not humane, but pragmatic. The British strongly desired to avoid "another India." It was easier and less costly to encourage native authorities to govern upon European principles than to rule in their stead. Bruce welcomed the opportunity to assist in Westernizing the Imperial government. He was satisfied with his progress in convincing the authorities of "the advantages to be derived from the adoption of European improvements . . . for, sincere conviction on these points is the only security against reaction, should this Government recover strength enough to suppress anarchy in China. . . . In short, improvement must be adopted, not imposed."¹³ The British sought to lead the Chinese toward what they considered a better system of government, and in doing so, to advance their interests.

To complete the regeneration of the central government and to protect British trade, it became necessary to reform the Ch'ing military system. The British had long held the Chinese army in contempt. Bruce deplored the provincial military system, which prevented concerted action against the Taipings.¹⁴ The Imperial government, however, was unable to manage the system of local forces under the gentry, who controlled a large part of military spending through the likin tax.¹⁵ "The decline in civil and military power of the central government was of necessity balanced by the establishment of local forces."¹⁶ Prince Kung had little choice but to adopt the policy of military decentralization, which the war-faction had previously advocated.¹⁷ Bruce sought to reverse the trend toward decentralization as a means of strengthening

the central government, and improving Sino-British relations. "The Chinese Government should create an Imperial force . . . and . . . we should boldly abandon the traditions of our past intercourse, which have led the consuls to . . . weaken . . . the authority of the Chinese Executive, and to look upon our position at the Ports, as being dependent, for its security, on the helplessness of the . . . Government."¹⁸ To avoid an "Eastern Question" in China and to protect British trade against the Taipings, Bruce advocated instructing the Chinese forces in Western military techniques.

Bruce requested Brigadier-General Staveley to assist the Chinese in organizing their forces.¹⁹ Unless the Chinese had proper military equipment their training was useless. To avoid large military commitments to the central government, Bruce considered it necessary to arm the Chinese forces. In his despatch to Russell, he reported that "Tseng Kwo-fan [sic] . . . had expressed opinions similar to mine,--that . . . it was necessary to obtain foreign arms, and to use foreign instruction, though not foreign troops. . . ."²⁰ Tseng had gathered a considerable military force under his command, uniting his officers by an appeal to Confucianism. He paid his troops well and regularly. His force transcended the limits of a local militia and constituted a strong regional army.²¹ Tseng's desire to limit foreign aid to instruction and weapons was not based upon a desire for personal aggrandizement; he dreaded the consequences of allowing foreign troops into China. Tseng feared that "unless . . . foreign soldiers were inclined to virtue they might become a danger within the state, not content after the war to disband quietly . . . but insisting on staying to seize a share in China's

inheritance."²² Although motivated by different reasons, Tseng and Bruce agreed that foreign assistance to the dynasty should remain limited, permitting the Chinese to assume greater responsibility in subduing the rebellion.

The British willingly provided the Chinese with material assistance. In March, 1862, Robert Hart instructed Mr. Lay to purchase, staff, and equip a war flotilla for the Imperial government. Lay's mission posed the difficulty of allowing British subjects to enter the emperor's service. The Admiralty pragmatically asserted that the prohibition against Englishmen entering the emperor's service "has already been virtually abrogated by the recent instructions to British authorities in China. . . ."²³ With the sanction of the British government, Lay completed his mission in late 1862, and selected Captain Sherard Osborn as assistant commander-in-chief. In 1863, the Lay-Osborn flotilla arrived in China. Osborn refused to serve the provincial authorities, Tseng Kuo-fan and Li Hung-chang. He would serve only the emperor. The Imperial authorities could not sanction the independence that Osborn demanded, nor could they permit such a gross insult to Tseng and Li. Osborn quickly dissolved the fleet, infuriating the Chinese and rendering their expenditure fruitless. Lay was dismissed.²⁴ The Lay-Osborn flotilla represented an abortive attempt at cooperation between Chinese and British authorities. If the British were to succeed in assisting the central government, they had to consider the Chinese military structure, adapting themselves to Chinese institutions while serving their interests.

The work of reforming the Chinese army proceeded slowly. Anxious

to maintain control of their forces, the Chinese preferred to adopt only European weapons. Bruce realized the difficulty of reorganization, and contented himself with rudimentary changes. He did not abandon the idea of reform, but advocated a policy of gradualism. "Good fire arms, with artillery, and a squadron of gunboats would give the Imperialists, even organized as they are, a great superiority over the insurgents," he wrote. "My efforts at present are directed to induce the Government to adopt these improvements, and to organise the garrisons of the Ports . . . on the European plan."²⁵ Russell approved Bruce's policy.²⁶ As late as November, 1862, Russell declined to sanction general British intervention. He cautioned Bruce to "distinguish those cases in . . . which we have a right and an obligation from those in which we have neither. You will call upon Her Majesty's Naval and Military forces to protect the Treaty Ports, but not to take part in the operations of war at places distant from those Ports."²⁷ Like Bruce, Russell wished the Chinese to take the initiative in the war against the Taipings.

Russell, however, remained concerned for the safety of British trade, particularly at Shanghai. The Taipings' "habits of pillage and murder," he said, "would soon put an end to the trade of that city, and make our Treaty rights null and void for any practical purpose."²⁸ After receiving reports that large supplies of munitions were being sold to the rebels,²⁹ Russell sanctioned a regulation forbidding British subjects to sell weapons to them.³⁰ This measure, and assistance to the Imperial government failed to allay Russell's concern for British trade. In January, 1863, the home government issued Orders in Council sanctioning employment of British officers in the emperor's service from

16 December 1862 through 1 September 1864,³¹ While the British had no intention of abandoning reform of the Chinese troops, the use of foreign officers was calculated to hasten the Taipings' defeat.

The decision to permit foreign officers to join the emperor's service was both an acquiescence to a long-standing situation in the civil war and a logical culmination of British policy. The American adventurer Fredrick Townsend Ward initially served the Chinese in an unofficial capacity. With a small force of mercenaries, he recaptured Sungkiang in 1860 for a group of local merchants. In 1861, "he substituted . . . a gradually increasing body of Chinese troops, drilled and officered by foreigners. . . ." ³² Bruce considered it impossible to prevent foreigners from entering the Imperialists' ranks if the Chinese were willing to employ them.³³ In 1861, Russell had considered permitting British subjects to enter a foreign legion under the emperor,³⁴ but this plan remained in abeyance until 1862, when the British became convinced of the necessity and viability of intervention.

Ward's force assisted the British against the Taipings at Nankiao and Kaokiao early in 1862, and henceforth was known as the "Ever-Victorious Army." While the British sold munitions at cost to Ward's army, Russell instructed Bruce to press upon Prince Kung "the expediency of the Chinese Government sparing no pains to raise the force under Colonel Ward to ten thousand, and to furnish him with the means of equipping them for the field."³⁵ It was not merely Ward's success nor the Taipings' threat to British interests that led the British to favor the Ever-Victorious Army. Ward did much toward disciplining the Chinese troops. By assisting in army reform, he indirectly served the British

without subjecting them to unwanted responsibility. The Imperial government's policy of cooperation and invigoration of the army convinced the British that reform in China was practicable. Ward's force and Tseng Kuo-fan's resistance to using foreign troops perfectly fitted British desire to assist the government without incurring the expense of sending a large number of troops to China. In September, 1862, Ward was killed in action. His death created discipline problems in the Ever-Victorious Army, and necessitated a search for a new commander.

Through Admiral Hope's recommendation, the American Henry Burgevine assumed command of the Ever-Victorious Army. While he was a capable leader, Burgevine was tactless and distrusted by Chinese officers. The British, however, cooperated with him to secure the army's continuation. Admiral Hope "felt that it was absolutely necessary to give him some assistance with officers, until he shall have had time to procure them, if it be desired to prevent the entire disorganization of the corps."³⁶ Hope's efforts were useless. Burgevine quarrelled with his paymaster, and his relations with the Chinese officers steadily worsened. Burgevine was dismissed and eventually defected to the Taipings. An English officer, Captain Holland, replaced him. With an Englishman in command and their pay in arrears, the American officers became quarrelsome. A threatened mutiny was averted by payment of the troops, but the Ever-Victorious Army increasingly was a source of friction between Chinese and foreigners. Resolved to protect their interests, the British nevertheless committed themselves to assist the government by licensing officers to join the emperor's service.

Throughout 1863, administrative problems of intervention plagued British officials, who slowly realized the magnitude of their task. Obstacles to reorganizing the Chinese army made Bruce despair of achieving a strong, centralized force. The British experienced considerable difficulty in defining the role of officers in the Chinese forces, which were unused to foreign discipline and methods of warfare. In this phase of adjustment, the tenuous Sino-British alliance began to weaken, revealing the fundamental discontinuity between Chinese and British interests.

"The object to be effected," Bruce wrote, "is the substitution of an improved military and naval organization for the one hitherto used in China. I need not point out the impossibility of doing this suddenly."³⁷ Reformation of the Chinese military, he noted, entailed great expense to the central government, which simultaneously was paying war-indemnities to France and Britain.³⁸ The British exacted a heavy price for protection of Free Trade in China. Indemnities and reform placed a considerable financial burden on the Imperial government. Payment of indemnities weakened the government that the British ardently desired to regenerate through expensive reforms. Yet they did not see a contradiction in their policy. Inconsistencies were overridden by an appeal to the cause of Free Trade, which Victorians regarded as a boon to Chinese civilization.

Anxious to impress the Chinese with the necessity of reform, Bruce tactlessly denigrated the Imperial forces. The Chinese contingents, he said, "cannot face the rebels, and are invariably defeated, unless supported by Foreign troops, or by Chinese disciplined by foreign

officers."³⁹ Sincere in his desire to reform the Chinese military system, Bruce became irritated as the government failed to accept his recommendations. At the end of the civil war, he predicted, "the foreign officers will be dismissed, and the Chinese Force will revert to its old condition of large numbers of men badly paid, badly led and insufficiently equipped, and only fit to increase the pillage and anarchy which they are unable to put down."⁴⁰ Consul Robertson was equally discouraged by the problems of training Chinese troops in European drill.⁴¹ Despite his irritation at the slowness of reform, Bruce preferred to continue the program of instruction for Chinese troops, rather than assemble forces under foreign commanders.⁴² While Russell concurred with Bruce, he regarded the use of foreign officers as a temporary but necessary expedient. He informed Bruce that the use of foreign commanders "must be continued for the present and till Shanghai is free from all danger of capture, but as a permanent system H[er] M[ajesty]'s Gov[ernmen]t would much prefer that the Imperial Gov[ernmen]t would be placed in a condition to defend its territories by means of Chinese Officers and Soldiers."⁴³

While training Chinese soldiers in European warfare, the English became more involved with the Ever-Victorious Army. With the queen's license, and at half-pay, British officers were permitted to serve beyond the thirty-mile radius of Shanghai.⁴⁴ In March, 1863, Major Charles "Chinese" Gordon assumed command of the Ever-Victorious Army. Captain Holland's brief tenure had been fraught with defeats and blunders, but Gordon was an unwelcome replacement. "The force was sulky and mutinous, and did not wish an English officer; but . . .

[Gordon] informed the officers . . . that they need not fear sweeping changes or injury to their prospects; and they remained in their duty."⁴⁵ He quickly won their respect through successful campaigns against the Taipings.

Affiliation of English officers with the Chinese army created unforeseen problems for Lord Bruce, the home government, and the commanders themselves. Bruce disavowed any responsibility for the actions of British officers who served beyond the thirty-mile radius, and wished to maintain strict control over the officers training Chinese troops. "Officers lent to discipline the Chinese . . . can only serve for the protection of Shanghai, and the radius, and in improving the military organization of the Chinese."⁴⁶ Russell disagreed. To support his view, he mentioned that adequate control existed over all British officers in China; the home government could simply recall "an imprudent or ambitious Officer."⁴⁷ Bruce's policy rested upon a strong desire to reform the Chinese troops, and to keep intervention to an absolute minimum. The home government's policy ostensibly accorded with Bruce's, but Russell favored any measure designed to quell the rebellion, while Bruce insisted upon the more far-reaching policy of reform. As the rebellion intensified and the Taipings fought more desperately, foreign intervention became a greater interest to the home government than Bruce's cautious policy of reform.

Unusual difficulties with the Chinese forces disrupted Sino-British cooperation. The Imperialists showed no mercy to captured Taipings. To Tseng Kuc-fan, "these rebels . . . added to their rebellion against the Throne blasphemy . . . and disdain for the orthodox

faith of the fathers; they were outside the pale of humanity, they were a poison in the body politic that must be utterly eradicated."⁴⁸ The Imperialists' cruelty to the Taipings appalled the British. In 1862, Russell had instructed Bruce to "impress on Prince Kung that if he sanctions cruel and indiscriminate punishments he will entirely lose the support of the British Authorities."⁴⁹ Bruce remonstrated the Imperialists, but did not fulfill Russell's threat of withdrawing British support.⁵⁰ Atrocities against the Taipings continued, and later would have important repercussions for Sino-British relations. Gordon experienced problems with the Ever-Victorious Army. As funds for the troops frequently were in arrears, the army looted captured cities as a guarantee of payment. The force mutinied over a proposed transfer of its headquarters, enraging Gordon. "He was willing to placate his men, as long as they behaved themselves; but unmilitary conduct, a mutinous spirit, and the subordination of a soldier's first duty--fighting--to private interests--loot--were things he would not stand."⁵¹ After disputing with a Chinese general, Gordon submitted his resignation, but was persuaded to rescind it. Difficulties between the Chinese and British, however, merely multiplied.

Despite Gordon's problems with the Ever-Victorious Army, the home government continued to rely upon it, placing little faith in the ability of Chinese troops to safeguard British interests at Shanghai. Although Major-General Brown proposed to withdraw his force from Shanghai, complaining that the city was insalubrious, the home government strongly resisted his suggestion. "Shanghai must not be abandoned; it is believed that a million and a half of people are living there,

that British Trade at that Port is very great, & . . . important British interests must not be neglected."⁵² Troops at Shanghai also provided Gordon with an additional military safeguard, while the city was an important source of supply for his army.⁵³ As fighting around Shanghai intensified, Brown provided Gordon with troops to serve temporarily beyond the thirty-mile radius. The British government approved his expedient, wishing to avoid permitting full-pay officers at Shanghai to enter the Chinese service. The Secretary for War, however, desired that Brown "afford every facility to officers who are willing to go on half pay to join the force under Major Gordon."⁵⁴ As it appeared expedient, the British assumed greater responsibility in the war. They wished to assure the safety of the Ever-Victorious Army, which, together with the British regular forces protected Shanghai. Reformation of the Chinese army, impeded by military decentralization and the financial problems of the Imperial government, did not serve the immediate interests of the British. An inconsistent policy toward reform was the result of British willingness to use expedients in subduing the rebellion.

In 1864, continuing their earlier victories, the Imperial forces defeated the Taipings. Sino-British military cooperation hastened to an end. Circumstances which led to the disbanding of the Ever-Victorious Army illustrated the incompatibility of Chinese and British modes of warfare. Beneath this difference in method lay an opposition of purpose. The British intervened to protect their trade. They considered regeneration of the Imperial government through military training a secondary goal. The Chinese defended a world-view--Confucianism--and a way of life which proved fundamentally opposed to the modernity the

British wished them to adopt. The rebellion's aftermath, the abortive T'ung-chih Restoration, conclusively demonstrated the incompatibility of Chinese and British interests.

In the few months that remained before the fall of Nanking, the rebels continued to fight for their lost cause. The Imperial forces launched a dual campaign, fighting in Chekiang province while besieging Nanking. The capture of Ch'ang-chou in May, 1864, was one of the Taipings' last struggles. "It was taken by assault after a desperate hand to hand fight which appears to have been continued in the streets of the city. . . . It is not surprising that a place of such importance . . . should have been defended with a degree of desperation not hitherto witnessed."⁵⁵ In June, Hung Hsiu-ch'uan died at Nanking. The following month, the city fell to the Imperial forces. Although remnants of the Taipings joined other rebel bands, the T'ai-p'ing T'ien-kuo was destroyed.⁵⁶

Throughout the last campaigns, relations between Gordon and the Imperial commanders steadily deteriorated. After the recapture of Soochow in December, 1863, several Taiping chiefs surrendered. With Gordon's sanction, Governor Li had promised them clemency. Li, however, revoked his promise and ordered the chiefs to be executed. Enraged, Gordon again threatened to resign. Through Robert Hart's mediation, Gordon agreed to retain his command and took part in the capture of Ch'ang-chou. Subordinated to autonomous provincial commanders, Gordon held no authority. His terms of service prevented any long-term cooperation with provincial generals, who were jealous of their power. While licensed to serve the emperor, Gordon actually served the

provincial authorities. British policy was contradictory, as the Ever-Victorious Army undermined the centralization they desired to foster. Angered by Li's conduct, and unable to halt the progress of military decentralization, the British withdrew their officers from the emperor's service.⁵⁷ As a result of the usual delay in communication, Gordon remained in the Chinese service until June, when the troublesome Ever-Victorious Army was disbanded. Gordon's force operated within a limited area, largely around Shanghai. The army helped protect British interests at Shanghai, and from the English perspective, this limited intervention was both expedient and successful. As part of the broader program of reform, however, the Ever-Victorious Army was a gross failure. The British pragmatically chose a course of intervention best suited to their immediate interests, unintentionally abetting decentralization.

After disbandment of the Ever-Victorious Army, the English colli reassessed their interests in China. Bruce conferred with the official Wen-hsiang, to discuss their future policy. His suggestions and observations focused largely upon the safety of British interests. He "pointed out that their policy ought to be to render secure . . . [the] great centres of trade and revenue, and have as few other strong positions as possible."⁵⁸ Wen-hsiang desired to protect the port cities with Manchu forces, to avoid initiating Chinese in the use of foreign weapons and military techniques.⁵⁹ He clearly wished to retain as much central authority as possible, a policy agreeable to Bruce. The authorities, Bruce observed, foresaw "difficulty in disposing of the provincial levies which have been called out to make head against the

insurrection and this apprehension of . . . these men turning against the Government . . . confirms me in the opinion that we have nothing to fear from any aggressive policy on the part of the Manchoo Government."⁶⁰ Bruce was aware that provincialism would weaken the dynasty; he suggested that customs revenue and foreign inspectors be used to check local authorities.⁶¹ The Maritime Customs system and its agents would serve to unite the British and Chinese governments, simultaneously strengthening the dynasty and serving British interests.

Bruce's desire to reform the Chinese military had considerably weakened before the rebellion ended.⁶² Military decentralization intensified during the Taiping Rebellion, and Bruce correctly observed that the process would be exceedingly difficult to reverse. While he realized that provincial authorities wielded great military and political power,⁶³ he assumed that the central government eventually could restore its authority in the provinces. He shared Gordon's opinion that the Imperial troops "are no longer the inefficient Rabble they used to be. . . ."⁶⁴ His assessment was highly optimistic. The government's green-banner forces remained incompetent. Although the authorities attempted to consolidate the militia and the Imperial army, they failed. "Provincial armies and the regular green-banner troops existed side by side. All that the government accomplished was a blunting of the militia development, resulting in an increasing general military weakness by the end of the century."⁶⁵ While provincial militarization initially weakened the central government after the rebellion, eventually China's entire military system lapsed into disarray, leading to unprecedented humiliation later in the century.

Bruce's program of reform could not reverse decentralization, nor could he halt the progress of the Ever-Victorious Army, although he disapproved of using British officers beyond the radius of Shanghai. British intervention was calculated to serve, and did serve, British interests. The short-sightedness of British policy and obstacles to centralization negated the program of reform.

As the Taiping Rebellion drew to an end, the British renewed their interest in trade. The defeat of the rebel forces gratified the British desire for a restoration of commerce. Trade on the Yangtze River increased,⁶⁶ and silk cultivation slowly revived. "The mulberry trees in the silk producing districts were left unpruned, the inhabitants being afraid to resume their occupation. But as soon as Hang-chow-foo was taken, they began to make their appearance, and the fields were filled with individuals pruning the trees."⁶⁷ After reestablishment of Imperial authority, the British confidently expected a revival of the silk trade. The rebellion, however, ruined China's silk export; Japan and Italy gradually assumed control of the silk market.⁶⁸ Wars, treaties, and intervention in the rebellion, all for the sake of trade, had created diplomatic ties between the Chinese and English governments. Despite the rebellion's adverse effect upon trade, the British could not easily abandon their interests in China.

"The objects of trading countries such as Great Britain . . . are not incompatible with the interests or dignity of China or her Government. . . ."⁶⁹ Bruce's enthusiasm seemed appropriate in the aftermath of the Taiping Rebellion. While the Chinese had uniquely adapted to Western diplomacy, British officials were willing to respect Chinese

customs and advocated a policy of reform and compromise. Despite the aura of cooperation between the Chinese and British governments, their interests fundamentally were opposed. During the Taiping Rebellion, the Chinese defended the Confucian way of life, and the British defended trade. The uneasy Sino-British alliance rested upon unification of incompatible opposites, Confucianism and modernity. The Chinese secondarily assisted the British in protecting their trade interests, as the British cooperated with the Chinese to avert destruction of their society. Sino-British cooperation in the Taiping Rebellion proved a feeble link between two nations with divergent interests. The unity of Chinese and British interests was superficial and coincidental. The tenuous Sino-British alliance inaugurated during the Taiping Rebellion slowly dissolved, and finally vanished in the Boxer Rebellion.

FOOTNOTES

¹F.O. 17/370/6 Enclosure 1, Bruce to Harvey, 1 February 1862, in Bruce to Russell, 4 February 1862.

²Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Papers Relating to the Rebellion in China," 1862, LXIII, [2976], Number 42, Robertson to Hammond, 29 January 1862.

³F.O. 17/370/15, Bruce to Russell, 4 March 1862.

⁴F.O. 17/368/93, Russell to Bruce, 2 June 1862.

⁵F.O. 17/370/24 Enclosure 2, Bruce to Hope, 19 March 1862, in Bruce to Russell, 26 March 1862.

⁶F.O. 17/368/96, Russell to Bruce, 12 June 1862.

⁷F.O. 17/369/112, Russell to Bruce, 22 July 1862.

⁸F.O. 17/368/79, Russell to Bruce, 6 May 1862.

⁹F.O. 17/368/44 (Telegram), Russell to Bruce, 12 March 1862.

¹⁰F.O. 17/371/51 Enclosure, Bruce to Hope, 6 May 1862, in Bruce to Russell, 8 May 1862.

¹¹F.O. 17/369/108, Russell to Bruce, 7 July 1862.

¹²F.O. 17/360/24, Bruce to Russell, 26 March 1862.

¹³F.O. 17/372/80, Bruce to Russell, 20 June 1862.

¹⁴F.O. 17/351/45, Bruce to Russell, 9 May 1861.

¹⁵The likin tax was instituted in 1853 to provide local officials with revenue necessary to subdue the rebellion. The tax was levied by local authorities with the central government's permission. The central government, however, had no means of controlling likin receipts, which constituted approximately one-third of the revenue used to support the Chinese troops. For a brief discussion of the likin tax, see Mary Wright, The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-chih Restoration, 1862-1874, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), pp. 167-168.

¹⁶Franz Michael, "Military Organization and Power Structure of China During the Taiping Rebellion," Pacific Historical Review 18 (November 1949): 470.

¹⁷Banno, China and the West, P. 239.

- ¹⁸F.O. 17/374/154, Bruce to Russell, 5 November 1862.
- ¹⁹F.O. 17/371/43 Enclosure 1, Bruce to Staveley, 23 April 1862, in Bruce to Russell, 23 April 1862.
- ²⁰F.O. 17/371/51, Bruce to Russell, 8 May 1862.
- ²¹Michael, "Military Organization," p. 478.
- ²²William Hail, Tseng Kuo-fan and the Taiping Rebellion, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927; reprint ed., New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1964), p. 240.
- ²³Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Correspondence on the Employment of British Officers by the Government of China," 1862, LXIII, [3057], Number 3, Secretary to the Admiralty to Mr. Hammond, 25 June 1862.
- ²⁴Hosea B. Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 2: The Period of Submission, 1861-1893 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918), pp. 34-36 passim.
- ²⁵F.O. 17/373/124, Bruce to Russell, 10 September 1862.
- ²⁶F.O. 17/369/192, Russell to Bruce, 27 November 1862.
- ²⁷F.O. 17/369/188 "Seen by Lord Palmerston and the Queen", Russell to Bruce, 26 November 1862.
- ²⁸Ibid.
- ²⁹F.O. 17/373/94 Enclosure 2, Staveley to Bruce, 16 June 1862, in Bruce to Russell, 14 July 1862.
- ³⁰F.O. 17/369/177, Russell to Bruce, 13 November 1862.
- ³¹Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers, "Order in Council Authorising the Enlistment of Officers and Men, and the Equipment and Fitting-out of Vessels of War for the Service of the Emperor of China," 1863, XXXV, [341], 9 January 1863.
- ³²Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 2, p. 72.
- ³³F.O. 17/352/53, Bruce to Russell, 23 May 1861.
- ³⁴F.O. 17/349/112 "Seen by Lord Palmerston and the Queen", Russell to Bruce, 8 August 1861.
- ³⁵F.O. 17/368/79, Russell to Bruce, 6 May 1862.
- ³⁶F.O. 17/374/159 Enclosure 1 "Secret and Confidential", Hope to Bruce, 29 October 1862, in Bruce to Russell, 10 November 1862.

- ³⁷F.O. 17/390/13, Bruce to Russell, 11 February 1863.
- ³⁸Ibid.
- ³⁹F.O. 17/392/81 Enclosure 1, Bruce's memorandum to Prince Kung, 5 June 1863, in Bruce to Russell, 12 June 1863.
- ⁴⁰F.O. 17/392/87, Bruce to Russell, 25 June 1863.
- ⁴¹F.O. 17/393/107 Enclosure 1, Robertson to Bruce, 10 February 1863, in Bruce to Russell, 18 July 1863.
- ⁴²F.O. 17/394/160, Bruce to Russell, 13 October 1863.
- ⁴³F.O. 17/389/219, Russell to Bruce, 28 December 1863.
- ⁴⁴F.O. 17/400, Foreign Office to War Office, 23 April 1863.
- ⁴⁵Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 2, p. 94.
- ⁴⁶F.O. 17/390/23 Enclosure 2, Bruce to Staveley, 12 March 1863, in Bruce to Russell, 14 March 1863.
- ⁴⁷F.O. 17/403, Foreign Office to War Office, 2 September 1863.
- ⁴⁸Hall, Tseng Kuo-fan, p. 359.
- ⁴⁹F.O. 17/368/79, Russell to Bruce, 6 May 1862.
- ⁵⁰F.O. 17/389/186, Russell to Bruce, 26 October 1863.
- ⁵¹Morse, The International Relations of the Chinese Empire, vol. 2, p. 97.
- ⁵²F.O. 17/403, Foreign Office to War Office, 25 September 1863.
- ⁵³Gregory, Great Britain and the Taipings, p. 129.
- ⁵⁴F.O. 17/404, War Office to Hammond, 17 November 1863.
- ⁵⁵F.O. 17/408/72 Enclosure 1, Parkes to Bruce, 14 May 1864, in Bruce to Russell, 24 May 1864.
- ⁵⁶Siang-tseh Chiang, The Nien Rebellion, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1954), pp. 26-27. Compare Chiang's account to Lo-erh-kang's thesis, analyzed by Teng in The Historiography of the Taiping Rebellion, p. 69.
- ⁵⁷F.O. 17/406/49, Russell to Bruce, 8 March 1864.
- ⁵⁸F.O. 17/408/87 "Secret and Confidential", Bruce to Russell, 12 June 1864.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²F.O. 17/407/17 Enclosure 1, Bruce to Gordon, 22 November 1863, in Bruce to Russell, 12 February 1864.

⁶³F.O. 17/390/36 "Secret and Confidential", Bruce to Russell, 30 March 1863.

⁶⁴F.O. 17/408/57, Bruce to Russell, 29 April 1864.

⁶⁵Michael, "Military Organization," p. 481.

⁶⁶F.O. 17/408/51 Enclosure, Adkins to Bruce, 24 February 1864, in Bruce to Russell, 15 April 1864.

⁶⁷F.O. 17/408/70, Bruce to Russell, 24 May 1864.

⁶⁸Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, footnote "b", p. 290.

⁶⁹F.O. 17/408/87 "Secret and Confidential", Bruce to Russell, 12 June 1864.

CONCLUSION

At mid-nineteenth century, Free Trade had assumed the guise of a universal panacea for international relations. In opening China to trade, the Victorians saw themselves conferring material and social benefits upon the Chinese. Yet in forcing Westernization upon the Chinese, the Victorians failed to discern their own self-righteousness. Determined to bring China into the sphere of contemporary diplomatic and economic relations, the British dismissed China's historic tribute system as an anachronism. Through wars and treaties based upon Western principles of international relations, the British gradually brought the Imperial government into modernity. The British experience in China began as an economic venture, but the establishment of Free Trade entailed unforeseeable legal, diplomatic, and political problems. The Nanking and Tientsin treaties were provisional solutions to the problems of the China trade, which in turn created new difficulties as the English became dissatisfied with the Chinese response to Western principles of commerce. Sino-British treaties were only the initial step toward the modernization of China, as the English gradually realized from their experience with the Imperial government.

Through the circumstances which led to Chinese acceptance of the treaties, the Manchu and British governments slowly developed a policy of cooperation. The Taiping Rebellion strengthened the Sino-British alliance. Seen against the background of the rebels' fanaticism and

destructiveness, the Manchus appeared defenders of the stability that British economic interests depended upon. Although they long-professed neutrality, the British tacitly favored the Imperial cause, as they were bound to the central government by the treaties. The Manchus' belated pro-foreignism and governmental reform, coupled with the treaties, gave them a decisive advantage over the rebels in winning British support. The British therefore dismissed the Taipings' pro-foreignism and Hung Jen-kan's reforms as empty gestures. The British intervened on the government's behalf when they were convinced that reform was hopeless among the Taipings and practicable for the Manchus. By serving the interests of a reformed administration, British prestige remained intact.

British intervention in the Taiping Rebellion exemplified "informal" imperialism. The British avoided assuming direct political control of China. They preferred to cooperate with indigenous authorities, evading the expense and difficulties of formal control. The Taiping Rebellion indicated the problems of a debilitated administration. As a result of the government's weakness, the British were forced to assume unwanted political responsibility to safeguard their commercial interests. In pursuit of economic enterprise, the British encountered a series of local economic problems which increasingly required political solutions. These temporary solutions to local problems conflicted with the long-range British policy of evading political responsibility. The British therefore attempted to place the duty of governing back upon the Chinese. Their interests, however, compelled them to assume an advisory role in the process of regenerating the Imperial government.

While the British had no desire to incur governmental responsibility in China, they required political stability to ensure the security of their economic interests, which gradually drew them into involvement with upholding the sovereignty of the Manchu dynasty. The inconsistent, provisional character of informal imperialism in China demonstrated the pragmatism of mid-Victorian foreign policy.

Prior to ratification of the Treaty of Tientsin, the British had favored the Imperial cause, yet their policy largely developed as an unplanned product of local and temporary circumstances. Upon achieving ratification, the British hesitated to intervene; they did not follow a rigid plan of supporting the dynasty. Although their influence over the Imperial authorities became stronger as a result of the rebellion, the British did not pursue a course designed to weaken the government by causing it to rely upon the foreign powers for assistance. British officials wished to take some part in China's government, and to keep it from becoming strong enough to resist foreign influence. Yet their foremost consideration remained the protection of Free Trade, which required a modicum of stability and strength for the Imperial government, to prevent further disasters such as the Taiping Rebellion. The British program of reform and limited intervention, although based upon protection of Free Trade, was meant to redound to the credit of the Imperial government.

A common interest in restoring the stability of China united British and Chinese authorities. To reestablish their sovereignty, the Manchus had to reassert Confucianism, the conservative ideology of Chinese society. Yet Confucianism proved incompatible with the program

of gradual modernization which the British advocated to maintain their trade interests. The opposition of the dynasty's political interests and British economic interests became increasingly evident throughout the nineteenth century, and culminated in China's humiliation under the Boxer Protocol.

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