

Why did the
embassies of lord
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and lord amherst in
1816 fail? es...

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McCartney's mission, followed by Amherst's mission, could be considered as one of the primitive contact held between Britain and China. Despite their effort, McCartney and Amherst's missions both failed and caused an enormous effect on British-Chinese relationship for a long period of time.

Why did the embassies of Lord McCartney in 1793 and Lord Amherst in 1816 fail?

It is mostly due to the persistent view that the Chinese government was not disinclined toward foreign intercourse. British wished to achieve several objectives which were mainly about the trade and the diplomatic representation. So McCartney had visited China and tried to open discussion with Ho-shen. But China regarded McCartney's visit to Peking as a celebration of the emperor's birthday. Even though the mission was warmly welcomed by the governor-general, a flag bearing the characters of "Tributary Envoy from England" was placed on their boat. The Ch'ing court considered diplomatic negotiations completely out of order. In both Jehol and Peking, Ho-shen was unresponsive, parrying all attempts at negotiation. At the end, China had told McCartney's mission to leave Peking as they had been well treated, they should be satisfied to return home with gratitude.

After McCartney's return, two edicts were issued to King George ?. It mentioned that China was not able to grant British's wishes because it was contrary to the established practice of China as Emperor Ch'ien-lung says, "Europe consists of many other nations besides your own: if each and all demanded to be represented at our court, how could we possibly consent? The thing is utterly impracticable. How can our dynasty alter its whole

procedure and system of etiquette, established for more than a century, in order to meet your individual view?" To make the matter worse, Emperor Chia-ch'ing, the son of Emperor Ch'ien-lung, was reserved and did not even receive foreign envoys unlike his father. He responded to the demands of the new British embassy with unenthusiastic comment which goes " All in all, I am not glad of this event."

The Emperor also told Amherst that as long as he will not agree to kowtow, he should be given a local reception at Tientsin only, and told that the Emperor had gone on a hunting trip and would not return for several months. All of these facts are telling that China had no interest in outside world and Britain was not an exception. As China called British " outer barbarians", it shows that China feels itself superior to other countries; they had everything they need in domestic area. They rather thought the opening of the trade would bring profit only to the partner. They also knew that building up a relation with Britain would only collapse the established practice of China. So China accepted McCartney with the utmost politeness, treated with utmost hospitality, watched with utmost vigilance and dismissed with the utmost civility but never let them speak a word about the diplomatic issues. Both McCartney and Amherst had done their best but failed.

However, we cannot miss the fact that there was a lack of understanding of the Chinese culture in Britain. This also has contributed to the British failure. Kowtow was one of the most significant cultures they had to face. Kowtow is to kneel three times and lie down nine times before the Emperor to show him respect. Both McCartney and Amherst did not mind doing so, but they

considered this action as an insult to King George ? and would only reinforce the low opinion the Chinese court had of Europeans. They decided to resist the Chinese ritual and tried to make compromise out of this issue. Endless arguments continued between them. Even though China had forgave McCartney and Amherst from the formal kowtow, their refusal accelerated China's feeling of repugnance towards Britain. Another factor was that Britain was not aware of China's abundance of goods.

They prepared clocks, an elaborate planetarium and fine Wedgwood porcelains as gifts to impress the Emperor with the high standard of British science and industry. However, British's attempt had failed. At the end of McCartney's mission, Emperor Ch'ing-lung had said, " We possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufactures." As I mentioned before, in Amherst's case, the matter was worse; Emperor Chia-ch'ing did not even receive the gifts. Third reason why British were rejected by China is revealed in the conduct of Amherst. On the day they had reached Peking, Amherst was told that the Emperor is ready to receive him immediately at the Summer Palace. But Amherst, being exhausted from the bumpy journey and the summer heat, and unaccompanied by his credentials and costumes which had lagged behind, he wished to have a rest before meeting the Emperor.

To this attitude, the Chinese escorts were furious and had to tell a lie to the Emperor that Amherst and the English envoys are sick. Emperor, being suspicious about the English envoys, thought " China is the universal overload. How can she willingly submit to this kind of insult and insolence?"

As a result, English embassy was expelled and its “tribute” was rejected. These factors could be the evidences of how British were unaware of Chinese cultures and China itself. “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” - this spirit was missing from the Britain. If British knew to esteem China a little more, if they at least knew how important dynasty is for China, there could have been a chance of negotiation.

But their mission was not a complete failure. They succeeded in collecting valuable information. China’s scientific and medical knowledge was actually in a low status, their army quality is declining, the poverty was prominent in the society and moreover the dynasty was in danger of collapsing. From this information, the British’s next step was to change their situation by using military forces. This soon led to the breakdown of the Canton system and it was the beginning of the long-decayed clash between Britain and China and also the beginning of the British’s revenge. Therefore, McCartney and Amherst’s failure converted into a big success later in the future.