



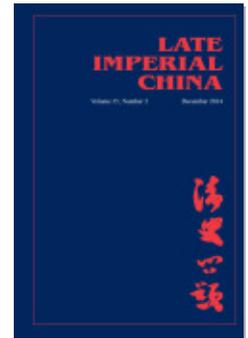
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A MULTITUDE OF LORDS: QING COURT RITUAL AND THE MACARTNEY EMBASSY OF 1793*

James L. Hevia

In 1793, the 58th year of the Qianlong emperor's reign, the king of England, George III, sent an embassy to China under the direction of George Lord Macartney, for the purpose of negotiating alterations in the condition of relations between Great Britain and the Qing empire. On September 14, 1793, Lord Macartney was received in audience at Rehe by the emperor in a round tent that had been set up in the Garden of Ten-thousand Trees. Macartney, carrying a jewel-encrusted gold box containing a message from his king, entered the tent where the emperor sat on a raised platform. He proceeded up a side stairway (probably on the east) and went directly before the emperor. Kneeling down on one knee, Macartney passed the box into the hands of the emperor, stood up, and retreated to the left (east) side of the tent where he and his retinue were seated for a banquet.¹

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¹ This description is taken from Macartney's journal in Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:122-123. In his account of the embassy, the vice-ambassador, Sir George Staunton, 1797, 2:231-232 and 1978, 3:37-39 made the following observation:

This mode of reception of the representative of the King of Great Britain, was considered by the Chinese court, as particularly honourable and distinguished: Embassadors being seldom received by the Emperor on his throne, or their credentials delivered into his own hands, but into that of one of his courtiers. These distinctions, so little material in themselves, were however understood by this refined people as significant of a change of opinions of their government in respect to the English; and made favourable impressions upon their minds.

Anderson 1796:219-221, was present at Rehe but does not mention the ceremony. Barrow 1804:117-118 was at the Yuanming yuan while Macartney was in Rehe; he notes that a great uproar occurred there, especially among Western missionaries, when word arrived that Macartney had not kowtowed.

Pritchard 1943:190 notes that Chinese sources in the Palace archives indicate that the particulars of an English ceremony were presented to the emperor prior to the audience. The *Qing shi gao* [Draft History of the Qing Dynasty] Beijing 1928, "Li zhi" [Annals of Rites], *juan* 10:4a-b adds that a special edict was issued allowing the Western ceremony. Neither of these originals have been examined by contemporary scholars. The *Libu zeli* [Precedents of the Board of Rites], Beijing 1820, *juan* 180:10a notes that the British ambassador knelt (*gui*) in delivering his king's message, but does not mention him either passing it into the emperor's hands or that he was in front of the emperor.

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The particulars of the Macartney audience outlined here have long been interpreted as a pivotal moment in relations between imperial China and the West. Crystallized in Macartney's simple act of kneeling upon one knee, rather than kotowing, is a whole history of the struggle between modern diplomatic practices and Chinese "isolation" and "sense of cultural superiority." As such, Macartney's mission has been interpreted as a failure, since it left the "tribute system" intact. But it also has signified a challenge, beginning a process that eventually toppled the "tribute system," a mode of subjection that has been seen as the very essence of the Sino-centric character of "traditional" Chinese foreign relations.

These assumptions are challenged by a closer look at the ritual context of the mission itself. While Macartney's account and imperial court records about the audience of 1793 corroborate each other on many points, the form the audience took was from the Qing point of view most unusual and intriguing. Two questions appear pertinent to ask about the final form of the audience. First, why was the Manchu-Chinese court willing to make alterations to accommodate the British ambassador, and second, to what extent do the concerns of an eighteenth-century British ambassador correspond to those of modern diplomacy?

With respect to the first of these questions, in no Chinese prescriptions for audience with the emperor does a foreign ambassador ever approach the throne, let alone hand something directly to the emperor while kneeling on one knee. If we confine our attention to editions of the *Assembled Canon of the Qianlong Reign* (*Qianlong huidian*) and *The Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing* (*Da Qing tongli*) published during the reign of the Qianlong emperor, it is clear that no one except the emperor is supposed to enter the center space of an audience site, and that messages such as the one Macartney brought were normally delivered to officials of the Board of Rites in a ceremony prior to the imperial audience.² Ambassadors ordinarily moved through the west side of courtyards and halls, and were expected to perform the kotow, or three kneelings and nine headknockings, on that side of the hall.³

² *Qianlong huidian* [Assembled Canon of the Qianlong Reign], Beijing 1761, *juan* 56. *Da Qing tongli* [Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing], Beijing 1756, *juan* 43. See the *Siku quanshu* [Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature], Ji Yun, comp., preface dated 1779. Reprinted Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1978, Series 8, vol. 130.

³ Wills 1984:3 seems to indicate that officials and ambassadors kotowed in the central avenue leading to the Supreme Harmony Hall. No texts I have consulted indicate such a placement. In an account Wills provides of the Portuguese embassy of Manoel de Saldhana, the embassy was ordered to stand in the middle during one audience, which the Portuguese took to be a sign of favor. See Wills, 209. Such exceptions are consistent with the argument being made here that rites were altered according to changing conditions in the world.

How then are we to explain these apparent major deviations from practices prescribed in authoritative Manchu-Chinese texts on audiences? Few Western sinological interpretations of traditional Chinese foreign relations prepare us for any such alterations. The tribute system hypothesis tells us that the structural elements of these relations were classically quite rigid; so much so, in fact, that an environmental shock on the order of the Opium Wars was required before any "adaptation" could take place.⁴ Those who have considered ceremony from a symbolic point of view have emphasized that rites might be considered expressive and representational, that they were primarily involved with maintaining appearances. In any of these cases, rites are assumed to confirm fixed relations that exist prior to them; "expressions" or "symbols" are treated as mere reflections—and sometimes dim ones at that—of the actual relations of power which can be discerned in a less mystified contemporary analysis.⁵

None of these interpretations would lead us to expect major deviation or innovation in rites, except as forcefully imposed from the outside. Indeed, from the point of view of symbolic or expressive interpretations, we might expect the imperial court to have insisted on strict compliance with forms found in the texts referred to above, especially when we consider that Macartney had arrived in Rehe in September—an important ritual period of the year. In September the emperor received in audience princes and ambassadors from central Asia. Further, Macartney was present during the celebration of the emperor's birthday, which ritual manuals tell us was a time when a variety of high order rites occurred, including Grand Assemblage (*dachao*) and Grand Banqueting (*yanyan*).⁶ To have Macartney perform an atypical ceremony on this great occasion before the eyes of the many important personages then present in Rehe appears to contradict virtually everything that has been written about traditional Chinese foreign relations by later Western commentators. Moreover, those who have dealt specifically with the Macartney embassy, while acknowledging that the audience form was indeed altered, have not explained why the imperial court was willing to make such changes.⁷

Just as the behavior of the imperial court raises certain uncomfortable questions for a modernist view of "traditional" Chinese foreign relations,

⁴ Fairbank and Teng 1941; Fairbank 1942; and Fairbank 1968:258.

⁵ Pritchard 1943:196-200; Mancall 1968:78 and 1971:85; Wills 1984:21-22, 187; and Jochim 1980.

⁶ *Da Qing tongli*, first published 1756, *juan* 17 and 37. See also Beijing 1883 reprint of 1824 edition which is a re-edited version of the 1756 original, *juan* 18 and 40.

⁷ Pritchard 1943:190-194; Cranmer-Byng 1957-58:117-186; and Wills 1984:184-185.

Macartney's own behavior challenges certain taken-for-granted assumptions. Macartney is usually presented to us as a typical European enlightenment figure embodying modern values in confrontation with traditional China. While there is much in Macartney's account that might substantiate this view, there is also a good deal in his behavior that is inconsistent with modern characterizations of enlightenment rationality. Frequently overlooked are such factors as Macartney's own intense concern with court ceremony and with the relationship between it and what he called the "business" of his embassy.

In late eighteenth century Europe concern over ceremony was linked to the dignity and honor of the sovereign represented by an ambassador; diplomats focussed on matters of precedence and on mastering a variety of ceremonial forms to be found in the many courts of Europe. No less an authority than John Adams makes clear the importance of ceremony in European courts and how it must be endured before diplomatic negotiation can begin.⁸ These concerns suggest that, in theory at least, it was through ceremony that mutual recognition of sovereignty was asserted and state-to-state equality achieved. Such ceremonial recognition was a prerequisite for the negotiation of substantive issues and the codification of agreements in the form of treaties.

Prior to his departure for China, Macartney received much information regarding court ceremony in China. Some of this he dismissed on the grounds that the exact content of ceremony was negotiable and to be determined at the discretion of the ambassador. At the same time, however, he became convinced that the Chinese judged people on the basis of "external appearances" and that the Chinese court was probably the most sophisticated Asian court the British had yet encountered. These considerations led him to insist that the embassy had to maintain a high sense of decorum and display "eclat," i.e., measure up to precedents of pomp established by other European embassies to China. This would be accomplished in part through dignified participation in ceremonies and by means of the gifts the British embassy presented to the emperor. In his audience with the emperor, for example, Macartney dressed himself in a velvet coat and wore the Order of the Bath, a diamond badge and star, and a richly-plumed hat, seeing this attire as indicative of the attention he paid to

⁸ On the importance of ceremony in European courts see Martens 1795:136-144. John Adams' observations on ceremony are included in his account of an audience with George III in 1785. See C. F. Adams 1853, 8:251-259.

"oriental customs and ideas."⁹

Macartney's preoccupation with form in the orient appears to be consistent with his experience of court ceremony as it was then practiced in Europe. Such concerns followed a logic of representation in which ceremonial action was presumed to reflect natural relations of power in the world. In the presence of all other sovereigns European ambassadors performed ceremonies that dramatized the independence and unqualified unity of the sovereignty for which they stood.

We might go one step further in a consideration of ceremonial form. Previously I noted that modernists interpret ceremony as symbolic and representational. More to the point, in these interpretations an emphasis on ceremonial form is confined to the world of tradition. What was for Macartney a projection onto the orient of his own understanding of ceremony (i.e., as a representation), becomes in the hands of later historians a defining characteristic of political and social order in the "orient." The resulting interpretation ignores an eighteenth century European sensibility which also held ceremony to be important in diplomacy. In the same move modernists ascribe to the "traditional world" of the orient characteristics that are embedded in that which they suppress in the European past. Like the European diplomatic world of the eighteenth century, the Manchu-Chinese imperial court was concerned with ceremony; only it understood it in other than representational terms.

To account for the imperial court's willingness to alter the forms of rites on the occasion of the Macartney embassy requires, therefore, (1) a consideration of the metaphysical assumptions that led historic actors to presume that imperial rites and/or European diplomatic ceremony were an efficacious way of organizing actual relations of power; (2) a description of the relevant imperial formation for dealing with foreign rulers; and (3) an

⁹ Macartney made the link between ceremony and business when he first arrived in China. See Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:75. For Macartney's thoughts on ceremonial presentation before the Chinese court see *India Office Macartney Correspondence* 91:43-52. Some of his impressions probably came from a report on China prepared by James Cobb of the East India Company. See *India Office Macartney Correspondence*, 20, "Sketches respecting China and Embassies sent thither." In his account, Staunton refers to the Chinese concern with "exterior appearance," 1797, 2:230. For Macartney's description of the costume he wore in imperial audience see Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:122.

With respect to the gifts to be presented to the emperor, Macartney distinguished between "treasure," "trifles of momentary curiosity," or things "more glittering than useful" and items whose merit lay in their utility. Concern over utility led Macartney to select the latest European scientific instruments as a major part of the gifts for Qianlong. *India Office Macartney Correspondence* 20:109, 142. On the scientific instruments see Cranmer-Byng and Levere 1981.

exploration of the conditions under which a rite might be altered. Such an explanation has implications for the way in which the subject of Sino-Western relations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is approached.

The Metaphysics of Rites and Imperial Ritual

During the sixty-year reign (1736-1796) of the Qianlong emperor, as earlier, outer lords were engaged with the emperor in a political discourse within which Manchu-Chinese imperial rituals were central. These outer lords included religious hierarchs such as Mongol reincarnated bodhisattvas or Tibetan lamas, Mongol khans, East and Southeast Asian kings, the Tsar of Russia, the Pope, the kings of Portugal and England and the so-called king of Holland. The way in which these lords or their ambassadors were to be received by the Qing court is most clearly outlined for us in the Guest Ritual (*bin li*) section of *The Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing*. According to this text, the relationship constituted through ritual action between the Qing emperor and outer lords accorded the emperor the position of supreme lord (*huang di*), while outer lords accepted a position as lesser lords (*fan wang*). However, such relations were contingent and required the ongoing participation of the imperial court and lesser lords in fashioning and refashioning them. Rather than reflecting or representing an unchanging tradition of foreign relations replicated through a succession of Chinese dynasties, supreme lord/lesser lord relationships were unique achievements produced and reproduced, made and altered, in response to changing circumstances. In order to better understand how Guest Ritual formed these relationships an overview of imperial ritual will be useful.

None of the extensive ritual materials dealing with emperorship can be understood independent of the claim made in imperial discourse that the sage king was the pivot between Heaven and Earth. Imperial ritual was the proper action which formed a relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal, the transcendent and the affairs of human beings. Ritual texts and Manchu-Chinese records of foreign embassies take their place within this larger context of imperial ritual action.

Certain cosmological principles inform these rites. (1) The cosmos is dynamic, that is, the universe is in a perpetual state of generation, regeneration, and transformation. (2) The world of humanity must in some way be in accord with these processes, which are generated in an invisible realm and then manifested in the visible. Kingly ritual is about comprehending these cosmically-produced manifestations and working on

them in some manner.

A reading of imperial rites suggests that proper human activity can affect or alter cosmic patterns toward the good—a logical inversion of the perception that the improper performance of imperial ritual could produce natural disasters, thus indicating the mismanagement of human affairs by an incompetent ruler. Thus, while there is an overall pattern of repetition in the cosmos, (i.e., spring follows winter, summer follows spring, etc.), there is also palpable and continuous change in patterns, which if misrecognized could open the door to chaos, the dissolution of the specific kingship, and its possible replacement by another kingship.

As we find it in Manchu-Chinese historical texts, the rites associated with the emperor are divided into five categories, which, through their performance, encompass and produce a whole; that is, the five rites define the capacities of the sage king in ordering the cosmos as well as the capacity of others to participate in this ordering process.

Let me briefly review some of the content of the "five rites." (1) Auspicious rites (*ji li*) deal with sacrifices to Heaven and Earth, rites in which the emperor is the Son of Heaven; (2) Felicitous rites (*jia li*) are concerned with the south-facing ruler, the ruler addressing his domain, and include the assembly of the entire official domain before the gaze of the emperor, the presentation of memorials to the emperor, and the handing down of imperial edicts. Presentation and handing down are designated as hearing (*ting*) and governing (*zheng*). (3) Martial rites (*jun li*) have to do with the emperor as warrior. (4) Guest rites (*bin li*) are about the emperor's relations with other lords, and serve as a model for host/guest relations between all peoples in the imperial domain. (5) Inauspicious or Funerary rites (*xiong li*) begin with rituals for the interment of the emperor and end with accounts of funeral rites proper to the common people.

In general, the rites defined the activities of the king temporally throughout the year, including both solar and lunar time, and spatially in terms of all under Heaven, meaning the whole world. No absolute outside was acknowledged, only relative degrees of proximity to a center. This center, in turn, had to be constituted through ritual practice. Differences in proximity of participants to the body of the emperor were both made and displayed in rites. The spatial disposition of participants and things (e.g., imperial regalia) using principles of cardinal directionality, upper-lower, and closer-farther signified in ways consequential for specific states of political relations. By manipulating space, by disposing bodies, the imperial court could show for all to see that cosmic change was being appropriately acknowledged, worked on, formed, and included in the

emperor's kingship.

The processes through which inclusion was realized are probably best demonstrated in the Grand or Extra-Mural sacrifice portion of Auspicious rites. These are the rites that are discussed first in the ritual text; they address the cycle within the year considered to be the most significant, that of the solstices and the equinoxes. As Angela Zito's work on Grand sacrifice demonstrates, *The Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing* provides the fullest narrative for the winter solstice sacrifice. The summer solstice portion of the text then simply refers back to the winter rites when the actions to be taken are the same, indicating that the winter sacrifice is logically superior to the summer, forming its basis, as it were. The equinox sacrifices are, in turn, organized as lesser and only partly varied versions of the solstice sacrifices, with spring superior to summer. In these homologous relationships, we can see differentiation at work, because what is described in the sections following the winter solstice sacrifice are chiefly the points that differ from it.

Zito concludes, quite correctly I believe, that the relationship between the pairs, normally construed as being of equal significance and proportions, as if they were a kind of harmonious system of eternal oscillation, is actually asymmetrical, with the superior of the pair encompassing and including the inferior through the performance of the rite. The significance of this particular insight cannot be overemphasized. It is not just that a hierarchy is proposed, but that this hierarchy is built on a logic of inclusion or encompassment that at the same time maintains difference, rather than, as European notions of hierarchy have it, on an exclusionary principle of rigid vertical boundaries.¹⁰

The principles of encompassment and differentiation, which appear to be common to all imperial rites, extend far beyond the organization of texts and forms of inter-textual reference. We might conclude that relationships so formed have the following characteristics: the power of the superior lies in his capacity to generate conditions necessary for the inclusion of inferiors; the power of the inferior lies in his capacity to bring to completion what the superior sets in motion. The Manchu-Chinese constitution of imperial sovereignty took this form.

¹⁰ Zito 1984. For general discussions of European sovereignty see Hinsley 1969 and Gross 1968. Critical evaluations concerning the exclusionary nature of the concept and its implications can be found in Ryan 1982:4-6. Also see Foucault 1980:92-108 and Stallybrass and White 1986.

The asymmetry and interdependence of the superior/inferior relationship cross-cuts many domains of Chinese text production and practice and is signified as such in several ways in imperial rites. First, the superior initiates, sets affairs in motion, is a source; second, not all inferiors have the capacity for situationally specific completion. Not everyone is the Son of Heaven, and not all knowledge and human capacities are equal. Finally, the emperor pivots from his position facing north when he addresses Heaven and ancestors, to a position facing south when he addresses Earth. In the former relationship, he is the completing principle to Heavenly generation; in the latter, he stands as the generator and Earth as the completer. What I take to be significant here is that at the very pinnacle of imperial ritual plural human agency and the constitutive properties of such agencies are proposed—people can be both generators and completers depending on the relationship being formed. It is in and through rites that these contingent human attributes are realized and make the world in a specific way.

If we look closely at Grand Sacrifice, we may see one way in which this is accomplished. At the solstices and equinoxes the emperor moves out of his palaces in the four cardinal directions, thereby constructing, as it were, a center. In these rites, Heaven (south) and Ancestors (east) initiate, while the emperor, as Son of Heaven and filial imperial son, faces north and completes. Facing south, the emperor initiates and Earth (north) and Soil and Grain (west) complete. As if to emphasize a pivotal center, the solstice sacrifices were followed by Grand Assemblage and Grand Banqueting. In the latter rites, the emperor is located at the north end and on the center line of an audience hall, facing south toward the world of human affairs. In this capacity he is the Supreme Lord (*huang di*), the Lord of Lords, the generative principle, and those before him, his servants, are the completing principle. As generator, the emperor commands the assembly of officials; as completers, officials assemble before him in east and west flanks and kowtow.

Lordship and Guest Ritual

Guest ritual was informed by an assumption that the world was made up of a multitude of lords, all of whom had to be addressed in some fashion by any claimant to supreme lordship. There were several practical reasons why this was so. In the first place, lords commanded domains, that is, they organized relations of power and authority over people and resources in a particular area. This capacity to command others is, of course, comparable to the capacities of the emperor, and, like the

emperor, is also the foundation upon which a lesser lord's martial strength is built. Moreover, the military strength of lords, be they supreme lord or lesser lords, when focused, could be and indeed often was directed against other lordships.

This aspect of lordship, in turn, provides some indication of what the goals of warfare ideally were. One did not necessarily utterly reduce a rival; rather a lord had to demonstrate that his command over people and things was superior to that of others, and then include the strength of a defeated rival within his own sphere. Yet such inclusion had to be continually managed and reproduced, because alterations were presumed to be ever present in relations of power. In other words, change had continually to be addressed if any lordship was to remain intact. In this sense, relations between lords were inherently contentious and contradictory, even after an act of inclusion had been accomplished. It was not enough (to use the language of the tribute system) for other lords to be "enrolled as tributaries."¹¹ Rather, relations were contingent and provisional, requiring continuous renegotiation and refashioning as conditions in the world changed.

In a political situation in which lords vied with each other for supremacy, any claim that the emperor might make to supreme lordship was predicated on his dexterous management of relations with other lords; he must include their strength without diluting it so that he could, if necessary, command them to assist him in the ordering of the world. This was, after all, his Mandate from Heaven. Without the inclusion of other lordships, such order would at best be superficial and sovereignty unstable. And there were very practical consequences to such an eventuality; any lesser lord, especially one who stood as an inferior vis-à-vis a reigning emperor, could, under the proper conditions, also make a claim to supreme lordship based on the manifest inability of the emperor to fashion links with the transcendent and properly order the world. For Manchu kings, this was no small matter, since the dynasty itself was founded when the Qing rulers made just such a claim against the Ming.

Guest Ritual provided the context in which the lesser lord's strength was both acknowledged (that is, differentiated from that of other lords) and shown now to be part of a whole, having been reformed and channeled in such a way that it was encompassed by the supreme lord. Guest Ritual had, therefore, a martial element to it: the strength of the lesser lord was displayed, but he was also shown the superior military prowess of the

¹¹ Fairbank 1979:190.

emperor. This form of display was accomplished in several ways. First, in imperial audiences the lesser lord was positioned on the west, the side reserved for the emperor's military officers, as opposed to the east which was reserved for civil officials. Second, present at audiences for lesser lords were large imperial guard contingents. Third, the routes travelled by the lesser lord to and from the capital sometimes had guard contingents displayed along them. And, finally, in audience he might not be the only lesser lord present. In effect, he was shown that others like him also pledged their loyalty to the emperor.¹²

The Guest Ritual process begins with the actions of the supreme lord as generative principle; kingly virtue, or to use Waley's translation, the power of the exemplar (*de*) extends outward in the world and reorients other lords. This power is manifested in the emperor's performance of the ritual cycle. In his fashioning of the relationship between Heaven, earth, and humanity he takes and holds a pivotal role in the ordering of the cosmos. What it generates is a kind of awareness in the lesser lord, a knowledge of the awesome power of the exemplar. As many texts tell us, the lesser lord is reoriented to face toward transformation sincerely (*xiang hua zhi cheng*); he is drawn toward the great king.¹³ Having been reoriented, the lesser lord requests permission to enter the imperial domain.

From ritual and related texts, we can then discern the following relationship between superior and inferior which serves to orient action. The emperor emerges as one who bestows imperial grace (*en*); as bestower, he entitles the lesser lord and gives him such things as clothing, jade scepters, the emperor's calligraphy, the calendar, and food. He also allows him to participate in other rites. The lesser lord, as the completing principle, offers things up to the emperor. These might include his genealogy, the unique products of his domain, and thanks for the extension of the emperor's grace. Moreover by his deportment, including dress, speech, and gesture, such as the prostration or kotow, the lesser lord was understood to manifest his sincere loyalty. The result is that an inferior center (i.e., that constituted by the lesser lord in his domain) is encompassed: that is the lesser lord by his movements and gestures actually accepts transformation and is differentiated (maintaining a distance and displacement

¹² At the audience Macartney participated in at Rehe, there were numerous princes and ambassadors from Central Asian kingdoms. The *Rehe zhi* [Rehe Gazetteer], published 1781, indicates that this was a fairly common practice. See *juan* 23. In the Dutch embassy of 1794-95, Korean ambassadors were presented at court along with the Dutch embassy. See Duyvendak 1939:1-2:54.

¹³ Cf. *Zhang gu congbian* [Collected Historical Documents], Beijing 1929-1930, *Ce* 1:5a.

from the superior center constituted by the emperor on the center line).

Throughout the Guest Ritual process, asymmetrical spatial principles are continually evoked as the relationship being fashioned is evaluated and managed by imperial officials. These principles inform, for example, responses to contingencies that arise as the rite unfolds and are read in the relationship between this particular encounter and other encounters (precedents) that may have occurred in the present reign or previous reigns.

Imperial Audience Within Guest Ritual

The Guest ritual process can be divided into five parts: (1) a request by the lesser lord to send an embassy to the imperial court; (2) the reception of the embassy and its preparation for audience by court officials; (3) imperial audience; (4) imperial banqueting; and (5) the seeing off of the embassy.¹⁴ While the court treated the rite as a single continuous process,¹⁵ it is also clear that audience with the emperor was a crucial and significant moment in it. A description of imperial audience drawn from *The Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing* illustrates the process of manifesting relations in ritual space and indicates which portions of the rite were altered in the Macartney audience.

Following the reception and inspection of an embassy and its gifts at the Board of Rites, the director of the Board memorializes the throne requesting a date for audience. An imperial edict is issued fixing the day. On the day of audience the members of the embassy are lined up in order of rank and led by a court-appointed translator to a position outside the gates of the Supreme Harmony Hall (*Taihe dian*) in Beijing. At the same time, the emperor enters a preparation room. After court officials have taken up positions in the hall, the emperor ascends the throne. The ambassador and his retinue, escorted by the director of the Board of Rites and the translator, are led to the west or right (from the viewpoint of the south-facing emperor) side of the courtyard in front of the hall, where they kotow. They are then led up the west stairs to the west door of the hall, where all kneel. They do not enter the audience hall proper. Thereupon, a conversation occurs. The emperor asks solicitous questions, which are repeated by the director of the Board of Rites to the translator. The ambassador responds, the translator translates, and the director memorializes the throne for the ambassador. After the conversation is complete, the embassy retreats.

¹⁴ See Wills 1984:25-37, for a detailed account of the embassy routine.

¹⁵ Cf. *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:61b.

A special ceremony, presumably decided upon at the discretion of the court, may be appended at this point. Here the emperor takes his throne in a "convenient" hall. The embassy enters and takes its place on the west side of the hall at the end of a flank of officials from the eight banners. All participants are seated and drink tea proffered by the emperor.¹⁶

A few features of imperial audience procedure as outlined by this text are worth emphasizing. First, we see a shift of the embassy from the left (east) side of the hall, which it had occupied in a preliminary ceremony at the Board of Rites, to the right (west) side.¹⁷ Second, at no time does the ambassador or the embassy ever occupy the center line or central space of halls or courtyards. In conjunction with this observation, we might also note that the kowtow, when it does occur, happens in the courtyard outside the hall, rather than directly before the emperor on his throne. In fact, according to this text, ambassadors do not approach the throne. **Finally, the actual presence of an embassy in the audience hall proper is considered to be a special situation, one presumably predicated on the court's judgement of the lord or his ambassador as sincerely loyal; it is thus a mark of high honor or the extension of imperial grace.**

Alterations in the Macartney Audience

Earlier I said that rites were both an effort to comprehend cosmically-generated manifestations and a way of working on them. The British embassy provides a good example of this process. Let's begin by considering what the imperial court knew about England. According to various sources, including European missionaries in the emperor's service, England was the "Red Haired" kingdom located in the northwestern part of the West Ocean.¹⁸ There was also evidence that the English might be the same as the Pileng people who were located in Calcutta and who appeared to have some relationship to the lord of the Gurkhas in Nepal. Fukangan, the commander of the imperial forces in Tibet, proposed this connection and added that the Pileng had refused to aid the lord of Nepal, thus demonstrating their loyalty to the emperor.¹⁹ The court records also indicated that for many years the subjects of the king of England had come to Canton to trade, but the king had never sent an embassy before.²⁰ From the court's perspective, therefore, the arrival of the British embassy

¹⁶ *Da Qing tongli*, 1756, *juan* 43:3b-5a.

¹⁷ *Da Qing tongli*, 1756, *juan* 43:2b-3a.

¹⁸ *Zhang gu congbian*, *Ce* 1:3b.

¹⁹ Rockhill 1910:57-62 and Fu 1966, 1:324.

²⁰ *Zhang gu congbian*, *Ce* 2:12a-b.

signified the extent to which the emperor's exemplary power (*de*) had extended to remote corners of the world.

It was soon clear, however, that there was something unusual about the English lord's domain. The ambassador, Lord Macartney, indicated that he had his own ideas about how an audience with the emperor should proceed. While he had been willing previously to turn over a list of the British gifts at the request of court officials, he would not hand over his king's letter to them, demanding instead that he be allowed to place the letter directly into the hands of the emperor in audience. Macartney also did not wish to kowtow, but said he would be willing to, provided an imperial official of equal rank to himself performed the kowtow before a picture of George III. He had brought with him a portrait and put it on display in a "presence chamber" in Peking, where he delivered this proposal to Chinese officials.²¹

Given the emphasis placed on the spatial locations of participants in audiences and on the acts they perform, these requests appear to be rather provocative. Indeed, one might even expect that Macartney would be sent packing at this point. But that didn't happen. Instead, imperial officials questioned Macartney concerning the ceremony he himself would perform before his own king. Macartney explained that he would go directly before his monarch, kneel down on his right knee, and kiss the king's right hand.²² After much deliberation and a meeting with the highest imperial councillors, in the course of which it was provisionally decided that the English ambassador was sincerely loyal, Macartney was told that he could perform his own court's ceremony before the emperor, including delivering his king's letter directly, but that hand kissing was to be foregone.²³

According to Macartney's account, this is what happened during the audience of Sept 14: he knelt on one knee before the emperor and delivered his king's message.²⁴ But there was more as well. Rather than being placed on the right or west side of the tent in either the audience or the banquet that followed it, Macartney and his retinue were placed on the left side.²⁵ The placement of the embassy on the east and the deletion of the kowtow runs counter to every description we have for any level of

²¹ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:99.

²² See Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:100, 117-119. The meeting with high officials is discussed by Macartney on pp. 120-121.

²³ The court's version of this encounter is in *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 7:54a-b.

²⁴ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:122. See note 1.

²⁵ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:123. Also see the schematic diagram in William Alexander, *Embassy to China*, 3:f.59, no. 156; and Alexander's painting in Eames 1909 following 124.

audience that an embassy from a lesser lord might participate in. I shall take these two issues up in turn, beginning with the placement of the English embassy in audience.

The key to explaining this deviation lies, it turns out, in a parallel drawn by the court between the English embassy and a Portuguese embassy of 1753.²⁶ An investigation of the *Statutes and Precedents of the Assembled Canon of the Qing Dynasty* indicates that the ceremony performed on the occasion of the Portuguese embassy (Qianlong 18) was the same as that for an embassy in the fifth year of the Yongzheng emperor's reign (the Portuguese embassy of Alexandre Metello de Sousa e Menezes in 1727). Records of the latter embassy refer back, in turn, to one that occurred in the fifty-ninth year of the Kangxi emperor's reign (a West Ocean embassy in 1720).²⁷

This earliest entry explains that an ambassador from the West Ocean arrived to present a petition and participate in an imperial audience. A table was placed in front of and at the center of the stairs leading to the "Nine Classics and Three Obligations" hall (*Jiujing sanshi dian*) in the "Eternal Spring" garden (*Changchun yuan*). In other words the site was not any of the palaces of the imperial city as prescribed in the *Comprehensive Rites of the Great Qing* (in this case the summer palace complex, which included the Yuanming yuan). After the emperor had taken the throne, a functionary of the Office of Ceremony (*hong lu si*) led the ambassador to the central table, where the communication was placed. After stepping back from the table the emissary performed the rite of three kneelings and

²⁶ *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 2:11b.

²⁷ *Da Qing huidian shili* [Statutes and Precedents of the Assembled Canon of the Great Qing], Taipei: reprint of the Guangxu edition 1963, *juan* 505:8b-9a and 505:5b. The 1720 embassy has caused a degree of controversy because of the difficulty in identifying it. The *Qing shi gao* in "Li zhi," *juan* 10:2b claims it was a Portuguese embassy led by ambassador Fei-la-li, but stands uncorroborated by other sources. The only embassy present at the end of December 1720 was a papal delegation led by Mezzabarba. Fu 1966, 2:501 argues rather convincingly that Mezzabarba and Fei-la-li are one and the same.

The significance of the precedent lies, however, more in what was desired by the West Ocean ambassador, whoever he was. That is, the precedent indicates the way in which an ambassador could deliver a communication from his superior directly into the hands of the emperor, rather than as the *Da Qing tongli* stipulates. In the latter, the communication was to be offered up in a preliminary ceremony at the Board of Rites. It is also of interest to note that an almost identical situation occurred just a few months before during the Russian embassy headed by Izmaylov. According to various sources, after kowtowing, the ambassador was allowed to convey the Czar's message into the emperor's hands. See Rockhill 1905:25-28.

References to Portugal and Italy were also made in one of the emperor's letters to George III. See *Gaozong chun huangdi shilu* [Daily Court Record of the Qianlong Emperor], Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1964, *juan* 1435:13b, cited hereafter as the *Qianlong shilu*.

nine head-knockings. Then, using stairways and gates to the left (east) of the emperor, the ambassador delivered the communication into the emperor's hands. The emperor passed it to a high official at his side. Retreating the way he had entered, the ambassador returned to the foot of the stairs leading to the hall and again performed the rite of three kneelings and nine head-knockings. Returning to the hall, the ambassador received an imperial bestowal of a seat and tea. He then gave thanks for the emperor's grace and departed.²⁸

The treatment of the West Ocean embassy cited here makes it quite clear that an alteration in Guest ritual similar to that designed for the British had occurred as early as the Kangxi period. The ambassador of the lesser lord moved through the east side of the audience hall, the side normally reserved for the emperor's civil officials, and was allowed to deliver his lord's communication directly into the hands of the emperor. In effect, aspects of the "presentation of credentials and local products" ceremony at the Board of Rites²⁹ appear to have been incorporated into imperial audience. More important, the ambassador seems to have been allowed to act as if he had been transformed into one of the emperor's civil officials offering up a communication from a lesser lord.

What happened in Macartney's case is that certain elements dealing with the location of the West Ocean ambassadors in audience were followed from earlier precedents, with the kotow eliminated. And, as if to emphasize this last alteration, rather than being escorted by an official from the Office of Ceremony, as the West Ocean ambassador had been in 1720, Macartney was led by higher-level officials—a grand councillor and an officer of the Board of Rites.

The court entries about this audience both account for its uniqueness and indicate that Macartney's requests were positioned vis-à-vis a history of previous encounters. This history was explicitly evoked as precedent in the edicts and memorials that preceded the audience. At the time of audience, past and present crystallized into a unique moment which was, in fact, labelled as such by the emperor. In a poem prepared for the occasion, Qianlong made reference to the extension of his ancestors' (Nurhaci and Abahai) grace throughout the world as well as the distance travelled by the English to come to court.³⁰ The first reference suggested the inclusion of the English domain in the ongoing reproduction of the Manchu kingdom;

²⁸ *Da Qing huidian shili*, juan 505:4b-5a.

²⁹ *Da Qing tongli*, 1756, juan 43:2b-3a.

³⁰ *Qianlong shilu*, juan 1434:11b.

the second served to differentiate the English in the process of inclusion.

The second aspect of the audience, the waiving of the *kotow* and its replacement with the British ambassador kneeling on one knee, leads to a consideration of what meanings may have been ascribed to such physical actions in audience ceremonies by Europeans and Manchu-Chinese actors. For Macartney, ritual gestures were less significant in themselves than in terms of some external order of symbolic reference. While he dismissed many ordinary rituals of politeness as "tricks of behavior,"³¹ he saw the *kotow* as a possible means of representing political reciprocity: thus his suggestion that an imperial official *kotow* to his portrait of George III. His separation of ceremony and "business," exemplified here in an attempt to achieve ceremonial reciprocity, betrays an assumption that national sovereignty could be the fixed referent or meaning of an equal exchange of (essentially arbitrary) ceremonial symbols. Such bodily symbols, once exchanged, could only refer to exterior universal realities, i.e., the internal homogeneity and bounded exclusiveness of sovereignty. In theory, at least, either a reciprocal *kotow* or the unilateral performance of an "English" ceremony, could become for Macartney a *representation* of something universal, a mutual acknowledgement of the natural order of relations between states.

In his formulation, Macartney's bodily movements before the emperor could not stand as a signifying practice that was constitutive of contingent and continuing relationships. It could only represent or express, at the moment of exchange, the transcendent truth of the internal unity of British and Chinese sovereignty, the recognition of which was the task of "ceremony." Only after this task was completed could the "business" of the embassy proceed. Therefore, a unilateral *kotow* was dangerous precisely because, by implying allegiance to a non-reciprocating sovereign, it would have destabilized the unity and exclusivity of the sovereignty Macartney represented. He would have aborted his mission precisely at the moment it was to have begun in earnest.

In this respect, two further aspects of Macartney's audience with the emperor Qianlong are worth noting. First, following the presentation of his king's letter and his repositioning on the left side of the audience tent, Macartney treated the remainder of the day's activities as grandiose displays that he later described from the position of objective observer. He believed here that the transition from ceremony to "business" in diplomacy had occurred. Therefore, his account, which concluded with a

³¹ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:222.

comparison of the events underway with a puppet theater he recalled from childhood,³² attributed to the participants certain presuppositions Macartney had brought with him to China: Asians love pomp; the Chinese judge people on the basis of "external appearance"; the emperor's rule is absolutist and despotic in nature.³³ Second, his "success" regarding the altered form of his audience with the emperor convinced him, in turn, that much of the ritual he saw was mere spectacle for the consumption of the unenlightened, and that China's so-called "immutable laws" would dissolve when met with firmness.³⁴

The imperial court's problems were somewhat different. The overwhelming emphasis in ritual texts on the position and disposition of bodies in ceremonial space meant that ritual actions constituted a cosmopolitical order in highly consequential ways. To have an imperial official kowtow to a picture of the English king might, therefore, have been viewed as logically preposterous. Presumably such action would have constituted a center where cosmologically it could not exist. Yet, the court was also bound to include and differentiate the English lord and his domain or terminate the ritual process. Since at that point the English ambassador showed sincere loyalty, the emperor and his ministers hesitated to end the rite prior to audience. To bring the rite to completion the court was willing to accept within its own audience an act of bodily signification appropriate to the English lord's kingdom. Macartney's act of kneeling on one knee and bowing his head, (the allowance of which one can assume to have been another sign of differentiation), was understood to be no more and no less than a spatial inscription which still realized the supreme lord/lesser lord relationship. In the formation of this relationship, kneeling, like the kowtow, completed inclusion and differentiation: it provisionally incorporated the strength of the English king in the emperor's rulership.

The audience participated in by Macartney demonstrates quite clearly the degree to which the imperial court was willing to alter a rite in order to realize its own perception of how relations between superior and inferior lords ought to be formed. That the kowtow could be waived and other actions introduced that would accomplish the same purpose raises interesting questions concerning the nature of conflict between China and the

³² Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:122-124.

³³ See note 9 above. Many references to Chinese despotism can be found in Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962; see also Henry Dundas's instructions to Macartney in Morse 1926, 2:233-234.

³⁴ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:153-154.

West in the nineteenth century. Not the least of these is to reconsider many areas of contestation across political orders in terms of the difference between two modes of ceremonial practice: signification, understood as constitutive of a world order, and "symbolic" representations, which are taken to express or reflect underlying realities.

The Aftermath of the Qianlong/Macartney Audience

For modern historians of Sino-Western relations a commonplace assumption is that the British embassy to China in 1793 failed to achieve its goals of re-ordering relations between China and Europe. Cited frequently in this respect is the letter sent from the Qianlong emperor to George III, in which the emperor complimented the English king for his "respectful humility," while refusing diplomatic exchange and an extension of British trade in China.³⁵ According to this view, the Macartney embassy had no effect on the traditional attitudes of the Chinese towards external contact. China remained aloof, isolated, and ignorant of the threat posed by British expansion. Such an interpretation, while consistent with the views of many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western observers of China's "traditional" foreign relations,³⁶ misses two important points about the British embassy. On the one hand, it ignores the stated assessment of Macartney and members of the British government concerning the accomplishments of the embassy. On the other hand, it fails to take into account the imperial court's assessment that the British did not understand and refused to cooperate in the ritual construction of imperial sovereignty.

If actions performed before the emperor of China by a European ambassador were deemed to be significant because they reflected or expressed underlying and, ultimately, universal realities, it might also be said that how many knees one knelt on was not the entire issue facing an experienced eighteenth-century diplomat such as Lord Macartney. Ceremony had a place, and as we have seen, a significant one for both British and Manchu-Chinese actors; but for the British, at least, the constitution and recognition of sovereignty in diplomatic audience was not an end in itself. Macartney had come to China to establish a claim of equality between the sovereign of Great Britain and the sovereign of China, but he had also

³⁵ Cf. Fairbank 1979:161.

³⁶ Cf. Auber 1834:200; Abbott 1843:214, 232; Eames 1909:121-122; and Rockhill 1909:31. Davis 1836, 2:72-73 presented the rare view that the Macartney embassy resulted in improved conditions for British merchants in China.

come to speak on behalf of the subjects of his king who had dealings with the Qing empire. In this context, the ceremonial establishment of sovereign equality was a prerequisite for such a presentation. It enabled what Macartney called the "business" of his embassy to go forward.

What confused the issue at the time and would become a major point of contention between the British and the imperial court in subsequent years was concern over with whom business was to be conducted. Having successfully established sovereign equality and, from his point of view, having been recognized as the representative or, more precisely, the "re-presenter" of his sovereign, Macartney assumed that he would be dealing with an opposite number of equivalent rank and stature to himself, a prime minister, to be exact. But the man he had taken to be his equal, Heshen, refused both in Rehe and Peking to open discussions in spite of Macartney's repeated efforts to do so.

Upon leaving Peking, however, en route overland to Canton, Macartney was met by Changlin, the former governor of Zhejiang and newly-appointed governor-general of Liangguang. In extensive discussions, Macartney and Changlin covered a variety of topics including: (a) the fixing of duties on British cargoes and the elimination of duties on ships that moved back and forth between Macao and Canton; (b) freedom of movement for merchants outside the English factory at Canton, free access to the city, and year-round residence in their factories; (c) the setting aside of a plot of land where sick English seamen could recuperate; (d) permission to trade with merchants other than those in the "hong"; (e) permission for any Chinese to instruct the English in the Chinese language; (f) a stipulation that punishment would be meted out only to those who had committed a crime; and (g) agreement that the English not be confused with a people who speak the same language but live in another part of the world, called America.³⁷

For Macartney the dialogues with Changlin proved to be the most rewarding part of his embassy. These consultations led to two orders issued by Changlin on January 2 and 5, 1794. The first forbade abuse of the English by any persons in Canton; the second prohibited extortion from English merchants.³⁸ Changlin also wrote a detailed response to Macartney's requests that reduced the duties between Canton and Macao, promised justice and a greater degree of communication with the

³⁷ See *India Office Macartney Correspondence* 20:196 for a complete list in the form of requests.

³⁸ *India Office Macartney Correspondence* 92:467-68.

supercargos, looked favorably on the idea of a hospital for sailors, promised that Chinese would be taught to the English, and, per a request from the supercargos, agreed that ships would not have to wait at Macao for pilots. He added that officials would now note the difference between the English and Americans.³⁹ In addition, Changlin told Macartney that the emperor would welcome further communication and another embassy from his king. Macartney interpreted this as an opportunity for at least an occasional, if not a permanent, minister resident in China.⁴⁰

This diplomatic opening was coupled with successful efforts by Macartney to gather commercial "intelligence" in response to requests and directives of the East India Company (EIC). In a letter to the directors of the EIC, Macartney outlined progress he had made on this front. In a significant coup, Macartney was not only able to gather information on the production of tea in China, but, when asked, Changlin allowed him to remove live tea plant specimens, which Macartney shipped to India.⁴¹ In addition to tea, Macartney was able to secure specimens of tallow, varnish, and mulberry trees, and expected to be able to ship silkworms to India. He also provided first-hand information on silk and cotton production, and porcelain manufacture.

In addition to these observations on commodities, Macartney also noted a number of encouraging signs that might be significant for the extension of British trade in China.⁴² In particular, he was excited about the prospects for finer British woollens such as "fleecy hosiery" to penetrate the vast China market. Also encouraging was the fact that the Chinese seemed to understand the advantages derived from the division of labor. This meant that equivalencies might exist in labor costs between the two nations that would allow the Company to realize a reasonable profit on Chinese manufactures. Moreover, the Chinese, unlike Europeans, held no prejudice about exchanging bullion for acceptable goods.

³⁹ Fu 1966, 1:327-331.

⁴⁰ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:184-185.

⁴¹ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:186. Also see 291-303 for information he gathered on mineral resources. Pritchard 1939 says that the tea plants were probably sent to the botanical gardens at Calcutta. It appears, however, that nothing further came of the experiment. See 501, note 2.

⁴² In a letter to Sir John Shore, Governor-general of Bengal, written in February 1794 from Macao, Macartney was somewhat less enthusiastic concerning the prospects for British trade. In this letter, he reviewed a number of circumstances that presently "impeded" the further introduction of British manufactures into China. Among these were the age of the emperor and his disinclination to change, and the cautious nature of the government, which of late had been exacerbated by reports from Europe of the French revolution. See Pritchard 1938:498-499.

While these elements might work in favor of the extension of trade, Macartney also pointed out that the greatest advantage would be secured by penetrating commodity-producing areas in China. He thought this entirely possible, provided British seamen could be controlled by Company authorities. Such control was important because China's despotic government was suspicious of any activities that might threaten the tranquillity and submission of the population it ruled. In closing, the ambassador noted that he had made clear to Chinese officials the difference between British subjects and Americans, whom the Chinese had now learned to distinguish under the name "Yankies."⁴³

It should be clear from his communication to the EIC that Macartney did not see his embassy as a failure. While it was true that no formal treaty had been negotiated that would have resolved all of the outstanding issues existing between China and Great Britain, there was more than sufficient cause to believe that relations were moving in a more fruitful direction. In this regard, Macartney felt it important that the British government seize this opportunity to send an ambassador to Peking, both to build on his successes and to correct what he believed was the erroneous information the imperial court had concerning the British establishment in India and its relations with the Rajah of Nepal.⁴⁴

The British ambassador's optimistic outlook regarding future relations with China were predicated on the successes he thought he had achieved in introducing the "business" of his embassy. Reason and reasonableness, when combined with firmness, had won out. As he recorded during his final days in China, "by my Embassy the Chinese had, what they never had before, an opportunity of knowing us, and this must lead them to a proper way of thinking of us and of acting towards us in the future."⁴⁵

The British Communication to China in 1795

Upon the embassy's return to England in the fall of 1794, Macartney and British Secretary of State Henry Dundas moved swiftly to assure the advantages gained in the encounter with the Manchu court. At first they thought of sending Sir George Staunton as king's minister to the imperial court, but had to abandon the plan when he became ill. Instead, they

⁴³ *India Office Macartney Correspondence* 20:203-211 and Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:221-278.

⁴⁴ *India Office Macartney Correspondence* 20:191-194.

⁴⁵ Cranmer-Byng, ed. 1962:213.

dispatched a number of letters and gifts in the spring of 1795 which arrived in China near the end of the year. This correspondence is of particular interest because it embodies the "useful knowledge" thought to have been accumulated by the embassy in its dealings with Chinese officials.

Five letters in all were sent, each of which was addressed from one British official to his presumed counterpart among those Chinese officials with whom Macartney had apparently dealt successfully. Each of the letters was written in a personal and familiar tone, which was meant to exemplify the more friendly relationship Macartney had cultivated. They began with a letter from the king to the emperor expressing gratitude for the treatment of the embassy. After this "ceremonial" opening, the letter moved on to important "business" by clarifying the situation between the British dominions in Bengal and the Chinese territories in Tibet and concluded by promising that a representative of the king would soon arrive in Canton and proceed to the imperial court when the emperor desired. Following the king's message were letters from Dundas and Macartney to Changlin, and from the chairman of the East India Company to Changlin and the "Hoppon." Each of these letters confirmed in writing the results of the negotiations between Macartney and Canton officials.⁴⁶

An anonymous instruction took up the handling of the letters, each of which was translated into Latin and Chinese. After observing that the translations should bear the king's seal in order to provide "more Authenticity," the instruction continued:

The original English and the Latin and Chinese Translation should be put in a small Silken bag of Yellow Colour for the Emperor, just large enough to contain the Letters, and the bag kept from being soiled, by being wrapped up in yellow Paper or linen but the Silk bag only containing the Letter in the three Languages to be delivered in form to the Viceroy, after taking it out of the outside wrapper in his presence by the Chief Servant of the Company at Canton.

The letter for the Viceroy may be put in a bag of green Silk.

Among the Chinese, the smaller the Character the more elegant.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *India Office Macartney Correspondence*, 93:327-330 and 345-374.

⁴⁷ *India Office Macartney Correspondence*, 93:361. The instruction follows copies of the English-only versions of the letters.

English concern with ceremonial form is here encoded through a literal mirroring of Chinese signs viewed as significant by the ambassador. Thus, the packaging of the letters in a manner reminiscent of the emperor's communication to the English king, the multiple translations, and assumptions made concerning what would impress the Chinese all work within a process of establishing equivalent affiliations between British and Chinese categories, thus affirming the achievement of sovereign equality. This process was extended by the organization of the gifts that accompanied the letters.

The gifts were divided into two groups, one to the emperor and the other to the Viceroy and Hoppo of Canton. The gifts to the emperor included: 6 yellow superfine cloths; 6 brown superfine cloths; 6 Vigonia superfine cloths, 2 fawn, 2 claret, and 2 deep olive-colored; and fleecy hosiery, 3 brown and 3 blue-colored. The gifts to the Viceroy and Hoppo of Canton included: 3 brown superfine cloths; 2 claret Vigonia cloths; and fleecy hosiery, 2 brown and 2 blue-colored. A distinction was made among the gifts on the basis of both quality and quantity.

There are a number of observations to make about this form of differentiation on the part of the British. In the first place, it reproduces in identical terms the differentiation of imperial bestowals to the English king and his embassy. That is, these gifts instantiate an English interpretation of a Chinese hierarchical order through the matching of the quality and numbers of things to a certain rank. As such, it is designed to demonstrate British claims of equality, while indicating that they had also understood the "native" coding procedure and were equally adept at manipulating it. Secondly, the gifts for the emperor begin with yellow items, the color that the embassy had confirmed as "imperial."⁴⁸ Finally, we may note that fleecy hosiery is included on both lists. This item, as we saw above, was one that had drawn Chinese attention during the embassy and was thus a recognition of Chinese "taste."

Taken as a whole, this communication to the emperor and imperial officials at Canton was designed to continue the dialogue that the embassy had established with the Manchu court and to confirm the optimism that had been generated concerning the possibility of dealing reasonably with the Chinese. Like the embassy itself, it was organized around assumptions

⁴⁸ A list of the gifts presented by the court to the British embassy can be found in *Da Qing huidian shili*, Beijing 1899, *juan* 507:25a-31a.

Prior to his departure for China, Macartney had learned that the Manchu court valued the color yellow which he termed "Imperial." Several yellow-colored items were added as gifts. See Pritchard 1936:281.

about "oriental" courts that had been confirmed by the embassy, and included new knowledge that had been accumulated through the encounter.

However, while further communications were sent to China in 1804 and 1811, a king's commissioner was not sent out. The successes that Macartney thought his embassy had gained were not pursued. The British government, distracted as it was for some years by the revolutionary developments on the European continent, did not send another embassy until 1816. By then whatever advantages Macartney had gained for the British crown seemed dissipated with time. Indeed, in 1816 Macartney's British embassy was remembered inside China more for the problems it had caused than for the productive dialogue that Macartney had seen as his chief success.

The Imperial Court's Assessment of the British

For the Qing court, the Qianlong/Macartney audience was followed by a period of initial confusion leading to deep concern over the behavior of the British ambassador. As indicated above, Guest ritual formed a relationship between a superior lord and an inferior lord in such a way that the strength of the lesser was included in the lordship of the supreme lord. In the process of inclusion, the lesser had the key responsibility of bringing to completion the affairs that the superior had set in motion. From the position of the Qing court, therefore, the British ambassador was expected to accept imperial bestowals for his king and the embassy, give thanks for the emperor's grace, and depart. When these expectations were not met, the court became suspicious of Macartney's motives and moved to differentiate him from his king, who was still considered to be a worthy servant of the emperor.

Available space prevents a thorough review of the court's reassessment of the British embassy, but matters appear to have taken a new direction when Macartney presented three requests following his audience with the Qianlong emperor. These included (1) permission for a member of the embassy party, Captain Mackintosh, to return to his ship now anchored off the Zhejiang coast; (2) permission for additional trade in Zhejiang; (3) and permission for two missionaries, Hanna and Lamoit, to come to the capital and enter imperial service.

In a memorial of September 20, the Grand Council suggested that an edict be issued and the emissary be instructed that dispatching Mackintosh

at this time was unnecessary, since the ship had many competent officers aboard. Moreover, it would entail escorting Mackintosh to Zhejiang and then back to the capital. Trade at Zhejiang was permissible, but Macartney should prepare a list of the items desired, give it to a high official, and it would be sent to the governor of Zhejiang, Changlin, under whose jurisdiction the trade would occur. Changlin could then present it to the ship's officers and make arrangements for trade in order to insure that the British were fairly treated. In addition, no taxes would be levied on the trade.⁴⁹

With respect to the missionary issue, the Grand Council argued that Macartney should have made his wishes known when he arrived at Tianjin and arrangements could have been made. Instead, saying nothing, he had allowed the two men to return to Zhejiang with the fleet. This, according to the councillors, was nonsense (*wuwei*). The best thing to do at present would be for the ambassador to prepare a letter for transmission to Zhejiang, and Changlin could make arrangements for the escort of the missionaries to the capital. If, on the other hand, they wished to return with the fleet south, then arrangements could be made for them to be escorted from Canton. It was left for the missionaries to judge what they thought most convenient.⁵⁰

Presumably an edict containing these suggestions was issued, because on the following day, September 21 (the day the embassy departed Rehe), the Council reported that Zhengrui, the imperial commissioner charged with escorting and caring for the embassy, had spoken to Macartney. While the ambassador expressed gratitude for the imperial grace extended to him, he still sought an order from the emperor to the governor of Zhejiang allowing direct trade. Moreover, he did not see why he should prepare a list as instructed. Regarding the request to send Mackintosh to Zhejiang, Macartney said that there were no competent officers aboard his ship who could adequately supervise its departure from Ningbo or Chusan. As for the missionaries, the ambassador felt that the court need only issue an order; no letter from him was required.⁵¹

In memorials and imperial instructions that followed, the emperor and his councillors concluded that the British ambassador did not comprehend (*wuzhi*) the relationship being constituted in Guest ritual and that the various requests made by him were simply efforts to procrastinate and delay.

⁴⁹ *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:58b-59a.

⁵⁰ *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:59a.

⁵¹ *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:59b-60a.

The emperor asked the pointed question that if Mackintosh's services were so crucial to the ship, how had it been able to sail from Tianjin to Zhejiang without him? Clearly, the British ambassador had been untruthful in his petition. Moreover, the emperor and his officials suspected that Macartney had other requests and that he would become insatiable in his entreaties. Observing that every undertaking has a source and culmination, the emperor ordered all jurisdictions involved with the embassy to expedite its departure in order to avoid further difficulties.⁵²

These observations by the emperor and his councillors indicate their emerging perception that something was seriously wrong in the rite, that a profound discontinuity existed between Macartney's external pronouncements in giving thanks for the emperor's grace and his inner feelings, as well as a discontinuity between Macartney's hypocrisy and the sincerity that was determined to be present in the English king's decision to send an embassy to China. In light of this, the emperor suggested that perhaps the embassy had only come to spy and, once the English requests were denied, perhaps they would attempt to cause other kinds of trouble, especially in Canton.⁵³

At the same time, however, the blame for having skewed the ritual process could not be ascribed solely to the British. Over the course of the rite, certain excesses and deficiencies had been introduced by both the emperor and his servants which had generated reckless arrogance (*qiaozi*) in the British ambassador.⁵⁴ It was imperative, therefore, for officials to avoid being extravagant toward the embassy. It was to be supplied with daily necessities, but no more. If the ambassador made foolish requests, officials must be stern and forthright in pointing out his errors, for if lax, Macartney would only begin again his incessant importunities (*maodu wuyan*).⁵⁵

The court was, however, bound by the logics of inclusion that informed supreme and lesser lord relations. Since the English king was not present to participate in the ritual process, the court could not easily decide that he too was insincere. Rather, the ambassador was differentiated from his king and the embassy was treated differently.

⁵² *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:60a-64a.

⁵³ *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:64b-65a and 9:70b-72a.

⁵⁴ *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:65a-65b.

⁵⁵ *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 8:64b-65b. At one point, provincial-level officials were also instructed to have subordinates, rather than themselves, see off Macartney when he passed through their jurisdiction. See *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 9:69a.

Because the British ambassador seemed incapable of understanding how superior/inferior lordship relations were formed, the Qianlong emperor gave extensive instruction to George III, while at the same time according him the respect due a loyal inferior. On two occasions the emperor went to great pains to explain in detail why certain of his requests, as expressed in his letter to the emperor and in petitions from his ambassador, were impossible to grant. Moreover, the details of the emperor's response to the English king were circulated to lower-level officials who would have to deal with the embassy as it departed China.⁵⁶ Later, when Changlin reported that Macartney appeared to be sincere, the court's appraisal of the British ambassador softened somewhat and additional imperial gifts were sent, although the emperor also warned officials that Macartney was cunning.⁵⁷ All of these issues indicate that Macartney, in proceeding to "business" following his audience with the emperor, was seen as presumptuous, since from the imperial court's point of view the ritual as a whole was the business.

Concluding Remarks

The events of the Macartney embassy challenge the received wisdom concerning "traditional" Chinese foreign relations in a number of ways. The Manchu-Chinese records reviewed here call into question both functional and symbolic analyses of imperial rites as well as the very categories through which we attempt to organize ritual relations comparatively. For example, while many would grant that ritual activities have had something to do with the way Chinese imperial courts approached foreign relations, far too often modern interpretations have displaced the centrality of rites onto functional and symbolic models which create an opposition between practical reason (i.e., imperial statecraft) and imperial ritual. The issue has not been whether it can be determined if and to what degree imperial rituals were efficacious; the modernist scientific representation of the world has convinced us that they could not have been. In this respect, we have taken a position similar to that of nineteenth-century missionaries, who knew from the outset that they were dealing with false religions in China.

Scholars have been, therefore, compelled to find reasons besides efficacy for the presence and persistence of these practices, reasons which inevitably suppress the cosmological and world-constituting aspects of Chinese

⁵⁶ *Qianlong shilu*, juan 1435:9b-20b; and *Zhang gu congbian*, Ce 9:69b-70a.

⁵⁷ *Qianlong shilu*, juan 1437:4a-b, 9a-11a, and 1439:3a-4a. The emperor also indicated that another embassy from England would be welcome. See *Qianlong shilu*, juan 1439:13a-15a.

imperial rites. Where a ritual dimension is acknowledged to be important, the modernist reading tends to privilege something we call culture, confining the significance of these practices to the expressive and ideological domain. Moreover, interpretations that rely for explanation on arguments about culture and practical reason assume a post-eighteenth-century view of international relations. A model of how diplomacy ideally operates in the modern world is inscribed in the mundane categories that have been brought to bear for evaluation of the "realism" or "flexibility" of Chinese *and* British behavior.

I think it should be clear from the Macartney example that whatever the eighteenth-century Manchu-Chinese notion of sovereignty was, there is no logical or practical equivalence with the European political order from which Macartney had ventured. That European world was one in which religion and politics were already radically separated and in which sovereignty was constituted through processes of excluding and bounding "otherness," while creating a boundary between ceremony and business. Nonetheless, both Manchu-Chinese and eighteenth-century British actors saw necessary relationships between ritual and sovereignty which stand in contrast to modernist legal models of sovereignty.

The world that Macartney entered clearly made no exclusionary boundary distinctions. In fact, the powerful political ordering process embodied in Guest ritual had to take its points of reference from higher-order rites which constituted a relationship with the transcendent and defined such relationships in terms of the mutually significant capacities of generators and completers. One searches in vain in imperial court records for fixed centers or impermeable boundaries. We find instead plural agents and transforming subjects. The imperial hierarchy is a continuously negotiated set of fluid relationships; relationships in which superior and inferior are mutually dependent and contingent upon conditions that each produces for the existence of the other. This is not oriental despotism or, as some would have it, a failure to distinguish symbols or ceremonial appearances from hard political realities. It is, rather, a means of fashioning, sometimes tenuously or unsuccessfully, a cosmo-moral world in response to ever changing conditions. The difference to be found between the Manchu-Chinese discourses on relations with other kingdoms and British notions of relations with other nations (as coherently represented by Macartney) lies in the constraints embedded in an imperial cosmology which privileged inclusion and differentiation, as opposed to an aggressive European insistence on exclusion (fixed and bounded territories and entities) and homogeneity (all sovereignties are equal and internally unitary). The conflict that ensued had less to do with "cultural attitudes" or the absence or presence of flexibility, than with the incompatibility of two ceremonial processes that constituted power and authority in quite different ways.

Glossary

bin li 賓禮

ji li 吉禮

Changchun yuan 暢春園

jia li 嘉禮

dachao 大朝

Jiujing sanshi dian 九經三事殿

Da Qing huidian 大清會典

jun li 軍禮

Da Qing huidian shili 大清會典事例

Libu zeli 禮部則例

Da Qing tongli 大清通禮

Li zhi 禮志

de 德

maodu wuyan 冒瀆無厭

en 恩

Pileng 披楞

fan wang 蕃王

Qianlong huidian 乾隆會典

Gaozong chun huangdi shilu 高宗純皇帝實錄

gui 跪

Qianlong shilu 乾隆實錄

huang di 皇帝

qiaozi 驕恣

hong lu si 鴻臚寺

Qing shi gao 清史稿

Rehe zhi 熱河志

Siku quanshu 四庫全書

Taihe dian 太和殿

ting 聽

wuwei 無謂

wuzhi 無知

xiang hua zhi cheng 向化之誠

xiong li 凶禮

yanyan 延燕

Zhang gu congbian 掌故叢編

zheng 政

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