

# China and the Modern World: Imperial China and the West Part I, 1815–1881

The East India Company's steamship *Nemesis* and other British ships engaging Chinese junks in the Second Battle of Chuenpi, 7 January 1841, during the first opium war. (British Library)



# ABOUT THE ARCHIVE

*China and the Modern World: Imperial China and the West Part I, 1815–1881* is digitised from the FO 17 series of British Foreign Office Files—Foreign Office: Political and Other Departments: General Correspondence before 1906, China—held at the National Archives, UK, providing a vast and significant primary source for researching every aspect of Chinese-British relations during the nineteenth century, ranging from diplomacy to trade, economics, politics, warfare, emigration, translation and law. This first part includes all content from FO 17 volumes 1–872.

Source Library

The National Archives, UK

Number of Images

Approximately 532,000

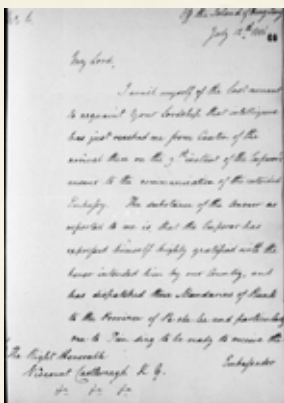
## CONTENT

From Lord Amherst's mission at the start of the nineteenth century, through the trading monopoly of the Canton System, and the Opium Wars of 1839–1842 and 1856–1860, Britain and other foreign powers gradually gained commercial, legal, and territorial rights in China. *Imperial China and the West* provides correspondence from the Factories of Canton (modern Guangzhou) and from the missionaries and diplomats who entered China in the early nineteenth century, as well as from the envoys and missions sent to China from Britain and the later legation and consulates.

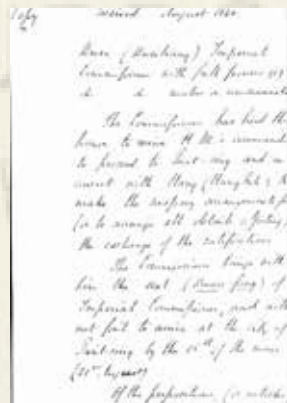
The documents comprising this collection include communications to and from the British legation, first at Hong Kong and later at Peking, and British consuls at Shanghai, Amoy (Xiamen), Swatow (Shantou), Hankow (Hankou), Newchwang (Yingkou), Chefoo (Yantai), Formosa (Taiwan), and more. Communications with Chinese government officials can also be found in the correspondence, often as enclosures. All matters touching the interests of Britain in the region—from opening treaty ports, securing the extraterritorial rights of British subjects, and designing and constructing legation and consulate buildings to legalising the coolie trade and the treatment of distressed or insane British subjects in China—appear in these volumes.

This first part of the FO 17 series provides General Correspondence relating to China from 1815–1881. As well as providing exceptional insight into the Anglo-Chinese relationship in the nineteenth century, the activities of Russia, the US, France, and other Western powers in the region all come under discussion, alongside British interests and ambition in Japan, Korea, Cochin-China (Vietnam), Siam (Thailand), Burma (Myanmar), Malaya (Malaysia and Singapore), and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia).

Maps extracted from the physical collection have been rescanned in full colour and replaced in their original locations, and the full value of hand-written documents has been unlocked thanks to the application of Handwritten Text Recognition (HTR) technology, as well as item-level information drawn from the Foreign Office Indexes in series FO 605.



Letter dated July 2, 1816 by Lord Amherst in Hong Kong to Lord Buckinghamshire concerning the Chinese emperor's positive response to the British Embassy's request for an audience. (FO 17/3/46)



Lord Elgin's correspondence with Kwei-liang, the imperial commissioner of the Qing Dynasty, on the negotiations concerning the ratifications of the Treaties of Tientsin. (FO 17/331/3)



Zeng Jize's letter to British Foreign Secretary on the Chinese merchants in Peru, (FO 17/869/56)

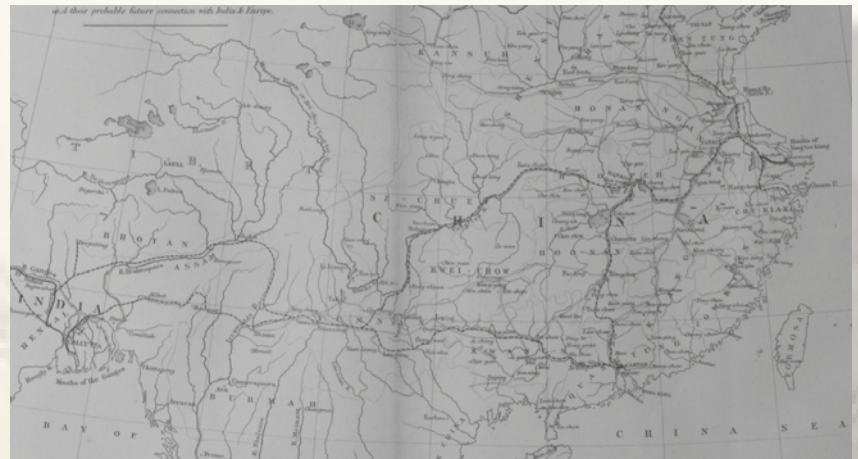
# THE VALUE OF THIS COLLECTION

This collection provides researchers with unparalleled detail into the activities of the British and other foreign powers in China during the nineteenth century, as well as information on the Chinese representatives tasked with dealing with Western government officials, diplomats, and traders either inside or outside China.

This is a vital resource for scholars with interests in the international and transnational processes and networks of the nineteenth century, as well as those focused on China or the British Empire in Asia.



Newspaper clipping on the Tientsin Massacre of French catholic priests and nuns in 1870 (FO 17/607/75)



China Railway sketch Map (MR 1/746/2-3) (1865)

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FO 17 comprises an ocean of fascinating primary sources on Britain's engagement with and knowledge of China in the 19th century. The collection covers an era when China's modern foreign relations were born and can illuminate our understanding of the Opium Wars and the gunboat diplomacy, the unequal treaties, the Taiping Rebellion, the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, the Boxer Rebellion, and the beginnings of revolutionary activity against the imperial dynasty in the early 20th century.

— Stephen Platt

# KEY EVENTS

Major historical events and topics covered in the series include:

**The Canton (trade monopoly) System (1757–1842, 工行製度)**

**Lord Amherst's mission to China (1816, 阿美士德使团)**

**The two Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860, 兩次鴉片戰爭)**

**Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864, 太平天國運動)**

**Tsungli Yamen set up in Peking (1861, 總理衙門成立)**

**Foreign legations established in Peking (1861–1862, 外國公使館在京開設)**

**Tientsin Massacre (1870, 天津教案)**

## KEY FIGURES



Li Hongzhang 李鴻章

**Henry Pottinger 璞鼎查 (1789–1856)**, British envoy and plenipotentiary in China and superintendent of British trade, and negotiator of the Treaty of Nanking.

**Karl Gutzlaff 郭士立 (1803 – 1851)**, the first Lutheran missionary to China. He was the second Chinese Secretary of the British administration in Hong Kong and served as interpreter for British diplomatic missions during the First Opium War.

**Lord Elgin 埃爾金勳爵, James Bruce, 8th Earl of Elgin (1811 – 1863)**, British High Commissioner and Plenipotentiary in China and the Far East, and commander-in-chief of the joint British and French forces during the Second Opium War. He ordered the destruction of the Summer Palace and compelled the Qing dynasty to sign the Convention of Peking.

**John Rutherford Alcock 阿利國 (1809 – 1897)**, British consul in Fuzhou, Shanghai, and Guangdong (1844–1856) and later British Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to China (1865–1869).

**Henry Parkes 巴夏禮 (1828 – 1885)**, British interpreter and consul in Canton, Amoy, and Shanghai (1843–1861) and later Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to China from 1883 to 1885.

**Thomas Francis Wade 威妥瑪 (1818 – 1895)**, a British diplomat and sinologist. He was interpreter, consul, and Chinese secretary serving the British military and foreign office in China from 1843 to 1864; chargé d'affaires in Peking from 1864 to 1865 and from 1869 to 1871; and Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary and Chief Superintendent of British Trade in China from 1871 to 1883.

**Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (also Li Hung-chang; 1823 –1901)**, a Chinese politician, general, and diplomat of the late Qing dynasty. He quelled several major rebellions (including the Taiping Rebellion) and served in important positions in the Qing imperial court, including the Viceroy of Zhili, Huguang, and Liangguang (Guangdong and Guangxi).

**Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾 (Kuo Sung-t'ao; 1818 –1891)**, a Chinese diplomat and statesman during the Qing dynasty. He was among the first foreign emissaries sent abroad by the Qing government, serving as the Chinese minister to Britain and France from 1877 to 1879.

**Zeng Jize 曾紀澤 (Tseng Chi-tze; 1839 – 1890)**, a Qing dynasty Chinese diplomat. Zeng was appointed minister to Britain, France, and Russia in 1878, and lived in Europe for seven years (1879–1885). He was best-known for his success in renegotiating the infamous 1879 Treaty of Livadia with Russia (里瓦幾亞條約) and forced the latter to give up most of her gains of 1879 in the final Treaty of Saint Petersburg (中俄伊犁條約) signed in 1881.



Thomas Francis Wade 威妥瑪



Guo Songtao 郭嵩燾

# RELATED COLLECTIONS

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- Missionary, Sinology and Literary Periodicals, 1817-1949
- Records of the Maritime Customs Service of China, 1854-1949
- Diplomacy and Political Secrets, 1869-1950
- Imperial China and the West Part 2 (forthcoming)
- Records of Shanghai and the International Settlement 1840-1949 (forthcoming)

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- Asia and the West
- Mapping the World

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### ARCHIVES UNBOUND COLLECTIONS:

- Papers of British Consulates and Legation in China, 1722-1951
- The Earl George Macartney Collection
- Minutes of the Shanghai Municipal Council
- Shanghai International Settlement: the Municipal Gazette
- The Papers of Ernest M. Satow
- Chinese Maritime Customs Service: The Customs' Gazette, 1869-1913
- Policing the Shanghai International Settlement, 1894-1945
- Political Relations Between China, the US, and Other Countries, 1910-1929
- Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in China: Reports and Correspondence of the US Military Intelligence Division, 1918-1941