

Early Sino-American Relations, 1841-1912

The Collected Articles
of Earl Swisher

edited by Kenneth W. Rea



A Westview Replica Edition

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Copyright © 1977 by Westview Press, Inc.

Published in 1977 in the United States of America by

Westview Press, Inc.

1898 Flatiron Court

Boulder, Colorado 80301

Frederick A. Praeger, Publisher and Editorial Director

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Swisher, Earl, 1902-1975.

Early Sino-American relations, 1841-1912.

(A Westview replica edition)

Bibliography: p.

1. United States--Foreign relations--China--Collected works.
 2. China--Foreign relations--United States--Collected works.
- I. Rea, Kenneth W. II. Title.

El83.8.C5S895 1977

327.73'051

77-13252

ISBN 0-89158-305-X

Printed and bound in the United States of America

In memory of Earl Swisher
(1902-1975)

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Early Sino-American Relations, 1841-1912:
The Collected Articles of Earl Swisher
edited by Kenneth W. Rea

In this collection of seven essays, Sino-American relations from 1841 through 1912 are examined by one of America's foremost authorities on the topic. Relying heavily on Chinese material and concentrating on the Chinese perspective, Professor Swisher introduces new material and analyzes selected aspects of these relations in detail.

Earl Swisher, widely recognized as an authority on Chinese affairs, received a doctorate in Chinese history from Harvard University, after which he returned to teach at the University of Colorado, where he had completed his earlier studies. He retired from the university as a professor emeritus in 1971.

Kenneth W. Rea holds a doctorate in history from the University of Colorado and is currently professor of history at Louisiana Tech University.

PREFACE

This volume, a companion to Canton in Revolution, concentrates on Earl Swisher's pioneering research in early Sino-American relations. From 1935 until his retirement in 1971, Swisher taught history at the University of Colorado and for many years served as the director of its Asian studies program. His interest in China began when he accepted a teaching appointment at Canton Christian College (Lingnan University) in 1924. After four years in China, he returned to the United States and completed his graduate studies at the University of Colorado and Harvard University. A gifted linguist who mastered Chinese, Japanese and several other languages, Swisher made a major contribution to the study of Sino-American relations. In the 1930s and 1940s, he translated and edited documents dealing with China's early relations with the United States. This work formed the basis of his dissertation at Harvard. After further research in Peking, the documents themselves were published under the title, China's Management of the American Barbarians, a monograph which has proven to be a major source for American scholars seeking a clearer and more meaningful understanding of Chinese policy toward the United States. The following articles, some of which are now published for the first time, shed additional light on this policy.

For this volume, I am deeply indebted to Ms. Robin Swisher Turcotte for making Professor Swisher's papers available. I wish to express my appreciation to Professors Joyce Lebra, John Brewer, Wiley Hilburn and Yawsoon Sim for their encouragement and assistance. Dean Paul J. Pennington and Professor W. Y. Thompson, of Louisiana Tech University, deserve my special thanks for their support of this project, as does Ms. Glenda Hammons who helped prepare the manuscript.

Finally, this book would not have been possible without the patient understanding of my wife, Rebecca Rea, and my sons, Michael and Christopher.

K. W. R.

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CHAPTER 1 EARLY FORMULATION OF CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

The earliest discussion of Chinese policy toward the United States to appear in the official records of China occurs in a memorial dated February 6, 1841 (the date of official reception in the Palace at Peking). The memorial was presented by I-li-pu,¹ then governor general of Liang-chiang and imperial commissioner in charge of military affairs to deal with the English who had occupied Ting-hai, on Chusan island, Chekiang province. I-li-pu was a Manchu of the Bordered Yellow Bannerman, who, although a collateral relative of the reigning Manchu house and thus entitled to wear the Red Girdle, had gone through the Chinese academic discipline to become a chin-shih in 1801 and member of the Hanlin Academy. After some service in the capital, he served as magistrate on the southwest frontier in Yunnan province and in 1819 was commended to the throne as proficient in "controlling tribal chieftains and managing Burmese bandits" and recommended for promotion. Later as governor of Yunnan he became associated with Juan Yuan,² whom he succeeded as governor general of Yunnan-Kweichow. In 1839 he was transferred to Chekiang where the frontier problems involved the ocean routes and the English instead of Burma and the tribesmen.

In his memorial of 1841, I-li-pu took up the barbarian problem as it had developed in Canton and Chekiang, quoting at length a letter from the venerable and respected Juan Yuan, already seventy-eight sui (probably seventy-seven by Western computation). Juan Yuan was one of the most distinguished men in China at the time this letter was written. A native of Kiangsu province,³ he became chin-shih in 1789 and bachelor of the Hanlin Academy, inaugurating a long career as an ideal exponent of the Chinese cultural and official system; a scholar who applied himself

alternately or concurrently to creative writing, to research, and to official duties of the most varied nature. He suppressed piracy on the Chekiang coasts; he undertook educational reform and promotion; he demonstrated his filial piety and his loyalty to his friends, even at the risk of imperial censure; he edited, wrote, or compiled works on ancient inscriptions, biography and anthology and prepared a new edition of a T'ang dynasty thesaurus.

As early as 1818, as governor general of Liangkuang, Juan Yuan reported confidentially to the throne on precautions to be taken against the English, pointing out that China should avoid meeting them on the sea, where they were strong, but should take advantage of their devotion to trade and their lack of land forces, utilizing the weapons of stoppage of trade, cutting off of foodstuffs, and finally, of firing on them when they venture to land. In dealing rigorously with the English, who "fear strength and scorn weakness" and pointed out the possibility of securing the approbation of "the merchants of other countries who would all realize that they defied our prohibitions, rather than our lightly picking a quarrel with them." The occasion for these extensive remarks on policy toward England may have been the recent unpleasantnesses connected with the Amherst Embassy in 1816 and 1817, when Captain Maxwell of H. M. S. Alceste had entered the Bogue, been fired on from the forts and in turn fired on the Chinese forts guarding the entrance to the river, beyond which foreign ships of war were not supposed to go.⁴

In 1832 Juan Yuan had occasion to investigate the traffic in opium by barbarian ships and removed one of the hong merchants who was security for the ships dealing in the drug. He also attempted to regulate the trade of the English receiving ships at Lintin Island, where illegal transfers were made.⁵ In 1826 he was transferred to the post of governor general of Yun-kuei where he resumed his activity against the Burmese border ruffians. On the occasion of his seventieth birthday, in 1833, the emperor conferred honors and gifts on him, and two years later he was recalled to Peking to serve as grand secretary. In 1837 and again in 1838, Juan Yuan acted as regent while the emperor was on tour, but he was then old and ill and asked to retire. He was allowed to retire with the rank of grand secretary and half his salary.

At the time of the present memorial Juan Yuan was presumably in retirement and passing to his former colleague, I-li-pu, the advice and experience of more than fifty years of official life. That he was still vigorous is indicated by the fact that in this year he made the journey to Peking to pay his respects on the occasion of the emperor's sixtieth birthday. Juan Yuan was given further honors and full salary in 1846 and died three years later at eighty-six sui.

The third person involved in the memorial is Ch'i-shan, a Manchu Solid Yellow Bannerman, hereditary marquis of the first grade. Unlike I-li-pu, he entered official life on account of birth, rather than through civil service examination, beginning his career in 1806. Described by the emperor as clear-headed and capable, able to endure hard work and ill-will, he was appointed governor general of Liang-chiang in 1825. His rather turbulent career contains only two items which bear on the foreign impact: he recommended the use of rifles instead of spears and bows and arrows in the army, and formulated rules for the prevention of opium smuggling at Tientsin, noting that it was the English who opposed and delayed compliance.

In 1839, when English ships came to Tientsin, it was Ch'i-shan who persuaded them to return to Canton, and for this service he was commended and ordered to Kwangtung as imperial commissioner "to investigate and act." In Canton he recognized the hopeless position of the Chinese forces pitted against the English and made the fatal error of conceding them Hong Kong, recommending to the throne that a settlement be reached with them before further damage and bloodshed. The indignant Rescript said, in part:

We, the Sovereign, regard the world as insufficient for the people, so much more that which the nation has; yet Ch'i-shan dared to give away Hong Kong, dared to allow trade and even more so bold as to ask us to confer extraordinary favors; moreover he rashly said that this territory was unimportant, that armaments were not good enough to rely on, military strength insecure, and popular morale unreliable, speaking traitorously under coercion. What kind of bowels has he, to ignor Favor, betray his country and exhaust utterly his better nature?6

He was ordered deprived of office and brought in irons to Peking for trial and all his property confiscated by the government. When the full account of the British capture of Canton and occupation of Hong Kong reached Peking, the blame was placed on Ch'i-shan and the princes and ministers passed sentence of beheading. He was released by Imperial Favor and sent to Chekiang garrison to redeem himself.

In the letter quoted by I-li-pu, Juan Yuan notes that Ch'i-shan has not been able to curb the barbarians in Canton and then proceeds to comment on foreign policy:

I have long known that of the various countries trading at Canton, besides England, the United States is the largest and most powerful. In this country the ground is level and rice plentiful. The English barbarians look to her for supplies and do not dare offend her. But the American barbarians at Canton have customarily been peaceable, not obstinate like the English barbarians. If we treat the American barbarian courteously and abolish their customs duties, and also take the trade of the English barbarians and give it to the American barbarians, then the American barbarians will be sure to be grateful for Heavenly Favor and energetically oppose the English barbarians. Moreover, the ships and cannon of the English barbarians have mostly been acquired by hire or seizure from other foreign states. If the American barbarians are made use of by us, then other countries will learn of it and it will not be difficult to dispose of them.

Juan Yuan goes on to say that while this policy will probably not stop the English, without allies they will wear themselves out and then China can step in and expel them. He explains to I-li-pu that he is old and ill and does not trust himself to memorialize the plan.

I-li-pu, recognizing the superior force of the English and their pressing demands, sees merit in Juan Yuan's plan.

If we borrow the strength of the American barbarians in order to curb the English barbarians,

it would seem that the effort would be halved and the result doubled.

Although in view of the greatness of the Heavenly Court, to borrow the help of the outside barbarians may not seem to be proper handling, still in the books of strategy there is the theory of 'attack and get terms' and the technique of 'using barbarians to curb barbarians.' From Han and T'ang times onward it is recorded in history, not once but many times, that such has been done without loss of dignity. Moreover, considering the two propositions of conciliating the English barbarians or utilizing the American barbarians, still the latter is better than the former. It would seem that the device of Juan Yuan is still not without perspicacity. The only questions are whether or not the American barbarians can curb the English barbarians; whether or not they are willing to be used by us.

I-li-pu protects himself in submitting his proposal by explaining that he is not sure of its wisdom, particularly as Juan Yuan has been away from Canton for many years and barbarian affairs have undergone changes. Nevertheless he commends it to the emperor's judgment and, should he approve, asks that it be committed to Ch'i-shan at Canton for execution.⁸

When I-liang, governor of Kwangtung and concurrently in charge of Canton customs, memorialized (received February 10, 1841) that customs had fallen off and that not only the English and Indians had stopped trading, but also "the ships of other countries have been obstructed by the English barbarians and are unable to enter port," the court detected the means of bringing influence to bear on the Americans. The Imperial Rescript to I-liang's memorial said:

Kwangtung legally authorized the various barbarians to trade. The respectful and obedient states naturally should trade as usual. The English barbarians are overbearing and tyrannical and have interfered with the livelihood of other countries. Are those states willing resignedly to lose their profits? (We) hereby charge Ch'i-shan, Jung-wen and Ch'i Kung on their respective arrivals at Canton, to investigate carefully the attitudes of the various

countries, whether or not they are resentful of the English barbarians' interference with their livelihood or have any resentment toward the Heavenly Court for not yet being able to draw them in and pacify them, causing them to be neglected and lose their trade, and memorialize according to the facts.⁹

Ch'i-shan also memorialized that the American merchants were under the impression that China was in the market for foreign ships for war purposes. He had the hong merchants disillusion them on this score but pointed out that their troubles were all caused by the English. He advocated trading with the Americans in order to keep them quiet, make them resentful toward the English and grateful toward China. "Thus while they would not be used by us, there would not be any danger of their siding with evil and abetting treason."¹⁰

Another memorialist on foreign policy in 1841 was Yu-ch'ien, at this time imperial commissioner, governor of Kiangsu. Yu-ch'ien was a Mongol Bordered Red Bannerman, of the Po-lo-t'e tribe, whose ancestors for three generations had distinguished themselves in the Manchu military service on the northwest frontier as well as in China proper. He was originally named Yu-t'ai and under that name became a chin-shih in 1817 and a bachelor in the Hanlin Academy. He served in various capacities in the Peking government until 1826, when he was appointed to a prefecture in Hupeh. As the financial commissioner of Hunan¹¹ had the same name, the governor general memorialized asking to change the new appointee's name to Yu-ch'ien. In 1839, he received appointment as judicial commissioner of Kiangsu, acting concurrently as governor. In the following year, while he was acting governor general of Liang-chiang, the English occupation of Ting-hai, on the island of Chusan, took place.¹² Yu-ch'ien took charge of the defense at Pao-shan, north of Shanghai, on the Yangtze estuary, later retiring to Shanghai. He memorialized on strategy for the recovery of Ting-hai proposing to take advantage of the mobility of Chinese infantry, as opposed to the cumbersome English artillery; and the light draft of Chinese fishing craft, as opposed to the large British vessels which could not maneuver in the shallow waters. He urged the necessity of taking the offensive immediately and making a bold move to restore the morale of the government troops.

In 1841, he was imperial commissioner. In the meantime, I-li-pu had arranged an armistice and the evacuation of Ting-hai by the British, but the emperor did not accept the terms. I-li-pu was recalled to Peking for punishment and Yu-ch'ien named to act as governor general of Liang-kiang in his stead. He was to take charge of the reoccupation of Ting-hai by Chinese troops. Yu-ch'ien rebuilt the defenses and reported that he was confident he could withstand a British attack. The British renewed their campaign in August and recaptured Ting-hai on October 1. Yu-ch'ien fought to hold Chen-hai, on the mainland opposite Ting-hai, and when Pottinger's forces captured it on October 10,¹³ Yu-ch'ien "threw himself into the water to preserve his honor," and committed suicide.¹⁴

Early in 1841 (memorial received on March 21), just after his appointment as imperial commissioner, Yu-ch'ien presented his views on the military and diplomatic situation:

To continue, these marine volunteers are all vagabonds. In Kwangtung they are called 'rascals'. To use them against the barbarians would be like using poison to counteract poison. In case they are wounded or killed there will be no regrets; thus there will be no injury to the Heavenly prestige and, at the same time, a local evil can be removed.

Furthermore, I have ascertained that the various foreign countries, because the English rebels have stirred up trouble and trade as become slack, are all thoroughly angry and resentful. The strength of such countries as Europe, the United States, and France is separately equal to that of the rebels. It is not worth while for the Heavenly Court to issue an Edict ordering them to render help, but in a proclamation offering rewards, there is no harm in making clear that no matter whether they be soldiers or people, marine volunteers, Chinese traitors, or barbarians of the various countries, all are authorized to kill rebels and claim rewards, and also to issue a manifesto informing the various countries 'that the Great Emperor as Sovereign over all under Heaven, looks upon Chinese and outsiders with the same benevolence. Those who obey He soothes; those who rebel He

chastizes. England is rebellious and has resisted authority and troops have been sent to punish her. You other countries are not involved, and are all allowed to trade as usual. If the English rebels brazenly dare to use force to stop you or interfere with your livelihood, you other countries are authorized to fire upon them on the high seas or separately to use warships to attack their country, or anything else you can do.' Thus the minds of the various countries can be pacified and also the gall of the rebel barbarians overcome. Furthermore, (we can) secretly summon the capable and dependable among the Hong merchants and order them, acting as though this were their own idea, to make use of the policy of converting their spies (to our own uses), to meet emergencies as they arise, and to play them off and egg them on, causing them to destroy one another. Our army can merely remain quiet and depend on their activity, until the said (English) barbarians are left isolated and in embarrassed circumstances. The government troops and marine volunteers can then take advantage of their weakened condition to attack them. Such an insignificant rebel can easily be eradicated with one stroke of the drum.¹⁵

The Rescript expressed confidence in the ability of the land forces to expel the British, once they came ashore, but sent Yu-ch'ien's proposal to offer rewards to General I-shan to use or not as he saw fit.¹⁶ Such proclamations had already been issued in Canton as early as July 1840 and were repeated in February 1841.¹⁷

In the meantime, Assistant Military General Yang Fang was in charge of military operations at Canton. Yang Fang, a native of Kweichow, was a military career man. He showed courage and ability as a common soldier and was chosen from the ranks for promotion. After some twenty-five years of military service in west and southwest China, with various promotions, he took part, 1827-1830, in a large expedition into Kashgaria. He distinguished himself and was rewarded by the emperor, being made hereditary marquis of the second grade, Grand Tutor to the Heir Apparent, privileged to ride horseback in the Forbidden City, given gifts of clothing and