

Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century*

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IN 1850, while defending the interventionist foreign policy of his government before the House of Commons, Lord Palmerston said, "Just as the Roman in days of old held himself free from indignity, when he could say *Civis Romanus Sum*; so also a British subject in whatever land he may be shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong."¹ This statement is remarkable for the unrestricted right of free access which it presumes for all British citizens, in whatever land they may be.

When we examine the biographies of prominent functionaries of the Victorian era, we see that most of them acted with the assumption that such a right indeed existed. And when this "right" was infringed upon, they did not hesitate to force their way into places as far away as Crimea, Africa, India, and China, sometimes in the course of the same year, and occasionally even simultaneously. It is true that the phenomenal growth of the world economy in the nineteenth century and the improved status of Britain within it enabled the British to move around the globe with ease, but it would be a mistake to assume that this omnipres-

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¹ K. Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England* (Oxford, 1970), p. 302.

ence entailed an equally dazzling omnipotence either for British citizens or for the British state.

On close inspection we see that in most of the places where Britain established a foothold in the nineteenth century, it left the local institutions and relations intact. The British abandoned the grand designs of creating a new Roman empire in favor of intermediate arrangements that relied on the cooperation and participation of local groups. Consequently, what kind of rights British subjects had in a given place, and whether and to what extent they would be able to exercise those rights, were questions decided not by international treaties or balance of power but rather by the relations that developed between foreigners and local actors.

This study focuses on China and the Ottoman empire as two very strong political entities that became the targets of Britain's expansionary policies during the nineteenth century. Initially, the British government assumed that a broadly similar set of policies would work in both the Ottoman empire and China in terms of making their economies more open and their polities more cooperative. But it soon became evident that conditions in the two empires were fundamentally different. For example, the Chinese government turned out to be much more recalcitrant than its Ottoman counterpart. The presence of a large number of Christian and Jewish merchants in Ottoman territory, however, did not mean that the Ottoman countryside was wide open to British and foreign interests. Thus the British had to adopt different tactics in the two places, and they also had to be content with less than what they had originally hoped to achieve in them. This study attributes both the shifts in British designs and the shortfall in the extent of their realization to a multitude of interactions among many groups with competing interests that came into contact with each other as the British moved to expand their sphere of influence in the world economy. Rather than explaining the patterns that emerged from these contacts as resulting from an "external force" or seeing them solely in terms of British domination or Chinese and Ottoman resistance, this study sees them as parts of a global process to which all regionally specific structures contributed.

BALTA LIMANI AND NANJING: TREATIES OF FREE TRADE AND FRIENDSHIP

The Balta Limani Treaty of 1838 and the Nanjing Treaty of 1842 are regarded as watershed events in the foreign trade and foreign

relations of the Ottoman empire and China.² Unlike the earlier unilateral concessions that had circumscribed foreigners' rights to trade and reside within the borders of the two empires, the new treaties were drawn as bilateral agreements. They removed most of the restrictions on foreign trade and considerably expanded the privileges of foreigners in China and the Ottoman empire.

Both these treaties were negotiated and signed during what could be described as difficult times for the Ottoman and Chinese empires. In the late 1830s the Ottomans were trying to suppress a revolt by the governor of Egypt, while the Chinese were fighting a war with Britain that proved very costly to them. The threats and losses these conflicts posed for the two empires are assumed to be the key factors that prompted them to agree to the less than favorable terms of the Balta Limani and Nanjing conventions.³

Reflecting the fact that it came after an armed conflict with the British, the Nanjing Treaty contained several punitive clauses.⁴ The Chinese government agreed to pay an indemnity of \$21 million, ceded the territory of Hong Kong to the English, granted amnesty to Chinese subjects who had been imprisoned for their dealings with the British, and allowed for the presence of the British fleet in Nanjing to enforce compliance with the treaty. Outside of these provisions, the bulk of the Nanjing Treaty and all of the Balta Limani Treaty dealt with commercial matters.⁵ They were "free trade treaties" in the sense that they sought to provide

² For example, an official pronouncement from China states: "The Opium War of 1840–1842, in which the Chinese people fought against British aggression, marked both the beginning of modern Chinese history and the start of the Chinese people's bourgeois-democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism." Foreign Language Press, *The Opium War* (Beijing, 1976), p. 1. See also M. Kenzo, "The British Cotton Industry and Asia: Some Aspects of the Imperialism of Free Trade in the 19th Century," *Annals of the Institute of Social Science* 24 (1983). D. Avcıoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Düzeni* (Ankara, 1973), p. 70, refers to the Balta Limanı Treaty as "Turkey's death sentence"; for a parallel interpretation, see O. Koymen, "The Advent and Consequences of Free Trade in the Ottoman Empire," *Études Balkaniques* 2 (1971); for a critical appraisal, see O. Kurmuş, "The 1838 Treaty of Commerce Reexamined," in J. L. Bacqué-Grammont and P. Dumont, eds., *Économie et sociétés dans l'empire ottoman* (Paris, 1983), pp. 411–17.

³ V. J. Puryear, *International Economics and Diplomacy in the Near East* (Stanford, 1935), pp. 78–84; J. K. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast* (Cambridge, 1953); A. Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (London, 1958); H. Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge, 1964); P. W. Fay, *The Opium War* (Hew York, 1975).

⁴ For the text of the treaty, see W. F. Mayors, *Treaties between the Empire of China and Foreign Powers* (Shanghai, 1906), pp. 1–4.

⁵ For the text of the Balta Limani Treaty, see C. Issawi, *The Economic History of the Middle East* (Chicago, 1966), pp. 39–40; Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İngiliz İktisadi Münasebeleri-1*, (Ankara, 1974), pp. 109–13.

protection for the activities of foreign merchants, reduced the authority of the Chinese and Ottoman governments to impose unilateral tariffs on the articles of trade, and stipulated the abolition of all kinds of monopolies and other mechanisms of control that could inhibit the circulation of goods in the two empires.

With clauses that involved loss of territory and payment of monetary indemnity, the terms of the Chinese treaty seem more onerous than those of its Ottoman counterpart. However, a closer examination of its commercial provisions reveals that the Nanjing Treaty was in fact narrower in scope than the Balta Limani Treaty. For one thing, the Chinese treaty was to be enforced only in the five ports that were declared open. This restriction was very significant, since it left intact the monopolies in the rest of China and put limits on the freedom of foreign merchants to move around the country and engage in trade. The Nanjing Treaty did not even give the British the authority to appoint an ambassador to Beijing or consuls in places other than the five ports. Only in 1860, after two more wars, was the first British minister appointed; also at that time foreigners were granted the right to travel in the interior of China, though still with the provision that they obtain special permits.⁶

Compared with the Nanjing Treaty, the Ottoman agreement was more comprehensive and was intended to be universal in its implementation. The Balta Limani Treaty declared the foreign merchants and their agents equal to their Ottoman counterparts in all respects. It prohibited all government monopolies, outlawed locally imposed surcharges, and specified the rate and manner of collection of import, export, transit, and local duties. All these provisions were to be valid in all the possessions of the empire and were to cover all its subjects. British diplomatic and consular representation had already existed for more than two hundred years in the Near East.

In the 1830s the revolt of the Egyptian governor Muhammad Ali had made the Ottomans particularly susceptible to outside pressure, which gave the British some leverage in their dealings with the Ottomans. But external pressure was only one of the reasons why the Ottomans were more accommodating toward the British than were the Chinese. Other, fundamental concerns prompted the Ottomans to open their markets and liberalize their commercial practice. To understand these and to highlight the specificity

⁶ Mayers, *Treaties between the Empire of China and Foreign Powers*, pp. 11–13.

of the Ottoman context, we will consider the overall conditions under which the Ottomans moved to reach an agreement with the British, and then compare these with the Chinese situation during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

OTTOMAN BUREAUCRACY: A WILLING ACCOMPLICE?

The Ottoman willingness to grant widespread freedoms to European merchants had to do in part with the changes that were already under way in the Ottoman empire. At the end of the eighteenth century, large areas in the Ottoman countryside were dominated by notable families; the trade with Europe that originated partly from the estates of these families had been expanding greatly; and indigenous merchants, such as the Greeks of western provinces, who were involved in this trade had achieved unprecedented prominence and wealth.⁷ During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Ottoman government took a series of steps that aimed not to reverse but to coordinate and regulate these changes and to contain their impact on the society. Among these were partial deregulation of grain prices, relaxation of the central bureaucracy's monopsonistic privileges over some foodstuffs and raw materials, and the growing, though de facto, recognition of both private property in land and the legitimacy of accumulated wealth.⁸ These changes had strong support throughout the Ottoman administration, including its highest reaches.⁹ For example, Sultan Selim III, who ruled between 1789 and 1807, said, "If someone who has accumulated wealth through trade, manufacture, or farming dies and leaves a rightful heir, not even a sin-

⁷ See T. Stojanovich, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant," *Journal of Economic History* 20 (1960): 234–313; R. Kasaba, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Economy: The Nineteenth Century* (Albany, 1988), chap. 2.

⁸ On changes in land tenure, see M. Gene, "Osmanlı Malikane Sistemi," in Ü. Nalbantoğlu and O. Okyar, eds., *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi Semineri* (Ankara, 1975); R. Abou-el-Haj, "The Ottoman Nasihatname as a Discourse over Morality," in A. Temimi, ed., *Mélanges Professeur Robert Mantran* (Zaghouan, 1988), pp. 17–30. On other changes, see Y. Cezar, *Osmanlı Maliyesinde Bunalım ve Değişim Dönemi* (Istanbul, 1986), pp. 151–55 and passim; A. Sayar, *Osmanlı İktisat Düşüncesinin Çağdaşlaşması* (Istanbul, 1986), p. 189.

⁹ In the early 1850s, Şehak Abru, an employee of the Translation Office of the Palace, translated J. B. Say's *Principles of Political Economy* into Turkish. In addition to these early official initiatives, the government also encouraged the free-trade ideas that were articulated by private individuals and journalists, such as David Urquhart, William Churchill, Alexander Blacque, and Serendi Arseven. See Sayar, *Osmanlı İktisat Düşüncesinin Çağdaşlaşması* pp. 272, 280; İ. Ortaylı, "Osmanlılarda İlk Telif İktisat Elyazması," *Yapıt* 1 (1983): 37–44.

gle gold piece of his wealth should be taken over by the state treasury."¹⁰ In 1831 Selim's successor Sultan Mahmud II recruited the French journalist Alexander Blacque, who owned a newspaper in Izmir and who was known for his ardent support of laissez-faire principles, to publish the French version of the newly established official newspaper of the Ottoman government, *Takvim-i Vekayi*.¹¹

Early in the nineteenth century this new political economy of guarded liberalization achieved a victory of sorts, when the inflationary policies designed by the director of the mint, Kazaz Artin, helped the Ottoman state weather the economic impact of the 1810 war with Russia. Artin was also responsible for abolishing price controls on food in Istanbul in order to draw the hoarded stocks to the market.¹²

The treaty of 1838 was not the first free trade treaty agreed to by the Ottomans. The Treaty of Adrianople, signed with Russia in 1829, had already granted the Russian merchants freedom of commerce and navigation in Ottoman lands and seas.¹³ The treaty that was signed with the United States in 1830 carried similar stipulations and had an important effect in expanding the American trade in Ottoman opium in the years that followed.¹⁴

Given this background, the Balta Limani Treaty should be taken as representing a turning point not so much in Ottoman commerce but in Britain's foreign policy in the Near East. With this convention, Britain took a firm stand against the expansionist ambitions of France and Russia and declared the preservation of the integrity of the Ottoman empire as the centerpiece of its policy in the Near East. The following quotations from Palmerston reflect how much Britain's view of its relations with the Ottoman empire changed during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The first comes from a letter that Palmerston wrote to his friend Littleton in 1829, shortly before he became foreign secre-

¹⁰ "Ticaret ve sanat ve herasetle tahsil-i mal eylemiş adamlardan her kim vefat ederse madem ki varisi vardır bir akcesi canibi-1 miriye alınmasin." Quoted in Sayar, *Osmanlı İktisat Düşüncesinin Çağdaşlaşması*, p. 186.

¹¹ Sayar, *Osmanlı İktisat Düşüncesinin Çağdaşlaşması*, pp. 194-95. On Blacque, see O. Kologlu, "Blacque (Blak) Bey," *Tarih ve Toplum* 57 (1988): 143-47.

¹² H. Kazgan, "2. Sultan Mahmut Devrinde Enflasyon ve Darphane Amiri Kazaz Artin," *Toplum ve Bilim* 11 (1980): 120-24.

¹³ *Mufassal Osmanlı Tarihi* (Istanbul, 1962), 6 vols., 5:2912-16; J. C. Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics* (New Haven, 1975), pp. 245-47.

¹⁴ Hurewitz, *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics*, p. 252.

tary: "I confess I should not be sorry some day or other to see the Turk kicked out of Europe, & compelled to go and sit cross-legged, smoke his pipe, chew his opium, & cut off heads on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus; we want civilization, activity, trade, & business in Europe, & your Mustaphas have no idea of any traffic beyond rhubarb, figs, and red slippers; what energy can be expected from a nation who have no heels to their shoes and pass their whole lives slip shod?"¹⁵

Ten years later, in his correspondence with the British ambassador in Istanbul, Palmerston's thinking had changed considerably: "People compare an ancient monarchy with an old building, an old tree, or an old man, and because the building, tree, or man must from the nature of things crumble, or decay or die, they imagine that the same thing holds good with a community. Than which there cannot be a greater or more utterly unphilosophical mistake . . . all that we hear every day of the week about the decay of the Turkish empire, and its being a dead body or a sapless trunk, and so forth, is pure and unadulterated nonsense."¹⁶

The best way of describing the development of Anglo-Ottoman relations during the first decades of the nineteenth century would be to say that the respective interests of the two states converged during this time period. For the Ottomans, being recognized as part of the European state system was a significant step in securing the long-term viability of their empire. From the point of view of the British government, an Ottoman administration that was rationalized, centralized, and secularized was likely to be more effective in maintaining the territorial integrity of the empire and hence in providing unified and friendly access to India. Accordingly, while the Sublime Porte was forthcoming in commercial matters, Britain became the main supporter of Ottoman reforms in the nineteenth century.

All this should not be taken to imply that there was complete agreement between the Ottomans and the British, or that the members of the Ottoman bureaucracy and their local representatives did not ever try to interpret liberally, circumvent deliberately, or ignore totally the provisions of the treaty. For one thing, the simultaneous pursuit of the objectives of free trade and administrative reform imbued all the reform policies of the Ottoman government with a tint of uncertainty. There were

¹⁵ K. Bourne, *Palmerston: The Early Years, 1784-1841* (London, 1982), p. 394.

¹⁶ Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, p. 235.

always high-ranking bureaucrats who questioned the general thrust of governmental policies. Even when liberalization seemed to be gaining uncontested ground, mercantilist and cameralist ideas continued to find a receptive audience among Ottoman statesmen.¹⁷

More specifically, following the signing of the treaty, Ottoman and British officials disagreed about the price to be taken as the basis for determining the tariff schedule for Ottoman exports. The Ottoman government tried to specify particular ports for the implementation of the treaty and to retain the power to ban the export of cereals and corn in extraordinary times. The two sides also had problems in dealing with the special taxes the Ottoman government had imposed on salt, alum, and snuff to finance the organization of its new army.¹⁸ In 1840, in an effort to maintain some control over the pace of the opening of the Ottoman economy, the Porte passed a special real estate tax on properties leased to foreigners;¹⁹ in 1845 the export of grains was prohibited, and at least for a while the measure was implemented successfully;²⁰ and in the treaty signed with Russia in 1846, the Ottomans insisted on the inclusion of special provisions that addressed some of their concerns.²¹ But in the end these disagreements and complications did not affect or alter the main thrust of the 1838 treaty. None of the ports was excluded from the treaty, and no commodity or trading group was exempted from its provisions.

BRITAIN AND CHINA: TWO RELUCTANT FRIENDS

At first sight, the transformations taking place in China during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries appear to be similar to those in the Ottoman empire. The provincial uprisings that covered the Ottoman empire from the Balkans all the way to the Ara-

¹⁷ Mercantilist influence is particularly clear in the writings of Sadık Rifat Paşa, who was one of the leading figures of this era. See Sayar, *Osmanlı İktisat Düşüncesinin Çağdaşlaşması*, pp. 222–35; S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 169–95.

¹⁸ M. Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İngiliz İktisadi Münasebetleri*, 11 (İstanbul, 1976), pp. 7–22.

¹⁹ “Memorial Drafted by the U.S. Protégés in Izmir. Addressed to the Secretary of State,” U.S. Department of State, *Dispatches from U.S. Consuls in Smyrna*, T. 238, roll 8, 7 September 1872, p. 7.

²⁰ Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey*, p. 213.

²¹ Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İngiliz İktisadi Münasebetleri*, pp. 72–74.

bian peninsula found their parallels in the White Lotus Rebellion that challenged the Qing Dynasty between 1795 and 1804. As was the case in the Ottoman empire, the internal and external trade of China expanded significantly during the second half of the eighteenth century. Also similar to the Ottoman empire was the reformation of the Chinese bureaucracy, which allowed the Chinese to deal effectively with the White Lotus rebels.²² However, there were some important differences between the two empires in how political rebellion was organized, how commercial growth affected the society, and how bureaucratic reform was carried out.

Unlike the revolts of the provincial notables in the Ottoman empire, the White Lotus Rebellion did not represent a fundamental break in the relations between local gentry and the central government. The rebels consisted of a socially diverse group that included peasants, rural laborers, traveling salesmen, actors, and monks. Some local potentates did participate in the uprisings, but strong ties between them and the central government continued to exist throughout these turbulent years, and the central government relied in part on the gentry in suppressing these rebellions.²³

In the Ottoman empire in the late eighteenth century, commercial expansion was significant because of its impressive rate and scope, and also because it involved some important changes in content, organization, external partners, and most important the resulting balance of trade. In none of these areas do we see a significant change in China, even though here too foreign trade grew at very high rates during the eighteenth century.²⁴ Also, there was no slowing or reversal in the flow of specie from America via Europe to Asia because the Chinese continued to export more than they were importing, as they had been doing for centuries.²⁵

Unlike the situation in the Ottoman empire, bureaucratic con-

²² P. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 49; S. A. M. Adshad, *China in World History* (London, 1988), pp. 313–14.

²³ Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*, pp. 41–50; J. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York, 1990), p. 112.

²⁴ From 1761 to 1800, the East India Company's tea shipments out of Guangzhou rose almost tenfold, from 2.6 million pounds in 1761 to 23.3 million pounds in 1800. See Yen-p'ing Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China* (Berkeley, 1986), p. 21; W. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796–1889* (Stanford, 1984), pp. 124–25.

²⁵ K. N. Chaudhuri, "The Economic and Monetary Problems of European Trade with Asia during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of European Economic History* 4 (1975).

control over foreign trade continued to be effective through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in China.²⁶ This supervision was exercised through interlocking patterns of responsibility that connected many groups and activities to each other in the provinces. For example, Guangzhou, which was the main entrepôt in the south, was placed under a system of management in which merchants who were authorized to engage in foreign trade were required to belong to guilds (*cohong*) and to conduct their business through successive levels of linguists, compradors, and servants. Furthermore, each one of the three groups in the hierarchy had to guarantee and provide security for those who came directly after.²⁷ After 1736 the government began to hold the *cohong* members responsible for the activities of foreigners with whom they had business dealings as well.²⁸ During the second half of the eighteenth century, it served the Chinese government well to have access to *cohong* and other trade monopolies as means of regulating the activities of foreigners and local merchants. By the same token, if any one of these organizations became too strong or attempted to divert the flow of trade, the government officials did not hesitate to intervene and punish the responsible members of the *cohong*.²⁹

Until well into the nineteenth century the Chinese bureaucracy continued to supervise this complex system of hierarchy in which each component had some autonomy yet remained subject to central coordination. Therefore, growing trade in and around China did not automatically become the axis of a centrifugal force in the eighteenth century. It was not easy for foreigners—even monopolies such as the East India Company—to find the vulnerable points of the imperial structure and press the Chinese to relax their control. Neither was it likely that local merchants could turn provincial trade into means of private accumulation for themselves. The only exceptions to this were the agency houses through whom many of the European firms were conducting their Asian trade. These were based not in China but in India, from

²⁶ See A. Feuerwerker, "The State and the Economy in Late Imperial China," *Theory and Society* 13 (1984): 297–326; T. Metzger, "The Organizational Capabilities of the Ch'ing State in the Field of Commerce: The Liang-huai Salt Monopoly, 1740–1880," in W. E. Willmott, ed., *Economic Organization in Chinese Society* (Stanford, 1972), pp. 9–46.

²⁷ Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China*, p. 46.

²⁸ F. Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China* (New York, 1975), p. 121.

²⁹ See Rowe, *Hankow*, p. 192.

whence they carried the trade of the subcontinent into China and gradually expanded their activities farther east.³⁰

Thus, in the late eighteenth century the Chinese government wielded more power and authority than its Ottoman counterpart in administering the domestic and foreign trade of the empire and controlling the activities of local and foreign merchants. In those instances when the Chinese felt the need to alter some aspect of the bureaucratic structure through which this control was exercised, they perceived and presented this as “self-strengthening” and not as adopting a radically different path of development called reorganization, reform, or “westernization,” as quickly became the case in the Ottoman empire.³¹

The first and most serious challenge to the authority of the Chinese government in economic matters came in the late eighteenth century when the illegal traffic in opium began to overtake other forms of trade. The Chinese government in response devised a multitude of methods to ban the consumption of opium and to restrict and control even more closely the activities of foreigners and merchants. Early in the nineteenth century the imperial government ordered the revival of the defunct mutual responsibility units of the old *baojia* system, whereby each member was required to guarantee personally that the other members of his unit were not growing opium.³² Un Zexu, who was appointed to coordinate the government’s battle with the opium trade, took the further step of putting the gentry in charge of the *baojia* system; during the Opium War he gave them permission to raise local militias.³³ In the meantime the central government issued a series of edicts directly prohibiting the sale and consumption of opium.³⁴ It is important to emphasize that while issuing these prohibitions, the government continued to encourage foreign trade in other items, such as silk, tea, and cotton goods.³⁵ When Lin was

³⁰ Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China*, p. 124.

³¹ Compare M. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism* (Stanford, 1966), pp. 196–221, with Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, and S. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, 1989).

³² F. Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate* (Berkeley, 1966), p. 32.

³³ V. Shue, *The Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic* (Stanford, 1988), pp. 75–103; E. Perry, “Collective Violence in China,” *Theory and Society* 13(1984): 430; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 194.

³⁴ Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China*, p. 113; Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, p. 32.

³⁵ Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China*, pp. 113, 115.

sent to Guangzhou in 1838, his commission was clearly defined so as not to harm China's general foreign trade.³⁶ In his famous memorial to Queen Victoria, which was drafted between 1839 and 1840, Lin carefully drew a distinction between opium and other commodities. After explaining that "laws against the consumption of opium are now so strict in China that no one buys it and no more fortunes will be made," he asked rhetorically, "Rather than waste your effort in a hopeless endeavor, would it not be better to devise some other form of trade?"³⁷

On the eve of the Opium War, at the highest levels of the Qing Dynasty, there was still a belief in the integrity and the strength of China, and in the ability of the imperial bureaucracy to solve the problems created by the growing opium trade. After all, China held the "Mandate of Heaven," and nothing had happened yet to test this conviction. The final passage of Lin's memorial clearly reflects deep self-confidence. Addressing Queen Victoria, he said: "Our Heavenly Court would not have won the allegiance of innumerable lands did it not wield superhuman power. Do not say you have not been warned in time. On receiving this. Your Majesty will be so good as to report to me immediately on the steps that have been taken at each of our ports."³⁸

The irony was that the Chinese were confronted with a power that was becoming equally confident in its ability to protect and to expand its interests into distant corners of the globe. This imperial vision was articulated by Claudius Buchanan, chaplain to the East India Company, in 1813: "Great Britain unquestionably holds the place which Rome formerly held, in regard to the power and means of promoting Christian knowledge. Why else indeed should providence have saved Great Britain from the general wreck of nations?"³⁹

It was inevitable that these two visions would eventually clash, as they did in a series of wars in the nineteenth century. Through these confrontations, the British tried to gain free trade treaties and also the right to protect the interests of British subjects while they were in China. Such extraterritorial protection was deemed to be the most effective and desirable method of curbing the abil-

³⁶ Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes*, pp. 18, 46, 123.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-31.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁹ Quoted in C. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London, 1989), pp. 140-41.

ity of the Chinese government to obstruct foreign trade. In 1843 Foreign Secretary Aberdeen wrote to Pottinger, who was representing the British government in the ongoing cease-fire negotiations with China, asking him to obtain from the Chinese government a “renunciation of jurisdiction similar to that made in former times by the Sultans of Turkey, and recorded to the Capitulations.”⁴⁰ After the end of the Opium War, through a supplementary treaty that was signed on 8 October 1843, the British obtained some extraterritorial rights and jurisdiction in China for the first time.

For a long time, the British had perceived the various regulations of the two imperial bureaucracies as the biggest obstacles to the progress of free trade in China and the Ottoman empire. Once the cooperation of the two empires was secured, the British were confident that they could carve a large space for themselves in the markets of these empires by relying on the competitive superiority of British commerce and manufacturers. But the British soon found out that without the presence of a centralized authority, they had to deal with a vast network of merchants, bankers, and brokers whose spread across China and the Ottoman empire was at once more thorough and less tangible than that of the imperial bureaucracies. Furthermore, having been released from the close administrative control of the center, these groups were now free to pursue their own interests, which were not always in harmony with British designs. Thus, even though the political structures of the two empires were different, and their official attitudes toward Britain varied initially, in both places the British found themselves in the difficult position of trying to deal with a multitude of competing and conflicting groups and interests. In the end, such local contexts played a far larger role than treaties and agreements in determining the extent of Britain’s presence in the Ottoman empire and China.

CONTACTS ON THE GROUND: EUROPEANS AND LOCAL NETWORKS IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The contacts the foreigners had with prominent individuals in the provinces of the Ottoman empire turned out to be much more contentious than the relations they had established with high offi-

⁴⁰ See G. W. Keeton, *The Development of Extraterritoriality in China* (New York, 1969), 1:174.

cials in Istanbul. The prospects of both a freer trade and a stronger state directly and unequivocally threatened the position of provincial governors, *qadis*, tax farmers, and the leaders of non-Muslim communities. Under the classical system these local potentates had the right to charge all kinds of duties and fees, and in consultation with each other and with local merchants, they also set the prices in local markets. Now they were losing these privileges. Many issues that they used to decide were being incorporated into code books and into the proceedings of international conventions. In most of the major towns, consuls of European nations and the United States were systematically expanding their power. They were using their influence with local and central authorities to affect all kinds of legislation and decisions, from commercial duties to the appointment of officials. In frustration, an Ottoman official in Beirut wrote to Istanbul complaining that the British consul "adopts the attitude that this is British territory upon which we are permitted to remain out of charity; an attitude he loses no opportunity of expressing in his every word and act."⁴¹

To protect their interests local officials tried to slow down the Europeans' advance and subvert the implementation of the Balta Limani Treaty. For example, the *muhassil* (tax collector) in Kayseri and the governor of Kütahya refused to give up their monopolies over imported coffee; the governor of Izmir claimed that cotton goods dyed and printed in Izmir should be exempted from the provisions of the treaty because they could no longer be considered an imported product;⁴² and the collector of customs in Izmir attempted to tax cocoons and silk separately, claiming that the two were different articles.⁴³ The governor of Bursa insisted on having the silk crop exported via Istanbul rather than Izmir because he stood to make a personal gain in that route.⁴⁴ The prince of Samos ignored the treaty and for several years continued to charge a variety of local duties that he had imposed.⁴⁵

In the short run some of the activities of the local officials proved to be effective in slowing down the British entry into Ana-

⁴¹ Quoted in Koymen, "The Advent and Consequences of Free Trade in the Ottoman Empire," p. 313.

⁴² Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey*, p. 97.

⁴³ United Kingdom Foreign Office (hereafter cited as FO), Dispatches from British Consuls in Turkey, 195/288, 14 January 1848.

⁴⁴ FO, 78/402, 15 May 1840.

⁴⁵ Issawi, *The Economic History of Turkey*, p. 98.

tolia. But the resistance put up by this group never reached an organized level so as to disrupt the treaty on a long-term basis. For one thing, no identifiable common interest implicitly or explicitly tied these groups to each other. Theirs was a largely haphazard, almost instinctive reaction to a fast changing environment in which control was slipping from their hands. Although a wedge was separating them from the central government, at least formally they were still a part of the imperial bureaucracy. Unlike some of the other groups in the provinces, local officials had limited access to independent sources of wealth and privilege, and they continued to depend on the Ottoman state for their wellbeing. Therefore, in most cases, the local officials found that they had little choice but to retreat when presented with a "vizierial letter," an imperial decree, or an official protest, which the British and other Europeans could now obtain with relative ease on the basis of their treaties and connections in Istanbul.

Local merchants were another major group in a position to check the progress of European merchants in the Ottoman empire. One of the key factors contributing to the strength of this group was the predominant pattern of landholding in the Ottoman empire. In most of Anatolia land was dispersed in small parcels under peasant ownership and different types of rental arrangements.⁴⁶ Before the expansion of trade with Europe, taxes and tribute were collected in the countryside and peasant households were linked to each other and to regional markets through the mediation of indigenous traders. Partly through the earlier policies of the Ottoman state and partly as a result of the economic and political developments in and around the Ottoman empire during the eighteenth century, these merchants had come to control a vast and largely informal network of trade and credit across the empire.⁴⁷

Among the various groups vying for influence in the empire, only the indigenous merchants had simultaneous contact with cultivators, state officials, and foreign merchant houses in coastal cities. The position of local merchants in these networks made them indispensable contacts for any trader who was seeking to enter the interior parts of the Ottoman domain. The "conquering

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 206–207.

⁴⁷ H. Exertzoglou, "Greek Banking in Constantinople, 1830–1881" (thesis, Kings College, London, 1986), describes the link between early involvement in trade and the later wealth of the Greek banking community in Istanbul, pp. 116–20.

Orthodox merchants" of the Balkans, the Greeks and Armenians of the western provinces, and the Arab, Persian, Armenian, Greek, and Jewish merchants of the eastern and southeastern provinces dominated these networks in different parts of the empire.⁴⁸ Some of these traders regularly visited European markets, including the fairs in Vienna, Leipzig, Moscow, and as far away as Lyons and Manchester to make their purchases. To give but one startling example, an Armenian named Francisco Namtella was born in Diyarbakir, traded in Aleppo, learned Spanish in Manila, visited Guangzhou twice, and died in Marseilles.⁴⁹ Given the scope of their activities and the extent of the territory they covered, these intermediaries had to have access to complicated arrangements of multilateral exchange and to equally complex systems of credit.⁵⁰

On the face of it, local merchants did not stand to be harmed by the Balta Limam Treaty. On the contrary, they were identified as parties to be protected by the provisions of the convention and to benefit from the new measures of liberalization. Among other things, along with foreign merchants, they would be relieved of internal duties and would be able to move and trade more freely in the countryside. What came between local and foreign merchants was not an inherent incompatibility of their interests but the contradictory nature of Britain's foreign trade policy. Although the 1838 treaty was built around the notion of free trade, the old colonialist coalition continued to enjoy privileged status in the British government and shaped the implementation of the agreement.⁵¹ Therefore, when examined from the vantage point of Anatolia, Britain's interests appeared to be in the expansion of *British* trade and in promoting the activities of *British* merchants rather than all trade and traders. Britain sought to achieve this by setting up British banks, insurance houses, and similar infra-

⁴⁸ Stojanovich, "The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant," pp. 234–313; D. Chevallier, "Western Development and Eastern Crisis in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Syria Confronted with the European Economy," in W. Polk and R. Chambers, eds., *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 205–22; G. Leon, "The Greek Merchant Marine," in S. Papadopoulos, ed., *The Greek Merchant Marine* (Athens, 1972); F. Tabak, "Local Merchants in Peripheral Areas of the Empire: The Fertile Crescent during the Long Nineteenth Century," *Review* 11 (1988): 179–214; B. Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East* (New York, 1988).

⁴⁹ Adshead, *China in World History*, p. 267.

⁵⁰ Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran*, p. 99.

⁵¹ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "The Political Economy of British Expansion Overseas, 1750–1914," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 33 (1980): 463–90.

structure and supporting these with a wide consular network that now fell under the purview of the Foreign Office.

In reaction to this attempted takeover of local networks, the local merchants turned the tools of formal encroachment against Britain and used them as effective means of resistance. One of the techniques was to use other national flags in carrying out coastal or interregional trade, especially in the Aegean and the Black Sea. The local reports are full of complaints about such practices. In the late eighteenth century the Greeks were already using the Russian flag to trade in the Black Sea.⁵² Later the Russians sought to trade under the flag of other European powers to avoid the stipulations of their treaty with the Ottomans.⁵³ In 1842 an Armenian merchant who was a Russian protégé asked for his agent to be placed under British protection for similar reasons.⁵⁴ In 1847 the British consul in Izmir complained about the Greek merchants who were “covering themselves under the British flag,” and stated that he would “notify the authorities” about such people.⁵⁵ Foreign merchants, representatives of foreign governments, and Ottoman officials collaborated to prevent such practices and to close informal channels of trade. It seems, however, that as the century went on local merchants came up with new ways of evading these interventions. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, for example, the foreign-owned tobacco monopoly had to double its expenditures on surveillance from 1.2 million liras in 1885 to 2.5 million liras in 1907.⁵⁶

Peasants, workers, and urban manufacturers also organized movements of protest and active resistance against both the reform measures of the central government and the increasing presence of foreigners in their midst. For example, in 1841, in Kütahya, townspeople rose against the newly appointed tax collector “on account of vexatious imposts and drove him for refuge to the Pasa’s residence.” In the end he had to be recalled to Istanbul.⁵⁷ For almost all of 1845 the eastern provinces of Erzurum and Van were in a continuous state of rebellion that made it impossi-

⁵² Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East*, describes similar practices in the eastern Mediterranean in an earlier period, p. 101.

⁵³ Kütükoğlu, *Osmanlı-İngiliz İktisadi Münasebetleri-I*, p. 55.

⁵⁴ FO, 78/490, 22 September 1842.

⁵⁵ FO, 195/288, 3 September 1847–

⁵⁶ D. Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 1983), p. 22.

⁵⁷ FO, 78/441, 20 May 1841.

ble for the new governor of Van to enter the city.⁵⁸ In 1841 and 1842, in Amasya, a group of inhabitants killed the quarantining doctor, presumably to protest the inconveniences and delays caused by this new institution.⁵⁹ Bands of people described as brigands are a fixture in all the contemporary accounts of the hinterlands of the major port cities.⁶⁰ In addition to attacking merchants and robbing trade caravans, they routinely kidnapped prominent foreigners and held them for ransom, sometimes getting as much as 500 liras per foreign hostage.⁶¹ Later in the nineteenth century there were larger and better organized acts of resistance, including demonstrations, breaking of machines, crop burnings, and strikes by carpet makers and tobacco growers in western Anatolia, port workers in Istanbul, and miners in northern Anatolia.⁶² One common thread that tied these groups together was that they all stood to lose from the activities of foreigners in the Ottoman empire.

It is important to note here that in the Ottoman empire small peasant households retained considerable freedom in farming and also in protecting and expanding their interests in the Anatolian countryside.⁶³ Therefore, in their interactions with government officials and foreigners, the "settled" peasants used less visible forms of resistance, such as withstanding the demands of government officials, refusing to sell to foreign merchants and their agents when conditions were not favorable, and finding ways of holding onto their land even under extremely adverse conditions. Particularly advantageous for direct producers was the general sparseness of population, which provided space for workers to circulate and hence to improve their bargaining power. In the border regions of the empire, partly because of the declin-

⁵⁸ FO, 78/614, 13 June, 10 July, 13 August, 10 October 1845. Also H. Inalcik, "Application of Tanzimat and Its Social Effects," *Archivum Ottomanicum* 5 (1973): 97-127; M. Cadirci, "Tanzimatın Uygulanması ve Karşılıklı Güçlükler," in *Mustafa Reşid Paşa ve Dönemi Semineri* (Ankara, 1987), pp. 97-111.

⁵⁹ Inalcik, "Application of Tanzimat and Its Social Effects," p. 111.

⁶⁰ Nassau Senior, *A Journal Kept in Turkey and Greece*, (London, 1859), p. 64. One of Senior's informants describes these groups as more numerous, widespread, and effective than the regular soldiers, pp. 195-96.

⁶¹ When a foreign citizen was kidnapped for a high price like this, it was usually the ambassador of the state who would put up the money to be reimbursed later by the Ottoman government. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁶² Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire*; D. Quataert, "Machine Breaking and the Changing Carpet Industry of Western Anatolia," *Journal of Social History* 19 (1986): 473-89.

⁶³ See Ç. Keyder, "The Cycle of Sharecropping and the Consolidation of Sharecropping in Turkey," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 10 (1983): 130-45.

ing strength of the central government and partly as a result of the ethnic composition of the population, this circulation routinely crossed frontiers and gave the people an additional measure of protection by virtue of being located under two different jurisdictions at the same time.⁶⁴ As is commonly the case, small-scale farming also involved pooling labor resources within or among villages, or else doubling the cultivated area by planting crops that had different harvesting times and needs. Finally, a high ratio of land to labor contributed to the relatively high wages that characterized rural and urban employment in the Ottoman empire.⁶⁵ All these factors enhanced the power of local groups to resist the outsiders who were trying to reorganize trade and to establish large farms by employing local and imported laborers.⁶⁶

CHINESE CONNECTION: SECRET AND NOT SO SECRET

Unlike the Ottoman empire, China adopted a more recalcitrant line of thinking in its position toward foreigners during most of the 1840s and 1850s.⁶⁷ By the late 1840s the tension between Europeans and Chinese was already evident in issues such as official protocol, the status of Guangzhou, the residence and travel of consuls and other foreigners, and the right of the Chinese government to impose duties on domestic trade. In 1851, less than ten years after the Opium War, Palmerston was already preparing for another military confrontation: "I clearly see that the Time is fast coming when we should be obliged to strike another blow in China. . . . These half civilized governments, such as those of China, Portugal, Spain, America require a Dressing every eight or ten years to keep them in order."⁶⁸ Ultimately, the British, along

⁶⁴ S. Akşin, "1839'da Osmanlı Ülkesinde İdeolojik Ortam ve Osmanlı Devletinin Uluslararası Durumu," in *Mustafa Reşid Paşa ve Dönemi Semineri*, p. 10; Çadircı, "Tanzimatın Uygulanması ve Karşılaşılan Güçlükler," p. 103; M. M. Van Bruinessen, *Agha Shaikh and State: On the Social and Political Organization of Kurdistan* (Rijswijk, 1978), pp. 227-39.

⁶⁵ K. Boratav, G. Ökçün, and Ş. Pamuk, "Ottoman Wages and the World-Economy, 1829-1913," *Review* 8 (1985): 379-406.

⁶⁶ "Memorial Drafted by the U.S. Protégés in İzmir. Addressed to the Secretary of State."

⁶⁷ Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China*, pp. 139-41; Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast*, pp. 104-13. Despite official resistance, there were some attempts by the Chinese state and its various bureaucrats to copy Western technology, especially in the field of arms manufacturing. See Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, pp. 197-99.

⁶⁸ Quoted in P. Lowe, *Britain in the Far East: A Survey from 1819 to the Present* (London, 1981), p. 34.

with the French, fought two more wars, forced their way into Beijing, and burned and looted the emperor's summer palace in order to gain the ratification of a series of free trade treaties.

In not cooperating with Britain and other European states, the Chinese government had as one of its goals to keep the interior of China off-limits to foreigners. If unequal treaties were allowed to extend into domestic networks, this would most likely drain the wealth out of the country and undermine the officials' position in the interior. To maintain the integrity of the empire, the bureaucrats had to encourage domestic trade. But to preserve their status, they had to make sure that interprovincial trade did not expand beyond their immediate sphere of control or fall into the hands of foreigners. Consequently, like their Ottoman counterparts, the Chinese pursued a variety of policies that did not always cohere well. For example, in the middle of the nineteenth century they imposed a new tax (called *lijin*) on domestic trade and set up a special bureau to administer it. But at the same time, they abolished some of the existing restrictions and allowed more freedom to foreigners as long as they confined their activities to the perimeter of the imperial system.

In an effort to improve the efficiency of its supervision of domestic trade, the central government delegated more power to lower ranks of the bureaucracy and gave the merchants and their organizations the right to assess and collect some of the taxes and supervise the movement of goods across provinces. Consequently, in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, local merchants were able to control many of the provincial markets while the gentry assumed the risks of defending the realm by raising and maintaining armed militias.⁶⁹ For example, during the first Opium War, the peasant armies that were raised locally and led by the gentry proved to be very effective in holding back the invading armies. In 1841, around Sanyuanli, what up to then had looked like sporadic clashes between British troops and local militia quickly turned into a full-scale battle that was organized and coordinated by the gentry under authority from the central

⁶⁹ S. Mann, *Local Merchants and the Chinese Bureaucracy, 1750–1950* (Stanford, 1987), pp. 12, 21, and passim; and Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China*. See also Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China*, p. 164; Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, pp. 40–41; Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, p. 187. For example, in 1841, in the battle to take back Zhenhai and Ningbo from the British, 33,000 local militia participated as opposed to 12,000 regular troops. See Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes*, pp. 158–59.

government. In a series of confrontations that followed, the Chinese managed to inflict major losses on the British army. Such victories helped attract more volunteers, and resistance spread into cities, where artisans and factory workers joined in through their guildlike organizations.⁷⁰

Even after the cessation of formal hostilities, these same armies continued to resist the British forces militarily, especially in and around Guangzhou.⁷¹ The number of guilds, including those that incorporated the intermediary merchants, continued to increase after the Nanjing Treaty and became a persistent subject of complaint by foreigners, who were quick to draw parallels with the old *cohong* system.⁷² As late as 1879 and 1880, two foreigners tried to sue the opium guild in Chaozhou, charging a “conspiracy against foreign trade.” They argued that “not a single one of us can trade independently and the trading is no good at all so long as this underground system exists.”⁷³

It took the British almost twenty years to break the official resistance of the Chinese to the European imperatives of freer trade. Even then, the British owed their success not so much to their perseverance, but rather to the major revolts of the Taiping (1850–1864) and the Nian (1851–1863) that threatened to put an end to the Qing dynasty. By the end of the Taiping Rebellion, years of strife had finally taken their toll, and the central government was forced to refrain from obstructing the spread of European trade in the interior of China. But relaxing the government’s grip did not mean that the Chinese markets became wide open to foreign merchants and goods. In fact, without close government supervision, regional constellations of social, political, and economic relations proved to be an even more formidable barrier against foreign interests.⁷⁴ The scope of these interlocking networks had expanded, and their strength and resilience had improved

⁷⁰ See Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, pp. 17–21, 39–40.

⁷¹ Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast*, p. 275; J. Nolde, “Xenophobia in Canton, 1842–1849,” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 13 (1975): 1; J. Y. Wong, “The Building of an Informal British Empire in China in the Middle of the Nineteenth Century,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51 (1977): 482–83.

⁷² See Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford, 1973), pp. 175–277; Rowe, *Hankow*, pp. 127–29.

⁷³ R. Murphey, *The Treaty Ports and China’s Modernization: What Went Wrong?* (Ann Arbor, 1970), pp. 52–53.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27. On the Taiping Rebellion, see F. Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion* (Seattle, 1966); on the Nian, see E. Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845–1945* (Stanford, 1980), pp. 96–151.

through the commercial growth of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷⁵ Of critical importance were those networks that had grown up around the perimeter of the empire, extending beyond the mainland into places like Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and as far away as Japan. In addition to mediating the movement of goods and people, these relationships involved a wide and sophisticated system of credit, which for the most part escaped governmental supervision.⁷⁶

Thus, in the post-Taiping period, foreigners still had to contend with several obstacles before they could reach the sites of production and markets in the Chinese countryside. Supposing that they could manage the larger local firms and collectivities, they were still faced with independent local traders who were officially categorized as compradores by the Chinese government.⁷⁷ The activities of this group were pivotal in the vast system of exchange in the Chinese countryside, and they also linked the interior with the export markets through the treaty ports.⁷⁸ Like their counterparts in the Ottoman empire, these local merchants took full advantage of their privileged position and maintained some independence even when they were employed by foreign firms.⁷⁹ In fact, it can be argued that the establishment of the treaty ports made the compradores even more powerful by removing some governmental control over their activities and leaving them with a wide range of opportunities to work the system to their own benefit.⁸⁰

Over time, some of the local reaction to foreign presence linked up with secret societies that already had a long history of opposition against the Manchu dynasty, which was seen as a foreign imposition in China. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in conjunction with the changes in Chinese society,

⁷⁵ W. Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 24 (1964): 3-43; W. Skinner, "Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth Century China," in W. Skinner, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, 1977), p. 219; Perry, "Collective Violence in China"; F. Bray, "Patterns of Evolution in Rice-Growing Societies," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 11 (1983): 5-33.

⁷⁶ S. M. Jones, "Finance in Ningpo: The Ch'ien-Chuang, 1750-1880," in W. E. Willmott, ed., *Economic Organization in Chinese Society* (Stanford, 1972), pp. 54-57; Rowe, *Hankow*, pp. 158-59. See also Murphey, *The Treaty Ports and China's Modernization*, pp. 2-3; Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp. 168, 190, 224-25; A. McElderry, *Shanghai Old-Style Banks (Ch'ien-Chuang), 1800-1935* (Ann Arbor, 1977).

⁷⁷ For a comprehensive study, see Y. Hao, *The Comprador in Nineteenth Century China: Bridge between East and West* (Cambridge, 1971).

⁷⁸ Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China."

⁷⁹ Rowe, *Hankow*, pp. 127-28, 138.

⁸⁰ Murphey, *The Treaty Ports and China's Modernization*, p. 28.

secret societies grew in number and membership, attracting people from among “marginal and destitute elements of towns and villages such as porters, coolies, vagabonds, peddlers, artisans, etc.”⁸¹ In many places these organizations had gained control over public markets, sold protection to local businesses, and operated pawnshops.⁸² One of the oldest secret societies, the Triad Society, was responsible for setting up a closely knit network of commerce across the South China Sea by using merchants who did not belong to the *cohong*.⁸³ Some of these societies were mobile, some actively recruited members across large territories, and in most cases the units and cells of the same society provided a network for people to move over long distances. So extensive was the field of involvement of these organizations that some analysts have described their history as “the history of the formation of the illegal petty-bourgeoisie in China.”⁸⁴

Although secret societies made antiforeign activities in China appear more organized than in the Ottoman empire, the nature of these activities as they confronted the formal institutions of the British empire and those of the imperial state was similar in the two contexts. The basic incompatibility between the British goal of mastering the vast commercial network in China and the interests of local groups led to repeated clashes between the two, and also to the portrayal of secret society activities solely as brigandage, banditry, and piracy in the official European, British, and Chinese documents.

On the whole, it seems that the Chinese merchants continued to be successful in strengthening their positions even further in the course of the nineteenth century. In a statement reminiscent of descriptions of the activities of Greek merchants in the Ottoman empire, William Rowe has said that “often a foreign merchant was an illusion as it became common practice for Chinese businessmen to set up bogus foreign firms in order to avoid transit duties which were imposed on Chinese merchants involved in domestic trade.”⁸⁵ In 1865, in a report from Zhenjiang, the British consul stated that “nine-tenths of the whole of the foreign trade

⁸¹ J. Chesneau, “Secret Societies in China’s Historical Evolution,” in J. Chesneau, ed., *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840–1950* (Stanford, 1972), p. 8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸³ F. Wakeman, “The Secret Societies of Kwangtung, 1800–1856,” in Chesneau, ed., *Popular Movements and Secret Societies in China, 1840–1950*, pp. 145–64.

⁸⁴ Cited in Chesneau, “Secret Societies in China’s Historical Revolution,” p. 17.

⁸⁵ Rowe, *Hankow*, p. 84.

are under Chinese control,” and that “the foreign merchant must rest satisfied with such profits as he may derive from his being simply the carrier of all this Chinese property.”⁸⁶ In 1866, in a report from Tianjin, the consul said, “Foreign merchant and ship-owner are being metamorphosed into the agent and carrier of the Chinese trader.”⁸⁷ In 1867, in Hankou, “old established [British] China firms who have gone to the expense of establishing branches in this port found the import trade taken out of their hands by small scale native commission agents, operating with virtually no overhead.”⁸⁸ And in 1868, the consul in Chaozhou expressed his disappointment that “the foreign merchants have . . . sunk to the position of mere commission agents.”⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

There was a tendency in European intellectual circles of the post-Enlightenment era to lump together the Ottoman, Chinese, and Indian empires under the rubric of “Oriental despotism.” Influenced by the notion that these empires were ruled by strong, centralized political structures, British (and other European) politicians focused all their initial energies on coopting the Ottoman and Chinese states. It was believed that once the cooperation of the political center was secured, the people would follow suit because they were seen as lacking the autonomous social institutions and networks that could sustain them after they were separated from their respective states.

After some false starts and reversals caused by these misperceptions, the British finally secured the Balta Limani and Nanjing treaties from the two empires. The important distinction between the two cases was that in China the British had to use more guns and boats than diplomacy in reaching their goal. This was somewhat contrary to their expectations because the widespread Jesuit propaganda had led them to believe that if anything the Chinese would be the more open of the two empires. In reality, however, the Ottomans had already begun to liberalize their institutions, and their economy had a long history of extensive contacts with the outside world.

⁸⁶ R. Murphey, *The Outsiders* (Ann Arbor, 1977), p. 193.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

⁸⁸ Rowe, *Hankou*, p. 83.

⁸⁹ Murphey, *The Outsiders*, p. 193.

Once the treaties of free trade and friendship had been signed, it did not take long for the British to find out that constraining the imperial state would not be sufficient to open up the interiors of the two empires. In both China and the Ottoman empire, the British were now faced with vast networks of trade and trading interests that were capable of surviving and indeed thriving independently of the central government. Some of these networks were held together by ideology and culture as well as economic interest, as was the case with various secret societies in China and a variety of non-Muslim religions and non-Sunni Sufi orders in the Ottoman empire. Such "brotherhoods" provided both an organizational grid and a belief system that made it possible for individuals to mobilize and defend their interests against foreigners and their own respective states.⁹⁰

At least as important as these divisions on the Ottoman and Chinese sides was a series of contradictions on the British side that weakened Britain's drive abroad. Regardless of their religions, persuasions, and orientations, a significant number of local merchants in the Ottoman empire and China were probably inclined to cooperate with foreigners and to participate in foreign trade. Yet often these same traders attracted the wrath of the private and official representatives of Britain. This opposition is traced to the well-entrenched landed aristocracy, the group known as the "gentlemanly capitalists," who continued to wield considerable power and influence in the making of British policy during most of the nineteenth century.⁹¹ Members of this group were primarily interested in steering a planned and protected expansion of the *British* field of influence in the world, rather than in strengthening free trade. Early in the nineteenth century they commissioned agents to map out the Ottoman and Chinese territories with a view to making recommendations to the British firms and government. Numerous reports were drawn up, complete with projections as well as descriptions of existing condi-

⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that the Naqshibandiyya order, which was one of the most popular of these Sufi communities, had followers not only in the Ottoman territories but also in India and China. See Adshead, *China in World History*, pp. 197–98.

⁹¹ See Cain and Hopkins, "The Political Economy of British Expansion Overseas, 1750–1914"; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas, I: The Old Colonial System, 1688–1850," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 39 (1986): 501–25; Cain and Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas, II: New Imperialism," *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 40 (1987): 1–26; Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, pp. 134–36.

tions.⁹² As P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins have noted, this “design for world development aimed at creating a cluster of satellite economies managed by foreign beneficiaries of English culture.”⁹³

The concern over delineating and protecting a space for Britain and British capital in these areas became particularly acute when the local indigenous capitalists took advantage of the new commercial openings to expand their own activities. Around this time theories of racial characteristics and hierarchies began to be elaborated in England to justify the exclusion of natives from areas of economic opportunity.⁹⁴ For example, a British resident of Istanbul described Greeks as “false, intriguing, and servile.” Armenians, he said, “[did] not have . . . ambition . . . or intelligence.”⁹⁵ As for Turks, “I do not believe we can sympathize with them. The head of a Turk . . . has much less brain than that of a European, especially as respects the organs of the nobler faculties. . . . He cannot reason, there is no logical sequence in his ideas. . . . His thoughts do not form themselves as those of a European do.”⁹⁶ A few years earlier, Palmerston had described the Chinese in similar terms: “Their minds are too shallow to receive an Impression that will last longer than some such period, and warning is of little use. They care little for words and they must not only see the Stick but actually feel it on their Shoulders.”⁹⁷

Incongruent and atavistic as they may have been, such interests and sentiments remained in the forefront of imperialist expansion during the heyday of the Victorian era. Obviously, any account of British imperialism that models itself solely after the recurring plans of a formal empire or after the beliefs of British politicians would be misleading. But it would be equally misleading to ignore these aspects of British imperialism or treat them as

⁹² For example, Christophe Aubin toured the western provinces of the Ottoman empire in 1812 on behalf of J. Finlay and Company and recorded his impressions. See A. B. Cunningham, “The Journal of Christophe Aubin: A Report on the Levant Trade in 1812,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* 8 (1983): 5–131. Another merchant, Samuel Ball, drafted his detailed observations, “Expediency of Opening a New Port in China,” in 1817. See D. Basu and R. Murphey, eds., *Nineteenth Century China: Five Imperialist Perspectives* (Ann Arbor, 1972).

⁹³ Cain and Hopkins, “Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas, I: The Old Colonial System, 1688–1850,” p. 523.

⁹⁴ See Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁹⁵ Senior, *A Journal Kept in Turkey and Greece*, p. 234.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁹⁷ Lowe, *Britain in the Far East: A Survey from 1819 to the Present*, p. 34.

aberrations by a handful of eccentric personalities. After all, such sentiments appear to have been prevalent among the British, from key figures like Palmerston down to the foot soldiers of the empire.

Rather than developing a new model of empire, imperialism, or colonialism or refining the theory of incorporation, this paper has sought to demonstrate the complexities that were involved as Britain tried to gain a political and economic foothold in the Ottoman empire and China in the nineteenth century. In the end, British merchants had to negotiate with and work through intermediaries, brokers, and existing networks. By focusing on zones of interaction between the British and the Ottoman and Chinese nodes of interest and power, it can be shown that often the forces that emanated from Europe were actually absorbed and transformed by local relations and structures. Just as it is impossible to study either side of this relationship without referring to the other, it is imperative that we recognize the presence of both in the resultant larger and broader global entity.

Opium and other kinds of "illicit" trade, vagabondage, brigandage, piracy, smuggling, usury, theft, monopolies, wars, and regulations: all are activities that resulted from this interaction. As such they have been integral parts of capitalist development on a world scale. It is difficult to break this long-term development into substantively distinct subperiods based on the dominant form of control exercised by the imperial power or the prevalent type of commerce that existed in that interval. Yes, Britain expanded during the first half of the nineteenth century, but never by superimposing a preconceived plan on non-European regions. To put it another way, the British did not determine local history, but they most certainly took part in its making.