

# Preface

On his official visit to Britain in October 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping was welcomed to Downing Street, attended a lavish state banquet hosted by the Queen, and spent two nights at Buckingham Palace. All these grand manifestations of hospitality happened because Britain is once again keen to trade with China, just as it was in the nineteenth century. In his speeches to the dignitaries at Buckingham Palace and the peers at the Palace of Westminster, Xi reminded his audience that Britain and China were becoming ‘increasingly interdependent’. Many British people are concerned about Britain’s close relationship with China, believing that Britain is kowtowing to China in order to get £30bn in deals. The BBC’s political editor, Laura Kuenssberg, asked, ‘Is there any price that is worth paying in order to further our business interests with China?’<sup>1</sup>

The times are changing – during the mid-nineteenth century Britain had to use military aggression to force China to open up its coastal ports for more trading and proselytising activities. It was an ‘informal imperialism’ in which Britain maintained a kind of flexible control over Chinese territories for trade purposes.<sup>2</sup> Indeed it was China’s administrative practice and Britain’s needs that created this interdependency.

It was the spirit of the age when Britain took it upon itself to civilise other countries by force and violence if necessary – it was the age of imperialism. F.W. Farrar, Dean of Canterbury, in 1900, held that ‘imperialism’ included ‘the wider meaning of that view of national duty and policy which maintains that we are bound to uphold, even at the cost of war, and in spite of all hazards, the Empire over those vast regions which the Providence of God has placed under our dominion and immediate influence’.<sup>3</sup>

1. Jessica Elgot, ‘Xi Jinping UK visit roundup: red flags, red carpets and Greene King’, *The Guardian*, 23rd October 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/23/chinese-president-xi-jinping-uk-visit-roundup>.
2. See Edmund S. Wehrle, *Britain, China, and the Antimissionary Riots, 1891–1900* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), 6–11.
3. F.W. Farrar, Dean of Canterbury, ‘Imperialism and Christianity’, *North American Review*, Vol. 171, No. 526 (September 1900), 289. For a detailed explanation of

The imperialists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sincerely believed that Britain had the sacred duty to subdue and conquer other countries and ensure that the natives be taught the 'true religion', Christianity. Mission became concomitant to imperialism. Using evidence from the Old Testament, Farrar believed war was necessary to defeat the tyrannous evil. Even the saintly quintessential English poet, William Wordsworth (1770-1850), wrote:

But thy most dreaded instrument  
In working out a pure intent,  
Is man array'd for mutual slaughter,  
Yea, carnage is thy daughter.

In its effort to inform China about the West, the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China, founded in Canton on 29 November 1834, declared:

We are now, then, to make the trial, whether the celestial empire, after it has defeated all efforts to bring it into an alliance with the civilised nations of the earth, will not yield to intellectual artillery, and give to knowledge the palm of victory.<sup>1</sup>

The war metaphors used in the above passage such as 'intellectual artillery' and 'palm of victory', anticipated actual military aggression in the Opium War (1839-1842). The employment of information and military powers to further commerce and evangelisation would benefit both the merchants and the missionaries tremendously. War waged against China, be it in the arts or artillery, would open up China for trade and proselytising.<sup>2</sup> There was thus a convergence of interests for both merchants and missionaries. To the colonial government of Britain, both guns and gospel were necessary to open up China to receive the blessings of Western civilisation. Some missionaries were also convinced that the Chinese would only respond to force alone.<sup>3</sup>

The unholy alliance between missionaries and merchants, which to us now seems scandalous and shameful, did not generally affect the Christian conscience in the West. After all, the profit from opium trading brought much material advantage to Britain, while the native Chinese were given

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the definition of 'imperialism', see Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 33-53.

1. Quoted in Chen Songchuan, 'An Information War Waged by Merchants and Missionaries at Canton: The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China, 1834-1839', *Modern Asian Studies* 46, 6 (2012), 1706.
2. *Ibid.*, 1705.
3. Stuart Creighton Miller, 'Ends and Means: Missionary Justification of Force in Nineteenth Century China' in John King Fairbank, ed., *Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 280.

the chance to go to heaven. Under the protection of gunboats and unequal treaties forced upon China, foreign missionaries entered freely into the interior to propagate the Christian faith.

American missionaries also took part in this battle for Christ and entered China in great numbers under the auspices of British imperialism. At the same time, in 1882, the American government enacted the Chinese Exclusion Act to prohibit Chinese people, whom they viewed as racially inferior, from becoming US citizens. Americans, it seemed, did not want the Chinese to enter California, nor did they want them to land in hell. The history of relations between China and the West is truly one of the most bizarre and fascinating in modern times.

This work, *Guns and Gospel: Imperialism and Evangelism in China*, attempts to explain why, in spite of so much toil and sacrifice undertaken by foreign missionaries in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christianity is still a minority faith in China. The book aims to be a critical examination of missionary activities that took place under the auspices of gunboat diplomacy and unequal treaties, and that eventually increased hostilities of the natives towards Christianity. 'One more Christian, one less Chinese' has long been a popular cliché in China.

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