

# CHINA'S ENCOUNTER WITH THE WEST: SINO-FRENCH RELATIONS BEFORE THE ARROW WAR

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*This paper explores the evolution of Sino-French relations from the first diplomatic contact in the late seventeenth century to the outbreak of the Arrow War (Second Opium War) in 1856. Most research concerning modern Sino-French relations begins with the Arrow War of 1856-60, when French forces joined a punitive British-led expedition that thrashed the Chinese army and sacked Beijing. Prior to this dramatic turning point, however, French diplomatic policy towards China had gradually undergone significant modifications, shifting its emphasis from missionary activities to commercial interests before finally transforming France from a bystander in Chinese affairs to an active imperial power. This article will systematically explore modern Sino-French relations before the Arrow War in order to clarify how and why this evolution in French policy took place. It will highlight China's desire to establish cordial relations with France, evidenced by the Qing dynasty's willingness to grant deeper concessions than those given to Britain or the United States, and the aggressive turn in French foreign policy in the Far East that came with Louis-Napoléon's ascension to the throne in 1852. France had cultivated China's hope for a strong bilateral relationship, but in the end it preyed on Chinese weakness in much the same manner as all of the other Western powers.*

In recent years, China has firmly cemented its status as one of the world's superpowers. It has enjoyed four decades of peace and robust economic growth, transforming into a country that would now be mostly unrecognizable to those who had last seen it during the mass deprivation of the Mao Zedong years. Western nations, including those that once took advantage of the Qing Dynasty's weakness in the nineteenth century to carve out their own

spheres of influence in China, now anxiously seek out Chinese investors that will help them maintain their high standard of living. At the same time, China's growing military assertiveness in areas such as the South China Sea has sent a clear message that Beijing will fight to defend its interests if necessary. The asymmetrical power relationship that existed at the time of China's first encounters with Western nation states has not exactly been reversed, but it most definitely has been eliminated. China deals with the West today with a confidence that could not contrast more greatly with its vulnerability of two centuries ago.

Historians have long been fascinated by early Sino-Western engagements, but this subject matter has renewed importance given China's leading role and the shifting power balance in our contemporary world. They have focused the lion's share of their attention on Britain's role in forcing the Qing to open its doors to the West during the Opium Wars, creating opportunities for secondary European powers, the United States, and Japan to ride in on its coattails. We can, however, gain more insight into this fascinating turn of events—not to mention both British and Chinese policy considerations—by exploring France's role in opening China in the nineteenth century. Historians of modern Sino-French relations typically choose to open with the Arrow War of 1856-60, a joint Anglo-French military campaign that culminated in a decisive victory over Chinese forces and the fall of Beijing to the western invaders. By choosing this starting point, historians have overlooked a very significant, but gradual, evolution of French policy towards China. France's stance was very much reactive, based on its relationship with Britain and a desire not to fall behind its long-time rival. At the same time, France was also very cognizant of its relative weakness in the region. As a result, France carefully shifted its focus from religious penetration, then trade, and ultimately, at the time of China's greatest vulnerability, to military intervention. This paper will examine France's most important strategic decisions in China prior to the Arrow War.

France played a long, clever game in China that enabled it to gain maximum concessions from Beijing at minimal cost. Paris first used missionaries to gain a presence in the Far East while it was preoccupied with European affairs in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Then, it remained astutely neutral—while feigning a sympathetic position towards China in conversations between French and Chinese diplomats—during the era of the Sino-British Opium War. France held out the prospect of Sino-French cooperation to exploit China's lack of potential foreign allies against Britain and, in doing so, secured deeper trade concessions than

any other foreign power. At the same time, French foreign policy under Napoleon III took an increasingly bellicose turn and was often coordinated with Britain, the strongest imperial power of the era. France augmented its military presence in the Far East during this period, but it did not have the ability to intimidate China into opening the entire country to French trade on its own. Thus, it waited for a pretext, which came with the brutal murder of French missionary Father Chapdelaine in 1856, then joined Britain in a punitive expedition that forced the desired trade concessions on Beijing. China was naive to assume that France would behave any less rapaciously than the other Western powers, but it had no alternative but to hold on to the faint hope of French cooperation against Britain given its lack of other cards to play.

### Early Contact: French Activity in China

France and China, the greatest powers of the time in their respective regions, established relations with one another in the final years of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) and contacts between the two deepened during the early Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). In 1665, the Sun King Louis XIV sent a number of learned French Jesuits, including Joachim Bouvet and Joan Franciscus Gerbillon, to China for missionary work.<sup>1</sup> Louis XIV's empire expanded in Canada, the Caribbean, West Africa, and South Asia over the course of the seventeenth century. The French East India Company was founded a year earlier to challenge British and Dutch trade in Asia, where France lagged behind its competitors. Direct Sino-French trade began shortly thereafter when the *Amphitrite*, a ship under the French East India Company, departed for its first voyage to China and arrived in Guangzhou in November 1689.<sup>2</sup>

Successive French rulers presided over a rapidly growing empire, and the hyper-competitive environment of the era meant that events in one colony could quickly spill over into global wars with other European rivals. France fought no fewer than six major wars with England (later Great Britain) from Louis XIV's reign to Napoleon's, which meant that French commercial interests in China grew slowly as developments in Europe, the Americas, and to a lesser extent, South Asia, took precedent. Nevertheless, the lure of

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1 John F. Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 7.

2 Paul Pelliot, *Le Pronies Voyage de L'amphitrite en Chine: l'origine des relations de la France avec la chine* (Paris: Librairie orientaliste P. Geuthner, 1930), 7.

Chinese trade prompted the French East India Company to establish a trading factory in Guangzhou in 1725,<sup>3</sup> and in 1776 France established a consulate there.<sup>4</sup> Despite these auspicious beginnings, Sino-French relations failed to develop in a meaningful manner before the First Opium War between China and Britain in 1840 due to developments back in Europe.

French missionary influence in China ground to a halt thanks to the infamous “Chinese Rites Controversy” in the 1720s, a highly divisive internal church debate between Jesuits on one hand and Dominicans and Franciscans on the other over whether certain Chinese practices were compatible with Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Jesuits had been the champions of accommodating elements of Confucianism as a means of winning over more Chinese converts, while their Dominican and Franciscan rivals saw native practices as incompatible with Christianity. Pope Alexander VII sided with the Jesuits in 1656, which enabled Catholic missionaries to win the support of the Kangxi Emperor (1654–1722), who issued an edict of toleration towards Christianity in 1692.<sup>6</sup> This goodwill evaporated when Pope Clement XI reversed course in 1704, condemning Chinese rites, a move that subsequently prompted the Kangxi Emperor to crack down on Catholic missionaries in his country in 1721.<sup>7</sup> While Catholic France waffled over whether it should tolerate or suppress long-standing Confucian and imperial rites in China, Sino-French trade lagged while that of China and Protestant Britain—mercifully free from this counterproductive Catholic squabble—grew at a healthy rate.<sup>8</sup>

The unfavorable conclusion of the Chinese Rites Controversy for France was soon followed soon by a series of large-scale global military conflicts between the British and French empires. Paris spilled much blood and expended considerable treasure in the War of Spanish Succession (1701–14), the War of Austrian Succession (1740–48), the Seven Years War (1756–63), and the American War of Independence (1778–83), which meant that its attention was mostly consumed by events in Europe and the Americas until the end of the eighteenth century. France’s preoccupation

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3 Zhongping Cao, *Dongyayutaipingyangguoji guanxi: dongxi fang wenhua de zhuangji, 1500–1923* [International Relations between East Asia and the Pacific: The Cultural Impact between the East and the West, 1500–1923] (Tianjin: Tianjin University Press, 1992), 40.

4 Taishen Wei, *China’s Foreign Policy: 1839–1860* (New York: Columbia University, 1932), 24.

5 Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 8.

6 David E. Mungello, *The Forgotten Christians of Hangzhou* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 62.

7 Kejia Yan, *Catholic Church in China* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2004), 45.

8 Robert Maillard, *L’influence Française en Chine aux points de vue historique et économique* (Paris: Imprimerie Chaix, 1900), 44.

with European matters became so pronounced during the Napoleonic era that the French consulate in Guangzhou was cancelled in 1804.

Decades after the spectacular collapse of Napoleon's empire in 1815, the French government began the process of reconsidering its passive policy towards the Far East. This reevaluation was driven in large part by the growing intensity of conflicts between China and Britain at the end of the 1830s. During this period, Britain had surpassed France to establish itself as Europe's most formidable power and an uneasy coexistence developed between the two historic enemies. France had chosen a path of rapprochement with London during the reign of Louis Phillippe I (1830–48) by pursuing a more subdued, cooperative foreign policy to assuage fears of French revanchism. Nevertheless, Paris reasserted that France was at the center of the global developments despite its recent misfortunes and could not be allowed to fall behind any other nation.<sup>9</sup> In order to make good on this pledge, France sent its first new consul, M. Gernavert, to Guangzhou in 1832 after a nearly thirty-year hiatus.<sup>10</sup>

On the eve of the Opium War, Théodore-Adolphe Barrot, a French consul in Manila, kept close watch on the Sino-British conflict and promptly reported on pertinent developments to the French government in Paris. He convinced his superiors to put more diplomatic resources in China to collect more detailed information for decision makers in Paris, which led to the reopening of the Guangzhou consulate in July 1839.<sup>11</sup> On the heels of this bureaucratic shuffling, A. S. Bellée twice proposed to Adolphe Thiers, who doubled as the French Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, in March and April 1840 that the French government should send out a diplomatic mission to China to restore France's former status and influence.<sup>12</sup>

After the Sino-British Opium War broke out in March 1839, France implemented a new Chinese policy aimed at better understanding the rapidly changing situation in the Far East. In March 1841, the French government decided to dispatch Adolphe Dubois de Jancigny (1795–1860), a soldier during the Napoleonic era who later spent a decade in Southeast Asia and

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9 "Note sur la Mission en Chine," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Mémoires et documents*; see Fuping Ge, "Faguoyuyapianzhanzheng [France and the Opium War]," *Shijielishi* 5 (2000): 50.

10 R. Montgomery Martin, *China; Political, Commercial and Social; in an Official Report to the Majesty's Government* (London: 1847), 397.

11 Henri Cordier, *La Mission Dubois de Jancigny dans l'Extrême-Orient, 1841-1846* (Paris: Champion & Larose, 1916), 30–33.

12 A. S. Bellée, "Programme d'une Mission en Chine, Les 19 mars et 16 avril 1840," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Affaires divers politiques, Chine* 1: 2-15.

was widely regarded as one of France's most knowledgeable experts on the Far East,<sup>13</sup> as an imperial envoy to China. The objective of this expedition was threefold. First, it was designed to obtain firsthand information on the political situation in China and on the prospect of extending French trade in the greater Far East. Second, it set out to draft a series of recommendations regarding the role which France might play in the area in the future given recent developments. Finally, it was a measure that would show the French flag in a region where France's historic rival Britain was aggressively using the Royal Navy to assert its geopolitical interests. This mission carried no diplomatic credentials and was not authorized to enter negotiations, severely limiting its ability to chart a new course for France in the region. Nevertheless, the squadron sailed from Brest harbor on April 28, 1841, and reached Chinese waters the following December.<sup>14</sup>

Given the lack of reliable information from the Far East, prudence was the overriding aim of French policy towards China at this time, an approach that dictated neutrality and non-interference in the Sino-British conflict. The French government adopted this position because the battlefield situation of the Sino-British War was still not clear when the observation mission was dispatched, and it was not possible for Paris to make a reasonable predication as to whether Britain would end up the victor. After the war broke out, Barrot reported to the government in an urgent document that he doubted the British expeditionary force could defeat the Chinese given popular determination to fend off the invaders.<sup>15</sup> He was ultimately proven wrong. Furthermore, the French government decided against participating in the Sino-British conflict as much as possible to avoid inflaming British opinion or creating misunderstandings that had the potential to lead to more tension between France and Britain in Africa, the Near East, and Europe.<sup>16</sup> France still stung from its long series of painful conflicts with Britain and did not want to risk action that would jeopardize efforts to reconsolidate its empire.

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13 Henri Cordier, *Histoire Générale de la Chine et des relations avec les Pays Etrangère* (Paris: Geuthner, 1921), 10.

14 Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 33–34; Dubois de Jancigny, "Note sur la Mission projetée aux Indes Orientales et en Chine, Paris, March 24, 1841," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 24: 5–6.

15 "Barrot au Duc de Maréchal Dalmatic," *Archives des affaires Etrangères, Correspondance Politique, Chine* 1: 26; Shuyuan Li, "The Jancigny Mission and Sino-French Relations during the Opium War," *Collected Papers of History Studies* 4 (2003): 20.

16 Qinghua Huang, *France's Missionary Policy towards China* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1991), 202.

Nevertheless, Jancigny and Jean Thomas Médeé Cécille operated independently of one another rather than coordinating their efforts. They both shared a desire to open China and assert French influence, which translated into a willingness to take bold actions that far exceeded those authorized by the French government.<sup>17</sup> In late January, Cécille advised the Chinese to make peace as quickly as possible and suggested that Beijing should send a special envoy to Paris to formally request an alliance with France if that was what it sought. Sensing an opportunity, Cécille made two further requests of the Qing government: canceling the special tax on French merchantmen and the release of a French missionary. Nearing the end of the meeting, Cécille then indicated that the Qing officials might contact the special envoy sent by the French King.<sup>18</sup>

In meetings held in late March and early April, the French suggested seven principles for Sino-British negotiations that would satisfy the Western powers' position. This included: the permanent ceding of Hong Kong to Britain, British surrender of parts of China it occupied, opening of several Chinese ports for friendly nations' merchantmen, permission for foreign ministers to enter Beijing, a Chinese war indemnity in silver to Britain, Chinese compensation for British economic losses during the disruption of the opium trade, and a more flexible Chinese position on the issue of opium imports. Jancigny expressed his belief that the conclusion of a peace treaty on these terms would not only benefit China but also all "civilized" nations.<sup>19</sup>

These were indeed weighty overtures, but existing materials do not confirm whether Jancigny or Cécille actually had the right to negotiate with China in the name of France given that neither clarified their diplomatic status during their respective conferences with the Chinese. This was a deliberate subterfuge; they intentionally concealed their position in order to use the Qing officials' ignorance of international diplomatic protocol to France's advantage during the negotiations. There was little risk in this to France. If the Qing were willing to accept all of France's requests, a properly accredited diplomat could build on the work of Jancigny and Cécille, and Jancigny and Cécille could be rebuked for breaching protocol if the Qing denied the requests. After these conferences, both Frenchmen travelled separately north by water and began to carry out their next task: learning more about the situation on the ground in the Sino-British War.

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17 Ibid., 34.

18 Ge, "Faguoyuyapianzhazheng," 51–52.

19 "Jancigny au Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Macao, 15 mai 1842," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 24: 67.

## New French Priorities

Events on the ground moved quickly, and the French government was forced to reconsider its new policy towards China following the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanjing between China and Britain on August 29, 1842. The Jancigny mission had only been in country for roughly a year and a half, but major decisions had to be made swiftly.

Before long, the French government adopted new measures and sent Benoît-Ulysse-Laurent-François de Paule, Comte de Ratti-Menton, a high-ranking Italian-born diplomat with extensive experience, to Guangzhou to strengthen France's influence in China.<sup>20</sup> Comte de Ratti-Menton arrived in July of 1843, at which point he provided sound advice for Paris. He observed that in view of Britain's tendency to enlarge its circle of dominion in Asia that extended from Turkey to China, an intensification of the rivalry between Britain and Russia, which was caught in the British pincers, was inevitable. He argued that such a development would afford France new opportunities to exploit the British-Russian rivalry, recommending that Paris should prepare a long-term policy of aggrandizement in eastern Asia and the establishment of a shorter and more secure line of communications with the homeland. He identified a harbor or an island in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Siam, and Tonkin as particularly valuable stepping stones for French colonial ventures in Asia.<sup>21</sup>

During his meeting with Qi Ying, the Qing imperial envoy in Guangzhou, on September 6, Comte de Ratti-Menton requested that France be granted the same trade privileges as Britain. Four days later, Qi Ying clarified French merchants did indeed enjoy equal rights to British and other Western competitors in China. Qi also praised the efforts of Comte de Ratti-Menton as a positive step towards the successful conclusion of Sino-French negotiations.<sup>22</sup> Still, France's complicated diplomat shell game continued as the note he delivered from François Guizot, the foreign minister, stipulated that Comte de Ratti-Menton was not authorized to negotiate with China

20 Cordier, *La Mission Dubois de Jancigny dans l'Extrême-Orient*, 92–93.

21 "Ratti-Menton à Guizot, Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Macao, 29 juillet 1843," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Correspondance politique, Chine 1*: 182–87.

22 "Ki-Ying, Haut-Commissaire Impérial et Ki-Koung, Vice-Roi de la Province des Deux Kouang, à M. Guizot, Grand Ministre de France chargé du Département des Affaires étrangères, 23e année de Tao Kouang, 7e lune Intercalaire, 17e jour (10 septembre 1843)" in *La Mission Dubois de Jancigny dans l'Extrême-Orient*, 81–83.



given his rank of consul in Guangzhou.<sup>23</sup>

Despite his best efforts, Jancigny was unable to keep pace with his compatriot in the competition to see which diplomat could secure the greatest package of concessions for France in China. However, Jancigny did represent the French government in signing the “Provisional Project of a Convention between France and China” with Qi Ying on July 5, 1843. The proposed treaty contained fifteen articles, the fifteenth of which was to remain a secret. In disregard of the “open door” principles that granted all foreign trades equal access to the Chinese market, several articles proposed granting special import privileges to French manufactured items and also to make provision for the export of raw silk to France outside of regular Chinese tariff requirements. The secret article provided that arms and ammunition of war of all sorts carried to China by French ships would be exempt from duty, which would be of great benefit to both parties in the event of the resumption of Sino-British hostilities.<sup>24</sup> China badly desired European weaponry to resist further British encroachment, while France saw an opportunity to profit from China’s weakness and to curtail Britain’s ability to gain further concessions through military pressure.

While Cécille, Jancigny, and Ratti-Menton disagreed with each other and took separate measures, they all shared the common goal of obtaining an agreement similar to the Sino-British Treaty of Nanjing, which would grant the same privileges to France as Britain enjoyed in China. Although their activities overstepped the boundaries of rank and the official instructions they had been provided by the French government, their policy proposals were nevertheless adopted by the government after the fact and contributed to its decision to deploy the Lagrené Mission to China. France was finally preparing itself to actually commit to a new direction.

The Lagrené Mission signaled a major transformation of French policy towards China. This mission was headed up by Théodose de Lagrené, an experienced career diplomat who was instructed by his government to focus on expanding French commerce. Following the Opium War, France dispatched two destroyers and three small escort ships to China, but its trade came nowhere close to matching its ability to project force in the region. Sino-French annual trade still amounted to only two million francs (the equivalent

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23 *Journal des Débats*, 29 mai 1844.

24 J. M. Callery, *Journal des Opérations Diplomatiques de la Légation Française en Chine* (Macao, 1845), 30; Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 39. Regarding the detailed protocol, see “Projet d’une Convention provisoire entre la France et la Chine,” in *La Mission Dubois de Jancigny dans l’Extrême-Orient*, 62–66.

of roughly US\$383,000 today), which lagged far behind that of Britain and the United States. The most important condition for growing future French commercial interests was securing equal treatment for French merchants. Therefore, Lagrené was directed to negotiate a treaty with China following the British model. Lagrené's mission was also ordered to collect commercial and shipping data which might be useful to French commercial interests. Along with promoting business interests in China, Guizot also requested that Lagrené ensure political privileges, such as consular jurisdiction.<sup>25</sup>

In his secret instructions, Guizot emphasized the need to acquire a territorial foothold for France somewhere in the vicinity of China. Such a base was required to free French vessels from dependence on the hospitality of the Portuguese- (Macau), British- (Hong Kong), or Spanish-held (Manilla) East Asian ports and to provide facilities for extending political and commercial contacts with the people of the area. Guizot suggested that the base should possess a large and enclosed harbor and have a healthy climate with abundant supplies and water at hand. These instructions finally directed Lagrené to explore the possibility of acquiring a base from Spain in the Sulu Archipelago, situated between Spanish Mindanao and Borneo, and to consider the island of Basilan.<sup>26</sup>

The Lagrené Mission arrived in Macao on August 13, 1844. Before Lagrené met with Qi Ying, he received cordial direction and help from both the American negotiator, Caleb Cushing, and the British representative in Hong Kong, J. F. Davis. Davis wrote a letter to Lagrené before the arrival of the French mission to express his willingness to provide help in France's policy towards China and sent a copy of the Sino-British treaty and regulations to Lagrené as a reference.<sup>27</sup> Cushing sent Lagrené a copy of the Sino-American Wangsha Treaty, highlighting the differences between the Sino-British and Sino-American treaties in detail, and educated him on how to negotiate with the Qing officials. Lagrené admitted that Cushing gave him a great deal of useful information.<sup>28</sup>

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25 "Instructions du Guizot, Ministre des Affaires étrangères à Lagrené, envoyé extraordinaire et ministre plénipotentiaire de France en Chine, Paris, 9 novembre 1843," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 4: 130–39.

26 "Note Confidentielle, 9 novembre 1843," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 4: 140–43.

27 "M. Davis, Minister Plenipotentiary, Governor and Commander in Chief of Hong Kong to M. Lagrené, Victoria, Hong Kong, 19 July 1844," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 6: 32.

28 Lavollée, *France et Chine*, 32–34.

## Negotiations Begin

Plans for negotiations were carefully laid during the month of September while Lagrené awaited Qi Ying's announcement of the opening of a formal Sino-French conference.<sup>29</sup> On October 5, formal negotiations finally started. Lagrené critiqued China's domestic and foreign policies repeatedly over the course of the conference, following with suggestions on how best to modify them as a precursor to establishing a mutually beneficial Sino-French friendship. According to the records from Lagrené and J. M. Callery, Lagrené focused on several main themes.<sup>30</sup> His first was that China should draw a lesson from its defeat to the British, abandon its policy of isolation, and seek a Western ally. Second, he proposed that France and China exchange diplomatic embassies and set up cultural institutes in their respective capitals to strengthen Sino-French relations. Third, he emphasized that France did not have any territorial claims in China, but it would be helpful for China to permit France a base—his suggestion was Humen in the Zhujiang River Estuary in close proximity to Macau and Hong Kong—from which France could assist China in the event of another war. Fourth, he suggested that China could express its respect and friendliness by permitting the spread of France's ethics and religion in China,<sup>31</sup> reconsidering the punishment of Christians for criminal acts, and consenting to the legalization of Christianity.<sup>32</sup> All in all, China readily made these concessions.<sup>33</sup>

On the morning of October 6, the Chinese representative, Qi Ying, sent a formal note including copies of the Sino-British and Sino-American trade regulations and customs tariff transcripts to Lagrené to indicate that he agreed to negotiate similar terms with France. That afternoon, Qi Ying and Lagrené continued to negotiate. At this point, they exchanged plenary

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29 Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 48.

30 J. M. Callery was an interpreter and translator in the Lagrené Mission. Callery was a Turin-born naturalized Frenchman who had studied Chinese in Macao under the Portuguese Father Gonzalez during the 1830s. He had resigned as a missionary in 1840 and returned to France. His connections appear to have been with the Paris Society. See Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 43.

31 In 1692, Emperor Kangxi enacted a toleration edict, which avoided any mention of the missionaries themselves in order to obviate any embarrassing counter demand on the part of the Chinese that France accepted responsibility for preventing furtive missionary penetration into the interior of China. See Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 49.

32 Angelus Crosse-Aschhoff, *The Negotiations between Ch'i-Ying and Lagrené, 1844–1846* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1950), 57-59; Louis Wei Qingxin, *France's Missionary Policy towards China* (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1960), 263–66, 340–41.

33 Wei, *France's Missionary Policy towards China*, 267.

power certificates and decided to continue working out the text of the treaty the following day. China assigned Huang Entong, Pan Shicheng, and Zhao Changling as representatives, while France assigned Th. de Ferrière Le Vayer, Bernhard d'Harcourt, and Callery.<sup>34</sup>

These negotiations proceeded smoothly, with seven meetings split between the dwellings of Qi Ying and Lagrené. Lagrené prepared the content of the protocol, while the Chinese representatives generally agreed to his draft without careful inspection, though there were a pair of exceptions. They rejected the French request to exchange envoys between Beijing and Paris and refused to cede territory for a French base. This was not enough to scupper the treaty, which Qi Ying and Lagrené signed on the French battleship *Archimedes* on October 24, 1844. In accordance with international practice, this Sino-French treaty was titled the Huangpu (Whampoa) Treaty, named for the locale where it was signed.

It is significant to note that while the Huangpu Treaty mirrored the Sino-British and Sino-American treaties, it also extended more privileges to the French and had its own characteristics. For example, this treaty text was the first to use the title of “emperor” for the French king, which Lagrené thought was possibly the first exception in the Chinese empire’s glorious tradition.<sup>35</sup> This simple matter of title—referring to a Western ruler and nation in the same breath as the Chinese empire—signaled that the Chinese government was coming to realize that China was not a superior nation in the world nor was it the only nation to possess great influence and be an advanced civilization. This acknowledgement indicated that there should not be differences or distinctions in Sino-Western relations.<sup>36</sup>

When it came to trade, there were more advantageous stipulations for France than for other Western powers. For example, Article 2 specified that in the event of an incident of smuggling or bargaining in unopened ports, the punishment would be confiscation of the offending cargo followed

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34 J. M. Callery, *Correspondence Diplomatique Chinoise: Relative aux Négociations du Traité de Whampoa Conclu entre la France et la Chine le 24 Octobre 1844* (Paris, 1879); see Zhang Jianhua, “Zhong Fa ‘huangpotiaoyue’ jiaoshe—yi Lagrenéyu Qi Ying zhijian de laiwangzhaohuihanjianweizhongxin” [The Sino-French Negotiation of the Whampoa Treaty – Focusing on the Note Documents between Qi Ying and Lagrené], *Lishiyanjiu* 2 (2001): 86.

35 “M. de Lagrené à M. Guizon, Macao, 29 octobre 1844,” *Archives de Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 6: 289. Regarding the appellation of France’s King, see Tiewa Wang, ed., *The Compilation of the Old Sino-Foreign Regulations* (Beijing: Shanglian Shudian, 1957), 58.

36 “M. de Lagrené à M. Guizon, Macao, 29 octobre 1844,” *Archives de Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 6: 261–79.

by a note to the relevant consul. By contrast, it was expressly stipulated in the Sino-British and Sino-American treaties that these crimes would be punished by the confiscation of the offending ships, a far costlier deterrent. Later, Article 6 stated that the Chinese government could not add any injunction on different varieties of cargo in its tariff regulations. Article 35 postulated that only France was authorized to request revisions to the treaty after twelve years and explicitly specified that China could not impose duty on French goods on behalf of other third-party countries. Moreover, China would reduce its clove, liquor, and tobacco customs duties to the benefit of French exporters.<sup>37</sup>

China made a reasonable explanation for its concerns on consular jurisdiction and warship anchorage that were meant to address France's needs. Article 23 stipulated that Frenchmen arrested for illegal penetration of China's interior would be transferred to the nearest consulate, but they should not be physically mistreated or harmed by the Chinese authorities. This treaty granted even further privileges in the realm of cultural promotion, which was arguably the one sphere where France could reasonably be expected to outperform the British and Americans. In Article 22, China conceded the right of foreigners in the treaty ports to establish schools and asylums. The former would be key to promoting the French language and by extension cultivate Francophile elements within China. Article 24 permitted foreigners at the treaty ports to hire teachers, buy and sell books, and engage in scientific and literary work.<sup>38</sup> In its entirety, the Huangpu Treaty was not only the first Sino-French treaty but also the most comprehensive of the first batch of unequal treaties China signed with the Western powers. It seemed that arriving late had produced certain advantages for France.

Lagrené also deliberately planned to expand the French missionary presence in China as a means of countering France's inferior economic and military position compared to Britain. On November 1, 1844, Lagrené explicitly pointed out in a report to French Minister of Foreign Affairs Guizot that "in the commercial trade aspect, the British and Americans left nothing for us to do; but in the spiritual culture aspect, I thought it was time for France and the French government to take action by turns."<sup>39</sup> In his earlier correspondence in October, Lagrené explained to Qi Ying that it would be difficult for France, a civilized country with cultivated tastes and little

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37 Ibid., 280–316.

38 Lavollée, *France et Chine*, 132–33.

39 "M. de Lagrené à M. Guizot, Macao, 1er novembre 1844," *Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Mémoires et documents, Chine* 6: 317–63.

interest in the commercial aspects of the treaty, to be convinced of China's friendship so long as the religion professed by Frenchman was proscribed as a criminal offense in China.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Lagrené and Callery tempted Governor Huang Entong to persuade the Qing government to permit the free exercise of Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Still, Qi Ying sent a confidential report on the negotiations to Beijing outlining his belief that China's legalization of Christianity would not guarantee any assistance in the form of a French alliance.<sup>42</sup>

Surprisingly though, imperial approval was accorded on December 28 to the effect that the Chinese accepted the religion of the Lord of Heaven for good purposes and that it would thereafter be exempt from legal culpability. Lagrené was still not satisfied with this measure because the edict did not overrule previous anti-Christian laws and had merely suspended their application on the grounds that Christianity was now judged to be a moral religion. The reply from the Chinese representative indicated that he dared not antagonize the Beijing mandarins by again raising the subject of religious toleration.<sup>43</sup> Undeterred, Lagrené negotiated with Qi Ying once again in August 1845 on religious issues and proposed new demands after obtaining the French government's support. These included having China separate Christianity from other religions that did harm under the pretext of missionizing, having local officials post notice of the Emperor's edict to make it widely known, releasing Christians that were in custody, and granting permission from the government to permit Chinese Christians to build churches. Under pressure from Lagrené, the Qing government conceded to all of these demands except the third. Later in October 1845, Emperor Daoguang issued the second sacred edict which announced that Christians were permitted to build churches and consecrate the cross. Every one of Lagrené's demands had been met.

And still Lagrené pressed for more. There was great tension in Sino-British relations in December following the withdrawal of British forces from the island city Zhoushan and their redeployment to the mainland port at Guangzhou, giving Lagrené a golden opportunity to exact further concessions from Qi Ying.<sup>44</sup> As a competent diplomat, he chose to take advantage of the situation by adding new requirements. It had already been agreed that the

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40 Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 50.

41 Wei, *France's Missionary Policy towards China*, 340–561.

42 Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 55.

43 *Ibid.*, 56–60.

44 Regarding the Zhoushan Island evacuation and French attitude on this affair, please refer to Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 65–68.

Sino-French Treaty would include a supplementary sacred edict to be issued explaining the toleration policy and to be distributed to local officials in every province. Lagrené pressed further; he now requested that any old church buildings dating from Kangxi's time, if still standing and not otherwise in use, be restored to Christian ownership. Obtaining Beijing's approval of an edict like this was far from easy. When persuasion failed, Qi Ying finally told the Emperor bluntly that the new French demands, coupled with the appearance of a greatly augmented French fleet, were an ominous threat to China that signaled treacherous designs. French war vessels had been brought to China at great cost to support Lagrené's demands and China could not afford to sacrifice the friendship of France in the face of British hostility.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the Emperor Daoguang bowed to French pressure and issued the third sacred edict to ratify these demands in February 1846.<sup>46</sup>

In summary, the visit of the Lagrené Mission and the ratification of the Sino-French Huangpu Treaty signified that France's policy towards China had shifted from its 'wait-and-see' attitude to an active scramble for influence and concessions in line with that of other Western powers. French negotiators had not only won the same privileges as the British and Americans, but they also secured protection for Christians and firmly established France's position and influence in China.

### **French China Policy under Napoleon III**

France originally intended to extend Christian influence in China rather than pursue commercial opportunities and additional territory. Accordingly, over the following half decade after the completion of the Lagrené Mission, French activities in the Far East were very heavily associated with an aggressive surge of the Catholic missionary movement and with naval and other measures taken to support it. France was, by contrast, extremely cautious in terms of geopolitical matters, and its commercial interests were almost nonexistent, particularly when compared to those of Britain.<sup>47</sup>

The appearance of a relatively low level of interest in the region concealed the fact that France was waiting for a fortuitous opportunity before dispatching a powerful fleet to the Far East once again. This shrewd approach was rooted in an understanding that the status quo was unlikely

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45 Ibid., 62–64.

46 *Qing Dai Chouban Yiwu Shimo: Daoguang Chao*, Vol. 75, 2936, 2964.

47 Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 70.

to last given China's deep dissatisfaction with the humiliating concessions it had to make at the end of its war with Britain along with London's appetite and willingness to take advantage of Chinese weakness to press for more gains. The moment Paris had been waiting for came with the outbreak of the Arrow War, also known as the Second Opium War, which was the byproduct of France's aggressive intent.<sup>48</sup> In February 1856, the news of Father Auguste Chapdelaine's death was destined to become a pretext for the French government to initiate a war with China.

The French thought that the "Father Chapdelaine Incident" was a tangible and flagrant challenge to French political prestige as well as an attack on the missionary cause. Father Chapdelaine was the first representative of the Missions Etrangères in China since 1815 to suffer death by order of a Chinese magistrate. In 1852, he had left France to join the Christian mission in the Guangxi province, then relocated to nearby Guangzhou for a brief spell before settling in Guiyang, the capital of the Guizhou province, in the spring of 1854. In December of that year, he travelled to Yaoshan village in Guangxi's Xilin County with Lu Tingmei to meet with the local Christian community of around 300 people. This was a relatively remote interior settlement where Chinese had made little contact with outsiders, much less Europeans. Father Chapdelaine celebrated his first mass in the community on December 8, 1854, but was arrested by the local authorities on trumped up charges and thrown into the Xilin county prison ten days after his arrival. He was released after a hearing, but this was not the end of his trouble with the law in the Xilin County. On February 22, 1856, he was again denounced on charges of dividing families and causing a public disturbance by those who resisted his missionary activities and the challenge they posed to traditional Chinese beliefs. On February 25, he was arrested once again in Yaoshan, with several Chinese Christians by orders of Zhang Mingfeng, the new local mandarin. Zhang handled the issue terribly; under his command, Chapdelaine was severely beaten and locked into a small iron cage, which was hung at the gate of the jail as though he were a medieval thief. He was already dead when Zhang had him beheaded for good measure on February 29, 1856.

Father Chapdelaine's tragic death could well have been a minor incident had France genuinely been interested in a productive relationship of

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48 Research on France's role in the origins of the Second Opium War is still thin. Although almost all scholars in China note that the death of Father Chapdelaine was a pretext for the French war with China, they seldom elaborate further.



equals with China, which had after all already freely conceded to virtually all previous requests from Paris. So why then did it balloon into an international crisis, and what were France's true motives?

The peculiarities of French domestic politics provide a major explanation for Paris's decision to go to war. Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (Napoleon III) had been assiduously courting Catholic support as part of his preparations for his successful coup d'état on December 2, 1851. This directly brought religious interests to the heart of French overseas policy and contributed to an aggressive posture in the Far East, which, as outlined earlier, was of a region of high priority to missionaries.

During the presidential election in 1848, Louis-Napoléon had established a political union with the Catholic party in order to bring some conservatives into a coalition with his primary supporters amongst the poor and the left. To satisfy the demands presented by Comte Charles Forbes René de Montalembert, the leader of the Catholic party, Louis-Napoléon issued a manifesto on November 27, 1848, acclaiming religion, family, and property as the basis of society and pledged his support for freedom of worship and liberty of instruction and for the restoration of papal authority in Rome.<sup>49</sup> As a result, Louis-Napoléon got his share of the religious vote without shedding support from his base on the left-leaning end of the political spectrum. After his electoral triumph, Louis-Napoléon moved to bind the Church closely to his cause and took a series of actions to enhance the Catholic Church's political position in France, such as appointing Alfred de Falloux as the new education minister and dispatching an army to Rome in 1849 to restore Pius IX as the head of the papal state.

Clerical backing was a crucial element in obtaining popular acquiescence in Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état of December 1851 that transformed him from a president to an emperor.<sup>50</sup> The Catholic party not only voted for Louis-Napoléon but also persuaded farmers and other social strata to support his election. Thereafter, the symbiotic relationship between Napoleon III and the Catholic party deepened. Therefore, when the news of Father Chapdelaine's death made its way to Paris, Napoleon III saw a rare opportunity to please the domestic Catholic party through a bold foreign policy that delivered revenge. He soon began raving about the prospect of sending forces to China to demand payment on the blood debt for the dead

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49 Cady, *The Roots of French Imperialism in Eastern Asia*, 89–90.

50 *Ibid.*, 90–91.

missionary.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, Napoleon III also considered using Chapdelaine's death as a tool to enhance his domestic reputation, national glory, and prestige of the dynasty, which was consistent with his actions after entering the political stage. He stoked nationalism through a series of aggressive wars closer to home in the 1850s and 1860s. In Africa, France conquered Algeria and established a Senegalese colony; in North America, France dispatched troops to Mexico in support of Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria's claim to the throne (a terrible miscalculation in hindsight); in Asia, France seized Cochin China and brought Cambodia under its protection; in the Near East, France joined the Crimean War against Russia and took on a leading role in the Middle and Near East together with Britain; while in Europe, Napoleon III personally commanded troops against Austria in Italy. Participating in the invasion of China during the Arrow War was consistent with France's aggressive foreign policy of the era.

Certainly, the capture of overseas markets and raw materials for French industry was a great motivating factor behind Napoleon III's decision to deploy his expeditionary force to China. France's economy could not compare with Britain's, but the gross value of its industrial output nearly doubled from the 1830s to the 1840s. Also, the country had basically completed its own Industrial Revolution during the Second Empire. As an active participant in the forcible opening of the Chinese market, France saw great benefits for the continued development of its domestic economy. These factors led France to support British and American demands for treaty revisions with China during the 1850s, with the anticipation that this would further weaken Beijing. The French government concluded that France's economy would grow even more quickly if France's commercial trade could expand to all coastal areas of China rather than being limited to the five treaty ports.<sup>52</sup> At the end of 1856, France's Foreign Minister Alexandre Florian Joseph Walewski instructed M. Alphonse de Bourboulon, the French ambassador to China, that France's activities in China should not only be based on their "own dignity" but also on the needs of "commercial interests." He further requested that Bourboulon use his influence to spread French commercial trade further inland.<sup>53</sup> In May 1857, after making the official decision to send an expedition to China, the French government emphasized

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51 Ge Fuping, "Faguoyu di er ci yapianzhanzheng [France and the Second Opium War]," *Jindaishiyanjiu* 1 (1997): 98.

52 Cordier, *L'Expédition de Chine de 1857-58*, 8-10.

53 *Ibid.*, 96-101.

in a letter to plenary power envoy Baron Gros that the goal of treaty revisions with China was to “make our merchants navigate along China’s rivers and freely pass in and out all harbours.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, it can be seen that France joined the Arrow War not only for “France’s honor” or “pure religious benefit” but mainly for substantial commercial interests that had hitherto been absent from calculations of France’s China policy.

Moreover, French participation in the Arrow War should be understood in respect to the European situation of the period, especially the obligations of the Anglo-French alliance. France, long feared by its neighbors because of its hegemonic ambitions in Europe, wanted to break out of its international isolation and had been making a concerted effort to coordinate its foreign policy with London. Anglo-French cooperation first manifested itself in a shared, favorable position towards Belgian independence from the Netherlands in 1831 and 1832. Then in 1834, France officially allied itself with Britain, Spain, and Portugal. While suspicions between historic enemies France and Britain remained on both sides, collaboration continued unimpeded in war and peace. Just prior to the Arrow War, Britain and France triumphed over Russia in the Crimea War, which was the high-water mark in Anglo-French cooperation in the nineteenth century. Across the continent in Asia, France had located its main forces in Annam (northern Vietnam), but these were still insufficient to carry off a major military action in China alone. Most of the officers in the Foreign Affairs Ministry and Army Department believed that allying with Britain against Beijing was a golden opportunity to expand France’s influence in China and gain wealth in East Asia.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, French participation in the Arrow War was also the inevitable result of France’s policy towards China after the First Opium War. The Huangpu Treaty had made France one of the great powers in the Far East by granting France the same political and commercial privileges as Britain and the United States. From this turning point, France swiftly modified its formerly hesitant approach and began actively cooperating with Britain to intimidate China into making further concessions. In January 1847, France cancelled its consulates in Manila and Guangzhou and separately established an embassy and consulate in Macau and Shanghai respectively. In 1849, following Britain’s lead, France also obtained a concession area in Shanghai. Then in 1851, the French government appointed Alphonse de Bourboulon as ambassador to China to cooperate with British and American representatives

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54 Ibid., 145–51.

55 Ge, “Faguoyu di er ci yapianzhanzheng,” 100.

on forcing the Qing government to revise old treaties and protect missionary activity in China.<sup>56</sup> In 1856, when Britain suggested that France join it in combined action in China, the French government immediately consented. That December, the French government instructed Bourboulon that it had already consulted with Britain and the United States on its policy towards China and had decided to gather the requisite battleships along the Chinese coast to ensure that it had enough power to influence negotiations from the very beginning of hostilities.<sup>57</sup>

## Conclusion

France's conduct in China was based on nothing more than pure national interest, and it was unrealistic of the Chinese to expect French assistance against Britain without any tangible benefits for Paris that would mitigate the risk of antagonizing its powerful neighbor. That said, given France's long-standing rivalry with Britain, it was unfathomable to expect the country to stand back and allow London to secure a significant economic and military advantage in the Far East. In fact, if France had enjoyed Britain's resources, it too almost certainly would have pursued an aggressive, predatory policy in China much earlier than it did. Its relative limitations dictated a policy of caution and opportunism. China was willing to grant France many privileges, but the temptation to secure a better deal at gun point was too difficult for Paris to resist. In the end, China was vulnerable, and France manipulated it masterfully to its advantage.

France's resources in the Far East—be they military, religious, cultural, or economic—were never sufficient for Paris to establish the sort of colonial control in China that it had with such success in the Americas and Africa. By the early nineteenth century, France was active in China to a certain extent, but its limited trade and a relatively small number of Catholic missionaries meant that it played a much smaller role in the country than Britain and perhaps even the United States. France's empire had become terribly overextended by the reign of Napoleon III, who should have been more focused on continental affairs than imperial expansion with the great German threat looming, yet a deep desire remained to establish France as an East Asian power to be reckoned with. This could not have happened

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<sup>56</sup> Wei, *France's Missionary Policy towards China*, 638.

<sup>57</sup> Cordier, *L'Expédition de Chine de 1857-58*, 96-100.

without the opportunity provided by the British, who were determined to break down all barriers to the Middle Kingdom and graciously invited other European imperial powers to join in their scramble to pick over the bones of the Qing Dynasty, coupled with cunning diplomacy.

France at no point during the pre-Arrow War period had a genuine interest in allying with China and astutely played Sino-British tensions in the 1840s and 1850s to win maximum cultural and commercial advantage at minimal cost. Shrewd, boundary-pushing diplomats such as Jancigny, Cécille, and Lagrené feigned sympathy towards China in conversations with the Qing dynasty's emissaries, who came away with the impression that France might well offer some degree of support in a future Sino-British conflict. These diplomats played their role in concealing the true nature of the French threat to China, giving Paris time to prepare for a military intervention on favorable terms. Meanwhile, Napoleon III imposed upon France his daring foreign policy vision of war and imperial expansion as a means of shoring up legitimacy for his regime. When it came to China, he wed aggression with patience, cautiously building up French military strength in the Far East, coordinating policy with London, and waiting for a pretext to act. This process culminated in the murder of Father Chapdelaine and the war Napoleon III launched in conjunction with Britain to avenge him. The Treaty of Tianjin that concluded the fighting opened even more ports to France and international trade, removed travel barriers for foreigners in China's interior, opened the Yangtze to foreign shipping, and allowed for the establishment of foreign legations in Peking. Napoleon III had won a stunning military victory on the far side of the world, while French missionaries and traders had unfettered access to a huge new market of potential souls and customers. For France, this was the culmination of a game well played.

China, by contrast, was naïve to assume that France would behave any less rapaciously than the other Western powers that had so rudely announced their presence in the Far East, but it cannot exactly be faulted for holding on to the faint hope of French cooperation against Britain given its ignorance of European great power politics and lack of other cards to play. In summary, France's policy towards China during the period from the Sino-British Opium War to the Arrow War underwent a significant transformation. It shifted from a limited emphasis on missionary activities to the voracious pursuit of commercial interests that fit with an era that saw the high-water mark for European colonial empires. France shifted to a more active policy in China when it enjoyed peace on the home front and could divert more resources to the Far East. Over time, France abandoned its bystander role to

become an imperialist power with direct interests in China. This foreseeable perfidy meant that France, despite pretenses to culture and high civilization that had strong echoes in the Middle Kingdom, would be lumped in with the rest of the villains during China's century of humiliation.