

Distortion of China's past threatens reformers today

by Michael O. Billington

Dragon Lady, The Life and Legend of the Last Empress of China

by Sterling Seagrave

Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1992

601, hardbound, \$30

The Immobile Empire

by Alain Peyrefitte

Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1992

624, hardbound, \$30

These two popular histories are not particularly worth reading, but are interesting due to the political significance of their publication at this time. Alain Peyrefitte, a Frenchman, and Sterling Seagrave, an American, are both devoted Anglophiles, who believe that Britain attempted out of goodwill and charity to save China from its own self-destruction. *The Immobile Empire* by Peyrefitte is a detailed documentation of the British effort in 1793 to convince the Ch'ing (Manchu) Dynasty to extend full diplomatic and trading rights to the British opium dealers. *Dragon Lady* by Seagrave covers the last half-century of the Ch'ing, following the 1840-60 Opium Wars, in which the British won by force what they had been refused diplomatically. With the current decrepit Chinese Communist Party (CPC) regime threatened with internal convulsions which could end the Maoist dynasty forever, there is a clear intent in these books, only partially stated, to draw a parallel between the CPC and the degenerate last years of

the Ch'ing Dynasty, arguing that the dynasty, and China in general, would have survived if they had accepted British tutelage earlier and more completely—and by implication, that China must now accept the tutelage of the Anglo-American bankers and the International Monetary Fund.

The Enlightenment goes to China

The Immobile Empire is, nonetheless, quite readable. It provides a fascinating view of 18th-century China (and of British perfidy) through the eyes of those who journeyed to Peking on the failed "MacCartney Mission" of 1793, drawing on numerous previously unpublished diaries and reports from the mission. Peyrefitte personally identifies with Lord MacCartney, a rising star in the imperial order who had been tutored by, among others, Rousseau and Voltaire. Peyrefitte says: "This was the century of Enlightenment, and MacCartney was absorbing its photons at the very source." Also on the trip was Sir Thomas Staunton, whose 12-year-old son, Thomas, Jr., learned Chinese on the voyage and served as interpreter. Young Thomas was to go on to become the senior official of the British East India Company, as well as, nearly 50 years after his first visit to China, the leading spokesman for the policy of militarily crushing China's resistance to British opium sales, precipitating the first Opium War in 1840.

Despite Peyrefitte's praise for MacCartney and Staunton (they were men of "deep-seated humanism," *ad nauseam*), the true intentions of the mission are clearly demonstrated in the journals he quotes at length. China was to be subjugated as India was, either by threat or by force, with opium as the primary weapon. Throughout his journals MacCartney profiles the weakness of the Chinese defenses and proposes military operations if the emperor were to reject Britain's

demands: "If the Court of Peking is not really sincere, can they possibly expect to feed us long with promises? Can they be ignorant that a couple of English frigates . . . in half a summer could totally destroy all the navigation of their coasts and reduce the inhabitants of the maritime provinces . . . to absolute famine?"

MacCartney speculated that such an operation should be coupled with: 1) encouragement to Korea and Formosa to seek independence; 2) the use of India as a "base from which to foment trouble in Tibet"; and 3) the use of force to seize Macao from the Portuguese or seize another area as a British base of operations assuring British control of trade and political dominance over a divided China. He also provided intelligence reports on "certain mysterious societies in every province who are known to be disaffected," which he proposed could be used to British advantage against Peking. Sixty years later the British sponsored just such a revolt, the Taiping Rebellion, which, together with direct British military operations, subjugated China to British rule, while wasting 50 million Chinese lives.

The British policy of destroying the political and physical economies of subject nations in order to control them could not be more clearly expressed than this entry in MacCartney's journal: "Breaking up the power of China . . . would occasion a complete subversion of the commerce, not only of Asia, but a very sensible change in the other quarters of the world. The industry and ingenuity of the Chinese would be checked and enfeebled, but they would not be annihilated. Her ports could no longer be barricaded. . . . For some time there would be much rivalry and disorder. Nevertheless, as Great Britain, from the weight of her riches and the genius and spirit of her people, is become the first political, marine, and commercial power on the globe, it is reasonable to think that she would prove the greatest gainer by such a revolution as I have alluded to, and rise superior over every competitor."

Author Peyrefitte's personal view of the Chinese is perhaps even more degraded than was MacCartney's, which helps to explain how this former French minister (including the National Education in 1968 and Justice portfolios in 1977-81), career diplomat, and historian could so totally embrace the overtly evil British imperial policy. Referring to the treaties which were imposed after the Opium Wars (which included the right to sell opium throughout China; which set indemnities for the Chinese to pay for the costs of British military operations, as well as the lost income from confiscated opium; and which seized territory and gave the British immunity from Chinese laws), Peyrefitte says: "The treaties replaced the inequality of forces with the last rule of law halting the destructive logic of unequal combat in favor of the peaceful logic of relations between equals. . . . [The treaties] overturned their entire view of life, imposing rationality upon them and wrenching them away from magical thought."

Peyrefitte reveals the source of this distorted view of

reality by referencing his own adherence to the perverted psychiatric doctrines of Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm. Based on these Frankfurt School ideologues, he suggests that the Chinese use of human excrement for fertilizer has caused the permanent insanity of the Chinese!

He asks rhetorically: "Has the virtually religious use of excrement, gathered as precious instead of rejected and shameful, century after century, damaged the psyche of the Chinese to the point of perpetuating inhibiting neurosis?"

Peyrefitte is a longstanding China hand, who reports that in 1971 he "led the first official western mission granted to the People's Republic since the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution." Throughout the book he repeatedly emphasizes what he perceives to be "the strange similarities between the Maoist state and the one MacCartney had confronted." Each time one of MacCartney's entourage reports on some aspect of Chinese culture or practice which is considered to be primitive, Peyrefitte tacks on the comment that this is the way things still are in China today. He would appear to believe that he is a modern-day MacCartney, bringing the truth to China, which Chinese can ignore at their peril.

A defense of British imperialism

Dragon Lady also contains a fair amount of detailed research, especially on the Boxer War of 1900. But it is too infested with Seagrave's prejudices and cynical style to be of any value. His use of hyperbole and sarcastic characterizations to convey his political invective toward the Chinese is enough to repel any but the most amoral yuppie. His previous "bestseller," *The Soong Dynasty*, was a fantastical portrait of Chiang Kai-shek as a totally corrupt, sexually depraved, drug-running oppressor of China, and was completely devoid of any analysis of Chiang's economic, social, or political policies, in favor of treating rumor and gossip as "known facts." *The Dragon Lady* follows the same tradition.

The theme of the book is a retelling of the famous case of Sir Edmund Backhouse, the homosexual, self-made China scholar whose 1910 pornographic biography of the recently deceased Tzu Hsi, the Dowager Empress of China for 48 years, was exposed in 1976 by British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper as a fraud. Backhouse had also been the source of the London *Times* reports following the Boxer fiasco in 1900 that Tzu Hsi was the demonic, murderous, sexually perverse power responsible for all evil in China. Seagrave claims to be lending support to Trevor-Roper's exposé through further research. But what emerges is a glib account of developments in the essentially colorized nation of China after the Opium Wars, portraying the British "governor-general" Robert Hart (who ran China's economy on behalf of the City of London and the Hong Kong and Shanghai opium cartels) as the only sincere, well-meaning character in all of China—Chinese or foreign. Much of the book comes directly from Hart's memoirs. Only those in the court who totally supported Hart and British rule generally are portrayed as "reasonable."

The primary target of Seagrave's attack is the "Ironhats." (Seagrave has a gimmick of finding—or inventing—nicknames for his enemies which convey his intended characterizations, and then referring to them by these labels exclusively.) This referred to the faction in the court and the military that wanted to resist the escalating foreign control over China. While it is true that some in this faction sponsored or tolerated the emergence of anti-foreign populism and the anti-Christian hysteria (which brought carnage to both foreign and Chinese Christians during the Boxer outbreak), there is *no* effort to probe the alternatives to Robert Hart's reign of "beneficent" looting of China. In Seagrave's story, these "Ironhats" are the monsters who did all the ill deeds falsely blamed on the rather innocent and naive Empress Dowager.

Unlike Peyrefitte, Seagrave does not constantly add, "It's the same still today." But his hatred toward the policy of China's republicans, as expressed in his previous venom against Chiang Kai-shek, makes one assume that his message is that today's Emperor Deng Xiaoping, as well as any reformers who may replace his tottering regime, would be well advised to follow the dictates of Robert Hart's descendants at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), who are picking China clean today in the tradition of their 19th-century mentor.

Kang Hsi

In view of the malicious intent of both these books, it is tempting to take the defense of the authors' targets, Ch'ing Emperor Chien Lung in the 1790s and the so-called Ironhats a century later. However, it is true that the Ch'ing Dynasty was in the process of decay when the British arrived in the late 18th-century, and, after another century of British genocide and barbarism, the regime was even more rotten. But both authors relinquish their right to complain against these regimes by lying about the cause of that degeneracy—the sabotage (primarily by Enlightenment forces in the West) of the nearly successful alliance between the Christian missionaries of the 17th century and the China of Chien Lung's grandfather, Emperor Kang Hsi. This alliance had been based on the recognition by the missionaries that Confucianism constituted a moral tradition which was coherent with Christianity, together with the open embrace by Kang Hsi of the scientific and moral teachings of the Christian Renaissance.

Our two authors not only ignore this great historical development, but also turn it on its head. Seagrave denounces the early Ch'ing leaders, including Kang Hsi, as "gypsies" who ran China with a "reign of terror that never ended." In typical Seagrave verbosity and glib misrepresentation, he writes: "In these borrowed palaces the Manchu had gorged, splurged, and squandered until—sometime during the last years of the prodigal Emperor Chien Lung—it was all gone except the hangover."

Peyrefitte compares the entire Ch'ing Dynasty to the Maoist period, only with "Mao Zedong Thought standing in for Confucius Thought, the Little Red Book for Kang Hsi's Sacred Edit." He accused the Jesuit missionaries and Leibniz, who conveyed to all of Europe the extraordinary developments in China in the 17th century, of outright lies, aimed only at ingratiating themselves with the Chinese rulers. MacCartney's team, he claimed, "set about to destroy this myth irrevocably, denouncing the writings of the Catholic missionaries as pure fabrication. Instead they came to believe that the supposedly incomparable model was in fact fossilized by ritual and steeped in vanity." Showing his "free trade" proclivities, Peyrefitte complains that "Confucius never read Adam Smith."

A. Hammer: 'agent vliyana' for Trust's new world order

by Denise M. Henderson

The Dark Side of Power: The Real Armand Hammer

by Carl Blumay with Henry Edwards
Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992
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At the end of *The Dark Side of Power* co-authors Carl Blumay and Henry Edwards write that Armand Hammer "had spent a lifetime creating himself and he was, indeed, a unique creation. . . . He chose to act the part of a great man. And when his performance came to an end, the only thing he left behind was an empty stage."

Although I would have to agree that Hammer was not a great man in the sense of a Leonardo da Vinci (whose works he collected) or an Abraham Lincoln, it is absolutely the case that Hammer was not "acting," i.e., was not merely the creation of his public relations man, Carl Blumay, who worked under Hammer's direction at Occidental Petroleum from 1955 to 1980. And the stage is certainly not "empty." The *tabula rasa* theory of human history—that when we are born, our minds are blank, to be written upon by our five senses and what they perceive and that when we die, it signifies nothing—is simply false; and in the case of Armand Hammer, the stage is strewn with the wreckage—including corpses—created by his activity during his 91 years.