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Author(s): Knight Biggerstaff

Source: *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (May, 1942), pp. 277-279

Published by: Association for Asian Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2049185>

Accessed: 06/07/2010 19:46

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A TRANSLATION OF ANSON BURLINGAME'S  
INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE CHINESE  
FOREIGN OFFICE

KNIGHT BIGGERSTAFF  
*Cornell University*

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DURING the winter of 1867-1868 the Chinese Foreign Office dispatched its first diplomatic mission to the United States and Europe. The stipulated time for treaty revision was drawing near and the Chinese government had reason to expect that the Treaty Powers, under pressure from their merchants doing business in China, would demand a considerable expansion of the privileges which they had forced the Chinese to grant them on previous occasions. Fearful of the internal effects of a great extension of foreign influence and activity, the Foreign Office decided to send a special embassy directly to the governments of the various Treaty Powers to plead for patience and forbearance. It was hoped that the envoys would be able to persuade the Powers that China was already making adjustments to her new international relationships as expeditiously as possible, and that too rapid change, especially if made under external pressure, might produce a reaction which would nullify the gains already achieved.

Lacking experienced diplomats of their own, the Chinese appealed to Anson Burlingame, the retiring American minister to China who had won their confidence and respect, to lead the mission. Associated with him were two Chinese officials, Chih-kang and Sun Chia-ku, and a retinue of advisers, interpreters, and attendants. The mission first visited the United States, where eight supplementary articles to the Chinese-American Treaty of Tientsin were negotiated, after which it proceeded to Europe. Although nothing was accomplished in France, considerable success was achieved in Great Britain and Prussia. The effective work of the mission was brought to an end by the untimely death of Burlingame in Russia on February 23, 1870.<sup>1</sup>

Until about a decade ago, when the Peiping Palace Museum published a comprehensive collection of Chinese documents relating to foreign affairs, it was generally believed that the Chinese government had issued no formal

<sup>1</sup> For detailed studies of the Burlingame Mission, see F. Wells Williams, *Anson Burlingame and the first Chinese mission to foreign powers* (New York, 1912), and Knight Biggerstaff, "The official Chinese attitude toward the Burlingame mission," *The American historical review*, 41 (July, 1936), 682-702.

instructions to Burlingame. F. Wells Williams, the leading authority on the mission, believed that the Foreign Office letter of December 7, 1867 to the American chargé d'affaires in Peking constituted "the sole authorization for action abroad vouchsafed by the Imperial Government to its Embassy."<sup>2</sup> But a set of very specific instructions to Burlingame appears in the collection of Chinese documents mentioned above, under the date of November 26, 1867.<sup>3</sup> These instructions, which were so completely ignored by Burlingame as to create some doubt that he knew of their existence, are translated below.

#### BURLINGAME'S INSTRUCTIONS

1. Now since Your Excellency is very anxious to exert himself on behalf of China, it is necessary in all diplomatic intercourse to see that both China and the foreign Powers benefit and that neither side resorts to compulsion. The ministers of the Foreign Office have long desired to request the appointment of Chinese officials to proceed to the Treaty Powers, but without training and experience it was feared that they would not be at all familiar with foreign manners and customs. Being fully aware of Your Excellency's fairmindedness and even temper, we have memorialized requesting the Emperor to issue a special edict appointing Your Excellency to proceed to the Treaty Powers to deal with matters in exactly the same way as would a Chinese official. But at the same time it is still necessary for China to send her own officials, to consult with Your Excellency, both to expedite matters and to enable Chinese officials to secure thorough training and experience. All details are to be clearly set forth in their presence.

We have now received our Emperor's edict appointing Chinese officials to accompany Your Excellency to the Treaty Powers. According to Chinese usage an official of any rank whatsoever who has received an Imperial order to proceed anywhere is an "Imperially Appointed Official." Since the officials being sent abroad at this time have received a special Imperial order, they must, according to Chinese usage, be on an equal footing both with Your Excellency and with the high officials of the Treaty Powers no matter what their rank.

2. The officials appointed by China to proceed with Your Excellency to the Treaty Powers must of course discuss with Your Excellency the business to be dealt with and the places to be visited. Moreover it is earnestly hoped that Your Excellency will inform the aforementioned officials in detail regarding all business, no matter how great or small, so that it will be entirely clear, enabling them to transmit it to the Foreign Office for approval.

3. It is recorded in Article III of the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Tientsin that "when a diplomatic representative possessing full powers is received in audience by the Emperor of China he shall not perform any ceremony which offends the dignity of his country."<sup>4</sup> When the officials appointed by China at this time reach a Treaty Power it is unnecessary for them to have an interview (with the ruler). But should

<sup>2</sup> Williams, op. cit., pp. 103-104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ch'ou-pan i-wu shih-mo* (Peiping, 1929-1931), T'ung-chih section, Ch. 52, pp. 2b-5a.

<sup>4</sup> The Chinese text of the Treaty of Tientsin differs somewhat from the official English version.

an occasion arise where they meet (a ruler), it is hoped that Your Excellency will make clear that both sides are to avoid acts of formal ceremony, awaiting a future settlement by negotiation of the ceremonial rules which are to be followed (in such a situation).

4. It is recorded in Article IV of the Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Tientsin that "the British plenipotentiary and the officials of his suite may come and go at their pleasure; and the communications which they receive and send and their baggage may not be opened without authority"; also that "they shall be treated with the same courtesy as is customarily accorded by Western Powers to officials of corresponding rank." The Chinese officials appointed at this time must act in accordance with the British treaty, and the Treaty Powers must avoid the least appearance of slighting them. Such arrangements as the preparation of hotel accommodations, the procurement of provisions, and the hiring of conveyances must be delegated to Your Excellency. In all matters not herein fully provided for Your Excellency must rely upon the special guarantees of the treaties. China will itself meet all the expenses of the mission; not one cent is to be asked of foreign countries.

5. When the Imperially appointed officials of China and Your Excellency go to the Treaty Powers, should matters arise which are altogether advantageous to both sides and which may be permissible, Your Excellency and the Chinese officials are expected to reach a decision and to communicate it to the Chinese Foreign Office for possible adoption. In the event that matters of momentous importance arise, Your Excellency and the Imperially appointed officials must draw up a statement of facts to be sent to the Chinese Foreign Office and await its decision.

6. Our Emperor specially bestows upon Your Excellency, acting as a Chinese envoy to the Treaty Powers, an official wooden seal for use in correspondence. The Emperor has already bestowed wooden seals upon the Chinese Imperially appointed officials. This type of seal is to be used exclusively on official dispatches and letters. As to whether matters dealt with must be sanctioned or rejected, Your Excellency and the Imperially appointed officials are to consult with the Foreign Office and await the Foreign Office decision regarding what is to be done, because the Foreign Office seal is the authoritative one.

7. The Imperial appointment of Chinese officials (to go abroad) is an experiment, and definitely does not constitute an appointment of resident envoys to the Treaty Powers. The date of their return shall be at the end of one year, and they shall return to China when that time has elapsed. If after they return a thorough investigation of the experiment shows that it has yielded effective results, the matter of a permanent system will again be considered.

8. When the Imperially appointed officials go to the Treaty Powers at this time they must take with them one or two students of the *T'ung-wen Kuan* who are conversant with European languages to act as interpreters. In addition they should consider taking along several clerks and soldiers for use as attendants. The Powers must extend general protection to these various types of officials in accordance with the treaties.