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Polachek (1991), *The inner Opium War.*

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## Introduction

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This book examines anew a question that has long absorbed the attentions of scholars of the modern period of Chinese history. That is the question of why the experience of decisive military defeat during the Sino-British, or "Opium," war of 1840 did not inspire a major overhaul of China's diplomatic and military posture toward the outside world. In searching for fresh insights into the logic of Chinese conservatism during this first phase of her encounter with nineteenth-century Western sea power, I have singled out for particular attention the decade-and-a-half between 1835 and 1850. This was an interlude that saw the Ch'ing empire struggling for the first time with an agenda of problems created specifically by the buildup of British commercial interests and military capabilities that had taken place in East Asia in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars: problems

such as an expanding illicit trade in opium and silver bullion, the increased vulnerability of China's riverine defenses to Western naval penetration, and the unwillingness of most Chinese officials and scholars to perceive that a strategy of interim accommodation offered China her only chance for avoiding military humiliation. It was also a period marked by the first appearance of that typically late-Ch'ing phenomenon in foreign policy, the oscillation from harsh, xenophobic rigidity, to a collaborationist opportunism, and back again to rigidity—a phenomenon that would later become the despair of China's would-be foreign "protectors" and allies. Taken in combination, these twin features of the "Opium War interlude" (if thus it might be labeled)—the novelty, that is, of the new, "maritime" agenda in foreign relations, and the first anticipation of late-Ch'ing pendular indecisiveness in foreign policy questions—make it a particularly fascinating and fruitful period for anyone interested in reopening the question of imperial China's "non-response" to the nineteenth-century West.

But how is one to study it? And in what particular regards is the approach attempted in this book a new one? In one respect, what the reader will find in the pages that follow will seem not at all new, but rather a throwback of sorts to an older genre of history: the political narrative of Sino-Western diplomatic and military contact. This is, of course, the historiographical format through which China's "opening" used to be studied. I have come back to it in assembling my own insights into the period because we still possess no full English-language account of the 1835–1850 period in its entirety—none, at least, that incorporates the full range of relevant Chinese archives and published sources that have become available to the scholar since the 1950s. An updated narrative reconstruction in the tradition of Morse's, Costin's, Fairbank's, and H. P. Chang's studies of the Opium War period has thus seemed in order, and it is this that I have set out to accomplish.

In terms not of form but of analytical theme, however, I have consciously deviated in this volume from the outlook epitomized in the above-cited works and in other more recent studies dealing with the intellectual and political roots of Chinese conservatism during the later Ch'ing. While most of the above take as their central concern either the curious survival of the "Middle Kingdom" outlook on foreign relations or the distracting effect of the Taiping and ancillary

rebellions on Ch'ing foreign policy during the Opium War interlude, I have chosen quite another focus. In this work I shall be devoting most of my attention to the little-known subject of central-government political dynamics as an influence upon Ch'ing military and diplomatic decision making. More precisely, I shall be concerned with the "court politics" of foreign policy—that is, with the making of key foreign policy decisions by the Ch'ing imperial government, and with the competition to influence these decisions. In particular, I shall argue that the Ch'ing deliberative system was too weighted down by the requirements of consensus, and much too open to interference by political adventurers bent on building up their own personal prestige, to generate effective diplomatic or strategic policies. I shall argue further that the country's rulers developed an acute awareness of this set of problems by the end of the first round of defeats and treaty exactions in 1842, but that, in spite of this perception, they remained unable, in the long run, to correct the weakness they espied, thus giving rise to the "policy oscillation" phenomenon alluded to above. Why this slippage took place—why no major restructuring of central-government political institutions or power relationships proved possible, in spite of the very considerable impetus for change provided by the 1840 war with Great Britain—forms the principal analytical question I shall attempt to answer in this book.

#### OPIUM WAR POLICIES: SOME INTERPRETATIONS

As should be clear from these preliminary remarks, then, this book is both a good deal more and a good deal less than a mere updating of earlier interpretations of Sino-British interaction during the period of the Opium War. Though it retells a well-known story, the events and actors will often be unfamiliar, as will also the approach, which emphasizes the inertia of the central-government political system as the chief obstacle to foreign policy change. One might justifiably ask why I have seen fit to attempt so radically different an interpretation of the causes and consequences of the Opium War. In particular, what are the shortcomings or insufficiencies in the existing literature on Ch'ing policy during this period that have prompted this effort at redefining our views of the problem? To answer, one must begin with the literature itself, within which one finds two somewhat divergent lines of interpretation, the one concentrating

on the persisting influence of imperial Confucianist notions of statecraft, and the other on the displacement or distortion of a “rational” foreign policy as a consequence of the onset of the great wave of mid-century rebellions.

Within the first school, the dominant view remains that of John K. Fairbank, whose writings have relentlessly stressed the paralyzing effect that the “tributary system,” and the “Sinocentric world order” that it expressed, had upon the diplomacy of the late empire. In Fairbank’s view, this system—or, rather, this “ideology”—of foreign relations succeeded, even as late as the 1880s, in blocking Ch’ing perception of a need for competition with the maritime powers. Rather, the latter (and especially the British) were seen as participants *in* that system, aiding the equally foreign Manchu rulers of the Imperium as dependents or subordinates capable of supplying useful services, but in no case being regarded as equals worthy of emulation.<sup>1</sup> From this point of view, the explanation for the marginality of Chinese institutional innovation during and after the Opium War period lies in the tenacious strength and flexibility of the pre-nineteenth-century vision of a Sinocentric world order—a vision that could all too easily absorb the new phenomenon of Western “free-trade” imperialism without sensing in it any ultimate challenge to the political order in China.

Departing slightly (but not entirely) from Fairbank’s argument is a second conceptual-determinist interpretation of Ch’ing nineteenth-century conservatism—albeit one concerned primarily with post-Opium War developments—in which the main issue is taken to be the irreconcilability of traditional Confucian political ideals with the statist or power-oriented spirit of late-nineteenth-century Western statecraft. According to this paradigm, which has found its most skillful articulation in the work of Benjamin Schwartz, the traditional ideals of statecraft and of elite political action dominant in the minds of the scholar-official class before 1895 were biased strongly against the kind of uncompromised glorying in state power that would later come to preoccupy reformist thought in the era of rapid institutional change. In this earlier period, the statist (or state-nationalist) rationale for change was simply not sufficiently developed in the “orthodox” Confucian approach to statecraft to justify any major acts of institutional reform—such as, for example, the abolition of the examination system.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in the realm of economic organization, the traditional Confucian aversion to competition and the deeply

ingrained habit of family loyalty have been seen as too powerful to be cast aside even in the government-controlled “modern” industrial complex that appeared in China in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>3</sup> A radical and uncompromising break with the past was thus required before Chinese political elites would be free to undertake really ambitious structural reforms. And, quite naturally, such a break could not take place either quickly or without major disruptions.

Quite apart from these interpretations, which emphasize the influence of Chinese values and ways of thinking, one finds in two more recent works the basis for a second interpretation of China’s mid-nineteenth-century inertia—an interpretation that might be labeled the domestic-distractions approach. I refer here to Frederic Wakeman, Jr.’s 1966 *Strangers at the Gate*, and to J. Y. Wong’s 1976 administrative biography of Yeh Ming-ch’en, the Liang-Kuang viceroy responsible for provoking the “second” (1856–1860) Opium War. Admittedly, neither of these works is as concerned with Sino-foreign relations as with the social and administrative problems of southeastern China during the Taiping period. But they do bear a message concerning the domestic political origins of Ch’ing official xenophobia, a phenomenon they tie directly to the swiveling of official attention brought about by the advent of the Taipings. Both argue, in effect, that the ultimate consequence of this inward turn was to make otherwise fairly enlightened officials more inflexible and wooden in their response to British pressures than they would otherwise have been. Thus it is to the pressures and distractions of provincial government that we must look to discover the roots of Ch’ing government xenophobia during this period. Ideology seems to count for fairly little. In Wong’s analysis, Viceroy Yeh, a figure usually offered up as exemplary of the spirit of Sinocentric ideological arrogance, becomes merely a harassed administrator, too preoccupied with the day-to-day problems of securing and funding his inland outposts to have time left for soothing British petitioners.

In Wakeman’s study, the effect of these same inland distractions becomes somewhat more complex, and their result a more clearly irrational style of diplomacy, but it is still in them that we find the explanations for Ch’ing negotiative behavior. As Wakeman reconstructs the political situation in Kwangtung during the decade-and-a-half after the Treaty of Nanking (1842), it is the local scholar-gentry, rather than the officials, who were the really important actors. Well-

armed but distinctly xenophobic, these tough-minded notables of the Canton hinterlands became, thanks to the near collapse of local order, the real arbiters of what could and could not be done in treaty dealings with the British. Try as they might, pragmatic conciliators like Ch'i-ying could not—and demagogues like Viceroy Yeh would not—enforce the new treaties; to do so was to write off virtually the only ally the government possessed as it struggled to suppress Taiping-inspired secret societies in the Pearl River delta. In the end, therefore, we find Viceroy Yeh not only sounding like a local gentryman in his vehement anti-foreignism, but apparently even believing his own claims—to disastrous result. This is perhaps further than Wong would be willing to go, but here too we see the needs of local control setting the tone of Ch'ing diplomacy, pushing it in a direction it might not have taken had there been no rebellion to worry about.

Though perhaps incomplete in some regards, the above seems to me to summarize the major explanatory themes that have been sounded, and still resound, on the subject of official anti-foreignism in nineteenth-century China. How well will they hold up as guides to the events of the period with which we are concerned in this book? That will depend in part on one's assumptions about where the really important decisions were made within the Ch'ing system—locally, or in Peking; and, even more, on how much influence and unity of outlook one is inclined to attribute to late imperial Confucianism. Supposing, however, that one makes no assumptions either way, it should be clear that much about the nature of early-nineteenth-century Ch'ing foreign policy conservatism still needs explanation.

Consider, for example, some of the possibilities that come to mind once we stop assuming that Ch'ing foreign policy behavior flowed inevitably from a fixed domestic ideological consensus. Was it necessarily true, then, that the Ch'ing could not embrace reform or collaboration with certain Western powers unless the majority of the traditional scholar class were first won over to a more positive view of the West itself? Did the Confucian utopianism of the traditional intelligentsia have to be replaced by a foreign-inspired one before significant institutional changes could occur, or before China could modify its mode of interaction with the outside world? In positing the need for this kind of massive intellectual readjustment, have we not wrongly dismissed the possibility that change could—indeed, logically ought—to have come through bureaucratic action undertaken

in an elitist and pragmatic, rather than a utopian, spirit? After all, as the early Meiji foreign policy revolution reminds us, a practical interest in the centralization of power and in the enhancing of political unity could have supplied the inspiration for a program of change in China equally as well as the more utopian constructs that would later dominate the reformist thought of the late Ch'ing and early Republican periods. What if the early years of treaty diplomacy did in fact bring to the fore a nucleus of power-seeking court reformists of just such predisposition (a proposition I shall try to substantiate later in this volume), but they failed? Need we assume that this failure was guaranteed by the hostile ideological milieu in which they had to operate? Or might it have been unforeseen political difficulties that wrecked their efforts?

Our list of possible rejoinders to the “pull-of-tradition” interpretation of Opium War era Ch'ing diplomacy does not stop here, however. To it, I would add another more specific one, concerning the question of whether the Sinocentric or tribute-system ideology of Sino-foreign relations was really so deeply engraved into the mindset of the Ch'ing political elite as we have assumed? Was this really the only conceivable choice, or were there not alternative visions of China's global role, based squarely in China's earlier historical experiences, to which early-nineteenth-century Ch'ing emperors or their advisers could have turned *had they the will to launch out in new directions?* In a suggestive article on this general topic, Michael Hunt reminds us that the international Machiavellianism of the Warring States period and the expansionist cosmopolitanism of the early T'ang empire constituted just such ready-to-hand alternatives, and were consciously employed as such by late Ch'ing official reformers. Indirectly confirming Hunt's suggestion of an indeterminate, plural tradition, John Wills has recently proposed that early Ch'ing management of Sino-foreign relations, quite in contrast to its better known late Ch'ing mutation, partook very little of the tribute system ideology that had dominated Ming diplomacy.<sup>4</sup> None of this is to deny, of course, that the pompous “Celestialism” of the late Ch'ing court posed a very real problem for those who would have brought China more speedily into the modern world. But it will serve to remind us that there was an element of choice in insisting on this particular posture, and thus raise the question of why that choice was made—a question that cannot (save tautologically) be answered on grounds of ideology alone.

Thus far we have been concerned with the limitations of an ideological approach to the problem of Ch'ing foreign policy in our period. Equally forceful objections can also be raised, however, to the local-history or domestic-distractions approach, provided one is willing to question the idea that it was the provincial authorities rather than court leaders who held the key to Ch'ing diplomacy in the early days of the treaty system. For the pre-Taiping decades, at least, that assumption demands to be questioned—particularly when the province under scrutiny is one as geographically remote from the centers of Ch'ing imperial power as was Kwangtung.

But why so? For one thing, the regional center of gravity of the Ch'ing imperial system was not in the southeast. It lay, rather, in north and east-central China, two macroregions whose social structures and communications were a good deal more vulnerable to intimidation from the sea than were those of Kwangtung. The "center," therefore, ought logically to have been quite suspicious of intelligence and policy suggestions sent up from Canton, and to have reserved for itself the privilege of responding to the same diplomatic or military issues in ways very different from those advocated by the Liang-Kuang viceroy. This, in fact, is precisely what happened during the Opium War itself, as we shall see in chapter 4. And it comes near to being a description of what would occur again in 1857–1858, during the early days of the second "Opium" war, when Peking simultaneously nurtured defiance in the hinterlands of Canton while agreeing to major treaty concessions in the Yangtze and in foreign rights of access to the capital. A Kwangtung-based, or "local-history," interpretation of early treaty-period anti-foreignism thus seems quite insufficient to explain why Ch'ing diplomacy as a whole moved in the directions it did.

But even if the rebellion-fearing imperial agents in Canton did eventually help push Ch'ing policy in a populist or xenophobic direction, how far back in time can we rightfully project this pattern? One must not forget, after all, that Ch'ing authority in the south did not really begin to crumble until after 1850, more than sixteen years after Sino-British relations had become highly tense over opium and free-trade issues. During the initial years of the Opium War interlude, at least, the authorities in Kwangtung and Peking would have been reaching decisions on foreign policy with no such domestic anxieties to distort their judgment or distract their attention. If there are over-

tones of unrealistic intransigence and anti-foreign militancy in this earlier phase (and I shall argue that there are), how then are we to account for their presence? Not without a more careful scrutiny of the logic of foreign policymaking at the imperial *center*—a subject about which the existing literature on the Opium War period gives us little guidance.

We return, then, from our very hasty tour of the literature on mid-nineteenth-century Sino-foreign relations with a daunting list of explanatory possibilities as yet inadequately explored. It may well be, for example, that the mandarin scorn that British petitioners found so irritating (and inexplicable) in our period reflected a tradition of unwavering Sinocentric isolationism. But to argue thus is to leave unexplained why this particular brand of tradition was chosen, or allowed to dominate, at the expense of others. More simply, it is to ignore the politics behind that choice. By the same token, to posit that reform had to await the popularization of a Western-influenced utopianism among educated Chinese is to neglect the possibility that a practical *bureaucratic* interest in power (or power-enhancement) could also have supplied the motive for voluntarily opening China up to Western influences (as it does today), and thus to leave unexamined the intriguing question of why the Ch'ing bureaucratic class seemed unable to produce leaders strong enough to grasp this point and act upon it. Where, then, were the bureaucratic (or military) strongmen potentially sensitive to this opportunity, and why were they so weak, or so weak-willed? And, finally, how are we to explain the generally conservative drift of central-government leadership during the relatively quiescent—domestically quiescent, that is—years prior to the onset of the great rebellions of the Hsien-feng reign? The freezing effect of domestic disorder in Kwangtung has been well-documented, as we have noted. But until 1850, at least, it was Peking that made the critical decisions on foreign and domestic policy, and little can be learned, therefore, about the motives for these decisions by focusing upon events in the distant southeast. Rather, we must look for instruction to the configuration of politics at the center.

In this book, my point of departure and approach have been defined very largely by these several hitherto overlooked questions, and I have accordingly tried to provide a treatment of the period that will fill in some of the blank spaces identified in the course of the above reflections. Politics—the analysis, that is, of inter-group compe-

tition for power over foreign policy—forms our general subject; the pre-Taiping Opium War interlude (1835–1850), our time period; *central* government policymaking (and enforcement), our specific focus; and the rise (and demise) of a power-oriented pro-treaty system leadership during the 1840s, the key narrative event toward which our story builds and which it seeks to explain. Since I have tried to come to grips with these issues in the context of writing a new narrative history of the Opium War period, it has been impossible to keep from straying at times into other matters—most notably that of provincial-level anti-foreignism in and around Canton (a subject that dominates fully two chapters of this book). Another very considerable digression occurs at the beginning of this work, where I delve at length into the pre-1835 history of “out-group” factional politics at the Ch'ing court, and examine the reasons why one particular class of elite political actors—the literati—seem so persistently to be drawn to this type of activity both before and during our period.

Apart from these two major detours, however, I have tried to keep this study focused as relentlessly as possible on the issues defined above: the processes and rivalries of Opium War era court politics, and the problems at that level of the system that kept pro-treaty forces weak while strengthening the hand of the isolationist ideologues ringed about them. By so doing, I hope, at the least, to have succeeded in laying to rest once and for all any notion that nineteenth-century China can be treated as an ideological monolith. If I am luckier still, this book will encourage greater attention to be paid in the future to such questions as the nature of political leadership at the apex of the late Manchu political order, and the direction in which it was evolving before the foreign impact became paramount in the early twentieth century.

#### THE LITERATI: AN ANTICIPATORY OVERVIEW

Historical narratives not usually benefiting from an overload of prefatory generalization, I shall not here attempt any systematic answers to the questions I have put forward in the preceding section. These can be reserved for the final chapter, where there will be time to consider them in the context of the events described in the middle sections of this book. There is, however, one particular theoretical component to this study that needs to be taken up before we become

immersed in the story proper. That concerns the major political role I have assigned the “literati,” a somewhat mysterious subgroup of the Confucian lettered elite who figure in this book as the inner core of the anti-treaty movement. In keeping with that judgment, I have digressed at the outset of this work (in chapters 1 and 2) in order to explore the full array of institutional and psychological issues that seem to have prompted this class's stubborn resistance to treaty concessions. My reasons for devoting so much space to the literati point of view will be clearer, however, if we pause here to anticipate certain of the conclusions about literati politics that will emerge from this digression, and consider such basic questions as who precisely the “literati” were, the range of concerns that drove them, and the particular political medium—that is, “factions”—through which they characteristically asserted themselves.

As regards the membership and motivational character of this group, a few words ought to suffice at this point, since we shall return to the matter at length in chapters 1 and 2. In defining the literati as a distinct subset of the much larger Confucian lettered elite—a seemingly arbitrary manipulation of terminology—I have in mind that particular subgroup of potential officeholders who sought career advancement through the recognition and friendship of fellow-spirits, rather than of their academic or bureaucratic superiors (the more conventional route). Although this might seem a highly subjective distinction, or one that most would-be officials of scholarly background would have denied existed (if only because it offended their self-respect), in practice there was a very real choice to be made, and never very many who were daring enough to choose the former path. Awareness of the exceptionality of such behavior is, I think, quite clearly reflected in the way in which nineteenth-century scholar-officials used the term *shib-ta-fu*—that is, to demarcate not all scholar-officials (its literal meaning), but rather those few who did as scholar-officials ought to do, particularly with regard to the selection of patrons and mentors. In keeping with this exceptionalist self-awareness, the literati approach to career-making and patron-hunting tended, as we shall see, to be self-consciously flamboyant and at times almost provocative, as if perhaps to advertise a collective scorn for the political order that was responsible for lowering the standards of the vulgar majority.

To this initial characterization it must immediately be added that

the pursuit of the literati ideal, if undertaken collectively by any significant group of Han Chinese scholar-officials, was inherently controversial, even dangerous, and quite in violation of Ch'ing imperial thinking. In the context of our period, what was most controversial in the political style of the literati was their tendency to knit together into highly exclusivistic factions (*p'eng-tang*), functioning either to further the influence of a self-appointed few or to diminish the power of certain enemies. Inasmuch as such behavior threatened both the throne's disciplinary authority over the bureaucracy and the access to power of non-Chinese non-scholarly elites (a major concern under the ethnically foreign Ch'ing regime), it inevitably elicited the harshest and most furious of imperial condemnations. Yet, as long as factions of this sort remained the only vehicle capable of providing scholar-officials with some control over their personal fate, participation in them would continue to exercise strong appeal, even becoming (I shall argue) a progressively *more* influential phenomenon as the century wore on. The literati presence in late-Ch'ing high politics was, then, throughout our period intimately bound up with factional politics and with a mode of factional politics inherently controversial.

As for what motivated this persistent literati enthusiasm for "faction," it will be seen that I have emphasized two background issues in particular. The first, alluded to above, was the demand for more control by scholars over the terms of their progress into the ranks of the officeholding class. Under the Manchus, this demand took on certain implicitly "constitutional" overtones, since the issue was not simply freedom to seek support where one wished, but also the collective fate of the Han Chinese scholar-official "estate" as a whole—now but one of several broad elites competing for office and power. In addition to this quasi-constitutional grievance against the Manchu order, however, I have also sought to explain the appeal of "faction" in terms of certain persisting psychological and sociological features of lettered elite life by no means peculiar to the period of Manchu rule. These latter aspects of literati factionalism are discussed in detail in chapter 1, where I argue that the over-competitiveness of examination life tended in and of itself to breed a psychology of moral bravado and a taste for membership in close-knit loyalty groups, especially among scholars at the early, insecure stages of their careers. The picture that emerges from this discussion will in turn suggest that literati

class identity was often a transitional affair—a momentarily assumed *persona*, as it were, appealing chiefly as a source of psychological reinforcement during certain more difficult passages in one's career development, but not necessarily likely to survive them. But we shall also see that, for some, it could be more than that: either a permanent alter ego of sorts, useful for senior officials in rallying the support of their juniors, or even a kind of lifelong vocation unto itself, as seems to have been the case with the famous poet-cum-factional-activist, Chang Chi-liang.

Two final points connected with the problem of literati influence in mid-century Ch'ing politics still remain to be commented upon before we can proceed. One concerns the precise range of behavioral attributes associated, in this book, with the concept of literati factions; and the other, the distortions in the overall image of Ch'ing high politics that may have resulted from my concentrating almost solely on the activities of literati political actors.

On the first point, it ought to be stated emphatically that literati factions or factionalism are *not* associated, in this book, either with political opportunism or with a presumed independence from any particular class or social base. In the political-science literature on twentieth-century China, at least, those are exactly the attributes that one would expect to encounter in factions, and that distinguish the latter from political parties. Here, however, no such connotations are intended. In fact, not only were literati factions extraordinarily non-opportunistic in their anti-treaty advocacy, but, as we shall also see, those factions most closely linked to this resistance were motivated by a very powerful sense of class-specific identity and values. There were, no doubt, many other patronage groupings alive and influential during our period that lacked this preoccupation with class and class values, but we shall be seeing very little of them—and not by accident either, for they seem to have played little if any role in the foreign-policy disputes with which we are concerned. *Faction*, therefore, is not to be read as a pejorative; to drive home that point, I have deliberately alternated the word with other more neutral terms, such as *party*, *circle*, and the like.

We come last, however, to the matter of omissions. Are there major political groupings or interests that have been ignored or pushed too far into the background as a consequence of this book's preoccupation with literati partisanship? The answer ought probably

to be in the affirmative, with the leading contenders being the Manchus themselves. From the research of several American and Chinese scholars we have begun to take note of a complex of "Manchu interests" at work behind the facade of imperial Confucian bureaucracy, simultaneously policing that bureaucracy from the outside and displacing from its control major chunks of revenue and of job-patronage power. In terms of organization, this exclusively Manchu power preserve seems to have been anchored within several interlocking institutions: the imperial household bureaucracy (*nei-wu fu*), and the several trade monopolies, tax farms, and purveyance manufactures under its jurisdiction; and the triad of superintendencies controlling grain transportation to the capital and maintenance of the necessary waterways. All these agencies would have found their powers and perquisites very much at risk whenever government policy moved toward war, and officials who headed them up were presumably very well situated to lobby effectively against whatever threatened them.

Why then do the powerful Manchus figure so minimally in the account of high policymaking offered here, while so much attention is lavished upon the politically more peripheral literati? For the not very satisfying reason, chiefly, that the sources do not conduce to righting the balance. Perhaps all historians are creatures of opportunity, lured to those subjects for which the documentation is most readily available, and deterred from those for which the sources are poor. However that may be, such considerations have certainly affected this study, whose shape has been much influenced by the fact that the published sources representing the literati side of the story are much richer and more easily available than those detailing the workings of the Manchu interest for our period.<sup>5</sup> This evidential imbalance may have produced an unbalanced account, one too lopsidedly informed by the literati perception of events. For the moment, however, there seems little alternative to relying primarily on literati sources for our impression of how the early-nineteenth-century Ch'ing political system actually worked; and so I have done, leaving for my successors the task of sorting out, if they can, what was afoot in the inner corridors of power where the literati never dared to go.

Such, then, are the problems and methodological eccentricities that the reader will confront in the study that follows. In conclusion

it remains only to add a few explanatory comments concerning the structure I have employed for arranging the materials. Though the main interest of this study is how different political forces influenced decisions on foreign policy, only part of the discussion that follows (chapters 3, 4, and 7) is actually devoted to the topic of decisional politics in the narrow sense. In chapter 3 ("The Politics of Opium Suppression"), I examine the first and most dramatic of the foreign-policy decisions taken during this period: the 1838–1839 decision to interdict British trade at Canton in order to end the import of India opium into China, by which decision the 1840–1842 conflict with Britain was triggered. In chapter 4 ("The Myth of Victory in Kwangtung"), I follow the course of the debates over military policy that took place on the Ch'ing side during the 1840 war, focusing specifically on the search for a strategy to defend the key southeastern entrepot city of Canton. Finally, in chapter 7 ("The End of Manchu Diplomacy"), I examine the background to the 1850 removal from office of the leaders of the postwar reform party (Mu-chang-a and Ch'i-ying), focusing in particular on the role of the domestic-security question in aligning the monarchy on the side of the opponents of that group. In all three of the aforementioned chapters, the guiding interest is the competition between the leaders of literati opinion—who, in 1838, supported a trade cutoff; in 1841, backed the use of paramilitaries in defending against the British; and, in 1850, urged the toppling of the Mu-chang-a leadership—and their opponents entrenched within the bureaucratic and military establishments.

The remainder of the study that follows, however, is concerned, not directly with decision making, but rather with the formation of literati attitudes about the leading policy questions of the day. In the first two chapters ("The Literati Re-Ascendant," and "The Rise of the Spring Purification Circle") we shall be dealing primarily with the question of why the literati were able to assert themselves politically to such an impressive extent during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Along with this larger question, however, I shall also be considering the changing nature of the lettered elite's self-perception during this same period. There, I shall be concerned in particular with the problem of how the literati coped intellectually with the problem of their own political marginality under the Manchu dynasty. The principal conclusion is that dissatisfaction was rising, in pace, ironically enough, with the increasing dependency of the mon-

archy on their political cooperation after 1830. A heightened oppositional radicalism was the result—a mindset that was, in turn, to become important as a motive for resisting the treaty system and the accommodationist values it was seen to represent.

In addition to the introductory chapters, there are two others (chapter 5, “The Debate over the Conduct of the War”; and chapter 6, “The Ku Yen-wu Shrine Association”) that are also concerned exclusively with the views of the literati, but now in the postwar decade. In the first of these, I examine attitudes on the military and diplomatic questions raised in the course of the Ch'ing wartime defeat. And, in the second, we shall see how lingering constitutional frustrations turned the literati with particular vehemence against the postwar peace party in Peking, whose key leaders were Manchus. These two shorter studies, in addition to explaining the 1850 overturn of the Mu-chang-a “peace” government, will also help, I hope, to illuminate the general nature of the sentiments that guided literati resistance to the treaty system in the nineteenth century.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Literati Re-Ascendant*

The Anglo-Chinese War of 1840–1842 might very well not have taken place had Foreign Secretary Palmerston, its principal enthusiast on the British side, applied himself beforehand to the study of contemporary Ch'ing court politics. Of course, as a flamboyant, populist Whig who thought himself adequately schooled in “the East” from a decade of experience in Mediterranean diplomacy, Viscount Palmerston was hardly the man to think such efforts necessary. And, even if he had, he might well have been disconcerted by the difficulties, for his was a time when European access to the inner political and intellectual life of the Manchu empire was at an all-time low, and credible information on the thinking of China's rulers almost impossible for a foreigner to obtain. Yet, had he or his agents been able to see through this formidable veil, their discoveries might well have

## CHAPTER FOUR

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### *The Myth of Victory in Kwangtung*

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It is one of the more curious aspects of the Sino-British war of 1840–1842 that the Ch'ing defeat and surrender failed in the end to achieve any lasting impact on how that government conducted its foreign relations. Literati beliefs about the economic and military self-sufficiency of the empire remained fundamentally unshattered, in spite of the seemingly indisputable military verdict. And, what is more, the Ch'ing monarchy was to prove unable to exclude literati political initiatives for very long from the realm of diplomatic deliberations, no matter how irresponsible the literati role had been in the policy debates of the late 1830s.

Why was this? In this and three subsequent chapters, we shall be considering a number of internal political developments whose influence converged to assure this particular outcome. But first, we shall

focus on the events of the war itself. More particularly, we shall be interested to see how these events came to encourage the literati in their belief that the 1842 defeat was not conclusive evidence of the bankruptcy of the existing political and military system.

The line of explanation to be pursued leads us somewhat away from the main theatres of conflict, for, as the literati themselves would later understand it, this was actually two conflicts, whose outcomes were quite different. In the Yangtze and off the central China coast, there had been defeat after defeat. But in the southeast, and particularly at Canton, where the principal action of this part of our story unfolds, the verdict was believed to have been much more positive for the Ch'ing side. Indeed, even as the final peace negotiations were getting under way at Nanking in August 1842, vigorous protests began to pour into Peking from all across the empire, urging that the triumphs allegedly scored by "loyal" Ch'ing subjects in Kwangtung had established that concessions were not necessary, and that Ch'ing belligerence ought therefore to be perpetuated. Moreover, over the next several years, this same claim of an overlooked Ch'ing triumph in Kwangtung continued to serve as a rallying point for those many scholars who wished to undo the new treaties. Having proven that the means existed to resist, the victories at Canton thus called the literati onward, to a renewed struggle against the barbarian.<sup>1</sup>

To contemporary British observers (as, indeed, to many Manchus), all this was to seem terribly perplexing. Conditioned to expect that responsible governments could recognize when they had been defeated in the field, and confident that the recently demonstrated British capacity to seize key Yangtze communications centers had established the fact of Ch'ing incompetence to continue the war, they could not account for the perverse claims of a Ch'ing victory in the southeast.<sup>2</sup> But, equipped as we now are with a background in high Ch'ing politics, we are perhaps in better position to grasp how such a view could have spread. The really crucial factor was, of course, the special intensity of literati political involvement in the conduct of military operations in the southeast, a circumstance that arose, in turn, directly out of the decision to concentrate opium enforcement efforts within the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien, and to assign Lin Tse-hsu to oversee them.

These efforts did not influence Captain Elliot and his government

in quite the manner intended. And, by late 1839, Lin was thus to be compelled to tighten a full tourniquet around the Canton trade, in turn prompting the dispatch of a large expeditionary force from India. Whether they had foreseen it or not, therefore, Lin and his local scholar accomplices in Canton had found themselves in charge of a full-scale war. Or rather, if not quite in charge, then at least responsible for it.

The matter of responsibility was certainly, in fact, the crucial one. And, indeed, a great deal of what was to transpire at Canton during the period of hostilities (at least on the Ch'ing side) will only make sense when understood as the outgrowth of a concern, shared by Lin and by his supporters alike, to cleanse their reputations of the all-too-likely charge of irresponsible warmongering. The only way to do this, once the fighting had actually begun, was to win: or, at least, to avoid too obvious a setback in the places (Canton and Amoy) where literati activists occupied command positions. Thus, from virtually the moment bullets began to fly, one begins to see maneuvering of the most extraordinary sort at Canton, intended to convince the broader Ch'ing political elite that, whatever else had happened, the Ch'ing had not lost the war in the Pearl River delta. And to show as well, one might add, that such reverses as had occurred at Canton had been the fault solely of Governor General Lin's arch-rival within the bureaucracy, the "cowardly" Manchu commissioner, Ch'i-shan. Had Lin been left in charge of Canton's defenses, it followed, even these temporary routs (from which local forces were said to have quickly recovered) would never have occurred.

Needless to say, those who chose to credit this version of events had also to overlook certain basic features of the campaign the British had just fought and won. In retrospect, it should have been clear to all, as it certainly was to some of the emperor's palace advisers, that Her Britannic Majesty's fleet had never targeted the Pearl River estuary as its major objective. Under explicit instructions from London, it had instead determined to ignore Canton and to strike northward, closing in upon China's great transport artery, the Yangtze River, where the Ch'ing empire's own supply lines were most vulnerable to waterborne assault and where postwar trade prospects were the most exciting.<sup>3</sup> In a vague sort of way, this marginality of the southeast to the British war effort was eventually to become an accepted tenet of Manchu generalship—which explains why, after

May 1841, the dynasty's best field units were invariably detailed to the lower Yangtze and to Tientsin. But for Lin and his venerated, the British remained, from beginning to end, but another species of "pirate" "marauder" (*hai-k'ou*), incapable of sustained penetration of the empire's inner fastness, and tied, by their own immediate needs for cash and supplies, to the smuggler-dominated southeastern littoral. That they had not succeeded in seizing and holding Canton (or any other major city in this latter quarter, for that matter) therefore could be certainly taken as proof that China's coasts were defensible, if the defense were only properly organized and led.

Yet it was not just literati *amour propre*, or a convenient miscomprehension of British strategy, that won for the saga of Cantonese resistance so large a following among the lettered elite. There was yet another aspect to the appeal of this legend—an aspect that will, in fact, require the better part of the chapter before us to explicate properly. That is, the service it performed in justifying the takeover, by local elites, of military powers formerly monopolized by the bureaucracy and by the Manchu court. The "victory" at Canton, as we shall presently discover, was never presented to the political public as a victory of Ch'ing imperial arms. Rather, it was consistently credited to the zeal of local scholar-notables in undertaking to rally loyal paramilitary forces to the support of the Ch'ing cause just when the officials and the generals had brought the city to the brink of disaster.

To grasp just why this dimension of the war should have figured so significantly in popularizing the myth of "Canton unconquered" requires a multi-layered analysis of the events transpiring in and around Canton in 1841 too complex to be easily summarized here. The major outlines of our interpretation can perhaps still be anticipated, if only schematically. Certainly one of the most telling factors was the unanticipated strain imposed on virtually all key coastal cities by the rapid transfer there of hand-picked troops under mainly Manchu command. In Chekiang and Kiangsu, no less than in Kwangtung, these "guest" legions were to prove much more a scourge of the local population than were the British themselves. The myth of paramilitary, civilian-led resistance successfully challenging the British where the regular military had failed carried with it the implicit lesson that the court should abandon its traditional predilection for fast-paced, manpower-intensive armies sent in from the outside, and leave military arrangements to local elites.

Within this context, however, the scholar-generals of Canton had a very noteworthy contribution to make. For it was really only in Kwangtung that there existed the social conditions conducive to large-scale scholar-led military mobilization independent of the bureaucracy. What such private mobilization actually entailed, in order to be effective, was the prior existence of an elite-controlled property base capable not only of financing a private self-defense force, but also of simultaneously benefiting, managerially, from its deployment. Perhaps nowhere in coastal China, outside of the Pearl River delta, did such conditions exist. But even if that was true, the efficiency of civilian mobilization efforts in Canton was nonetheless attractive elsewhere as a demonstration that the hated regulars were unnecessary to the war effort.

So here, then, was another layer to the grand appeal of the idea that there had been two wars, and that the struggle in Kwangtung had been victorious. The scholar-led militia units of Canton were credited with successful resistance against the British, and, by virtue of that claim, they automatically confirmed local elites elsewhere in their conviction that the "generals" ought not be allowed to fight this war.

#### LIN TSE-HSU AND THE ANTI-OPIUM CAMPAIGN

As will be evident from our introductory remarks, the truly unusual feature of the events that were to unfold in Kwangtung during the 1840–1842 war was the extraordinarily prominent role of the Cantonese scholar-elite. Because of the depth of local elite involvement in military (and, for that matter, diplomatic) affairs in that province, our history of the war in the Kwangtung theatre divides into two separate stories, only at the end fusing back into a single strand. First is the official level, where Lin and then his successors as theatre commanders-in-chief (Ch'i-shan, Ch'i Kung, and I-shan) were nominally in charge—in coordination, naturally, with the court. But, in the end, the direction that events were to take in Kwangtung was to be decided as much by the actions of the upper crust of the local degree-holding class. At this second level of activity, the activists were academy pedagogues and their pupils—the finest of the Cantonese urban scholar-elite. Through both their fanatic loyalty to Governor General Lin, and, later on, their growing concern to insulate their native city from the ravages of British and Ch'ing soldiers, these

scholars were to be propelled into the thick of local diplomatic and military deliberations. Once established there, moreover, they were not to be evicted easily, as a succession of postwar provincial official appointees were to learn to their dismay. Our story of the resistance at Canton thus naturally takes as its starting point the problem of just how these men managed to involve themselves in the business of international warmaking—a business that, strictly speaking, was not theirs to engage in.

As we shall presently see, formal military leadership passed into private scholarly hands only beginning with the March-May 1841 siege of Canton, owing mainly to the collapse on that occasion of regular government forces in the area, and to the need to fill the attendant military vacuum on the Ch'ing side. However, as we shall also see, the scholars of Canton were more than ready for their chance when that occasion presented itself. Scholar-commanded auxiliary units already were in the field. Moreover, the leaders of these forces already possessed a kind of ad hoc organizational base within the academy hierarchy of the city, capped at its upper end by a special coordinating bureau (*chü*) located at the Ta-fo-ssu Temple.

This latent organizational matrix alerts us to the fact that the Cantonese academy elite had been moving, gradually, into the sphere of public affairs even before the eruption of hostilities accelerated the pace of their intrusion. And it suggests, as well, that we must trace the beginnings of this involvement at least as far back as the anti-drug campaign of early 1839, from which campaign the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau first emerged as a center of local elite organizational influence.

The idea of mobilizing the Cantonese scholar class in the struggle against drug consumption was, of course, an inspiration of Commissioner Lin's, and began to manifest itself virtually from the moment Lin set foot in Canton. Within two weeks of his arrival (on 10 March 1839), Lin's diary indicates he had begun to consult with what might be described as the academy-class scholars there. And from these discussions Lin was to move directly to the creation of an independent, scholar-run opium-control operation headquartered in the Ta-fo-ssu Temple compound inside the city. The membership, we note from Table 2,<sup>4</sup> came almost exclusively from among the ranks of the pedagogues then occupying leadership roles within the academy establishment of the city.

According to a lengthy manifesto issued by Lin to explain the ex-

Table 2

Name	Academy Office
Chang Wei-p'ing Ts'ai Chin-chuan	Board of directors, Hsueh-hai-t'ang Current academy head in Hui-chou prefecture
Teng Shih-hsien Ch'en Ch'i-k'un	Head, Yueh-hua Academy Head, Yang-ch'eng Academy
Yao Hua-tso	Hunan prefect-designate, home on leave of absence

act nature of this non-official body, the mission of this Ta-fo-ssu Bureau was to receive deliveries of surrendered opium and smoking equipment from individual offenders in the city, and to distribute medicine to those turning in their supplies. At the same time, the bureau chiefs were to maintain surveillance over the members of the local degree-holding class known to them from their teaching activities, to recommend upright scholars in each of the suburban areas to oversee parallel sorts of activities in their own neighborhoods, to enroll all examination scholars in pledge groups sworn to abjure opium smoking, and to hand over offenders within their own ranks. Through the mobilization of the hierarchy of academic institutions from above, in other words, Lin was hoping to gain voluntary self-enforcement of the consumption prohibition within the examination-taking elite. Presumably, since degree-holders seem to have constituted a major category of offenders, this would quickly reduce local demand for the drug.<sup>5</sup>

A second aspect of the opium drive that also called for scholar-elite assistance involved the identification of Chinese distributors, and the ferreting out of corruption in the water-patrol forces and other local government agencies responsible for the toleration of smuggling activity. This was a more delicate operation, politically, than arresting consumers—since suspects displayed no visible symptoms, and those arrested in the past were often known to have been innocents framed for purposes of extortion or to divert attention from the real culprits. Yet Lin's need to induce a quick collapse in the drug market made it absolutely necessary that these middlemen be attacked too. And, since regular government agents could not be trusted with such a job, Lin found himself calling, inevitably, upon

the scholar class.<sup>6</sup> No doubt other, more cautious officials would have balked at such a step. But here we must remember that Lin was now acting in collaboration with the Spring Purificationists, a group fanatically committed to the idea that scholars were fit for—in fact, needed—such responsible social-managerial roles. In effect, Lin was here only acting on an assumption that had been latent in the drug-crusade idea from the start.

Thus the acceptance of consumer surrenders, the overseeing of group pledges within the scholar-class, and the production of reliable information on the elusive middlemen in the smuggling traffic and on those who helped them from within the government itself—these key tasks fell to the scholars.

This sharing of administrative labors was only one aspect, however, of a much more far-reaching attempt by Lin to penetrate into what might be called academy politics in Canton. At the same time that Lin was calling for scholar-gentry aid, he was self-consciously moving to win for himself and his cause an identity and a loyalty that transcended the immediate issue of drug suppression. The core of scholar activists who moved in to occupy the key roles in the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau were drawn into this activity not simply by anti-opium fervor, but also by Commissioner Lin's adroit linking of his campaign to the promotion of a belletristic revival (*hsing-wen*) movement in the upper ranks of the academic elite itself.

In doing so, no doubt, Lin had very good practical reasons. For, as we have suggested, the kinds of services Lin was demanding from the local scholar class required a very high level of integrity to be of real value. And that, in turn, required that the developing campaign be associated as closely as possible with scholastic or belletristic "renovation"—that perennial source of elite moral optimism. Yet, whatever his reasons (and one suspects, perhaps, that there was also a good measure of literati vanity in Lin's inspiration), the decision to link the anti-drug effort to a revolution in local academic fashion was to have consequences that quite outlasted the campaign from which they had originally sprung. Inadvertently—or, perhaps, not so inadvertently—Lin was thereby to install in key roles a nucleus of firmly loyal souls, who would thenceforth connect their own survival as leaders within Cantonese academic life with the preservation of Commissioner Lin's prestige as a policymaker. Here, as it was later to develop, were the true seeds of local elite involvement in the diplo-

matic and military realms—an involvement that was to get under way as an outgrowth of scholar-class determination to sabotage those peacemakers trying to discredit Lin's policies.

But we have digressed somewhat from our immediate concern, which is here merely to document the ideological and personnel changes within Cantonese academy life introduced by Commissioner Lin in conjunction with his anti-opium crusade. Let us see if we can reconstruct more precisely just how this association of opium suppression with belletristic revivalism actually looked in practice.

The place to begin is with a quick synopsis of the divergent intellectual trends current in Canton on the eve of Lin's arrival—for scholarly "renovation," in Canton as in Peking, inevitably meant a readjustment in the relative status of these different schools, from which in turn was to come the energy for a new efflorescence in letters. We have already dwelt, in passing, on one such trend, the philological-positivist or Han Learning school. This current of scholarly thought, as we noted, had been introduced into Canton by the former governor general, Juan Yuan, early in the 1820s. Its temple was, of course, the Hsueh-hai-t'ang, though even Han Learning scholars never enjoyed a complete monopoly in shaping the curriculum there.

Indeed, as we have noted, Han Learning had bitter rivals, even during Juan's tenure of office, as a claimant on the scholastic loyalties of the Cantonese pedagogical class. During the late 1830s, in pace with the changes in intellectual fashion then sweeping the capital, these rival schools began to combine under renewed official patronage to form a countercurrent quite bitterly critical of the Han Learning orthodoxy. Lin had, in the end, to do little more than give his own personal blessing to this reorientation (and to confirm it through additional personnel changes within the academies) in order to establish himself as a revivalist.

For our present purposes, the list of these rival academic influences can be confined to two, though there was clearly a plenitude of lesser, indigenous schools that also existed in some tension with the newer Han Learning, even if less capable of offering a challenge to it.<sup>7</sup> The first was a local variant of the Weng Fang-kang school of poetic aesthetics, called the White Cloud Mountain (Pai-yun-shan) school. To be sure, in Peking, the Weng school had been closely associated with Han Learning. But that association was much less clear-cut in its Kwangtung counterpart, seeded, originally, by Master Weng dur-

ing a mid-career term as schools commissioner there. Weng's ideas had been reworked at the hands of Cantonese followers recruited on this and later occasions, and had eventually been reduced to little more than a new consciousness of broader, Peking-generated currents in poetry fashion, centered, inevitably, upon the study of the works of Wang Shih-chen. All seemingly quite inconsequential, perhaps. But the White Cloud Mountain group, inheritors of this local transformation of northern-clique aesthetic ideals, had nonetheless come to occupy a distinct, and distinctly proud, role within the Cantonese academy system. Chang Wei-p'ing (1780–1859), its most famous proponent, had been so respected a local lecturer even in Juan Yuan's day that he had been assigned a place in the Hsueh-hai-t'ang. At the same time, Huang P'ei-fang (1779–1859) and T'an Chin-chao (*chin-shih* of 1817), two others associated with the White Cloud Mountain school, had been floating, somewhat dissatisfied, in and out of local academy posts for well over a decade as of the moment Commissioner Lin came sweeping into Canton, early in 1839.<sup>8</sup>

Also affiliated, if indirectly, with this lingering northern-school aesthetic group was Ch'en Hung-ch'ih (*chin-shih* of 1805; Han-lin), the master of the Yueh-hua Academy since 1834. A somewhat eccentric character, Ch'en had somehow derailed after a promising start as a protégé of the great northern-clique literocrat Chu Kuei. By the time he arrived in Canton, moreover, he had decided (for unexplained reasons) that he disapproved of the cold-blooded approach to learning that was the hallmark of Hsueh-hai-t'ang scholasticism. As one biographer was to remember him, during his declining years as a Canton academy head, Ch'en had acquired the habit of spending all his time in the company of a few favorite students,

... arguing over their judgments of [actions recorded in] the *Book of History* and the [post-classical] histories, his emotions rising and his words pouring out with vehemence. Or, on other occasions, he would discourse upon the words and deeds of officials of reputation and of great scholars of the Ch'ien-lung and Chia-ch'ing period; or he would talk excitedly and with indignation of the issues of the day. On such occasions, he would rise to great heights of feeling, and would often compose a poem on the spot. . . .<sup>9</sup>

Such an approach was most decidedly a tilt away from objectivism, and toward the "urgent-words" end of the academic spectrum—thus

really more akin to the spirit of the T'ung-ch'eng school than to that of Han Learning.

The second intellectual current ready to challenge the dominant Han Learning fashion in Canton was, in fact, the *ku-wen* (or T'ung-ch'eng) party itself. This school had been popularized in Canton chiefly through the efforts of Fang Tung-shu (1772–1851), a T'ung-ch'eng native (and, incidentally, a close friend of Yao Ying) who had taught for several years in Canton in the 1820s under the somewhat unwelcome patronage of Juan Yuan himself. Fang, however, had never quite approved of his patron's intellectual lineage, and so had not stayed long at his post. It must therefore have been with great eagerness that he returned to Canton, early in 1837, this time at the behest of a governor general whom he could respect as a longstanding patron of the T'ung-ch'eng school, Teng T'ing-chen.<sup>10</sup>

We must return now to the realignment of official scholarly patronage patterns in Canton in the late 1830s, from which the literary renovation of Lin Tse-hsu was to spring. A perceptible shift seems to have set in just after the 1836 rejection of legalization, perhaps commencing with Governor General Teng's decision to summon Fang Tung-shu back to Canton in 1837, nominally to oversee the composition of a gazetteer of the Cantonese maritime customs authority. At around the same time, moreover, Teng was taking steps to bring Ch'en Hung-ch'ih into his inner circle—first (in 1836) consulting with him on the opium-control question; next, asking Ch'en to nominate a favorite pupil as tutor to Teng's son; and then in 1838, appointing another of Ch'en's star pupils, Ch'en Li, to the board of directors of the Hsueh-hai-t'ang.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the tide of official scholarly favor had already begun visibly to shift, even before Lin's dramatic entry into the "city of rams," early in March 1839. What Teng had initiated, however, Lin was to push much further. As his first gesture toward the local rivals of the Han Learning establishment, Lin began with the symbolic step of making his official residence in the Yueh-hua Academy (until recently, under Ch'en Hung-ch'ih's leadership), and not, as one would have expected, in the Hsueh-hai-t'ang. This choice was immediately followed by the announcement of a special examination intended to "fathom the local scholarly climate." Such examinations were a normal part of the tenure-inaugurating ritual of a newly arrived high provincial offi-

cial. But what was unusual about these examinations (held 20 August 1839) was that Lin excluded the students of the Hsueh-hai-t'ang from the competition, asking only those enrolled in the other three top-ranking academies of the city to participate. In the examination itself, Lin went to some lengths to associate himself with the anti-Han Learning forces. The poetic theme was a reference to the great T'ang dynasty *ku-wen* belletrist, Han Yü, who had once, like Lin, been "exiled" to the malaria-infested Ling-nan frontier, and whose presence was supposed, "for one evening to have rolled the miasmic mist . . . away."<sup>12</sup>

The final indication of which way the Lin regime would swing was to come in the form of the simultaneous elevation of two of the White Cloud Mountain set (Huang P'ei-fang and Chang Wei-p'ing) to positions of prominence within the city's academic establishment. Late in 1838, just prior to Lin's arrival, Teng T'ing-chen had already elevated both these men to the Hsueh-hai-t'ang's board of directors, while giving Huang a simultaneous honorary appointment as headmaster-without-salary at the Yueh-hua and Yang-ch'eng academies.<sup>13</sup> Lin seemed determined to continue this course. It was Chang and a friend who were first among the local scholar class to be ushered in to meet the commissioner on his arrival, early in 1839; Chang Wei-p'ing's son alone for whom Lin endeavored to win a pass on the 1839 provincial examinations; and Chang, again, who was the only local scholar to be afforded a private interview by Lin as the latter left Canton in 1841. Needless to say, Chang also served as an original member of the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau; while Huang was likewise asked to join somewhat later on. By contrast, none of the surviving pedagogical greats of Juan Yuan pedigree still active in the city (Chang Shao, Tseng Chao, or Fan Feng, for example) were asked to participate in this body as long as Lin remained in office.<sup>14</sup>

How this frantic juggling of academy directorships, and signaling of new official scholarly allegiances, affected the morale of the local lettered elite is a matter that requires some guesswork. But the outward signals of a great enthusiasm among the benefited scholarly majority are certainly there to be observed. Some hint of how feelings were running is already apparent in an exchange recorded by the new Yueh-hua headmaster, Liang T'ing-nan, as having taken place between himself and Lin late in 1839, just as Lin was making ready to shift his lodgings from the Yueh-hua Academy to the governor

general's yamen. When Lin began his valedictions with an apology for having inconvenienced the scholars of the academy by his long stay, Liang cut him off abruptly. "The scholars of this school," Liang riposted, "have long held Your Excellency in high esteem."<sup>15</sup> But even more dramatic a demonstration of the loyalty Lin had won for himself was to appear late in 1840, when Ch'i-shan's eleventh-hour peace plan caused the court to remove Lin from his offices in Canton. The list of well-wishers coming to commiserate with Lin on the eve of his departure was practically endless; and Lin's usually terse diary halts to reel off, one after the other, the names of all the high-ranking scholars, academy heads, and recent degree-winners from the city's schools who turned out *en masse* to present him with a set of eight matched hanging scrolls.<sup>16</sup> Why they had all come was suggested, in part, by the wording of these scrolls: to Governor General Lin for his "teaching and renewal of literary culture" (*chiao-yü hsing-wen*).<sup>17</sup> At least for those present at this meeting, that dimension of Lin's efforts seemed to rank on a par with his other great accomplishments: "Justly and loyally promoting the honor of the state," and "scattering the [opium] smoke over the malarial seas."

Unless Lin had masterminded a gigantic fraud, therefore, our impression must be that scholarly mobilization against the opium traffic had indeed been a success, and that it really had fused, in the minds of many, with the drama of a renewal of letters. From these tremors of local scholarly excitement were to arise, in time, the faith that the war Lin had started really could be carried forward. And from that conviction came, in turn, the idea that the scholars themselves could defend Canton.

#### LIN TSE-HSU VERSUS CH'I-SHAN

If the soul of Cantonese scholarly militarization was already latent in Governor General Lin's literary revival and anti-opium campaign, the corporeal manifestation of that spirit was not to assume its final form until well after those particular episodes had long been forgotten. In between came another set of events, unfolding, this time, mainly within the interstices of the imperial bureaucracy rather than the confines of Cantonese academic politics. The main protagonists were not local scholars but high-ranking provincial officials, and the prize over which they fought was of far greater magnitude than the

mere control of local academic office. The stakes were nothing less than the control of the empire's policy toward Great Britain as the principals—Lin Tse-hsu and Ch'i-shan—settled down to battling it out during the winter months of 1840–1841 well knew.

Yet the outcome, and even the progress, of this contest was to have consequences of the most immediate sort for the nascent scholar-generals of Canton. Even as this miniature drama unfolded, the scholars were already being drawn into it, thanks, originally, to Lin's efforts to drum up support from all possible quarters in order to block the Manchu commissioner Ch'i-shan's peace initiative. With the resolution of this struggle in Lin's favor, Canton itself suddenly came under direct foreign threat. Having themselves had a role in precipitating the British decision to attack, the scholars of Canton could hardly stand aside and watch their city fall, without resistance, to the enemy. Thus, the road for the scholar-activists of Canton was to lead, with unforeseen swiftness, from political mobilization in defense of Lin, to military mobilization in defense of their native city.

For the moment at least, however, our narrative must be concerned first with the details of Lin Tse-hsu's contest with Ch'i-shan over foreign policy—the event from which all else was, in a sense, to spring. The motivating force in this confrontation—the source from which all its bitter energy flowed—was Commissioner Lin's passionate desire to divert blame from his own initial recklessness. Having steered the Celestial Empire into a major military confrontation that he had refused until the last minute to see coming, Lin was now left in the awkward position of having to find a formula—some formula—by which he could persuade himself and others that war was not indeed too terrible a risk for the Ch'ing side as most had imagined. That formula, naturally, would have to present the new enemy in the shape of other past seaborne threats that had been successfully resisted by continental imperial governments—such as, for example, the so-called Japanese marauders (*wo-k'ou*) of the mid-sixteenth century, or the Taiwan-based fleets of the half-Japanese Coxinga (Cheng Ch'eng-kung), who had raided the Ch'ing coastline during the third quarter of the seventeenth century. And so the British were placed in the manageable category of maritime raiders, who, everyone knew, unlike legitimate states, lacked the stamina to fight for political objectives, and thus could be controlled simply by prolonging the struggle

to the point where material profits (through commerce or looting) had been exhausted.<sup>18</sup>

As he struggled to breathe life into this misleading formula—during the waning months of 1840, Lin ran into a succession of nasty hitches, occasioned, first, by Elliot's own refusal to act in conformity with Lin's plan; and, second, by the realization on the part of certain Manchu leaders in Peking that Lin's view of British strategic limitations and motives had been entirely wrong.

But here we must back up several steps to review the progress of diplomatic and military affairs until immediately prior to Lin's moment of truth, in the fall of 1840. Lin's problems began with the mid-1839 collapse of his scheme to extract a permanent guarantee of no further involvement in the India opium traffic from the British superintendent of trade, Captain Elliot. From this setback emerged, in turn, a bellicose last-minute embargo on all British trade and provisioning, and the concomitant British decision to resort to arms. Though there is much to suggest that the liberal war party in London and Manchester was already primed for a fight even before the guarantee issue arose, it is also true that Lin's precipitate actions in dealing with this particular aspect of the opium negotiations helped greatly to unify British commercial opinion behind the hawkish Free Trade lobby and the equally hawkish Palmerston. Up until he began to push for such an agreement, involving a possible capital sanction against all future offenders, Lin had been able to make some progress in his second-hand negotiations with the British representative. Under pressure from steeply falling opium prices (induced, however, as much by importer over-speculation as by diminishing Chinese consumption), the traders and Elliot had seen some virtue in agreeing to surrender existing stockpiles through Elliot, if Lin would agree to compensation. Without clarifying his position on the latter issue, Lin had nonetheless eagerly accepted the offer, and, in June 1839, at Chen-k'ou, near the Bogue, he proceeded to put all the 20,000 chests he had received to the torch (apparently unaware that he was destroying crown property). Further than this, however, Elliot simply would not go. And when Lin then proceeded to demand "voluntary bonds" (again, in unknowing violation of Western legal practice), he found his counterpart increasingly intractable. That left but one option: the trade cutoff sanction. And, accordingly, on 5 January 1840, the court, dragging along behind Lin, agreed to promulgate the

necessary edict. Such an order, even with Lin's enthusiastic efforts at local enforcement, could do little but drive the fence-sitters among the British trading community into the arms of the war-intent Elliot.<sup>19</sup>

And so began Lin's period of trials. Yet, perhaps more costly still than the injudicious provocations offered to Elliot was the commissioner's grave miscalculation about how the British would strike back. Did Lin believe the assurances he had been sending Peking of the relative weakness of the British position, in spite of the other side's superiority in ships and gunnery? Lin certainly seems to have convinced himself that the enemy he faced truly was of little more account than the sea marauders of earlier imperial times, and from this drew the inference that the British would have to focus their anticipated attack upon Canton, the only coastal city "near" their home bases in the "Southern Seas" whose trade and stockpiled wealth were sufficient to provide "booty" to cover the costs of fighting so far away from home. By contrast, the upcoast stations (such as the Chusan islands, off the mouth of the Yangtze, or Tientsin), where British admirals really were planning to strike, seem never to have figured in Lin's thoughts as likely targets. (No doubt part of the problem for Lin was his lack of comprehension of the financial arrangements normal to European wars that permitted much greater freedom of action in the field than Lin's own spoils-financed concept of maritime warfare allowed for. Liang T'ing-nan, one of Lin's military advisers and one who was certainly in every other regard eager to portray Lin as a sympathetic figure, nevertheless has Lin later confessing his own original mistake on this point, but only after it was too late to correct. In all likelihood it was this oversight in particular that explained why Lin was so sure that Canton would be the enemy's prime military objective.)<sup>20</sup>

Thus, Lin had badly miscalculated the way in which the fighting would be likely to develop. Moreover, acting on the basis of this miscalculation (and perhaps also out of a desire to avoid alarming Peking unnecessarily), Lin had delayed alerting the court as to the possibility of attack in the north until the last possible moment. For almost an entire year (from mid-1839 to mid-1840), as he waited in Canton for the enemy to come to him, Lin had confined defense planning entirely to the Kwangtung coast. Anticipating an attempt to sack Canton, or perhaps to force the reopening of trade at gunpoint, Lin had here undertaken the usual range of preparations for a pirate raid.

Chains had been stretched across the mouth of the Whampoa; fireships made ready; and improvements ordered in the fortifications in the vicinity of the Bogue, including even some test casting and firing of newer, foreign-style bronze cannon. But beyond these local initiatives, there had been not a whisper of activity anywhere else along the coast, nor even any warning from Lin that such activity might be necessary.<sup>21</sup>

The result of all this was, of course, that Elliot's forces—22 warships, 27 transports, and 3,600 Scottish, Irish, and "Native" infantry—were able to achieve complete surprise when they descended, in the summer of 1840, upon their two preselected objectives: the fortified city of Ting-hai, in the Chusan Islands; and Ta-ku, the strongpoint guarding the river approach to Tientsin and Peking. Ting-hai fell, without resistance, on 5 July 1840. And, at Ta-ku, to which a reduced version of the British expeditionary force repaired on 11 August (a mere eight days after word had finally come from Lin that there would be an attack!), the governor general in charge of the defenses, Ch'i-shan, could do little more than offer his services as a mediator between Elliot and the court, in the hope of thereby delaying a repetition of what had just happened at Ting-hai. (The British engineer, Ouchterlony, who had accompanied Elliot to Ta-ku in August, records that the Chinese were frantically throwing up earthenwork defenses as the British flotilla drew near!).<sup>22</sup>

Ch'ing abilities to resist, minimal as they perhaps were, had barely been tested before Elliot was practically at the gates of Peking and ready to start pressing his demands. To Lin Tse-hsu, this eventuality was doubly painful: first, because Lin had himself been very much to blame for the failure to forewarn his colleagues in the north; and also because, as word began to reach Canton of the substance of the ongoing Tientsin parleys, it was becoming clear that Ch'i-shan intended to convince the emperor that the whole business about the opium could have been settled peacefully, if only Lin had not been so unreasonable.<sup>23</sup>

Obviously, Lin could not afford to disown his own diplomacy now, for, to do so at this point, would be to admit that his earlier claims about British vulnerability had been misinformed, even self-seeking. He thus grew, if anything, even more rigid in his insistence on the British-as-pirates, directing his persuasive efforts first to the throne and, when that failed, to personal friends within the bureaucracy. The great battle for self-vindication was now about to begin.

The first approach, naturally, had to be to the emperor, whom Lin still clearly hoped to persuade of the feasibility of continued military resistance (the obvious tactic, since, after all, there had been no real test of arms so far). Thus, upon hearing of the loss of Ting-hai, Lin wrote hastily to Peking asserting that the British forces there were weak, demoralized, and easily assaulted and that the island might easily be retaken by sneak attack from the onshore Chinese population. Simultaneously, a sea-raid on the British flotilla operating off the mouth of the Pearl River was promised by Lin as a way of drawing the expeditionary force away from the northern coastal station. Tao-kuang, however, was not impressed, and noted unkindly that Lin seemed to be trying merely to cover himself for the "bungling" in Kwangtung that had brought on the loss of Ting-hai in the first place.<sup>24</sup>

But Lin was not yet ready to quit, and on 11 October he sent off an eloquent and impassioned plea for the continuation of his own unyielding diplomacy. He had, Tao-kuang was now told, "long since" expected that British frustration at Canton would lead to raids elsewhere along the coast; Ting-hai's seizure had thus been entirely predictable, since the barbarians needed to sell their opium and buy their tea in order to pay for the costs of the war they were now fighting. However, Lin reported, the enemy garrison on Ting-hai was weak and sick, and an uncooperative populace had undermined their trade. "Thus even if we now do not engage them on the high seas, but confine ourselves to 'resolute defence of our strongholds,' we have the means to bring them to self-exhaustion." No concessions should be made in the forthcoming negotiations, therefore; for "the prestige of the state" was at stake in the maintenance of the opium prohibition, and the means were at hand to stand by this higher order of principle. To back down now would be only to invite more demands and added arrogance from the other side.<sup>25</sup>

The arguments were, however, too late: for, already on 28 September, the emperor (now under Ch'i-shan's spell) had decided that Lin would have to be replaced, and that Ch'i-shan would have to go to Canton if there was still to be any prospect of a non-military resolution of the conflict. "Totally senseless and disgusting stuff," was his comment on Lin's latest proposals. "You say that the barbarians are only making an empty show of force to test our resolve. But it seems to Us that, if anyone has learned from their tricks, it is you,

who are trying to frighten Us just as the English try to frighten you!"<sup>26</sup>

The closure of Lin's direct line of communications to the court by no means discouraged him, however, from carrying on, now as an oppositionist, in the hope of gaining a hearing for the idea that the war should be continued. This Lin was quite well equipped to do, provided as he was with an array of admirers both within the government bureaucracy (where a number of former subordinates now occupied key positions), and, more important still, within the world of the Southern City literati. His case drew additional strength, moreover, from the fact that his rival, Ch'i-shan, was now in the unenviable position of having to mediate between Peking and a suddenly much more aggressive Elliot. As the negotiations got under way outside Canton in November 1840, Lin was able to keep himself informed through loyal scholarly acquaintances and ex-subordinates on the trade-expansion and territorial demands Elliot was now advancing—demands that predictably ran well ahead of what Ch'i-shan was willing to relay to Peking. He was also able to watch, grimly, from the sidelines as Elliot unilaterally seized Hong Kong and stormed the outer Bogue forts in January 1841, in order to keep up the momentum of negotiations. Naturally, all of this made excellent material for Lin's developing campaign to oust Ch'i-shan and to resume the war.

Thus, on 26 January 1841, Lin (still in Canton), wrote to his former subordinate, the Kiangnan governor, Yü-ch'ien, to complain about the sad drift of events in the south since Ch'i-shan had arrived to take charge. Yet, he admitted sadly, the stories were true that Yü-ch'ien must have been hearing about how the key forts guarding the mouth of the Canton River had fallen, several weeks before, to British attack. But this was owing to Ch'i-shan's cowardly refusal to prepare for renewed fighting—all in the vain hope of avoiding provoking Elliot's suspicions about Ch'ing bad faith. Of course, Lin continued, Ch'i-shan had continued to blame all his troubles on Lin's mishandling of the opium question, but this was all so much nonsense. "He did not care to reflect," Lin commented acidly, "that these rebellious barbarians had not dared before this to venture an attack [in the river] because our defenses were then tight, and our unity of spirit made us as impregnable as a rampart...., and so he turned our arrangements upside down, broke our morale, sabotaged our soldiers'

spirit, stiffened the [enemy's] resolve, and brought insult to our military prestige."<sup>27</sup> If the Ch'ing were now suffering military setbacks, in other words, the blame was not Lin's, but Ch'i-shan's: Lin's measures for quarantining the key strongholds had been sound and would have stood the test of battle had Ch'i-shan not sabotaged them to "buy" enemy favor.

And then, on 18 February, Lin wrote to his former metropolitan examiner, Shen Wei-ch'iao, in Peking, giving the "true" history of the current imbroglio—in which history, naturally, Ch'i-shan, rather than Lin, proved to be the real bungler. Everything had been under control and the enemy's arrogant spirit tamed, Lin insisted, until the Ch'ing court's indecisiveness over the issue of voluntary bonds had revealed to the British that "we were not as one in our purpose." Acting on this perception of Ch'ing internal dissension, the British had taken to probing for weak points along China's coastline. Naturally, Lin, at Canton, had foreseen that this might happen, and had not only erected "impregnable" defenses in his own theatre, but had urgently warned Peking of the threat that now confronted Ch'ing fortifications all along the empire's maritime frontier. However, the Chihli viceroy, Ch'i-shan, had refused to take these warnings seriously. He had thus been caught in a condition of embarrassing unpreparedness by Elliot's squadron. To extricate himself, he had determined upon a policy of appeasement—the same policy he was (at the time Lin wrote) still stubbornly pursuing at Canton, against all hope of success. For the nature of these English barbarians was such that conciliation would lead only to more arrogant demands, as the foolish Ch'i-shan had since discovered. Thus, Ch'i-shan had compounded his initial error of military negligence with an injudicious kind of diplomacy. And the Ch'ing cause had suffered an irreversible setback.<sup>28</sup>

There must, of course, have been a good deal more of such apologetics in circulation during the winter of 1840–1841, either directly from Lin's own hand, or from the hands of his literati admirers in Peking. For, barely had the *pourparlers* gotten under way in Tientsin than all sorts of savage revelations began to surface before the emperor concerning Ch'i-shan's double-dealings—most of them having some substance. For instance, starting on 8 November and continuing intermittently over the next several months, the metropolitan censorate erupted forth with a succession of reports (originating,

ultimately, from Huang Chueh-tzu in Amoy) designed to cast suspicion on Ch'i-shan's claims that he had managed to lure the British from Ting-hai. Not only had there been no such agreement, but (Huang and his agents in Peking insisted) the British were now actually fortifying the place and preparing for a long stay. Under such circumstances, it was hardly appropriate that the talks planned at Canton should be allowed to get under way!<sup>29</sup>

Even more telling, however, than the help Lin's campaign had elicited from the Spring Purificationists was the support it drew from former protégés within the provincial bureaucracy. In mid-February 1841, the Soochow governor, Yü-ch'ien, catalyzed by the news Lin had been forwarding from Canton, submitted to the court a damning impeachment of Ch'i-shan's actions from the initial talks at Tientsin to the currently stalemated negotiations in Canton. This was an important break for Lin, since Yü-ch'ien, being a Mongol, was just the sort of official who might be given command if military action revived. His intervention against Ch'i-shan thus greatly simplified the emperor's problems in considering what to do next.<sup>30</sup>

Another loyal ex-subordinate, the current Kwangtung governor, I-liang, entered the fray soon afterward with revelations perhaps even more damning than Yü-ch'ien's had been. Angered not just by what had been done to Lin but also by his own exclusion by Ch'i-shan from the secret talks with Elliot, I-liang decided to break to the emperor the news that Ch'i-shan had been playing with the idea of offering recognition of the status quo in Hong Kong in return for immediate retrocession of Ting-hai. And, in the same dispatch, which reached the emperor on 26 February, he included a British-prepared Chinese translation of a proclamation informing all Chinese living on that island (Hong Kong, that is) that they were now under British crown law!<sup>31</sup>

This last bit of evidence clearly destroyed whatever faith Tao-kuang had still retained in Ch'i-shan and in the negotiations at Canton. For had not Ch'i-shan been explicitly warned that there were to be no concessions of territory? And why had Ch'i-shan never mentioned in his dispatches so much as a single word about the British determination to hold Hong Kong? Within hours of the arrival of the damaging document from I-liang, therefore, the order had gone out for Ch'i-shan's arrest and recall to the capital.<sup>32</sup> And within but a few more weeks, with the prospect of resuming war now before

him, Tao-kuang was at last to relent and offer Lin a qualified pardon. Lin was to be assigned to the lower Yangtze front as a "deputy," there to assist Yü-ch'ien (newly named as theatre commander) to improve the defenses along the eastern Chekiang coast, just across from Ting-hai. Thanks to the fanatic loyalty of his friends within the government establishment, Lin had won. And the war would now be taken up again, where it had stopped.<sup>33</sup>

There is, however, one last aspect of the Lin/Ch'i-shan duel that needs to be mentioned, before we turn back, again, to our narrative of events at Canton. That is the role the scholars of Canton themselves had played in helping to plead Lin's case and to damage Ch'i-shan's. Their aid bore perhaps only indirectly upon the outcome of the struggle, but the vehemence of its delivery reveals quite unmistakably the hold Lin had acquired on the imaginations of many in this group. In February 1841, just as the fate of the negotiations hung in the balance, a scholar-led protest demonstration suddenly exploded inside the city, adding further to the pressure that was eventually to impel I-liang to take the field against his colleague. The immediate background to this protest was the circulation in the city of news of Ch'i-shan's cession of Hong Kong and of the acting governor general's uncertainty over whether or not to forward the evidence of this unauthorized action to Peking. Excited by this news, a certain Teng Ch'un called a meeting of "the collected scholars of the prefectoral schools" in order to get up a petition urging I-liang, the viceroy, to go through with the impeachment.

Then, however, the crowd moved on to Ch'i-shan's yamen. "Several tens [of the students] went in," recounts Liang T'ing-nan, "and Ch'i-shan had to explain to them that the peace concessions [meaning the cession of Hong Kong] were in accord with the emperor's will, and that perhaps the gentlemen were not very familiar with the realities of the situation." Before the unpopular Ch'i-shan could clear his office of unwanted guests, however, he had to endure an afternoon of lecturing on just how the barbarians ought to be dealt with.<sup>34</sup>

Was this but a random, spontaneous venting of naive student emotionalism? Possibly it was. But one can hardly fail to note that Teng Ch'un, the organizer of the affair, was himself a member of the White Cloud Mountain clique that had originally been tapped by Lin for the talent needed to oversee the opium-suppression drive, and was also a close friend of the current Ta-fo-ssu Bureau commissioner,

Huang P'ei-fang.<sup>35</sup> More likely, then, the demonstration had been an insiders' affair, prompted by the scholar-commissioners' deliberate leakage to the students of the information about I-liang's impending decision. The scholars of Canton had now taken their stand. And it had been for Lin, and for war.

### THE SIEGE OF CANTON

From the point of view of the scholar-activists of Canton—now about to be plunged almost over their heads into the treacherous currents of war—the news of the toppling of Ch'i-shan and the redemption of Lin was no doubt very gratifying indeed, at least initially. Gone at last was the hated Manchu commissioner, who had almost succeeded in laying low the man they so revered and who had gratuitously insulted the scholars with his abrasive reminders that they had no particular grasp of the issues at stake in the conflict. True, Lin had still not been given a full pardon. And true, also, Lin would soon be leaving Canton for good. But the word about Lin's replacement that reached Canton co-terminously with the order for Ch'i-shan's arrest must have compensated at least partly for the loss. The new governor general, it was learned, was to be a Han Chinese official, Ch'i Kung, who, while not himself a Han-lin, was of a Han-lin family, and who had already an established reputation for consulting very closely in government decisions with the leaders of local scholar opinion. Furthermore, Ch'i had recently served a six-year term in the Kwangtung governor's yamen, so that he would need little prompting when it came to deciding just who the representatives of local elite opinion were.<sup>36</sup> For a fleeting moment, at least, it must have seemed as if the pro-Lin scholar faction in Canton was about to have its way on both of the issues that concerned them: The war would go on, as desired, and here in Canton the local elite, not the Manchus, would be in control.

But then, gradually, a new, and much more ominous trend began to develop, arising from actions initiated by both the British and Ch'ing sides, and quite out of the control of the Cantonese elite. First was the decision, taken in Peking and without any consultation with local officials in Canton, to transform the Pearl River delta into the major arena for decisive military action against the British. The Manchu military spirit had now clearly asserted itself in the capital, and the price in suffering and loss of autonomy for the officials and

people of Canton was to be high indeed. Some 17,000 soldiers were en route to the Kwangtung front where they would have to be maintained at the expense of the provincial government and the citizens of the provincial capital—until, that is, they could complete their attack upon the newly gained British island fortress in Hong Kong.<sup>37</sup> The top command over military operations in the Pearl River theatre, moreover, had been assigned to a prince of the blood, I-shan, whose only experience in government life had been fighting Muslim rebels on the plains of inner Asia.<sup>38</sup> To the scholars of Canton, who had already had quite enough of Manchu arrogance and highhandedness during the run-in with Ch'i-shan, these developments could hardly have boded well. And for those of them (such as Liang Ting-nan) truly convinced that the war could actually be fought as a war of attrition against a pirate enemy, the whole operation must have seemed pure folly from the start. What sense could it make to squander limited Ch'ing resources on a one-shot try for glory, when the object of the struggle was to wear down the enemy?

But worse news was still to come, this time from the enemy quarter. Quite unintimidated by the Ch'ing decision to begin a military buildup in Canton, Elliot determined, late in February 1841, that he had enough of the conference table and it was time to resume military pressure. After but a week of a naval action in the vicinity of the Bogue, British forces were already in full command of the outer ring of forts guarding the water access to Canton. There they had halted for ten weeks, after the interim Ch'ing commander, Yang Fang, agreed to allow the season's trade in teas and silks to be concluded. But by 17 May, after the new purchases had been safely removed from the Canton river channel, the British were on the move again, slowly tightening the noose around the provincial capital. The Ch'ing, it seemed, were to be taught a lesson, so as to end once and for all any illusions about British naval power.<sup>39</sup>

It was against this suddenly very somber background that the first overt moves developed to bring the scholars of the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau directly into the organization of local self-defense. The initiative arose at least as much from the viceroy's yamen as from the scholars themselves. From all available accounts, it would seem, in fact, that Ch'i Kung was the really active spirit at this initial stage of local elite paramilitary mobilization. Either because he too completely distrusted I-shan's military skills, or because he resented having to gov-

ern, in effect, as the Manchu general's paymaster, the new governor general showed himself from the start most anxious to work with the Lin faction among the city's scholarly leaders in order to build up a second, civilian-led line of defense. Thus, two of the three men the new governor general took as his initial advisers were scholars of the "renovated" academy directorate: Liang Ting-nan (Lin's 1840 choice to head the Yueh-hua Academy) and Huang Pei-fang (an 1838 Teng appointee to the Hsueh-hai-tang). A third, Yü Ting-kuei, was probably an academy student of Huang's—we have insufficient biographical information to be sure.<sup>40</sup> Through Liang, in turn, Ch'i Kung seems to have come to some sort of understanding with the retired Han-lin scholar Li Ko-chiung regarding the raising of a private, local elite-funded army to be based in Fatshan—a suburban manufacturing city some 10 miles southwest of Canton. This army was presumably to guarantee a sanctuary for the retreating provincial government should it prove advisable to abandon the capital.<sup>41</sup> Finally, Ch'i Kung, in collaboration, again, with the academy elite, turned to the question of defending Canton itself. Sometime late in April or early in May 1841, Huang Pei-fang arranged for the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau directors to raise funds for a special "water-brave" force for river operations. The commander of this unit was Lin Fu-hsiang, a low-ranking scholar from Macao and a student of Huang's. Through Lin, in turn, were recruited some 500 men from the outlying counties of the delta well-versed in the terrain around Canton and in the ways of river fighting.<sup>42</sup> Through this entirely private force, Ch'i Kung acquired in effect an autonomous capacity for military operations in the Canton suburbs. Perhaps indicating his low opinions of I-shan's generalship, Ch'i stationed this force north of the city, away from the front where I-shan was preparing for his all-out attack on British forces on the river.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, as Ch'i Kung moved to align the civilian administration in Canton increasingly with the Ta-fo-ssu commissioners and so provide himself with a civilian-led reserve force, Generalissimo I-shan was acting with increasing aloofness vis-à-vis these same scholar-strategists. Liang Ting-nan recalled, with some vexation, that the Manchu held himself remote from the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau's affairs, and consistently refused audiences with its leaders, or with any other scholarly military experts, for that matter. The generalissimo was, in his own words, "too busy" with preparations to waste his time listen-

ing to such advice. And why should he listen to it, knowing full well that it was rooted in the "fantasies of bookworms" and "lacking in relevance to the realities"?<sup>44</sup> More infuriatingly still, even after it had finally dawned on the Manchu prince that his grandiose plans for a water assault against the British fleet would require some sort of independent river force to move his troops and to gather intelligence, I-shan would still not accept Liang's suggestion that he make use of the scholars to recruit such a force from among the boat people of the delta. To entrust such a role to the Cantonese, he believed, would be to create just so many more spies for the enemy—for who, after all, could trust these perpetually "traitorous" people of the Pearl River coast? Far better, instead, to hire men from the adjacent province of Fukien, even if it did require more time. The result was that I-shan still had no river navy of his own when the final showdown with the British came.<sup>45</sup>

As the battle for Canton approached, therefore, the command structure had already split into two clearly demarcated camps. In nominal control of operations was the "insurgent-quelling generallissimo," I-shan, together with his subalterns, Lung-wen and Yang Fang, and his 17,000 unpopular "picked" troops from the interior. Already quite visible as a nascent second layer of military organization was a civilian-led force under the joint command of the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau scholars and the provincial viceroy, Ch'i Kung. Just how this latter force might be used, and what its goals might be should the struggle move yet further upriver, was still probably quite unclear to its leaders. But one thing its commanders knew for certain: They desperately wished to be rid of I-shan and of his brutal, costly, and useless army. The version of the events would reflect this aim in most unmistakable form. In it, I-shan and his legions were (not without justice) to figure as the bunglers of Canton's defenses, while, equally predictably, the scholar-paramilitaries were (with far less accuracy) to appear as the last-minute rescuers of their native city. The paradoxical myth of victory at Canton was about to be born, but it was to be a myth that communicated little sympathy for the Manchu-led military establishment.

### SANYUAN-LI

The final episode in the tragic-comic battle for Canton—occurring in the closing weeks of May 1841, and climaxing with a Ch'ing government decision to ransom the city for 6 million dollars—was of little practical significance for the outcome of the larger Sino-British struggle just then beginning to get seriously under way. Moving off from the Pearl River estuary, British forces were soon to regroup for a second push northward, this time with the intent of penetrating into the central reaches of the Yangtze valley where Ch'ing imperial supply lines seemed to be the most exposed.<sup>46</sup> As this new effort progressed, bringing the British closer to the political victory and trade concessions they sought, the events at Canton must have seemed more and more a sideshow, a diversion on the road to bigger and much more consequential engagements.

But the memory of that same fight was not to be so quickly obliterated from the minds of the men who had the worst of it. On the Ch'ing side, at least, the British agreement to withdraw for a price came quickly to be understood as proof that Elliot had lost his nerve. He had been daunted, in the end (as the story now came to be told), by the "people" of the city and by the great hordes of villagers that had followed their scholar-leaders out onto the field of battle. More astonishingly still, by the end of the year, this version of events was to attain the status of proof that the war ought to be turned over everywhere to civilian-led irregulars. And even the emperor would for a while flirt with the idea of doing just that, though in the end he would not be entirely convinced of its feasibility.

How this was to happen is only partly explained by the details of what took place in the final days of the siege. For the rest of the story, to which we shall turn in a moment, it will be necessary to trace the actions of the officials and scholars here and elsewhere along the coast who determined to make of this minor affair a case in point to back their demands for the withdrawal of Manchu-led regulars from the war. We shall need to begin with the specifics of what actually did occur at Canton in the last days of the fighting. In particular, we shall need to take cognizance of an incident that took place just north of the city, when British troops clashed briefly with peasant village guards. This was the so-called San-yuan-li incident—an incident that, with official and literati support, was soon to be offered to the

Ch'ing political world as a demonstration of what "the people" could do against the enemy.

The affair occurred on 30–31 May 1841, at the village of San-yuan-li, just a few miles above the city of Canton, near whose walls General Gough's forces were waiting for the outcome of the discussions about ransom terms. Frederic Wakeman's perceptive study of the evidence concerning this engagement has helped to establish a number of interesting points about what actually took place. The sudden appearance in the field of some 10,000 village militiamen and their brief success in isolating a column of Sepoys during a flash rainstorm were not, he has shown, the results of any prearrangement with the scholars or officials inside Canton. What Gough had unknowingly blundered into was a tradition of village confederation for self-defense. The villagers of the San-yuan-li area had been keyed up by reports of grave-desecrations and rapes by British and Indian soldiers. Responding in accordance with time-honored traditions of reciprocal aid against a shared outside threat, they had marched forth, in the first instance, in the hope of intimidating the invaders by a show of massed manpower. To accomplish this, 100-odd villages mobilized more than 7,000 primitively armed men in several hours' time. When the British stood up to this force and tried to scatter it with rocket fire, things got uglier than had perhaps been intended. At this point, a sudden thunderstorm caught a detachment of Sepoys and their British officers out in the paddies, unable to use their drenched muskets. The column was immediately set upon by the peasant "braves," and, before it could be rescued by reinforcements, it had suffered some 15 wounded and one killed. The next day, the British forces still stubbornly refusing to withdraw from the area, an even larger force of village volunteers began to collect. By now, however, the ransom agreement had been signed in Canton, and the Ch'ing military command, determined to prevent renewal of the fighting, dispatched the Kuang-chou prefect, She Pao-shun, together with several subordinates, to the scene to instruct the leaders of the village militia forces to call their men away.<sup>47</sup>

That was about the extent of the affair—except perhaps for a few mysterious episodes of angry placards being posted within the city itself to warn the British against coming back to the San-yuan-li vicinity. Nothing more had been proved, apparently, than that angry peasants would fight to defend their homes and villages from a perceived

threat. Certainly neither Elliot nor Gough had taken the matter very seriously.

Yet virtually from the moment of its occurrence, both the scholar-generals of the city, and their allies in the province's civil administration, seem to have decided that the villagers' attack had established that the militia could deter the British, where I-shan and his troops could not. Reworking the several different versions of the story they had obtained, they soon had produced a convincing array of proclamations describing the unknowing village notables of San-yuan-li actively threatening to throw the British into the sea, together with the "cowardly" mandarins and "rapacious" soldiers who had fled before them during the recent fighting.

Actually, it seems to have been the scholars of the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau who first were inspired with the idea of borrowing the voice of the San-yuan-li militia chiefs for this particular set of propagandistic purposes. Probably what had put this idea into their heads was the short, 300-character manifesto the villagers really had pasted up in public places inside the city to deter an expected punitive attack by the "vengeful" British barbarians. But this former manifesto (or "Scolding of the Foreign Devils," as it was called) had been a pretty rustic affair, filled with colloquialisms and "keep-away-from-our-turf" bravado, not much concerned with the subtleties of scholar-versus-bureaucrat rivalries inside the elevated world of Canton military politics.<sup>48</sup> By contrast, in the three city-scholar productions that were later posted, the language was much more elegant and classical. And the point of the invective was also different, with the emphasis switching from the "fierceness" of the villagers to the fecklessness and ineptitude of the generals. From here, the argument sweeps, irresistibly, toward the conclusion that the "righteous people" (*i-min*) must be allowed to run the war in their way—that is, without the ruinous presence of the hated extra-provincial regulars.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, in a "Proclamation Addressed to the English Barbarians . . . from the People of the Countryside Residing in Canton," the writers assert that "in our passion for revenge all of us are alike aroused; what need have we, then, to trouble our high officials to 'raise their spears' [in our defense]? Waving our arms and giving a great shout, we certainly have the power to crush the [English] beasts without anyone else's aid!"<sup>50</sup> Or, in the "Tears of the Pearl River," another of these anonymous placards, the writer insists on two separate occasions that

the government soldiers have been more cruel and caused many more deaths to the local people than the "devils" or the "barbarian people." And he then moves on to indict the authorities in Canton for making the people of the city part with huge sums of money for the ransom, and for "barring" the people of the villages from defending themselves (the reference here being to the prefect's interference at San-yuan-li on 31 May).<sup>51</sup> Finally, in the longest and most eloquent of these city-produced manifestoes, the authors twice repeat (in their threats) that the "official soldiers" (*kuan-ping*) of the province will not be needed should hostilities resume. Instead, "We shall only call on the people of the countryside," and "we ourselves" shall take up arms to kill off you [British] pigs and dogs until there is not one of you left."<sup>52</sup>

Obviously, the preoccupations reflected in these latter documents are those, not of the village defensemen, but of the urban scholarly strategists who had for so many months been fuming at the carryings-on of I-shan's expeditionaries. They can only have been authored, then, as expressions of the version of recent events that the scholars of Canton themselves wanted publicized to a broader political world. And, indeed, one of these productions (the "Tears" manifesto) even admits as much, when it calls upon "benevolent gentlemen" to spread its message about everywhere, "so that a courageous official in the capital might report its sentiments to the throne."<sup>53</sup>

Scarcely surprising, then, that during the next several months, the manifestoes of the braves of San-yuan-li did indeed find their way to Peking and to other quarters as well, speeded there by literati correspondence networks, as well as by the vigorous lobbying efforts of officials, like Ch'i Kung himself, bitterly hostile to the kind of war the Manchu government seemed determined to fight. Chang Wei-p'ing, the White Cloud Mountain poet and Ta-fo-ssu Bureau headman, seems, for one, to have been quite exercised that the world should learn of the true significance of San-yuan-li. And to make sure that it did, he composed a short and moving poem on the affair, echoing the sentiments of the Canton manifestoes, that was to circulate widely through scholar poetry networks.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, in the Southern City, the Cantonese Han-lin Lo Ping-chang, newly returned to the capital from home leave in the fall of 1841, distributed among his friends a large collection of popular ballads about San-yuan-li and other recent goings-on in Canton, all terribly persuasive on the subject of the people's bravery and the cowardice of I-shan's regulars.<sup>55</sup>

That these endeavors by Chang, Lo, and others achieved their intent is demonstrated by the broad readership the San-yuan-li manifestoes appear to have gained among scholars outside of Kwangtung, even before the year was out. Thus, we observe Fang Tung-shu (now back again in his native T'ung-ch'eng) recording in a poem that he had finished poring over some of these documents during the autumn of 1841 and had been greatly moved by them. And even in out-of-the-way southern Chekiang, Sun I-yen, a Southern City officeholder living temporarily at home in Jui-an, was to be roused to verse later in that same year after similar materials had come into his hands.<sup>56</sup>

At the same time, moreover, as the poets of Peking and elsewhere were helping to spread the gospel of San-yuan-li, so also were the civil officials of Kwangtung and other coastal provinces. This too was understandable, considering that the commencement of the British Yangtze invasion in the fall of 1841 had brought with it a sudden rash of additional Ch'ing troop transfers into the same region—much to the consternation of provincial governors like Liu Yun-k'o and Yen Po-t'ao (in Chekiang) and Liang Chang-chü (in Kiangnan), who now had to face precisely the same problems Ch'i Kung had been living with for months. How very natural that, under such circumstances, there should be a great expansion of mandarin interest in what had happened at San-yuan-li. Yet, even so, the audacity certain of these newly converted official enthusiasts displayed in lobbying for court accreditation of the San-yuan-li saga is quite remarkable.<sup>57</sup>

It was probably Wang T'ing-lan, a sub-gubernatorial official in the Canton civil administration, who was the first to attempt to spread official interest in the story beyond the confines of Kwangtung province. In mid-1841, Wang wrote to a same-year graduate, the Fukien financial commissioner, Tseng Wang-yen, with the full inside story of the San-yuan-li battle. From Wang, Tseng and his fellow officials learned that the villagers had surrounded an enemy force of "one thousand or more," killed "eighty or ninety" of them, wounded innumerable others, and would doubtless have exterminated the whole lot if only I-shan had sent in his reinforcements to help. Instead, however, the generalissimo had become fearful that the recently signed truce agreement would fall victim to British wrath. He had thus done nothing, letting slip a great chance for victory. But this, Wang told Tseng, was just what one would expect from someone so inept and cowardly.<sup>58</sup>

The preaching did not, however, end there. Tseng immediately brought Wang's letter to the attention of his superior, Governor General Yen Po-t'ao, who in turn sent it on, with an enthusiastic cover letter, straight to the emperor. And when Tao-kuang then asked the newly appointed Kiangnan governor, Liang Chang-chü, for his opinion on the tale (Liang, we should note, had just been transferred from Kwangsi, immediately upriver of Canton, where he would have been able to collect his own information on events in progress in the Pearl River theatre), the answer he received was even more euphoric than Wang's letter in its praise of the village fighters. So convinced was Liang, in fact, of the truth of the claims about these peasant corps-men, and so eager, too, to have the emperor share his conviction, that the Kiangnan governor even presumed to enclose an original of one of the San-yuan-li manifestoes in his report.<sup>59</sup>

The really significant decision about the credibility of the San-yuan-li story would still, however, have to be made by the court. It was one thing for a provincial official to wax eloquent on the formidable peasant soldiers of Kwangtung. But it was quite another matter again to expect the emperor, merely on the basis of such claims, to rein in his strategic impulses, call back his generals, and withdraw his elite troops from the Yangtze gateway provinces. But what exactly did Tao-kung and his inner-palace advisers make of all this? And, if they too believed, what would they do? In particular, would they accede to Ch'i Kung's recent precedent-setting request for permission to withdraw for good the remains of I-shan's army and to substitute for it a standing force of 36,000 local militiamen?<sup>60</sup> Would such a precedent, even in Kwangtung, be acceptable to a government that had traditionally refused to share military power with the local scholar class?

In the end, in fact, there never was to be a final ruling by the court on any of these questions. But, in two limited regards, at least, the changes in strategy desired by the San-yuan-li propagandists actually did take place. First, and most important, was the decision not to replace I-shan's shattered army with fresh outside troops. On 31 October 1841, the Manchu commander-in-chief of the Nanking military theatre, Hai-ling, petitioned the emperor in the strongest possible terms to dispatch at once to the southeast a new field army assembled from Manchurian garrison units. This was necessary, Hai-ling argued, in order to inject fresh life back into the campaign in Kwangtung (a concern that must have loomed large for the general, since his own

troops were about to come under attack). With the Yangtze now facing another British onslaught, it was critically important that the Ch'ing renew the pressure against the British rear in Hong Kong. And for such fighting, Hai-ling insisted, only the best northern troops would be adequate.<sup>61</sup>

But Tao-kuang would have none of this. And then, as if to add a larger strategic gloss to his veto, the emperor six days later (on 5 November) promulgated a remarkable document, conceding as a matter of principle that irregulars ought to be mobilized everywhere along the coast, not just in Kwangtung, so as to reduce the need for any further shifting about of elite units. In fact, this new ruling was still not quite the same thing as a decision to turn the war over to scholar-led militia forces. Tao-kuang nowhere makes mention in it of actual withdrawals of transferred units. All that it really signified, in fact, was that the court was now too worried about a possible attack on Tientsin or Manchuria to be able to spare any more first-class troops for the south. The trials of the lower Yangtze civil officials were still far from over.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, from the vantage point of the officials and scholars of Canton, this 5 November edict could be read in the most positive sort of way. At the very least, there would be no more incoming troops from the north or from the interior. And the "principle" that irregulars were of value in the fight against the British invaders had at last been recognized. These were both major political triumphs in their own right. But they were triumphs, no less, for the myth that the scholars of Canton had created: the myth of a "victory" at San-yuan-li.

#### PARAMILITARY REALITIES

By way of bringing to a conclusion our narrative of the strange second war the Ch'ing side fought—or thought it had fought—in the southeast, it will be necessary here to document one last sequence of events that were to occur at Canton. These arose out of the actions of Governor General Ch'i Kung and the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau scholars, not in the realm of political lobbying outside of the province, but rather in connection with the reorganization of the government's actual military disposition in the vicinity of Canton itself. During the fall and winter of 1841–1842, more or less in pace with the advancing repute of paramilitaries in the strategic rhetoric of the

court, the authorities in Canton undertook to transform the claims of local elite loyalism and spontaneous popular hostility to the British with which they had been bombarding Peking since 1841 into a tangible, independent military force supported and manned exclusively by Cantonese themselves. In this effort they were to be quite remarkably successful. By the war's end, somewhere approaching 40,000 regulars (the equivalent of nearly half the province's regular quota of government-maintained soldiers) were to have been added to the ranks of the forces theoretically available to resist another British attack.<sup>63</sup> Further, they were to be concentrated exclusively in the neighborhood of the provincial capital, where, by 1842, it was no longer Green Standard regulars, but rather these new detachments that had absorbed responsibility for patrolling the labyrinthine inlets and creeks of the Pearl River estuary. Canton, in short, was to be virtually independent of the military bureaucracy and come almost entirely under the paramilitary control of local elites, a situation not paralleled anywhere along the empire's coastline during or after the war. How this was accomplished, and how Peking would perceive the strategic significance of this switch (in terms of its own wartime objectives), are the questions we must now address. For, quite obviously, both matters would have great bearing in the postwar years on how the authorities in Peking and Canton would dispose themselves on the question of paramilitary demobilization—one of the most ticklish postwar political issues in this particular part of China.

In the wake of the British retreat from the Canton river in June 1841, the truce arrangements agreed upon by Elliot and his Ch'ing counterpart, Prince I-shan, had mandated a pullback some twenty miles from Canton of all Ch'ing regular units remaining under arms in the area.<sup>64</sup> The military vacuum created by this redeployment, the effect of which was compounded by the defeat-induced demoralization of those troops under the government's banners and by fear of looting and of banditry, had made it imperative that some sort of arrangements be made by the civilian authorities and the local elite to police the city and its rural suburbs.<sup>65</sup> The random and ad hoc militia structures created by the bureau in Fatshan and elsewhere during the siege, in other words, would now have to be replaced by some more regularized structure of armed control. But how exactly was this to be done?

In theory, of course, there was no reason why this could not have

been accomplished merely by systematizing and extending into all precincts the kind of village guard arrangements that had worked so well at San-yuan-li and in other village clusters dotting the hill country just north of the provincial capital. There the traditions of village self-defense had shown themselves well enough entrenched to bring out a huge force of peasant guardsmen whose morale had been sufficiently high even to withstand a brief test by British rocket fire. Presumably, such village guard-force units could have easily handled the threat from within, and done so, moreover, without the expense or political controversy attendant upon the raising of a fully professionalized constabulary force.

As subsequent developments were to demonstrate, however, such informal methods of militia organization as these simply were not sufficient to service the more ambitious kinds of local security needs Ch'i Kung and the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau leaders had perceived and were intent on meeting: needs that included protection both against foreign attack and against well-organized native mobsters and racketeers who had always controlled certain of the more socially complex reaches of the delta.<sup>66</sup>

In the first place, it is evident that the new military planners at Canton really were quite frightened of the prospect of another "looting" of Canton by the British, and were determined to make such a return as costly for the enemy as they could. Such a concern alone can explain the huge amount of effort that went into building new river forts and into emplanting all sorts of obstacles (stone-filled boats, pilings, chains, and so forth) at practically every point of entry into the delta.<sup>67</sup> To man these fortifications and patrol the barriers, however, Ch'i Kung would need some kind of permanent standing army, available at all times, and not just during emergencies. Then, too, funds would have to be raised to finance these new riverine defenses—funds that could scarcely be squeezed out of villages already well protected by their own volunteer guards.<sup>68</sup> And, finally, there were certain parts of the delta where internal security needs could not be met by local communities themselves. Such areas included the walled city of Canton and its satellite towns, such as the great manufacturing center of Fatshan (population 200,000), ten miles to the southwest. But they also included large stretches of rural terrain as well—notably the estuarine shoal-fields (*sha-t'an*) reclaimed from the salt marshes of the delta. Here transient tenant-laborers,

duck herders, and boat people, rather than settled villagers, were the principal inhabitants. In such stretches of the estuary—where, incidentally, many urban academies held rent-bearing properties—communities were too atomized, and secret-society-run protection syndicates too active, to allow patrol arrangements to be entrusted to local volunteers.<sup>69</sup>

All these considerations persuaded the responsible authorities in Canton that they would have to create a delta guard force of a fully professionalized and centralized character to supplement the San-yuan-li type self-defensive arrangements that existed in certain upriver portions of the delta. In fact, Ch'i Kung's initial report to Peking on military reorganization following the lifting of the siege of Canton (submitted in September 1841) had already spoken plainly of this necessity. (Though, we might add, the explanation given—that the village guardsmen of the kind that had fought at San-yuan-li were "reluctant to campaign" away from their homes—told only part of the story).<sup>70</sup> But, in December, in a second report written after the November 1841 edict authorizing irregulars universally, Ch'i Kung was able to be more straightforward about the arrangements he had been implementing. There were now, Peking learned, over 30,000 mercenaries (*chuang-yung*) on the payroll, recruited from the seagoing folk of Ch'ao-chou, Hsiang-shan, Shun-te, and Tung-kuan, and gathered together in garrisons of from several hundred to a thousand to guard various key points throughout the ditch- and canal-filled delta.<sup>71</sup>

The huge scale of this private army leads us to the question of how such a force was paid for, and thus to our next point, which concerns the fee-earning services it performed for scholar-controlled corporate landowning bodies (mainly academies) holding rent-producing properties in the shoal fields themselves. Sometime during the fall or winter of 1841, Ch'i Kung seems to have been talked into letting the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau in Canton assume responsibilities as a kind of overlord licensing agency for authorizing and controlling shoal-field exploitation within the lower delta. As this system came eventually to function, interested urban and suburban corporations holding plots within these areas were to purchase licenses recognizing their rights as landlords from this new, centralized militia authority in Canton. By virtue of such recognition, the landholding agency would then be guaranteed the right to protection by the Bureau's patrol forces—protection both against rival strongman organizations

run by the secret societies and against unruly tenants and graziers themselves. The Bureau, for its part, would receive yearly fees for the licenses that would help pay for the patrol forces.<sup>72</sup>

From this modest beginning, the authorities in Canton moved on, late in 1842, to an even more ambitious project involving the issuing of licenses for new reclamation projects in the outer reaches of the Whampoa channel—these likewise to be managed by the Canton Bureau and policed by its soldiers. The provincial government, it now seemed, was intent on bringing the subcontracting and policing of nearly all reclamation in the delta area under the control of a single, scholar-run centralized authority in the provincial seat.<sup>73</sup>

The point was, clearly enough, to coax funding for military reorganization from the pockets of the delta's landlords without at the same time stirring up tax protests. And, given that particular goal, the arrangement was eminently practical, offering as it did an improved security of control to absentee landlords in return for the surcharges that they paid into the coffers of the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau. Moreover, from the provincial government's point of view, regardless of how effectively the shoal patrols might or might not fight against the British, the system was already justified solely on the basis of the contribution it made to internal order. For now, at least, Ch'i Kung had nearly 40,000 well-paid and well-armed gendarmes to assert government authority in the Triad-infested waterways of the delta. As measured against the dangerous state of affairs that had existed in mid-1841—and even, for that matter, against the fairly anarchic circumstances that had obtained during the prewar years, when corrupt, underpaid regulars had exercised this function—this must have seemed a considerable gain for the cause of local law and order. So much an improvement, in fact, that it might be worth a few exaggerations to Peking in order to keep the new "army" in the emperor's good graces.

All of which will serve to bring us, in due course, to the matter of how this ambitious program of military restructuring was represented to Peking, and how Peking, for its part, was disposed to regard Ch'i Kung's quite unorthodox innovation. From the very outset, of course, Ch'i Kung was intent on portraying his measures as an important contribution to the Ch'ing government's military efforts against the British. This the governor general had to do, since one of the primary reasons for establishing the legitimacy of the paramilitaries

was, as we have seen, to get Peking to withdraw its field armies from the city. Under such circumstances, it was a foregone conclusion that the new army would have to be a more formidable opponent of the enemy than I-shan's had been. And so, in fact, the emperor was told.<sup>74</sup>

Moreover, at least initially, there seems even to have been a genuine readiness on the part of the emperor to credit these claims, if only perhaps because there was (after November 1841) no real alternative to rebuilding the Kwangtung units from the outside. The emperor's willingness to believe, however, was to be gradually eroded by his disappointments at the inertia of the new "army" during the winter of 1841–1842, when, suddenly, it became critically important to Peking that an offensive of some kind be undertaken against Hong Kong. The background to this decision to call out Ch'i Kung's irregulars for an assault on the British main base in the south was the approaching military showdown in the lower Yangtze theatre. There, in a last-ditch attempt to stem the enemy's relentless advance upon the Grand Canal and Nanking, the court had ordered one final counteroffensive. For this it had gathered together some 30,000 troops (including 10,000 elite and aborigine fighters from the interior provinces) for a grand three-pronged attack against British positions in the eastern Chekiang promontory.<sup>75</sup> However, awareness ran high, in Peking and at the front in Chekiang, that prospects of success would be greatly aided if the British fleet, or part of it, could be drawn off by the necessity to relieve pressure upon Hong Kong. For such a job the Cantonese irregulars ought to have been perfect, since they were natives of the region, and, according to what Tao-kuang had been told, were adept at "water warfare." What could have been more appropriate, then, but to throw these intrepid marines against the British forces on Hong Kong island—perhaps in a daring nighttime raid, backed up by a mutiny from the island itself, prearranged with the Chinese coolies and servants who kept the colony running?<sup>76</sup>

But, though a veritable flood of edicts descended upon I-shan and Ch'i Kung in Canton, arguing, imploring, demanding such an attack, it never took place. I-shan explained this first as a matter of local military priorities. The Kwangtung command would have to wait until the delta's defenses had been made invulnerable before going on the offensive. Otherwise, he insisted, the irregulars could not march (or sail) into battle confident that their own rear was safe from British counterattack. But, by January 1842, I-shan was willing to be a little

more forthcoming. The Cantonese irregulars, he admitted, simply "had no stomach" for confronting the British on the seas—or even, apparently, in Kowloon harbor. But that itself ought not to be taken as a negative comment on their utility to the Ch'ing, since a successful defensive action at Canton was a better way of engaging the enemy than a direct attack upon his strongest positions. Moreover, at least according to I-shan, the spectacle of Ch'ing military preparations advancing so rapidly just across the bay from Hong Kong had put considerable fear into the new British plenipotentiary, Pottinger, and had forced him to deploy more warships in Hong Kong harbor, where they now sat, wasting supplies and unable to help their own campaign in the north.<sup>77</sup>

To Tao-kuang, all this was greatly vexing, since, at the moment he received this report, Ch'ing armies in Chekiang were dissolving in disarray, broken by the enemy's formidable naval firepower. Reluctantly, he began to come to two difficult conclusions. First, the opportunities for negotiations would again have to be explored. For this purpose the Manchu general Ch'i-ying was ordered to Hangchow in April 1842. Second, the irregulars of Canton, having proven themselves worthless, would have to be pared back. On 13 April, I-shan—whose claims about enemy ships lying idle at Hong Kong were now openly scorned as "absolute nonsense"—was accordingly ordered to start taking these actions. The stage had thus been set (however inadvertently) for a clash between the court and the government authorities at Canton over the fate of the new Kwangtung "army."<sup>78</sup>

But, to the Cantonese, and even to I-shan, this struggle still seemed very far in the future. As late as October 1842, when the generalissimo was about to depart for the north, he could still tell the emperor that the "scholars and people of Canton" were gratified to him for allowing the "raising of irregulars to defend the citizenry," thereby sparing "their province alone" from the savagery of the enemy.<sup>79</sup> The Cantonese, at least, had still to admit that they had not won a "unique" victory over the British.

## CHAPTER FIVE

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### *The Debate Over the Conduct of the War*

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One of the principal arguments of this book—that literati political ambitions fostered an inward-looking intellectual rigidity during the period of the Opium War crisis—seems almost flatly contradicted by the extraordinary effusion of literati interest in wartime defense and diplomatic policy that erupted in 1842. Scarcely a single anthology of the works of politically active literati resident in Peking during the last months of the war or the years immediately following the Treaty of Nanking is without its bitter poetic lament over the humiliation of the empire's armies, or its passionate tract urging one or another formula for the quick recovery of military self-confidence.

Nor was this sudden burst of enthusiasm for discussing and studying “maritime affairs” confined to occasional essays or poems, soon to be forgotten once the shock of the treaty—with its alarming pro-

visions for new trade ports and for the cession of Hong Kong—had passed. The immediate postwar years were also to see the publication of several major works by literati on coastal defense and on the geography and political economy (however poorly understood) of the European trading empires, and the circulation in manuscript form of others. Yao Ying's well-received *Record of a Mission to Tibet* (*K'ang-yu chi-hsing*), and Wei Yuan's even more broadly cited *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Nations* (*Hai-kuo t'u-chih*), for example, were both immediate products of the shock of defeat, as were several other somewhat less widely distributed volumes on military and geographical subjects, such as Huang Chueh-tzu's *Illustrated Compendium on Maritime Defense* (*Hai-fang t'u-piao*), or Hsu Chi-yü's *Short Account of the Maritime Circuit* (*Ying-huan chih-lueh*), a vaguely pro-European work suppressed until its 1866 reprinting. Then, too, there were a number of careful studies of the recent war itself—both as an episode in diplomacy and as a case study in military planning—including, most prominently, Wei Yuan's *Record of the Campaigns and Pacification of the Foreign Fleets* (*Tao-kuang yang-sou cheng-fu chi*), and its rival, the more defeatist *Record of Pacifying the Barbarians from Afar* (*Fu-yuan chi-lueh*) of Huang En-t'ung.<sup>1</sup>

In comparison with the political and intellectual milieu of the immediate prewar years, this in itself seems a startling change: a realization, as it were, of the intractable reality of international military competition, or a confession that the prewar ministerial leadership had blundered into its confrontation with England too much blinded by internal political causes to pay adequate heed to the problems of external defense. As Yao Ying, the passionate Ming-revivalist literati leader of the prewar political scene, was to put it, the scholars of the 1830s had been too enclosed in their narrow, domestic world—Yao himself included. Writing to a friend in 1846 or 1847, Yao blamed this political and intellectual introversion in no uncertain terms for the disaster that the Ch'ing had just suffered:

The techniques of the barbarians have never been greatly superior to those of China. Moreover, in terms of strategic geography they fight in violation of the precepts of military science [i.e., by operating so far from their bases]. Why, then, have we panicked and retreated whenever they have landed on our shores? Surely the reason is that the book-bound scholars of China have been too glued to immediate concerns, and too inattentive to planning for "that which lies distant." In the days preceding this crisis, our scholars paid no heed whatsoever to the

study of the interstate relations or domestic affairs of these barbarians from beyond the seas. And thus, when their great ships suddenly hove into view, [our scholars] were as terrified as if they had just seen a ghost or spirit; and as frightened as if they had just been struck by a thunderbolt.<sup>2</sup>

It was now time, Yao seemed to be saying, for the literati to give their undivided attention to matters external.

Nor does the impression of a sudden outward redirection of literati interest change when we examine the political alignments and controversies that came to dominate the Peking political scene during the 1840s. For these too seem to have been very much the product of disagreements within the elite over the external affairs of war and diplomacy. As is well known, the major political rivalry in the capital during the years immediately following the Nanking negotiations pitted the Manchu grand councillor, Mu-chang-a, who had backed the policy of retreat at court, against the Han Chinese grand councillor, Ch'i Chün-tsao, who (supported enthusiastically by his many adherents) had been the most vigorous opponent of the surrender policy.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in the final showdown between these court factions, climaxing in 1849–1850, diplomatic and military issues were to play a highly visible role, as we shall discuss in chapter 7. After 1849, for example, the opposition party was to make much of the fact that the British had not resorted to war (as their rivals insisted they would) over Ch'ing refusal to admit foreigners into Canton. This, they claimed, proved what the more enlightened students of barbarian affairs had been saying all along—that the British were too overextended in south Asia and Nepal to risk another conflict in distant China. And in 1850, when the Mu-chang-a government finally fell from grace, the emperor himself was to declare its leaders unnecessarily timid on the Canton question, and to present this as a major reason for the decision to throw them out.

To all outward appearances, then, the literati had now fully committed themselves to greater attentiveness in the realm of what they called maritime affairs. Concern within the political elite over foreign policy questions had developed to the point that it eclipsed other issues as a source of disagreement and spur to political competition. This would seem, indeed, to be a very different, and much more extroverted, political climate than that of the 1830s, when fairly trivial bureaucratic reforms and controversies over the Ch'ing

political constitution had been the main fare of high politics. And if the political milieu was still not quite ready for a major commitment to military or economic modernization, surely the greater sensitivity to foreign affairs that had been induced by the war would, before long, begin to move things in that direction.

Yet in the end, matters did not develop this way. The newfound literati fascination with the external world did not lead to great self-consciousness or to a positive appreciation of the military and economic institutions that had enabled the enemy to triumph. It led, instead, in precisely the opposite direction: backward, toward a renewed conviction that Lin Tse-hsu really had been right, and that the maritime West really was, for all its formidable exterior, only an empty threat, not a challenge requiring major institutional reforms. War-provoked alarm, though deep, nevertheless ended up binding the literati all the more closely to the old ideas of Chinese strategic self-sufficiency.

In this chapter and in the next, our inquiry will concern itself with why this view triumphed at the expense of others. For the purposes of the chapter at hand, however, we shall be interested in one feature of the mid-century Ch'ing political milieu that had a direct bearing on literati consciousness of the war and its implications. This was the consciousness-molding influence exercised by the Spring Purification circle and other loyalty networks that had been built up by the literati in the prewar years. As we proceed with our analysis of literati opinion formation in the postwar era, we shall have occasion to observe over and over again how the channels through which views about the war were diffused were dominated by the prewar literati party, and how, as the result, the self-exculpatory enthusiasm of the literati leaders responsible for the war came to be inserted into almost every popular account of what had taken place. Needless to say, the legend of San-yuan-li and of paramilitary triumphs over the British figured quite prominently in these accounts. For after all, that particular affair (or rather, the distorted publicity given it) had been in part a product of the determination to vindicate Lin Tse-hsu's insistence on the practicality of military resistance.

But it was not simply the claims of an overlooked victory in the south that captured the postwar literati political imagination. Also prominent in this literati war literature were themes of betrayal and of internal sabotage. The tremendous amount of hostile publicity

Lin had stirred up against Ch'i-shan, for example, became one of the great influences on how the literati were to understand the war in retrospect. And there were other, parallel instances, where the residue of wartime policy quarrels and the appeals they had prompted to Southern City friends and supporters provided postwar commentators with convincing evidence that defeat really had come from within—such as, for instance, in the famous Taiwan case of 1843 that will be discussed below. The impact of these bitterly *ad hominem* productions on literati willingness to believe that military success had truly been within reach cannot be overrated. For, when presented against a background of lurid intrigues by cowardly Manchu generals and timid mandarins, the claims of an overlooked victory at Canton acquired just that much more plausibility.

Our attempt to interpret the influences bearing upon postwar literati political consciousness begins, then, with the analysis of how the literati loyalty networks built up during the immediate prewar period determined what kinds of information about the details of the 1840–1842 war would achieve the broadest currency. Stories of betrayal, of officials and generals in league to thwart the serious bellicerents, had a major place in this inner literati view, if only because so much of this private literature had its origins in the efforts of literati leaders to dishonor their opponents. Let us therefore launch our review of this loyalty-network literature by reconstructing, as best we can, two of the best-known betrayal legends: Lin's victimization by the Chihli governor-general, Ch'i-shan; and, the impeachment of the Taiwan intendant by the Amoy commissioner, I-liang.

#### CHI-SHAN AND THE TIENSIN NEGOTIATIONS

Without a doubt, the most widely circulated and accredited tale of bureaucratic betrayal was the episode of Lin Tse-hsu's removal from office and his replacement as imperial commissioner at Canton by Ch'i-shan late in 1840. To review briefly the course of events that led up to that particular episode, we shall recall from the previous chapter that the removal of Lin had been precipitated by Elliot's arrival at Ta-ku near Tientsin in August 1840 with a supporting naval squadron in tow. This surprise move caught the Chihli governor general, Ch'i-shan, and the court, totally unprepared. Although it is uncertain whether the Ta-ku forts could have been held even under more

advantageous circumstances, the hue and cry that followed was to focus instead on whose fault it was that there had been no effective defense preparations at Ta-ku.<sup>4</sup>

From Ch'i-shan's point of view, and from Tao-kuang's as well, there did not at first seem to be much doubt about who had been in the wrong. As we have already had occasion to note, Lin Tse-hsu had withheld all mention that the British might attack the north until it was virtually too late to take any precautionary actions. And he had done so because he simply had not expected this move.

Lin, however, had (or was soon to develop) other views on the matter. In one of his more broadly circulated self-defenses (his February 1841 letter to Shen Wei-ch'iao), he set forth his own side of the affair, in terms that introduced two new (and entirely false) claims about what had taken place. There had in fact been warnings of possible attack, Lin was now to insist. If they had not been taken seriously, that was to be attributed to the timorousness or sluggishness of the Chekiang and Chihli authorities. Second, Elliot's choice of Tientsin as his main target now became, in Lin's reworking of history, a "feint" or a "bluff"—a probe to search out the weak point in the Ch'ing defense system—that had occurred only because Lin himself had frustrated their primary purpose: the seizure of Canton. There is no convincing basis for either of these claims. But let us pause a moment to hear Lin's version, for it was soon to become the "official" view of the opposition:

At first, these barbarians were terrified of our celestial majesty, and at once handed over the entire stock of opium from their hulks. We had no need to deploy a single soldier or shoot a single arrow. . . . [But later when we backed down from our resolve to force them to sign promises of no further imports], they craftily perceived that our will was not as one. . . . Thereupon their ships began to glide like phantoms along our shores, and rumors began to fly forth from all quarters. Fortunately, in the Kwangtung region we had made vigilant defense preparations, and were able to drive them off several times. [And we were further aided] by the embargo edicts that then authorized us to terminate all their trading. *I then anticipated that their response would be to raid other provinces along our coast, and I accordingly sent in no fewer than five reports asking that orders be issued for defense preparations to be made. And I even managed to discover in advance and to report that they planned to occupy the Chusan [Islands] and to descend upon Tientsin. . . .* But the Chihli governor general, having earlier reported that a fleet need not be built [to guard that province], now found himself in a panic when the barbarian ships approached. So as not to humiliate him-

self as had the Chekiang authorities, he resolved to speak soft words and be generous with gifts, and thus appease their anger and delight them. *Thus would he insinuate his way out of the danger [he now faced]. He never anticipated that this would only whet their dog-like appetites, making them even more insatiable than they had been before.* [Italics added].<sup>5</sup>

The facts contradict Lin's claims. In the first place, we know from the testimony of Lin's own military adviser, Liang Ting-nan, that Lin had chosen to disbelieve early (spring 1840) reports about the dispatch from India of a large British naval force. His so-called "warning" of April 1840 in fact consists of little more than a list of arguments against worrying too much about the "rumor" Lin is reporting on British plans to send a fleet upcoast. And, still more to the point, the choice to make Tientsin the pressure point instead of Canton had been made in London, not at the China front, and had begun to be prefigured in Palmerston's correspondence as early as October 1839.<sup>6</sup> It is thus ridiculous for Lin to claim to have "driven off" the enemy fleet, and equally absurd for him to argue that the enemy's singling out of Ta-ku was connected to a decision to probe for weak points away from Canton.

Yet on these two ungrounded claims Commissioner Lin staked his self-defense, and these claims soon became the basis of a great deal of literati gossip about the affair—indicating, unmistakably, that it was Lin's account that had determined these men's views.

But let us examine some specific instances of this literati version, inspired by Lin himself, of the commissioner's purge. One widely circulated rendering of it occurs in an often-quoted letter composed by Lin's friend and wartime correspondent, the Mongol Han-lin Yü-ch'ien, to a fellow spirit within the bureaucracy, in the spring of 1841. Writing just after the ransoming of Canton, in May of that year, Yü-ch'ien analyzed the British strategy:

In the preceding two years [i.e., since Lin's arrival at Canton in the spring of 1839] the defenses of Kwangtung had been well organized, and there was no possibility of [the British] finding a strategy for seizing [the provincial capital]. Therefore the barbarians attacked and occupied Ting-hai. But their intentions remained firmly fixed upon Kwangtung. Their next step therefore was to concoct a treacherous plan. The most gullible [of the coastal governors and governors general] was singled out as the victim of their deception. Accordingly, they proceeded to the headquarters of the Chihli governor general at Tientsin and submitted a plan for the reconciliation. At the same time, they told Ch'i-shan: "If

your Excellency goes to Kwangtung, our two sides can live in everlasting peace." [Ch'i-shan] was ignorant of strategy and of the barbarians' nature alike, and so he was taken in. Boldly he took matters into his own hands. Upon reaching Kwangtung, [as a sign of good faith] he promptly dissolved the naval force and water braves [Lin had assembled].<sup>7</sup>

And so the city of Canton fell into English hands.

To another literati commentator, Hsia Hsieh, who had learned of the intrigue from Yü-ch'ien's account, the matter amounted to nothing more than an exercise of the most elementary of military strategies: taking by ruse what cannot be taken by direct assault:

The rule of fighting is that, if you attack the enemy's weak point, then his strongest position becomes no better than a weak point itself. Behold how [Palmerston's] letter was handed over at Tientsin; how Lin and Teng were cashiered; how Grand Secretary Ch'i-shan was transferred to Kwangtung; and how the fortifications at the Bogue were removed and Canton left exposed "like an open sack, inviting all to pilfer." [It is manifest] that Elliot had no intention of negotiating a settlement, but only sought to utilize Grand Secretary Ch'i-shan to unlock the door to Canton.<sup>8</sup>

In this ingenious manner, then, Elliot had succeeded in prying his two most formidable opponents (Lin and Teng) from office, and the Chinese side, taken by surprise by Elliot's seizure of the Bogue forts the following spring, had soon thereafter to acquiesce to an evacuation of all its troops from the Pearl River estuary.

The hypnotizing spell of Lin's own history of this complex affair is here evident, both in the assumption that Canton had all along been Elliot's principal target, and in the portrait of Ch'i-shan as the all-too-willing victim of Elliot's ingenious outflanking maneuver. And those very same assumptions inhabit the war memoirs of a great many other contemporaneous literati activists as well—many of whom seem like Hsia Hsieh to have gotten Lin's story via Yü-ch'ien correspondence. Thus, for example, late in 1842 a young scholar from Kwangsi named Wang Hsi-chen passed around to his friends in the capital a draft letter to the grand councillor, Ch'i Chün-tsao, which dwelt, as had the accounts of Yü-ch'ien and Lin, upon the element of cunning in British strategy. This cunning, Wang earnestly warned the grand councillor, had been evidenced, *inter alia*, in the treacherous methods the British had used to "fulfill their designs" upon Canton, and to "implicate" Lin. Let the current government

therefore take note, and not again be caught unawares by such arrant trickery.<sup>9</sup> At about the same time Wang was handing around his letter, moreover, another much better established Southern City personality, the censor Chu Ch'i, was coming to much the same conclusion as he reflected back upon what had happened at Tientsin. In a lengthy and emotional poem on the war written in mid-1842, he has the British, once again, "launching a treacherous subterfuge," sailing north to "set the [frightened officials in that quarter] to vilifying Commissioner Lin," and then ungratefully violating their promises to Ch'i-shan after he helped them get rid of Lin.<sup>10</sup> Nearly everyone, it would seem, had been seduced by Lin's tale.

As the result, therefore, of Lin's spirited self-defense and the publicity it got, the explanation that was to dominate postwar literati commentary on why the Ch'ing had been overwhelmed in the first phases of the war was to be an entirely self-determined, inward-looking one. Elliot's first northern campaign and the British decision to try the peace ruse upon Ch'i-shan were proof only of the strength and ingenuity of Lin's defense arrangements at Canton. And if such wiles had been successful, it was because, quite plainly, the Ch'ing bureaucracy had allowed too many spineless officials, such as Ch'i-shan, to clamber into high office. From this it was but one small additional step to the conclusion that perhaps the whole war, and not just the opening rounds, had been deliberately sabotaged by mediocre bureaucrats, intent upon safeguarding their jobs from the risks of a war they had not wanted. As one Southern City official very much under Lin's influence was to write, directly after the Nanking negotiations had ended, the whole sorry performance of the Ch'ing government in the recent war could be ascribed to the "premeditated treachery" of such officials. The government, it seemed—or at least most of its agents—had been merely going through the motions of waging war, meanwhile secretly hoping that Lin and the activist party would wreck themselves as quickly as possible. With such an attitude crippling the Ch'ing side, even the empty bluster of these "island barbarians" could easily carry the day.<sup>11</sup>

#### THE CASE OF YAO YING ON TAIWAN

If Lin Tse-hsu's 1840–1841 campaign against Ch'i-shan had first popularized the suspicion that the war had been lost through self-defeat-

ing treachery, that same conviction was to be given even more appeal by a second great literati *cause célèbre*: the attempt to save the Taiwan intendant, Yao Ying, from “revenge” by his British and Manchu enemies in 1843. Very few episodes connected with the war received quite so much publicity among the Southern City literati as this particular affair. And not surprisingly, either: Yao, we might remember, was one of the great moving spirits behind the original Spring Purification caucus in Peking, and had been accumulating enthusiastic scholarly dependents for over a decade by the time his own career was caught up in (and almost ruined by) the 1840 war. Moreover, like Lin, Yao had been a party to most of the political maneuvers that had precipitated the war—a circumstance that compelled him to act, throughout this affair, with maximum regard to maintaining the appearance of his own wisdom and honorability, whatever the realities of the situation might actually be.<sup>12</sup> Finally, and adding still more fuel to the fires of controversy that Yao’s actions were to ignite, was his own personal identification with the core values of *ku-wen* belletrism. To leave posterity words that conveyed a vivid moral example, and to act as if one were already between the covers of a “praise-and-blame” history text—such values were, to Yao, as to others in the T’ung-ch’eng school, the cardinal ideals of the scholar-official’s life.<sup>13</sup> This particular mind-set was to render Yao even more willing than Lin to propagandize in his own self-defense. And it was to guarantee, as well, that the story of Yao’s victimization would create even greater faith in the “self-defeat-through-intrigue” version of the war than had Lin’s sufferings at the hands of Ch’i-shan and Elliot.

But at this point some background is in order. What brought about Yao’s spectacular run-in with the Ch’ing authorities late in 1842 was the action he had taken as a wartime commander in charge of the defense of the island of Taiwan. The history of these actions began in the autumn of 1841, a crucial juncture in the progress of the war, when the British, under new leadership, were initiating the second and final round of assaults on Chinese coastal and riverine defenses that would take them to the walls of Nanking by the following spring.

For the purposes of our current narrative, several events related to that campaign can be seen in retrospect to have been of vital consequence for the outcome of the “Taiwan case.” The first was the fall of Amoy on 26 August 1841, with no significant resistance by its de-

fenders. Amoy was the first city to be occupied by British soldiers in this renewed round of fighting, and its loss (by contrast with the allegedly successful defense by Teng T’ing-chen in 1840) prompted an immediate and irate response from the court. I-liang, at the time Liang-Kuang governor general, and by reputation a militant, was assigned on 30 September to investigate the causes of the debacle. And on 19 October he was issued the seal of an imperial commissioner with responsibility for the defense of the province of Fukien. British garrison forces having evacuated on 5 September in order to avoid depleting their main attacking force, I-liang was spared the unpleasant task of having to recapture the lost port. But a flotilla of foreign craft remained anchored off Kulangsu Island, within sight of the city. And British forces continued to use that island as a staging point and supply base for their naval operations further to the north.<sup>14</sup>

At around the same time, a British troop ship, *Nerbudda*, carrying a complement of several hundred Sepoy troops for deployment in the Yangtze campaigns, was blown off course and shipwrecked off the port of Keelung, in Taiwan. A large number of Indian soldiers were taken prisoner by the Ch’ing authorities and an appeal was sent to Peking for permission to execute them as invaders.<sup>15</sup> While the matter was being deliberated at court, a second British vessel, the brig *Ann*, ran aground and went to pieces near Ta-an harbor—a port slightly further to the south—and its crew (this time including 18 British officers) likewise fell into the hands of the local authorities.<sup>16</sup> By June 1842, the intendant’s jail in Tainan contained 149 Sepoys and 19 “white” foreign soldiers. In the meantime, Yao Ying had received authorization to put the entire lot to death. These instructions were dutifully carried out on 12 or 13 August 1842, after interrogations had been completed. Only 9 of the castaways (mostly white, with the exception of two Cantonese pilots) were spared.<sup>17</sup>

Though none of these events was particularly decisive for the outcome of the war then being fought, in combination they conspired to put the Amoy commissioner in a difficult position. According to a later report submitted by him, the August raid by the British on Amoy had resulted in the loss of all of the heavy-draught war-junks assigned to defend that port and the nearby Pescadores. The funds at his disposal, according to this same report, were not adequate to support even so unambitious a naval construction effort as would have

been required to replace them.<sup>18</sup> The expulsion of the British from the Fukien coast—including Kulangsu and the Pescadores—was nevertheless expected of him. I-liang's already onerous burden could scarcely have been lightened by the news from Taiwan. It must certainly have been made heavier still by the receipt of word, in two successive edicts from Peking (dispatched on 18 and 19 January 1842), of the anticipated arrival of British naval reinforcements and of I-liang's own elevation to the post of governor general of Fukien and Chekiang provinces.<sup>19</sup>

Adding to the pressure all of this placed on I-liang, it may well be imagined, was at least a twinge of jealousy over the enthusiasm his subordinates on Taiwan had succeeded in eliciting from the court. Coming in the wake of a string of military disasters—including the loss of Amoy (26 August 1841), Ting-hai (1 October), and Ningpo (13 October)—Yao's report of the “sinking” of the *Nerbudda* roused Tao-kuang to transports of martial enthusiasm. The imperial ecstasy, it appears, may well have been unfounded; for the *Nerbudda*—as Yao himself was later to confess—seems to have run aground without the help (claimed by the Taiwan command) of a direct hit on her mizzen-mast by Chinese shore batteries. Of this, however, Tao-kuang as yet knew nothing. “Reading this news, my felicity knows no bounds,” reads his endorsement of Yao’s “victory” memorial. And to signify that his excitement was more than rhetorical, the habitually miserly emperor had authorized an immediate advance, from the Foochow treasury, of 300,000 taels to strengthen Taiwan’s defenses against anticipated British retaliation.<sup>20</sup> “Does the Taiwan intendant,” I-liang is reported to have exploded, “think that he can challenge destiny with his bare hands?”<sup>21</sup>

As the war entered its climactic phase, therefore, there was already considerable tension between the Manchu governor general, I-liang, in Amoy (the nominal theatre commander), and the difficult-to-control intendant in charge of Taiwan. The final showdown between these two competing officials was not to come, however, until Yao himself had independently solicited (and received) imperial permission to execute the survivors of the two British shipwrecks. This was a step that I-liang had already urged Yao not to take, since (as he had told Yao) the British commandant on Kulangsu, across the harbor from Amoy, had discovered what Yao was up to and threatened an invasion of Taiwan if the deed was done.<sup>22</sup> Not deterred, Yao had

gone ahead anyway, leaving I-liang no doubt enraged, but too preoccupied with other matters to act. Thus things stood as the war came to an end.

At this point, however, events began to unfold that were soon to leave Yao and his supporters convinced that there had been Ch'ing official intrigue against him ever since his first “victories” had won imperial praise. In the fall of 1842, Sir Henry Pottinger, Elliot's replacement as British plenipotentiary in China, brought the matter of Yao's war crimes (for such indeed they were, in British eyes) before the Nanking viceroy, Ch'i-ying, his opposite number in the recently concluded peace negotiations. Ch'i-ying, as one of the emergent heads of the peace party, was not reluctant to prosecute the investigation Pottinger demanded. Nor, for that matter, was I-liang. All manner of proofs were thus hurriedly assembled by the two Manchus to establish that Yao had in fact knowingly misreported the way in which prisoners had come into his hands.<sup>23</sup> And, with this evidence before him, Tao-kuang had felt obliged to give way and, on 11 January 1843, to order a formal judicial inquiry into the charges against Yao and Ta-hung-a, the Manchu garrison commander on Taiwan, commenting acidly:

If the matter is actually as [Ch'i-ying says], have not [these two] deceived their sovereign, misdirected the government, and brought disaster upon the people? How can their crime be exonerated?<sup>24</sup>

Within but two more months, both were in jail in Peking, awaiting their sentences—sentences that were, however, to be quite lenient, since Tao-kuang never really had much liking for the affair, and was acting mainly to placate the ever-worrisome British. (Yao had, in the end, merely to serve for three years or so as a minor official in the remote western reaches of Szechuan province.)<sup>25</sup>

This, then, was the background against which Yao made his own rather spectacular counter-moves, aimed at establishing that his actions had been honorable, and that Ch'i-ying and I-liang were the villains. Strangely enough, Yao did not deny that the claim of sinking the enemy's ships was false. Rather, his tack was to dismiss it as a mixup resulting from his failure to verify his sub-commander's reports, while simultaneously insisting that his own inclination to believe what he had been told was motivated by the loftiest and most honorable of concerns. Yao was to stress over and over again, in his

voluminous correspondence on the case, that there had been a critical morale-building need for a Ch'ing naval triumph—a need that overrode the particulars of the method in which the *Nerbudda* and *Ann* had actually come to grief. And there had, likewise, been a need for at least one mandarin who would openly defy the prospect of British reprisals, if only to inspire kindred spirits on the mainland with the will to continue the Ch'ing resistance.<sup>26</sup>

But here let us let Yao speak for himself. In the winter of 1843, soon after his release from prison, Yao explained his actions to a sympathizer (Liu Hung-kao, the Fukien governor) in the following terms:

The destruction of the barbarian ship at Keelung [i.e., the transport *Nerbudda*, reported by Yao to have been sunk by shore batteries] seems to have resulted from her hitting a reef. And the destruction of the barbarian ship at Tawan [i.e., the *Ann*, supposed to have been destroyed by Yao and Ta-hung-a in cooperation with a force of local fishermen-militiamen] was said to have resulted from her running aground. But [at the time of these actions] the men-in-arms throughout Taiwan were unrelenting in their vigilance at the parapets. And the righteous people were all eager to engage the enemy . . .

Moreover, at the time [we received the reports of the two sinkings] the barbarians were [fighting] with full fury. Despoiling several provinces, they had been laying waste to our people and murdering our generals. The court had designated several [officers] as imperial commissioners with sole responsibility for chastising them. But in the provinces there was not a single army that could report a victory. [His Grace] fretted and agonized day and night, and the loyal and conscientious [men at court] gnashed their teeth [in frustration]. Therefore, when the reports reached [Tan-shui] of the sinking of the barbarian ships and the capture of the barbarian [prisoners], everyone clapped their hands to their foreheads and exclaimed their congratulations, and said that [the sea spirit] Hai-jo had performed a miracle [in order to] help our officers and people extirpate the ghoulish breed [of invaders]. The opinion of all was that we ought to memorialize at once, both to bring solace to Our Sovereign's worried and angry heart, and to inspire our armies to rebuff the barbarians . . .<sup>27</sup>

The significance of Yao Ying's consciously contrived actions, then, had been to bolster the morale of a sagging Ch'ing officialdom and of the island's staunch paramilitaries. And if Yao had seemed, perhaps, to be acting shabbily in murdering so many prisoners just to keep the deception secret, surely the world must by now have realized that the deception itself had been undertaken at great personal peril, and thus could only have been honorable in its intentions.

Good military leadership, then, was mainly a matter of keeping

up a bold front. And, after all, hadn't the lie worked, inasmuch as the scholars and people of Taiwan had never lost their nerve, and as the British had been thereby deterred from attack at least until the declared war was over?

That, at least, seemed to be the other implicit justification offered by Yao in his letters on the incident. For, in this correspondence with his friends in Peking and elsewhere on the mainland—a correspondence that had already made him something of a hero even before his arrest in 1843—Yao returns ceaselessly to the point that his own personal bravery, and not much more, had kept up the courage of the militiamen and mandarins on the island, in spite of the terrible danger they faced. In a mid-1841 letter to a fellow Spring Purificationist (Mei Tseng-liang) in the capital, for example, Yao had reminded his old friend that the situation on Taiwan was even more perilous than it was on the mainland. For here, one had to fear not just the barbarians but also the very real prospect of a local uprising. "The secret is in not showing that one is perturbed, and in facing down these threats with pure *sangfroid*," Yao had reflected.<sup>28</sup> Or, again, in mid-1843, just before his jailing, Yao was to write to Fang Tung-shu that there were "all too few" within the official world who were truly capable of "forgetting their fears for themselves," or of "winning the confidence of the soldiers and people" by their "heroic and resolute energy." But obviously, Yao had been an exception.<sup>29</sup>

But if wise official leadership thus consisted of daring to keep up appearances and thereby helping them to become realities, then, by the same logic, the cautious realism of I-liang and Ch'i-ying had, like Yao himself, been a little more willing to believe in their own strength and a little less concerned with previous setbacks, then who could say what might have been accomplished?

Of course, being a man of principle, Yao would himself name no names. (On just one occasion did he appear to hint that I-liang had been acting out of jealousy over the acclaim Yao had won, but that slip was not to be repeated.)<sup>30</sup> At his trial in Peking, he typically refused to confound his Manchu accusers, preferring instead to confess his "crimes" and go silently to his punishment.<sup>31</sup> But, Yao's reticence notwithstanding, the problematic behavior of his rivals had not gone unnoticed by the intendant's many admirers among the Southern City literati. And, for that very reason, almost all second-hand accounts that were to circulate among the literati about the

affair during 1843 and 1844 dwell obsessively upon the conspiratorial malice of Yao's persecutors, as if to argue, by implication, that the war really might have been lost because of the very bad examples that these men had set.

Thus, for example, Hsia Hsieh's very long account of the Taiwan imbroglio zeros in quite mercilessly upon I-liang's cowardice, while quite overlooking the possibility that Yao's bravery might have been a good deal more damaging for the Ch'ing:

Earlier [Hsia moralizes], when Governor General I-liang was serving [as governor of] Kwangtung, he had been opposed to negotiations. As soon, however, as he was promoted to the Min-Che governor generalship, he began to fear a repetition of previous events at Amoy. His lifelong [sense of honor] suddenly deserted him, and he did not mind the loss. He [then] covered up for the barbarians and suppressed the people, and passed the blame [onto the shoulders] of his subordinates.<sup>32</sup>

When, therefore, the equally feckless Nanking governor general, Ch'i-ying, and the (Manchu) grand councillor, Mu-chang-a, had decided that Yao had to go, I-liang had been an all-too-willing accomplice.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, for the Spring Purificationist Lu I-tung, the lesson of the tale was clearly that the Ch'ing had had far too few wartime leaders like Yao, and far too many like I-liang. "Had all our leaders at the front been of Yao's caliber, *willing to risk all on a dare and never looking back*, we might perhaps still not have triumphed every time. But at least then there might have been some reasonable chance of a favorable outcome" (emphasis added).<sup>34</sup> But there had been practically no others like Yao, and all too many like Ch'i and I-liang, who would not gamble or bluff. And so, inevitably, defeat had resulted, and the chance for victory had been tossed away.

The examples here quoted do not begin to exhaust the huge number of earnest commentators who agreed with Yao and Lu.<sup>35</sup> Rather than merely enumerate more examples, it might be more to the point to give some anecdotal sense of the scale of publicity Yao's little drama was to achieve. When, for example, the intendant, now in chains, was rumored to be about to arrive in Peking, in the spring of 1843, practically the entire Southern City officialdom seems to have trekked out to the suburbs to meet him. According to one account, a certain rather elderly Southern City official, Wang Hsi-sun, "almost went blind" from the grief he experienced listening to Yao relate what

had happened. On the same note, back in Peking itself, I-liang's brother was described as fretting, daily and nightly, about what "future generations who read of this in the histories" would have to say about the way his brother had acted during the affair.<sup>36</sup>

Upon his release from jail at the end of the year, moreover, Yao was to become even more of a fascination for the younger and bolder spirits of Southern City society than he had been before his trial, since he now could be invited to proper literati gatherings and his story recited at length. Hardly averse to such celebrity status, Yao seems to have relished the opportunity to lecture at these affairs. Through the memoirs of Feng Kuei-fen, a burgeoning Han-lin talent who happened to attend one such meeting, there is preserved an account suggesting just what effect Yao exercised upon his enthralled listeners:

After Master [Yao] was set loose from prison, I joined with several of my friends to throw a banquet for him at his lodgings. Then someone in the group asked him to give us the full story of what had happened on Taiwan [during the war]. He did so, but with great modesty, never boasting at all of the things he had done, but going into great detail about the terrain and about the stratagems that had been used. Then, however, when we were all half tipsy with wine, he suddenly stroked his beard and straightened his gown. "No fear that our state is lacking in men of talent," he said to us. "Affairs of state such as this are not yours to be concerned about. Yet I see that your hearts are bursting with intensity as I talk, as if this were all your own personal grievance. . . . How true it is, then, as the saying goes, that 'men of spirit can surely find a way!' I might be old and no longer capable of very much, but is there anything that cannot be accomplished in this world [by men such as yourselves]? It is up to you gentlemen! Keep up your pride! Keep up your pride!" Whereupon all of us who had been listening suddenly cast down our gaze with shame.<sup>37</sup>

How, then could anyone in the Southern City believe that this war had really been unwinnable, when the victims of Ch'ing self-sabotage were so near at hand, so familiar, so persuasive, and so eloquent in their own defense? No, surely, a way could have been found, if only there had been more men of spirit. That it had not could only be explained by the scandalous intrigues of the bureaucrats and the courtiers who now seemed to be controlling the throne.

### WEI YUAN AND THE STRATEGY OF DEFENSIVE WAR

Having been persuaded by Lin and Yao that treachery from within was to blame for the Ch'ing defeat, commentators on maritime affairs were predisposed to find great validity in the traditional strategic formulations that had guided these literati-generals in the field. Not too long after the fighting had ended, Lin Tse-hsu's ideas about exhausting the "pirate" enemy through defensive warfare, and the supposed lessons of the paramilitary "victory" at San-yuan-li, were to be woven eloquently together by Wei Yuan into a formula for a war of attrition that relied almost entirely on non-Western military techniques. And, not too many years after that, Yao Ying himself would undertake to compile a volume on the South Asian "weak flank" of the British empire, from which information he would adduce that his own earlier, wartime notion of waiting "imperturbably" for the enemy to overextend himself had been entirely correct. The impact of these authors and the strategies they found validated by wartime experiences was enormous—a fact that should not surprise us, since the ideas and case materials that went into their work already enjoyed the advantage of broad prior circulation through the Spring Purification war-party grapevine. Then, too, the ideas that Wei and Yao now set forth profited from the fact that they had themselves originated (ultimately) from a common fund of favorite literati military-historical readings. These included, most notably, the *True Record of Troop Training* of the late Ming pirate-queller, General Ch'i Chi-kuang (1528–1587); and the *Illustrated Discourse on Maritime Defense* of Cheng Jo-tseng (fl. 1505–1580), another official likewise active in these same mid-sixteenth-century campaigns against Japan-based corsairs. For most literati readers, therefore, the strategic truths that could be gleaned from Wei's and Yao's works were practically *deja vu*, and, for that reason, all the more plausible. And finally, as if to guarantee the receptivity of the intended audience, there were the well-known stories of blundering Manchu generalship in Kwangtung and in the lower Yangtze counteroffensives to show that the dynasty's military commanders had indeed not heeded the lessons Wei and Yao had now distilled.<sup>38</sup>

But let us now take up, briefly, the work of these two highly influential summarizers of the literati version of the war, noting, as we do, how the various sources we have mentioned—the reportage

on Lin's and Yao's defense planning; the tales of paramilitary heroism at Canton; the sixteenth-century pirate-suppression texts; and the angry critiques of Manchu strategy in the offensive phases of the war—flowed together to produce a persuasive impression of how Ch'ing strategy could have defeated the enemy. We begin with Wei Yuan and his powerfully argued brief for paramilitary and defensive warfare as the overlooked keys to effective resistance.<sup>39</sup>

It is not fully clear when and with what expectations Wei decided to undertake his two major works on the 1840 war (the *Illustrated Gazetteer of the Maritime Countries*, completed in January 1843, and published in 1844; and the *Record of the Campaigns and Pacification of the Foreign Fleets*, published in 1846).<sup>40</sup> But internal textual evidence suggests strongly that the former work, at least, was intended as a counter-polemic, directed against those within the official world—and particularly those within the new diplomatic leadership in Canton—who had begun to question the veracity of the accounts of San-yuan-li that had circulated during the war. In his rebuttal, Wei (deterred not at all by the fact that he had never been to Canton) seems intent on proving that the disparagers were wrong, that the paramilitaries of the southeast had indeed scored major triumphs (and not just at San-yuan-li!), and that, furthermore, the defensive strategy that had made their actions so effective had been foolishly ignored by the Ch'ing high command elsewhere, thus explaining the sad outcome of the Yangtze campaigns.<sup>41</sup>

But here some background is in order concerning the debate that had begun over the Kwangtung militia and its role in the recent war. That question, naturally enough, had come up for close scrutiny when the "peace" government, in power in Peking and Nanking since mid-1842, had decided to demobilize the Cantonese irregulars as part of a broader effort to insure the smooth implementation of the new treaty agreements. The principal agent on the spot responsible for this task was a certain Huang En-tung, who had been transferred from Nanking to Canton late in 1842 at the instance of the chief "peace" diplomatist on the Ch'ing side, the Nanking governor general, Ch'i-ying.<sup>42</sup> As an official who had seen considerable action at the lower Yangtze front (he had been one of the officials in charge of the undistinguished defense effort at Nanking), Huang had already been quite skeptical of the value of paramilitary warfare and militia forces even before his arrival in Canton. His skepticism was

only intensified by the experiences he encountered upon taking up his duties in that city, where his arrival had been met by a vicious placard campaign aimed at spreading the idea that the demobilization scheme was a mandarin "trick" intended to speed the "selling" of the city to the barbarians. Genuinely irritated by the falsification, Huang had taken the unusually courageous step of launching a propaganda counteroffensive in Peking, in the hope of revealing the opportunism of the militia leadership for what it really was. To Chiang Hung-sheng, a friend in the capital currently serving as a censor, he had sent a summary of his own findings on the Cantonese irregulars—findings that hardly fit at all with the stereotypes popular among those in the Southern City inspired by the example of San-yuan-li. According to Huang, the militia chiefs who had instigated the placards against him were nothing better than "one or two barely literate fellows, upstarts in disposition, entirely ignorant of [political] realities, and totally lacking in concrete ideas. All they are capable of doing is waving about their claims of 'loyalty to the dynasty' so as to indulge their rhetorical vanity." In practical military terms, they could do absolutely nothing to frighten off the foreigner—who, in any case, had long since "seen through their petty tricks." In setting the record straight, Huang hoped, clearly, to smooth the way for a quick restoration of government control over the Kwangtung militia forces.<sup>43</sup>

Huang's words had been directed, in the main, not at the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau scholars themselves, but at the carpetbagging scholar-adventurers—men like the Chekiangese licentiate Ch'ien Chiang—who had flocked to Canton in the later months of the war in search of jobs and glory.<sup>44</sup> But, to the majority of the literati in the capital and elsewhere outside of Kwangtung, still under the spell of the war advocates, the assault seemed a challenge to the very idea that irregular warfare had a legitimate place in the empire's maritime defenses. (And, indeed, in another set of essays, published in 1846, Huang would openly attack the "hackneyed" works of Ch'i Chi-kuang and other paramilitary enthusiasts of the Ming period, whose influence upon current war-party thinking he found pernicious.)<sup>45</sup>

Coming back, however, to Wei Yuan's two volumes, it was evidently with the intention of refuting the peace party's insinuations about the Kwangtung militia and about the impracticality of the Ch'i Chi-kuang formulas that Wei decided to write the true history of the

war. And to write it not once but twice. For in both his works, Wei devoted a considerable amount of space to raking over the literati-grapevine accounts that he had acquired of the doings at San-yuan-li and elsewhere in the southeast, and to extracting from them a quite believable picture of civilian self-defense forces and irregulars effectively thwarting the enemy advance.

Thus, in his *Pacification of the Foreign Fleets*, Wei set out for his readers a version of the San-yuan-li tale more inspiring than anything that had come out of wartime Canton. To begin with, not merely "eighty or ninety," but now "more than two hundred," foreign soldiers turn out to have been killed by the villagers. And even Admiral Bremer somehow entered into the action (under the somewhat garbled name of Bremer-Becher), managing to lose his "command baton," and double-barreled pistol, and his head ("as big as a one-peck measure").<sup>46</sup> But there is still more to come, for now it appears that the Fatshan "braves" of the Ta-fo-ssu Bureau had also been in the field during the last days of the siege of Canton, and had not merely "blinded" the British garrison in a nearby fort with an ingenious application of poisonous smoke, but had also "wrecked" a fleet of enemy sampans sent in to relieve the defenders.<sup>47</sup>

Though this latter information, it turns out, has been clipped from one of the reports of Generalissimo I-shan, and thus might not be entirely reliable, another item in the same account certainly does have the ring of authenticity to it. That is the obligatory citation from the San-yuan-li manifestoes, one of which was quoted *in extenso* just as Wei brings his narrative to a close. And what particular themes should be featured in the quoted section? What else but the "stealth" of the British (who never dared attack the city when Lin was in charge, but instead cajoled an "intriguing minister" of the Ch'ing into dismantling Lin's defenses); and the determined "loyalty to the great Ch'ing" of the Cantonese people, who hereby swear that they will "fill the river with stones, catch up the British in an encirclement, and wipe them out with fire-ship attacks" should the enemy ever again try to penetrate up the Canton river.<sup>48</sup>

For Wei, apparently, this last bit of documentation virtually clinched the argument about whether or not the paramilitaries had been of use to the Ch'ing side in the battle for Canton. At any rate, in the remainder of the *Pacification*, and in the maritime defense essays of his *Illustrated Gazetteer*, Wei was no longer concerned so

much with clearing the name of the San-yuan-li militiamen as with showing that the strategic formula used in Kwangtung had a much wider applicability, the true significance of which had unfortunately been inadequately grasped by the Ch'ing high command elsewhere. And what was this formula? In the postface to the *Pacification*, Wei describes it simply as "neither attacking, nor negotiating, but concentrating singlemindedly upon defense."<sup>49</sup> If the Ch'ing had everywhere substituted a "concentration on defense" for full-scale war, he continues, it could have availed itself not only of "righteous volunteers" (such as at San-yuan-li), but even of the help of underworld folk-military professionals and of the seafaring people of the coast, who knew everything about the British from their long history of illegal commercial dealings with them. For, after all, in a *jujitsu*-like war of retreat (which is more or less what Wei seems to mean by "defense"), there would be all kinds of opportunities for catching the enemy out by deceptions and tricks—just the sort of thing the "heroes" of the criminal and secret-society worlds were so adept in, and that, for adequate reward, they would be eager to undertake on behalf of the government.<sup>50</sup>

And so the argument runs, too, in the introductory essays to the *Illustrated Gazetteer*. Conjuring up, in these latter pieces, a most believable picture of the Cantonese irregulars and of Yao Ying's Taiwan militiamen holding the British at bay by means of the retreat strategy, Wei then launches into a bitter denunciation of the generalship of the lower Yangtze commanders and of I-shan, whom he describes as having been over-preoccupied with "reckless offensives" (*lang-chan*). The Mongol Yü-ch'ien, for example, who had been in charge of the east Chekiang front in the first days of the British Yangtze campaign of 1841–1842, comes in for particularly harsh criticism in this regard, since Wei (who had himself briefly served in eastern Chekiang) was quite well-informed about that ill-fated commander's strategic doctrines, and did not hesitate to bare them to the world as an example par excellence of the kind of military wrongheadedness he believed had cost the Ch'ing the war.<sup>51</sup> For Yü-ch'ien, as Wei shows, the possibility of fighting a war of step-by-step retreat into the middle reaches of the Yangtze had been ruled out from the start. The easy navigability of that river for British oceangoing warships, the Mongol had decided, simply forbade any effective inland defensive actions in that theatre. Instead, Yü-ch'ien had believed that the war

had to be carried to the enemy, by seizing and holding Ting-hai Island—just as I-ching was later on to believe that the Ch'ing had to attack British onshore bases in the east Chekiang promontory. And, of course, I-shan had made the very same mistake in his reckless assault on British positions downriver of Canton.<sup>52</sup>

All of this, Wei continues, had been terribly ill-advised, inasmuch as it had exposed Ch'ing forces directly to the enemy's formidable shipborne firepower. But an even more deadly flaw in this strategy that stressed offensive action had been the requirement it had imposed for concentrating huge numbers of men, weapons, and supplies in order to gain the manpower advantage needed for offensive combat. The assembly of such gigantic "forward" armies had necessitated, in turn, the massive influx of extra-provincial manpower and material resources from the interior, so as to avoid depleting the defensive positions the Ch'ing was still committed to holding all along the coast. During the important campaigns of the war, Wei notes bitterly, there had thus been no real "strategy" (*yung-ping*) but only the fruitless "shifting about of reserves" (*tiao-ping*):

When the barbarians attacked Kwangtung, we shifted troops from elsewhere into Kwangtung. When they next attacked Chekiang, we then shifted troops from [Kwangtung and] elsewhere into Chekiang. And when they attacked Kiangsu, we then [again] shifted our troops into Kiangsu.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, state treasures and peasant taxpayer patience could hardly be expected to hold up for long under the dreadful fiscal weight of such a wasteful strategy.<sup>54</sup> And thus, perversely, the Ch'ing had fought a war of attrition, not against the over-extended British, but against itself, and had failed miserably to make proper use of the one supreme advantage it did enjoy: short supply lines.

Thus, from his reaffirmation of the accomplishments of the paramilitaries of Kwangtung, Wei moved, inexorably, back toward the same strategic macro-conception that Lin Tse-hsu himself had first put forward in the early days of the war. The enemy, for all his much-touted advantages in weaponry ("stout ships and fierce guns") was nonetheless extraordinarily vulnerable to attrition tactics, since he must trade as he fights, and must meet his war costs out of the profits of local commerce and looting. Ch'ing strategy ought therefore to have been designed to exploit this weakness, and should, as with the campaigns against the *wo-kou* marauders of the 1550s (to whom Wei

makes frequent allusion), have been geared to extending the war until there was no more trade, and no more easy booty, for the enemy to batten upon.<sup>55</sup> For this, obviously, the defensive style of fighting, and a reliance on locally recruited and locally supplied paramilitaries, would have been much better advised than the squandering of precious Ch'ing revenues on offensive campaigns by expensive, incompetent elite units. And so, appropriately, in the first published version of the *Illustrated Gazetteer*, the first two chapters are entitled "On Defense." Here was one overlooked formula by which the British could have been defeated. And, if anyone doubted, had not the Ch'ing effectively won by precisely such tactics in the southeast?

#### YAO YING AND BRITAIN'S VULNERABILITY IN SOUTH ASIA

Our brief summary of Wei Yuan's two studies of the 1840 war does not do justice to their full and very rich contents. In particular, it neglects Wei's interesting treatment, in the *Illustrated Gazetteer*, of the problem of offensive warfare, wherein he takes up the question of rearmament; urges the construction of dockyards and arsenals in the spirit of Peter the Great's innovations in seventeenth-century Russia; and even, quite presciently, foresees a need to link naval development with maritime commercial expansion, so as to provide it with a revenue base and a trained manpower pool.<sup>56</sup> However, our omission is also, to an extent, a contextually appropriate one. This is so, first, because, for Wei, Ch'ing competence in offensive war is by no means accepted as a final determinant of how foreign policy ought to be modulated. As long as the Ch'ing could conduct an effective defense—a requirement that, for Wei, could be met without any naval or weaponry modernization—there was no reason, he argues, for it to abandon its original goal of forcing the termination of the opium-import traffic.<sup>57</sup> And, in the second place, as shall become clear in a moment, Wei shared with his fellow strategist and historian, Yao Ying, a grand faith that British colonial vulnerabilities could be exploited as a substitute for a Chinese offensive capacity. For both these writers, but especially for Yao, the final push that (in the next war) was to force the British into retreat along the China coast was to come, not from Ch'ing armies, but from the mutiny of other conquered or threatened peoples long exposed to and resentful of British

imperial hegemony in south and central Asia. At this point, therefore, we might take leave of Wei, and turn, instead, to Yao Ying's 1846 *Record of a Mission to Tibet* (*K'ang-yu chi-hsing*), the other of the triad of war-inspired works on strategy and strategic geography that seem to have had the greatest influence on the literati perception of the Ch'ing state's military predicament.<sup>58</sup>

Like so many other of the strategic brainstorms that we encounter in the literati war literature of this period, Yao's ideas on British imperial vulnerability trace their origin back to a wartime initiative that (like San-yuan-li) had somehow failed to gain the recognition it should have had from the Ch'ing central government establishment. In this case, moreover, the initiative had been Yao's own, or at least partly his, so that the author had every confidence that he knew what he was talking about.

It had been only in the last months of the war, apparently, that Yao had become aware of the fact that the British, like the Ch'ing, were an imperial power, possessing all of the imperial paraphernalia of subject peoples, racial prejudice, and a fondness for using native soldiers for military jobs that the British themselves were not eager to take on (such as, for instance, the fighting in China). We know, in fact, precisely when Yao learned this; during the long spring months of 1842, when Yao's Sepoy and British prisoners moldered in their cells in Tainan, awaiting the arrival of their death sentences from Peking. Perhaps because he had begun to notice the tensions between the white officers and their black soldiers and camp-followers (some 240 of the latter had been left behind to drown in the first of the two shipwrecks, and only 150 made land), Yao decided that he ought to find out more about the background of this latter group.<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, he had set about interrogating Captain Denham (of the *Ann*) on the details of the British raj. One may doubt that he learned very much of actual use, but whatever else, he evidently convinced himself that there was indeed much bad will here, and that it might be exploited.<sup>60</sup>

The ideas that this new knowledge about India and the other British colonial outposts in maritime Asia had set astir in Yao's mind did not, however, take on strategic significance until very near the end of the war, when news had begun to trickle across the Taiwan Strait that the Ch'ing government was about to commence negotiations. At this point, Yao seems suddenly to have "heard," from his surviving prison-

ers, of a Nepalese (or "Gurkha") revolt in progress against the British across the southern flank of Tibet. (In fact there was no revolt, though there were strains arising from British India garrison probes toward Tibet. In February 1841, the Gurkhas, who were nominally tributaries of the Ch'ing, had in fact sent an emissary to Lhasa to ask for help in repelling the invaders, though no help had been forthcoming. This latter episode was doubtless one of the sources of Yao's information.) Seizing on this, and making use, as well, of his somewhat inexact expertise on Indian geography, Yao had dashed off dispatches both to Governor General I-liang in Amoy and to the court in Peking to propose that the Ch'ing act immediately to back the Nepalese. Through such action, he insisted, the flames of insurrection could be quickly spread into "neighboring" Calcutta, the heartland of British power in India. And the British, at the moment closing in for the kill at Nanking, would have to send their troops back to India forthwith.<sup>61</sup>

I-liang never received the long and persuasive dispatch Yao reports having rushed off to him on 1 July. Nor did the emperor receive his copy. But, even if they had, it is doubtful that much interest would have been shown. For the court was now resigned to ending the war as quickly as possible, and therefore not likely to be much interested in a scheme that would only prolong it.<sup>62</sup>

But, for Yao at least, the grand design of striking the British from their vulnerable Indian flank could not be put so easily aside, even after the treaties had been signed. During 1844 and 1845, as the former intendant served out his punishment of exile to western Szechuan as a minor official, he had grown increasingly obsessed with the idea. And increasingly persuaded that here was the great solution to the unsolved problem of Ch'ing offensive weakness. From this conviction, there was to develop, first, a vigorous correspondence with Wei Yuan and other literati now engaged in writing the history of the war on the subject of British imperial over-extension; and, second, Yao's own 1846 work on the peoples and terrain of Tibet, Nepal, and India.<sup>63</sup>

We can here easily pass over the specifics of Yao's "geography," for this compilation was innovative only with regard to the new information it provided on recent events in Tibet and Nepal. In other respects it offered only a reworking of already out-of-date Jesuit sources and Wei Yuan's *Illustrated Gazetteer*. Moreover, like Wei's par-

allel work on the maritime components of the British empire, Yao's volume all but ignored the institutions of the homeland from which British power had sprung.<sup>64</sup> Harder to pass over, however, was the influence that Yao's work, together with the preparatory puffing and publicity, had upon Southern City opinion. Wei Yuan, for one (at least according to the not unsympathetic Cantonese scholar, Ch'en Li [1810-1882]), was so persuaded by the Gurkha-insurrection fantasy that, under its influence, he conceived the idea of using the American, French, and Russians (like the Nepalese, also under British threat) as potential allies in the next war against Britain. Lin Tse-hsu, with whom Yao and many of his friends in the capital kept up a correspondence all through the 1840s, was similarly impressed by Yao's argument. And, as a fitting comment on the amount of interest aroused by Yao's work, the second edition of Wei Yuan's *Illustrated Gazetteer*, brought out in 1847, added to its original chapters, *inter alia*, a whole new section on the history of recent European colonial expansion and competition in India and Central Asia.<sup>65</sup>

Of such stuff, then, was constituted the new knowledge—the new outward orientation—that Yao had praised himself so inordinately for helping to popularize. Or, at least, what Yao, Wei, and others thought of as new knowledge. For, in fact, as one can hardly fail to notice in reading through all of this material, practically nothing has been allowed to creep into either Wei's or Yao's presentations that might question the truth both men were so determined to establish: that, even without new military techniques, the Ch'ing could, and should, have been able to fight its maritime enemy to a draw. The outward turn, and the new literature that chronicled it (or at least that literature that got read), was thus not much more than a polemic, a polemic whose purpose was to absolve the leaders of the Spring Purification war party of blame for the debacle that had followed from their actions.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

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### *Epilogue*

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The spectacular uprooting of the Mu-chang-a power group in the capital described in the preceding chapter can be seen in retrospect as having brought to a close an important episode in late Ch'ing political history. The distinct hallmark of this period—one that sets it off markedly from the post-Taiping Rebellion decades—was the prominence of the Manchu-Mongol service aristocracy as a kind of praetorian guard of reform. They had first advocated, for example, the uselessness of military resistance to British demands in 1842. More significantly still, it had been Manchu princes and court officials, and not Chinese bureaucrats, who perceived that controversial institutional changes (such as greater centralization of decision making and finances) would be needed to preserve the peace and to make the post-treaty order profitable to the Ch'ing state.

The kind of vigorous, consensus-defying reform leadership displayed by the courtier-elite in the days of Mu-chang-a and Ch'i-ying, however, was not a prominent feature of the political landscape after the mid-century mark. Indeed, during the final third or so of the century, it became almost axiomatic among foreign diplomats in China that the Manchu court and its hangers-on were exercising a woefully negative influence on the prospects for self-strengthening.<sup>1</sup> While this judgment was somewhat unfair, we can appreciate the circumstances that encouraged it. Although signs of a readiness to innovate begin to appear, after 1861, in virtually all of the aspects of institutional life vital to the renewal of Ch'ing China's international prospects, in no case (except possibly that of diplomacy itself) will we find the court taking the key entrepreneurial role in promoting the necessary adjustments. Instead, guidance tended to come increasingly from Chinese elites, often of only marginal bureaucratic status. In some cases, moreover—and especially in the crucial areas of military and fiscal reform—the prestige and power of the court was exercised to conservative and obstructive effect.<sup>2</sup> Forsaking its earlier, activist commitment to promoting change, then, Peking's leadership would gradually develop, after 1850, into a force largely hostile to reform.

Why this happened is a question only partially answerable on the basis of the events analyzed in this book. Nevertheless, Hsien-feng's decision to retreat from diplomatic and political reform can be seen, in its own right, as having helped push the court one step closer toward the negative role it would later permanently assume.

One regard in which this connection with later events can be readily identified is that of military modernization. Here, the court's virtual abdication from a positive leadership role in foreign relations meant, inevitably, that the key inaugural experiments in the use of Western weaponry would be undertaken by military leaders situated at the margins of the Ch'ing power structure, and not by the banner command of the capital region. Matters could scarcely have been otherwise, considering that the procurement of access to foreign weaponry—and to the finances needed to pay for it—necessarily premised a willingness to engage openly in diplomatic bartering with the treaty-port powers. Having forsown this option in 1850, Peking could only sit back and watch, with misgivings, as Han Chinese military plenipotentiaries, locked in combat with the Taiping in central China, turned in desperation to just such tactics after 1860. The expe-

rience in the use of up-to-date artillery and small arms acquired by these new-style units in the victorious pacification campaigns of the post-1860 decade, moreover, gave them a permanent edge in fighting technique over the banner soldiers of the capital region. Ever wary of this superiority, the Manchu military elite turned increasingly, after 1870, to harassment tactics and to the obstruction of further modernization in order to keep the gap from widening.<sup>3</sup> Here, then, was the first unfortunate legacy of the 1850 *volte face*—the conversion, that is, of the banner military elite into a vested interest intent on limiting rearmament to an absolute minimum.

A second area where the impact of the 1850 retreat seems to linger on is in the increasingly consensual basis of dynastic self-legitimation during most of the remainder of the century. Here, Hsien-feng's return to a "popular" foreign policy, anchored firmly in literati support, clearly foreshadows the pattern of monarchical legitimation through anti-Western conservatism that would come to prevail under the long reign of the Empress Dowager Tz'u-hsi (r. 1861–1908). One can, in fact, see intimations of this novel use of consensus politics from virtually the moment the coup d'état of 1861 propelled Tz'u-hsi into power. Passing over the details of that complicated incident, we need here observe only that Tz'u-hsi's successful capture of leadership in 1861, as well as her subsequent retention of it, rested very largely on her ability to reconcile the reality of a new set of treaty concessions abroad, with the appearance of enhanced respect for literati sensibilities in treaty and reform questions at home. This was accomplished, in part, by her alliance with an outsider in the Manchu princely establishment (I-hsin, usually called Prince Kung). To this able but isolated reformer was entrusted the thankless task of institutionalizing the system of foreign diplomatic representation in the capital promised by China after her defeat by Britain and France in 1860. Prince Kung's solution to this tricky problem—the Tsung-li Yamen, or "office for international affairs"—was never, in fact, to win much approval in Southern City circles. But, from the vantage point of the literati, Prince Kung's politically dependent regime was clearly much preferable to the aggressive princely leadership group that had flourished in the days of Mu-chang-a, and again, though with reduced clout, in the late 1850s.<sup>4</sup> The appeal of the new arrangement of power was further broadened by the Empress Dowager's solicitude in finding posts for veteran literocrats, such as Ch'i Chün-tsao, for-

merly associated with the restoration of Southern City influence in 1850. Upon the occasion of her 1861 accession, for example, both Ch'i and Wo-jen (another hero and beneficiary of the 1850 *volte face*) were granted prominent positions in the metropolitan bureaucracy and installed as the new boy emperor's tutors.<sup>5</sup> As a third prop of her consensus-building policy, moreover, Tz'u-hsi made it her habit to encourage literocratic rebukes of Prince Kung's alleged apostasy against Confucian tradition whenever he pressed her too hard for institutional reform at the central-government level.<sup>6</sup> For venerable opposition leaders (like Ch'i Chün-tsao), who remembered all too well the unchecked abuses of power of the late 1840s, this careful circumscribing of Prince Kung's authority must have evoked welcome echoes of Hsien-feng's inaugural rebuke to the power-hungry Mu-chang-a.

By such actions as this, the precedent set by Hsien-feng's restoration of literati prerogatives was ingeniously translated by the Empress Dowager into a permanent new aspect of imperial self-legitimation. Admittedly, under Tz'u-hsi, the underlying rationale behind this policy of propitiating Southern City opinion was no longer quite so directly related as it had been in the Tao-kuang and Hsien-feng periods to the need for literati support in the battle against heterodox rebellion. Of much more immediate concern, in this later era, was the frightening power of the new, modern army commanders—a power the monarchy sought to check by counter-mobilizing literati traditionalism.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the pattern of insistence on Southern City literocratic support was one that resonated unmistakably with the Hsien-feng emperor's "restoration" of the power of the literati some eleven years earlier. Here was a second capacity in which the *volte face* of 1850 proved a decisive influence in the later trend toward abnegation of leadership at the center.

To study the later evolution of Ch'ing politics is, then, to be reminded of just how crucial a divide was crossed in 1850, concomitant with the court's decision to step aside from an active leadership role in guiding the adjustment to China's changed international circumstances. This abdication of responsibility did not, of course, fully preclude institutional change. Nor, after 1861, was it intended to. It sufficed, however, to guarantee that the specifically Ch'ing dimensions of the imperial power structure—the monarchy and the Manchu-Mongol service aristocracy—would thereafter view diploma-

tic and institutional modernization chiefly as a threat to be diverted or contained, rather than as a force that could be harnessed to rebuild the waning power of the monarchy.

By shouldering the problems of refashioning Ch'ing foreign policy only to fail under their weight, then, Mu-chang-a and his comrades among this inner Ch'ing elite did not merely postpone the job until the 1860s. They may also, however inadvertently, have added significantly to the constraints under which future central-government leadership would have to operate throughout the entirety of the self-strengthening era.

With our brief look into the future forewarning us of how crucial an event the mid-century deflection of court reform leadership would turn out to be, it seems appropriate that we should, in conclusion, review what has been learned in this book about its causes. As I have tried to make clear, these were only partly situational in nature. In certain other regards, what happened in 1850 flowed logically, even inexorably, from the peculiarities of the Ch'ing central political system itself, and it is upon this latter range of influences that our attention can most profitably be focused at this point. What then were these peculiarities, and what lay behind them?

An obvious place to begin is with the curiously persistent weakness of the bureaucratic "interest" in the making of early-nineteenth-century Chinese foreign policy. There was in Ch'ing politics no such thing, of course, as a purely official point of view on foreign-policy questions, any more than on domestic ones. But, within the administrative elite as a whole, there were clearly certain officials whose policy views were shaped primarily by systemic or centrist concerns (Was a policy likely to prove universally enforceable? Would it enhance or undermine central-regional coordination?); and others who tended to be influenced more by regional or consensual considerations—such as local or Southern City literati. In this sense one may speak of a gap between the bureaucratic (or bureaucrat-centrist) outlook and its opponents within the Ch'ing political system. And, in this sense also, one might validly characterize most of the foreign-policy disagreements we have studied as direct outgrowths of this gap—as was, for example, in the 1850 tug-of-war between Mu-chang-a and his opponents that Hsien-feng had to arbitrate upon coming to the throne. The saliency of this particular political

fault line comes as little surprise, given the longstanding ethnic and administrative tensions dividing the bureaucratic center from other, competing nuclei of power within the system.<sup>8</sup> What is surprising, however, is the regularity with which leaders on the bureaucratic end of these policy disputes went down to defeat—this in spite of the more direct access they often had to the emperor than did their opponents; in spite, also, of their enjoyment, as a rule, of ethnic insider status; and in spite, usually, of the superior reasonableness of their specific arguments. But here we might do well to recall the particulars of the debates and defeats in question, if only to remind ourselves of the curious regularity of the pattern.

Far and away the most stunning defeat for the centrist approach came in 1850, with the removal from power of Mu-chang-a and Ch'ying—two statesmen whose notion of foreign policy had pivoted on insuring the security of the capital and its supply links to the lower Yangtze region, and whose chosen instrument for achieving this had been a centrally policed system of “pacifying” treaty concessions, to be forced, if need be, down the throats of the disgruntled Cantonese. Almost from its inception, however, this policy had been difficult to impose. The sticking point, as we have seen, was that new treaty arrangements could not possibly work without the disarming of the xenophobic irregulars who had become the principal guardians of law and order in and around the city of Canton during the last year of the Opium War. For obvious reasons, neither officials nor literati with an ongoing stake in the region found this step acceptable, whence the mounting challenge to the enforcement of the residence provision of the new treaty system. Here, then, was a clear test of the policies and strength of the centrists. But the victory had gone to their opponents.

Nor was this an unusual outcome for our period. On at least two other occasions, as well, the bureaucratic impulse had extended itself into foreign-policy deliberations, only to be dealt a decisive reversal at the hand of literati-intermediated oppositional coalitions. The first of these analogous setbacks had occurred in 1836, when a quartet—ironically enough—of Han Chinese statesmen (Grand Secretary Juan Yuan and three Kwangtung officials: Lu Kun, Teng T'ing-chen, and Hsu Nai-chi) had temporarily held the initiative on trade and opium-control matters. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Juan party had attempted to bring some consistency and enforceability

back into Ch'ing coastal-control regulations by proposing a limited import-legalization plan. Though clearly unattractive in its moral implications, such a reform would probably have helped in the short run to stanch the outward drain of silver that was then seriously disrupting Ch'ing tax administration. More important, it would certainly have simplified the task of keeping tabs on the behavior of coastal officials. In these twin regards, it bespoke a highly bureaucratic, rather than consensual, orientation in foreign policy. But, as we have seen, Juan's proposal proved extraordinarily vulnerable to challenge from below, very largely because its spirit was so purely elitist and managerial.

*Mutatis mutandis*, this was the weak point, too, of the third major centrist initiative we have studied in this narrative: the 1841 decision to seek a quick end to the fighting through concentrated onshore offensives in Kwangtung and Chekiang. Resented from the outset by the civil officials and local dignitaries through whose terrain the attacks were to be pressed, this decision nonetheless made a good deal of sense from the point of view of the Manchu-Mongol strategists who dominated court military thinking. If successful, it promised a quick termination of hostilities; and (though this was never stated) if not, its costs would be so dramatic as perhaps to bring the emperor around the more quickly to an appreciation of the benefits of peace. Then too the offensive strategy had the advantages of temporarily diverting the main military action away from the capital area and the Grand Canal, and of minimizing the role of potentially dangerous irregulars. All in all there was a formidable menu of arguments in its favor. Yet here, again, the nay-sayers—in this case a coalition of literati and threatened local officials—were able to compromise the plan quite seriously, if not to disrupt it altogether. As we have seen, I-shan's Kwangtung offensive was all but sabotaged before it could begin by Governor General Ch'i Kung, and his forces eventually harried out of the province, to be replaced by a strictly local muster. Only in Chekiang did the operations go forward as planned—too late, as it turned out, to draw the British away from their advance upon the Canal.

A curious insufficiency of power thus seems repeatedly to have hampered those who would steer policy in a centrist or bureaucratic direction—be they Manchu or Chinese, generals or diplomats. Curious because, in the first place, this had not been a feature of Ch'ing generalship or diplomacy in earlier periods; and curious, too, because

the logic of dynastic survival seems, in retrospect, to have pointed in the direction of more, and not less, central orchestration of policy than in the past. Yet even so determined and so well situated a leader as Mu-chang-a would not overcome this peculiar feature of the early-nineteenth-century Ch'ing political system. Consensualist and regionalist impulses, one is forced to conclude, were simply too deeply embedded within the system to be pushed aside for foreign-policy purposes.

But why was this the case? Why was the distribution of power so bottom-heavy, so remarkably advantageous to those set upon resisting the centrist will in policymaking? So asking, we come at once to a second persisting peculiarity of the system: the strongly centrifugal political orientation of the Southern City literati throughout the period we have surveyed. Owing to this predisposition and to the influence—or, more accurately, the veto power—wielded by these Southern City literocrats, regional administrative or elite interests at odds with the center could usually be sure of support “at court,” so to speak, for their efforts to resist unwanted new policies. To be sure, there were very real limits on how, or how effectively, this kind of lobbying power could be exercised. Much always depended on the momentary predisposition of the emperor, on his receptivity to being advised by “impractical” Chinese literati. Moreover, in foreign-policy matters at least, there are signs of a lingering distrust of any Han Chinese advice—a circumstance that perhaps explains why the leaders of the Shrine Association had to push so hard on the Kwangsi cover-up issue in 1850. Yet, for all of this, the Southern City voice was one that was heeded with surprising regularity in Opium-War-era Peking; and, when it was, the beneficiaries usually proved to be provincial officials or elites, as the following reconsideration of instances previously noted in our narrative will remind us.

Recall, for example, the dilemma Lin Tse-hsu faced in early 1841, and how vigorous a lobbying effort his Southern City allies were able to mount on his behalf. Though one would hesitate to describe Lin as a parochialist, it was nonetheless his refusal to consider the dangers to which his trade-interdiction policies exposed the central power apparatus that had turned the emperor against him in 1840, and had brought Ch'i-shan to Canton as his replacement. To be cashiered under such circumstances, one would think, would have been enough to discourage almost any official. Yet Lin was able, as we

have seen, not only to fight back, but even to hound his successor from office, thanks principally to the spirited campaign of personal vilification Huang Chueh-tzu was able to whip up in Peking against Lin's powerful Manchu adversary. By the time this assault had been successfully concluded, no fewer than ten memorials of Southern City provenance had come before the emperor—two from Huang's own hand, and eight more from anti-Ch'i-shan censors under Huang's personal influence. True, Ch'i-shang's naive underestimate of British war aims had made it that much easier for Huang's shafts to find their target. And true, also, the victory was both incomplete and short-lived, with Lin never gaining the permanent reinstatement to his post in Canton that he and his supporters had hoped for. Yet, in the larger perspective, what is most important in all of this is that a regional official of only median rank and seniority had been able to count on, and receive, very effective backing in the capital, thanks entirely to literati lobbying efforts.

Though Lin's successors in Canton could never be assured of quite this degree of loyalty, we have seen that they too were able to manipulate literati opinion in the capital to advantage in the fight to wriggle free of central-government guidance. Ch'i Kung, for example, had played this game masterfully in his effort to keep control of local military forces from passing into Manchu hands during the later stages of the war and after. We shall remember, to cite but one instance of this, how the events of the siege of Canton (in February-May 1841) had been altered by Ch'i's academy-scholar associates into a tale of victory by local militiamen thwarted only by the cowardice of the Manchu commander on the spot, I-shan, and the regulars under his command. Through the intermediation of Chang Wei-p'ing and Lo Ping-chang, two Cantonese literati with excellent Southern City connections, this version of the battle had then been circulated throughout the capital, where it had helped create a climate of opinion favorable for Ch'i's next move: the construction of a huge private military apparatus under local gentry control. Similarly, Hsu Kuang-chin, Ch'i Kung's successor but one as Liang-Kuang viceroy, seems to have bet heavily on Peking literati support during the showdown phase of the Canton entry crisis of 1849, for he took measures to insure that Chang Mu, the guiding spirit behind the Ku Shrine Association, received constant updating on developments in Canton as the final confrontation with Bonham approached. Having thus guar-

anteed a maximally euphoric Southern City reception for the news of his victory, it became fairly easy for Hsu and his assistant, Yeh Ming-ch'en, to greatly inflate its significance, and thus to convert Canton into a virtually autonomous bastion of diplomatic authority for the next decade.

Nor was the pattern confined to intra-bureaucratic conflicts over foreign policy. The same centrifugal orientation that drew Southern City activists onto the side of beleaguered official actors in the south could also elicit support for private interests, particularly where local security issues were at stake. A desire to aid the beleaguered gentry-academics of Canton, for example, is plainly visible in much of the pro-militia mythology we have summarized from the war chronicles of Wei Yuan and others. A much better example of this specific type of advocacy, however, is the Shrine Association-engineered exposé of governmental neglect in Kwangsi during the first months of Hsien-feng's reign—an action undertaken very much in response to the fears and complaints of that province's threatened scholar-gentry elite and in outright defiance of the regional bureaucracy. That the gentry of Kweilin could make use of indirect channels to lay their case before the emperor himself attests again to the unusual responsiveness of Southern City opinion to complaints of this order. For, as we have seen, Tseng Kuo-fan and Tu Shou-t'ien were willing to press the case even before they or anyone else had any idea of the full dimensions of the scandal their efforts would eventually bring to light.

It would seem, then, that, if the Ch'ing central political system of our period was peculiarly responsive to eccentric interests within that system, including both adventurist or parochialist regional administrators and civilian law-and-order activists, much of this is to be traced to the sympathetic predisposition of the literocrats of Peking, and to the considerable powers of influence these men commanded. Such sympathy could be as telling in domestic-policy conflicts as in foreign, as the Kwangsi affair reminds us. But its effect within the latter realm is what concerns us here, and there it cast a very long shadow indeed, facilitating, as we have seen, a succession of triumphant revolts against court insider control over foreign policy.

Having reminded ourselves of the indispensability of the Peking literati as guardians of this peculiarly downward-responsive style of foreign-policy management (or, perhaps more accurately, of policy

mishmanagement), we confront, finally, the question of underlying intent. To what degree did the pattern of literati partisanship we have described find sanction in higher-level ideals? Looking beyond the merely political dimensions of literati rebelliousness—the fears, jealousies, ambitions, and hatreds that often seem the chief grounds for their anti-ministerial intrigues—do we discover the signs of a higher purpose behind these actions? And, if we do, wherein lay the underlying concern: foreign affairs or domestic governance? Are we dealing here, in other words, with a compelling vision of how relations with culturally inferior outsiders ought properly to be conducted? Or might it not be more accurate to interpret the literati role in Opium-War-era politics as the expression of some higher domestic aspiration—as, for example, the desire to restore the Chinese scholar-official class to a position of secure collective power such as it had once enjoyed under the Ming?

The question cannot be answered categorically. But it can be argued, I think, that a sense of domestic political purpose—sometimes high-minded, and sometimes not—forms the most consistent guide to literocratic politics in our period. Conversely, a coherent alternative program for dealing with the foreigner and his perplexing military power seems to appear only fairly late in the game, and then chiefly as an afterthought, a second exhibit, as it were, in the case for a greater lettered-elite role in policymaking.

To enlarge somewhat on the point, let us begin by reflecting for a moment on how Southern City opinion first solidified its place in nineteenth-century Ch'ing politics. This had occurred, we recall, during the Chia-ch'ing reign, well before there was any sign of a crisis in Sino-foreign relations, and had long since evolved its own particular rationale (in the form of a self-extolling analogy with Ming moral-censure politics) by the time the debate over opium smuggling was ready to begin. The opening wedge, we will further recall, had been a quintessentially domestic issue: unpoliced rebellion at the doorstep of the capital; and, right down to 1850, this issue remained the surest card in the literati suit, their most reliable claim to a voice in politics.

Moreover, though there were obvious practical reasons for playing this card whenever possible, there were equally persuasive programmatic ones. As we have seen, Spring Purificationist true believers like Chang Chi-liang or Yao Ying, for example, had as their ultimate purpose nothing less than the total transformation of the

personality ideals of their class, in the interest (as they would have it) of better immunizing the social anatomy against moral infection. From their point of view, sounding the alarm over the breakdown in social order was practically a mission unto itself, entering even into the new literary dogmas they pressed upon their colleagues. Other, more modest reform proposals likewise regularly linked to the "rebels-in-the-hills" issue included calls for enhancement of the managerial and fiscal autonomy of local officials (the claim being that this would facilitate a more conscientious attack on the roots of disorder) and—another frequent favorite—institutionalized protection of censorial whistle-blowers (the policemen, as it were, of the police). The point is, then, that something approaching a fixed strategy and agenda—*both anchored firmly in the soil of domestic governmental concerns*—had come to shape literati involvement in politics during the two decades before the opium crisis, and continued well thereafter.

By contrast, no such prior clarity of objectives or program is visible in connection with foreign affairs. As we have been at pains to show, Commissioner Lin and his Spring Purification sympathizers in the capital were drawn into the debate over opium control almost inadvertently, the immediate objective being the enhancement of Lin's personal standing at court. Not until overwhelmed by the 1840 war and its unhappy domestic political aftermath did literati independents like Wei Yuan get around, belatedly, to formulating and documenting their own theories, so to speak, of Sino-foreign relations. And, when they did, what emerged was in many regards an echo of refrains long since audible in the domestic sphere. Wei's own preoccupation with arming the civilian population and the enlistment of errant heroes on the government side sounds, for example, extraordinarily like a reworked version of the social-control ideas favored by the Spring Purificationists in the 1830s. So, too, do his (and Commissioner Lin's) enjoinders that the British be dealt with as "mere" pirates—a breed of enemy already commonplace in the literati coastal-control literature of the late Chia-ch'ing.

Belated in their appearance and derivative in their content, literati solutions to the British question thus do not suggest much capacity or inclination to think about foreign affairs in isolation, even by the end of our period. That is not to say these views carried no weight at all, for they did in the end provide the rationale for the diplomatic

hardening that set in after 1850. They tell us little, however, about why this change was so urgently sought. For this, we must look instead to the domestic program evolved by literati activists during the 1820 and 1830s, whose chief goals (administrative decentralization and censorial free speech) stood little chance of realization so long as an authoritarian Manchu peace party ruled in Peking. Therein, our evidence suggests, lay the most persistent incitement to militancy.

All of this leaves us with one last piece of ground to be explored: that of the unexpressed biases or ethnic tensions helping to shape literati views on the foreign-policy questions of our period. Though such feelings are harder to identify than the programmatic concerns with which we have been dealing so far, they may have been just as important, or even more so; for, in a closed, multi-ethnic political system, it would be surprising indeed if unadmitted ethnic or status-group jealousies did not play a role in most major policy struggles. Reading between the lines, I think we shall discover a very considerable list of such prejudices at work in the foreign-policy debates of the 1830s and 1840s, foremost among them being something I would term the "class chauvinism" or "cultural chauvinism" of the Han Chinese lettered elite: the feeling, that is, that they could best define and implement the changes needed to rescue the empire, and ought to be allowed to do so with a minimum of interference. Complementing this "literophilic" sensibility seems to have been an enormous faith in the value of literati friendship and mentorship ties as politically restorative forces—whence came, in turn, the predisposition to support politically troubled Han-lin veterans virtually without regard for the policy issues at stake. However indirectly, these sub rosa biases could often have a dramatic effect on literati views, even in conjunction with foreign-policy questions of only marginal programmatic interest in their own right.

A case in point is Lin Tse-hsu's evolution, first into a trade-control hardliner, then into an apostle of treaty abnegation, largely under the impress, I would argue, of the intramural class-chauvinism he shared with other members of the Chia-ch'ing generation of literati reformers. It will be recollected that Lin began his career in the bureaucracy as one of a tightly knit cluster of ex-Han-lin fast-risers catapulted into high provincial office under the patronage of Chiang Yu-hsien during the 1820s. While generally eschewing any open pretensions to a special right of leadership, this cohort of literati reformists had neverthe-

less felt free to challenge covertly traditional Manchu-imposed administrative priorities whenever adherence to them threatened to obstruct the provincial-level improvements in which they were engaged. Thus, for example, Chiang Yu-hsien and Tao Chu had planned—and nearly secured—a permanent curtailment of canal-shipped tribute-grain deliveries in 1827, in clear disregard of announced court policy. And thus did Governor Lin himself embark during the 1830s on a five-year crusade—likewise unsuccessful—to reduce the huge tax load imposed by early Ch'ing rulers upon the Kiangnan heartland. So controversial a sequence of undertakings could only have been prompted by the conviction that Chinese literati officials were somehow better equipped than others within the bureaucracy to judge where and how reform should proceed—an attitude that seems only to have been reinforced by the rebuffs both these initiatives suffered en route.

This “literophilia,” already implicit in Lin’s approach to domestic affairs, became an influence as well on his foreign-policy views virtually from the moment of his arrival in Canton. As has been shown, Lin took up his duties in that southeastern port city determined to accomplish much more than his instructions called for. Not only would he bring the illicit drug trade under control, but he would do so promptly and permanently—all this as a demonstration of what *shih-ta-fu* zeal could achieve, and as a pathway back into a position of trust at court. Given such a mindset, it is not difficult to see why Lin took so extreme a position on trade control. Nor, in retrospect, is it surprising that he would lay the blame for his wartime failures at the feet chiefly of Manchu rivals within the bureaucracy: first Ch'i-shan, then I-shan, and ultimately Grand Councillor Mu-chang-a himself.

Once aroused by Lin’s actions, moreover, the class egotism of the Han-lin literati remained a powerful influence upon their foreign-policy views for years to come. Juan Yuan’s puzzling postwar defection to the side of the anti-treaty militants, for example, seems explicable only in these terms, for he had certainly evidenced little programmatic sympathy for the hardliners during the 1830s, when Han-lin veterans still occupied the heights of power. What seems to have turned him around was Mu-chang-a’s postwar attempt to dominate virtually all literocratic patronage and to uproot all groups capable of resisting him, irrespective of their particular scholastic underpinnings. This, from Juan’s point of view, must have looked like a throwback to the

Ho-shen years; and, if fighting back meant re-aligning himself with the dishonored war party, then a militant he would be. A similar, class-centered logic seems latent in Tseng Kuo-fan’s 1850 cooperation with the Shrine Association, for he too had been expressing grave doubts about Lin’s policies only a few years earlier.

There was, in short, a kind of unwritten agenda beneath the surface debates over foreign policy we have studied: an unspoken “inner” agenda shaped, ultimately, by the insecurities to which all lettered-class Chinese were subject as they struggled with the problems of career-making in a still Manchu-dominated world. By “inner,” I do not mean “most fundamental” or “determinant,” for this particular dimension of literati political consciousness—this “Han-lin chauvinism”—was by no means the sole or most compelling argument for Southern City resistance against the post-Opium War treaty system. Additional boosts in this direction were provided, as we have seen, by a tradition of attachment to decentralized policy enforcement (hence aversion to the legalistic uniformity promised by the new arrangements); by a predisposition (scarcely reconcilable with modern treaty diplomacy) to favor the dispersal of police power into private hands; and, above all, by an awareness that persistent monarchical paranoia on the home front made resistance to treaty-making strongmen like Mu-chang-a a practical political goal. Here was already a very rich inner (in the sense of domestic) agenda, one that would probably have sufficed in and of itself to guarantee literati opposition. Yet it may not have been the innermost. In the end, no full explanation of this extraordinary hostility to the treaty system seems possible without taking into account the wounded class vanity of the Chinese lettered elite, from which sprang a nearly reflex willingness to believe the very worst about the Manchu statesmen who had guided the new system into being. That such feelings came so readily into play suggests to me that the sides in this dispute had already been chosen before the issues yet existed; that the parties knew instinctively whom they would be arguing against, before there were yet grounds for disagreement. It is in this double sense that the conflict we have studied seems rightly characterized as an “inner” Opium War.