

Article Title	Little-Known Facts about Russian-Chinese Relations. Visit of the Mission of the Qing Empire to St. Petersburg in 1870
Author(s)	Nikolai SAMOYLOV
Source	Far Eastern Affairs , No. 1, 2009, page(s): 98-104
Rubric	• HISTORY
Place of Publication	Minneapolis-Moscow, USA-Russia
Size	19.7 Kbytes
Words	2993
Stable URL	http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/19917153

Little-Known Facts about Russian-Chinese Relations. Visit of the Mission of the Qing Empire to St. Petersburg in 1870

Author: Nikolai SAMOYLOV

This article uses Chinese and Russian sources to relate the visit of a Chinese diplomatic mission headed by Anson Burlingame, Zhi Gang, and Sun Jiagu to St. Petersburg. It reveals unknown details about this visit showing that the Russian government received the Chinese delegation at the highest level, observing all the rules and standards of diplomatic etiquette of that time. It was in St. Petersburg that the mission leader, American diplomat Burlingame, passed away, requiring his immediate replacement. This first official mission of the Qing Empire to a Western country was a milestone in the development of relations between Russia and China and helped to bring them up to a qualitatively new level by paving the way to establishing China's permanent embassy in Russia.

Key words: Russia, China, diplomatic missions, Burlingame, Zhi Gang, St. Petersburg.

The history of the Russian-Chinese relations of the 19th century has been studied in sufficient depth. But until recently researchers focused their attention on major events in the relations between Russia and the Qing Empire, such as the twists and turns in signing the most important interstate agreements and questions relating to demarcating the Russian-Chinese border. If a particular diplomatic mission did not end in the signing of some important document, historians usually ignored such contacts between the two states. Nevertheless, examination of these little-known episodes in Russian-Chinese relations could be interesting primarily from the perspective of studying the relations between the two states that represented essentially different socio-cultural types. The visits of Chinese diplomatic missions to Russia in the context of China's entry into the Western

Nikolai Samoylov, Ph. D. (Hist.), Deputy dean of the Oriental Department, St. Petersburg State University. E-mail: samoylov@mail.ru

system of international relations was an important milestone in establishing new relations between the Russian and Qing empires.

After China's defeat in the second Opium War and the signing of a series of unequal agreements with Western nations, the Qing government began to think seriously about changing the essence and methods of its relations with foreign states. Gradually the realistically-minded Qing dignitaries began to realize the need for establishing equal relations with Western countries from the viewpoint of the generally accepted international regulations of that time. The leaders of a specially created foreign political department, Zongli Yamen, headed by Prince Gong, strove to draw China out of the diplomatic isolation the country

continued to find itself in due to the supremacy of traditional ideas about the Middle Kingdom's place in the world.

The country's new foreign policy leaders gradually came to the understanding that without knowledge of Western reality and Chinese diplomacy's observance of world regulations and standards of interstate relations, it would no longer be possible to conduct affairs with other nations and develop relations with them. So in order to become acquainted with the life of foreign countries and prepare the ground for establishing permanent diplomatic relations with them a decision was taken in Zongli Yamen to send special missions beyond China, the participants of which were to keep daily notes and compile corresponding reports.

After the mission headed by Bin Chun¹ returned to China in 1866, preparations began for sending a new mission with broader powers, the participants of which were set the specific task of clarifying the conditions for creating permanent embassies of the Qing Empire in foreign countries.

Prince Gong and the leadership of Zongli Yamen came to the conclusion that the embassy's success would largely depend on knowledge of international law, observing diplomatic protocol and etiquette, and the ability to hold talks in the way customary in the West. Since the Chinese officials had a very vague idea about all this, it was decided to ask one of the Western diplomats to head the Chinese mission to the U. S. and European states (in so doing the propitious experience of Robert Hart's successful activity in organizing Bin Chun's mission was kept in mind).

This time the choice fell on American Anson Burlingame, who enjoyed the confidence of Prince Gong and several other high-ranking Qing dignitaries.

Anson Burlingame was born on 14 November, 1820 in New York. He obtained an education in law at Michigan University and worked as a lawyer in Boston. He was elected three times to the U. S. Congress. In 1861, the American government appointed Mr. Burlingame as U. S. Ambassador to Austro-Hungary, but the Austrian authorities refused to accept him because of his empathy with the Italian and Hungarian national-liberation movement. On June 14 of that year, U. S. President Abraham Lincoln appointed Anson Burlingame as American Ambassador to the Qing Empire. During his time in Beijing, he developed con-

fidential relations with Prince Gong. It is worth noting that when he temporarily left the Chinese capital in 1865, the high-ranking officials visited the American embassy to wish him a good trip. After Burlingame quit his post as American Ambassador to China in 1867, it was he who was asked on behalf of Zongli Yamen to head the Chinese mission to the West. At the end of 1867, the members of the mission began coming together. Three envoys Extraordinary and ministers Plenipotentiary were officially chosen to head the mission: Anson Burlingame, Zhi Gang, and Sun Jiagu. The mission also included a secretary, the duties of which were performed by the Frenchman E. Deschamps (who previously performed the duties of secretary during Bin Chun's mission), three interpreters, and a physician. Several students from the Tongwenguan School of Foreign Languages were also asked to join the mission.

Zhi Gang, who was appointed as one of the mission leaders, used to serve in the Ministry of Ceremonies (*Li bit*) and then, after passing his exams, became head of the chancellery in Zongli Yamen. He went down in history as the author of a diary he kept during the mission's stay in foreign countries. His diary was published in the PRC in 1981 in the *Zou xiang shize* series (Going to Meet the World)² and later republished. The information gathered by Zhi Gang and his impression about what he saw in the West are a valuable source allowing us to reconstruct the events relating to the work of this mission.

The mission left Shanghai on February 25, 1868 and returned to China in October 1870. The memorandum published regarding dispatch of the mission to the West said that its most important goal was to become acquainted with the way of life and sources of strength of foreign countries. The mission also had specific diplomatic assignments.

After visiting the United States where a treaty was signed on July 28, 1868 between the U. S. and the Qing Empire, friendly relations were officially established and China was permitted to establish its consulates in American ports (this treaty was also known as the Burlingame Treaty). Then the mission spent some time in the capitals of the largest European states: Paris, Stockholm, Copenhagen, the Hague, and Berlin.

In February 1870, the Chinese envoys arrived in Russia from Prussia. There they were received in St. Petersburg at an even higher level than Bin Chun's mission. An analysis of the corresponding pages of Zhi Gang's diary, documents kept in the depositories of the Russian State Historical Archives (RSHA), as well as articles in the St. Petersburg newspapers of that time make it possible to recreate the main events related to the stay of this official Chinese mission in Russia.

The Ministry of the Imperial Court, when holding consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, decided to receive the Chinese delegation in keeping with the rules and regulations customary at receptions of European missions, thus indicating how highly this mission was esteemed. The ceremony of the meeting and reception of the Chinese guests at the emperor's palace was held in compliance with all the requirements of court etiquette of that time. In

page 100

so doing, the documents that have survived make it possible to essentially reconstruct it.

February 4(16), 1870, the mission was given audience in the Winter Palace with Emperor Alexander II. Three court carriages were sent to the Klei Hotel on Mikhailovskaya Street, where the Chinese envoys were staying. They arrived at 12 o'clock and took the guests along Nevsky Prospekt to the Jordan entrance of the Winter Palace. All three envoys traveled in the first carriage accompanied by Olarovsky, an interpreter from the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry. In the Fieldmarshal's Hall of the Winter Palace they were greeted by a palace attendant and a Cossack guard of honor. In the Armory Hall, the Chinese diplomats were greeted by an infantry guard. Marshal Prince Golytsin greeted the Chinese delegation in the Yellow Room, where the guests were offered tea and sweetmeats. After resting for a short time, the members of the mission were shown into the White Hall where a guard from the court grenadier regiment was in waiting. There they were met by Marshal Count Liven and Director of the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry Stremoukhov.

Count Liven led the three Chinese envoys into the Golden Room for an audience with Emperor Alexander II and Empress Maria Alexandrovna. The audience was attended by State Chancellor Prince Gorchakov, assistant minister of the Imperial Court Count Adlerberg, Grand Duke Vladimir Alexandrovich, Vice Admiral Posyet, General Pereleshin, senior chamberlain Duke Shuvalov, Director of the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry Stremoukhov, and others.

As they entered the room, the envoys greeted the Russian emperor with several bows. Then Anson Burlingame read a letter from the Chinese emperor and gave it to Alexander II. In his speech, the American diplomat, acting as Chinese ambassador, talked about "the two centuries of friendship between Russia and China,"³ reiterating in so dong a phrase that Bin Chun repeated constantly on his visit to Russia in 1866. The Russian emperor responded in French and spoke very highly about "the friendly relations between China and Russia and about the

blossoming of international trade between the two countries."⁴

At the end of the audience, the retinue of the Qing mission was ushered into the Gold Room and Burlingame introduced its members to the emperor. Then there was a rather relaxed conversation during which Alexander II introduced the Chinese envoys to his son, Grand Duke Alexei Alexandrovich, a great lover of sea voyages. It is worth noting that the following year he was appointed as senior officer on the frigate *Svetlana* and undertook a long voyage during which he visited China and Japan.

Anson Burlingame's wife was introduced separately to the empress in her boudoir.

But this visit of the Chinese mission to St. Petersburg, which began so successfully, continued with a tragic event. The day after the audience in the Winter Palace Burlingame fell ill and died several days later at the Klei Hotel from pneumonia. According to the reports in the St. Petersburg newspapers, the head

page 101

of the Chinese mission died on the morning of February 11 (23),⁵ while the archives set the date as February 10 (22).⁶ In all likelihood, Anson Burlingame died in St. Petersburg during the night of February 10 - 11 (Old Style). The funeral took place on February 14 (26) at 14.00 in the Anglican church (the building on N 56 English Embankment, survives to this day). In addition to the deceased's family and members of the Chinese mission, the funeral ceremony was attended by numerous members of the diplomatic corps, Russian dignitaries, and generals. Everyone wore full dress uniform. The funeral was also attended by assistant minister of foreign affairs, secret advisor and senator Westman, Director of the Asian Department of the Foreign Ministry Stremoukhov, Russian Ambassador to China General Vlangali, general-adjutants of the retinue of His Imperial Highness Prince Urasov, Trepov, and Annenkov, as well as U. S., British, French, and other ambassadors. Burlingame's body was embalmed and sent to the United States for burial.⁷ Zhi Gang described the circumstances of his passing and the funeral service in his diary with a feeling of deep regret and grief⁸ Anson Burlingame was buried in a cemetery in Cambridge (the state of Massachusetts).⁹

So it was that in St. Petersburg the current head of the first official mission of the Qing Empire to the West was replaced. These duties were assumed by Zhi Gang. After contacting Beijing by telegraph, Zhi Gang and Sun Jiagu were instructed not only to continue their stay in St. Petersburg, but also to visit all the previously scheduled European capitals.

Burlingame's death raised the interest of Russian journalists in the envoys from China. Information about their arrival in St. Petersburg and further plans appeared in all the capital's main newspapers. The audiences, meetings, and talks interrupted by the illness and death of the mission's head continued.

The fact that the Chinese delegation was received by many high-ranking dignitaries, including members of the imperial family, shows the importance attached to its visit to the Russian capital. Zhi Gang and the other members of the mission were given audiences with crown prince Alexander Alexandrovich (future emperor Alexander III) and crown princess Maria Fedorovna. "Their Highnesses observed all the etiquette for receiving European envoys when receiving the Chinese envoys and their retinue." They were also received by the emperor's brothers: Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich, who held the post of Chairman of the State Council, and Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich (Senior), a member of the State Council and general-inspector of the cavalry, as well as his wife, Grand Duchess Alexandra Petrovna. Alexander II's sons, Grand Dukes Vladimir Alexandrovich and Alexei Alexandrovich, Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna (the widow of the emperor's uncle, Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich),

prince Peter Georgievich Oldenburg, Grand Duchess Ekaterina Mikhailovna and her husband Duke Georg of Meklenburg¹⁰ also met with the Chinese diplomats. They all showed a lively interest in the guests from China.

The cultural itinerary of the visit was also quite extensive. The members of

the Chinese delegation were able to acquaint themselves with the sights of the Russian capital and its surroundings and visit museums, which, judging from Zhi Gang's diary, made a great impression on them.¹¹

The Chinese mission spent more than two months in St. Petersburg. On April 4(16), a farewell audience was held in the Winter Palace with the Russian emperor, and attended by Chancellor A. M. Gorchakov. Zhi Gang noted in his diary that during the audience Alexander II enquired about how the Chinese ambassadors were dealing with the cold Russian weather, which was not coincidental since the mission's first head had died of a cold, and expressed the hope for former development of mutually beneficial trade between the two countries. Upon parting he wished the members of the Chinese delegation a good journey.¹² In turn, Zhi Gang introduced the mission's secretary, Englishman Brown, to Alexander II.

After leaving Russia, the Qing mission headed by Zhi Gang visited Belgium, Italy, and Spain, after which it headed for home.

In summing up, we need to recognize the immense contribution the Anson Burlingame-Zhi Gang mission made to the development of Chinese diplomacy in the new era. It was the first official mission of the Qing Empire to the West, while Bin Chun's mission was more awareness-raising in nature. The higher status of this mission made it possible for its leaders to meet with a wide range of officials, which was clearly manifested during the visit to St. Petersburg. During the visits to different countries, the mission's leaders and members were able to gain an in-depth understanding of Western life and begin practical assimilation of the ways and means of contemporary diplomacy.

This mission was a milestone in the development of relations between Russia and China and helped them to reach a qualitatively new level by paving the way to establishing China's permanent embassies in Russia.

The missions sent during the second half of the 19th century from the Asian countries to the U. S. and Europe helped spread knowledge in the Asian states about Western countries and made it possible for them to see with their own eyes the differences between the economy, political and cultural life, morals, customs, and traditions of these countries and the Asian states. It stands to reason that they filtered what they learned through the prism of a traditional world outlook. Nevertheless new ideas were able to take hold more easily. In this way, the Chinese diplomatic missions in the 19th century, including the Qing mission headed by Anson Burlingame, Zhi Gang, and Sun Jiagu, played the role of unique translators of the communication code of China's socio-cultural interaction with the countries of the West, including Russia.

NOTES:

1. For more details, see: N. Yu. Novgorodskaya. "Little-Known Visit of a Chinese Diplomat to Russia." *Far Eastern Affairs*, 1991, N 4, pp. 105 - 111 (*Russian version*).
2. Zhi Gang. *Chu shi tai xi ji* (Notes on the First Embassy to the West). Changsha, 1981.

3. Ibid., p. 89.
4. RSHA, rec. gr. 516, inv. 125/2382, d. 178. A Chamberlain's Journal. February 1870, p. 20-rev.
5. *Golos*. 1870. N 43; *Novoe vremya*. 1870. N 42; *Government bulletin*. 1870. N 35; *St. Petersburg vedomosti*. 1870. N 43.
6. RSHA, rec. gr. 473, inv. 1, d. 1349. On the Reception Audience of the Chinese Envoys with His Sovereign Emperor and their Introduction to the Grand Dukes and Grand Duchesses, p. 61-rev.
7. *Golos*. 1870. N 47.
8. ZhiGang. Op. cit, pp. 90 - 91.
9. Two American towns in California and Kansas are named after Anson Burlingame.
10. RSHA, rec. gr. 473, inv. 1, d. 1349, pp. 24 - 52.
11. Zhi Gang. Op. cit, pp. 90, 93 - 94.
12. Ibid., p. 97.

permanent article address: <http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/19917153>