“Soldiers with stiff bodies”: rumors, stereotypes and the Chinese image of the British army during the First Opium War (1839-1842)

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Abstract: One of the more curious aspects of the First Opium War was the circulation of two claims about British soldiers among Chinese officials, instigated by Commissioner Lin Zexu: their uniforms were so tight, if they were to stumble they would not be able to get up again; and, the men were “like fish,” so could function well at sea, but could not fight on land because they had become so used to the pitching and rolling of their ships. This article examines the extent to which these notions took on the quality of wartime rumors, which spread beyond generals and officials, extending into the general population. It considers the way in which the rumors functioned in different ways at different levels of society.

Keywords: First Opium War; rumor; Chinese perceptions; Lin Zexu; British army

One of the strangest aspects of the First Opium War was the role played by the various rumors which circulated during the conflict. One of the most widespread of these claimed that British soldiers had “stiff bodies,” so that if they stumbled, they would not be able to get up. The Chinese image of the British soldier has been mentioned in

passing in previous studies, with the most common interpretation ascribing it to the ignorance of the outside world among Chinese people at the time.[1] But this characterization of the British has never really been examined in any detail, at least in part because research on the war has been framed largely by questions around the failure of the dynasty to react adequately to the maritime threat, to adapt its diplomatic procedures to new realities and to reform its army. In broader surveys, the war is portrayed as the start of a "grand narrative," whether that be the century of humiliation, the path to modernization, or the end of isolation. In short, there appears to have been little place for cultural aspects of the war in the existing historiography.[2]

The chapter on the First Opium War in volume 10 of *The Cambridge History of China* does mention "the myth that Englishmen could not fight ashore," noting as well that Chinese diplomats found it hard to overcome their "natural abhorrence of these crude and physically noxious foreigners."[3] Moreover, a quotation is provided from Commissioner Lin Zexu, but without any indication as to its date, to the effect that the barbarians did not know how to use swords and, because their legs were "firmly bound with cloth[,]… it is extremely inconvenient for them to stretch."[4] Where this chapter succeeds is in drawing attention to the Chinese overestimation of the fighting ability of the Qing military forces and, likewise, in suggesting that rumor was a feature of the conflict. Yet, due to its brevity, there is no real analysis of the part played by stereotypes in the war.[5] More recent studies have provided more penetrating insights: Mao Haijian has discussed how the "myth" interfered with the military plans of the Qing army;[6] another historian, Ma Lianpo, dedicated a chapter in his 2003 book to demonstrating

[1] For example, when he touched on this topic, Lai thought Lin Zexu was "childish and ignorant." On the other hand, some researchers have even thought that the claim was actually correct. See Lai, *Lin Zexu*, 350; Institute of History of Fujian Academy of Social Sciences, *Lin Zexu yu ya pian*, 84.
[2] See Polachek, *Inner Opium War*, especially his discussion of the historiography, 1-16.
[3] Wakeman, "The Canton Trade and the Opium War," 196, 198.
[4] Ibid., 192. For this quotation, the reader is directed to Kuo, *A Critical Study of the First Anglo-Chinese War with Documents*, doc.no. 17, 250-251, which shows that it is taken from Lin's memorial regarding the military strength of Great Britain, dated September 24, 1839.
[5] Wakeman, "The Canton Trade and the Opium War," esp. 200, 202-204, 206-208.
[6] Mao, *Tian chao*, 164-165; Mao, *Jin dai*. The former considers the rumor had its roots in the marching-style in European armies and resistance to the practice of kowtowing; the latter work focuses more on its impact on the Second Opium War.

how the Chinese underestimated the fighting ability of the British army on land.[7] Although these two studies represent significant steps forward in historical understanding, the "rumors" are discussed only where they enliven the narrative.

Moreover, previous research has not considered the rumor against the background of how the uniform of the British army would have appeared to Chinese officers and officials, given the deep impression which the – for Chinese eyes – outlandish design would have left on the observer. The conclusion that the idea was pure fantasy is often used, in fact, to imply that those who spread it were completely ignorant of the outside world.[8] But the extent to which this claim was known, and the frequency with which it was repeated, offer the historian ample opportunity to consider a variety of questions. To what extent were the common people, the gentry, Chinese officials, officers and the emperor convinced of the veracity of the notions about the British soldiers' "stiff bodies"? Was the "stiff bodies" claim different in any way from other rumors circulating at the time? Why did the rumor continue to be repeated throughout the war – and what function did it serve through its repetition?

To provide some at least tentative answers to these questions, the historian is confronted with the challenge of examining the role of rumors and stereotypes as historical phenomena. One obvious challenge is the difficulty – conceptually – of separating stereotypes from rumors. And, not surprisingly, given its very nature, the social phenomenon of rumor has only attracted limited interest among historians;[9] scholarly studies of rumor have been undertaken mainly by sociologists, specialists in public opinion, and behavioral psychologists.[10] Nonetheless, to create a basic analytical framework, it is worth considering briefly the existing literature because, by doing so, some definitions of rumor can be considered.

Although in part discredited, the early theories of Allport and Postman do provide a starting point. Their research postulated that a rumor could satisfy a primary emotional

[7] Ma, *Wan qing di guo*. This research utilizes more source material, but it is limited by out-dated ideas.
[8] In assessing a memorial by Lin of September 1, 1839, Mao talks of "Lin's absurd notions about British soldiers." Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 122.
[9] One example is a chapter on rumor during the Boxer Rebellion in Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 146-172. See also the general reflections in Ghosh, "Rumour in History Writing."
[10] An overview of the research into rumor is given in Pendleton. "Rumor Research Revised."

urge; at the same time, it could serve to justify a feeling about a situation; as they put it, "rumor rationalizes while it relieves." They also argued that the intensity of rumor is conditioned by the importance of the subject to individuals multiplied by the ambiguity of the evidence available.[11] Two of their earliest critics offered another definition of rumor: "an unverified account or explanation of events, circulating from person to person and pertaining to an object, event, or issue of public concern." Peterson and Gist further argued that there were different types of rumors – retrospective, predictive, planted, spontaneous, flights of fantasy, and those with a "news-like" quality.[12] According to the more recent research of Rosnow, there are four variables frequently identifiable in the creation and dissemination of rumors: personal anxiety, general uncertainty, credulity and "outcome-relevant involvement."[13] In the case of the rumors in China about the abilities of British soldiers during the First Opium War, deciding which category the rumor can be placed in becomes extremely important. This is more so the case if one accepts that every rumor has three components: (1) it has a target (a person, a place, or a thing); (2) a charge or allegation; and, (3) a source – an authoritative figure who gives credence to the rumor.[14]

The first task of the article will be to consider the origin of the belief in British soldiers' inability to fight on land; thereafter, the way in which the idea spread among Qing commanders during the war; but what had begun as a claim made in official documents rapidly developed into one of many of the wartime rumors circulating among the Chinese population. Why the "stiff bodies" myth took hold so quickly will be explained, as will the issue of whether it should be viewed as a racial stereotype, a "rumor," or a groundless claim cynically exploited for ulterior motives.

1. The origins of the myth: the role of Commissioner Lin Zexu

In late July 1839, the tense situation around Guangdong province had been on-going

[11] Allport and Postman, "An Analysis of Rumor," 502-503.
[12] Peterson and Gist, "Rumor and Public Opinion," 159.
[13] Rosnow, "Inside Rumor," 485-488.
[14] Pendleton, "Rumor Research Revised," 75.

for nearly a year. Lin Zexu (1785-1850),[15] who had arrived at Canton earlier that year as imperial commissioner, sat down to write a memorial to the throne. Although he had been gripped with the excitement of burning opium at the beach of Bocca Tigris and deterring the "barbarians" from trading in the drug, he was deeply worried. An imperial edict had ordered him to be "in awe of the barbarians," while "avoiding any conflicts that may lead to a war."[16] But what he had done made this impossible. Fortunately, the Daoguang emperor (1782-1850) seemed to be satisfied with the public destruction of opium and approved the draft of "The Diplomatic Note to the Queen of Great Britain," which had been drawn up by Lin in a combative spirit.[17] Lin was trusted by the emperor and outstanding in his abilities and pragmatic approach to work; yet he was aware that if he could not provide some tangible evidence that the war would be won easily, the imperial court would not back him. Still, he was confident due to the experience he had accumulated over the previous six months in foreign affairs.

In another memorial, sent to the emperor on July 24, 1839, Lin had written that, since he had departed for Canton with the imperial edict, the order to "clean up the evil of opium and avoid the war" had been exercising him greatly. While preventing a conflict by permitting the illegal opium trade was an unappealing option, if rigorous measures were taken, which might possibly ease the confrontation, the initiative would be seized and communicate the "stern warning" of the Empire through "suitable punishments." Lin explained to the emperor that those who feared the foreigners were either terrified of their formidable battleships or envious of their wealth. The barbarians' ships could certainly endure the conditions on the open sea; yet their vessels were cumbersome; once they moved into the rivers where rocks and shoals were dense, the huge ships would prove too clumsy to steer. Further, "the soldiers of the barbarians were not good at fighting because their legs and feet were bound so tightly that they

[15] Prior to his arrival at Canton, Lin had enjoyed a remarkably successful career as a provincial administrator, earning a reputation as a wise, practical and popular state official. He was also a scholar and reformer; and, he enjoyed the trust of the emperor. Among the shorter summaries of his career and early successes in suppressing the opium trade, a sympathetic treatment can be found in Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*, 120-131.
[16] CIWSM, Vol.1, 189.
[17] CIWSM, Vol.1, 211.

could not move freely." Thus, there was no reason to fear the barbarians' army, since the Qing warriors would subdue them easily if they could be enticed to disembark.[18]

A few weeks later, on September 3, 1839, Lin found further evidence to support his conviction during his visit to Macao. Lin wrote that "the European men's bodies were bound tightly by their clothing, their coats were short and their legs were long," which in Lin's eye was far removed from the dress of those who were immersed in elegant "celestial civilization," and much closer to the dress of "actors who acted like wild beasts." Their hats, which were high and round, made them look like ignoble, low-level functionaries.[19] Due to the intelligence he had collected previously, and on the basis of his personal experience, Lin's conviction that British people were clumsy because of their clothing became much stronger. In fact, not only were the males "encased" by short jackets and "long close-fitting trousers," their hair was very curly, they had heavy beards and, he concluded, "they really do look like devils."[20]

To a great extent, Lin's views repeated tropes about the British which were already well established. Ruan Yuan, a leading minister in the Jiaqing period, had written two decades earlier that the British "would be embarrassed just like fish on solid ground" if they were to come ashore since they only fought well at sea.[21] What reinforced the existing idea was, however, the likelihood that some of Lin's early memorials were circulated through the medium of the *Peking Gazette.*[22] There were consequences, though, to these ill-considered beliefs. The provincial governor of Zhejiang, Wu-er-gong-e, stated that "the primary strategy to combat the British barbarians was to induce them to land because they came here from thousands of miles away and had got used to the jolting and rough conditions on ships. Once they stand on dry land, they will

[18] CIWSM, Vol.1, 216-217.
[19] *Lin Zexu ri ji*, 351.
[20] Cited in Waley, *Opium War*, 68-69. The same diary entry is cited in Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*, 200-201.
[21] "Emperor Jiaqing's Comment in Chinese on Memorials Submitted to Him," May 10, 1818, cited in Ma, *Wan qing di guo*, 210.
[22] Many of the articles which appeared in the *Gazette* have only survived as translations carried out by foreigners. While an important source, it cannot be classified as a newspaper, since it only published official notices, memorials and edicts. Moreover, the imperial court became increasingly worried about security as the war progressed, so began to exercise censorship over its contents. Harris, *Peking Gazette*, 13-14.

certainly be dizzy and weak."[23] In the eyes of government officials there was further evidence to support this assumption. A traitor captured in the town of Yin had provided a confession that he had entered "the country of red hair" (Britain) through Guangdong when he was a child. On the basis of his own experience, he added, the red-haired barbarians could only steer their ships and could not fight on land.[24]

With military preparations complete, and to every governor's surprise, as the conflict unfolded the following year the British force assaulted Zhejiang rather than Guangdong, capturing Dinghai on Zhoushan Island on July 5/6, 1840. Wu'er-gong-e was horrified. But his first action was to abrogate any personal responsibility by shifting the blame for the military disaster to the commander, Zhang Chaofa. In the memorial he sent to the emperor, he stated that before engaging the enemy, the local officer Yao and the gentry had agreed that "the barbarians' advantages were their cannons and ships and land fighting was not [one of their strengths]." Therefore, the strategy was to deploy half of the force in Banlu Ting, which was about a mile from the city, while the others would remain inside. However, the commander Zhang had insisted on "defending at the harbor and countless soldiers were killed by the cannon fire."[25] The reason for the capture of the town, the Qing officers concluded, was that the commander had refused to adhere to the agreed strategy. Explaining away disasters by pointing to the failings of local commanders was one reason why the rumors continued to influence the strategy of the Qing army.[26]

The news that Dinghai had been seized by the "barbarians" shocked the imperial

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[23] CMMCH, Vol.3, 366. There was the further claim that the British sailors moved in a clumsy fashion on land due to the pitching and rolling of the ships which made the bones in their legs and feet stiff. See CMMCH, Vol.3, 285.

[24] CMMCH, Vol.3, 146.

[25] CIWSM, Vol.1, 325.

[26] Two months before the capture of Dinghai, Charles Elliot (1801-1875) was clear in his own mind about the capacity of the Qing Dynasty to make adequate military preparations. Writing to Viscount Palmerston from Macao about Lin, he noted: "A Chinese functionary in his situation would rather risk all by doing little (hoping to the last that nothing would come) than take the certainty of punishment which would follow extensive military preparation rendered necessary by his own violence, and exposing the falsehood of his own reports of submission, victory and a cut-off trade." He added that attacks on British forces were out of the question: "But making every allowance for Chinese ignorance of European prowess the measures of defence of which we have authentic information from Canton are so grotesquely inadequate that it is difficult to believe that any serious opposition can be intended." TNA, FO 17/40, fol. 18-23, Elliot to Palmerston, May 4, 1840.

court. Holding responsibility for foreign affairs, Lin became even more anxious and sent a memorial on September 5, 1840, to present once more the methods of defense based on the "successful practice" of resisting the Europeans in recent months. Lin stressed again that the British strength was only their cannons and battleships: if the Chinese had to fight at sea, it would be necessary to choose the right location in fine weather. As for war on land, the British held no advantages and they "bound themselves so tightly that their waists and legs were stiff; once they had fallen, they would never get up again." For this reason, one soldier of the Qing army could kill several of the enemy and even common peasants could do the same. Moreover, the barbarians wore different clothes and their eyes, noses and hair could be easily distinguished. If the Chinese citizens and soldiers could make a joint effort, the "foreign renegades" could be wiped out completely.[27]

The emperor again appeared to accept this view. In response to a letter about the defense of Hangzhou from the commander of the Eight Banner garrison stationed there, Qi-Mingbao, received by Qi on July 13, 1840, the emperor had already stated his belief that the British relied on their formidable ships and cannon fire to harass coastal provinces. It was hard to predict the chances of success in sea battles but, if they were induced to land on Chinese soil, they would be annihilated completely.[28] Now Lin had support from the imperial court.

The governors in coastal provinces took for granted the belief that the British had stiff bodies, and could not fight well on land, and pursued the strategy of enticing the enemy on to dry land in order to defeat them. When the documents are examined, it can be established that the governors, commanders and admirals, men such as Deng Tingzhen, Qi-ying, Qi-shan, Liu Yunke, Yiliang and Liu Buyun,[29] and ministers at the imperial court and civil officers in the provinces, such as Zhu Chenglie, Luo Binzhang, Jin Yinglin and Li Guangshu,[30] accepted the veracity of Lin's claims. The opinion of

[27] CIWSM, Vol.1, 432.
[28] CIWSM, Vol.1, 334.
[29] All these individuals restated the firm belief in various documents that the British could not fight on land. CIWSM, Vol.1, 360, 454, Vol.2, 714-15, 1054, Vol.3, 1598, 287.
[30] These four individuals repeated various versions of the inability of "the barbarians" to fight on land. CIWSM, Vol.2, 920, Vol.3, 1548, 1422. Luo Binzhang reported the bizarre claim that the barbarians

Yu-qian (1793-1841)[31] was typical. When he arrived in Zhejiang to organize the defense in anticipation of the British offensive, he declared with some confidence in a memorial of September 12, 1840, that the enemy had committed eight errors which military leaders should avoid. The seventh of these was that "the barbarians only relied on their guns and cannons and were not good at combat with the bayonet. Moreover, their waists and legs were stiff, and their bodies were bound tightly, so it was difficult for their soldiers to stretch themselves. Once they fell, they would never get up again."[32] Based on this belief, he dedicated much effort to the preparation of the counterattack at Dinghai. Yu-qian mocked the British army not only because they "had difficulty in climbing mountains and walking, and thus dare not stay away from their ships," which explained why they had not captured the strategic area of Cengang (close to Dinghai), also because

> their cannons could not work on mountains, their bayonets could not be used to attack at a distance, their bodies were stiff and could not withstand a single blow. It was to our advantage to use the nimble and swift [Chinese] soldiers to defeat them with spears and arrows.[33]

But Yu-qian had no immediate chance to put his plan to the test. The emperor changed his mind and dispatched Qi-shan (1786-1854) to listen to accounts of the "unjust treatment" suffered at the hands of the British.

Until that moment, with the exception of the small-scale action at Dinghai, the armies of the two countries had not yet met in a serious military engagement. Some British soldiers who had become separated from their units were occasionally captured by the local militia, which was taken as confirmation that British soldiers were incapable of fighting on land. Most Chinese officers were satisfied by this simple

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used rubber and copper sheet to protect themselves from the sword and spear. Hence, the people of Guangdong province assaulted them by hitting their feet. CIWSM, Vol.3, 1339.

[31] The writer of *Daoguang-Yangshou-Zhengfuji* [The suppression of the foreign ships during the Daoguang period], Wei Yuan, considered that Yu-qian "was headstrong and not familiar with military affairs," while his character "was the same as Yan Botao's and, thus, he had a good relationship with Lin Zexu." It is little wonder he accepted the rumor unquestioningly. See Wei Yuan, *Daoguang-Yangshou-Zhengfuji,* cited in Liu, *Lin Zexu, Wei Yuan*, 97.

[32] CIWSM*,* Vol.1, 440.

[33] CIWSM, Vol.2, 678.

explanation of their superiority – until, that is, the negotiations broke down and the conflict was rekindled in February 1841.

2. Explaining away defeats: Qing officers' refusal to change their views

Hostilities flared up in earnest when Sir Henry Pottinger (1789-1856) arrived as the new British plenipotentiary in August 1841. Canton yielded, although not much force had been applied, with payment of a ransom promised to prevent the destruction of the city. According to the new instructions of Lord Palmerston, however, British military might was not to be used for peripheral actions around Guangzhou. Leaving the squadron that was blockading Canton, and the garrison which was protecting Hong Kong, the main force drove north towards the heart of the empire. The first engagement occurred at Xiamen on August 26, 1841, where the defense of the city, the construction of which the commander Yan Botao had devoted considerable attention to, was quickly suppressed by the superior firepower of the Royal Navy. Sampans were then used to transport British soldiers; once they had landed, they did not meet particularly strong resistance, with most of the Qing army escaping in disorder. The city of Xiamen had surrendered with barely a whimper.[34] A decisive victory had been scored by the British army in the first large-scale engagement; the message relaying this news shocked those who heard it, especially the emperor. He was astonished to learn that the barbarians' army was actually quite capable on land and had seized the battery after a fierce attack, a report which left him angry and confused. He warned in the imperial edicts, therefore, that the governors needed to pay attention to the preparation for battles on land and that they should not neglect this in favor of defense at sea.[35]

This warning did not, though, attract much attention as most ministers and commanders were still dismissive of the fighting ability of the British. Typical of the reactions was the statement by Bao-chang, commander of the Eight Banner garrison in Fuzhou. He noted that the loss of Xiamen had been because the number of the barbarians' ships had been greater, and they had "deployed two or more ships to assault

[34] Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 271-290.
[35] CIWSM, Vol.2, 1156.

one battery." The battery was captured in a sneak attack; then the barbarians turned the captured cannons on the Qing soldiers which caused most of the Chinese casualties.[36] But even though Xiamen had been lost, it appeared to many officials that the British still did not dare leave their ships; they had retreated to Gulangyu Island, which was further evidence of their incapacity to fight on land.[37]

Another rumor which emerged was that those who had fought against the Qing army on land had not been the "white barbarians" from England but the "black barbarians" (i.e., Indians) and Chinese traitors, who had been forced to fight by the British. Qi-shan's report on the fall of the Dajiao and Shajiao batteries included the explanation that they had conducted the fighting, a claim supported by Lin Zexu.[38] In the second battle of Dinghai (September 29 - October 1, 1841), governor Yu-qian reported that the army which had disembarked at Zhushan and Xiaofengling consisted of traitors from Fujian and Guangdong as well as some "black barbarians." The British had withdrawn the sampans once the traitors and Indians had disembarked and they had been forced to fight desperately to survive.[39] In fact, both the 26th (Cameronian) Regiment and 49th (Princess Charlotte of Wales') Regiment, which had taken part in the battle to seize the Dajiao and Shajiao batteries,[40] and the 55th (Westmorland) Regiment and the 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment which had seized Dinghai, were all regiments of British men. The officers who led the charge at the battle were Major Fawcett and Captain Francis Wigston,[41] and the units were definitely not composed of "the traitors from Fujian and Guangdong." Yet all the Qing officers had insisted on this point: the rumor of being defeated by Chinese traitors helped them rationalize their defeat at the hands of the British.

One study which has touched on the issue of Qing officers' abilities argues that,

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[36] CIWSM, Vol.3, 1261.
[37] CIWSM, Vol.3, 1261.
[38] Lin wrote in a letter home, sometime between December 28, 1840, and January 5, 1841, that "[the] soldiers who attacked the Shajiao battery from behind were mostly the Chinese traitors. They wore our official uniform or barbarian clothing and climbed the battery by ladders." Lai, ed., *Lin Zexu nian pu xin bian*, 442.
[39] CIWSM, Vol.3, 1265.
[40] Bingham, *Narrative of the Expedition to China*. See also CMMCH, Vol.5, 162.
[41] McPherson, *Two Years in China*, 214; Cannon, *Historical Record*, 71.

among all the bungling officers, Liu Yunke (1792-1864) may have been the only one who had realized the real fighting capacity of the British army.[42] Yet this was not the case. What Liu committed to writing did not extend beyond stereotypes. After the battle at Xiamen, Liu sent a memorial to the emperor and suggested that the only means to address Qing military shortcomings was to hire more mercenaries and prepare for land battles.[43] Zhenhai and Ningbo were subsequently occupied by the British (October 10 and 13, 1841, respectively), with Yu-qian attempting suicide at Zhenhai, only to survive, then die after being taken to Ningbo. This shocked Liu so much that he sent a report to explain why the British had been able to win the battle. He stated that the cannon fire had been fierce and the enemy army cohesive. Yet the critical factor was that they had received aid from traitors.[44] His well-known memorial of "Ten Concerns," sent to the Daoguang emperor on March 21, 1842, has been regarded as decisive evidence he had changed his mind.[45] Yet, in the memorial, he emphasized the role of Chinese traitors when discussing the fighting ability of the British army.[46] His claim in a memorial about the fall of Shanghai, that the British soldiers could "even climb the mountain and were robust like apes," in addition to a phrase in a subsequent memorial reporting on the fall of Zhenjiang of the soldiers' advance as "swift like flying,"[47] were in both cases almost identical wording to phrases found in *Yingjili Ji* [A History of England] written by Xiao Lingyu in 1832.[48] Based on this, it is not unreasonable to draw the conclusion that Liu's thoughts had not essentially changed when he wrote his "Ten Concerns." His words were more intended to please the emperor and to raise his deep worries about the internal unrest which might follow if the dynasty continued the war.

While Liu's reactions had been those of an educated official, the "hawks" still held the British army in contempt, even as the war progressed to its ignominious conclusion. The commander of Zhenjiang, Hai-ling, asserted with great confidence that British

[42] Ma, *Wan qing di guo*, 243.
[43] CIWSM, Vol.3, 1177.
[44] CIWSM, Vol.3, 1300.
[45] Mao, *Tian chao*, 402.
[46] "Ten Concerns," in CIWSM, Vol.4, 1680.
[47] CIWSM, Vol.3, 1301, 1366.
[48] Reproduced in CMMCH, Vol.1, 19-31.

barbarians could only wage war on water: "As long as they disembarked, our forces outside the city would encircle them and then I would personally lead the main force inside the city to make a decisive charge."[49] The governor of Liangjiang, Niu Jian, admitted that barbarians might fight well on land, but if they had no ships to provide support they would not dare to march inland.[50] He seemed to have forgotten how the barbarians had conducted expeditions to Yuyao and Fenghua. In the remaining battles of the Opium War, the British army swept all before it, and Zhapu, Wusong and Zhenjiang were all conquered with few British casualties;[51] and, the main spearhead was soon in a position to threaten Nanjing. By this point, the Qing Empire had simply run out of military options and the peace treaty was signed on August 29, 1842.

In considering why the ideas around stiff bodies seemed invulnerable to the unfolding events, it should be borne in mind that Lin Zexu had from the outset deliberately spread the idea that the British could not fight on land; hence, the operations of the Qing army were based on the assumptions inherent in his claim. Almost all the strategies that governors, commanders or higher officers put forward were either totally reliant on the coastal batteries, or, tried to induce the British to disembark in order to destroy them on land. Even after several battles had been lost and some commanders realized the British soldiers could fight on *terra firma*, many still wanted to believe that it was Chinese traitors and "black barbarians" who had fought against the Qing warriors – and, that white soldiers would not venture ashore.[52] One writer even recorded after the war that when Qi-shan was negotiating with Charles Elliot at Canton, he sent him 10 shields made of vine, 10 broadswords, 10 bows, and 10 arrows; he grumbled that those weapons represented a type of warfare which the barbarians had not mastered, asking why the imperial commissioner had sent these

[49] CMMCH, Vol.3, 65.
[50] CIWSM, Vol.4, 1859.
[51] The Battle of Zhapu took place on May 18, 1842; the Battle of Wusong on June 16, 1842; the Battle of Zhenjiang was fought on July 21, 1842, by the British force commanded by Sir Hugh Gough, principally against Chinese bannermen and a garrison of Manchu troops. Seizing the fortified city of Zhenjiang allowed the British to proceed to Nanjing. Fay, *Opium War*, 352-359.
[52] Li Xiangfeng (1789-1866) claimed in "Record of the Pacification of the Barbarians" that "the barbarians were… killed by common country men [in Baoshan] armed with weapons fashioned from bamboo sticks. Since that event they dare not disembark again and fear to fight us. The barbarians fear our people much more than our soldiers." CMMCH, Vol.3, 407.

weapons to China's adversaries.[53] Such tales continued to reinforce the belief in the incapacity of the British to fight. They were also part of the wider rumor-mill which conditioned attitudes to military developments among the different classes of officers.

3. The rumors spread beyond military and state officials

Rumors about both "black and white barbarians" were not restricted to officialdom – they spread rapidly among the common people. As cities and towns along the whole southeast coast were harassed by British forces during the war, not surprisingly, in the poetry written by local residents, indications can be found of the first impressions the British made on them. Racial stereotypes were also common in poems composed at that time, such as in "Informed of the Alarm from Zhoushan in June of 1840." The writer described the foreigner as having the "mouth of an eagle, eyes of a cat and red hair, who bound his legs with brocade up to his waist." In a footnote provided by the writer, he explained that "the British barbarians had extremely long legs and they wrapped indigo fabric around them. They could stand but were not able to jump or run. Their eyes were green, and they did not like the sun as they could not open their eyes at noon."[54]

Another poem, entitled *Zi Ti Fen Xiang Zhu Guo Tu Yi Bai Yun* [One Hundred Poems of My Prayers while Burning Incense], described what local people who met the foreigners noticed for the first time about their appearance. According to the poet, "their feet [were stiff] like a kind of tree, their hair was all curly, their eyes were green with a halo and their bodies were slender."[55] Another indication of how curious the Chinese found the appearance of British soldiers can be found in caricatures which were, curiously, sold to the British after the war. One adapted from original Chinese drawings and reproduced in a postwar account, shows British soldiers standing at awkward angles,

[53] CMMCH, Vol.3, 16.
[54] CLOW, Vol.1, 191. It is interesting that in a memorial by Qi-ying he stated that, "the Qing's army should wage an offensive at night because the British barbarians' eyes were dim at night and it was better to attack them in the dark." The emperor had provided a comment next to this statement that "everyone made the same assertion; it is true, and the telescope of the barbarians does not work at night either." CIWSM, Vol.3, 1495.
[55] CLOW, Vol.1, 171.

attempting to catch a chicken, with another individual peering into a vase (Figure 1). The composition of this caricature provides further evidence as to how odd the British obviously seemed to the Chinese artists who drew them.[56]

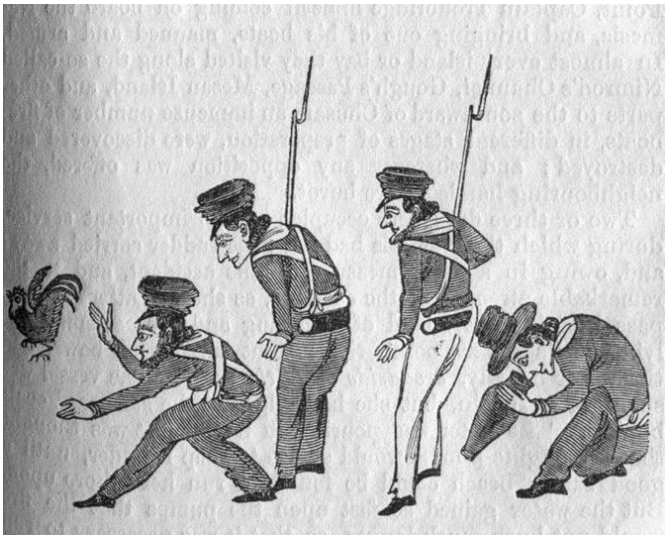

Figure 1: Copy of Chinese caricature of British soldiers
Source: Woodcut, "English Foraging Party," Hall and Bernard, *Nemesis*, between 367 and 368.

Further insight into why the Chinese viewed the British soldier they way they did can be gleaned from English-language sources. In a report of June 20, 1840, published in the *Macao Monthly*, it was noted:

> In the mind of the Chinese, they are all aware of the British force's advantages in sea battles but, once on land, this advantage faded away. It was probably an incorrect idea in the Chinese way of thinking, for they believed that Britain was a country surrounded by an enormous ocean, which, similar to the Netherlands, was no more than a small state with no other territories.[57]

[56] Hall and Bernard, *Nemesis*, 367-368.
[57] CMMCH, Vol.2, 482.

Moreover, it is certain that this image spread rapidly after the war had begun and, by reading the *Peking Gazette*, foreigners were made aware of its wide circulation.[58] British soldiers might have discovered the extent of this belief by reading the posters put up by local authorities. The commander of Zhenjiang, Hai-ling, had posted a notice in the main thoroughfare which stated that "we will stay in the city until the barbarians give up their advantages at sea and on the rivers to disembark, and then victory will be guaranteed." When British troops entered the city, this placard was discovered, and Hai-ling was ridiculed as he had fled.[59]

In the last phase of the war more than a few British knew about the myth of "stiff bodies." Robert Hart later recorded a telling anecdote in his famous diary:

> I accompanied Mr. and Mrs. Russell on their evening walk; during it Mr. Russell got a toss, and he lay on the ground laughing until some Chinamen helped him up. When the English soldiers were here in '41/'42, the Chinese got the idea that Foreigners were very stiff about the legs; seeing the stiff manner in which the Soldiers walked. They then thought that if they could get the Soldier down, he cd not rise again; but they said that "it was very hard to get them down". I dare say Mr. R's conduct wd tend to strengthen this idea.[60]

Another angle on the rumor was noted by the Englishman William Alexander Martin, who wrote in a memoir that the embassies of foreign countries who resisted kneeling and kotowing "confirmed the Chinese in a belief, which they had expressed during the first war, that 'foreigners had no knee-joints'."[61] In fact, in the Second Opium War, the same quaint belief was even more widely known among the British, and noted by Robert Swinhoe, a liaison officer in the campaign of 1860, in his postwar memoir.[62]

For the common people, the foreigners' appearance was not the only aspect of the rumors circulating. It seems certain that Sepoy troops committed rapes of local women in the vicinity of Sanyuanli in 1841; to this was added tomb desecration; and, the natural

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[58] In a memorial sent by Yang Dianbang, he warned the emperor that the British purchased the *Peking Gazette* for the purposes of gathering intelligence; they also tried to learn Chinese. Lin Zexu mentioned that Charles Elliot had lived in Guangdong for several years and often bought the *Peking Gazette* to gather information. See CIWSM, Vol.1, 130, 219.
[59] CIWSM, Vol.3, 49.
[60] Diary entry for January 6, 1855, in Bruner and Fairbank, eds. *Robert Hart's Journals*, 105.
[61] Martin, *Cycle of Cathay*, 201.
[62] Swinhoe, *Narrative*, 412.

racial antipathy towards the Indians.[63] It does not require a great leap of imagination to understand that news of incidents of rape, especially those committed by Indian troops, will have spread very quickly by word of mouth. Some sense of the outrage which will have been felt is communicated in an illustration entitled "Atrocities of the Black and White Barbarians," in Volume 4 of "Kaigai Shinwa," a Japanese account of the Opium War, but based heavily on Chinese and Dutch accounts, notwithstanding the generous embellishments of its author.[64]

For most of the gentry, the *yi-xia* (barbarian-Chinese) distinction could be detected behind the foreigners' outward appearance. Compared to the officials who were in authority, those from the gentry who had few responsibilities were enthusiastic about making moral judgments. Their poetry was intended to praise men with noble characters and officials who were loyal to the sovereign, who made serious efforts to resist the invasion, compared to the treacherous functionaries who had betrayed their own country. Moreover, they were writing on behalf of Chinese civilization which was being sullied by the barbarians' brutal acts, as seen in Lu Song's "Complaint about Current Events."[65] Another poet, in "Describing the Feeling in Jiangzhou," wrote during the war that "the barbarians' will was robbery, the scum of society was to be found in their ranks. It was said that they were strong, but they could be overturned easily."[66]

Nonetheless, it was those very barbarians who raised intense indignation among those who lived in the southern coastal provinces. Hence, in a poem such as *Zeng Gongjiansheng Zhaoqi Daling* [To Gong Zhaoqi, a County Magistrate with the Highest-Ranking Degree] it was asserted:

> The barbarians were not tigers and wolves, but pigs and deer instead… If we had had long ropes, it would not have been difficult to capture them. The powerful ships and cannons were all lies and the high mast was fake. The barbarians were cowards, so they avoided the countryside and attacked the towns. If you are angry about what you have heard, you must agree that we should first dissolve the regular army

[63] Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, 16-17.
[64] Illustration reproduced in Dower, "Opium War in Japanese Eyes," Sect. 2.
[65] CLOW, Vol.1, 141, doc. undated.
[66] CLOW, Vol.1, 143.

and use the militia to fight against the invaders.[67]

And, so, the gentry tried to belittle the military ability of the foreigners, even denying that their ships and cannons were better than those of the Chinese navy, in order to highlight the corruption and incompetence of the Qing officials and boast of the bravery of the militia units.

Given the local power structure in southern China on the outbreak of the war, the difficulties which the Qing dynasty suddenly found itself in provided an all too welcome opportunity for the gentry to exploit the rumors about the barbarians which had flowed from the original statements put about by Lin. While the claims made by them in their poetry looked superficially like a mere repetition of what had been declared by leading government officials, within the context of the raising of local militias literary attacks on the "barbarians" meant something very different. If the British soldiers were considered invaders with "stiff bodies," what did this say about the faltering Manchu military system? Mockery of the barbarian army communicated mockery of the Manchu banner forces to the villages and towns in the south, communities which had not forgotten the barbaric acts of the Manchus in the seventeenth century. As the war progressed, the gentry found themselves in a position from which they could question the legitimacy of the alien ruling class.[68]

The idea that British soldiers could not get up once they had fallen was not only believed by many officials in the Qing dynasty but was widespread among the common people. But in the eyes of the gentry this rumor became the ideal weapon to blame officials for incompetence and promote their own moral doctrine. On the other hand, for the Westerners in China it was simply a joke. Any potential for understanding between Chinese and the British was not promoted by wartime encounters – instead, the gulf between the two cultures deepened.[69]

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[67] CLOW, Vol.1, 148.

[68] On the gentry's role in local mobilization, Wakeman, *Strangers at the Gate*, 29-41.

[69] In July 1852, that old bone of contention – references to the British as *yi* [barbarians] – re-emerged, so that Sir John Bowring, Her Majesty's Britannic Plenipotentiary in Canton, wrote complaining to the Chinese Commissioner for Canton about the use of "unbecoming language to foreigners." Recalling previous British protests, he requested the prohibition of "a term well known to be offensive." JRLM, Bowring Papers, MS 1228/73, Bowring to Pihkwei, July 20, 1852, reproduced in, Government Notification of Aug. 3, 1852. But two years previously, Bowring himself had written from Canton that

4. Why was the image of "stiff bodies" so credible?

Of the many rumors circulating at the time, just why did the "stiff bodies" rumor exert such a powerful influence? For Lin Zexu and Yu-qian the idea that British soldiers "bound themselves too tightly to move freely" originated, in fact, from a comparison between the loose uniform of the Chinese soldiers with those of the British, rather than any deliberate attempt to deceive. It is also clear that the rumor was reinforced by the idea that the British would struggle to fight on land. It is now necessary to consider just why these notions attained such a level of credibility in Chinese society, first by taking a closer look at the uniforms of the British and Chinese soldiers.

A "patriotic" and jingoistic British lithograph of the Battle of Amoy from 1841 (Figure 2), which portrays soldiers of the 18th Royal Irish Regiment, provides a visual impression of the typical British uniform of the time.[70] The soldiers' headgear was the cumbersome, bell-topped, shakos, while rigid leather collars surrounded their necks. The upper part of the body was covered by the scarlet close-fitting coatee, which was short at the front and long at the back. Two broad buff-leather belts were slung across the chest, with an oval breast-plate decorated at the point where the belts crossed. Knapsacks were slung over their shoulders, with the top and the sides made of wood and fastened by two brown woven belts. Atop the knapsacks there were usually rolled-up overcoats or tents. On the right side, hanging over the buttocks, were black magazine clips and, on the left, were the bayonet sheathes and kettles made of wood. In the lower part of the bodies, they tended to wear white, or more often the bluish-grey tight overalls, and leather shoes or half-boots for the shanks and feet.[71]

"Many of the English are vehemently prejudiced against the Chinese." JRLM, Bowring Papers, MS 1229/168, Bowring to his son, Frederick, Apr. 16, 1850.

[70] Soldiers of the Eighteenth were among the first troops to arrive in China and fought in almost every battle. For an overview of their involvement in the Opium War, see Cannon, *Historical Record*, 65-76.

[71] Carman, *Military Uniforms*, 135-136; Laver, *Military Uniforms*, 18-19; Holmes, *Redcoat*, 187, 190.

Figure 2: 18th (Royal Irish) Regiment, Battle of Amoy, August 26, 1841
Source: Colored lithograph, J.H. Lynch after M.A. Hayes, 1841 (image courtesy of the National Army Museum, London)

The dress for sergeants and officers was even more ostentatious, as the former usually wore metallic shoulder knots while the latter wore board sashes.[72] In the period of peace following the Napoleonic wars, the practical dress style which had been advocated by Wellington was replaced. The military uniforms of the Victorian era became increasingly elaborate, even up to the point that they were "eminently unsuited for war,"[73] especially the leather neck-collars which apparently "encircled the soldiers' necks so stiffly that they could not turn their head and could barely bend it to look along the sights of their rifles."[74] In addition to the necessary weapons, ammunition, overcoats and blankets, British soldiers had to carry rations for three days (biscuits and

[72] Carman, *Military Uniforms*, 135-136; Laver, *Military Uniforms*, 18-19; Holmes, *Redcoat*, 121-122.
[73] Laver, *Military Uniforms,* 18.
[74] Ibid., 19.

beef jerky), equipment for bivouacking (hammer and hatchet), and, as one soldier declared, "the whole ensemble was anything but comfortable."[75] Quite clearly, such uniforms were designed for climates other than the tropical conditions of southern China. When British soldiers appeared before Chinese officials and soldiers wearing such strange attire, it was hard for the Chinese not to share Lin's feeling, especially given how their own soldiers were dressed.

Figure 3: Chinese soldier, 1842
Source: *Illustrated London News*, Vo1.1 (No.9), July 9, 1842, 132.

[75] Holmes, *Redcoat*, 193.

In the *Illustrated London News*, a lithograph was published in July 1842 (Figure 3), which provides a reasonably accurate visual representation of a common Qing soldier. He can be seen with a bamboo hat and wearing a loose uniform. The only equipment except his harquebus was his saber and magazine. Based on this sparseness of accoutrements, it was easy for commanders in the Qing army to jump to the conclusion that the Chinese soldiers would be more agile than any Europeans because of their less restrictive clothing. Moreover, when Yu-qian stated that the barbarians "could not fight well with the bayonet" this was not entirely inaccurate since European armies had not experienced much hand-to-hand combat since the Napoleonic wars and, according to Richard Holmes, were "often at a disadvantage in swordplay." [76] Contemporary drawings of a Qing spearman (Figure 4) and Qing swordsman (Figure 5) show equally meagre personal equipment and relatively loose clothing. British troops who participated in the First Opium War admitted that, when facing the spears of the inhabitants living around Canton, "our bayonets were simply poor defense."[77] In other words, the impression that the British soldiers could not move freely was not as groundless as it might have first appeared. Thus, the claim that soldiers could not get up again if they stumbled was based on an initial observation which became progressively more exaggerated.

[76] Ibid., 209.
[77] CMMCH, Vol.5, 228.

Figure 4: E.T. Wigan, “Chinese Spearman”
Source: Ouchterlony, *Chinese War*, between 446 and 447.

Figure 5: E.T. Wigan, "Chinese Swordsman"
Source: Ouchterlony, *Chinese War*, between 444 and 445.

There was a further dimension which contributed to the Chinese assumptions about "stiff bodies": the formations which British line infantry adopted on the battlefield were very different from the Qing army. The British infantry was famous for its rigid discipline: they kept advancing with 75 steps to the minute, after repetitious training,[78] until 100 yards away from the target,[79] before delivering a volley of musket fire.

[78] Holmes, *Redcoat,* 275.
[79] Ibid., 198.

However, the Chinese soldiers did not fight in this way. The *Chinese Repository* reported that the Qing army grouped five or ten soldiers in a row and a hundred as a unit, which was very different from European infantry. The soldiers did not advance in strict formation but moved essentially as skirmishers. If the road conditions were poor, they refused to advance. When the situation was not dangerous, they thought the men who advanced fastest were the bravest.[80] In the eyes of the undisciplined Qing soldiers, the only description for the way the British army moved was "stiff."[81]

Hence, the ideas about British soldiers' "stiff bodies" cannot be viewed as simply the product of racial prejudice. For the officials who spread these ideas, at least before the August 1841 battle at Xiamen, it could be regarded as a reasonable estimate based on limited intelligence and "personal observation." This said, as the cannons and muskets of British soldiers could inflict casualties on the Qing army from some distance, there was little opportunity for the Chinese to exploit their strengths. The Qing army, as it had evolved in the second half of the eighteenth century, had been designed to deal with uprisings in the far corners of the empire; and, it was based around mounted archers. Chaotic organization during the First Opium War meant that many Qing soldiers were poorly armed, on some occasions only with spears and knives, or on others with bows and arrows, often preferred by commanders as they were not affected by rain in the way the muskets of the time were.[82] Still, even if the foreign soldiers appeared rigid in their marching and drills, it was the repetitive training which gave inaccurate weapons the best chance of being employed effectively on the battlefield. A fair assessment is that Qing officials did not understand the power of modern weapons *if* fully exploited through proper training.

The other essential component of the rumor of the ineffectiveness of the British soldiers – that they would feel dizzy on dry land – is harder to explain using the

[80] CMMCH, Vol.2, 460.
[81] Mao Haijian also considers that the misunderstanding of the Europeans by Lin Zexu might have been due to the use of the goosestep by European armies. Mao, *Tian chao*, 139.
[82] Dai, "Ching Military Institutions," 345-351; Lococo, "The Qing Empire," 115-133; Waley, *Opium War*, 52-53, 172; Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 286. As Mao points out, there were essentially three levels of quality in the muskets used by Qing forces. The best weapons were reserved for the palace guards, the next category was issued to Eight Banner forces in Peking, while the worst were given to the Green Standards. Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 39.

available documentary record. What is revealing, though, is that older residents of the cluster of fishing villages at Zhuhai (i.e., before it began to be transformed into a city after 1979) recall it was said of the local fishing community, who lived permanently on their boats, that they felt unwell if they came ashore because they were so used to living on water.[83] Presuming this notion was widely known in the Guangdong region, it would have been unnecessary for officials to have explained their assumption that the British were only good sailors. Every person from the region who heard this statement would have immediately connected it with their understanding of their own fishermen, not least of all as Lin Zexu himself considered the people of Guangdong to be essentially a seafaring people. In fact, the boat-dwellers of the region attracted all manner of claims about their supposedly super-human abilities to dive beneath the waves. Lin and others had even hoped they might be employed to attack foreign ships.[84]

Following the war, the reaction of the imperial court to the defeat of the Qing Empire was sluggish. The governors sent memoranda to the emperor, but the measures they proposed were merely surveying the geography of the coastal provinces,[85] rebuilding the batteries and training soldiers to fight on water.[86] Even in 1843, a memorial written by Li Xiangfen still insisted that "the strategy of fighting on land was much better than on water for we had quantitative superiority"; the comment the emperor offered was simply, "what you have said is absolutely correct."[87] If the belief in the inability of the British to fight on land remained intact at the highest levels of the state, this does not explain, however, its earlier transformation into a compelling rumor.

5. Conclusion: rumor and the myth of "stiff bodies"

There were many rumors which circulated during the First Opium War: among them were those about the magic practiced by the foreign devils, not to mention the wild tales

[83] The authors are grateful to Ruijun Huang for sharing this piece of Zhuhai folklore with them. Whether the fishing people genuinely felt queasy on land is true or not is largely immaterial, as it seems likely that here was a belief which had wide currency along the coastal region of Guangdong.
[84] Waley, *Opium War*, 101-102, 115.
[85] CIWSM, Vol.5, 2507, 2534, 2543-2544.
[86] CIWSM, Vol.5, 2432, 2473.
[87] CIWSM, Vol.5, 2565.

of Chinese traitors, who could be junkmen, smugglers or bandits.[88] In fact, in late 1841, Liu Yunke wrote in a memorial to the Daoguang emperor about the situation in Zhejiang, noting that "the whole province is filled with false rumors."[89] There were many absurd stories told during the war about foreign and Chinese officers; in the case of Chinese officers, the rumors usually involved some form of gross moral failing, either financial or sexual.[90] But the claims made about British soldiers were different. They had begun with Lin Zexu; and, they were first spread through memorials which circulated at the highest level. To return to the types of rumors identified by Peterson and Gist, referred to in the introduction, the rumor about British soldiers' incapacity to fight on land was "predictive": the intention of Lin was both to predict the likely course of military events and to reassure. Thus, its original target was senior officials and the emperor. While it sought to highlight the weakness of the enemy, it was given credence by Lin's authority. And, as we have seen, it made perfect sense to all who heard it, not least of all as it was reinforced by the widespread belief that British soldiers would feel dizzy if they left their ships.

In its initial stages, therefore, one could even argue that Lin's assessment of British fighting abilities on land barely qualified as a rumor at all. It was a combination of a military assessment and a series of deeply held beliefs about "barbarians." Yet although Lin had only limited contact with foreigners, he had made an effort to study the British and was not as uninformed as he might first have appeared.[91] His initial "observation" is thus harder to classify as a "rumor" since, while it fulfilled the first and the third criteria for rumor identified in the introduction (it possessed a target and came from an authoritative source), Lin was convinced of the veracity of his "assessment." Yet, very quickly it became an "allegation." As the war unfolded, what had begun as a crude form of "analysis" very quickly took on all the qualities of a rumor. Nevertheless, while Qing officers initially shared Lin's view, the claims about the barbarians' "stiff bodies" soon

[88] Wakeman, "The Canton Trade and the Opium War," 202-203, 206-208; Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 245, 290, 330.
[89] *Chinese Repository*, 10 (1841), 681.
[90] For some examples, Waley, *Opium War*, 112, 163-164, 182-184, 186-187.
[91] Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 104.

became useful as a form of psychological defense mechanism as battlefield defeats mounted.

The context for the rumor among Qing officers was, however, very different to that of the gentry and, in turn, of the common people. The rumor existed in many ways in "multiple domains."[92] Remarkably, even after the war had been concluded, rumors about the British were still alive among the common people and could be found in literary works, sparking frequently a feeling of resentfulness towards the foreigners and the Manchus. In the years following the war, the governor Qi-ying was seen as an agent of the Europeans. In the eyes of ordinary people who lived in Guangdong, Qi-ying granted whatever was requested by foreigners, which confirmed the belief that they had joined together in a secret alliance. Hence, the "Sanyuanli incident" (May 29-30, 1841) was elevated in the popular mind into a major patriotic rebellion, leading to the widespread rumor that the Manchu rulers had conspired with the barbarians to undermine the "uprising."[93]

Not every individual, of course, believed the assertions about the barbarians' inability to fight on land. The famous scholar, Bao Shichen, for instance, noted that many people thought that the British soldiers could do nothing after coming ashore because they had become used to living on ships. However, he asked mockingly, were they not born on land? How could it be credible that they could not move after disembarking?[94] These rhetorical questions raise the issue as to whether all the Qing officers believed the rumors about the British soldiers. It seems likely that actual experience of their fighting methods will have convinced some that the "barbarians" were perfectly capable of fighting. If some officers clung to the myths about the British as a form of psychological reassurance, others may have been held back from expressing their true opinion – challenging the opinions of the emperor was never advisable.

The article of faith regarding British soldiers' stiff bodies included, furthermore,

[92] Ghosh, "Rumour in History Writing," 1239.
[93] Fay, *Opium War*, 296-307; Mao, *Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 250-270.
[94] CMMCH, Vol.4, 466.

the belief that foreigners were barbaric and clumsy, whereas the Chinese considered themselves the pinnacle of civilization. Determined to prove the Europeans were barbarians, the Chinese showed their disdain for the foreigners who had rejected "elegant Confucianism."[95] The assumption was seen as self-evident because the foreign bodies and dress could be described by the words "stiff" and "clumsy." In the eyes of ordinary people in the Qing Empire, steeped in traditional education, the foreigners appeared poorly educated and comical due to their stiff bodies. The Chinese people held doggedly to this image, which provided the perfect breeding ground for embellishments and further rumors.

When discussing the question of the *Huá-Yí* distinction,[96] the argument that Chinese scholars put forward to prove the superiority of Chinese civilization was the moral doctrine of Confucianism. Whether a person was of noble character, and had the four virtues of loyalty, filial piety, chastity and righteousness, or a barbarian whose temperament was no different to a wild animal, depended on recognition of the Confucian ethical system, a contention which could still be seen later in the Westernization movement's core ideology.[97] But it was not only the morals of the British which were challenged, it was also their strange appearance, bizarre attire and stiff bodies. Lin Zexu epitomized this attitude: when he granted an interview to Dr. Hill in January 1840, after he had been shipwrecked and was drifting towards Canton, he continued to sneer at the foreign style of clothing.[98]

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[95] Despite the misunderstandings and disasters, following the Treaty of Nanjing the Qing Dynasty remained wedded to its courtly rituals in its dealings with the British. Sir John Bowring observed this in a letter in 1850: "In this country where everything is on the p's & q's of centuries' etiquette, where every word is weighed & everything is estimated by the knowledge it exhibits of forms & usage & ceremonies, we have located our authorities in a place which the Chinese look down upon with contempt, in an atmosphere never approached by Chinese civilization." JRLM, Bowring Papers, MS 1228/20, Bowring to his son, Edgar, Jan. 14, 1850.

[96] This is also rendered as "Huá-Yí zhī biàn" (the Sino-barbarian dichotomy), although the basic idea can likewise be referred to as "yi-xia." In simplified terms, *yí* was generally understood to mean barbarians, uncivilized tribes, or people from faraway lands. For more on this complex subject, Liu, *Clash of Empires*, esp. 31-69, and, for the racial context to the ideas about "barbarians," Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, 1-17.

[97] Among the reformers of the "self-strengthening movement" who did not reject Confucianism, but rather sought to employ it in their reform arguments was Feng Kuei-fen (1809-1874). But an indication of the extent of the influence of Confucianism among scholar-officials is provided by Yeh Te-hui (1864-1927), who in defending Confucian ideals sought at the same time to defend Qing institutions. Bary, et al., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 707-11, 741-743.

[98] CMMCH, Vol.2, 427.

Of course, British officers were not immune from considering the Chinese they encountered with a similar sense of cultural superiority. One officer noted with mild amusement a scene in Nanjing at the end of the war when a band of the 18th Regiment began playing the national anthem, causing Chinese officers to crowd around them. He added that the "magnificent grenadier company of the 18th Royal Irish" had an appearance which "contrasted strangely with the ungainly dress of the imperial soldiery, who gazed upon their new allies with undisguised astonishment."[99] In fact, cultural superiority could in the minds of British officers be projected through the wearing of impressive uniforms. According to one army officer writing home in May 1842, he felt disappointed that he had not had the opportunity to wear his full dress uniform. Moreover, just as disappointing was the fact that the Chinese had not "had occasion to be dazzled with the brilliancy of undress uniforms".[100] Quite clearly, the majority of British officers had little real understanding of the effect which their uniforms were having on the Chinese whom they encountered.

If we reflect, then, on the image of "stiff bodies" within the context of the role of rumor in Qing society in the mid-nineteenth century, what emerges is a picture far more complex than simply a "myth." At the most general level, the alleged inability on the part of the British to fight was a natural outcome of the visual impression created by their uniforms. Beliefs about the superiority of Chinese civilization reinforced the conviction, especially at the imperial court, in part due to Lin Zexu's underwriting of the idea. At the provincial military level what had taken on the qualities of one among several wartime rumors could not be easily challenged. It became part of the schizophrenic world of those required to report back to the palace. For the gentry and the common people, however, the rumor fulfilled quite clearly the three criteria for rumor – it had a dual target (the foreign invaders *and* the Manchus), an allegation which appeared credible, and authoritative sources.

Without doubt, the rumor fed off racial assumptions about foreigners, but it would be misleading to characterize the image of "stiff bodies" as a racial stereotype. It was

[99] Ouchterlony, *Chinese War*, 445-447.
[100] Anon., *Last Year in China*, 159.

part of a wider groundswell of rumor, including rumors of rape, pillage, betrayal, magic and the dangers of "black barbarians." While the "stiff bodies" rumor had universal currency in the Qing Empire, it took on different constructions of meaning in different social and political contexts, drawing strength from different sources, the need for rationalization, while feeding off anxiety, uncertainty and credulity.

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GLOSSARY

Banlu Ting	半路亭
Bao-chang	保昌
Baoshan	宝山
Bao Shichen	包世臣
Cengang	岑港
Dajiao	大角
Deng Tingzhen	邓廷桢
Dinghai	定海
Daoguang	道光
Fenghua	奉化
Gulangyu	鼓浪屿
Hai-ling	海龄
Hangzhou	杭州
Hua-Yi	华-夷
Humen	虎门
Jiaqing	嘉庆
Jin Yinglin	金应麟
Liangjiang	两江
Li Guangshu	黎光署
Li Xiangfen	李湘棻
Lin Zexu	林则徐
Liu Buyun	刘步云
Liu Yunke	刘韵珂
Lu Song	陆嵩
Luo Binzhang	骆秉章
Ningbo	宁波
Niu Jian	牛鑑
Qi Mingbao	奇明保

Commented [A2]: Please confirm the pinyin is right. It should have read Cengang. Corrected

Qi-shan	琦善
Qi-ying	耆英
Ruan Yuan	阮元
Sanyuanli	三元里
Shajiao	沙角
Wu’er-gong-e	乌尔恭额
Yan Botao	颜伯焘
Yiliang	怡良
Yin	鄞
Yi-xia	夷夏
Yu-qian	裕谦
Yuyao	余姚
Wusong	吴淞
Xiamen	厦门
Xiaofengling	晓峰岭
Xiao Lingyu	萧令裕
Zeng Gong jiansheng zhaoqi daling	赠龚监生照祺大令
Zhang Chaofa	张朝发
Zhapu	乍浦
Zhenhai	镇海
Zhenjiang	镇江
Zhoushan	舟山
Zhu Chenglie	朱成烈
Zhuhai	珠海
Zhushan	竹山
Zi ti fen xiang zhu guo tu yi bai yun	自提焚香祝国图一百韵

Commented [A3]: Please confirm 提 or 题？The first one!

ABBREVIATIONS

CIWSM Wen-qing 文庆, ed. *Chou ban shi wu shi mo* 筹办夷务始末 [A Complete Account of the Management of Barbarian Affairs]. 6 vols. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1964.

CLOW A-ying, 阿英, ed. *Ya pian zhan zheng wen xue ji* 鸦片战争文学集 [The Collection of Literature on the Opium War]. 2 vols. Shanghai: Classics Publishing House, 1957.

CMMCH Qi Sihe 齐思和, ed. *Zhong guo jin dai shi zi liao cong kan: ya pian zhan zheng* 中国近代史资料丛刊：鸦片战争 [Collectanea of Materials on Modern Chinese History: Opium War]. 6 vols. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1955.

JRLM University of Manchester Special Collections, John Rylands Library, Manchester, UK (GB 133 Eng MSS 1228-1234, Bowring Papers).

TNA National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew, UK (FO 17, Foreign Office: General Correspondence before 1906, China).

Commented [A4]: 阿英 is penname, so spell as A-ying, and put this entry in A…. Agreed A-ying is best option here.

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