

Presentation

I. Introductory Remarks

Theme: A Life Worth Study.

Question: What does the biography of GTS tell us about the age in which he lived?

Method: 4 illustrations and their meaning: Staunton in 1794 by Hickey, *Neptune* trial by a Chinese artist in 1807, Engraving *The "Victoria Regia House, in the range of Hot houses at Leigh Park House"* by 1854

II. Staunton's Childhood

Image One: Thomas Hickey, George Thomas Staunton upon return from China, 1794.

In 1856, three years before his death at the age of seventy-nine, Sir George Thomas Staunton, published his memoir. Staunton, who served as a Member of Parliament, founded the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, visited the royal courts of England and France, and befriended famed politicians and intellectuals throughout Europe, reflected that the most important event of his life and the one that "proved the primary source of whatever reputation . . . it has been my fortune to acquire" occurred at the age of twelve.¹ In 1793, Staunton joined his father, Sir George Leonard Staunton, on the first British embassy to China. Staunton's participation in the embassy and his subsequent ability to speak and write Mandarin not only directed the

¹ George Thomas Staunton, *Memoirs of the Chief Incidents of the Public Life of Sir George Thomas Staunton, Bart.* (London: L. Booth, 1856), 9.

rest of Staunton's life, but also influenced the future course of Anglo-Chinese relations.

While much has been made of the 1793 embassy and its significance within the greater story of Anglo-Chinese diplomatic and mercantile histories, my focus on studying the boy Staunton within that context has allowed me to look closely at the ways in which members of elite British society were educated to carry out the 18th century mission, guided by Enlightenment principles, of collecting, appropriating, and colonizing the world. Staunton's childhood experiences in China and the events that led to that moment are tremendously useful in illustrating how children of empire could be educated and trained to carry out these great Enlightenment projects.

- B. 1781 – Milford, Salisbury, maternal Grandfather, Benjamin Collins
- 3rd /only surviving child of Jane Collins Staunton and George Leonard Staunton.
- Father in India when born, sent off to Galway
- Family reunited in 1785
 - “I must here affectionately record, that from this moment [when my father first saw me], down to the latest period of his life, the master purpose of my father's mind was my education and welfare.”
- Unique education: Wanted his son to have hands on experience – a apprentice like education, but with rigorous study, reading, and mixing with intellectual society.
- [ROUSSEAU]

- Focus on language study (Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, German, English, Chinese); and scientific and useful knowledge: science-astronomy, royal society lectures, botany (study with Smith and Symmons as well as field study – Swedish botanists), zoology AND mechanics, mathematics, and perhaps language; philosophy – political philosophy – Cesare Beccaria on prison reform.
 - Only spoke to one another in Latin – this was significant.
 - John Symmons at Paddington House – a collection of over 4,000 plants
 - Sir James Edward Smith's collection. Smith purchased the private herbarium of Carl von Linné, better known as Linnaeus
 - Simmons to Smith: "[Sir George Leonard Staunton's] little boy comes with his tutor to my garden every day, and goes over the collection of plants in regular course, with a Linnaeus and a Hortus Kewensis in his hand."

By the time of the embassy in 1792, the boy Staunton had been trained as "an agent of empire". His knowledge of botany, astronomy, zoology, allowed him to observe like other men on the embassy who were there to observe both the environment AND useful knowledge, plus the language skills to communicate with those he encountered and the ability to record his observations.

This fit with the stated mission of the embassy:

In a letter to the Qianlong emperor of China written in 1792, George III justified the embassy that he intended to send to Peking, as well as the entire imperial and global exploration process:

We have taken various opportunities of fitting out Ships and sending in them some of the most wise and learned of Our Own People, for the discovery of distant and unknown regions, not for the purpose of conquest, or of enlarging Our dominions which are already sufficiently extensive for all Our wishes, not for the purpose of acquiring wealth, or even of favoring the commerce of Our subjects, but for the sake of increasing Our knowledge of the habitable Globe, of finding out the various productions of the Earth, and for communicating the arts and comforts of life to those parts where they were hitherto little known . . . Our ardent wish had been to become acquainted with those celebrated institutions of Your Majesty's populous and extensive Empire which have carried its prosperity to such a height as to be the admiration of all surrounding Nations.²

- Key idea here is "improvement": The process of "improvement" was part of the overarching Enlightenment belief in an ordered world that could be decoded, controlled, and enhanced through knowledge systematically acquired through what the learned men of Europe saw as precise measurements and rational observations.

² George III to the Qianlong Emperor of China, 1792 in Hosea Ballou Morse, *The East India Company Trading to China*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 244 and in George Leonard Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1797), 49-50.

- JOURNAL: Held at Duke University.
 - Full of references to his scientific learning. Counting teeth, pondering the uses of various plants, childlike ethnography in recording the dance customs of the people of Batavia or Jakarta.
 - The experiential learning of visiting the gardens at Chengde – traveled to Chengde and also north to south in the interior – along the Grand Canal.
 - Visiting the east garden at Chengde he recorded: “The Park is vastly covered with a very beautiful red flower with large leaves called the *Nyphaea nelumbo* of Linnaeus.”

While scientific learning was important for this “improvement” mission – so too were understanding diplomatic norms. I’ve studied the language the boy uses to describe the exchange with the Qianlong emperor. His attention to ritual and gesture is very sophisticated and demonstrates an understanding of the significance of even the smallest gesture.

Staunton’s account:

“The gentlemen then stood at the entrance of the tent and Lord Macartney, my Papa, Mr. Plum and I walked up to the edge of the platform, and made the same ceremony as before, then Lord Macartney ascended the platform and presented the king of England’s letter and small present of watches. The Emperor then gave the Ambassador a piece of serpentine stone finely carved for himself and another for the king of England. The Ambassador then came down and My Papa and I

went up and made the proper ceremony. The Emperor gave my Papa such a stone as he gave the Ambassador and took one of the little yellow purses hanging by his side and gave it to me as soon as the ceremony was over we returned to the far part of the tent and set down crosslegged upon cushions before a dinner prepared for us by the Emperor. After eating we went again to the throne and the Emperor gave Lord Macartney a cup of warm Chinese wine out of his own hands." [the emperor] wished I should speak some Chinese to him which I did thanking him for the present."¹³ The emperor then asked the boy to draw him a picture of the purse, which Staunton did.

The boy's attention to the detail of ritual – such as Macartney receiving a cup of warm wine “from the emperor's own hand” and other passages which describe various hospitable and at times inhospitable gestures illustrate the informed and nuanced understandings of diplomacy and ritual that he had clearly learned from Macartney and his father Staunton. His language ability – to be able to speak appropriate court Mandarin on command from the emperor – demonstrates his growing ability to speak Chinese which he had learned en route to Beijing from the embassy's Chinese language translators – Mr. Plumb being the favored and Staunton's tutor – taken from the Propoganda Fide in Naples where he was learning to become a Catholic missionary. But, simultaneously, we are reminded that this was a boy, having an extraordinary experience, and that the universality of childhood allowed him a certain intimacy with one of the most powerful world figures at that moment in history, the Qianlong emperor, having a brief

exchange and being asked to make a drawing of the gift the emperor had given from his person.³

Understanding the way in which Staunton was able to learn Chinese, to build an understanding of botany and mechanics, and the focus of his learning on this topics – guided by his father – illustrate their significance to the larger project of imperial Britain in the late 18th century.

Transition to next point

This image, by artist Thomas Hickey – who served as the official portraitist on the embassy shows the young Staunton about the time of his return to England in 1794. * The boy, aged roughly 13 or 14, points knowingly to the globe referencing his recent trip half way round the world to China.

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- ³ Two medical professionals, two artists, a mechanic, a metallurgist, a watchmaker, a mathematical instrument maker, two botanists, five German Musicians, and a fifty-three person George III to the Qianlong Emperor of China, 1792 in Hosea Ballou Morse, *The East India Company Trading to China*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 244 and in George Leonard Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1797), 49-50. 3
 - Times (London) 31 March 1792, p.3. military escort made up part of the ambassador's ninety-five-person entourage. The gifts for the emperor were meant to amaze and astound -astronomical devices of the day, including a large planetarium, a telescope, and a large lens, which were of particular interest to the Chinese court.⁴ Knowing that the Chinese admired European chronometry, the British brought the finest English made clocks and watches. Macartney also included the best British manufactures in hopes of expanding markets. In all, the cargo amounted to approximately £78,000 in addition to
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- The books piled round the base of the globe while a common 18th century motif, reference Staunton's particular and purposeful education. One tome in particular is left open to a work by Euclid. This reference to geometry, mathematics and classical learning is again typical, but with Chinese references.
- As a scholar of Western Chinese relations, I can't help but wonder if the reference to Euclid also connects us to this portrait of the most effective and famous of early Western visitors to China, Matteo Ricci – who is picture here in a double portrait with his Chinese collaborator, Xu Guangxi in a 1607 portrait published in – Euclid's Elements. It is evocative of the promise this young linguist and diplomat held as he returned to England.

III. The Chinese Years

Image Two: Chinese artist, Court for the Neptune Affair

- Staunton, continued to study Chinese with a Chinese servant that returned to England with the Stauntons.
- The Qianlong emperor died shortly after their visit – 1796
- Staunton returns to China as a writer for the East India Company in 1799.
- They don't really know how to use his Chinese language skills.
- John Barrow quote
- Fascinating that Great Britain's most significant trade – that with China – would be facilitated by non-English linguists.
- Tea imports were skyrocketing:

- Tea imports by the Company increased from 214,000 lbs in 1713 to almost 32,000,000 lbs in 1813.⁴
- Historian Carole Shammas estimates that two pounds of tea per year would supply a person with one cup of tea per day. That meant that sixteen million people could consume one cup of tea per day as a consequence of the imports of the Company from Canton in 1813.⁵
- Managing the trade was a significant job of just a handful of East India Company servants. The trade was controlled....
- Canton factories could be racous and violent – not suited to Staunton’s personality.

On 24 February 1807, dozens of sailors “drunk”, “dead drunk” and a few “almost sober” from the British merchant ship the *Neptune* engaged in a series of riotous brawls. As a result of injuries sustained during the affray, a Chinese man, Leau A-ting, died. The incident began as sailors from the *Marquis of Ely* boarded Chinese junks stationed around the port of Canton. The British sailors, “probably stupefied drunk,” were robbed, stripped, and thrown into the river. All but one swam to safety or were rescued. Word of the incident spread throughout the foreign factories and among the sailors at liberty in Canton. As the sailors became agitated, the officers and captain of the *Neptune*, also on liberty at Canton, were called to restore order by containing their men within the factory itself. The conflict continued as local Chinese gathered along

⁴ Anthony Farrington, *Trading Places: The East India Company and Asia, 1600-1834* (London: The British Library, 2002), 94.

⁵ Shammas, “Changes in English and Anlgo-American Consumption,” 183-4.

the factory walls and taunted the sailors who were being detained inside. As secretary of the Select Committee at Canton, Staunton wrote the official account of the events:

collecting together in great numbers [the Chinese] continued during the greatest part of the day, to throw stones at the factory and at every European accidentally passing, although the security merchants, and the mandarins on the quay, were repeatedly but ineffectually called upon to interfere and disperse them.⁶

The *Neptune's* officers found it difficult to contain their crew. Twice, in response to the throwing of bricks and stones, four dozen cudgel-carrying sailors were able to break from their confinement and engage the Chinese in scuffles that caused injuries to several Chinese and some British. On February 27 the Select Committee learned that a Chinese resident of Canton, Leau A-ting, had died from injuries sustained during the riot.⁷

Although violence was common, Chinese authorities usually allowed the Europeans to police themselves. The Select Committee of the British East India Company was usually quick to act, preferring to keep such troubles within the local merchant community and outside the purview of government officials at Canton and more importantly at Peking. However, when crimes involved Chinese citizens and, more importantly the death of a Chinese citizen, the local authorities were compelled to take action.

⁶ Staunton, *Miscellaneous Notices Relating to China, and Our Commercial Intercourse with that Country* (London: J. Murray, 1822), 262.

⁷ BL, IOR, G/12/156.

Following another incident involving the ship *Providence* in 1800, Staunton committed himself to translate the Qing legal code.⁸ In 1807, when both the Chinese and British found themselves in another legal imbroglio, Staunton's ability as translator and previous work with negotiating with Qing officials allowed for a new level of communication and cooperation between the two countries.

What occurred over the next month illustrates how the ill-defined legal jurisdiction of the European community in Canton could frustrate an earnest attempt by the British and the Chinese to resolve a conflict peacefully. At issue were different perspectives of justice and responsibility. From the British perspective, the most pressing conflict was not necessarily between the British and Chinese, but rather between the East India Company officials and the commanders of the ships. The Select Committee saw their primary concern as the continued smooth transaction of the tea trade, while the officers placed highest priority on protecting the lives of their men. The Chinese officials and the Hong merchants were also at odds. The merchants, like their East India Company counterparts, needed to insure the continued trade, and the officials needed to find a culprit for the crime of murder.

From the perspective of the Chinese imperial government, control over the foreign community at Canton was very unambiguous. Primary responsibility in the case of criminal behavior in the foreign community

⁸ Sir George Thomas Staunton, *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1810). *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* is transliterated as *Da Qing Luli* in pinyin. Staunton did not use a modern Romanization system, but I will use *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* throughout because that is the publication title of the translation and refers specifically to his translation and no other translation of the Qing code. In addition to his work with the East India Company, Staunton also translated works that he thought would improve Chinese perceptions of and relationship with the British at Canton. One of his first translations from English into Chinese was a treatise on vaccination by George Pearson. Staunton, *Miscellaneous Notices Relating to China, Part the Second* (Havant: Henry Skelton, 1828), 311-312.

was placed on the Hong merchants who served as security for the trade. The merchants looked to the East India Company's Select Committee to question the *Neptune* officers to find and hand over the culprit. This hierarchy of responsibility at Canton had developed over centuries of multi-national trade in the area and fit soundly within the system of justice extended to all peoples residing in the Chinese empire.

At this point, the Chinese stopped the trade to signal their determination to ensure justice was done. According to Chinese legal custom, in order for justice to be served, a person needed to be punished for the crime. This should be the person whom the British community felt was guilty even if guilt could not be proven conclusively.

The trial was an impressive public spectacle. The stoppage of trade ensured that the entire European and American communities at Canton had a keen interest in the event. A Chinese painting captured the tribunal as Europeans, Americans, and Chinese crowded into the British factory, which had been staged as a Chinese tribunal. Three ranking Mandarin officials sat at the head of the room on a dais while the members of the Select Committee and Staunton sat to the right of the magistrates. Chinese officials sat to the left of the magistrates. The painting captures a moment when a group of sailors were being questioned as onlookers watched in anticipation.⁹

At the trial officials on both sides considered sailors' testimony more or less worthless. A representative example is the evidence of seaman Phillip Murray:

⁹ Chinese School, *Trial of Four British Seamen at Canton, 1 October 1807: Scene Inside the Court*, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

"Were you drunk?"

"Dead Drunk."

"What had you in your hand?" "A Rattan"

"Did you go out of the Factory?" "I was drunk and cannot remember."

"What do you know about the affray?" "All that I know is that many China men

Struck our men while at dinner."

"How many men went outside?" "As I was drunk how would I know?"¹⁰

As the sailors' testimony did not provide any useful information, the officers of the ship were questioned. In a clear case of cultural negotiation, Staunton worked diligently on translating such concepts as "firm belief" rather than "certain belief" or "probable belief," that would not compromise the officers' integrity, while providing sufficient evidence for the Mandarins to come to a judgment.¹¹ During the episode, Staunton observed an international event that proved the Chinese judicial system could be flexible and even accommodating, but not reflective of an understanding of a common international law.

Using the testimony of Thomas Buchanan, Captain of the *Neptune*, the Mandarins identified a list of eleven possible culprits. The Select Committee decided that they wanted the Mandarins to determine the guilt of one individual, who would be retained in China under the East India Company's protection, until a final decision had been agreed to

¹⁰ BL, IOL, G/12/156.

¹¹ Staunton, *Ta Tsing Leu Lee*, 563 and BL, IOL, G/12/156.

from the court at Peking. This compromise would allow the Select Committee to object to the culpability of the sailor if he were punished by strangulation, which they felt was an unnecessarily cruel punishment.¹²

Edward Sheen was finally accused of accidental homicide, which could have been punishable by strangulation. The Chinese officials made clear that Sheen would be spared. In their decision, the Mandarins voiced their disapproval of the behavior of the sailors, observing that had they been Chinese there would have been further investigation into the riot. Since the offenders were foreigners, however, the Mandarins preferred a quick resolution. The British reply acknowledged the poor behavior of the crews. Captain Rolles promised to punish them according to British regulations. For all intents and purposes, the affair was at its end as all sides waited for the punishment to be handed down from the Imperial Court.¹³

What the British did not realize was that Chinese merchants and officials continued to work on the case, developing what historian Patrick Tuck has deemed a "corrupt bargain" involving a false story and bribery.¹⁴ The British learned of this a year later in 1808 when Staunton gained access to legal documents from the case, including the emperor's decree. The authorities claimed that Edward Sheen, the accused, unwittingly pushed a stick out a second story window, which had hit the deceased and caused the injury that had led to the man's death. Staunton commented,

¹² BL, IOL, G/12/156.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Tuck, "Law and Disorder," 91-93.

[the] strictness of the laws unfortunately rendered it impossible for the magistrates to ground a verdict of acquittal upon a true statement of the case, without at the same time in some degree implicating and condemning themselves; they therefore, under these difficult circumstances, contrived to do that which was just in itself, though they certainly resorted to means which were far from defensible.¹⁵

Staunton, along with his community, learned that while the Qing Code could lead to what they saw as cruel punishments, the officials could also be flexible. They realized, however, that they needed a more comprehensive understanding of the law and also its operation. All of this was made possible through Staunton's sophisticated understanding of Chinese language and translation.

Staunton's language ability made him notorious (learning Chinese was illegal):

Ssu-tang-tung, who was 'young and crafty' at the time of the Macartney embassy . . . was an object of particular suspicion because 'he understands Chinese', and because 'barbarians who come to Kwangtung ask his advice and follow his suggestions. Probably in the long run he will make trouble.'

The result of Staunton's language study, efficacy at negotiating at Canton – work of EIC – built more language study by the time of the second embassy in 1816, they had a team of linguists including John

¹⁵ Staunton, *Miscellaneous Notices* (1828), 112.

Davis, the second governor of Hong Kong; Robert Morrison – the famed “first Protestant Missionary in China” among others.

Staunton was not a major supporter of the embassy as he held the philosophy that “It [was] . . . from the trade that power is derived.”¹⁶

Tension – the importance of status and rank; at the same time a strong understanding of Chinese perspectives and concern over British behaviors that were often contradictory, immoral, provocative, confusing, etc... No strong policy. “Accidental imperialists” – “Inconsistent imperialists”

On 13 July 1816, the embassy departed the waters near Hong Kong where the members had rendezvoused.¹⁷ The retinue consisted of seventy-five men including Lord Amherst, his eleven year-old son Jeffrey, second commissioner Staunton, third commissioner, Henry Ellis, secretary Henry Hayne, and “Chinese secretaries” Toone, Davis, Manning, and Morrison. A chaplain, two physicians, an artist, a comptroller, and several officers, servants, musicians, and guards also accompanied them.¹⁸ As Staunton waited for the embassy to embark on its mission, he wrote to his mother hopefully: “I do not flatter myself that much is to be gained at present by our Embassy, but I have little

¹⁶ This is a significant observation because the consular position at Canton was a debacle in so far as the position was not effective in asserting any real power over anyone at Canton. Merchants simply conducted trade under foreign flags, the Chinese refused to recognize the post, and ultimately, in the infamous case of the appointment of a governmental position of Chief Superintendent of Trade, Lord Napier perished in the process of trying to gain permission to proceed up river to Canton. EIC, *Papers Respecting*, 293 and Eames, *British in China*, 206-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 and Ellis, *Embassy to China*, 49.

¹⁸ Ellis, *Embassy to China*, 52.

doubt of the Chinese receiving us handsomely – and with the proper attention due from one Great Nation to another.” Staunton’s observation could not have been further from the truth. The Amherst mission could be considered little short of a fiasco. In part, because Staunton refused to allow the embassy to kowtow before the emperor and in part due to the lack of diplomatic interest and ability in the person of the Jiaqing emperor. In that instance, the embassy was rejected. They were not allowed to visit the emperor and were quickly sent out of the capital, but on the interior route. Staunton returned to England – never to return to China again, but always connected to it.

III. Return to England

Image Three: Victoria Regia

One of the first things Staunton did upon his return to England from China was to find an appropriate country estate. After making an unsuccessful bid for Lord Byron’s Newstead Abbey Staunton purchased Leigh Park.¹⁹ Convenient to London, the property had an “excellent moderate” house, as Staunton described it. An ornamental farm with expansive gardens that had already been well developed, the property would allow him to develop his passion for botany and hundreds of acres for a pleasure ground.²⁰ His estate reflected Staunton’s appreciation for “Chinese” aesthetics with a half moon arched bridge and winding pebbled paths, but it was his plant collection that really interested him. As he grew older, Staunton maintained the network of

¹⁹ Staunton, *Memoirs* (L. Booth, 1856), 53 and Gladwyn, *Leigh Park*, 29.

²⁰ George Thomas Staunton to Lady Jane Staunton, 22 July 1819, Staunton Collection, Duke University.

botanical contacts he had made since childhood through Sir Joseph Banks and he became well known for his exotic hothouses, pineapple pits, and Amazonian lotus.²¹ Staunton's most Victorian structure and indulgence in exoticism was his hothouse where he was one of the first cultivators of the *Victoria amazonica* or the giant water lily or lotus in 1853.²² While the plant was found in Bolivia and is much larger (its pad or leaves grow to over nine feet in diameter) than the variety he would have seen at the *Bishu shanzhuang* as a child, one cannot help but think of the awe he recorded as a child upon viewing the lotus there. Staunton's hobbies and life became naturally more nostalgic as he grew older.

In 1823, Staunton collaborated with the great Sanskrit scholar, Henry Thomas Colebrook, to establish the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland. The date of the society's founding reflected an international trend in forming such organizations, but also the mounting interests in Asia by the British. By 1820, Britain claimed control over twenty-six percent of the world's population, and increasingly theirs was an Asian empire.²³ Staunton played an important role in the formation of the society and the founders met regularly in Staunton's home before the society's creation. He became a

²¹ While Staunton's home was torn down in the nineteenth century, his green house, ornamental farm, gothic library, and the pleasure grounds, including numerous follies have become a National Trust site. See Derek Gladwyn, *Leigh Park* for a full account of Staunton's estate and botanical interests. On the use of Chinese motifs in Regency gardening see Patrick Conner, "The 'Chinese Garden' in Regency England," *Garden History* 14 (Spring 1986): 42-49.

²² See Gladwyn, *Leigh Park*, on the history of the gardens at Leigh Park.

²³ Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness," 323.

Vice President immediately upon its foundation—a post he held until his death thirty-six years later.²⁴

Staunton helped establish the society as a center for the study and research of Chinese history, society, and culture by donating his Chinese library, which consisted of over 2600 volumes of books and manuscripts.²⁵

Staunton promoted Chinese language study not only in England, but in Asia as well. In a speech given to the House of Commons, Staunton outlined the usefulness of an “Anglo-Chinese College” that promoted “the reciprocal cultivation of Chinese and European Literature” and was open to any European or American who was “Christian, and moral, and has an object to achieve,” and any Chinese who “can support themselves or are supported.”²⁶ An Anglo-Chinese School was founded by Robert Morrison in 1818 and subsequently moved to Hong Kong after the First Opium War. Staunton attempted to procure additional funding for this establishment that brought Chinese and Europeans together in the hopes of bridging the cultural divide, and ultimately facilitating the spread of Christianity in China.²⁷ Throughout his life, Staunton advocated the power of education as a means of diplomacy. His support of the Royal Asiatic Society and the connections

²⁴ These learned societies were being founded all over the world at the time. The *Société Asiatique* was founded in 1822, the American Oriental Society in 1842, and the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* in 1845. There were approximately thirty original founding members and quickly the society counted 324 names on its register and 217 subscriptions. For a complete history of the society see Stuart Simmonds and Simon Digby, *The Royal Asiatic Society: Its History and Treasures* (London: E.J. Brill for the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979).

²⁵ Royal Asiatic Society, *Minutes of Council*, 1:4, located at the Royal Asiatic Society, London (hereafter, RAS, *Minutes of Council*).

²⁶ Staunton, *Corrected Report of the Speeches of Sir George Staunton, on the China Trade, in the House of Commons, June 4, and June 13, 1833, with an Appendix* (London: Edmund Lloyd, 1833), 43-44.

²⁷ For a history of the college see Brian Harrison, *Waiting for China: the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca, 1818-1843* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1979).

he maintained through his sinological associates furthered that mission and satiated Staunton's natural curiosity and appreciation of learning.

Staunton is best described as an independent in politics. He supported George Canning as a Liberal Tory until Canning's death in 1827. He then became a proponent of reform, siding with the Whigs and defining himself as a Liberal. But as an independent he only received nominal support from Whig leadership. Because of his voting record during the consideration of the Reform Bill, Staunton has been identified as "at the very centre of the political spectrum."²⁸

Serving South Hampshire and Portsmouth until 1852, four years before his death.²⁹ Partook in all of the major debates regarding China. His position was consistently one of diplomatic engagement and protection of the East India Company trade. He was not an advocate of free trade. He was not an advocate of war. He wanted to maintain the status quo – after all, it had been tremendously successful not only for him, but for most of those involved in the trade – including the British government.

"There is now no longer any reason why our religious and our commercial intercourse with the Chinese people . . . should not mutually aid and promote each other . . . The examples of disinterestedness and universal good-will which our Christian Missionaries and Physicians have exhibited in union, in China, in the Free Hospitals already established at Canton and at Hong Kong, are calculated to soften the

²⁸ See O'Neil and Martin, "A Backbencher on Parliamentary Reform," 539.

²⁹ Staunton writes extensively in his papers and in his *Memoirs* about his time in Parliament. He serves as a useful case for understanding the machinations of an independent Member of Parliament in the crucial years of mid-nineteenth century reform. See O'Neill and Martin, "A Backbencher on Parliamentary Reform," Staunton, *Memoirs* (L. Booth, 1856), and Staunton Manuscripts, Staunton Collection, Duke University.

most obdurate hearts, and have not been altogether thrown away, even upon the lawless and hostile population of Southern China. . . whatever raises the moral, religious, and social character of foreigners in China, must tend, in an eminent degree to a juster [*sic*] appreciation, amongst the Chinese, of the advantages generally of Foreign Intercourse."

Staunton was distraught over the increased importance of the sale of opium – for which he wrote an anti-opium tract. He was appalled at the behavior of the British government and Lord Napier when Napier was sent out to China to force open talks – and failed, dying on board his ship in the excruciatingly hot Pearl River delta. And, he advocated diplomatic negotiations when other members of parliament were making a call to arms at the start of the First Opium War.

This, to me, was not surprising. He represented the diplomatic approach – the way he had been taught by his father and Macartney.

Staunton passed many days at Leigh Park – and relished his property. He remained a loner most of his life, but had a very dedicated group of immediate friends. Moreover, he encouraged visitors here.

His estate, left to cousins, did not remain in the family for long. And, I've found evidence that the portraits I've shown and the materials Staunton cherished from his days in China were quickly dispersed. His legacy, while significant to many family members still today, was not one that was preserved in tact – even Staunton Country park is a shell of its former self – changed and recast over the years.

Specimens of the *Agave Americana* are now in flower at Leigh Park, the residence of Sir G. Staunton, Bart. The worthy baronet allows his gardens and grounds to be inspected by all who have a taste for floriculture; and rarely does the florist find so perfect a collection as that of Leigh Park.... Few towns can boast of so perfect a *bijou* in their neighborhood, and the thanks of the community are due to the respected proprietor of Leigh Park, for his liberality in throwing open its gates to all visitors.

Floriculture, 1858

IV: **Legacy**

Image Four: Martin Archer Shee Portrait

We so often want to draw meaning from lives, like Staunton's, to support our own interests and causes.

In his obituary which ran in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, Sir George Thomas Staunton was described as "always of a delicate frame, and not capable of great physical exertion. Others observed in him a certain shyness and awkwardness of manner, of which his peculiar education affords an adequate explanation." It is curious that this is how Staunton would be remembered in light of his life's work. The author of the obituary noted as much and recounted that Staunton "on various occasions displayed great moral courage and determination."

Staunton here is presented in a way that is almost Orientalized – effeminate – weak – awkward . . . and yet, he had been able to live through more sea voyages than I am afraid many of us in this room, who might consider themselves to have hearty constitutions, could survive.

The obituary goes on to recount in heroic prose the way that Staunton “stood up” to the Chinese emperor and refused to kowtow to him. This “moral courage and determination” was indeed part of his action, but so too were many moments where he stood up to the English men around him and questioned whether their behavior was appropriate and moral. Staunton’s courage did not only appear when facing the Chinese.

THIS PICTURE SHOWS BRITISH AMBASSADOR’S RESIDENCE AT BEIJING IN OCTOBER 2008 (William Ehrman)

This said, Staunton, I believe is the best commentator on his own life. His memoir, I believe holds many lessons – one of which is understanding who he was as a man in this dynamic time in human history. He reminds us that while he was able to accomplish much, he relished, perhaps most of all, his time here, at Staunton Country Park. A place where he could reflect on his past, his personal hobbies; and his on-going intellectual improvement. He reflected:

“I never held a gun, I seldom mounted a horse, and my philosophic walks were soon terminated by a shady bench, where I was long detained by the sedentary amusement of reading or meditation. At

home I occupied a pleasant and spacious apartment; the library, on the same floor, was soon considered as my peculiar domain; and I might say with truth that I was never less alone than when by myself."

DRAFT