

Macartney at Kashgar

NEW LIGHT ON BRITISH, CHINESE
AND RUSSIAN ACTIVITIES IN SINKIANG,
1890-1918

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Preface

This book is an account of the career of Sir George Macartney who spent twenty-eight years from 1890 to 1918 as the sole British representative in Sinkiang, China's most westerly province. It does not pretend to be a history of the area or of the complicated Central Asian diplomacy of Russia, China and Britain during that period. In its most complex part this has been covered from the British side by G. J. Alder in *British India's Northern Frontier, 1865-95*. Instead the authors have concentrated on the record of a career remarkable not so much for spectacular achievements as for dedicated service and objective reporting in one of the most remote and lonely posts ever maintained by the British government. From it emerges a shrewd and objective account of Russian and Chinese power in Sinkiang in a period which was crucial for the fate of the province. Now that Russia and China are again in dispute over Sinkiang Sir George Macartney's analysis of their objectives and policies before 1918 has a fresh significance.

This book is written chiefly from the Political and Secret Records in the India Office Library which contain the Kashgar diaries and correspondence, supplemented by Foreign Office material in the Public Record Office. Sir George Macartney left no collection of personal papers, but the authors are indebted to his son, Mr Eric Macartney, for information about his family and for photographs of his father. They are also grateful to the Librarian and staff of the India Office Library and Records.

Introduction

by Sir Clarmont Skrine

This book stems from an account I wrote in 1966 of the repercussions in Sinkiang of the Chinese revolution from the point of view of the British Consul-General in Kashgar. My memoir was too short for a full-length book and Mr Anthony Forster of Methuen agreed to an expansion of it into a biography of Sir George Macartney who founded the Kashgar Consulate-General and worked there alone for twenty-eight years.

My work on the biography was cut short by illness in 1967. Luckily I was able to secure the services of Dr Pamela Nightingale, a graduate of Newnham College, Cambridge, as a collaborator. This is the book which she has now written.

For me the story is particularly enthralling because I arrived in Kashgar in 1922, only four years after Macartney retired. The Consulate Guard which had been conceded to Macartney by the government of India in his last year had just been replaced by eight mounted but unarmed locally recruited orderlies. Many of the characters who were active in Macartney's time were well known to me, notably the infamous General Ma Titai who continued to flourish until 1924 when his palace was stormed and he himself paid the price for his tyranny.

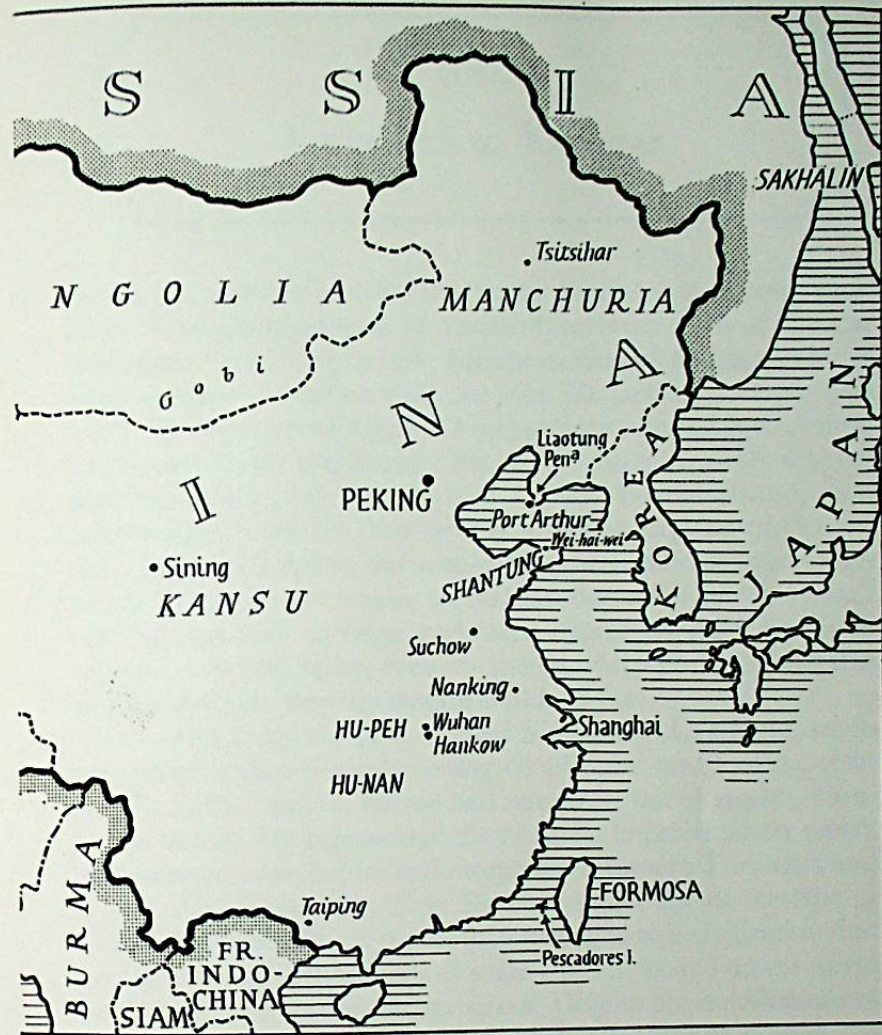
I now realize that the picture I drew in my book on Sinkiang was sadly incomplete. The little town of Bai, twenty-five marches north-east of Kashgar and roughly half-way to Urumchi, was the nearest I could approach, in the limited time at my disposal, to the provincial capital. We in Kashgar knew little of Yang Tseng-hsin, the provincial Governor in Urumchi. Indeed he must have been a somewhat shadowy figure to Macartney. I depended for Urumchi news on reports of intelligence agents of doubtful veracity, valuable but infrequent letters from members of the China Inland Mission, and on the talk of rare visitors from the provincial capital, usually travellers passing through on the 4,000-mile trail from the China

Macartney at Kashgar

coast to India. Few of these had actually seen or talked with the formidable Governor. We certainly supposed that his position was impregnable. In my last report from Kashgar in 1924 I expressed the opinion that the Governor's removal from his post by the central government was extremely unlikely. I did not take into account the danger Yang lived in from the envy, hatred and malice, not of the Muslims he ruled, but of his own countrymen. Assassins hired by a trusted friend laid him low on 7 July 1928 and with him destroyed the peace and relative prosperity of the New Dominion he had nursed and protected so long.

It was not until the 1930s that news began to seep out, showing what a remarkable governor Yang Tseng-hsin had been. We now know that his statecraft was responsible for the survival of peace and order in Sinkiang throughout and after the turmoil of the Chinese Revolution. Macartney came to the fore at the same time. He was in a position of influence during the Chinese Revolution and his diplomatic skill was equally invaluable later when repercussions of the Russian Revolution were felt in Kashgar.

Macartney's dispatches and diaries throw a fitful light upon the sequence of events that led to and followed Yang's accession to power. They also reveal Macartney's wise diplomacy. How strange the working of Fate, by which a Christian diplomat collaborated almost unconsciously with a Confucian mandarin in saving his province from the alternatives of foreign domination or chaos.





Macartney (left) and Francis Younghusband (centre)
with the Amban of Yarkand (between them) in 1890