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## THE STATE OF CHINA.

BY SIR J. BOWRING.

The following letter, addressed to the Registrar-General, London, by Sir John Bowring, has been published in the *Journal of the Statistical Society*—

Government House, Hong Kong, July 13, 1855.

"Sir—I wish it were possible to give a satisfactory reply to your inquiries as to the real population of China.

"There has been no official census taken since the time of Kia King, 43 years ago. Much doubt has been thrown upon the accuracy of these returns, which gave 362,447,183 as the total number of the inhabitants of China. I think our greater knowledge of the country increases the evidence in favor of the approximate correctness of the official document, and that we may with tolerable safety estimate the present population of the Chinese empire as between 350,000,000 and 400,000,000 of human beings. The penal laws of China make provision for a general system of registration; and corporal punishments, generally amounting to 100 blows of the bamboo, are to be inflicted on those who neglect to make the proper returns. The machinery is confided to the elders of the district, and the census is required to be annually taken; but I have no reason to believe that the law is obeyed or the neglect of it punished.

"In the English translation of Father Alvarez Sernedo's *History of China*, published in London, A.D. 1655, is the following passage:—

"This kingdom is so exceedingly populous that, having lived there 22 years, I was in no less amazement at my coming away than in the beginning at the multitude of the people. Certainly the truth exceedeth all hyperboles; not only in the cities, towns, and public places, but also in the highway there is as great a concourse as is usual in Europe on some great festival.— And if we will refer ourselves to the general register-book wherein only the common men are enrolled; leaving out women, children, and professors of letters and arms, there are reckoned of them to be fifty-eight millions fifty-five thousand one hundred and four score."

"The minuteness of the enumeration would seem to show that the father quoted some official document.

"I forward herewith two tabular statements which I have copied from Dr. Williams's *Middle Kingdom*, one of the best books on China. The first [No. 1] gives a list of the various estimates from A.D. 1393 to 1812, with the authorities quoted. The second is a re-arranged statement of censuses taken at different periods [No. 2.]

"As there are few men in China more diligent or better instructed than Dr. Williams, I thought it desirable to communicate with him in order to ascertain his present views as to the credit which may properly be attached to the official statistics of China. I send a copy of his letter [No. 3]

"I do not know that there is any safer course than to reason from details to generals, from the known to the unknown; and I have taken every opportunity which my intercourse with the Chinese has afforded me, to obtain, if not correct, at least approximative, information as to the true statistics of the country. It may be affirmed without any hesitation that, as regards the Five Ports and the adjacent districts to which we have access, the population is so numerous as to furnish arguments that the number of inhabitants of the entire empire is very much greater than is represented by the official returns. These localities cannot be taken as fair averages; for, naturally enough, increased commercial activity has brought with it a flow of new settlers, and there can be no doubt that some of the ancient seats of commerce have lost much of their population in losing their trade; but whether all the causes of decline in particular spots have much counteracted the fecundity of the Chinese races, considered as a whole, may well be questioned.

"Some years ago I had an opportunity of discussing the subject of Chinese population with the mandarin at Ningpo, who was charged with making the returns for that district. Ningpo can scarcely be called a progressive place—it is decidedly the least so of the five treaty ports; but I found, generally speaking, that the real returns were considerably in excess of the official estimates.

"And I would remark that, in taking the area of the 18 provinces of China at 1,348,870 square miles, the census of 1812 would give 268 persons to a square mile, which is considerably less than the population of the densely peopled countries of Europe.

"According to ancient usage the population in China is grouped under four heads—1, Scholars; 2, Husbandmen; 3, Mechanics; 4, Merchants. There is a numerous class who are considered almost as social outcasts, such as stage-players, professional gamblers, beggars, convicts—outlaws, and others; and these probably form no part of the population returns. In the

more remote rural districts, on the other hand, the returning officer most probably contents himself with giving the average of more accessible and better-peopled localities.

"I have no means of obtaining any satisfactory tables to show the proportions which different ages bear to one another in China, or the average mortality at different periods of human life; yet to every decade of life the Chinese apply some special designation:—the age of 10 is called 'the Opening Degree'; 20, 'Youth Expired'; 30, 'Strength and Marriage'; 40, 'Officially Apt'; 50, 'Error-knowing'; 60, 'Cycle-closing'; 70, 'Rare Bird of Age'; 80, 'Rusty-visaged'; 90, 'Delayed'; 100, 'Age's Extremity.' Among the Chinese the amount of reverence grows with the number of years. I made, some years ago, the acquaintance of a Buddhist priest living in the convent of Tien Tung, near Ningpo, who was more than a century old, and whom people of rank were in the habit of visiting, in order to show their respect and to obtain his autograph. He had the civility to give me a fair specimen of his handwriting.— There are not only many establishments for the reception of the aged, but the penal code provides severe punishments for those who refuse to relieve the poor in their declining years. Age may also be pleaded in extenuation of crime and in mitigation of punishment. Imperial decrees sometimes order presents to be given to all indigent old people in the empire. I am not aware of any detailed statistics giving the number of such recipients since a return published in the time of Kanghi (1657). Kienlung (1735) directed that all those claimants whose age exceeded 60, should receive 5 bushels of rice and a piece of linen; those above 80, 10 bushels of rice and two pieces of linen; those above 90, 30 bushels of rice and two pieces of common silk; and those above 100, 50 bushels of rice and two pieces, one of fine and one of common silk. He ordered also the elders to be enumerated who were at the head of five generations, of whom there were 192, and, 'in gratitude to heaven,' summoned 3,000 of the oldest men of the empire to receive Imperial presents, which consisted principally of embroidered purses, and badges bearing the character *shau*, meaning 'longevity.'

"The Kanghi tables show the numbers of those who enjoyed the benefit of the edict; but as the returns bear no proportion to the general population of the country or to the relative extent of the various provinces, many fortuitous and local circumstances must have caused the obvious incongruities. For example, in the adjacent provinces of Kwangtung and Kwangse, in which the whole mass of population is in the proportion of two to one, the recipients are 46 to 1; and as regards age, while the proportion of those above 80 is represented at 19 to 1, those above 90 are only a little more than 5 to 1. In all these matters the greater or less co-operation of the local authorities is one of the most important elements in producing a result. Kwangse is extremely mountainous, and bordered on the northwest by the country of the Meaou-tsz, or aborigines, the districts adjoining which are but in a half-reclaimed state, and governed by officers of a character and denomination distinct from those of the provinces. But it is inexplicable that the province of Pehile, in which Peking is situated, should exhibit but a small proportional return, especially as compared with the adjacent province of Shantung. Hookwang, with a population of 26,250,000, has 37,354 indigent persons above 70, while Szechuen, the population of which is 21,500,000, presents only 176 persons in that category.

"I think there is abundant evidence of redundant population pressing more and more heavily upon, and suffering more and more severely from, an inadequate supply of food. Though there are periods when extraordinary harvests enable the Chinese to transport rice, the principal food of the people, from one province to another, and sometimes even to foreign countries, yet of late the importations from foreign countries have been enormous, and China has drawn largely on the Straits, the Philippines, Siam, and other places, to fill up a vast deficiency in supply. Famine has, notwithstanding, committed dreadful ravages, and the provisions of the Imperial granaries have been wholly inadequate to provide for the public wants. It is true that cultivation has been greatly interfered with by intestinal disorders, and that there has been much destruction by inundations, incendiaries, and other accidental or transitory causes; but without reference to these, I am disposed to believe that there is a greater increase in the numbers of the population than in the home production of food for their use. It must be remembered, too, that while the race is thus augmenting, the causes which lead to the destruction of food—such as the overflow of rivers, fires, ravages of locusts, bad seasons, and other calamities—are to a great extent beyond the control of human prudence or human exertion. It would be difficult to show what new element could be introduced which would raise up the

native supply of food beyond its present productivity, considering that land husbandry has given to cultivation more of a horticultural than an agricultural character.

"The constant flow of emigration from China, contrasted with the complete absence of emigration into China, is striking evidence of the redundancy of the population; for though that emigration is almost wholly confined to two provinces, namely, Kwantung and Fookien, representing together a population of probably from 34,000,000 to 35,000,000, I am disposed to think that a number nearer 3,000,000, than 2,000,000, from these provinces alone, are located in foreign countries. In the kingdom of Siam it is estimated that there are 1,500,000 Chinese, of which 200,000 are in the capital (Bangkok). They crowd all the islands of the Indian Archipelago. In Java, we know by a correct census there are 136,000. Cochin China teems with Chinese. In this colony we are seldom without one, two, or three vessels taking Chinese emigrants to California and other places. Multitudes go to Australia, to the Philippines, to the Sandwich Islands, to the western coast of Central and Southern America; some have made their way to British India. The emigration to the British West India has been considerable—to the Havannah greater still. The annual arrivals in Singapore are estimated at an average of 10,000, and 2,000 is the number that are said annually to return to China.

"There is not only this enormous maritime emigration, but a considerable inland efflux of Chinese towards Manchouria and Tibet; and it may be added, that the large and fertile islands of Formosa and Hama have been to a great extent won from the aborigines by successive inroads of Chinese settlers. Now, these are all males; there is not a woman to 10,000 men; hence, perhaps, the small social value of the female infant. Yet this perpetual outflowing of people seems in no respect to diminish the number of those who are left behind.— Few Chinese leave their country without a fixed purpose to return to worship in the ancestral hall—to bring sacrifices to the tombs of their fathers; but it may be doubted if one in ten revisits his native land. The loss of life from disease, from bad arrangements, from shipwreck, and other casualties amounts to a frightful percentage on those who emigrate.

"The multitudes of persons who live by the fisheries in China afford evidence not only that the land is cultivated to the greatest possible extent, but that it is insufficient to supply the necessities of the overflowing population; for agriculture is held in high honour in China, and the husbandman stands next in rank to the sage or literary man in the social hierarchy. It has been supposed that nearly a tenth of the population derive their means of support from fisheries. Hundreds and thousands of boats crowd the whole coast of China—sometimes acting in communities, sometimes independent and isolated. There is no species of craft by which a fish can be inveigled which is not practised with success in China—every variety of net, from vast seines, embracing miles, to the smallest handnet in the care of a child. Fishing by night and fishing by day,—fishing by moonlight, by torchlight, and in utter darkness,—fishing in boats of all sizes,—fishing by those who are stationary on the rock by the seaside, and by those who are absent for weeks on the wildest of seas,—fishing by cormorants,—fishing by divers,—fishing with lines, with baskets,—by every imaginable decoy and device. There is no river which is not staked to assist the fisherman in his craft. There is no lake, no pond, which is not crowded with fish. A piece of water is nearly as valuable as a field of fertile land. At daybreak every city is crowded with sellers of live fish, who carry their commodity in buckets of water, saving all they do not sell to be returned to the pond or kept for another day's service. And the lakes and ponds of China not only supply large provisions of fish—they produce considerable quantities of edible roots and seeds, which are largely consumed by the people. Among these the esculent arum, the water-chestnut (*scirpus tuberosus*) and the lotus (*nelumbium*) are the most remarkable.

"The enormous river population of China, who live only in boats, who are born and educated, who marry, rear their families, and die—who, in a word, begin and end their existence on the water, and never have or dream of any shelter other than the roof and who seldom tread except on the deck or boards of their sampans—show to what an extent the land is crowded, and how inadequate it is to maintain the cumberers of the soil. In the city of Canton alone it is estimated that 300,000 persons dwell upon the surface of the river; the boats, sometimes 20 or 30 deep, cover some miles, and have their wants supplied by ambulatory salesmen, who vend their way through every accessible passage. Of this vast population some dwell in decorated river boats used for every purpose of license and festivity—for theatres—for concerts—for feasts—for gambling—for lust—for solitary

and social recreations; some craft are employed in conveying goods and passengers, and are in a state of constant activity; others are moored, and their owners are engaged as servants or labourers on shore. Indeed, their pursuits are probably nearly as various as those of the land population. The immense variety of boats which are found in Chinese waters has never been adequately described. Some are of enormous size, and are used as magazines for salt or rice—others have all domestic accommodations, and are employed for the transfer of whole families, with all their domestic attendants, from one place to another,—some, called *centipedes*, from their being supposed to have 100 rows, convey with extraordinary rapidity the more valuable cargoes from the inner warehouses to the foreign shipping in the ports—all these from the huge and cumbersome junks, which remind one of Noah's ark, and which represent the rude and coarse constructions of the remotest ages, to the fragile planks upon which a solitary leper hangs upon the outskirts of society—boats of every form and applied to every purpose—exhibit an incalculable amount of population, which may be called amphibious, if not aquatic.

"Not only are land and water crowded with Chinese, but many dwell on artificial islands which float upon the lakes—lands with gardens and houses raised upon the rafters which the occupiers have bound together, and on which they cultivate what is needful for the supply of life's daily wants. They have their poultry and their vegetables for use, their flowers and their scrolls for ornament, their household gods for protection and worship.

"In all parts of China to which we have access we find not only that every foot of ground is cultivated which is capable of producing anything, but that, from the value of land and the surplus of labor, cultivation is rather that of gardeners than of husbandmen. The sides of hills, in their natural declivity often unavailable, are, by a succession of artificial terraces, turned to profitable account. Every little bit of soil, though it be only a few feet in length and breadth, is turned to account; and not only is the surface of the land thus cared for, but every device is employed for the gathering together of every article that can serve for manure. Scavengers are constantly clearing the streets of the stercoraceous filth; the cloacæ are farmed by speculators in human ordures; the most populous places are often made offensive by the means taken to prevent the precious deposits from being lost. The fields in China have almost always large earthenware vessels for the reception of the contributions of the peasant or the traveller. You cannot enter any of their great cities without meeting multitudes of men, women, and children conveying liquid manure into the fields and gardens around. The stimulants to production are applied with most untiring industry. In this colony of Hongkong I scarcely ever ride out without finding some little bit of ground either newly cultivated or cleared for cultivation.

"Attention to the soil—not only to make it productive, but as much productive as possible—is inculcated as a political and social duty. One of the most admired sages of China, (Yung-chun) says:—'Let their be no uncultivated spot in the country—no unemployed person in the city; and the fourth maxim of the sacred edict of Kang-hi, which is required to be read through the empire on the 1st and 15th day of every moon, in the presence of all the officers of State, is to the following effect:—'Let husbandry occupy the principal place, and the culture of the mulberry-tree, so that there may be sufficient supply of food and clothing.' Shin Nung, the name of one of the most ancient and honored of the Chinese Emperors, means 'the Divine husbandman.'

"The arts of draining and irrigating—of preserving, preparing, and applying manure in a great variety of shapes, of fertilizing seeds, indeed, all the details of Chinese agriculture, are well deserving of note, and all display evidence of the inadequate proportion which the produce of the soil bears to the demands for the consumption of the people.

"The Chinese, again, have no prejudice whatever as regards food; they eat anything and everything from which they can derive nutrition. Dogs, especially puppies, are habitually sold for food; and I have seen in the butchers' shops, large dogs skinned and hanging with their viscera by the side of pigs and goats. Even to rats and mice the Chinese have no objection—neither to the flesh of monkeys and snakes; the sea slug is an aristocratical and costly delicacy which is never wanting, any more than the edible birds' nests, at a feast where honor is intended to be done to the guests. Unhatched ducks and chickens are a favorite dish.—Nor do the early stages of putrefaction create any disgust; rotten eggs are by no means condemned to perdition; fish is the more acceptable when it has a strong fragrance and flavor to give more gusto to the rice.

"See a valuable paper on Chinese Agriculture in the *Chinese Repository*, vol. iii, pp. 121-27.

"As the food the Chinese eat is for the most part hard, coarse, and of little cost, so their beverages are singularly economical. Drunkenness is a rare vice in China, and fermented spirits or strong drinks are seldom used. Tea may be said to be the national, the universal beverage; and though that employed by the multitude does not cost more than 3d. to 6d. per lb., an infusion of less costly leaves is commonly employed, especially in localities remote from the tea districts. Both in eating and drinking the Chinese are temperate, and are satisfied with two daily meals—the morning rice at 10 a.m., and the evening rice at 5 p.m. The only repugnance I have observed in China is to the use of milk—an extraordinary prejudice, especially considering the Tartar influences which have been long dominant in the land; but I never saw or heard of butter, cream, milk, or whey being introduced at any native Chinese table.

"While so many elements of vitality are in a state of activity for the reproduction and sustenance of the human race, there is probably no part of the world in which the harvests of mortality are more sweeping and destructive than in China, producing voids which require no ordinary appliances to fill up. Multitudes perish absolutely from want of the means of existence—inundations destroy towns and villages and all their inhabitants; it would not be easy to calculate the loss of life by the typhoons or hurricanes which visit the coasts of China, in which boats and junks are sometimes sacrificed by hundreds and by thousands. The late civil wars in China must have led to the loss of millions of lives. The sacrifices of human beings by executions alone are frightful. At the moment at which I write it is believed that from 400 to 500 victims fall daily by the hands of the headsman in the province of Kwangtung alone. Reverence for life there is none, as life exists in superfluous abundance. A dead body is an object of so little concern that it is sometimes not thought worth while to remove it from the spot where it putrefies on the surface of the earth. Often have I seen a corpse under the table of gamblers; often have I trod over a putrid body at the threshold of a door. In many parts of China there are towers of brick or stone where toothless—principally female—children are thrown by their parents into a hole made in the side of the wall. There are various opinions as to the extent of infanticide in China, but that it is a common practice in many provinces admits of no doubt. One of the most eloquent Chinese writers against infanticide, Kwei Chung Fu, professes to have been specially inspired by 'the God of literature' to call upon the Chinese people to refrain from the inhuman practice, and declares that 'the God' had filled his house with honors, and given him literary descendants as the recompense for his exertions. Yet his denunciations scarcely go further than to pronounce it wicked in those to destroy their female children who have means of bringing them up; and some of his arguments are strange enough:—'To destroy daughters,' he says, 'is to make war upon Heaven's harmony' (in the equal number of the sexes); 'the more daughters you will drown, the more daughters you will have; and never was it known that the drowning of daughters led to the birth of sons'. He recommends abandoning children to their fate 'on the wayside' as preferable to drowning them, and then says: 'There are instances of children so exposed having been nursed and reared by tigers.' 'Where should we have been,' he asks, 'if our grandmothers and mothers had been drowned in their infancy?' And he quotes two instances of the punishment of mothers who had destroyed their infants, one of whom had a blood-red serpent fastened to her thigh, and the other her four extremities turned into cow's feet.—

"Doubt has sometimes been expressed as to the practice of infanticide in China on any great scale; but abundance of evidence of the extent of the usage may be found in Chinese books. The following is a translation of a decree of the Emperor Kanchi entitled—

"Edict prohibiting the drowning of children.—When a mother mercilessly plunges beneath the water the tender offspring to which she has given birth, can it be said that it owes its life to her who thus takes away what it has just begun to enjoy? The poverty of the parents is the cause of this wrongdoing; they have difficulty in earning subsistence for themselves, still less can they pay nurses and undertake all the necessary expenses for their children. Thus driven to despair, and unwilling to cause the death of two persons to preserve the life of one, it comes to pass that a mother to save her husband's life, consents to destroy her children. Their natural tenderness suffers; but they at length determine to take this part, thinking themselves at liberty to dispose of the life of their children, in order to prolong their own. If they exposed these children in some unfrequented spot their cries would move the hearts of the parents. What, then, do they? They cast the unfortunate babe into the current of a river that they may at once lose sight of it and in an instant deprive it of life. You have given me the name of Father of the people. Though I cannot feel for these infants, the tenderness of the parents to whom they owe their being, I cannot refrain from declaring to you with the most painful feelings that I absolutely forbid such homicides. The tiger, says one of our books, though it be a tiger, does not rend its own young; towards them it has a feeling breast, and con-