

## **The Rise and Fall of Tianjin's Green Standards Fleet During the Reigns of Qing Emperors Jiaqing and Daoguang (1816-1839)**

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### **Abstract**

The sudden arrival at Tianjin and subsequently further into Tongzhou of the British envoy Amherst in June, the 21st year of Emperor Jiaqing's reign (1816), with an attempt to enter into trade agreements with China, unwittingly revealed a hole in the latter's coastal defense line and triggered a sense of urgency on the part of the Emperor. With two navy fleets guarding the 80-km wide mouth of the Bo Sea, the Jinzhou Fleet at the north end and the Dengzhou Fleet the south, the Qing government nevertheless had failed to stop the British ships from berthing in Tianjin. That the waters of Tianjin was vulnerably defenseless prompted the Emperor to rebuild a navy fleet there in less than a year and two more years saw the completion of all required warship and facility construction, making the Tianjin Fleet the top combat power among all northern fleets, while all its officers, sailors, warships, and artillery came from the south. For the time being, the only hole which had remained in the nation's coastline defense acquired a reinforcing band-aid.

However, the official Qing records and local topographies both contain very scant, if any, information on the establishing of the fleet during the Jiaqing period. Likewise, modern researchers of the early-mid Qing navy and coast defense have so far rarely addressed the topic of northern fleets. In fact the course of rise and fall of the Tianjin fleet could provide an in-depth perspective into the Qing court's deployment strategy and its limitations in coastal defense during the dynasty's early-mid period. The present essay will first go back to the dissolving of the Eight Banner's Tianjin fleet, and then using the Grand Council archives in the National Palace Museum's collections and other historical documents such as imperial decrees, review how the Green Standards' Tianjin fleet came into existence, from its policy shaping, preparations by four southeastern governors, appointment of its fleet commander, urging by the Emperor to expedite the matter, to shifting and settling of the southern ships north. However, the new naval fleet was soon to be disbanded when the new Emperor Daoguang came to throne, although its restoration would often come up as a subject of debate at the court. Arguments from both sides of the issue will be presented here. Finally, the essay will analyze the special significance associated with the Tianjin's Green Standards Fleet in the history of northern China's coastal defense.

**Keywords:** the Tianjin Fleet, Emperor Jiaqing, Wang Zhiyi, Xu Song, Tongan-style warship