

Outline / Study Notes  
The Opium Wars and The Boxer Rebellion  
from

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2. John King Fairbank, *The United States & China*, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1979)
3. Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1987)
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5. By the Compilation Group for the "History of Modern China Series," *The Opium War*, (Foreign Language Press: Peking, 1976)

**Background Leading Up to Opium Wars**

- Invasion and rebellion characterizes nineteenth-century China and East Asia in general.
- Victorian era in Western Europe wreaked expansionist change in China, Japan, Vietnam, and Korea.
- Chinese Empire slipping into downward phase of a dynastic cycle just as the Western powers began to beat upon the gates. Domestic and foreign troubles hand in hand, abetting each other.
- China's pre-modern economy slow to react to Western trade overtures. Its large size and great self-sufficiency discourages trade. Most Chinese capital wealth is land, not money that could be used for trading purposes.
- China also relatively backward technologically. Has not kept up with the West.
  - 1 Confucian bureaucracy discourages innovation, competition or change.

- 2 Plentiful labor precludes necessity for the creation of labor-saving devices.
  - 3 Innovation discouraged by Confucian distinction between hand and brain workers.
- Chinese economy around 1800 in different stage of development, differently constructed and thought of in entirely different terms.
    - 1 China regarded herself as a relative self-sufficient, economic entity.
      - Trade not formalized or heavily taxed.
    - 2 China had not institutionalized science or invention, as Europe was now doing. New technology was negligible.
    - 3 Entrepreneurship impossible:
      - No stimuli to develop foreign trade or new technolog
      - Government prepared to monopolize or heavily tax any new profitable undertaking.
      - No capital accumulation
      - No legal safeguards
      - No investment market
      - No joint stock company expertise
    - 4 Abundant manpower discouraged technological growth.
    - 5 Population growth ate up any increase in production.
    - 6 In sum, production absorbed completely in consumption, in keeping people alive. Net saving and investment, impossible.
  - Also, the inertia of government. Ch'ing administration unresponsive to foreign stimuli. Passive at local level because they were spread so thin.
    - Ritual responsibility made officials seek by all means to avoid the appearance of trouble.

- Produced deeply ingrained tendency to compromise, to harmonize, not to change. Spirit of Chinese official life was passive. Officials waited for things to happen, hoping they would not.
- Chinese state could not change when confronted by the Western challenge. Its leadership was stultified below and worn out at the top. Officials on the spot in the provinces could riot easily innovate. Emperor in Peking much too busy to do so.
- Broad responsibilities of the bureaucracy were not matched by a capacity for local initiative and innovation; the cumbersome safeguards which preserved the imperial power robbed it of adaptability.
- Government also enfeebled by corruption, the "squeeze."
- China did not understand the West.

### **The Opium Trade**

- Britain not making much money importing industrial or textile goods into China. Tea main import.
- Country trade system in Canton intensely profit-motivated.
- Opium smoking traditional in China. British dealers selling it there as early as 1700.
- Opium trade between East India Company and China.
- British India became dependent on Chinese opium trade for 5 to 10 per cent of its revenues.
- Chinese banned opium in 1727, but it quickly began corrupting the government.
- Britain's commercial expansion in China became dependent on opium. Trade entrenched. Powerful organized smuggling tool.
- In 1834, Britain takes over for East India Company. Also tries to end the tribute system.

## The Opium Wars

- Also called the First Anglo-Chinese War of 1839-42.
- Precipitated by the Chinese government's efforts to suppress a pernicious contraband trade in opium.
- Ended by superior firepower of British warships and followed by humiliating treaties that gave Westerners special privileges in China.
- Began nearly a century of "semi-colonial status" in China.
- Historically, China was ripe for picking by colonial powers. A vast discrepancy in power had developed. China had not developed technologically, organizationally or militarily. China's foreign relations were also out of date. Its tribute system was an 18th century way of dealing with the West. It had to collapse sooner or later.
- If it wasn't opium it might have been something else. The Opium War was the irresistible vigor of Western expansion against the immovable inertia of Chinese institutions.
- Government finally began to move when it realized that the opium trade was causing a fiscal crisis by a shift in the copper-silver exchange rate. Opium was draining China of silver.
- China trying to fight opium but preserve tribute system. Impossibility.
- Commissioner Lin Tse'hsu unwittingly accepts opium from British, which would later result in part of a \$22 million war indemnity.
- China no match for Western military might. Also, Manchus capitulated to preserve themselves. It had to make concession to maintain its rule.
- Treaty of Nanking, Aug. 29, 1842.
  - 1 Payment of war indemnities
  - 2 Cession of Hong Kong to British
  - 3 Opening of five treaty ports
  - 4 Fixed trade tariffs
  - 5 Most favored nation status
  - 6 Extraterritoriality
  - 7 Diplomatic equality

- Three further treaties were necessary to complete the settlement:
  - 1 1843-44: British Supplementary Treaty
  - 2 1844: The American Treaty (Caleb Cushing)
  - 3 1844: The French treaty.
- Most favored nation status negotiated by Britain had given the three counties above the same rights and privileges as G.B., but without any bloodshed.
- The years 1842-60 saw China wracked by internal and external difficulty. Internally, flood, famine and the inexorable weakening of the Manchu dynasty produced rebellions:
  - 1 The Taiping Rebellion
  - 2 The Nien and Moslem Rebellions
- This unrest was also causing problems in the treaty ports. Chinese merchants and traders were not cooperating. As a result, from 1851-60, the Western powers moved from a policy of negotiation to one of coercion.
- This development produced the Second Opium War, or the Anglo-French War against China, in 1856-60. Essentially, France, the U.S. and Britain felt the rebellions were footholds in the treaty ports and wanted to reaffirm their right to do business in China.
- Arrest of the French missionary was a pretext for Western Coercion.
- In 1858, Treaty of Tientsin (actually four separate treaties):
  - 1 Trade tariffs
  - 2 10 new treaty ports
  - 3 Inland navigation rights by foreign ships
  - 4 Foreign free travel rights throughout China.
  - 5 Legalization of opium trade with Britain.
  - 6 War indemnities paid to Britain and France
- Another outbreak of hostilities occurred in 1858. But two years later at Peking, the Peking Convention of 1860 reaffirmed the Treaty of Tientsin.

- Russia was the big winner in Peking. Claiming credit as mediator between China and Anglo-French forces, it demanded and got territories north of the Amur River and east of the Ussuri River, including today's Khabarovsk and Vladivostok, an area of more than 300,000 square miles.
- China's acceptance of the second treaty settlement gave the Western powers a stake in the established order, for they were now part of it.
- Chinese nationalism began in Canton, the original opium port. Until then, it was nonexistent.
- The two opium wars began the century long Chinese march towards revolution and the death of the dynastic system.

### **The Boxer Uprising**

- The Boxer uprising was part of a reform movement in China that began as a result of the Opium wars and continued until the 1949 revolution. It was one of many reactions to Western imperialism.
- The Boxers were a traditional secret society crudely translated by the West as "Righteous and Harmonious Fists," or more simply as "Boxers." Precursors to the Boxers were the "White Lotus Society," and the "Triad Society," and, to a certain extent, the Taipings.
- Some analysts say the Boxers were anti-dynastic. Others say the movement was pro-dynastic from the beginning. In any event, the movement was clearly pro-dynastic by 1899. The government worked both sides against the middle by siding with the Boxers in northern China to preserve Manchu rule but went against the Boxers in South China to keep order with the West.
- June, 21 1900, the Empress Dowager declares war. Boxers besiege the foreign legations in Tientsin and Peking. Some 250 Westerners are killed. Many more Chinese Christians. Violence stuns the world.
- Boxers were:
  1. Anti Christian
  2. Inspired by internal political and economic causes: flood and famine.
  3. Direct action-response to deepening crisis of Chinese people.

- Also, disappointed by failure of previous reforms:
  - 1 Failed restoration of Confucian system in 1860.
  - 2 The self-strengthening movement: industrial and military efforts.
  - 3 The reforms of 1898: 100 days of failed administrative reforms.
- Boxer Protocol, signed on Sept. 7, 1901.
  - 1 Execution of 10 high officials.
  - 2 Punishment of 100 others.
  - 3 Formal apologies.
  - 4 Suspension of examinations in 45 cities.
  - 5 Expansion of Legation Quarter.
  - 6 insured foreign access to Peking.
  - 7 Rising of import duties
  - 8 Huge indemnity.
- The huge indemnity, some \$750 million, including interest, was eventually cut by two thirds. Nevertheless, it wasn't completely paid until 1940.
- Defeat of Boxers led to wide-scale foreign financial exploitation of China.
- American expansion and the Open Door.
- Boxer movement was an important event in creating mass nationalism in China.