

Imperialism in China Project

Introduction

By 1800, China was a prosperous country with a highly developed agricultural system. China was not industrialized, but workers in small workshops were able to produce most of the goods the Chinese needed. Because China was practically self-sufficient, its emperors had little interest in trading with Europeans. For decades, Europeans could do business only at the port of Canton. Despite pleas from Britain and other nations, China refused to open other ports to foreigners. The Chinese regarded European goods as inferior to their own and bought few goods from the European merchants at Canton.

European merchants were determined to find a product the Chinese would buy in large quantities. Eventually, the British East India Company discovered such a product - opium. Opium is a habit forming narcotic made from the poppy plant. The Chinese government tried to stop the opium trade by appealing to British royalty. When those pleas went unanswered, the quarrel over opium grew into a war.

The Opium War and the peace that followed led to increased trading rights for Europeans in China. For a time it looked as though a scramble for China might follow the one for Africa...

Assignment

Your group has just traveled back in time to the year 1900. You have arrived in China during a time of great turmoil. The United States has just proposed a policy that will allow equal access to China for all foreign merchants. As a result, a group of Chinese nationalists have taken to the streets and have pledged to rid the country of "foreign devils."

You and your colleagues have been invited to a conference being held at the Chinese Imperial Palace. At this conference, European merchants and Chinese citizens will have the opportunity to present their visions for the future of China.

Members of your group will be participating on both sides of the debate. After completing background research on China's recent history, you will be split up and asked to write a speech arguing either on the side of the European merchants or the Chinese nationalists. Your speeches will help the Empress Dowager Tsu Hsi decide whether the Chinese government should support trade with foreign nations or aid in the fight to again isolate China from foreign influence.

Directions

In groups of four, you will research each of the following topics relating to events in China in the 1800s:

- the Opium War, • The Taiping Rebellion, • The Open-Door Policy, and • The Boxer Rebellion •

The group of four will then be split into two groups of two:

Group A will focus on the European (specifically British) perspective on the events in China during the 1800s and will write a speech from the point-of-view of a British merchant arguing for extended trading rights in China.

Group B will focus on the Chinese (nationalist) perspective on the events in China during the 1800s and will write a speech from the point-of-view of a Boxer nationalist arguing for the expulsion of foreign merchants from China.

*Each group should cite specific examples from their research supporting their argument for or against European trade in China.

Once the speeches are complete, both **Group A** and **Group B** will design a visual aid to complement their speech.
<http://www.coedu.usf.edu/main/departments/seced/webq/social%20studies/history/jberringer/webquest.htm>

1840-1860: Opium Wars

Trade war: Britain acquires 'a barren rock'

At the start of the 19th century, Hong Kong was little more than a backwater in southern China, with no indication it would one day be a world trade center.

By the middle of that century, Britain's desire to force opium on China had resulted in two wars -- and the loss of Chinese sovereignty in the territory.

In the early 1800s, Hong Kong was inhabited mostly by subsistence farmers, fishermen and pirates.

At that time, China's major contact with the outside world was taking place farther north, up the Pearl River, at Canton -- or what is now known as Guangzhou. It was in Canton that overseas traders from Britain, the United States and elsewhere lived and worked in a small enclave, closely regulated by Chinese officials.

Trade had mostly been in China's favor, until the widespread introduction of opium, grown mostly in Britain's then-colony India. And it was in Canton that the illegal and highly profitable opium trade flourished.

Opium addiction grew to epidemic proportions, ravaging Chinese society. The Ching emperor appointed a special commissioner in Canton, with orders to stamp out the opium trade.

A week after his appointment, Lin Ze-xu ordered his troops to surround the international enclave in Canton. He demanded the overseas traders turn over all of their opium stocks. After a six-week stand off, the traders surrendered more than 20,000 chests of the narcotic.

That confrontation brought demands for action from British opium traders, including two of the biggest, William Jardine and James Matheson. It also provoked a belligerent response from the British military, and the start of the First Opium War, of 1840-1842.

During that war, on January 26, 1841, a British naval party landed on the northwestern shore of Hong Kong, raised the Union Jack, and formally occupied the island.

China's antiquated navy and army were no match for the British. The First Opium War ended with the Treaty of Nanking, in August of 1842.

That treaty promised, among other things, British trading rights and privileges in five Chinese ports. It also ceded control of Hong Kong island to the British. In the words of the treaty, Hong Kong was "to be possessed in perpetuity by her Britannic Majesty, her heirs and successors."

Most of official Britain was surprised and amused by the Empire's new acquisition, a seemingly worthless, virtually barren rock of an island.

Less than two decades later, a new conflict broke out between the British and China's rulers. The Second Anglo-Chinese War (1856-1860) ended with another British victory and the Convention of Peking, which gave London perpetual control of the Kowloon peninsula, on the Chinese mainland across from Hong Kong Island.

By the century's end, other European countries and Japan had demanded and received concessions from China.

Professing concerns about the security of Hong Kong, the British also made new demands on the Chinese -- in particular, a 99-year lease on what is now called the New Territories -- land farther into China, beyond the Kowloon Peninsula.

That lease began in 1898, and expired on July 1, 1997.

Ch'ing China: The Opium Wars

The Opium War, also called the Anglo-Chinese War, was the most humiliating defeat China ever suffered. In European history, it is perhaps the most sordid, base, and vicious event in European history, possibly, just possibly, overshadowed by the excesses of the Third Reich in the twentieth century.

By the 1830's, the English had become the major drug-trafficking criminal organization in the world; very few drug cartels of the twentieth century can even touch the England of the early nineteenth century in sheer size of criminality. Growing opium in India, the East India Company shipped *tons* of opium into Canton which it traded for Chinese manufactured goods and for tea. This trade had produced, quite literally, a country filled with drug addicts, as opium

parlors proliferated all throughout China in the early part of the nineteenth century. This trafficking, it should be stressed, was a criminal activity after 1836, but the British traders generously bribed Canton officials in order to keep the opium traffic flowing. The effects on Chinese society were devastating. In fact, there are few periods in Chinese history that approach the early nineteenth century in terms of pure human misery and tragedy. In an effort to stem the tragedy, the imperial government made opium illegal in 1836 and began to aggressively close down the opium dens.

Lin Tse-hsü

The key player in the prelude to war was a brilliant and highly moral official named Lin Tse-hsü. Deeply concerned about the opium menace, he maneuvered himself into being appointed Imperial Commissioner at Canton. His express purpose was to cut off the opium trade at its source by rooting out corrupt officials and cracking down on British trade in the drug.

He took over in March of 1839 and within two months, absolutely invulnerable to bribery and corruption, he had taken action against Chinese merchants and Western traders and shut down all the traffic in opium. He destroyed all the existing stores of opium and, victorious in his war against opium, he composed a letter to Queen Victoria of England requesting that the British cease all opium trade. His letter included the argument that, since Britain had made opium trade and consumption illegal in England because of its harmful effects, it should not export that harm to other countries. Trade, according to Lin, should only be in beneficial objects.

To be fair to England, if the only issue on the table were opium, the English probably (just probably) would have acceded to Lin's request. The British, however, had been nursing several grievances against China, and Lin's take-no-prisoners enforcement of Chinese laws combined to outrage the British against his decapitation of the opium trade. The most serious bone of contention involved treaty relations; because the British refused to submit to the emperor, there were no formal treaty relations between the two countries. The most serious problem precipitated by this lack of treaty relations involved the relationship between foreigners and Chinese law. The British, on principle, refused to hand over British citizens to a Chinese legal system that they felt was vicious and barbaric. The Chinese, equally principled, demanded that all foreigners who were accused of committing crimes on Chinese soil were to be dealt with solely by Chinese officials. In many ways, this was the real issue of the Opium War. In addition to enforcing the opium laws, Lin aggressively pursued foreign nationals accused of crimes.

The English, despite Lin's eloquent letter, refused to back down from the opium trade. In response, Lin threatened to cut off all trade with England and expel all English from China. Thus began the Opium War.

The War

War broke out when Chinese junks attempted to turn back English merchant vessels in November of 1839; although this was a low-level conflict, it inspired the English to send warships in June of 1840. The Chinese, with old-style weapons and artillery, were no match for the British gunships, which ranged up and down the coast shooting at forts and fighting on land. The Chinese were equally unprepared for the technological superiority of the British land armies, and suffered continual defeats. Finally, in 1842, the Chinese were forced to agree to an ignominious peace under the Treaty of Nanking.

The treaty imposed on the Chinese was weighted entirely to the British side. Its first and fundamental demand was for British "extraterritoriality"; all British citizens would be subjected to British, not Chinese, law if they committed any crime on Chinese soil. The British would no longer have to pay tribute to the imperial administration in order to trade with China, and they gained five open ports for British trade: Canton, Shanghai, Foochow, Ningpo, and Amoy. No restrictions were placed on British trade, and, as a consequence, opium trade more than doubled in the three decades following the Treaty of Nanking. The treaty also established England as the "most favored nation" trading with China; this clause granted to Britain any trading rights granted to other countries. Two years later, China, against its will, signed similar treaties with France and the United States.

Lin Tse-hsü was officially disgraced for his actions in Canton and was sent to a remote appointment in Turkestan. Of all the imperial officials, however, Lin was the first to realize the momentous lesson of the Opium War. In a series of letters he began to agitate the imperial government to adopt Western technology, arms, and methods of warfare. He was first to see that the war was about technological superiority; his influence, however, had dwindled to nothing, so his admonitions fell on deaf ears.

It wasn't until a second conflict with England that Chinese officials began to take seriously the adoption of Western technologies. Even with the Treaty of Nanking, trade in Canton and other ports remained fairly restricted; the British were incensed by what they felt was clear treaty violations. The Chinese, for their part, were angered at the wholesale export of Chinese nationals to America and the Caribbean to work at what was no better than slave labor. These conflicts came to a head in 1856 in a series of skirmishes that ended in 1860. A second set of treaties further humiliated and weakened the imperial government. The most ignominious of the provisions in these treaties was the complete legalization of opium and the humiliating provision that allowed for the free and unrestricted propagation of Christianity in all regions of China.

The Illustrated Gazetteer of Maritime Countries

China's defeat at the hands of England led to the publication of the *Illustrated Gazetteer of Maritime Countries* by Wei Yüan (1794-1856). The *Gazetteer* marks the first landmark event in the modernization of China. Wei Yüan, a distinguished but minor official, argued in the *Gazetteer* that the Europeans had developed technologies and methods of warfare in their ceaseless and barbaric quest for power, profit, and material wealth. Civilization, represented by China, was in danger of falling to the technological superiority of the Western powers. Because China is a peaceful and civilized nation, it can overcome the West only if it learns and matches the technology and techniques of the West. The purpose of the *Gazetteer* was to disseminate knowledge about the Europeans, their technologies, their methods of warfare, and their selfish anarchy to learned officials. It is a landmark event in Chinese history, for it was the first systematic attempt to educate the Chinese in Western technologies and culture. This drive for modernization, begun by Lin Tse-hsü and perpetuated by Wei Yüan would gain momentum and emerge as the basis for the "Self-Strengthening" from 1874 to 1895.

The Opium War and Foreign Encroachment

Two things happened in the eighteenth century that made it difficult for England to balance its trade with the East. First, the British became a nation of tea drinkers and the demand for Chinese tea rose astronomically. It is estimated that the average London worker spent five percent of his or her total household budget on tea. Second, northern Chinese merchants began to ship Chinese cotton from the interior to the south to compete with the Indian cotton that Britain had used to help pay for its tea consumption habits. To prevent a trade imbalance, the British tried to sell more of their own products to China, but there was not much demand for heavy woolen fabrics in a country accustomed to either cotton padding or silk.

The only solution was to increase the amount of Indian goods to pay for these Chinese luxuries, and increasingly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the item provided to China was Bengal opium. With greater opium supplies had naturally come an increase in demand and usage throughout the country, in spite of repeated prohibitions by the Chinese government and officials. The British did all they could to increase the trade: They bribed officials, helped the Chinese work out elaborate smuggling schemes to get the opium into China's interior, and distributed free samples of the drug to innocent victims.

The cost to China was enormous. The drug weakened a large percentage of the population (some estimate that 10 percent of the population regularly used opium by the late nineteenth century), and silver began to flow out of the country to pay for the opium. Many of the economic problems China faced later were either directly or indirectly traced to the opium trade. The government debated about whether to legalize the drug through a government monopoly like that on salt, hoping to barter Chinese goods in return for opium. But since the Chinese were fully aware of the harms of addiction, in 1838 the emperor decided to send one of his most able officials, Lin Tse-hsu (Lin Zexu, 1785-1850), to Canton (Guangzhou) to do whatever necessary to end the traffic forever.

Lin was able to put his first two proposals into effect easily. Addicts were rounded up, forcibly treated, and taken off the habit, and domestic drug dealers were harshly punished. His third objective — to confiscate foreign stores and force foreign merchants to sign pledges of good conduct, agreeing never to trade in opium and to be punished by Chinese law if ever found in violation — eventually brought war. Opinion in England was divided: Some British did indeed feel morally uneasy about the trade, but they were overruled by those who wanted to increase England's China trade and teach the arrogant Chinese a good lesson. Western military weapons, including percussion lock muskets, heavy artillery, and paddlewheel gunboats, were far superior to China's. Britain's troops had recently been toughened in the Napoleonic wars, and Britain could muster garrisons, warships, and provisions from its nearby colonies in Southeast Asia and India. The result was a disaster for the Chinese. By the summer of 1842 British ships were victorious and were even preparing to shell the old capital, Nanking (Nanjing), in central China. The emperor therefore had no choice but to accept the British demands and sign a peace agreement. This agreement, the first of the "unequal treaties," opened China to the West and marked the beginning of Western exploitation of the nation.

Other humiliating defeats followed in what one historian has called China's "treaty century" (major aspects of the so-called "unequal treaties" were not formally voided until 1943). In 1843, France and the United States, and Russia in 1858, negotiated treaties similar to England's Nanking (Nanjing) Treaty, including a provision for extraterritoriality, whereby foreign nationals in China were immune from Chinese law. To compel a reluctant China to shift from its traditional tribute based foreign relations to treaty relations, Europeans fought a second war with China from 1858-1860, and the concluding Treaty of Tientsin (Tianjin) and Convention of Peking (Beijing) increased China's semi-colonial status. More ports were open to foreign residence and trade, and foreigners, especially missionaries, were allowed free movement and business anywhere in the country.

Conflicts for the rest of the century wrung more humiliating concessions from China: with Russia over claims in China's far west and northeast in 1850 and 1860, with England over access to the upper reaches of the Yangtze River in 1876, with France over northern Vietnam in 1884, with Japan over its claims to Korea and northeast China in 1895, and with many foreign powers after 1897 which demanded "spheres of

influence," especially for constructing railroads and mines. In 1900, an international army suppressed the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion in northern China, destroying much of Beijing in the process. Each of these defeats brought more foreign demands, greater indemnities that China had to repay, more foreign presence along the coast, and more foreign participation in China's political and economic life. Little wonder that many in China were worried by the century's end that China was being sliced up "like a melon."

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Letter of Advice to Queen Victoria

Background: *Lin Tse-Hsu (1785-1850) was the Chinese Commissioner in Canton whose actions precipitated the Opium Wars (1839- 1842). Although opium was used in China for centuries, it was not until the opening of the tea trade to Dutch and British merchants that China was able to import large quantities of the drug. By the early nineteenth century opium was the principal product that the English East India Company traded in China and opium addiction was becoming a widespread social problem. When the emperor's own son died of an overdose, he decided to put an end to the trade. Lin Tse-Hsu was sent to Canton, the chief trading port of the East India Company, with instructions to negotiate an end to the importation of opium into China. The English merchants were uncooperative, so he seized their stores of opium. This led to immediate military action. The Chinese were decisively defeated and had to cede to a humiliating treaty that legalized the opium trade. As a result commissioner Lin was dismissed from office and sent into exile. Lin Tse-Hsu's "Letter of Advice to Queen Victoria" was written before the outbreak of the Opium Wars. It was a remarkably frank document, especially given the usual highly stylized language of Chinese diplomacy. There remains some question whether Queen Victoria ever read the letter.*

A communication: magnificently our great Emperor soothes and pacifies China and the foreign countries, regarding all with the same kindness. If there is profit, then he shares it with the peoples of the world; if there is harm, then he removes it on behalf of the world. This is because he takes the mind of heaven and earth as his mind. The kings of your honorable country by a tradition handed down from generation to generation have always been noted for their politeness and submissiveness. We have read your successive tributary memorials saying, "In general our countrymen who go to trade in China have always received His Majesty the Emperor's gracious treatment and equal justice." and so on. Privately we are delighted with the way in which the honorable rulers of your countif deeply understand the grand principles and are grateful for the Celestial grace. For this reason the Celestial Court in soothing those from afar has redoubled its polite and kind treatment. The profit from trade has been enjoyed by them continuously for two hundred years. This is the source from which your country has become known for its wealth. But after a long period of commercial intercourse, there appear among the crowd of barbarians both good persons and bad, unevenly. Consequently there are those who smuggle opium to seduce the Chinese people and so cause the spread of the poison to all provinces. Such persons who only care to profit themselves, and disregard their harm to others, are not tolerated by the laws of heaven and are unanimously hated by human beings. His Majesty the Emperor, upon hearing of this, is in a towering rage. He has especially sent me, his commissioner, to come to Kwangtung, and together with the governor-general and governor jointly to investigate and settle this matter. All those people in China who sell opium or smoke opium should receive the death penalty. We trace the crime of those barbarians who through the years have been selling opium, then the deep harm they have wrought and the great profit they have usurped should fundamentally justify their execution according to law. We take into to consideration, however, the fact that the various barbarians have still known how to repent their crimes and return to their allegiance to us by taking the 20,183 chests of opium from their store ships and petitioning us, through their consular officer [superintendent of trade], Elliot, to receive it. It has been entirely destroyed and this has been faithfully reported to the Throne in several memorials by this commissioner and his colleagues. Fortunately we have received a specially extended favor Born His Majesty the Emperor, who considers that for those who voluntarily surrender there are still some circumstances to paliate their crime, and so for the time being he has magnanimously excused them from punishment. But as for those who again violate the opium prohibition, it is difficult for the law to pardon them repeatedly. Having established new regulations, we presume that the ruler of your honorable country, who takes delight in our culture and whose disposition is inclined towards us, must be able to instruct the various barbarians to observe the law with care. It is only necessary to explain to them the advantages and advantages and then they will know that the legal code of the Celestial Court must be absolutely obeyed with awe. We find your country is sixty or seventy thousand li [three li make one mile, ordinarily] from China Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade for the purpose of making a great profit The wealth of China is used to

profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit to an extreme, they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience? I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden by your country; that is because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. Since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on to the harm of other countries -- how much less to China! Of all that China exports to foreign countries, there is not a single thing which is not beneficial to people: they are of benefit when eaten, or of benefit when used, or of benefit when resold: all are beneficial. Is there a single article from China which has done any harm to foreign countries? Take tea and rhubarb, for example; the foreign countries cannot get along for a single day without them. If China cuts off these benefits with no sympathy for those who are to suffer, then what can the barbarians rely upon to keep themselves alive? Moreover the woolens, camlets, and longells [i.e., textiles] of foreign countries cannot be woven unless they obtain Chinese silk. If China, again, cuts off this beneficial export, what profit can the barbarians expect to make? As for other foodstuffs, beginning with candy, ginger, cinnamon, and so forth, and articles for use, beginning with silk, satin, chinaware, and so on, all the things that must be had by foreign countries are innumerable. On the other hand, articles coming from the outside to China can only be used as toys. We can take them or get along without them. Since they are not needed by China, what difficulty would there be if we closed our the frontier and stopped the trade? Nevertheless, our Celestial Court lets tea, silk, and other goods be shipped without limit and circulated everywhere without begrudging it in the slightest. This is for no other reason but to share the benefit with the people of the whole world. The goods from China carried away by your country not only supply your own consumption and use, but also can be divided up and sold to other countries, producing a triple profit. Even if you do not sell opium, you still have this threefold profit. How can you bear to go further, selling products injurious to others in order to fulfill your insatiable desire?

Suppose there were people from another country who carried opium for sale to England and seduced your people into buying and smoking it; certainly your honorable ruler would deeply hate it and be bitterly aroused. We have heard heretofore that your honorable ruler is kind and benevolent. Naturally you would not wish to give unto others what you yourself do not want. We have also heard that the ships coming to Canton have all had regulations promulgated and given to them in which it is stated that it is not permitted to carry contraband goods. This indicates that the administrative orders of your honorable rule have been originally strict and clear. Only because the trading ships are numerous, heretofore perhaps they have not been examined with care. Now after this communication has been dispatched and you have clearly understood the strictness of the prohibitory laws of the Celestial Court, certainly you will not let your subjects dare again to violate the law.

We have further learned that in London, the capital of your honorable rule, and in Scotland, Ireland, and other places, originally no opium has been produced. Only in several places of India under your control such as Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Patna, Benares, and Malwa has opium been planted from hill to hill, and ponds have been opened for its manufacture. For months and years work is continued in order to accumulate the poison. The obnoxious odor ascends, irritating heaven and frightening the spirits. Indeed you, O King, can eradicate the opium plant in these places, hoe over the fields entirely, and sow in its stead the five grains [millet, barley, wheat, etc.]. Anyone who dares again attempt to plant and manufacture opium should be severely punished. This will really be a great, benevolent government policy that will increase the common weal and get rid of evil. For this, Heaven must support you and the spirits must bring you good fortune, prolonging your old age and extending your descendants. All will depend on this act. As for the barbarian merchants who come to China, their food and drink and habitation, all received by the gracious favor of our Celestial Court. Their accumulated wealth is all benefit given with pleasure by our Celestial Court. They spend rather few days in their own country but more time in Canton. To digest clearly the legal penalties as an aid to instruction has been a valid principle in all ages. Suppose a man of another country comes to England to trade, he still has to obey the English laws; how much more should he obey in China the laws of the Celestial Dynasty?

Now we have set up regulations governing the Chinese people. He who sells opium shall receive the death penalty and he who smokes it also the death penalty. Now consider this: if the barbarians do not bring opium, then how can the Chinese people resell it, and how can they smoke it? The fact is that the wicked barbarians beguile the Chinese people into a death trap. How then can we grant life only to these barbarians? He who takes the life of even one person still has to atone for it with his own life; yet is the harm done by opium limited to the taking of one life only? Therefore in the

new regulations, in regard to those barbarians who bring opium to China, the penalty is fixed at decapitation or strangulation. This is what is called getting rid a harmful thing on behalf of mankind.

Moreover we have found that in the middle of the second month of this year [April 9] Consul [Superintendent] Elliott of your nation, because the opium prohibition law was very stern and severe, petitioned for an extension of the time limit. He requested an extension of five months for India and its adjacent harbours and related territories, and ten months for England proper, after which they would act in conformity with the new regulations. Now we, the commissioner and others, have memorialized and have received the extraordinary Celestial grace of His Majesty the Emperor, who has redoubled his consideration and compassion. All those who from the period of the coming one year (from England) or six months (from India) bring opium to China by mistake, but who voluntarily confess and completely surrender their opium, shall be exempt from their punishment. After this limit of time, if there are still those who bring opium to China then they will plainly have committed a wilful violation and shall at once be executed according to law, with absolutely no clemency or pardon. This may be called the height of kindness and the perfection of justice.

Our Celestial Dynasty rules over and supervises the myriad states, and surely possesses unfathomable spiritual dignity. Yet the Emperor cannot bear to execute people without having first tried to reform them by instruction. Therefore he especially promulgates these fixed regulations. The barbarian merchants of your country, if they wish to do business for a prolonged period, are required to obey our statues respectfully and to cut off permanently the source of opium. They must by no means try to test the effectiveness of the law with their lives. May you, O King, check your wicked and sift your wicked people before they come to China, in order to guarantee the peace of your nation, to show further the sincerity of your politeness and submissiveness, and to let the two countries enjoy together the blessings of peace How fortunate, how fortunate indeed! After receiving this dispatch will you immediately give us a prompt reply regarding the details and circumstances of your cutting off the opium traffic. be sure not to put this off. The above is what has to be communicated.

From Ssu Yu Teng and John Fairbank, *China's Response to the West*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), repr. in Mark A. Kishlansky, ed., *Sources of World History, Volume II*, (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995), pp. 266-69

The Taiping Rebellion

Chinese Cultural Studies: The Taiping Rebellion, 1851-1864

Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864) was the son of a farmer and an aspiring Chinese bureaucrat. He came under the influence of Christian missionaries, and reached the conclusion that he was the younger son of Jesus sent to found the Heavenly Kingdom on earth. Faced with the collapse of Qing dynasty rule (under Western onslaught), Hung tapped into the deep millenarianism of the Chinese peasantry (previously expressed in Buddhist terms) and began a rebellion - the Taiping Rebellion ("Taiping tien-kuo" means the "Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace").

There were many other revolts, but this was by far the most serious. Lasting from 1851 to 1864 it took control of large swerves of south and central China, including the southern capital of Nanking. There a theocratic military government was established.

Although it was millenarian in form, the Taiping leaders adopted many policies which would later become the marks of modernizers in China: prohibition of opium smoking, gambling, the use of tobacco and wine, polygamy, the sale of slaves, and prostitution. They promoted the equality of the sexes: they abolished foot-binding and appointed women as administrators and officers in the Taiping army. They also tried to abolish the private ownership of land and property, and they developed a program for the equal distribution of land.

The following is an excerpt from the basic document of the Taiping Kingdom, called "The Land System of the Heavenly Kingdom." published in 1853.

All fields are to be divided into nine grades: every *mou* [6.6 *mou* equal one acre] of land, which during the two seasons, both early and late, can produce 1,200 catties [of grain] shall be ranked as a superior field of the first class; every *mou* that produces 1,100 catties as a superior field of the second class; and every *mou* that produces 1,000 catties as a superior field of the third class. Every *mou* that produces 900 catties shall be considered as a medium field of the first class; every *mou* that produces 800 catties as a medium field of the second class; and every *mou* that produces 700 catties as a medium field of the third class. Every *mou* that produces 600 catties shall be considered as an inferior field of the first class; every *mou* that produces 500 catties as an inferior field of the second class; and every *mou* that produces 400 catties as an inferior field of the third class. One *mou* of superior field of the first class shall be considered equal to a *mou* and one tenth of a superior field of the second class, and to a *mou* and two tenths of a superior field of the third class; also to a *mou* and three and half tenths of a medium field of the first class, to a *mou* and five tenths of a medium field of the second class, and to a *mou* and seven and half tenths of a medium field of the third class; also to two *mou* of an inferior field of the first class, to two *mou* and four tenths of an inferior field of the second class, and to three *mou* of an inferior field of the third class.

The division of land must be according to the number of individuals, whether male or female; calculating upon the number of individuals in a household, if they be numerous, than the amount of land will be larger, and if few, smaller; and it shall be a mixture of the nine classes. If there are six persons in a family, then for three there shall be good land and for three poorer land, and of good and poor each shall have half. All the fields in the empire are to be cultivated by all the people alike. If the land is deficient in one place, then the people must be removed to another, and if the land is deficient in another, then the people must be removed to this place. All the fields throughout the empire, whether of abundant or deficient harvest, shall be taken as a whole: if this place is deficient, then the harvest of that abundant place must be removed to relieve it, and if that place is deficient, then the harvest of this abundant place must be removed in order to relieve the deficient place; thus, all the people in the empire may together enjoy the abundant happiness of the Heavenly Father, Supreme Lord and Great God. There being fields, let all cultivate them; there being food, let all eat; there being clothes, let all be dressed; there being money, let all use it, so that nowhere does inequality exist, and no man is not well fed and clothed.

All men and women, every individual of sixteen years and upwards, shall receive land, twice as much as those of fifteen years of age and under. Thus, those sixteen of years of age and above shall receive a *mou* of superior land of the first class, and those of fifteen years and under shall receive half that amount, five tenths of a *mou* of superior land of the first class; again, if those of sixteen years and above receive three *mou* of inferior land of the third class, than those of fifteen years and below shall receive half that amount, one and one half *mou* of inferior land of the third class.

Throughout the empire the mulberry tree is to be planted close to every wall, so that all women may engage in rearing silkworms, spinning the silk, and making garments. Throughout the empire every family should keep five hens and two sows, which must not be allowed to miss their proper season. At the time of harvest, every sergeant shall direct the corporals to see to it that of the twentyfive families under his charge each individual has a sufficient supply of food, and aside from the new grain each may receive, the remainder must be deposited in the public granary. Of wheat, pulse, hemp; flax, cloth, silk, fowls, dogs, etc., and money, the same is true; for the whole empire is the universal family of our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God. . . For every twentyfive families there must be established one public granary, and one church where the sergeant must reside. Whenever there are marriages, or births, or funerals, all may go to the public granary; but a limit must be observed, and not a cash be used beyond what is necessary. Thus, every family which celebrates a marriage or a birth will be given one thousand cash and a hundred cattles of grain....

In every circle of twentyfive families, the work of the potter, the blacksmith, the carpenter, the mason, and other artisans must all be performed by the corporal and privates; when free from husbandry they are to attend to these matters. Every sergeant, in superintending marriages and funeral events in the twentyfive families, should in every case offer a eucharistic sacrifice to our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God; all corrupt ceremonies of former times are abolished.

In every circle of twentyfive families, all young boys must go to church every day, where the sergeant is to teach them to read the Old Testament and the New Testament, as well as the book of proclamations of the true ordained Sovereign. Every Sabbath the corporals must lead the men and women to the church, where the males and females are to sit in separate rows. There they will listen to sermons, sing praises, and offer sacrifices to our Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God....

In the creation of an army, for each 13,156 families there must first be a corps general; next there must be five colonels under the command of the corps general; next there must be five captains under the command of each colonel, altogether twentyfive captains; next each of the twentyfive captains must have under his command five lieutenants, altogether 125 lieutenants; next each of the 125 lieutenants must have under his command four sergeants, altogether 500 sergeants; next each of the 500 sergeants must have under his command five corporals, altogether 2,500 corporals; next each of the 2,500 corporals must have under his command four privates, altogether 10,000 privates, the entire army numbering altogether 13,156 men.

After the creation of an army, should the number of families increase, with the increase of five families there shall be an additional corporal; with the increase of twentysix families there shall be an additional sergeant; with the increase of 105 families there shall be an additional lieutenant; with the increase of 526 families there shall be an additional captain; with the increase of 2,631 families there shall be an additional colonel; with the total increase of 13,156 families there shall be an additional corps general. Before a new corps general is appointed, the colonel and subordinate officers shall remain under the command of the old corps general; with the appointment of a corps general they must be handed over to the command of the new corps general.

Within [the court] and without, all the various officials and people must go every Sabbath to hear the expounding of the Holy Bible, reverently offer their sacrifices, and worship and praise the Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God. On every seventh seven, the forty ninth day, the Sabbath, the colonel, captains, and lieutenants shall go in turn to the churches in which reside the sergeants under their command and expound the Holy books, instruct the people, examine whether they obey the Commandments and orders or disobey the Commandments and orders, and whether they are diligent or slothful. On the first seventh seven, the forty ninth day, the Sabbath, the colonel shall go to a certain sergeant's church, on the second seventh seven, the forty ninth day, the Sabbath, the colonel shall then go to another sergeant's church, visiting them

all in order, and after having gone the round he must begin again. The captains and lieutenants shall do the same.

Each man throughout the empire who has a wife, sons, and daughters amounting to three or four months, or five, six, seven, eight, or nine mouths, must give up one to be a soldier. With regard to the others, the widowers, widows, orphaned, and childless, the disabled and sick, they shall all be exempted from military service and issued provisions from the public granaries for their sustenance.

Throughout the empire all officials must every Sabbath, according to rank and position, reverently present sacrificial animals and offerings, sacrifice and worship, and praise the Heavenly Father, the Supreme Lord and Great God. They must also expound the Holy books; should any dare to neglect this duty, they shall be reduced to husbandmen. Respect this.

From Franz Michael, *The Taiping Rebellion: History and Documents, vol. 2, Documents and Comments* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1971), pp. 313315, 319320.

Ch'ing China: The Taiping Rebellion

While the Chinese entered into conflict with Europe and European culture during the Opium War and after, it was also convulsed by a number of rebellions in mid-century. With rebellion in Nien (1853-1868), several Muslim rebellions in the southwest (1855-1873) and northwest (1862-1877), and, especially, the Taiping rebellion, the consequences for China during this period were devastating. In the Taiping rebellion alone, which lasted for twenty years, almost twenty to thirty million died as a direct result of the conflict. In fact, the period from 1850 to 1873 saw, as a result of rebellion, drought, and famine, the population of China drop by over sixty million people. Along with humiliating defeats at the hands of European powers, the mid-nineteenth century in China was truly tragic.

The Taiping rebellion, though, is, as an internal disturbance, and odd compliment to the conflicts with the west. It combined both European and Chinese cultural patterns in a unique and volatile mix. The person in which this strange mix fermented was Hung Hsiu-ch'üan (1813-1864), the leader of the rebellion.

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan

Hung Hsiu-ch'üan was the son of a poor farmer near Canton. He was a promising young student, but repeatedly failed the civil service examination in Canton. After one such failure, he overheard a Christian missionary speaking and brought home several Christian treatises. The next year he again failed the exam and, according to some historians, had a nervous breakdown. Whatever happened, Hung had several visions in which an old man told him that people had stopped worshipping him and were worshipping demons; in another, the man appointed him as a slayer of demons. Hung believed that the man in the visions was God the Father and that a younger, middle aged man that visited him in visions was Jesus Christ, his Elder Brother. He himself was the Younger Brother and had been sent by God to earth in order to eradicate demons and demon worship.

Hung, however, did nothing with these visions until seven years later when he began to study with Issachar J. Roberts, a Southern Baptist minister who taught him everything he would know about Christianity. With the Christianity of Roberts, Hung, some relatives, and some followers formed a new religious sect, the God Worshippers, that dedicated itself to the destruction of idols in the region around Canton.

The movement attracted followers for a variety of reasons. Western historians argue that the famines of the 1840's inspired the Chinese to join various movements that were successfully feeding and taking care of themselves. Chinese historians stress the anti-Manchu rhetoric of Hung's early movement. While the God Worshippers were dedicated to the destruction of idols and the stamping out of demon worship, it's clear that they felt that the Manchu rulers were the primary propagators of demon worship. In Hung's early philosophy,

he seems to have arrived at the conclusion that the overthrow of the Manchus would help bring in the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

The movement, however, did not become open revolt until the government started to harass the God Worshippers systematically. Combined with his belief that the Kingdom of Heaven would be established on the ruins of the Manchu government, the God Worshippers were also militantly organized to destroy and eliminate demon worship. In the late 1840's, Hung reorganized his movement into a military organization. He and other leaders systematically began to build up a treasury (all believers had to give their property to the movement), consolidate forces, and lay up a store of weapons. In December of 1850, Hung was attacked by government forces and, since he had spent so much time preparing for war, he successfully turned back the attack. In 1851, Hung declared that a new kingdom had been established, the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace; he himself was the Heavenly King and the era of the Taiping, or "Great Peace," had begun.

The Kingdom of Heavenly Peace was a theocratic state with the Heavenly King as Absolute Ruler. Its objective, as implied by its name, was the achievement of peace and prosperity in China with all people worshipping the one and only one god. It consisted of a single hierarchy which undertook all administrative, religious, and military duties. The movement was founded on a radical economic reform program in which all wealth was equally distributed to all members of society. Taiping society itself would be a classless society with no distinctions between people; all members of Taiping society were "brothers" and "sisters" with all the attendant duties and obligations traditionally associated with those relationships in Chinese society. Women were the social and economic equal of men; many administrative posts in the new Kingdom were assigned to women. This social and economic reform, combined with its passionate anti-Manchu nationalism, made the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace a magnet for all the Chinese suffering under the dislocations and disasters of the mid-century.

The Rebellion

From a military standpoint, the rebellion got off to an impressive start. The army itself was uncannily disciplined; after elaborate initiation rituals, Taiping believers became fanatically disciplined and devoted soldiers, willing to die without hesitation in God's cause against demonic forces. The army of the Taipings roared northward through the central Yangtze valley to Nanking. In many ways, however, this dramatic progress of the Taipings was no progress at all and explains why they lost so easily despite their impressive start. The central reason they advanced so quickly was that they avoided large urban centers and so encountered little resistance. When they conquered a territory, they made no effort to consolidate the conquest by setting up an administrative mechanism, but instead roared on northwards. There was no room for disagreement in the military hierarchy; not only did the Heavenly King gain his authority directly from God, but the military generals themselves claimed to be guided by God the Father in a series of visions. There was little room, then, for serious strategic thinking in this environment.

The Taipings occupied Nanking in March of 1853; they renamed the city, T'ien-ching, or "Heavenly Capital." From T'ien-ching, they attacked Beijing, but their army, after making rapid progress north, was defeated. For the next ten years, the Taipings occupied themselves with conquering Western territories and fighting continuously to maintain their territory in the central Yangtze valley. The rebellion swung from one side to another, now a defeat, now a victory, now a defeat.

Under the pressures of war and an inefficient administration, the Heavenly Kingdom of Peace slowly began to unravel. The leaders of the Kingdom failed to consolidate their authority in conquered territories, preferring instead to rule over major cities. In reality, then, Taiping rule only extended over major cities in the conquered territories rather than the territories themselves. The Taipings had very few competent officials; efforts to recruit scholar-officials were usually unsuccessful since most educated Chinese were deeply disturbed by the theocratic nature of the state and the lack of education among its leaders.

Most significantly, the Taiping administration began to disintegrate when Hung himself withdrew from active participation in administrative and military affairs. Believing that the Heavenly King should rule only by his divine virtue and not by active engagement in politics, Hung seems, in reality, to have grown steadily more unbalanced. Rather than dedicating himself to divine virtue, he plunged into the sensual pleasures of the palace and the sexual pleasures of the harem of women he had collected around himself. Hung's withdrawal from Taiping administration sent cracks all through the Taiping administration.

By 1864, the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace was coming to an end. Chinese forces had threatened T'ien-ching for months when Hung's central general fled to the south. Hung himself believed that God would defend the Taipings, but in June, 1864, he seems to have lost his certainty of God's protection and poisoned himself. The imperial forces discovered his body, wrapped in the color of the emperor, yellow, wallowing in a sewer beneath the city. At a cost of nearly thirty million lives over a period of twenty years, the Heavenly Peace had come to an end.

The Open Door Policy

Map of Spheres of Influence in China



The Open Door Notes (1899-1900)

By the late 19th century, Japan and the European powers had carved much of China into separate spheres of influence, inside of which each held economic dominance. The U.S., coming late to imperialism, held no sphere of influence in China. In 1899 U.S. Secretary of State John Hay proposed an "Open Door" policy in China in which all nations would have equal trading and development rights throughout all of China. Such a policy would put all the imperialist powers on equal footing in China and would limit the advantages of having ones own sphere of influence. As you read, think about how the Open Door policy might be seen as altruistic, and think about how it reflects American political and economic self-interest.

Earnestly desirous to remove any cause of irritation and to insure at the same time to the commerce of all nations in China... [the United States urges all nations claiming a sphere of influence in China to declare] that

[all nations] shall enjoy perfect equality of treatment for their commerce and navigation within such spheres.... Within its respective sphere [a nation]... ?

First. Will in no way interfere with any treaty or port or any vested interest [of another nation] within [its own] sphere [of influence]... in China.

Second. That the Chinese [tariff]... shall apply to all merchandise landed or shipped to all such ports... within said sphere [of influence]... no matter what nationality it may belong, and that duties so leviable shall be collected by the Chinese government.

Third. That [a nation] will levy no higher harbor dues on vessels of another nationality frequenting any port in such sphere that shall be levied on vessels of its own nationality, and no higher railroad charges over lines... within its sphere on merchandise belonging to citizens or subjects of other nationalities, transported through such sphere than shall be levied on similar merchandise belonging to its own nationals transported over equal distances....

[The United States seeks] the adoption of measures ensuring the benefits of equality of treatment of all foreign trade throughout China....

We adhere to the policy... of peace with the Chinese nation, of furtherance of lawful commerce, and of protection of lives and property of our citizens by all means.... [We are committed to] affording all possible protection everywhere in China to American life and property;... guarding and protecting all legitimate American interests;... [and] aiding to prevent a spread of disorders [in China]....

The policy of the Government of the United States is to seek a solution which may bring about permanent safety and peace to China, preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity, protect all rights guaranteed to friendly powers by treaty and international law, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire.

The Open Door Policy: Doing Business in China

China was in political and economic disarray as the end of the 19th century approached. The giant was not recognized as a sovereign nation by the major powers, who were busy elbowing one another for trading privileges and plotting how the country could be partitioned. The imperial nations sought spheres of influence and claimed extraterritorial rights in China. The United States took Far Eastern matters more seriously after the Spanish-American War, when they came into possession of the Philippines. In the fall of 1898, President McKinley stated his desire for the creation of an "open door" that would allow all trading nations access to the Chinese market. The following year, Secretary of State John Hay sought a formal endorsement of the concept by circulating diplomatic notes among the major powers, enabling the secretary to be credited with authoring the Open Door policy.

Hay's proposal for an Open Door Policy called for the establishment of equal trading rights to all nations in all parts of China and for recognition of Chinese territorial integrity (meaning that the country should not be carved up). The impact of such an Open Door Policy would be to put all of the imperial nations on an equal footing and minimize the power of those nations with existing spheres of influence.

No nation formally agreed to Hay's policy; each used the other nations' reluctance to endorse the Open Door as an excuse for their own inaction. An undeterred Hay simply announced that agreement had been reached. Only Russia and Japan voiced displeasure.

On the surface, it appeared that the United States had advanced a reform viewpoint, but the truth was otherwise. The U.S. had no sphere of influence in China, but had long maintained an active trade there. If other nations were to partition China, the United States would likely be excluded from future commercial activities. In short, Hay was simply trying to protect the prospects of American businessmen and investors.

Challenges to the Open Door policy would be mounted frequently in the ensuing years, including the Boxer Rebellion of 1900 in which Chinese nationalists resorted to armed opposition in an attempt to end foreign occupation of their country; Japanese incursions into Manchuria following the Russo-Japanese War; and the "21 Demands" levied by Japan on China in 1915.

An effort was made to shore up the Open Door in 1921-22 at the Washington Naval Conference, but a challenge was again mounted by the Japanese in the 1930s as they expanded their control in Manchuria.

China would not be recognized as a sovereign state until after World War II.

Boxer Rebellion

Boxer Rebellion, officially supported peasant uprising of 1900 that attempted to drive all foreigners from China. "Boxers" was a name that foreigners gave to a Chinese secret society known as the Yihequan ("Righteous and Harmonious Fists"). The group practiced certain boxing and calisthenic rituals in the belief that this made them invulnerable. It was thought to be an offshoot of the Eight Trigrams Society (Baguajiao), which had fomented rebellions against the Qing dynasty in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Their original aim was the destruction of the dynasty and also of the Westerners who had a privileged position in China.

In the late 19th century, because of growing economic impoverishment, a series of unfortunate natural calamities, and unbridled foreign aggression in the area, the Boxers began to increase their strength in the provinces of North China. In 1898 conservative, antiforeign forces won control of the Chinese government and persuaded the Boxers to drop their opposition to the Qing dynasty and unite with it in destroying the foreigners. The governor of the province of Shandong began to enroll Boxer bands as local militia groups, changing their name from Yihequan to Yihetuan ("Righteous and Harmonious Militia"), which sounded semiofficial. Many of the Qing officials at this time apparently began to believe that Boxer rituals actually did make them impervious to bullets, and, in spite of protests by the Western powers, they and Cixi, the ruling empress dowager, continued to encourage the group. Christian missionary activities helped provoke the Boxers; Christian converts flouted traditional Chinese ceremonies and family relations; and missionaries pressured local officials to side with Christian converts—who were often from the lower classes of Chinese society—in local lawsuits and property disputes. By late 1899 the Boxers were openly attacking Chinese Christians and Western missionaries. By May 1900, Boxer bands were roaming the countryside around the capital at Beijing. Finally, in early June an international relief force of some 2,100 men was dispatched from the northern port of Tianjin to Beijing. On June 13 the empress dowager ordered imperial forces to block the advance of the foreign troops, and the small relief column was turned back. Meanwhile, in Beijing the Boxers burned churches and foreign residences and killed suspected Chinese Christians on sight. On June 17 the foreign powers seized the Dagu forts on the coast in order to restore access from Beijing to Tianjin. The next day the empress dowager ordered that all foreigners be killed. The German minister was murdered, and the other foreign ministers and their families and staff, together with hundreds of Chinese Christians, were besieged in their legation quarters and in the Roman Catholic cathedral in Beijing. Imperial viceroys in the central Yangtze River (Chang Jiang) valley and in South China ignored government orders and suppressed antiforeign outbreaks in their jurisdiction. They thus helped establish the myth that the war was not the policy of the Chinese government but was a result of a native uprising in the northeast, the area to which the disorders were mainly confined.

An international force of some 19,000 troops was assembled, most of the soldiers coming from Japan and Russia but many also from Britain, the United States, France, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. On August 14, 1900, that force finally captured Beijing, relieving the foreigners and Christians besieged there since June 20. While foreign troops looted the capital, the empress dowager and her court fled westward to Xi'an in Shaanxi province, leaving behind a few imperial princes to conduct the negotiations. After extensive discussions, a protocol was finally signed in September 1901, ending the hostilities and providing for reparations to be made to the foreign powers. Perhaps a total of up to 100,000 or more people died in the conflict, although estimates on casualties have varied widely. The great majority of those killed were civilians, including thousands of Chinese Christians and approximately 200 to 250 foreign nationals (mostly Christian missionaries). Some estimates cite about 3,000 military personnel killed in combat, the great bulk of them being Boxers and other Chinese fighters.

"Boxer Rebellion". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*.
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<<https://www.britannica.com/event/Boxer-Rebellion>>.

Ch'ing China: The Boxer Rebellion

Carving up the Melon

When China was defeated by Japan in 1895, European powers responded with a policy they called, "carving up the Chinese melon." Following the partitioning of Africa among European powers, they turned their sights to what they saw as a terminally weak Chinese government. European powers and America began to scramble for what was called "spheres of interest." These spheres of interest involved holding leases for all railway and commercial privileges in various regions. The Russians got Port Arthur, the British got the New Territories around Hong Kong, the Germans got a leasehold in Shantung, and the Americans got nothing. Concentrating largely on the Philippines and Guam, the Americans had missed the Chinese boat and so insisted on an "open door" policy in China in which commercial opportunities were equally available to all European powers and the political and territorial integrity of China remained untouched.

The Boxers

The imperial court responded to this foreign threat by giving aid to various secret societies. Traditionally, secret societies had been formed in opposition to imperial government; as such, they were certainly a threat to the Ch'ing government. However, anti-foreign sentiment had risen so greatly in China that the Empress Dowager believed that the secret societies could be the vanguard in a military expulsion of Europeans. This policy reached its climax in 1900 with the Boxer Rebellion.

The Boxers, or "The Righteous and Harmonious Fists," were a religious society that had originally rebelled against the imperial government in Shantung in 1898. They practiced an animistic magic of rituals and spells which they believed made them impervious to bullets and pain. The Boxers believed that the expulsion of foreign devils would magically renew Chinese society and begin a new golden age. Much of their discontent, however, was focussed on the economic scarcity of the 1890's. They were a passionate and confident group, full of contempt for authority and violent emotions.

In reality, the Boxer rebellion could hardly be classified as either a rebellion or a war against the Europeans. China was largely under the control of regional Governors General; these regional officials ignored the Empress Dowager's instructions and put forth every effort to prevent disorder or any harm coming to foreigners. The Boxer Rebellion, then, was only limited to a few places, but concentrated itself in Beijing. The Western response was swift and severe. Within a couple months, an international force captured and occupied Beijing and forced the imperial government to agree to the most humiliating terms yet: the Boxer Protocol of 1901. Under the Boxer Protocol, European powers got the right to maintain military forces in the capital, thus placing the imperial government more or less under arrest. The Protocols suspended the civil service examination, demanded a huge indemnity to be paid to European powers for the losses they had suffered, and required government officials to be prosecuted for their role in the rebellion. In addition, the Protocols suspended all arms imports into the country.

Reform

The humiliation of the Boxer Protocols set China on new course of reform that dynamically put into place all of the reforms originally proposed by K'ang Yu-wei. In 1901, the education system was reformed to allow the admission of girls and the curriculum was changed from the study of the Classics and Confucian studies to the study of Western mathematics, science, engineering, and geography. The civil service examination was changed to reflect this new curriculum, and in 1905 it was abandoned altogether. The Chinese began to send its youth to Europe and to Japan to study the new sciences, such as economics, and radical new Western modes of thinking started making their way into China, such as Marxism. The military was reorganized under Yuan Shih-k'ai (1859-1916), who adopted Western and Japanese models of military organization and discipline. Key to this new military was the establishment of the military as a career; a new professional officer corps was created built on a new principle: loyalty to one's commander rather than loyalty to the Emperor.

The provincial assemblies that had originally been proposed by K'ang Yu-wei were established in 1909, the year in which the last emperor, Pu Yi, the Hsüan-tung emperor, ascended the throne. A national, democratically elected Consultative Assembly was established in 1910. Although the Assembly was meant to support the imperial court, in reality it was frequently odds with the interests of the imperial government. This is where things stood in 1911 when an uprising began in Szechwan province in the west. Angered at a government plan to nationalize the railways, the uprising soon grew into a national revolution that would end once and for all imperial rule in China. That, however, is a story for another day.