The Opium Wars and European Powers in East Asia
By Walter S. Zapotoczny

At the end of the eighteenth century, the Chinese felt confident in dismissing British requests for changes to the existing system of trade. They had no idea that continued rejection would lead to war with the British and a series of unequal treaties that would force China to discard its traditional worldview and begin accepting a new international order in East Asia. Moreover, Chinese officials did not perceive the British as a serious threat. However, the Chinese traditional forms of military organization and weapons had not changed in centuries. Meanwhile, Britain's industrial revolution fashioned military technology far beyond that of the Chinese forces. By the mid-19th Century, conflicts began between China and the European nations. At the root of these conflicts was money. China had no interest in European goods, resulting in a trade deficit with China. Britain was the most impacted by the deficit. According to Pamela Crossley, "In order to reverse this trend, the British started exporting opium from India and into China. This had the desired effect as soon China began to run a trade deficit with the British." The Chinese government countered by restricting the flow of silver from the country. This action angered British politicians, resulting in two wars (Opium Wars) between Britain and China. The results of these wars would have a lasting effect on China. This paper reveals how China's losses in the Opium Wars affected the increasing authority of European powers in East Asia.

The failure of the Chinese in the first conflict (1839-1842) with the British led to a negotiated settlement. Peace came at a heavy price for the Chinese in the form of the Treaty of Nanjing in August 1842, which destroyed the existing trade system and restructured the nature of China's relations with the West. First, it stipulated that the Chinese government must open a total of five ports to British traders and that each port would have a British diplomatic consul in residence. Second, China gave up the island of Hong Kong to the British. Third, it stipulated that the Chinese government pay the British and indemnity totaling $21 million to cover the cost of the opium and expenses incurred during the fighting.

A supplemental Treaty of the Bogue, signed in October 1843, added more privileges for the British, including the right of British Consuls to try their own subjects for crimes committed in China, a "Most Favored Nation Clause," which meant that any privileges China extended to other Western countries automatically applied to England as well, and fixed customs duties at five percent of the value of the cargo. Soon thereafter, the Americans and the French demanded similar treaties from the Chinese government. Anxious to avoid new conflicts they could ill afford, China agreed and signed separate treaties with these other powers.

The excitement and satisfaction with which the Westerners in China greeted the Opium War and the new treaty system did not last long. Western traders and officials soon found that the opening of five treaty ports did little to satisfy those who desired greater access to Chinese markets. Local authorities in the newly opened port cities dragged their feet on official matters and remained reluctant to accommodate Western merchants. Chinese officials in general

showed little interest in adhering to the terms of the treaty or adopting the diplomatic and commercial practices of the Westerners. As leaders of the Far Eastern trade, the British continued to press for free access to other ports along the China coast and the fabulous wealth they imagined existed in the vast interior. Christian missionaries joined in, hoping to visit cities in the interior in order to proselytize and win converts. British, French and American attempts at treaty revision met with staunch refusal, setting the stage for a second clash between England and China.

The second clash came in October 1856, when Chinese authorities at Guangzhou boarded the vessel *Arrow* and arrested a dozen Chinese crewmembers for acts of piracy. Owned by a Chinese but registered in the British territory of Hong Kong, the seizure of crewmembers from a British vessel provided the pretext for a second Opium War, often called the Arrow War, less than twenty years after the first. Shocked and again defeated, the Chinese government saw little alternative to negotiations with the Westerners.

The resulting Treaty of Tianjin, signed on June 26, 1858, gave the British the right to post a minister in Beijing, opened ten new treaty ports to British ships, allowed the British free navigation of the Yangzi River, and gave British subjects and missionaries the right to travel into the interior of China. The treaty also legalized the opium trade and forced the Chinese to pay a compensation of 5.6 million dollars to cover Britain's war costs. The Chinese government accepted these conditions, and then agreed to similar treaties with the French, Americans, and Russians.

Defeat in the Opium Wars of the mid-nineteenth century began what many Chinese see as a "century of humiliation" during which foreign powers pressed their military advantage over China to acquire territorial and economic concessions. This sense of victimization at the hands of foreign imperialists had a profound impact on the history of modern China, as future generations struggled with military modernization in order to defend China against further external aggression. The advantages gained by the European powers enabled them to gain significant advantage in Asia.

References

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