

China and the West

PART 1: OPIUM WAR - TAIPING REBELLION - SELF-STRENGTHENING MOVEMENT



This is a view copy. It shows the cover, table of contents and a few representative pages. For the complete publication, see www.historypicturesanddocuments.com

Content

INTRODUCTION	3
1 EMPEROR CH' IEN-LUNG WRITES A LETTER TO KING GEORGE OF ENGLAND (1792)	4
2 THE OPIUM WARS	
1 An account about opium smugglers bij William Hunter, an American eyewitness	11
2 'The letter of advice to Queen Victoria' of Lin Zexu	13
3 ENGLAND FORCES UNEQUAL TREATIES	
1 The preamble of the Treaty of Nanking (1842)	19
2 The content of the Treaty of Nanking (1842)	19
4 THE TAIPING REBELLION	
1 An Englishman visits the Taipings	25
2 Hung Jen-kan's proposals	29
3 The Taiping Ode for Youth	30
5 THE SELF-STRENGTHENING MOVEMENT FAILED	
1 Fen Guifen in <i>On the adoption of western learning</i>	33
2 Yan Fu in <i>From learning from the West</i>	34

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(previous page)
British warships (on the right) destroy Chinese war junks in de First Opium War during the Second Battle of Chuenpee, January 7, 1841

Introduction

About the history of China a countless number of historical surveys is written by western scholars, all secondary sources. Books with primary sources are rare. On the internet there are many primary sources about the history of China. Everyone who has enough time and knowledge can find them.

Our series is intended for those who do have not enough time for extensive research, but are interested to read about the stories and documents behind the historical surveys.

The primary sources in our series about China and the West are mostly of Chinese origin. We limit ourselves to the most important, most mentioned, subjects. To the sources we add short historical introductions, to help the reader to place the sources in their time.

The volumes in this series can be used together with a historical survey. You can use the primary sources also as a start for your own research.

This series is a tribute to Professor Dr. Erik Zürcher (1928-2008). He focused his work at Leiden University not solely at his students. He and his staff also gave high priority to informing the public about the history of China. And they were always a great help for developers of teaching materials.

Already publishes in this series *China and the West*:

- Part 1: Opium War – Taiping rebellion – Self-strengthening Movement
- Part 2: The Hundred Days – Abdication of the emperor
- Part 3: The Boxer Rebellion

To be published in the course of 2015:

- Part 4: Women in imperial China
- Part 5: The Revolution of 1911
- Part 6: From Sun Yat-sen tot Mao Zedong



Emperor Ch'ien-lung in court dress



King George III (1738-1820) in court dress

1 Emperor Ch'ien-lung writes a letter to king George of England (1792)

In 1792 emperor Ch'ien-lung wrote a letter to the king of England. The letter shows a lot about the thinking of the top of the Chinese government at the time. Great pride in their way of life, great believe in their cultural superiority and no need to fundamental change.

You, O King, have yearned from a distance for Our civilizing influence. You have most earnestly shown your wishes for improvement. You have dispatched envoys respectfully bearing a communication and some tribute, and you have instructed them to cross the seas and pray for Our happiness.

We, observing your respectful obedience, O King, commanded Our ministers to conduct the envoys here. They have been granted the honor of an audience; a banquet was prepared for them; and they have received many costly gifts. Our commands have already been formally issued to them. And by way of showing Our tender affection, We have sent you, O King, presents such as patterned silks and valuable curiosities.

The other day your envoys raised the question of your kingdom's commerce and petitioned Our ministers to bring the matter before Us. Since their requests would mean tampering with established laws, it is inappropriate to grant your wish.

Until now the barbarian ships of the different European states and of your own kingdom, coming to trade in the Celestial Empire, have always carried on their commerce at Macao. This practice has been followed for some time now and is by no means something We decided upon yesterday. The stores of goods in the Celestial Empire are

extremely plentiful. There is nothing We do not possess, so that there is really no need for the products of the foreign barbarians in order to balance supply and demand.

However, the tea, silk, and porcelain produced by the Celestial Empire are indispensable to the different states of Europe and to your kingdom. For this reason We have, in Our grace and pity, established Our official trading companies at Macao. It has been Our wish that all your daily needs be properly supplied and that everyone share in Our overly abundant riches.

But now your envoys have made considerable demands over and above what is permitted by established custom. Their requests are seriously contrary to Our practice of extending the bounty of the Celestial Empire to distant peoples. They conflict with Our concern for the welfare of the different barbarians. Moreover, the Celestial Empire exercises supervision over all countries and is kind to each in an equal degree. Those who trade at Macao and Canton do not come from the kingdom of England alone. What would happen if all of them were to come clamouring in the same way as your envoys? Are We to be pestered with requests impossible to grant? Do you suppose that We could always go out of Our way to bestow such favours?

We know, however, that your kingdom occupies an obscure corner in the distant wilderness. We are aware that it is oceans and oceans apart from Us. We also take into account that you are naturally unfamiliar with the laws and etiquette of the Celestial Empire. For this reason We commanded Our ministers to make all of this clear to your

4 The Taiping Rebellion

1 AN ENGLISHMAN, A.F. LINDLEY, VISITS THE TAIPINGS

Foreigners were generally hostile to the Taipings because they feared to lose the commercial privileges granted in treaties with the Manchu regime. A few westerners were sympathetic. One of them, the Englishman A. F. Lindley, visited the territories of the Taipings.

We passed many villages, all thriving and apparently doing considerable trade. One especially attracted my attention – it was a very large walled village, named San-zar, and seemed to be the centre of an immense commerce. This place was fortified and well garrisoned [by Taiping troops]. We stopped there and took in a supply of provisions, which were very cheap. I particularly remember San-zar, because I found in it the best sponge cake I ever tasted in China.

The village was very extensive, containing upwards of five thousand houses. The shops were numerous, and at the time I first visited it every article of Chinese consumption was to be found in abundance. I passed through it lately – upon my return to England - and found everything sadly changed. The Imperialists [imperial troops] were close at hand, and the inhabitants had fled away; the shops were closed, excepting here and there where some trader, more venture-some or avaricious than his fellows, seemed determined to drive his business till the last. The streets were silent and trafficless; in some parts the depopulation was so complete as to strongly remind me of Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village'.

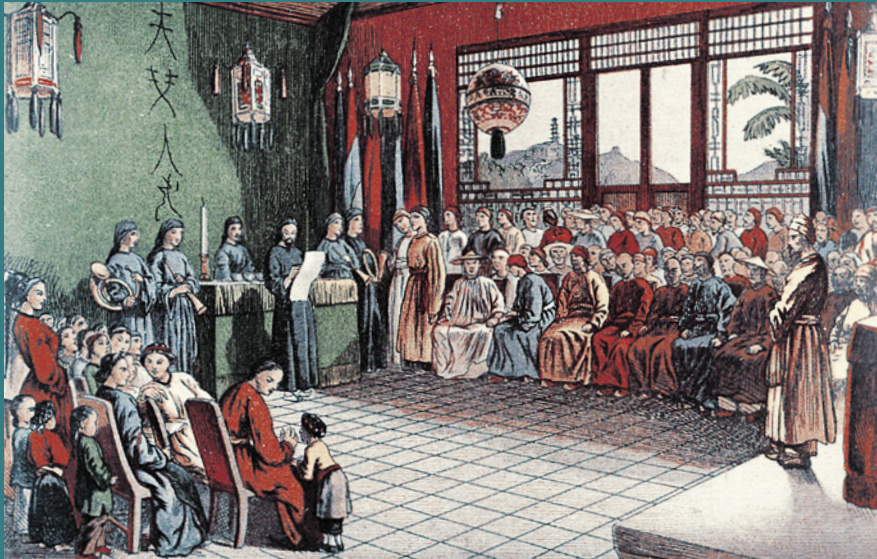
Shortly after leaving San-zar, we arrived at San-le-jow, the termination of our voyage, a fortified position. ... San-le-jow is situated within

the silk district, into which we should have proceeded further, but the creek was spanned by a bridge too small for our vessel to pass. We were therefore compelled to remain at anchor, and send boats in for the silk. All the specie [money] was placed in them, comparatively unprotected, only the supercargo [officer] and two of our crew going in charge of it. And yet it was taken into the very heart of Taiping territory in perfect safety.

We remained about three weeks at San-le-jow, while our supercargo was absent purchasing silk. During this time I determined to see as much of the Taiping territory and the Taipings as possible. I constantly visited the neighbouring villages to endeavour to ascertain what feeling the country people entertained for the Taiping rule. I was pleased to find them in every instance completely happy and contented; and was particularly struck by the gratified manner in which they would attract my notice to their long hair – the emblem of the Taiping and freedom, as opposed to the Manchu and the shaven-headed, tail-wearing badge of slavery [the queue] they inflict upon the Chinese. During my rambles I took my servant, A-ling, with me, and, as he was a capital interpreter, I was enabled to fully investigate all I cared for or found interesting.

As San-le-jow was only about twenty miles distant from the important provincial capital, Soochow, I engaged a boat, took A-ling with me, and reaching the city, spent seven or eight days there pleasant. Upon my arrival at Soochow, I received the kindest reception, and obtained an audience of several of the principal chiefs in the city. But little trace of the former magnificence of the 'Chinese Paris' remained.

What the Taipings wanted



Religious meeting in a church of the Taipings, illustration in the book of A.F. Lindley (see page 25). Lindley lived some years with the Taipings. Shortly afterwards he published his book 'The history of the Ti-Ping Revolution', London 1866 (on internet downloadable).

See for a part of the reform program of the Taipings the previous pages. Some other ideas were the following;

- abolishing customs as the wearing of long fingernails, foot-binding, the raising of birds, and the wearing of ornaments;
- calligraphy and painting, gold and jewels should be esteemed less than steamships, trains, thermometers, barometers, binoculars, and other scientific instruments;
- the transformation of monasteries into hospitals and churches;
- the abolition of group punishment, arguing that only the culprit himself should be punished, while his family members and others should be spared;
- the prohibition of personal visits to official residences in order to avoid the solicitation of favours.

5 The Self-strengthening Movement failed

1 FENG GUIFEN ON THE ADOPTION OF WESTERN LEARNING

The first excerpt:

Books on mathematics, mechanics, optics, light, chemistry, and others all contain the ultimate principles of understanding things. Most of this information is unavailable to people in China. I have heard that with their new methods the Westerners have found that the movements of the earth conform closely to those of the heavens. This can be of assistance in fixing the calendar. ... I have heard that the Westerners' method of clearing sand from harbours is very effective. ... This can be of assistance to keep the water flowing. Also, for agricultural and sericultural tools, and things required for the various crafts, they mostly use mechanical wheels, which require little energy but accomplish much. These can assist the people to earn their living. Other things beneficial to the national economy and the livelihood of the people should also be used. There are many intelligent people in China. Surely there are some who, having learned from the barbarians, can surpass them.

The second excerpt:

Today the world is 90,000 li around. There is no place boats and vehicles do not travel or human power does not reach. According to Westerners' maps, there are at least one hundred countries in the world. Of the books of these hundred countries, only those from Italy from the time of the end of the Ming and from present-day England, numbering in all several tens, have been translated.

Books on mathematics, mechanics, optics, light, chemistry, and others all contain the ultimate principles of understanding things. Most of this information is unavailable to people in China.

The principles of government are derived from learning. In discussing good government [*famous historian*] Sima Qian said, 'Take the later kings as models', because they were closer to his own time, and customs, having changed, were more alike, so that their ideas were easy to implement because they were plain and simple. In my humble opinion, at the present time it is also appropriate to say 'Learn from the various nations', for they are similar to us and hence their ways are easy to implement. What could be better than to take Chinese ethical principles of human relations and Confucian teachings as the foundation, (ti) and supplement them with the techniques (yong) of wealth and power of the various nations?

2 YAN FU IN FROM LEARNING FROM THE WEST

In the essay from which the excerpts below were taken, Yan discusses learning from the West in terms of two concepts from Chinese philosophy: yong (concrete techniques) and ti (the cultural foundation or context of those techniques).

I think the greatest difference between China and the West, which can never be made up, is that the Chinese are fond of antiquity but neglect the present. The Westerners are struggling in the present in

Li Hongzhang and his arsenal



Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), politician, general and diplomat, was a strong supporter of the Self-strengthening Movement. One of his activities was the building of the Nanjing Jinling Arsenal (below) in 1865. In the Arsenal war material was developed, manufactured, repaired and stored.



order to supersede the past. Chinese consider that a period of order and a period of disorder, and a period of prosperity and a period of decline are the natural course of heavenly conduct of human affairs; while Westerners consider that daily progress should be endless, and that what has already been prosperous will not decline, and that when things are well governed, they will not be in disorder again – all of which they take as an absolute law of academic thought and political ideas.

The foundation [ti] and the use [yong] mean the same thing. The body of an ox should have the use of carrying heavy things; the body of a horse should have the use of carrying something to a distance. I have never heard that the ox is the body or the foundation, while the horse is for use. The difference between Chinese and Western knowledge is as great as that between the complexions and the eyes of the two races. We cannot force the two cultures to be the same or similar. Therefore, Chinese knowledge has its foundation and function; Western knowledge has also its foundation and function. If the two are separated, each can be independent; if the two were combined, both would perish.