

## CHINESE HISTORY – 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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### Overview

The reign of the Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735-1796) in China is remembered for its strength, stability and prosperity—and as being one of the most brilliant in all of human history. Even though the ruling household was a conquest dynasty from Manchuria, the Emperor Qianlong arguably controlled more resources and directly ruled a larger number of people than had ever been recorded in human history until that time. Indeed, the population of Qing China reached approximately 300 million under Qianlong! China had reached the pinnacle of its power in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The system which had allowed for the rise of such a brilliant civilization, undergirded as it was by Confucianism, Daoism, a high-functioning bureaucracy, early industrialization, a thriving economy, a well-maintained infrastructure, and successful agriculture, had proven itself successful over many centuries. There was great reluctance to question something that had worked so well for so long, even though China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was beginning to encounter challenges heretofore unknown. In addition, reform was generally not highly regarded in the Confucian system—and to the extent it was—it was often reinterpreted theoretically through the lens of one of the branches of neo-Confucianism. In short, China was poorly equipped philosophically and culturally to meet the challenges of a radically changing world. Historians agree that reforms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were slow in coming, inadequate in their scope and sometimes haphazard in their execution. And, of course, they could only be initiated at the highest levels and if they posed no threat to the existing political, social, economic or military order. As might be expected, things went badly and humiliation and collapse followed. It is a cautionary tale all civilizations would do well to study.

### Events

**Opium.** The Emperor Qianlong was succeeded by the Emperor Jiaqing (r. 1796-1820) and then by Emperor Daoguang (r. 1820-1850). Aside from the White Lotus Rebellion (1794-1804), there was no significant domestic upheaval or conflict for the first thirty-nine years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But China was experiencing challenges economically and militarily that called for bold, visionary leadership. Yet, for a period of approximately fifty years, both of Qianlong's successors sought mostly to stamp out corruption and to scale back the excesses of the previous period. The typical Chinese pattern of dynastic decline, of an old dynasty that was slow to apprehend the extent of the danger, was beginning to find expression. This occurred at precisely the wrong time for China. The Europeans had discovered that the application of science to agriculture, industry and the military yielded new technology which could quickly outpace even Chinese technology. Given the cultural blinders worn by the Chinese elites, the country was slow to react. At the same time, China's population, which had been a measure of its wealth under Qianlong, began to become a liability. There was an excess labor force and any downturn in agriculture quickly led to hunger and social disruption. It is not a surprise that many Chinese turned to drugs to escape the difficulties of life.

The Chinese had known of opium's medicinal properties for centuries, if not millennia, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it is not believed that significant numbers of Chinese had used opium for recreational purposes before this time. There was simply insufficient supply even if there had been demand. The Emperor Jiaqing made its consumption illegal in 1799, a prohibition he restated in 1813. The Emperor Daoguang issued his own edict in 1830 and started a campaign to address problems associated with chemical dependency. What was different about the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and opium in China was its relative accessibility and low cost. In particular, the Europeans (who had been allowed to trade with the Chinese through a very carefully controlled arrangement known as the Cohong system) were keen to sell it in China for a large profit. The British East India Company was one of the largest importers of the drug although only relatively small quantities of it were sold in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, in 1790, the British imported 4054 chests. But by the late 1830s, 40,000 chests (approximately 2400 tons) were imported from all western sources. With this much narcotic available, the authorities began to take notice and sought to eradicate its use. Even the bannermen soldiers and eunuchs working for the Emperor Daoguang were known to have smoked it! The British, however, refused to cooperate with the Chinese authorities and hostilities broke out in 1839. The British were, of course, at a distinct disadvantage because they could only

bring to the fight a very small military and used technology to their greatest advantage. They fought the Chinese mostly with their navy in and around the coastal areas of China and as far up the major rivers as they dared to travel. They used blockades and “hit-and-run” tactics to their advantage. The Chinese were frustrated because they could not bring to bear the tremendous weight of their military might. After a series of battles, most of which were rather small, the Chinese decided to parley. The resulting Treaty of Nanjing should have been a wake-up call for the Chinese. The British demanded the creation of the “treaty port” system which would characterize Chinese foreign policy with Europeans and other westerners for decades to come. The Treaty of Nanjing would eventually become a national humiliation. However, when it was signed in 1842, the extent of its influence was unclear to the Chinese. Indeed, the Chinese government seemed to ignore their defeat in the Opium War and continued to act toward westerners in much the same way as they had before. This led to many, many small, but humiliating conflicts with the west over the coming decades.

**The Taiping Rebellion.** Few events in the long history of China have been as tragic or as consequential as the Taiping Rebellion. This conflict engulfed most of southeastern and south-central China between 1851-1865 and resulted in the deaths of at least 20 million Chinese—and quite possibly millions more. In many areas along the Yangtze River Valley, civilization largely broke down and entire regions of China had to be re-settled after the war because they had been denuded of population!

The Taiping Rebellion began with an apocalyptic Christian cult led by Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864). Hong was a frustrated degree-seeker from southeastern China who had been briefly exposed to Christianity. He had taken and passed the first levels of the Chinese civil service examination, but could not succeed at the highest levels. This led him to become disillusioned with Confucianism and explains a great deal about his motivations. After his last effort with the examination, he reportedly suffered from a bout of “nervous exhaustion.” During his recovery, he had a vision in which he came to interpret himself as the Chinese Son of God and the brother of Jesus. He understood his mission to be the cleansing of China of all non-believers. The authorities took little notice of his preaching until 1850 when his followers began to number in the tens of thousands. When they moved to arrest him in 1851, he rose in revolt and began a series of offensive campaigns against the shocked Manchu troops arrayed against him. By 1853, the Taiping had taken most of southeastern and south-central China and the city of Nanjing. As a result, they proclaimed a new dynasty and a new era. Over the course of the next decade, the Qing sent army after army to destroy the Taiping. None were successful. Finally, the Qing raised several indigenous Han Chinese armies led by Han generals who were able to vanquish the increasingly fragmented and poorly led Taiping. One of the most famous was Zeng Guofan (1811-1872), who also oversaw the first reform movements in the post Taiping era. In 1864, Hong died and the remaining rebels were destroyed.

**The Nian Rebellion.** If the Taiping Rebellion were not enough, the Qing were simultaneously dealing with what was a major rebellion in its own right in another area of China. This rebellion took place between the years 1855-1868 mostly in Shandong Province. Though not as bloody as the Taiping Rebellion, it proved very costly. More than 100,000 people were killed and people living in more of the most fertile and wealthy land in China were not paying tax to the imperial treasury. In effect, these two rebellions, along with the continuous Muslim revolts in western China, bankrupted the Qing. More than that, however, it was made clear to many Han Chinese that the Manchu could not exercise effective authority over the population.

### Government

**Lassitude.** The system the Qing used to govern China required the collaboration of large segments of the ethnic Chinese. Most Han Chinese had embraced the Qing initially because of their hatred of the Ming. But by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hatred of the Ming had been replaced with growing bitterness toward the Manchu. The events of the early and middle 19<sup>th</sup> century had exposed the Qing as being incapable of repelling foreign invasion, of lacking administrative acumen and of being incapable of maintaining the peace domestically. In short, it was only the accumulated inertia of two centuries of rule that allowed the Qing to retain power after the Taiping Rebellion because they exercised neither effective military power nor maintained meaningful political authority.

**The Bureaucracy.** One of the hallmarks of late Imperial China was the Confucian bureaucracy. The system of staffing government positions which had worked so well since the Tang Period (618-907CE) was based on the civil

service examination. Degree seekers prepared for years for an examination which would reveal the best and brightest in the land who would then provide staffing for every level of government. These examinations constituted the first true large-scale meritocracy in the world. However, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were two major problems with government employees. First, there were not enough of them. The population of China had quadrupled to approximately 400 million by the 1880s (since 1644), but the number of bureaucrats had hardly risen in 200 years. Second, the tax base had not kept pace with the population increase. This led to the treasury being first stressed and then always empty. Sufficient funding for essential government functions could not be secured. When government bureaucrats anywhere are not compensated appropriately but must still fulfill their function, they turn to corruption—both in the selection/hiring process and in the taking of bribes and kickbacks once in office. In short, government corruption became endemic and, in time, government ceased to function at the highest levels. Only the willingness of local officials to continue to do their jobs stood between the people of China and administrative collapse. By the 1890s, even local authority was beginning to become unreliable. Though not in a complete state of chaos, China mostly had a titular government by the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**The Military.** The banner armies which had swept the Manchu into power in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century had long since ceased to function as an effective military force by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Taiping and Nian Rebellions had demonstrated that the Qing had little in the way of a military to force its will on an unwilling population. There were several attempts to reform the banner armies in the wake of the two rebellions. New weapons, new tactics, new training, new technology and new forms of transportation were all employed to upgrade the Qing military. The even had a new name, the “New Army.” By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it appeared as though they might have been successful. But events such as the Boxer Uprising (1900) made clear that the Chinese military was extremely weak and could neither keep the peace domestically nor repel foreign aggression.

**The Empress Dowager.** A symptom of the fragmentation associated with imperial rule can be found with the Empress Dowager. The Empress Dowager, Ci’xi, is one of the most reviled women in all of Chinese history. She was a concubine of the Emperor Xianfeng (r. 1850-1861) who outmaneuvered all her rivals to have her son, later known as the Emperor Tongzhi (r. 1861-1875) named crown prince. In due course, she became the regent to her son. When her son died while still a young man, she became the regent to her very young nephew, the Emperor Guangxu (r. 1875-1908). She would remain the single most powerful person in China until her own death in 1908. She is remembered for her unparalleled political acumen and for her general unwillingness to initiate or allow for reforms the country so desperately needed. In her defense, there was likely very little that any leader—visionary or not—could have done to save the imperial system from collapse. However, given that she was the captain of a sinking ship, she is blamed, fairly or unfairly, for overseeing the demise of one of the greatest, long-lasting political systems in human history.

## Culture

**Religion.** Chinese civilization was very mature (some may view it as ancient) by the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No new religions or governing philosophies emerged to challenge the orthodoxy of Confucianism and Daoism. The only exception was the Taiping movement, which was so violent and heretical in its belief system that many Chinese Christians were unable to support even its spiritual elements. As might be expected, there was a backlash among the governing elites against Christianity in the post-Taiping era. Indeed, in the decade or so after the Taiping Rebellion, there was a strong reactive movement to return China to its true Confucian path. There were several “self-strengthening” reforms instituted, most of which had as a stated goal the return of the people to more moral and upright behavior among all segments of society. When the final of the “self-strengthening” reforms (the 100 Days of Reform) was instituted in 1898, it had as one of its core elements the re-interpretation of Confucianism which, if taken to its logical end, could have questioned the political position of the Empress Dowager. For his trouble, the Emperor Guangxu—who had supported and promoted this effort—was effectively placed under house arrest where he was assassinated in 1908 by arsenic poisoning. It appeared that traditional Confucianism, as interpreted by the ruling elites, was sacrosanct from both the spiritual and political perspective.

**The Literary Arts.** The late Qing period is not known for bold or innovative steps taken in the writing of fiction or other literary arts. Many authors and poets spent their entire careers writing about how to navigate the violence and turmoil of the turbulent 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the reform movements of the post-Taiping era, a number of Chinese

traveled abroad and were exposed to vibrant and expansive cultural expressions seen in the literary and philosophical world—particularly in Japan. Some returned to China to become leading philosophers and authors. One such author is Huang Zunxian (1845-1905), who worked for the Chinese delegation in Tokyo, London and San Francisco. Huang respected tradition and was not a radical (as evidenced by his profession), but his poetry pressed the boundaries of literary convention. He is remembered for popularizing the word “civilization” 文明 (*wénmíng*—roughly interpreted “enlightenment through letters”). Others, such as Kang Youwei (1858-1927), an influential Chinese thinker who went into exile in Japan in 1898, continued to have influence well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among Kang’s most influential works are the *Datong Shu* (Book on the Great Community) and *Kongzi Gaizhi Kao* (The Study of the Reforms of Confucius). The latter formed part of the basis of the aborted 100 Days of Reform.

### Society

**Fragmentation.** As the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, Chinese society first saw little in the way of change, then there were the years of catastrophe during the Taiping Rebellion and then finally, the slow devolution of the existing order. The system, in which there were monarchs, aristocrats, bureaucrats, artisans, clergy, peasants, laborers, etc., had worked very well since the transition from the Ming Period (1368-1644). Most Chinese understood their role in a stable and prosperous society. The Mandarins, the administrative class, continued to do their jobs at all levels of government. But it is, in part, because of China’s stable and prosperous system that the population continued to grow in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1800, there were perhaps 300 million Chinese. By 1900, that number had reached at least 400 million. Agriculture was the key to maintaining social and political order. It is not clear who or what is to blame for China’s social problems in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But it is clear, as evidenced by the widespread use of opium, the rise of banditry and the breakdown of authority, that they got worse as the century progressed. Any disruption in agriculture due to drought, flood, pests, excessive heat or cold required the use of emergency government-run granaries to feed the people until the next harvest. It appeared that many of China’s peasants (which represented most of the population) often teetered on the brink of hardship or worse. And the government was increasingly unresponsive, even though the peasants continued to pay their taxes. In addition, government corruption was endemic. Infrastructure such as dikes, roads and irrigation ditches, which had allowed for the dramatic advances in agriculture, but which was expensive to maintain, began to breakdown. When the Grand Canal ceased to function after the 1855 Yellow River floods (during which the Yellow River changed course dramatically), some of the Confucian elites began to imply that the Qing had lost the “Mandate of Heaven.” Failure to maintain essential infrastructure often presaged dynastic decline.

**Secret Societies.** Given the absolute power enjoyed by most of China’s emperors, it was not possible to assemble without government approval, which was rarely forthcoming. In this environment, secret societies provided an outlet for civil discussion. Not all of these societies were triads or criminal enterprises, but many were. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, others emerged with the express intent of overthrowing the government. Among these groups were the Xingzonghui (Revive China Society)—led by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and the Furen Literary Society. The former was established in Hawaii and the latter in Hong Kong. Both had among their primary goals the overthrow of the Qing. Though influential in their own right, these two societies would largely have been forgotten except that they merged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to become the Revolutionary Alliance. This group was instrumental in the events which led to the Republican Revolution in China in 1912. Both the current Guomindang Party (now governing in Taiwan) and the Chinese Communist Party (currently ruling the mainland) consider themselves to be the spiritual inheritors of the Revolutionary Alliance.

### Economy

**Agriculture.** In the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, agriculture continued to advance. The Chinese economy was showing signs of early industrialization. Rapid advances in technology applied to the agricultural sector resulted in reliable sources of excess calories for many years. Rice, wheat and other grains allowed the population to increase rapidly. Much of the land, however, was under stress from over-farming and there simply wasn’t enough additional land not under cultivation which could be made productive. In other words, Chinese agriculture reached a high point in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The horrors of the Taiping Rebellion changed the agricultural dynamic dramatically. First, much of the most productive agricultural land in China (in the Yangtze River Valley) was the sight of some of the fiercest fighting. Second, other areas that were under the actual control of the Taiping could not

contribute excess food stuffs. Third, several catastrophic floods, primarily along the Yellow River, created an environment in which there was a deficit in calories. Indeed, there was widespread hunger in the immediate post-Taiping years. In the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, agriculture suffered from the myriad of miseries that accompanied the slow devolution of government: banditry, excessive and arbitrary taxation, breakdown of irrigation and transportation infrastructure and the general lack of government support. Nonetheless, the peasantry continued to do fairly well on a micro-level unless that was a localized drought or flood. Somehow, the population continued to grow.

**Economic Trouble.** The Chinese commercial economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century suffered one setback after another. There was a problem with the outflow of silver associated with the opium trade. Given that more and more Chinese were willing to pay westerners in silver to support their drug habit and because silver was the specie with which one paid the tax, scarcity and inflation in the Chinese economy became the norm in the years leading up to the Opium War. (Western economies also suffered from time to time from silver shocks in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.) Indeed, one of the reasons that the Emperor Daoguang (r. 1820-1850) gave for his campaign to suppress opium was the damage it did to the economy of south-east China. This disruption was hard on the imperial treasury and put a damper on macro-economic trade as well. The other great disruption in the commercial economy in 19<sup>th</sup> century China was the Taiping Rebellion. Roughly 1/3 of China was under the control of other political entities (Taiping or Nian) for more than a decade. The most expensive activity a government can engage in is war. When it is a civil war, the costs multiply exponentially because areas being destroyed are a part of the economy and are also at the same time not paying tax to the government. In the case of the Taiping Rebellion, the economic damage was so widespread that entire areas of the Yangtze River Valley did not recover for more than a generation. Given the extent of economic development and industrialization taking place in most of the western economies (and Japan) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, China experienced political instability and economic collapse at precisely the wrong time. China didn't just slowly fall behind other expanding, industrial economies, its fortunes were dramatically reversed in both real and comparative terms. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China was no longer the world's greatest power. Instead, it can best be described as a failed state, incapable of controlling or caring for its people. But it was on the cusp of even greater humiliations still. Dismemberment and a loss of sovereignty became a real possibility in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Readings

Harold Tanner, *China: A History, Volume 2. From the Great Qing Empire through the People's Republic of China (1644-2009)*, (Hackett Publishing, 2010), pp. 72-110.

Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914*, (Penguin Books, 2012).

Thomas H. Reilly, *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom: Rebellion and the Blasphemy of Empire*, (University of Washington Press, 2014).

Luke S. Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics and Ideas of 1898*, (Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1984).

June Chang, *The Empress Dowager Cixi*, (Anchor Books, 2014).

## Questions for Discussion

- 1) China's encounter with the west in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century is often depicted as a clash of world-views, as a struggle between eastern and western civilizations. Is this a fair characterization? Were the Europeans able to interact with the Chinese in the way that they did because of Chinese weakness or European strength? If so, what about China was weak? If so, what about the Europeans was strong?
- 2) What was the primary reason that China declined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Was the problem political? Was it cultural? Was it a problem with philosophy? Was it a problem with the economy or education—or something else altogether? Or did China decline only in relation to the newly industrialized west? Could China's decline have been arrested at any moment by strong leadership?
- 3) Why was there a Taiping Rebellion? Did it have to happen when and where it did? Did the Taiping rise because of weakening central authority? Or did the Taiping simply expose existing weaknesses? Finally, did the Taiping create weaknesses among the central authorities? How did the Qing government manage to survive the period of rebellion? What about the Chinese system of government made it so resilient?
- 4) Were the reforms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in China too little, too late? Who can be fairly blamed for the government not reacting in an appropriate manner? Was this solely the problem of the Empress Dowager or was there some sort of systemic weakness? What, among the myriad of attempted reforms, seemed the most promising for the Chinese? If you had to construct and implement a series of reforms, which ones would you have decided upon? Why do you think they would have worked when all the others didn't?

## Texts

1) The Taiping Ten Commandments according to Hong Xiuquan, originally recorded in 1847. Found in the public domain.

- 1) Honor God and worship him
- 2) You shall not worship evil spirits
- 3) You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain
- 4) Every seventh day you shall praise God and extol his virtues
- 5) Honor your father and mother
- 6) You shall not commit murder or hurt anyone
- 7) You shall not commit adultery or act badly in any other way
- 8) You shall not steal, rob or plunder
- 9) You shall not speak any untruth
- 10) You shall not covet

2) Letter from Commissioner Lin (the official sent by the Emperor Daoguang to Guangdong Province to suppress the opium trade in 1839) to Queen Victoria of Great Britain. Found on Modern History Sourcebook website (<http://legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1839lin2.asp>).

It is only our high and mighty emperor, who alike supports and cherishes those of the Inner Land, and those from beyond the seas—who looks upon all mankind with equal benevolence--who, if a source of profit exists anywhere, diffuses it over the whole world—who, if the tree of evil takes root anywhere, plucks it up for the benefit of all nations; --who, in a word, hath implanted in his breast that heart (by which beneficent nature herself) governs the heavens and the earth! You, the queen of your honorable nation, sit upon a throne occupied through successive generations by predecessors, all of whom have been styled respectful and obedient. Looking over the public documents accompanying the tribute sent (by your predecessors) on various occasions, we find the following: “All the people of my country, arriving at the Central Land for purposes of trade, have to feel grateful to the great emperor for the most perfect justice, for the kindest treatment,” and other words to that effect. Delighted did we feel that the kings of your honorable nation so clearly understood the great principles of propriety, and were so deeply grateful for the heavenly goodness (of our emperor): --therefore, it was that we of the heavenly dynasty nourished and cherished your people from afar, and bestowed upon them redoubled proofs of our urbanity and kindness. It is merely from these circumstances, that your country—deriving immense advantage from its commercial intercourse with us, which has endured now two hundred years—has become the rich and flourishing kingdom that it is said to be!

But, during the commercial intercourse which has existed so long, among the numerous foreign merchants resorting hither, are wheat and tares, good and bad; and of these latter are some, who, by means of introducing opium by stealth, have seduced our Chinese people, and caused every province of the land to overflow with that poison. These then know merely to advantage themselves, they care not about injuring others! This is a principle which heaven's Providence repugnates; and which mankind conjointly look upon with abhorrence! Moreover, the great emperor hearing of it, actually quivered with indignation, and especially dispatched me, the commissioner, to Canton, that in conjunction with the viceroy and lieutenant-governor of the province, means might be taken for its suppression!

Every native of the Inner Land who sells opium, as also all who smoke it, are alike adjudged to death. Were we then to go back and take up the crimes of the foreigners, who, by selling it for many years have induced dreadful calamity and robbed us of enormous wealth, and punish them with equal severity, our laws could not but award to them absolute annihilation! But, considering that these said foreigners did yet repent of their crime, and with a sincere heart beg for mercy; that they took 20,283 chests of opium piled up in their store-ships, and through Elliot, the superintendent of the trade of your said country, petitioned that they might be delivered up to us, when the same were all utterly destroyed, of which we, the imperial commissioner and colleagues,

made a duly prepared memorial to his majesty; --considering these circumstances, we have happily received a fresh proof of the extraordinary goodness of the great emperor, inasmuch as he who voluntarily comes forward, may yet be deemed a fit subject for mercy, and his crimes be graciously remitted him. But as for him who again knowingly violates the laws, difficult indeed will it be thus to go on repeatedly pardoning! He or they shall alike be doomed to the penalties of the new statute. We presume that you, the sovereign of your honorable nation, on pouring out your heart before the altar of eternal justice, cannot but command all foreigners with the deepest respect to reverence our laws! If we only lay clearly before your eyes, what is profitable and what is destructive, you will then know that the statutes of the heavenly dynasty cannot but be obeyed with fear and trembling!

We find that your country is distant from us about sixty or seventy thousand miles, that your foreign ships come hither striving the one with the other for our trade, and for the simple reason of their strong desire to reap a profit. Now, out of the wealth of our Inner Land, if we take a part to bestow upon foreigners from afar, it follows, that the immense wealth which the said foreigners amass, ought properly speaking to be portion of our own native Chinese people. By what principle of reason then, should these foreigners send in return a poisonous drug, which involves in destruction those very natives of China? Without meaning to say that the foreigners harbor such destructive intentions in their hearts, we yet positively assert that from their inordinate thirst after gain, they are perfectly careless about the injuries they inflict upon us! And such being the case, we should like to ask what has become of that conscience which heaven has implanted in the breasts of all men?

We have heard that in your own country opium is prohibited with the utmost strictness and severity: --this is a strong proof that you know full well how hurtful it is to mankind. Since then you do not permit it to injure your own country, you ought not to have the injurious drug transferred to another country, and above all others, how much less to the Inner Land! Of the products which China exports to your foreign countries, there is not one which is not beneficial to mankind in some shape or other. There are those which serve for food, those which are useful, and those which are calculated for re-sale; but all are beneficial. Has China (we should like to ask) ever yet sent forth a noxious article from its soil? Not to speak of our tea and rhubarb, things which your foreign countries could not exist a single day without, if we of the Central Land were to grudge you what is beneficial, and not to compassionate your wants, then wherewithal could you foreigners manage to exist? And further, as regards your woolens, camlets, and longells, were it not that you get supplied with our native raw silk, you could not get these manufactured! If China were to grudge you those things which yield a profit, how could you foreigners scheme after any profit at all? Our other articles of food, such as sugar, ginger, cinnamon, etc., and our other articles for use, such as silk piece-goods, chinaware, etc., are all so many necessaries of life to you; how can we reckon up their number! On the other hand, the things that come from your foreign countries are only calculated to make presents of, or serve for mere amusement. It is quite the same to us if we have them, or if we have them not. If then these are of no material consequence to us of the Inner Land, what difficulty would there be in prohibiting and shutting our market against them? It is only that our heavenly dynasty most freely permits you to take off her tea, silk, and other commodities, and convey them for consumption everywhere, without the slightest stint or grudge, for no other reason, but that where a profit exists, we wish that it be diffused abroad for the benefit of all the earth!

Your honorable nation takes away the products of our central land, and not only do you thereby obtain food and support for yourselves, but moreover, by re-selling these products to other countries you reap a threefold profit. Now if you would only not sell opium, this threefold profit would be secured to you: how can you possibly consent to forgo it for a drug that is hurtful to men, and an unbridled craving after gain that seems to know no bounds! Let us suppose that foreigners came from another country, and brought opium into England, and seduced the people of your country to smoke it, would not you, the sovereign of the said country, look upon such a procedure with anger, and in your just indignation endeavor to get rid of it? Now we have always heard that your highness possesses a most kind and benevolent heart, surely then you are incapable of doing or causing to be done unto another, that which you should not wish another to do unto you! We



have at the same time heard that your ships which come to Canton do each and every of them carry a document granted by your highness' self, on which are written these words "you shall not be permitted to carry contraband goods;" this shows that the laws of your highness are in their origin both distinct and severe, and we can only suppose that because the ships coming here have been very numerous, due attention has not been given to search and examine; and for this reason it is that we now address you this public document, that you may clearly know how stern and severe are the laws of the central dynasty, and most certainly you will cause that they be not again rashly violated!

Moreover, we have heard that in London the metropolis where you dwell, as also in Scotland, Ireland, and other such places, no opium whatever is produced. It is only in sundry parts of your colonial kingdom of Hindostan, such as Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Patna, Malwa, Benares, Malacca, and other places where the very hills are covered with the opium plant, where tanks are made for the preparing of the drug; month by month, and year by year, the volume of the poison increases, its unclean stench ascends upwards, until heaven itself grows angry, and the very gods thereat get indignant! You, the queen of the said honorable nation, ought immediately to have the plant in those parts plucked up by the very root! Cause the land there to be hoed up afresh, sow in its stead the five grains, and if any man dare again to plant in these grounds a single poppy, visit his crime with the most severe punishment. By a truly benevolent system of government such as this, will you indeed reap advantage, and do away with a source of evil. Heaven must support you, and the gods will crown you with felicity! This will get for yourself the blessing of long life, and from this will proceed the security and stability of your descendants!

In reference to the foreign merchants who come to this our central land, the food that they eat, and the dwellings that they abide in, proceed entirely from the goodness of our heavenly dynasty: the profits which they reap, and the fortunes which they amass, have their origin only in that portion of benefit which our heavenly dynasty kindly allots them: and as these pass but little of their time in your country, and the greater part of their time in our's, it is a generally received maxim of old and of modern times, that we should conjointly admonish, and clearly make known the punishment that awaits them.

Suppose the subject of another country were to come to England to trade, he would certainly be required to comply with the laws of England, then how much more does this apply to us of the celestial empire! Now it is a fixed statute of this empire, that any native Chinese who sells opium is punishable with death, and even he who merely smokes it, must not less die. Pause and reflect for a moment: if you foreigners did not bring the opium hither, where should our Chinese people get it to re-sell? It is you foreigners who involve our simple natives in the pit of death, and are they alone to be permitted to escape alive? If so much as one of those deprive one of our people of his life, he must forfeit his life in requital for that which he has taken: how much more does this apply to him who by means of opium destroys his fellow-men? Does the havoc which he commits stop with a single life? Therefore it is that those foreigners who now import opium into the Central Land are condemned to be beheaded and strangled by the new statute, and this explains what we said at the beginning about plucking up the tree of evil, wherever it takes root, for the benefit of all nations.

We further find that during the second month of this present year, the superintendent of your honorable country, Elliot, viewing the law in relation to the prohibiting of opium as excessively severe, duly petitioned us, begging for "an extension of the term already limited, say five months for Hindostan and the different parts of India, and ten for England, after which they would obey and act in conformity with the new statute," and other words to the same effect. Now we, the high commissioner and colleagues, upon making a duly prepared memorial to the great emperor, have to feel grateful for his extraordinary goodness, for his redoubled compassion. Anyone who within the next year and a half may by mistake bring opium to this country, if he will but voluntarily come forward, and deliver up the entire quantity, he shall be absolved from all punishment for his crime. If, however, the appointed term shall have expired, and there are still persons who continue to bring it, then such shall be accounted as knowingly violating the laws, and shall most assuredly be put to death! On no account shall we show mercy or clemency! This then may be called truly the extreme of benevolence, and the very perfection of justice!

Our celestial empire rules over ten thousand kingdoms! Most surely do we possess a measure of godlike majesty which ye cannot fathom! Still we cannot bear to slay or exterminate without previous warning, and it is for this reason that we now clearly make known to you the fixed laws of our land. If the foreign merchants of your said honorable nation desire to continue their commercial intercourse, they then must tremblingly obey our recorded statutes, they must cut off forever the source from which the opium flows, and on no account make an experiment of our laws in their own persons! Let then your highness punish those of your subjects who may be criminal, do not endeavor to screen or conceal them, and thus you will secure peace and quietness to your possessions, thus will you more than ever display a proper sense of respect and obedience, and thus may we unitedly enjoy the common blessings of peace and happiness. What greater joy! What more complete felicity than this!

Let your highness immediately, upon the receipt of this communication, inform us promptly of the state of matters, and of the measure you are pursuing utterly to put a stop to the opium evil. Please let your reply be speedy. Do not on any account make excuses or procrastinate. A most important communication.

P. S. We annex an abstract of the new law, now about to be put in force.

“Any foreigner or foreigners bringing opium to the Central Land, with design to sell the same, the principals shall most assuredly be decapitated, and the accessories strangled; and all property (found on board the same ship) shall be confiscated. The space of a year and a half is granted, within the which, if any one bringing opium by mistake, shall voluntarily step forward and deliver it up, he shall be absolved from all consequences of his crime.”

This said imperial edict was received on the 9th day of the 6th month of the 19th year of Taoukwang, at which the period of grace begins, and runs on to the 9th day of the 12th month of the 20th year of Taoukwang, when it is completed.

3) Excerpts from “On the Adoption of Western Learning” by Feng Guifen. Feng was a Qing official and one of the leaders of the many reform movements in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Found in *Education about Asia*. ([http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/feng\\_guifen\\_western\\_learning.pdf](http://afe.easia.columbia.edu/ps/china/feng_guifen_western_learning.pdf))

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 the hundred countries, only those from Italy from the time of the end of the Ming and from present-day English, numbering in all several tens, have been translated. ...

Books on mathematics, mechanics, optics, light, chemistry, and others all contain the 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 Westerners’ method of clearing sand from harbors is very effective. ... This can be of assistance to keep the water flowing. Also, for agriculture 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 principles of government are derived from learning. In discussing good government, [the 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, and supplement them with the techniques of wealth and power of the various nations.