

Decline of China before Xinhai Revolution

Econ 43750

N.C. Mark

University of Notre Dame and NBER

Monday 17 Augus 2020

Why China became weak

- Leaders wanted to maintain status quo.
- Dismissive attitude towards the barbarians. A huge miscalculation.
- Militarily weak
 - The Sun Tzu philosophy backfired—didn't build a large military
 - Leaders diverted tax revenue (corruption)

Qing Dynasty 1644-1911

- Manchurians were militaristic. Conquered the corrupt and bankrupt Ming rulers.
- In early years, Qing turned China into military power, expanded territory: Took over Mongolia, Tibet, Xingjian (in northwest, bordering Krygyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan)
- Forced men to wear the queue. [▶ The Hated Queue](#)
- Built the Forbidden City. Indication of excess.
- Imposed measures to keep out the barbarians (and foreign ideas).

Qing Dynasty 1644-1911

- Restrictions on foreigners
 - Restricted points of entry and routes to Beijing
 - Access to market limited to regulated seasonal trade in Guangzhou. In off-season (winter), foreign merchants had to go home. Could not stay in China
 - Illegal to teach Chinese to foreigners or to sell them books on Chinese history or culture
 - Foreigners allowed to communicate only with the specially licensed merchants
- Britain insulted. Eventually, this became too much for the foreigners. Macartney sent on mission

The Macartney Mission 1793

- Macartney was a big guy in England. Former Governor of this place and that place. Envoy to Catherine the Great. Former Governor of Madras (region in India).
- Mission:
 - Establish diplomatic ties between Britain and China. Establish embassies in Beijing and London
 - Obtain access to more ports on the coast
- British want **silks, tea, porcelain** etc.
Take note: This is the government acting on behalf of the business community. Royals have financial stakes too. England has a pro-business, mercantilist government.

The Macartney Mission 1793

- Macartney was to convince Chinese people Britain had things to offer in exchange. To impress the emperor, he brought (like a trade show)
 - Surgeon, Physician, Mechanic, Metallurgist, Watch maker, Mathematical instrument maker, German musicians
- Gifts for emperor
 - Chariot, Diamond studded watch, British porcelain, Portraits of King and Queen
- Chinese court viewed the British as arrogant, uninformed barbarians trying to get special favor from the Son of Heaven
- Chinese unimpressed by the gifts. Unserious toys.

The Kowtow question (Kissinger)

- Imperial court wants Macartney to **kowtow** to the emperor. What dat? ▶ KowTow
- Macartney wants to bend the knee (British custom).
- Negotiated for Weeks what Macartney would do and not do.
- Finally, court says he can **kneel**. Then they **stalled**. Diverted by weeks of bankquets and celebrations. Tried to wear down British, hope they give up. Sun Tzu's art of war. Psychological warfare.
- Eventually, told him to leave.
- Macartney protests. Allowed to go to Forbidden City.

The Kowtow question (Kissinger)

- Macartney thinks he's going to meet Emperor. Instead, there is a **letter on a chair**.
- Macartney told to **kneel to the letter**.
- Afterwards, they put letter on the 'king carrier' (litter vehicle) to Macartney's compound.
- Opens the letter. It **rejects everything** Macartney asks for in an insulting manner. Says to **Get Out**
- Subsequently, two other failed British missions to China

Opium

- British solution: Create a demand as drug pushers.
- Feed and expand Chinese **opium** habit.
- Produced in **British India**
- Trade and finance. In order to buy, you have to sell.

The Opium Wars

- China wants this to stop. Asks Queen Victoria to stop the opium trade. She never gets the letter.
- China attacks British opium dealers, destroys their stash.
- British retaliate and easily defeat the Chinese. China has lost every war since.
- Britain also tired of the restricted and limited access to China.
- First opium war: 1839-1842
 - Britain gets Hong Kong Island [▶ Hong Kong](#)
[▶ Hong Kong 2](#)
 - Britain also gets \$6 million compensation
 - Access to 5 treaty ports where westerners could live, trade, have permanent missions. British rule in these treaty ports
 - After Britain gets concessions, US, French, Germans followed to get their own piece of the China pie
 - People upset at Qing emperor for being so weak. Led to series of rebellions to get foreigners out. (e.g., Boxer rebellion)

Second Opium War

Second opium war (1856-1860). Britain and France joined to fight, easily defeated China again

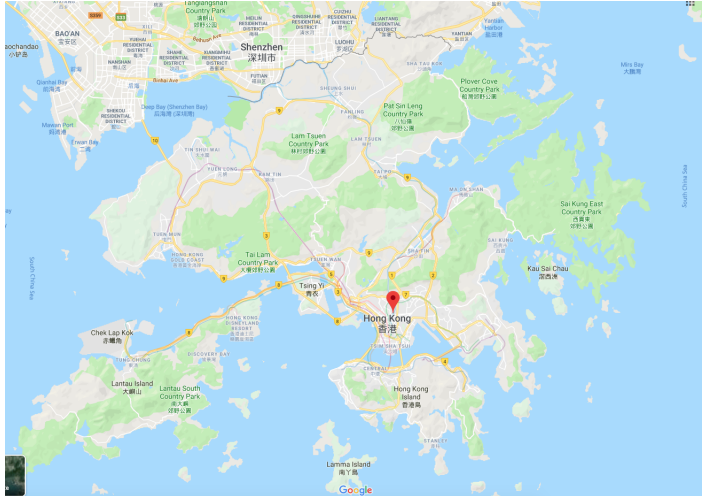
- Treaty of Tianjin: Britain gets more Hong Kong territory (Kowloon to Boundary street)
- Britain can take Chinese workers abroad to work (as coolies), on plantations, mines, build railroads, and so forth.
- China gets carved up and occupied. Regions run by foreigners (British, Germans, French). Chinese people unhappy about this.
- Huge revolt kicks out the (child) emperor and ends the Imperial system. 1911.

Hong Kong



► [Back To Opium Wars](#)

Hong Kong 2



► Back To Opium Wars

The Hated Queue



► Back Qing Dynasty

KowTow



► [Back to The kowtow question](#)