

IMPERIALISM
AND
CHINESE POLITICS

HU SHENG



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Publisher's Note

The author, a noted Chinese historian, wrote in his preface to the Chinese edition of this book, published in 1948:

Imperialism and Chinese Politics deals with the political relations between the imperialist powers and semi-colonial China—one of the basic questions of China's modern political history and of the history of revolution—over a period from the Opium War (1840-1842) to the eve of the First Revolutionary Civil War (1925-1927). The subject is a very rich one. This book lays emphasis on how the imperialist aggressors sought for and fostered their political tools in China, the different attitudes the reactionary rulers and the people of China adopted towards imperialism, and the damage which the illusions with regard to it cherished by all the political reformists of modern China caused to the revolutionary struggle of the Chinese people.

This book is not only a history of imperialist aggression against the Chinese people and the abnormal political relations that arose from it, but also an analysis of the Chinese people's struggle against imperialist aggression and for national independence, democracy and freedom. Taking the point of view of historical materialism, it deals with the great revolutionary tasks which the masses of the Chinese people accomplished in various historical stages, and criticizes the erroneous views of certain bourgeois historians.

The book presents an important aspect of the background of the revolutionary struggles of the Chinese people who have now won a great victory. It provides, on the

basis of abundant historical facts, a convincing analysis of the nefarious activities of the imperialists aimed at halting China's progress. We believe, therefore, that this English edition will be of interest to all who cannot read the Chinese original.

The translation is from the fourth edition of the Chinese text published by the People's Publishing House, Peking, in 1954.

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CHAPTER I

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW RELATIONSHIPS (1840-1864)

1. THE DRIVE EASTWARD OF THE AGGRESSIVE FORCES OF CAPITALISM

This work begins with the Opium War of 1840-1842. It is first necessary, however, to deal briefly with China's relations with foreign powers prior to the war.

China's trade relations with Russia along the northern borders began more than two hundred years before the Opium War. Trade disputes, which had led to military clashes between the two countries, were settled during the reign of the Emperors Kang Hsi and Yung Cheng of the Manchu Dynasty (1644-1911) by the conclusion of the Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689 and the Treaty of Kiakhta of 1727. During the 16th and 17th centuries, when European capitalism was in the stage of primary accumulation of capital, European merchants prowled the coastal areas of Kwangtung and Fukien Provinces and engaged in piratical activities. The Portuguese took Macao in 1557. They were followed by the Spaniards, the Dutch and the British who came to China in 1575, 1601 and 1637 respectively. All this took place during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The French sent their first merchant vessel to China in 1660 (in the 17th year of the reign of Emperor Shun Chih of the Manchu Dynasty).

In the 16th century, the Portuguese, who then ruled the seas, monopolized trade in the East; in the 17th century,

they lost their leading position to the Dutch. In the 18th century, thanks to the activities of the East India Company, Britain was able to jump to the first place in European trade with China and the Far East. As a result of what is known as the "Industrial Revolution," Britain was the first country to establish the bourgeois rule. British industries, particularly the textile industry, were expanding rapidly. The colonialists of the European countries were engaged in "overseas expansion." But while they plundered and fleeced the backward native populations and committed barbarous atrocities wherever they went, they behaved warily towards the great Chinese empire in the Far East, which was a unified country with time-honoured cultural traditions. They contented themselves with robbing the people of this empire and cheating them in trade whenever an opportunity presented itself. In the middle of the 18th century, Britain began to act differently. The rising industrial capitalists who had accumulated tremendous fortunes and enough power to go ahead with their schemes of overseas expansion were anxious to convert this vast country in the Far East into their own market in which they could sell their surplus commodities. So the British set out vigorously to "open up" China.

At this period, the Manchu Government of China was intensifying its policy of seclusion. From 1757, trade with foreign merchants was limited to the port of Canton (previously it had, for a time, also been carried on in Amoy in Fukien Province, and Ningpo and Tinghai in Chekiang Province). Foreign trade in Canton was placed under the control of the Manchu Government. Foreign merchants had to observe official regulations as to the duration of their stay, the choice of their living quarters and the scope of their activities in Canton. Moreover, they could trade and do business only with authorized Chinese merchants. They were not allowed to trade with other merchants, or deal directly with Chinese government organs. In 1793, the British Government sent Lord Macartney as its special

envoy to China for the purpose of taking up the question of improving trade relations between Britain and China directly with the Chinese emperor. Although the British envoy was allowed to come to Peking, he failed to attain his aim.

Why did the Manchu Government adopt a policy of seclusion? On the one hand, this policy of seclusion was a natural reaction to the lawless conduct of the marauding European merchants. On the other hand, the Manchu Government was prompted by the desire to save its own regime. For China's history shows that no matter what feudal dynasty ruled, "danger from without" generally coincided with "trouble from within." The Manchus themselves had invaded China and established their rule by taking advantage of internal unrest during the Ming Dynasty. They, therefore, tried to protect themselves from the strange new forces coming from the other side of the world, and their vigilance towards foreigners was especially sharp at times when their rule was threatened by internal troubles. In 1759, Li Shih-yao, Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, submitted to the emperor for his consideration a draft of "Regulations for the Control of Foreigners." He explained the reasons for these regulations as follows:

The foreigners who come to China from afar do not know the Chinese language; they have to conduct their business transactions in Canton with the aid of Chinese merchants who know foreign languages. However, a foreign merchant named James Flint understands both the local and Peking dialects; he is even familiar with the subtleties of written Chinese. Besides, there are quite a few other foreign merchants who also know both spoken and written Chinese. How could these foreigners have learned Chinese if they had not been taught secretly by traitors? . . .

It is my most humble opinion that when uncultured barbarians, who live far beyond the borders of China, come to our country to trade, they should establish no contact with the population, except for business purposes. Therefore, it is better

to take precautionary measures to restrain them than to punish them after they have transgressed. . . .¹

Thus it may be seen that from the standpoint of the Manchu rulers, for foreigners to become acquainted with the situation in China was something to be feared. They even shuddered at the thought that some foreigners could come to learn the Chinese language. What they were particularly afraid of was contact between the people they ruled and the foreigners. All this, from their point of view, had to be prevented. In taking precautionary measures to restrain the activities of foreigners, the feudal autocratic rulers were moved by the same motive that prompted them to oppress their own people, that is, to eliminate the source of menace to their power.

The Chinese people, on their part, while they detested the piratical foreign merchants, had no anti-foreign prejudices and did not fear new things. From the beginning, they were not against peaceful trade between nations. If the Chinese people later showed themselves "anti-foreign" in their attitudes and actions, this was the result of aggressive wars and economic plunder carried out in China by capitalist aggressors. The Manchu rulers, on the other hand, intended their "anti-foreign policy" as a means of maintaining their rule. But when they discovered that such a policy was powerless against foreign gunboats they gradually switched to a "pro-foreign policy," hoping thus to keep themselves in the saddle.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Britain continued to hold the leading position in trade with China. In 1784, soon after it gained its independence and became a sovereign state, the United States of America sent merchant vessels to Canton. It rapidly gained ground in the trade

¹ *Journal of Historical Sources* (in Chinese), published by the Palace Museum, Peking, No. 9, p. 307.

with China, overtaking France and other countries early in the 19th century, but still lagging far behind Britain. Although the foreign powers were constantly bickering among themselves, they were unanimous on the question of opening up China to trade. It is not surprising that Britain, the most influential capitalist country at that time, took the lead in this mission. Tsarist Russia at that time traded with China only along its northern borders. In 1805, it demanded from the Manchu Government equal privileges with other countries to trade through Canton, but this demand was rejected.

At the turn of the century, the Manchu empire, although outwardly powerful, was going through an internal crisis. The crisis manifested itself in the form of peasant unrest. Peasant uprisings burst out one after another throughout the country. The uprisings failed to develop into a peasant war, yet, with the bankruptcy of rural economy which was the basis of feudal rule, more and more oppressed peasants joined secret societies and in this way gradually enlarged the ranks of the "plotters." Moreover, corruption was paralysing the bureaucratic ruling machine. Such a phenomenon is common wherever a feudal autocracy is on the verge of death. For this reason the Manchu rulers became all the more determined to isolate China from foreign powers. In 1816, Britain sent another ambassador, Lord Amherst, to Peking for the purpose of establishing diplomatic relations with China. Not only was the mission unsuccessful, but it led to a decree by the Manchu court to the effect that thereafter no foreign envoys would be allowed to enter Peking.

British trade with China had been monopolized by the East India Company, but the British capitalists at home were itching to have a finger in the pie and this led to the abolition of the monopoly of the East India Company in 1834. In the same year, the British Government appointed Lord Napier as Superintendent of Trade in China. Napier went to Canton with a view to establishing direct relations

with the viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi. He failed to obtain an audience with the viceroy and returned to his ship. At this time, the British Government was preparing to use strong measures in dealing with China. In the eyes of British capitalists, with the abolition of the monopoly of the East India Company, the controls and restrictions imposed on foreign trade by the Chinese Government constituted the only obstacle to their efforts of opening up the Far Eastern market. Efforts to remove such an obstacle could not fail to enlist the support of other powers. Hence, even if Lin Tse-hsu¹ had not imposed a ban on the opium trade in 1839, another pretext for war would have been found.

The ban imposed by the Manchu Government on the opium trade and the confiscation of the opium smuggled into China were obviously lawful and reasonable. Britain's recourse to armed force to maintain its dirty trade was a brazen act. But as it dared not openly use "opium" as a pretext to unleash the war, it raised complaints that the Chinese Government was subjecting British traders in China to all sorts of "unequal treatment." Every country, however, is within its rights in formulating regulations governing foreign trade through its own ports. For Britain to resort to war on this account was entirely unwarranted. The real point was that Britain launched the war to expand its economic sway by using armed force to enslave the Chinese people. It was a war of aggression. Therefore, when the war broke out, the Chinese people supported Lin Tse-hsu, who stood for resolute resistance in Canton. The British forces when they landed on Chinese soil massacred

¹ Lin Tse-hsu (1785-1850)—special commissioner sent to Canton by the Manchu court in 1839 to put an end to the opium trade. He confiscated and burnt more than one million kilogrammes of opium smuggled into Canton by British and American merchants, and also laid down strict rules prohibiting foreign vessels from bringing opium to Chinese ports. On the pretext of protecting trade, the British Government dispatched forces to China in February 1840 and started a war.

and looted in the usual fashion of colonial wars. Thus the bitter enmity of the Chinese people towards the "foreign devils" was aroused for the first time.

The unity in action between China's rulers and people which manifested itself during the war did not last long. Soon the rulers changed their attitude towards the war from firmness to oscillation and ultimately to compromise. At first, the Manchu Government, fearing that foreign influences might sap its ruling position, went to war unhesitatingly. But when British forces occupied the coastal areas of Chekiang Province and began to menace Taku and Tientsin in the North, the Manchu Government, alarmed by the course of events, hurriedly dismissed Lin Tse-hsu and sued for peace. The Manchus had not the faintest idea, however, of Britain's real strength; after negotiations had begun, they again shifted to a policy of war. The Manchu court vacillated between policies. One moment it was for war, the next moment it was proposing peace. The responsible heads in the provinces acted independently, with the result that while hostilities were going on in one province, another province would offer money to the enemy and sue for peace. The people not only had to bear war costs but had to pay "peace contributions"; they suffered both from the savagery of the alien invaders and from molestation by their own armies. The war continued off and on for two years. Finally in 1842, when the British forces advancing from Shanghai reached Nanking, the Manchu Government decided to accept a humiliating peace and signed the first of its unequal treaties with foreign powers—the Treaty of Nanking. How in these circumstances could the people be expected to stand behind the government? There were two spontaneous anti-British popular movements in Canton in 1841 and 1842, both of which were suppressed by the Manchu authorities. This showed the marked difference in the attitudes of the Manchu Government and the Chinese people towards foreign aggression. The patriotic struggle of the Chinese people against the

foreign capitalist aggressors began the very day the Manchu Government signed the first treaty which sold out China to a foreign power.

The Opium War thus proved to be a turning point. It ushered in the oppression of the Chinese nation by foreign capitalists and intensified the antagonism between the autocratic rulers and the Chinese people. It also brought about a hitherto unknown kind of political relationship between China and the capitalist countries with aggressive ambitions. At the beginning of the war, the foreign aggressors had regarded the Manchu Government as an obstacle, preventing them from having a free hand in China. The outcome of the war convinced them, however, that it was vulnerable to the threat of force and could be coerced into submission. As a result of the Opium War, the anti-foreign policy hitherto firmly adhered to by the Manchu Government was shaken to its foundations for the first time. The Chinese people, on the other hand, showed that they were a force opposed to foreign aggression. This new situation took clear shape in the events that occurred in the twenty years after the Opium War and indeed these twenty years may be taken as a distinct period in the history of China. When they ended, as we shall see, the foreign aggressors acted hand in glove with the Manchu rulers in applying force against the Chinese people.

2. THE OFFICIALS, THE PEOPLE AND THE FOREIGNERS

By the Treaty of Nanking (1842), Britain exacted from China an indemnity totalling \$21,000,000 and robbed China of a portion of its territory (Hongkong). China was forced to open Canton, Foochow, Amoy, Ningpo and Shanghai to trade and in practice to agree to fix tariff rates on British goods by mutual agreement. In 1843, China signed with Britain the "general regulations under which the British trade is to be conducted at the five ports of Canton, Amoy,

Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai" as well as the Supplementary Treaty known as the Treaty of the Bogue. The Supplementary Treaty between China and Britain contained articles concerning "extraterritoriality" and the "most-favoured-nation treatment."

Although the United States had not participated in the war of 1840, many American traders were engaged in the opium trade, and during the war, the United States Government sent a squadron to the Far East. After the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking and the Treaty of the Bogue, the United States appointed Caleb Cushing as Minister Plenipotentiary to China and through him threatened and blackmailed China into making concessions. In a note to Cheng Yu-tsai, Governor of Kwangtung and concurrently Acting Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, Cushing went so far as to declare that refusal on the part of China to grant American demands might be regarded as an invitation to war.¹ The outcome of the Cushing mission was the conclusion of the Treaty of Wanghia in 1844. Like the Treaty of Nanking, it provided for the opening of the five ports to American traders. Besides it imposed on China more concrete obligations in regard to "extraterritoriality," "fixed tariff duties," and the "most-favoured-nation treatment." In the same year, France, following the example of Britain and the United States, demanded that China conclude an analogous treaty and the Sino-French Treaty of Whampoa was signed in 1844. As its trade with China was not so large as that of the other two powers, France attached special importance to the privilege of propagating Christianity in China, which it exacted. Both Catholic and Protestant faiths were recognized by the Manchu Government as lawful and the missionaries of the Western countries, together with their merchandise, began to infiltrate into China.

¹ See *Sino-American Diplomatic Relations* (in Chinese), by Li Pao-hung, p. 41.

The various treaties signed between 1842 and 1844 showed that, after its military defeat, the Manchu Government ungrudgingly made a series of concessions and enabled the capitalist countries to lay a solid foundation for their imperialist policy in China. Ilipu and Kiyung, who were responsible for directing the foreign affairs of the Manchu Government, gradually discarded their haughty attitude towards foreigners. What agitated their minds most now was how to satisfy the demands of the foreigners without losing their own "face" at the same time; to their country's long-range and vital interests they were completely indifferent.

Take, for instance, the most-favoured-nation clause in the Bogue Treaty of 1843 (with Britain). Article VIII of this treaty ran as follows:

Should the emperor hereafter, from any cause whatever, be pleased to grant additional privileges or immunities to any of the subjects or citizens of such foreign countries, the same privileges and immunities will be extended to and enjoyed by British subjects.

The Chinese commissioners who were responsible for concluding this treaty thought that this was an act of magnanimity and would save China from being involved in controversies with foreign countries in the future. They little realized that this very concession was to create a precedent for the "unilateral most-favoured-nation treatment." Again, the Treaty of Nanking merely provided for the opening of five ports to trade; none of its articles referred to the establishment of foreign settlements. But the local officials in Shanghai did not hesitate to accept the demands presented to them by Britain, the United States and France for establishing foreign settlements in certain areas of Shanghai. Such being the case, it was only natural that the aggressors were very contented with the Manchu Government and the officials in its service.

All the same, the aggressors were far from completely