



# The Opium War

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of Modern China"  
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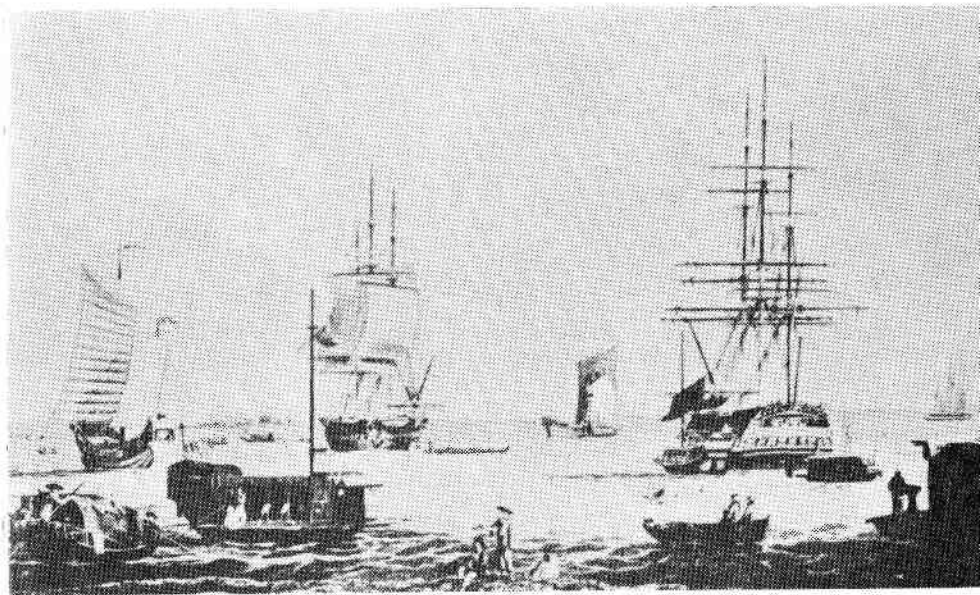
## *Publisher's Note*

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*The Opium War* is one of several booklets translated from the "History of Modern China" Series, Shanghai People's Publishing House. Others are: *The Taiping Revolution (1851-64)*, *The Reform Movement of 1898*, *The Yi Ho Tuan Movement of 1900* and *The Revolution of 1911*. All were compiled by members of the history departments of Fudan University and Shanghai Teachers' University. Some editorial changes have been made in the English version.

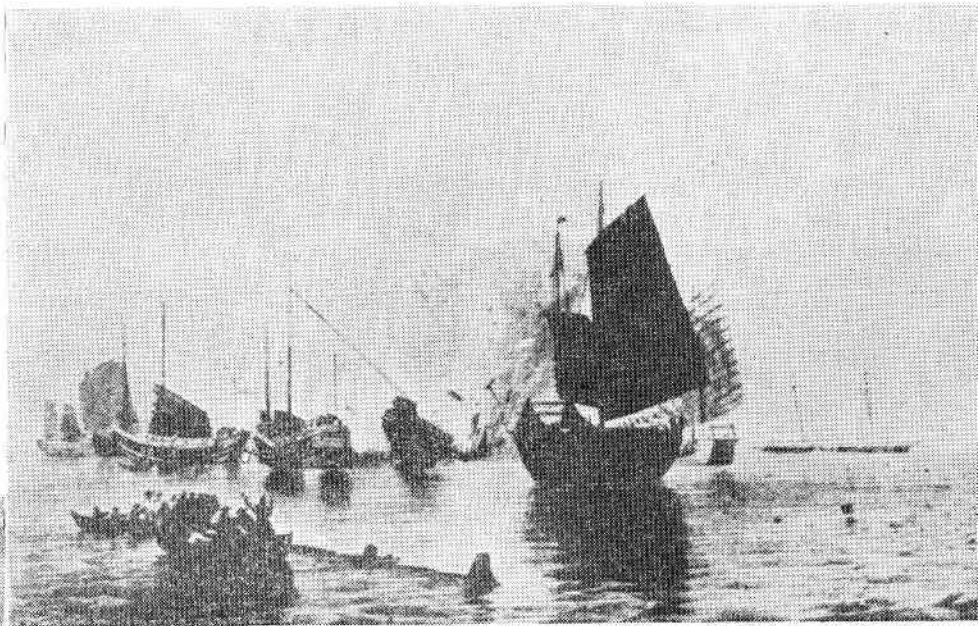
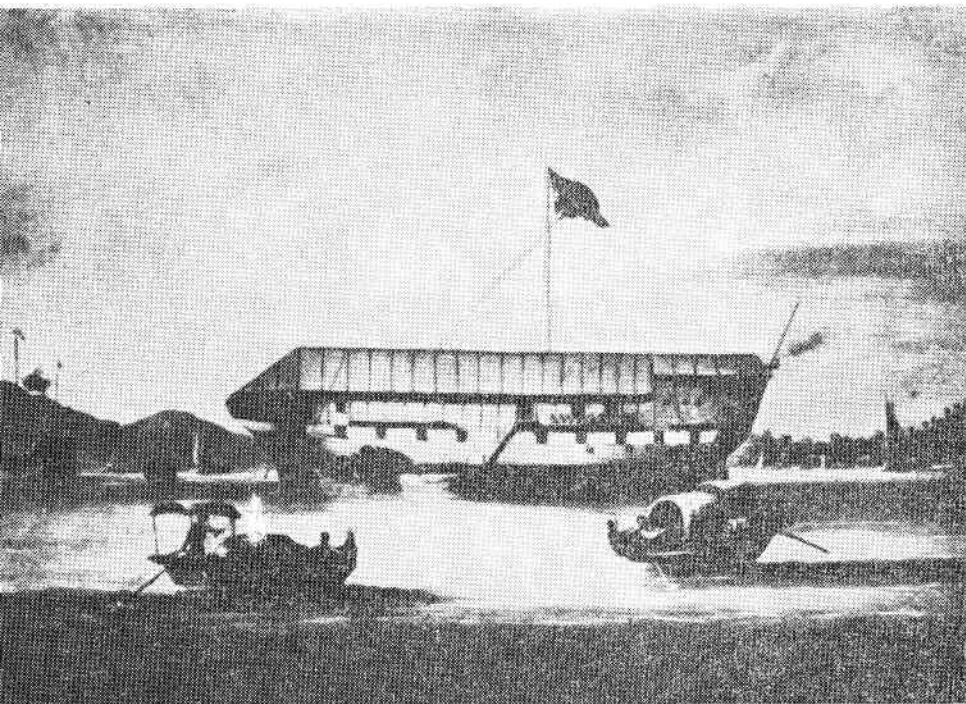
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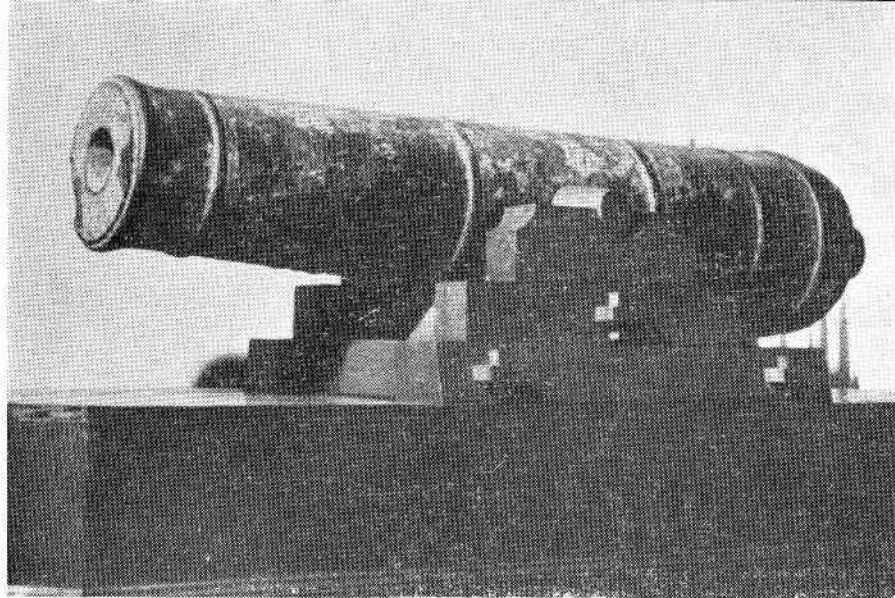


The port of Whampoa near Canton, 1835.

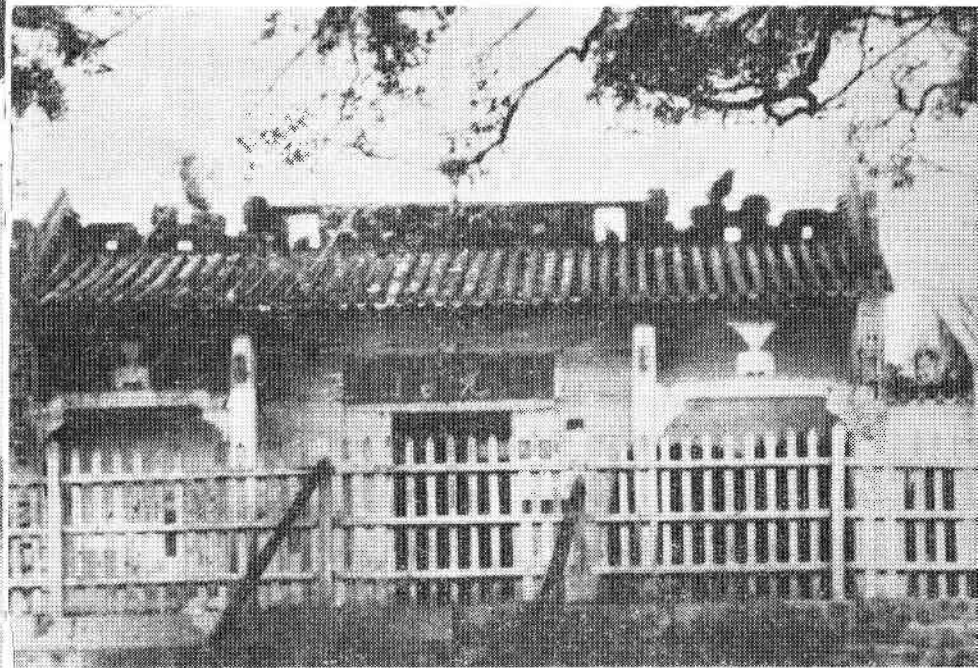
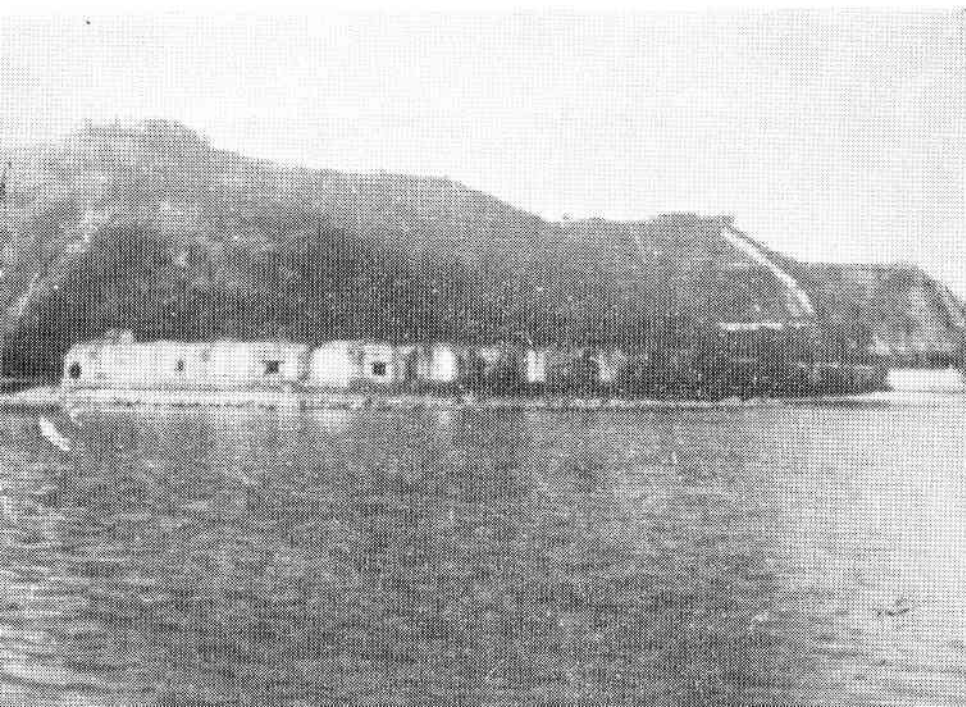
Opium-smuggling ship moored at Lingting near Canton, 1839.



Marine forces of the Ching government in battle with invading British warships off Canton, January 7, 1841.



A cannon at Humen Fort, Canton.  
Remains of Humen Fort.



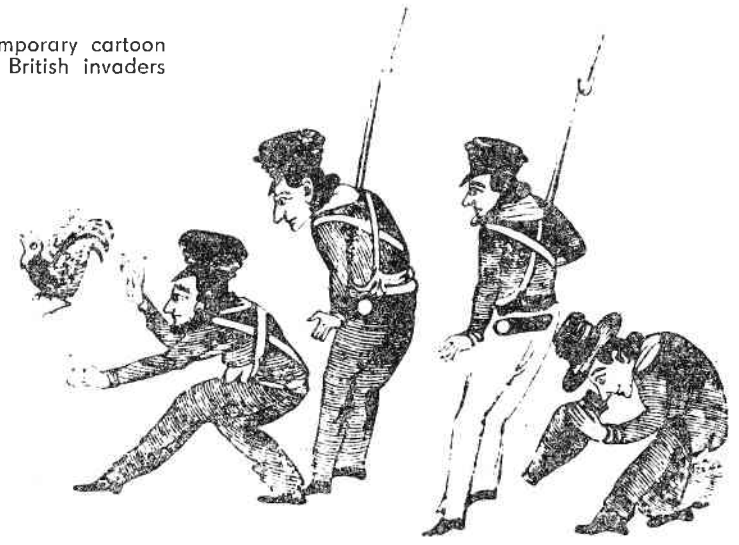
The old temple at Sanyuanli near Canton where villagers took an oath to resist the British invasion, 1841.



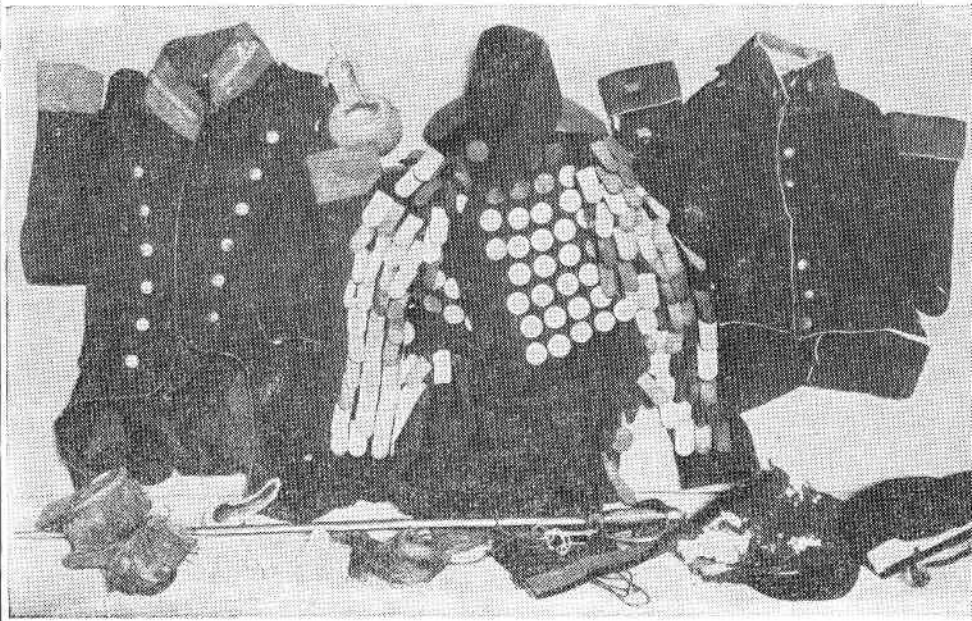
我婦女鬼神共怒天地難容我等所以誓不顧身圖  
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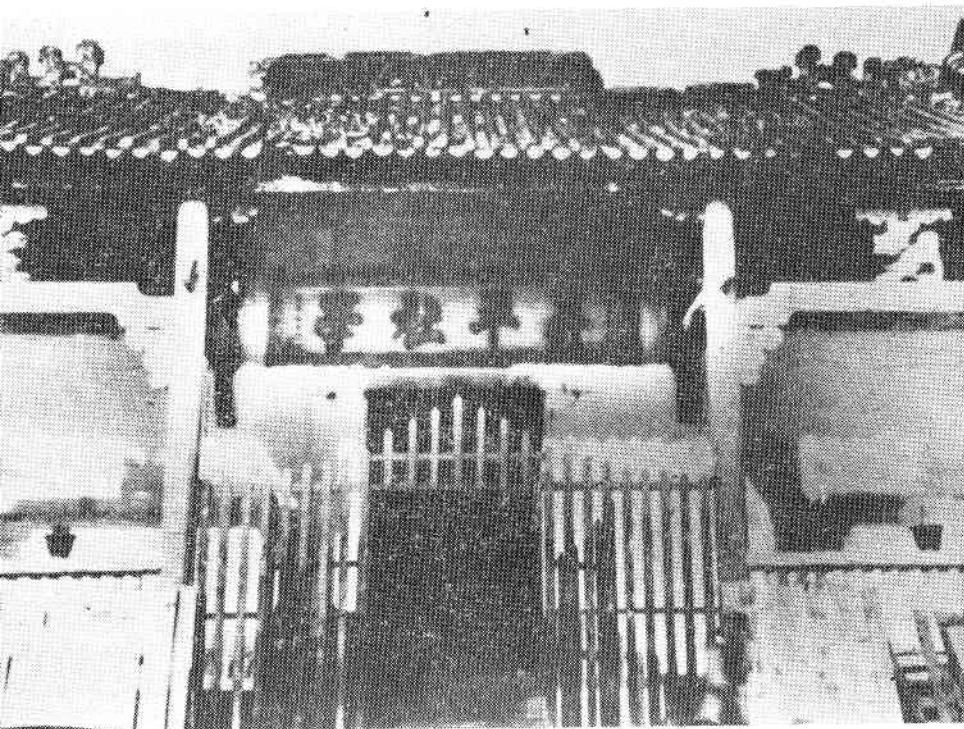
A contemporary cartoon showing British invaders looting.



Sanyuanli people's proclamation of war against the British aggressors.



British invaders' uniforms, sword, seals, etc. captured by Sanyuanli people.



The Sheng Ping Sheh Hsueh organized by Sanyuanli people as headquarters of their resistance to British aggression.

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The Opium War of 1840-42, in which the Chinese people fought against British aggression, marked both the beginning of modern Chinese history and the start of the Chinese people's bourgeois-democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism.

The Chinese people's great leader Chairman Mao pointed out in 1939: **"The history of China's transformation into a semi-colony and colony by imperialism in collusion with Chinese feudalism is at the same time a history of struggle by the Chinese people against imperialism and its lackeys. The Opium War, the Movement of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, the Sino-French War, the Sino-Japanese War, the Reform Movement of 1898, the Yi Ho Tuan Movement, the Revolution of 1911,**



**the May 4th Movement, the May 30th Movement, the Northern Expedition, the Agrarian Revolutionary War and the present War of Resistance Against Japan — all testify to the Chinese people's indomitable spirit in fighting imperialism and its lackeys.”\***

The Opium War was wilfully provoked by the British invaders. It was the first of a series of aggressive wars launched by the capitalist powers to turn China into their semi-colony and colony.

Even half a century before the war, the Ching Dynasty then ruling over the Chinese people was already quite corrupt. Its political decline, military impotence and financial insolvency had become obvious. As time went on, social wealth was progressively concentrated in the hands of an exploiting minority of nobles, officials, landlords and rich merchants. The problem of land annexation was getting ever more serious. Peasants and handicraftsmen suffered exploitation through continually rising taxes, land rent and usurious interest rates, and class contradictions consequently intensified. Popular secret societies were becoming more active in their struggle against reactionary

\* Mao Tsetung, "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party," *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1967, Vol. II, p. 314.

Ching rule. The White Lotus peasant uprising, which lasted nine years and swept across several provinces at the turn of the 18th-19th centuries, was an explosion of these growing class contradictions. Though it was cruelly suppressed by the Ching rulers, the uprising was a heavy blow to the reigning dynasty and weakened it considerably. Popular resistance continued unremittingly in the ensuing years. The reactionary Ching rule began to falter.

Meanwhile, capitalism was developing rapidly in Europe and America. In Britain, the world's first capitalist power, handicraft industries had gradually given way to machine manufacture in the latter half of the 18th century. By the beginning of the 19th century, capitalism was developing even faster there. In 1825 the first crisis of overproduction in the history of capitalism occurred in Britain. The British bourgeoisie felt it imperative to seek new and bigger markets for their goods in order to shake off the crisis and gain more profit. Having consolidated their control over their Indian colony, they shifted the spearhead of their aggression to China, a country with vast territory, rich resources and a big population, so as to force open its door and extend their tentacles to rob and enslave the Chinese people.

At the time, what predominated in the Chinese social economy as a whole was natural economy combining individual farming with household handicrafts. The family was the basic unit of peasant production, the men tilled the land and the women wove cloth. Most of the peasants' clothing and other daily necessities were produced at home. They had no particular need of, nor did they have the money to buy, the manufactured goods of foreign capitalism. In order to pay exorbitant land rent and miscellaneous taxes, they had periodically to sell some of their side-line products. So, it was hardly possible to dump British goods on the Chinese market.

Between 1786 and 1829, British capitalists came to China on eight occasions to sell cotton textiles. But they had very poor sales, and repeatedly lost money. For instance, in 1790 Britain got only 2,000 silver taels for 100 pieces of cotton cloth from Manchester, which barely covered costs. Again, in 1821, the 4,509 pieces of British calicoes and 416 pieces of velvets and velveteens which were sold by auction in Canton raised only 40 per cent of their cost price. Such losses had gone on until 1827 when, even though British piece goods began to bring in profits, the market for them was still limited.

The lack of a market for British industrial goods led to China maintaining a favourable balance in its trade with Britain. At the end of the 18th century, the East India Company — which under a charter from the British government monopolized trade with the East, mainly India and China, and carried on colonial enterprises there from the 17th to mid-19th centuries — bought an average of 4 million silver taels worth of teas from China each year. This alone more than offset the three main commodities — woollen fabrics, metal products and cotton — exported by British merchants to China. The value of all British goods imported into China from 1781 to 1793, including woollen fabrics, cotton cloth, cotton yarn and metal products, amounted to only 16,870,000 silver dollars, or one-sixth of the value of the teas China exported to Britain. So, to get teas and silks from China, the capitalists in Europe and America had to pay large sums in silver. At the beginning of the 19th century, some 1-4 million taels of silver flowed into China through Canton each year. Foreign ships coming to Kwangtung Province for trade had to bring more in silver dollars than in goods.

This state of affairs worried the British capitalists, who were eagerly seeking to expand the market for the products of their mechanized in-

dustries. They regarded the limited sales of their goods as the result of the closed-door policy pursued by the Ching government. For before the Opium War, only one Chinese port, Canton, was designated for foreign trade, and all import-export business was done by the hong merchants with special government permission. Anxious to force its way into China, Britain tried a thousand and one ways to induce the Ching government to open more ports and permit free trade.

In 1793, the British government sent Lord Macartney to Peking at the head of a large delegation to negotiate with the Ching court. He demanded that the latter open Tientsin, Tinghai and Ningpo as trading ports in addition to Canton, cede an islet near Choushan (Chusan) Island (which is the biggest in the Choushan Archipelago), reduce tariffs and allow the propagation of Christianity in China. These demands, of an obviously aggressive nature, would seriously have infringed upon China's sovereignty, so they were rejected by the Ching government.

In 1816, the British government sent Lord Amherst to China and he once more set forward the demands Macartney had made, which were again turned down.

In the 1820s and the 1830s, with the further development of capitalism, the aggressive British

capitalists became even more anxious to force open China's door for their goods. They believed that, if the Chinese market were opened, the British goods sold there would surpass all that sold in the rest of the world. This fully revealed the covetous attitude of the British bourgeoisie to China. Expounding the characteristics of capitalism, Lenin pointed out that **"the capitalist system cannot exist and develop without constantly extending its sphere of domination, without colonizing new countries and without drawing ancient, non-capitalist countries into the whirlpool of world economy."**\* Clearly the launching of the Opium War against China by British capitalists was no chance occurrence, but was a case in point.

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\* V. I. Lenin, "The Development of Capitalism in Russia," *Selected Works*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1944, Vol. I, p. 379.

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The British capitalists tried every possible means to change their unfavourable balance of trade with China. In the latter half of the 18th century, they found opium was a highly profitable commodity, with a good sale in China among its extravagant, empty-headed aristocrats, bureaucrats, landlords and rich merchants. They decided to use it to “get a foot in the door.”

Opium was first produced in India and Asia Minor. Before 1767, China’s opium imports from India had not exceeded 200 chests a year. The Ching government permitted the imported opium to be used as a medical ingredient. In 1773, the government of British India adopted the criminal policy of large-scale opium exports to China and granted the East India Company the right to mo-

nopolize the opium trade in India. To ensure the implementation of this policy, in 1797 it also gave the company the sole right to manufacture opium. By the year 1800, opium exported to China had reached 2,000 chests.

Having obtained the monopoly of the manufacture and sales of opium, the East India Company made every effort to increase its output and export. It compelled the Indian peasants to grow poppies and built factories in Calcutta to process large quantities of opium mixtures that suited the tastes of Chinese addicts. With the complicity of the government officials of British India, the company openly sold the drug by auction to merchants who then smuggled it to China.

Opium traffic brought huge profits to the East India Company, the government of British India and the opium dealers. First, let us take the East India Company with the year 1813 as an example. The cost of a chest of top-grade opium in India was 237 rupees, but its price at auction, including the tax levied by the government of British India, was 10 times that sum, 2,428 rupees. Before the mass import of opium into China, the company spent huge sums each year in silver dollars to buy Chinese teas and silks. But after it had got the monopoly of opium manufacture and sales in India,

the proceeds of exports to China alone financed the purchase of large quantities of Chinese teas and silks.

The colonial government of British India benefited because opium tax became a major item in its revenue, the rate being over 300 per cent *ad valorem*. Such tax collected in 1829-30, for example, surpassed 1 million pounds sterling, about one-tenth of its total annual revenue.

To the opium dealers, the trade was fabulously profitable. Before the Opium War, opium smuggling was more lucrative than any legal trade with China. For one thing, there was no tax to be paid. For another, the Chinese dealers always cleared the accounts in advance. William Jardine, the biggest of the British opium dealers, disclosed in a private letter that "in the good years . . . gross profits were sometimes as high as \$1,000 a chest."\* Many of the dealers amassed great fortunes through the criminal traffic. Some got themselves elected to parliament and others were knighted. Jardine himself made a large fortune and worked his way into the House of Commons without much difficulty in 1841. Another opium smuggler, James

\* Quoted in Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42*, Cambridge University Press, 1951, p. 105, Footnote 2.

Matheson, who returned to Britain from China in 1841, had made a great deal, though no one knew exactly how much. What is known is that the year after his return, he bought an island off the west coast of Scotland, and spent £329,000 on its reclamation alone. And this drug trafficker was later knighted by Queen Victoria!

Opium trade also meant huge profits for the British government and for British capitalists doing business with the East. The tax on imported teas was an important item in British government revenue. In 1793, the value of Chinese tea exports to Britain amounted to £16 million. In the 1830s, it surpassed £30 million. Thus the tax the British government collected on teas jumped from £600,000 in 1793 to £3.3 million in 1833. And the import of teas from China to Britain was largely financed with the proceeds of opium smuggling. The chief market of the British capitalists then trading with the East was India. In the 21 years from 1814 to 1835, British cotton piece goods exports to India rose from less than 1 million yards per annum to 51 million yards. This influx of British machine-made cotton fabrics inflicted enormous damage on the Indian handicraft textile industry. In his report for 1834-35, the British governor-general of India stated that the skeletons



of the Indian textile workers were whitening the Indian plain. The mounting sales of British textiles in India were largely due to the fact that the Indian peasants bought them with the income obtained from the opium they were forced to grow.

So it is clear that this evil traffic was closely linked with the interests of the British government and the British bourgeoisie as a whole, and this is the reason why they were prepared to go to such great lengths to continue it.

At the beginning of the 19th century, Britain's exports of opium to China rose rapidly. In the early period the smugglers would first unload their opium in Macao, where the drug was sold in secrecy, and then sail to Whampoa near Canton to put other goods on sale publicly. But later, bribed by the smugglers, the Ching officials turned a blind eye to the opium traffic, and the traders regularly moored their receiving ships at Whampoa itself and openly stored and sold the drug there.

As opium imports kept rising, the Ching government issued orders prohibiting it in 1796, 1800, 1813 and 1815, but all to no avail.

In 1821 when the Ching government took strict prohibition measures the traders countered by removing the opium ships from Whampoa to the open sea near Lingting (Lintin) Island at the mouth

of the Pearl River. From then on, unbridled smuggling continued on an ever-increasing scale. Instead of seven or eight receiving ships being constantly moored at Lingting, there were over 20, and the number of chests of opium stored there grew from a few thousand to 20 or 30 thousand.

In addition to these receiving ships which served as a base for the opium traffic, a smuggling network was formed throughout China's coastal provinces and hinterland until there were "outlets" for the opium traffic in practically all the cities and towns of China.

The capitalists of the United States also played an important role in this criminal smuggling. They sent their first ship to China in 1784 and thus began their armed smuggling. As the East India Company had a monopoly on the opium manufactured in India, they had to go half way round the world to buy opium from Turkey and Persia for sale in China. A survey made at that time showed that nearly all the U.S. merchants in Canton were involved in the opium trade.

Perkins and Company of the 1820s and Russell and Company of the 1830s were both U.S. establishments engaged in immense opium traffic operations in China. The U.S. aggressors built clippers especially for large-scale armed smuggling,

which could sail faster than other trading ships. When they ran into Chinese naval patrols, they would open fire and force their way through.

The U.S. smugglers robbed the Chinese people of enormous wealth through opium traffic. In 1824, one trader admitted that he had not shipped in a single silver dollar to China in the previous three years, though he had annually shipped out merchandise, mainly silks and cotton piece goods, worth approximately 1 million silver dollars.

Opium traffic became more and more rampant in China because the British and U.S. invaders had bought over the Ching officials. One of the British recorded in his memoirs: "These fellows were in the habit of receiving a bribe of from five to ten dollars a chest, which they would request the captain to keep back for them from the Chinese smugglers. . . . About once a month they would visit the ships for payment on the number of chests smuggled."\*

Thus the British and U.S. traffickers had by a despicable combination of bribery with smuggling broken through the dyke, so that poisonous black torrents of opium began to gush into China. The annual import of the drug, standing at 5,000 chests

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\*J. Elliot Bingham, *Narrative of the Expedition to China*, Henry Colburn, London, 1843, Vol. I, p. 6.

in 1821, had soared to over 10,000 chests by 1831.

The year 1834 was an important one in the infamous history of the opium traffic. The opposition of the growing British industrial and commercial capitalist class to the East India Company's monopoly of trade with China resulted in its abolition by the British government in that year, thus making it possible for the entire British bourgeoisie to trade with China. To meet this new situation, the government appointed William John Napier, a Scottish peer, and a ranking officer in the British navy, as chief superintendent of British trade in China. Previously, the president of the East India Company's select committee in Canton was the British government's only commercial representative and it had no official permanent diplomatic representative in China. Its intention in appointing a chief superintendent was to establish diplomatic relations with the Ching government with a view to realizing its aggressive ambition to open more ports to the opium trade, to expand Sino-British trade, and to obtain some naval bases.

Napier arrived at Macao in 1834. When none of his aggressive demands was satisfied, he became exasperated and on September 5 ordered two British warships to bombard the forts at Humen

("The Bogue"). He also blustered that war between Britain and China was imminent and that China would have to bear the entire responsibility for it.

In fact Napier died soon afterwards. The British government later appointed first Sir George Best Robinson, an ex-president of the East India Company's select committee in Canton, and subsequently Charles Elliot, a former senior colonial officer in the then colony of British Guiana, to be chief superintendent of British trade in China. These two would resort to anything to facilitate the armed opium traffic and frustrate China's efforts to prohibit it. Robinson even moved his office from Macao to a cutter anchored off Lingting so that he could help the British opium traders better. In 1837, with the support of his successor, Elliot, the British and U.S. opium dealers succeeded in smuggling into China 39,000 chests of opium, worth 25 million U.S. dollars.

These huge imports of opium brought terrible calamity to China. At first only aristocrats, officials, landlords and rich merchants smoked the drug. Later, all kinds of hangers-on of the ruling class, such as court eunuchs, yamen runners, sedan-chair bearers, soldiers, Buddhist monks and nuns, Taoist priests and city prostitutes, became

addicts. According to an estimate of 1835, over 2 million people took to smoking the drug.

The opium trade upset the favourable balance China had long maintained in its foreign trade. The tea, raw silk, cloth and medicinal herbs it exported were insufficient to pay for the opium, and a large silver outflow began. After 1821, when the level of opium smuggling rose sharply, the dearth of silver was felt not only in the coastal provinces but in other parts of the country as well. British statistics indicated that the outflow of silver from China to Britain between 1823 and 1834 was worth the alarmingly high figure of 25.2 million dollars. The most conservative estimate is that at least 100 million dollars' worth, one-fifth of the total amount of silver in circulation in China, was drained from the country in the 20 years 1821-40 before the Opium War. This means there was, on the average, an annual loss of 5 million dollars in silver, one-tenth of the Ching government's annual revenue.

The outflow of silver resulted in a serious situation as the value of silver appreciated in terms of copper, silver and copper cash being the two currencies then in use. At the end of the 18th century, 700-800 copper coins could be exchanged for 1 tael of silver. By the 1830s, however, 1,600-

1,700 were needed to obtain the same amount of silver, showing a twofold rise in the value of the latter currency.

Peasants and handicraftsmen suffered directly from the rising price of silver because the market prices of agricultural and handicraft products were calculated in terms of copper cash, while they, being obliged to pay taxes in silver, had first to change their copper cash into silver. At the same time, the silver drain gave rise to a financial crisis for the Ching government. Tax collection became more difficult, the provinces fell far behind in their delivery of tax payments, and the state treasury was shorter and shorter of silver reserves. Furthermore, opium addiction among officials and in the army had a corrosive effect on the whole ruling apparatus, and smuggling and bribery corrupted it even more. So, the opium problem became a cause of serious concern and anxiety to the ruling class.

## *The Debate on the Opium Ban*

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The Chinese people had long been deeply concerned about the spread of opium and firmly demanded its prohibition. From the early 1830s, the Ching government officials gradually divided into two groups on this issue: one advocating thorough suppression, the other legalization. Those in the former group, dissatisfied with the lethargic and superficial way the problem was being handled, demanded that both opium dealers and addicts should be dealt with severely. Those who favoured legalization held that legal measures, however stringent, could never eliminate the use of the drug, so, in face of the constant silver outflow, it would be wiser just to put a tax on opium to relieve the treasury's problems.

In June 1836, Hsu Nai-chi, a minister in charge of the Court of Sacrificial Worship, suggested in a

memorial to the Tao Kuang Emperor that the ban on opium should be lifted, that, in regard to opium traffic, all prohibitive regulations should be annulled and that its free importation by foreign merchants should be officially permitted again, providing that tariff duty was paid on it as a medical product. However, to stem the outflow of specie, only purchase by barter should be allowed, and trading opium for silver should be forbidden. Regarding its use, the memorialist believed that the only restrictions should be on government officials and on soldiers while ordinary people might do as they pleased. For he reasoned that though opium smoking certainly shortened people's lives, China's population was growing, so there was no need to worry that it might start to fall. He also advised a permissive policy on the cultivation of the poppy, allowing anyone who wished to grow it to do so, in the belief that when enough people did, importing the drug would no longer be profitable and the foreigners would abandon the trade of their own accord.

Obviously Hsu Nai-chi's proposal, which was meant to legalize the cursed opium trade, encourage the spread of the drug and induce the labouring people to grow the poppy and become addicts, would have brought greater harm to the country.

Small wonder his proposal was applauded by Elliot, chief protector of the British opium smugglers, as soon as it became known. Elliot immediately sent a report on the "good news" to his superiors, and then impatiently awaited the proclamation of the lifting of the ban.

The masses of the people, however, were firm in their opposition to the absurd idea of lifting the opium ban. Even some officials of the Ching government memorialized the Tao Kuang Emperor, repudiating Hsu Nai-chi's proposal, and advocating strict prohibition. In 1838, Huang Chueh-tzu, a minister in charge of the Court of State Ceremonial, wrote to the Emperor that the opium ban had been ineffective in the past because of the sabotage by government officials at various levels who had vested interests in the opium trade. He pointed out sharply that if the situation was allowed to continue, the price of silver would go on rising, the state's silver reserves would keep diminishing, its sources of revenue would dry up and it would have no funds to meet expenditure. All this, he said, would have unthinkable consequences. He wanted opium smokers to be dealt with severely, suggesting that they be required to rid themselves of the habit within a year, after which there should be heavy penalties for defaulters amongst the common peo-



ple, and even sterner ones for government officials. His line of reasoning was that if all smokers stopped using the drug, it would vanish without prohibition.

A heated debate on the opium ban then began among the Ching rulers, and the Tao Kuang Emperor had Huang Chueh-tzu's proposal sent to all the provincial viceroys and governors so that they could state their opinions. The outcome was eight for the proposal and 20 against, with Lin Tse-hsu (1785-1850), then Viceroy of Hupeh and Hunan provinces, in the minority party, and Chishan, Viceroy of Chihli Province, among the majority. This showed how weak the prohibitionists were at the top of the government hierarchy.

The debate in the upper echelons of the Ching ruling class took place at a time when large-scale opium imports had become a real menace to their regime. Both sides were therefore motivated by a desire to stabilize this feudal rule. Actually when growing opium imports were endangering the very survival of the Chinese nation, there could be no doubt at all that a policy of total prohibition was the right one.

In the course of the debate, the Tao Kuang Emperor realized what a menace to his rule opium was and so favoured total prohibition. He was especially impressed by Lin Tse-hsu's argument: "Opium is

extremely harmful and must be relentlessly suppressed. If things are left to slide, I am afraid in a few decades China will have no soldiers capable of resisting its enemies and insufficient silver to finance its armed forces." Lin's warning brought home to the Emperor the gravity of the situation, and he dismissed Hsu Nai-chi and summoned Lin Tse-hsu to Peking to discuss what measures should be taken to prohibit opium.

When the issue of opium prohibition arose, Lin Tse-hsu, in his capacity as Viceroy of Hupeh and Hunan, took active measures in the region he governed with conspicuous success. He arrived in Peking in December 1838 and had many audiences with the Tao Kuang Emperor before he was finally appointed Imperial Commissioner, with command of naval forces in Kwangtung, and sent to suppress opium at Canton.

The task was not at all an easy one, since he had both the British endeavour to undermine his efforts and the corrupt force of addicts, dealers and bribe takers amongst the Chinese themselves to contend with. This corrupt reactionary group was represented by Muchanga, a Manchu nobleman who served as Chief Grand Councillor and enjoyed the Emperor's complete trust; and Chishan, Viceroy of Chihli. They opposed both the thorough suppres-

sion of the drug and its legalization, for they depended not only on the opium trade but also on the smuggling itself which, once the trade was legalized, would cease to be a source of bribes for them. In fact they acted as agents of foreign opium traders. When the prohibitionists had the upper hand, they engaged in covert sabotage. But when the British aggressors started the war, these capitulationists surfaced and, disregarding national interests, they attacked the prohibitionists represented by Lin Tse-hsu.

Long before Lin Tse-hsu went to Canton, there had been a widespread popular struggle in Kwangtung against British and U.S. opium trafficking. The then Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi provinces, Teng Ting-chen, who had once favoured lifting the ban on opium, had changed his view under great popular pressure and later advocated thorough prohibition. Under the measures he took against the drug, thousands of smokers surrendered their pipes and indicated their resolve to relinquish the habit. A large number of local ruffians who had lived on the proceeds of opium smuggling fled in fear. Many of the British and U.S. opium traders were afraid that the growing anti-opium movement would be detrimental to their interests. The incident in Canton of December 12, 1838, demon-

strated this anxiety. On that day, a Chinese opium trader was conducted by Ching officials to the square in front of the foreign factories to be hanged on a wooden cross. British and U.S. opium dealers had the effrontery to break up the cross and drive away the officials and executioners. Such a serious infringement of China's sovereignty naturally aroused great popular indignation and demonstrators soon surrounded the foreign factories.

An American opium trader gave this eye-witness account: "The siege of the factories by the mob [a slanderous reference to the Chinese people] was continued throughout the afternoon, the guards at the corner of the American factory were obliged to retreat . . . and things looked very serious." There gathered "without doubt eight or ten thousand" demonstrators, "seemingly bent on the destruction of the 'foreign devils.' Towards five o'clock someone suggested that it might be worth while to get notice of our situation to Houqua [the hong merchant Wu Tun-yuan]. . . . Mr. G. Nye . . . and myself undertook to go and see him . . . we managed to cross to that [the roof] of a shop in Hong Lane, through which we descended, and after some exertion reached the street in the rear of the factories, called the 'Thirteen Factory Street,' which led to Houqua's hong. We found the old

gentleman. . . . He at once dispatched a messenger to the 'Kwang-Chow-Foo,' the chief magistrate of the city. . . . About half-past six o'clock, to our great relief we heard the approaching sound of the gong, denoting the coming of the officers, and witnessed from our verandah the immediate dispersion with whips of the rabble. No one was spared, the sight of the numerous soldiers in attendance on the mandarins caused a rush towards every outlet from the Square, and even to the river, where several were drowned. . . . Wide open flew the factory gates, and in an instant their imprisoned occupants [foreign opium dealers] appeared with looks of relief indescribable. The mandarins passed the night on the ground, chairs were procured for them, official lanterns were lighted. . . . The next day everything reassumed its normal state of comfort and safety. The 'victim' had been strangled at the public execution ground, to which he was taken from the Square. Approaching the mandarins in the morning to thank them for their timely assistance . . . they received us very courteously, and assured us we had 'nothing to fear!' '\*

\* W. C. Hunter, *The "Fan Kwae" at Canton Before Treaty Days, 1825-1844*, Kelly and Walsh, Limited, Shanghai, 1911, pp. 75-77.

This account reveals, firstly, how the stormy force of this spontaneous popular struggle terrified the foreign aggressors. It also exposes the infamous behaviour of the hong merchants, precursors of the Chinese comprador class, who whole-heartedly served the interests of the invaders. Finally, it shows how, in the face of humiliation, the feudal rulers of the Ching regime, instead of fighting back, turned around to suppress the people and protect the aggressors! All this demonstrates that from the very beginning the Chinese people and the reactionary feudal ruling class took entirely different attitudes to foreign aggression. The former stuck to a line of firm resistance, the latter to a line of capitulation. Lin Tse-hsu's conviction that opium should be prohibited was further reinforced when, on his arrival at Canton in March 1839, he found that there was strong popular pressure for action against the foreign aggressors. He ordered that the coastal defences be strengthened and the opium dealers arrested. On March 18, he instructed the foreign traders to furnish an inventory of their opium stocks on the receiving ships within three days and to await the destruction of these stocks. They were also required to sign a guarantee that they would never again bring opium to China. In his edict, Lin stated resolutely: "I will not leave

Canton until the flow of opium is stemmed. I have solemnly pledged to see this matter satisfactorily dealt with, and nothing can obstruct me in this respect.”

These measures hit the foreign smugglers hard, and Charles Elliot, chief British trade superintendent and representative of the British government, determined to undermine them. He protested at the installation of defences at Canton, gave orders for the opium receiving ships off the Pearl River estuary to flee and prepare for battle, and began to compel the British merchants at Canton to leave.

To counter Elliot's sabotage, Lin Tse-hsu followed the customary procedure of “sealing the holds when regulations are violated.” He called a halt to all trade, sent soldiers to keep the foreign community under surveillance, and ordered that it be quarantined by the withdrawal of Chinese employees from its premises and the interruption of communications between the receiving ships and the foreign factories. Seeing the futility of outright resistance, Elliot changed his tactics and ordered the British traders to surrender their opium, promising that the British government would give them compensation. To bring the U.S. opium traders into line, he persuaded them to do likewise on the same condition. His nefarious intention was to raise

Lin's handling of the illegal opium trade to the level of an international issue between China and Britain, so that the British government might have a pretext for war.

From mid-April to mid-May that year, the British and U.S. traders surrendered 20,283 chests plus some 2,000 sacks of opium, totalling well over 2 million catties. All this was publicly destroyed between June 3 and 25, on a beach at Humen, with foreigners among the many spectators. When the destruction of the opium was announced, some foreign ill-wishers, certain missionaries among them, scoffed that the Chinese would never destroy even an ounce of the opium and that, if ever it was attempted, most of the stuff would be stolen. But those who went to the scene had to admit that they had been wrong. The missionary E. C. Bridgman wrote: “The degree of care and fidelity, with which the whole work was conducted, far exceeded our expectations. . . .”\*

The destruction of opium at Humen was a victory for China's anti-opium policy, showing the whole world the Chinese people's determination to stamp out trade in the poisonous drug and oppose foreign aggression.

\* *Chinese Repository*, Vol. VIII, p. 74.

But opium traffic was a source of wealth for the British bourgeoisie and of revenue for its government. Naturally they were not going to concede defeat. While the British traders were surrendering their opium, Elliot was pushing ahead with preparations for an aggressive war. On April 3, 1839, he suggested in a report to the British Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston that the best way to deal with China was for the British to reveal nothing beforehand and then to strike a sudden blow at it. In his many subsequent reports, he repeatedly urged the British government to start a war.

After he had had the opium destroyed, Lin Tse-hsu persisted in his prohibitionist policy. He required the captain of each foreign merchant ship entering the port of Canton to sign a bond that his ship would never carry opium to China and to accept that, in case of violation, the cargo would be confiscated and the persons involved would face capital punishment. In the meantime, he continued with military preparations. He and Admiral Kuan Tien-pei directed the Kwangtung water forces in training and had the fortifications at Humen strengthened by repairing and adding to the gun positions. The cannon there were increased to 300. Two rows of wooden piles linked by chains were

thrown across the narrowest point of the Pearl River estuary to block the passage to British warships; two batteries were erected in the Chienshatsui (Tseenshatsuy) area with the emplacement of 56 cannon; guards were stationed at every land and water pass.

Lin Tse-hsu also called on the people to organize their own forces and recruited 5,000 men from among boat dwellers and fishermen for a subsidiary marine force known as the "water braves." They were trained to carry out reconnaissance and make sudden attacks on enemy vessels, so as to help the regulars in battle when necessary. Each person received pay of six silver dollars a month, and another six as a family allowance.

Such resolution in the face of armed invasion distinguished Lin Tse-hsu from the capitulationists of the landlord class. However, he was of course a member of the feudal ruling class, and though he had something in common with the people as far as opposing aggression was concerned, class contradictions still existed between him and them. For this reason, he had had serious misgivings about recruiting boat dwellers and fishermen, which he said should be done most carefully, and only as a temporary expedient. He stipulated that the families of the men should be carefully investigated and a



guarantor should be required for each recruit. If anyone was found unreliable, he was to be dismissed immediately and sent home and placed under surveillance so as to prevent him from doing evil in the future. This shows that Lin Tse-hsu, as a member of the landlord class, could not really mobilize the people against aggression.

In response to Lin Tse-hsu's determined enforcement of the opium ban and his defence preparations, Elliot, while urging his government to launch a war, ordered the British merchants to refuse to sign the undertaking not to carry opium and to continue their armed smuggling on a large scale, and he provoked frequent armed clashes.

In July 1839, an incident occurred at Chienshatsui, Kowloon, in which a group of British seamen beat up some villagers one of whom, Lin Wei-hsi, was so badly injured that he died. Lin Tse-hsu repeatedly demanded that Elliot hand over the culprit to the Chinese government. Elliot not only refused to comply but went so far as to hold a trial himself on Chinese territory, thus wilfully infringing on the sovereignty of China. In August, Lin Tse-hsu responded by cutting off the supply of provisions to the British, and Elliot then resorted to armed provocation. At 2 p.m. on September 5, he ordered some British ships to open fire on three

patrol boats of the Chinese navy off Kowloon. The Chinese seamen fought back courageously, and the batteries on land also opened fire. In this battle, according to a young British sailor, the Chinese fire was "steady and well directed," and he wrote that he hoped never to take part in such a battle again.

In his persistent refusal to allow the British merchant ships to sign the bond, Elliot depended heavily on support from the U.S. aggressors. U.S. ships transported goods for the British, and British trading vessels even entered the port of Whampoa under the U.S. flag. This speech of thanks from Elliot to an American opium dealer, Robert Forbes, who was manager of Russell and Company, reveals that the United States acted as an accomplice of the British aggressors from the very beginning of the war: "My dear Forbes, the Queen owes you many thanks. . . . We have got in all our goods, and got out a full supply of teas and silk. If the American houses had not remained at their post, the English would have gone in. I had no power to prevent them from going."\*

But Elliot had not succeeded completely in his attempt to prevent British merchants signing the bond. In October 1839, the captain of the merchant

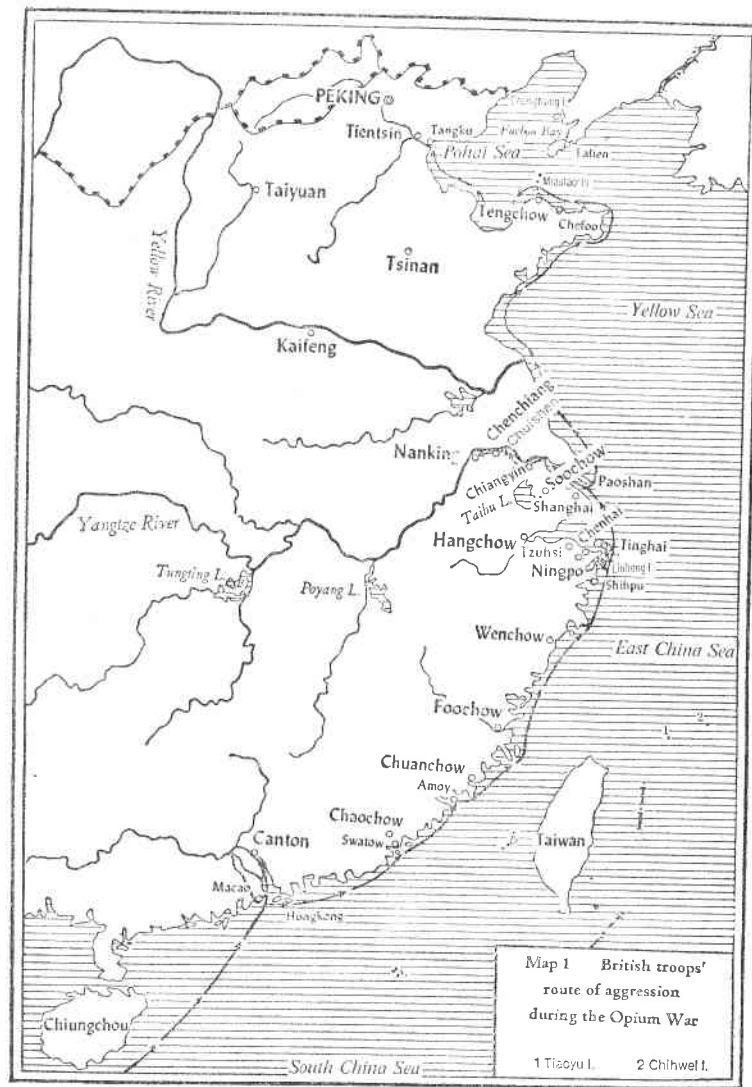
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\* Robert B. Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, Boston, 1892.

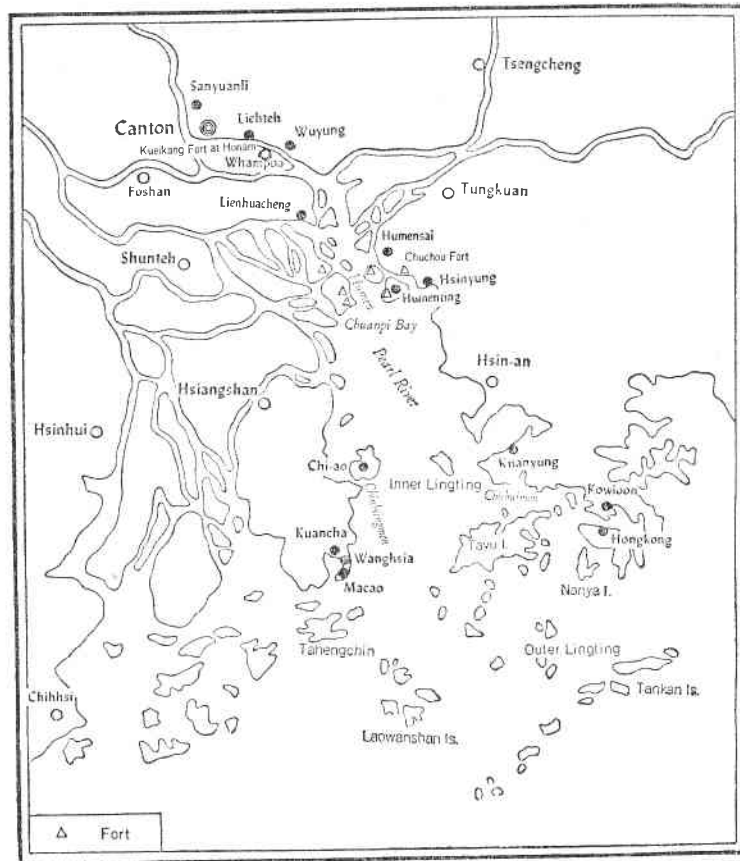
ship, the *Thomas Coutts*, signed and entered the port in defiance of Elliot's ban. Soon afterwards the captain of the *Royal Saxon* applied to sign, too.

This infuriated Elliot. On November 3 when the *Royal Saxon* was approaching the port, Elliot dispatched two warships to obstruct her and they opened fire on Chinese naval vessels, provoking the fierce battle of Chuanpi (Chuenpi). Under the command of Admiral Kuan Tien-pei, the Chinese forces fought gallantly in this two-hour naval engagement. Finally the British warships withdrew to the high sea, one of them having sustained damage.

Elliot did not repent after the failure he suffered at Chuanpi. In the 10 days from November 4 to 13, he provoked six more incidents in the vicinity of Kuanyung at the Pearl River estuary, being repelled in each. These battles were a prelude to the war between China and Britain. In January 1840, on instructions from the Tao Kuang Emperor, Lin Tse-hsu proclaimed the formal closure of the port of Canton and the cessation of Sino-British trade.



## *British Aggression Brings War to China*



Map 2 Situation in the Canton area during the Opium War

Merchandise, opium and cannon were the three weapons used by the British aggressors to force the door of China. A decade prior to the Opium War, the British opium smugglers had already begun to prepare public opinion for the war and to gather related intelligence. In 1823, James Matheson, a leading opium smuggler, made a reconnaissance expedition of more than 500 kilometres along the Chinese coast. In 1827, in Macao this same Matheson started publication of a newspaper, the *Canton Register*, which openly advocated aggression. In 1832, the Canton branch of the East India Company, operational headquarters of British aggression in the East, sent its spy ship, the *Lord Amherst*, on a six-month cruise up the Chinese coast. On board were two spies, H. H. Lindsay

(alias Hoo-Hea-Mee) and Charles Gutzlaff, who systematically collected political, economic and military intelligence regarding Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai — important ports along the southeastern coast. Together with the results of the previous years of effort, this provided the British opium traffickers with the information they needed to plan the war right down to such details as the number of men and the types of vessels to be employed. This was submitted to the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, in a personal letter from Lindsay dated July 24, 1835.

The East India and China Association was set up in London in 1836, with a membership of 109 big companies which had interests in India and China in such fields as the import-export trade, shipping and finance. This body maintained close contact with the British government, especially with the Foreign Office, supplying it with a constant flow of intelligence reports both verbal and written, and lobbying hard for stronger action against China.

On August 5, 1839, the news of the suppression of opium traffic in China reached London. It aroused an immediate response from the aggressive British bourgeois bloc which convened an emergency meeting on August 7 to discuss how to instigate war against China. Presiding at the

meeting was John MacVicar, a textile capitalist and director of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, an opium trader himself, since he was the “confidential agent” in Manchester for Jardine Matheson and Company, which specialized in opium smuggling. Everyone at the meeting belonged to the big bourgeoisie and had vested interests in the encroachment on China. Among them were G. G. de H. Larpent, president of the East India and China Association and a member of the opium club, and John Abel Smith, agent in England of the big opium smuggler William Jardine. After the meeting the participants were received by Palmerston, and together they planned the war.

The British bourgeoisie now launched a big drive to drum up support for the impending war. The Chambers of Commerce of London, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Glasgow and Bristol were united in their advocacy of determined and forceful action against China and clamoured for war. On September 21, upon receiving an official report from Charles Elliot on China’s ban on opium, Palmerston at once blusteringly declared that the only way to deal with China was first to give it a good beating and make explanations afterwards.

On October 1, a British cabinet meeting decided on war. In February 1840, Admiral George Elliot

was made full plenipotentiary and Charles Elliot deputy plenipotentiary so that they might blackmail the Ching court by military and diplomatic means. After a period of preparation, an aggressive force was assembled by the British government in April 1840, which comprised 16 men-of-war mounting 540 cannon, 20 transports, 4 armed steamers and 4,000 men. It was commanded by Admiral George Elliot.

The British fleet's instructions were to blockade the Pearl River estuary, occupy the Choushan Archipelago and to proceed north to Tientsin to intimidate the Ching government into opening trading ports, accepting a treaty tariff, paying compensation for the confiscated opium and ceding some islands. This plan of operations was based almost entirely on the intelligence reports and suggestions of the opium dealers Lindsay and Jardine. Palmerston wrote in a private letter of 1842: "To the assistance and information which . . . Mr. Jardine so handsomely afforded us it was mainly owing that we were able to give to our affairs, naval, military and diplomatic, in China those detailed instructions which have led to these satisfactory results. . . ."\* First and foremost among

\* Quoted in Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800-42*, Cambridge University Press, 1951, p. 214.

the "satisfactory results" he referred to was the Treaty of Nanking, the first of the unequal treaties between China and Britain. Here Palmerston was plainly stating that the British government had followed the ideas of opium traffickers in its plan of aggression, and this itself bespeaks the sordid nature of the war.

At the beginning of June 1840, the British naval forces arrived off the Kwangtung coast ready for an invasion attempt. At this time Lin Tse-hsu had been appointed Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, and under his command, the Kwangtung coast was well defended so the British attempt was frustrated. On June 30, the British fleet sailed north to invade Amoy, only to be thwarted by the Chinese forces under the command of Teng Ting-chen, now Viceroy of Fukien and Chekiang.

On July 2, the invading fleet reached Tinghai in Chekiang Province. As the Ching government had taken no precautions along the coast against war except in Kwangtung and Fukien, the British took Tinghai on July 5. The pirates began plundering the city as soon as they landed. According to an eye-witness account by an invading officer, when the troops landed and the Union Jack was unfurled, a horrifying scene of pillage and rapine followed. The men forced their way into every house and



ransacked every drawer and chest, and the streets were strewn with books, paintings, furniture, utensils and foodstuff . . . all of which were taken away. . . . The plundering only stopped when everything of value was gone. Such barbaric behaviour on the part of the British took place not only in Tinghai, but throughout the entire course of the war.

Using occupied Tinghai as a base, the main force of the British fleet sailed on northwards. They arrived off Taku near Tientsin, and on August 11 they transmitted a letter from the British government to the Ching government demanding, among other things, the legalization of the opium trade, the payment of an indemnity and the cession of territory.

The contradiction between the Chinese nation and the foreign capitalist invaders had now evolved into a war in which there was firm mass demand that aggression be resisted. Faced with this situation, the Ching government split into two groups, one favouring resistance and the other compromise. The former with Lin Tse-hsu, Teng Ting-chen and Kuan Tien-pei as its representatives, supported the opium ban and advocated resistance. The latter was composed of officials who had always opposed the opium ban, or who feared a foreign war might

shake the very foundations of their rule. Representative of this group were Muchanga, Chief Grand Councillor; Chishan, Viceroy of Chihli; and Ilipu, Viceroy of the Liangkiang provinces (Kiangsu, Anhwei and Kiangsi). These were men who wielded great power in the Ching government. As long as the opium ban and the war had both been going well, they had kept quiet. But as soon as Tinghai fell, they broke their silence and began to heap recriminations on Lin Tse-hsu, saying he had invited trouble by being too hasty in his handling of the opium affair. When the British fleet arrived off Taku, they came out into the open and claimed before the Tao Kuang Emperor that the opium ban had been the very cause of the coming of the foreign forces, and that Lin Tse-hsu had privately disposed of communications from the British side. What with the fact that the invaders had already reached the Tientsin area and were threatening his rule and that he had begun to suspect the doings of Lin and his associates, the Emperor wavered and dispatched Chishan to Taku for talks with the invaders. Once there, Chishan declared that victory would be hard to gain in view of the enemy's "sturdy warships and powerful cannon," and that "even if they could be thrown back this year they might come the next, so war, once started, would

indeed be endless." With this defeatist theory, he argued for his policy of persuasion which in fact amounted to capitulation in the face of aggression.

At the conference table with the invaders, Chishan acted as a shameless apologist, saying that the British had been abused, and that if they had avenged themselves at Canton, Lin Tse-hsu had certainly deserved it. He further assured the enemy that if they agreed to withdraw to Canton to resume negotiations there, all the outstanding issues would be settled to their satisfaction.

Considering Chishan's proposal acceptable, the British were appeased. In the middle of September, their fleet began to move south.

On September 17, the Tao Kuang Emperor made Chishan an Imperial Commissioner for what he called his "merit" in deterring the enemy, and sent him to Canton to continue the negotiations with the British. A few days later, the Ching government pronounced Lin Tse-hsu and Teng Ting-chen guilty of "mishandling the whole matter," and removed them from office pending investigation.

In the few months in which the British forces occupied Tinghai, 488 men — over a tenth of the total number — died of infectious diseases, and upwards of 1,500 men were hospitalized. In those days ships relied mainly on sail, and it took four or

five months for British ships to bring reinforcements and supplies from England to China via the Cape of Good Hope. Their plight was all the worse because the people of Tinghai refused to have anything to do with the occupying forces. Also, the peasants would lie in ambush to catch or kill any of them bold enough to go foraging outside the city for grain, cattle or fish. When the British fleet was off the Chekiang coast on its way south, Admiral Elliot pressed for a settlement of this matter in negotiations with Ilipu, the Imperial Commissioner in charge of the defence of this area. Ilipu had been the Viceroy of the Liangkiang provinces and had taken up his new post only after the fall of Tinghai, with the supposed mission of recovering the lost territory. But, like Chishan, he was a weakling, bent on capitulation. On November 6, he made a truce with Admiral Elliot which enabled the British to transfer some of their troops from Chekiang to strengthen their forces at Canton.

Chishan arrived at Canton on November 29, 1840. To humour the invaders with concessions to them, he undid much of Lin Tse-hsu's work, dismantling defence installations, cutting down the marine forces, disbanding the water braves recruited by Lin and allowing the British to send their skiffs up the inland waterways to reconnoitre them.

Negotiations between Chishan and Charles Elliot began early in December. George Elliot had already returned to England because of illness and had been succeeded as the commander of the British fleet by Gordon Bremer, so Charles Elliot was made representative for negotiations with the Ching government. Outrageous though his demands were, they were almost completely accepted by Chishan, who balked only at ceding Hongkong on his own responsibility, but promised he would, on Charles Elliot's behalf, ask the Tao Kuang Emperor to grant it.

The British, however, were too impatient to wait and on January 7, 1841, they took over the forts at Tachiao (Taikok) and Shachiao (Shakok). The garrison commander Chen Lien-sheng and his son died in the fighting there, due to lack of reinforcements. The enemy then thrust on to Humen, where Admiral Kuan Tien-pei and his men fought gallantly. But their request for reinforcements was ignored by Chishan. Indeed Chishan sent a delegation which travelled overnight to Chuanpi near Humen and signed the draft Convention of Chuanpi, undertaking among other things to pay an indemnity of 6 million silver dollars for the opium which had been destroyed, to reopen the port of Canton and to cede Hongkong.

Popular dissatisfaction with the cowardice of the Ching Dynasty in the face of British demands grew

and mass anti-compromise struggle was also rising. In Chenhai (Chinhai), Chekiang, over 1,000 people petitioned Ilipu not to withdraw the local garrison after the truce. Others sent letters demanding that Tinghai should be recovered. In Canton, the news that in accordance with the draft Chuanpi Convention British forces had occupied Hongkong was greeted by strong popular protests. The gentry and intellectuals of the landlord class who advocated resistance held meetings to demand the expulsion of British forces from Hongkong, and government officials who favoured resistance petitioned the Emperor to remove Chishan and reinstate Lin Tse-hsu and Teng Ting-chen to lead the fight against the British.

Until now the Tao Kuang Emperor had believed that the British fleet had come north to the Tientsin area for revenge after the destruction of the opium, and that once Lin Tse-hsu and Teng Ting-chen had been punished and the port of Canton reopened to Sino-British trade, the invaders would return Tinghai to China and peace would ensue. However, Elliot was now making even more unreasonable demands in the most bullying manner, and there was no sign that Tinghai would be returned. Feeling that the prestige of the "Celestial Empire" had received a great setback from all this, the Emperor

began once again to incline towards war. On January 6, 1841, he declared that no indemnity would be paid and ordered the provincial viceroys and governors concerned to strengthen the coastal defences. When the news of the fall of the forts at Tachiao and Shachiao reached Peking on January 27, he was so furious that he immediately declared war. He ordered Ilipu to take the offensive at once in order to recapture Tinghai, while Chishan was instructed to mobilize his troops for action. Three days later, the Emperor's nephew Yishan was given the title of "Rebel-Quelling General," with Lungwen and Yang Fang as his deputies. The three were to command a force of 17,000 men formed from the various provincial armies to fight the British at Canton.

The Emperor's declaration of war was not, however, an indication of real determination to fight aggression, it was meant as a mere "show of strength" which he expected to lead to the abandonment of the indemnity claim and the recovery of lost territory. Thus, when Chishan, misrepresenting the situation, had sought permission for the British to reside on the offshore island of Hongkong in exchange for the return of Tinghai and Shachiao, the Emperor had been ready to compromise, thinking that Chishan was trying to do

the best under the circumstances. At this juncture, however, Yiliang, Governor of Kwangtung, communicated to the throne that Chishan had without authorization signed the draft Chuanpi Convention promising an indemnity and ceding Hongkong, and that furthermore the Hongkong garrison had already been expelled by the British and the residents there had been made to "pay allegiance" to them and become their "subjects." This was too much for the Emperor, who took the indemnity and loss of territory as a great offence to "the prestige of the Celestial Empire." He burst out in a stream of abuse against Chishan and immediately ordered that he be conducted to Peking in chains. In the meantime, he gave strict instructions to Yishan and his deputies to speed up the mustering of the provincial forces and to "quell the rebels without faltering."

By this time, the British had already heard that reinforcements were coming to Kwangtung, and they did not wait to be attacked. On February 25, their fleet shelled the Humen Fort. The garrison under the command of Admiral Kuan Tien-pei put up a stiff resistance, though Chishan gave them no support whatsoever. (The edict about Chishan had not yet reached Canton.) In spite of multiple wounds, Admiral Kuan continued to fire cannon

himself in defence of the fort but his men were hopelessly outnumbered so it finally fell. Kuan and several hundred other defenders died fighting gallantly. On the 27th, when British warships steamed up the inland rivers, the Wuyung Fort fell without a fight as the garrison had fled. Chishan then ordered the withdrawal of forces from the strategic point Erhshawei, leaving Canton open to the enemy. By March, the enemy were closing on the suburbs of Canton.

Yang Fang, the new deputy commander, arrived at Canton before Yishan and Lungwen. Being a downright capitulationist, on March 10 in the face of an enemy advance from several directions, Yang Fang pulled his forces back into the city and waited fatalistically. It so happened that the resumption of war at Canton brought the trade to a standstill. British merchant ships totalling 20,000 tons were unable to enter the port, and 30 million pounds of teas piled up within it, which alone meant £3,000,000 in tax to the British government. With interests of such magnitude at stake, Elliot proposed a truce and the resumption of trade, which Yang Fang, greatly relieved, accepted at once. Under the truce, trade was resumed at Canton from March 20 to May 21.

But this truce was just a British ploy to enable them to get reinforcements. After the truce, Elliot

sent Bremer to India for that purpose. Meanwhile, on April 14, Yishan arrived at Canton.

Yishan was sent by the Ching court to be the supreme commander of the Canton front. He was an embodiment of the political corruption and military impotence of the reigning dynasty. In his very first communication to the Emperor on his arrival, he wrote: "The danger lies within, not without." Slandering the K'wangtung people who advocated firm resistance by calling them riff-raff, he went on to say: "It is more important to defend ourselves against the populace than the enemy." He even abused the people as traitors and had some of them executed in cold blood. His fear and hatred of the people clearly revealed the sharp class contradictions between the Ching rulers and the masses of people.

Yishan was full of groundless confidence. After his arrival at Canton he indulged in a dissipated life and did nothing for the war effort, yet he believed he would somehow be victorious. On May 21, he ordered a night attack on the British fleet, which, already reinforced from India, was fully prepared. No losses were inflicted on the enemy, but a great number of Chinese vessels belonging to the ordinary people were destroyed by fire. The next day, the British took the offensive, and by

the 25th, the Ching troops numbering over 10,000 had fallen back from all outposts, and the enemy were in control of every vantage point around the city. The British then shelled Canton from the Ssufang Fort, which was on favourable rising ground. On the 26th acting on intelligence reports from traitors, they concentrated their fire on the imperial examination hall in the southeastern corner of the city where Yishan and his colleagues resided. Thrown into a great panic by the fire power of the invaders, these cowards hoisted a white flag on the city wall. They sent the Prefect of Canton Yu Pao-chun and Wu Shao-yung, a traitorous hong merchant, as emissaries to sue for peace from the enemy. The Peace Convention of Canton was then signed on terms laid down by the British general Sir Hugh Gough.

The terms of the peace convention were: 1) Yishan and his troops to quit the city of Canton and proceed to a distance of upwards of 60 miles. 2) A ransom for Canton of 6 million silver dollars to be paid within one week; 1 million before sunset of May 27. 3) The British troops to stay in their present positions for the time being, neither side to be reinforced. If the ransom was not paid in full within seven days, the total to be raised to 7 million silver dollars; if not cleared within 14 days,

to 8 million; if 20 days, then 9 million. The British forces to withdraw to outside Humen when the ransom was paid in full. 4) A sum of 300,000 silver dollars to be paid to the British factories in compensation for their losses.

On the one hand, the signing of the Canton convention exposed the extreme corruption of the Ching ruling clique; on the other, it showed that what Engels called "**the old plundering buccaneering spirit**"\* of the English of the 16th and 17th centuries had been passed on to their bourgeoisie of the 19th century in its entirety.

However, this aggressive force which, when pitched against the corrupt rulers of the Ching Dynasty, had seemed almost invincible was revealed in its true colours as a paper tiger when it came face to face with the great Chinese people.

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\* See Frederick Engels, "The New English Expedition in China," April 1857.

*Sanyuanli People  
Trounce the Invaders*

5

The Chinese people's great leader Chairman Mao has pointed out: **"All the nationalities of China have resisted foreign oppression and have invariably resorted to rebellion to shake it off."**\*

From the very outset, the Chinese people took a stand of resolute resistance to foreign capitalist aggression, in contrast to traitors like Chishan and Yishan. When the battle of Canton began, the people in the surrounding area joined in of their own accord. In Hsiangshan (now Chungshan) County 500 water braves were organized among the masses to attack the invading fleet at Pai-e-tan, while in Hsin-an (now Pao-an) County the people organized three flotillas of fire rafts loaded with

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\* "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party," *Selected Works*, FLP, Peking, 1967, Vol. II, p. 307.

combustibles to make night raids on the British warships anchored off Humen. Peasants tilling the fields also launched spontaneous attacks against the invaders.

The shameful capitulation of Yishan and the others aroused great popular indignation; mass discontent and anger mounted rapidly. To inhibit the expression of these sentiments, Yishan, Lungwen and Yang Fang, the three high capitulationist officials, posted joint notices strictly prohibiting resistance to the invaders. They forbade the capture of any enemy landing parties engaged in harassment, and stated that any violation of this order was punishable by martial law. Thus the ugliness of the Ching rule protecting the enemy and suppressing the people was further exposed.

Nevertheless the people continued their determined resistance and a fierce struggle flared up in Sanyuanli, a village about 2.5 kilometres to the north of Canton city. The battle of Canton directly affected the villagers and the invaders' atrocities and the shameless surrender of the Ching officials infuriated the people of Sanyuanli and the surrounding area from the start. When a marauding enemy unit went to the village on the morning of May 29, 1841, the local people put up a stiff resistance, killed seven or eight of them and put the rest to flight.

In their struggles, the people will always produce their own leaders. A market gardener, Wei Shao-kuang, was the first to come forward and call on the whole village of Sanyuanli to unite and prepare for enemy retaliation. Led by Wei and others, the Sanyuanli people held an oath-taking meeting in front of an old temple at the north end of their village. Taking a three-star flag as their standard, they pledged to advance when it advanced and to retreat when it retreated, with no fear of death. Having made their preparations, they were all eager for a fight to the end against the enemy.

In order to mobilize more people, the Sanyuanli villagers chose Wei Shao-kuang and some other representatives to contact the nearby villages. Together, they rapidly organized a large armed contingent made up of peasants, textile handicraftsmen, masons, secret society members, and some patriotic gentry from the small towns of the area. To make their attack on the enemy effective, every village sent representatives to a meeting at Niulankang to discuss how to organize the masses and deploy them for battle.

Niulankang, about 6 kilometres to the north of Canton, was in a hilly region. On the afternoon of May 29, the representatives of the various villages assembled there. The following was agreed at the

meeting: 1) Every village was to form its own unit, with its own elected leader and banner. 2) Every village was to prepare several big gongs. When it was necessary to give alarm and one village beat its gongs, all the others would come out to fight. 3) All men between the ages of 15 and 50 were to fight. 4) In fighting, the tactic of drawing the enemy force in deep and then using a concentrated force to encircle and annihilate it was to be preferred to frontal attack. 5) Niulankang was to be the site for the decisive battle. After the meeting, the representatives hastened back to their villages and mobilization for the big battle continued into the night.

Early on the morning of May 30, the people of the Sanyuanli area, under the flag of the Ping Ying Tuan (Quell-the-British Corps), gathered a force several thousand strong and marched on the Ssufang Fort where the British were encamped. The invaders were eating breakfast when they suddenly heard thunderous battle cries and saw people armed with spears, swords, rattan shields and matchlocks sweeping down towards them under brightly-coloured banners from the hills and moors. Taken by surprise, the commander-in-chief of the British land forces, Sir Hugh Gough, hurriedly ordered the bugler to sound the signal



for assembly and then divided his forces in three groups to intercept the attackers. Equipped with muskets and artillery, they numbered no less than 2,000 men, that is, nearly as many as the full force which had attacked Canton.

When Gough led a charge from the heights where the fort was, the armed masses retreated rapidly to lure the enemy in deep according to plan. Upon reaching Niulankang they called a halt and formed up in battle array on the rising ground. Sensing danger the wily Gough hastily ordered a retreat, but it was too late. Suddenly a gun roared out and gongs and drums were beaten, whereupon the nearly 8,000 armed villagers who had been lying in ambush around Niulankang suddenly emerged. Panic-stricken, the enemy hurriedly started to shell the people's forces, but no matter how they tried they could not stop the waves advancing. The counter-attack of the people of the Sanyuanli area had begun. An enemy major was the first to lose his life. Gough then ordered a charge to break through at two points so that they might retreat to the Ssufang Fort.

When the British troops tried this, the people's forces immediately attacked them on the flank. An enemy colonel, in describing the situation at the time, admitted that as the British army retreated

in separate columns, the Chinese at once concentrated on their rear and on the flanks, resolutely and bravely harassing them and closing in on them until they were right before their bayonets. The attackers made use of every opportunity to engage in hand-to-hand combat, such as when the retreating troops were crossing a stream or marching in single files on narrow paths.

The desperately fleeing enemy was hampered by a big thunderstorm which drenched all their gunpowder and rendered their muskets useless. The heavy rainfall submerged the paths between the paddy fields, turning them into a vast expanse of water. The enemy, in leather boots, found it very hard-going squelching along on the slippery, muddy land, whereas the people of over 100 villages in the Sanyuanli area, in their straw rain capes and woven bamboo hats, fought harder and more courageously than ever. The women and the aged and the weak, whom it had originally been intended to evacuate, came to join in, armed with hoes and iron rakes. Even the children supported the peasant fighters by shouting battle cries. The women who had not come to fight cooked the meals on their own initiative and took them to the front. This voluntary co-operation between many thousands of people fighting the enemy together

fully demonstrated the might of the armed masses.

Pursued by the people's fighters, some of the enemy hid under cucumber and bean trellises, some fell into the flooded fields, and some laid down their arms and held up their hands in surrender. The overbearing "tyrant of the sea" was shorn of his prestige.

About 4 p.m. Gough and his routed troops reached the Ssufang Fort. They discovered that the 3rd Company of their 37th Regiment, which was supposed to bring up the rear, was missing. A detachment armed with the newest weapons, waterproof percussion muskets, was sent out to rescue it. It turned out that the 3rd Company had been surrounded by the people's fighters during the retreat. Its soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder in a square formation and retreated step by step, hoping thus to escape annihilation. But they had reckoned without the ingenious method thought up by the heroic Chinese people to deal with their stubborn resistance. The villager fighters used a kind of hooked spear to fish the enemy out one by one from their formation and then wrested their muskets from them.

Even with the help of the reinforcements sent by Gough, this routed band did not manage to break through the encirclement until after 9 o'clock

in the evening. It was then closely pursued by the angry people's fighters ring upon ring of whom encircled the Ssufang Fort till the morning of May 31.

Notable successes were achieved in the fighting on May 30. According to contemporary records, over 200 enemy soldiers were killed, still more were injured and a dozen or more prisoners were taken along with large quantities of captured matériel.

The news of the great victory in Sanyuanli spread rapidly to other villages around Canton. People from more remote hamlets who had not heard of what was going on before organized themselves on May 30 and kept arriving at the Ssufang Fort through the night. By 10 a.m. the next day, the fort was encircled by several tens of thousands, their flags unfurled, their swords and spears rising like forests and their war cries reverberating everywhere. Faced with these vigorous fighters, the invaders did not know where to turn.

At this crucial moment of confrontation, the Ching army, fully armed and over 8,000 strong, withdrew from the city of Canton with furled flags under the terms of the capitulatory convention of Canton. They pretended not to see the tens of thousands encircling the invaders. The enemy

trapped on the heights of the Ssufang Fort took the hint, and Gough at once wrote a letter which was smuggled through the heavy encirclement by a Chinese traitor, demanding help from Yu Pao-chun, the Prefect of Canton. Gough threatened that if the Ching government did not immediately disband the popular forces, the British army would consider that their actions were officially sanctioned and would abrogate the convention of Canton, advance to attack the city and burn down every town and village in its vicinity.

Having read Gough's letter of intimidation, Yishan, who had long been terrified of the invaders, immediately sent Yu Pao-chun to aid the encircled enemy. Traitor that he was, Yu Pao-chun hastened to the enemy camp to explain that the Ching government had not known of the popular forces' activities and that there were certainly no Ching officers among them. To show his "good faith," he shamelessly asked the British to send an officer with him to talk to the popular forces. Gough chose a Captain Moore, who went with a white flag in his hand and accompanied by an interpreter. Seeing Yu Pao-chun walking towards them shoulder to shoulder with one of the enemy, the peasant fighters were very indignant. They pointed their matchlocks at Moore, and for-

bade him to come any nearer. So he was compelled to slink off back.

Knowing that the indignant masses were not to be challenged, Yu Pao-chun asked them in a very conciliatory manner to withdraw. They, in a bitter fury, denounced him to his face for his shameless betrayal of the country. Their angry denunciations became an uproar and, seeing the impossible situation, Yu Pao-chun turned to the landlord gentry. He made threats to back up his demand that they find some means to disband the popular forces, saying that this affair was their doing as well as that of the common people and that, if the host did not disband and something occurred, they would be held responsible for everything and the 6 million silver dollars for the ransom of the city would also be charged to them. Prompted by the indignation they had justly felt for a time and by the wish to protect their own families and property, the gentry had taken part in this struggle against the British. But, belonging to the landlord class, they were, after all, of the same breed as the Ching bureaucracy and were naturally unable to hold out against the officials. When Yu Pao-chun intimidated them like this, they wavered. Some slipped away and others even helped Yu, by rhetoric and trickery, to persuade the masses to disperse.

After the siege of the Ssufang Fort was raised, the invaders did not dare remain in Canton for long and quietly retreated from Humen the second day.

The masses were temporarily dispersed but the flames of struggle were not to be extinguished. When, for the sake of saving face, the British got Charles Elliot to issue a proclamation on June 7 to cover up for the crushing defeat suffered by the invaders, the masses at once put out a repudiation and challenged them to another battle. By now the enemy had felt the people's strength and dared not accept the challenge.

The anti-British struggle in Sanyuanli was the first spontaneous battle fought by the Chinese people against foreign aggression in modern times. It was a glorious episode in the modern history of the Chinese people's national revolutionary struggle. Greatly raising the people's morale and deflating the arrogance of the foreign invaders, it encouraged the people of Kwangtung and of the whole country in their struggle against aggression and showed them that the troops of the feudal government were not to be relied on and the enemy was not to be feared. It forcefully negated the argument of the compromisers and capitula-

tionists that with powerful warships and artillery the invaders were invincible, and demonstrated that, once armed, the people could defeat the invaders in spite of their superior equipment.

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Yishan and his colleagues were defeated and surrendered to the invaders. But they lied about the battle of Canton in their memorial to the Tao Kuang Emperor describing their defeat as a "great victory," claiming that the ransom for Canton of 6 million silver dollars was to pay off debts for the hong merchants and disguising the forced withdrawal of their troops from Canton by saying that they were being sent to quell the bandits in the countryside. In closing, they asked the Emperor to approve the British request that trade be resumed. Hence the Emperor concluded from the memorial that his government need not bother about the British any more and, reasoning that they had already received some punishment, he agreed to the resumption of trade. Thereafter, this

bunch of corrupt Ching aristocrats deceived others, and even themselves, writing unscrupulous accolades of their "great victory."

However, when the Ching government, thinking the war was over, had instructed the coastal defence forces to withdraw, the British came again.

When the British government received a report from Charles Elliot on the draft Convention of Chuanpi in April 1841, it was very dissatisfied with what had been exacted from China. So the British government removed Elliot from all his posts in China, disavowed the convention and dispatched Henry Pottinger, a cunning politician already known for his part in colonialist activity in India, as a plenipotentiary to enlarge the scale of the invasion of China so that more rights and interests might be obtained.

When Pottinger arrived in Macao in early August 1841, he sent a note to the Kwangtung provincial authorities with an outline of the peace terms which he would accept. He informed Yishan that Elliot had returned to England and that he had been appointed in his stead, and threatened that if the Ching government did not accredit representatives fully empowered to accept the peace terms in their entirety, his forces would go north and attack.

Before his outline of conditions forwarded by Yishan to Peking had had time to reach the capital, Pottinger had already started north with a fleet which launched a surprise attack on Amoy on August 26. The garrison commanders, Chiang Chi-yun and Ling Chih, died fighting, and both the islet of Kulangyu (Kulangsu) and the city of Amoy were lost to the invaders.

Only when the news that Amoy had fallen reached Peking was the Tao Kuang Emperor startled out of his fond dreams of peace. He hurriedly ordered the coastal provinces to strengthen their defences, but by then the British fleet had already reached the Chekiang coast. On September 25, the British invaders attacked Tinghai. The defenders, 5,000 in number, commanded by Ke Yun-fei, Cheng Kuo-hung and Wang Hsi-peng, put up a firm resistance against the enemy, fighting to the last man. After six days and nights of fierce struggle, on October 1, Tinghai fell into enemy hands once more. The Chinese troops displayed great valour in the battle and inflicted heavy casualties on the invaders.

The British next attacked Chenhai (Chinhai). Yu Pu-yun, the garrison commander at Chao-paoshan outside the city, was a coward. Hardly had the enemy landed than he led a panic-stricken

flight. Then Yuchien, an Imperial Commissioner and Viceroy of the Liangkiang provinces, took over the command but failed and committed suicide by throwing himself into a river. Chenhai was lost on October 10. Three days later the enemy attacked and captured Ningpo. Though the morale of the Chinese troops in the battle of Chenhai had been somewhat affected by Yu Pu-yun's flight, many of them spontaneously put up a tremendous fight, charging the enemy again and again.

Having occupied Ningpo, the invaders appointed as its magistrate Charles Gutzlaff, who under the guise of being a missionary was an important agent and had taken part in the *Lord Amherst* expedition (see Chapter 4). They looted the city, the wealthiest trading centre in Chekiang Province, carrying off about 120,000 dollars worth of cash and silver ingots from the Ningpo prefectural treasury alone and stealing enough grain to keep them supplied for two years.

The Chekiang campaign was a real deterioration in the situation. The Ching government lost armies and cities and its days seemed numbered. Action was necessary. On October 18, the Emperor gave Associate Grand Secretary Yiching, his nephew, the title of "Majesty-Bearing General,"

with Wenwei and Teyishun as his deputies, and appointed Niu Chien as Viceroy of the Liangkiang provinces. They were given troops transferred from the interior, and sent to Chekiang to deal with the military situation.

Like Yishan, Yiching represented the corrupt forces of declining feudal rule, and he traversed almost the same path of defeatism and capitulationism as Yishan had. On his journey to Chekiang accompanied by many of his relatives and friends and an entourage recommended by princes and ministers, he frittered his time away in sightseeing and debauchery. He spent over a month at Soochow throwing his weight around but making no preparations to recover the lost territory. Some proposed the organization of local forces to be deployed around Ningpo, Chenhai and Tinghai so that they could harass the enemy in small contingents anywhere at any time, until at an opportune moment when the enemy was sufficiently worn out the regular troops could counter-attack in force. But Yiching, like Yishan before him, feared the people and naturally could not adopt a plan which needed popular support.

One day in January 1842, Yiching dreamed that the British had fled to their ships to escape to the open sea. His entourage all agreed that this was

a "good augury." Wenwei then claimed to have had the same dream. Yiching was delighted and decided to resume his expedition at once. But when they got to Shaohsing (Shaohing) in Chekiang, these nobles and princes got drunk every day on the famous local wine as they waited idly for the victory they had dreamed about.

On March 10, Yiching divided his troops into three groups which were to attempt the recovery of Ningpo, Chenhai and Tinghai simultaneously. He was so sure of success, counting on coordinating action from within the three cities, that he ordered his troops to be armed not with firearms, but with spears and swords. The British invaders had intelligence about Yiching's plans from the start and were prepared for him. As the troops which had been sent to capture Ningpo entered the city, they came under fire from the British positioned in the houses lining each side of the streets. They retreated in confusion with heavy casualties. The other two groups of Yiching's troops were also defeated due to poor command. The enemy took the chance to occupy Tzuhsi (Tzeki) while Yiching and his men escaped to Hangchow. Afraid to fight any more, he favoured compromise from that time on. Thus the battle in Chekiang came to an end, Yiching, like

Yishan, having gone through three stages of behaviour — reckless action, followed by panic at the first encounter with the enemy, and cowardly capitulation.

The battles of Canton and Chekiang in which Yishan and Yiching respectively commanded the Chinese forces were the biggest battles ever fought by the Ching government in the Opium War. About 20,000 troops took part in each, but each was lost because of blind, confused and blundering command. The root cause of the defeats, however, was the sharp antagonism between the decadent feudal rulers and the people. For the ruling class dared not organize the people to resist and indeed adopted a hostile attitude towards them from the start; when the people rose against the invaders of their own accord, it restricted and sabotaged their struggle, even fabricating charges of national betrayal against the resisters. This was what decided its absolute defeat. Had the Ching court not been so corrupt, it could have crushed the invaders who came far from home with a force of no more than 15,000 men and a fleet of some 100 assorted vessels.

The corruption and weakness of the Ching government revealed by its repeated defeats gave rise to great popular indignation. High expenditure on the war and war-profiteering by officials

together increased the people's burden which was also aggravated by the Ching army's lack of discipline, for they suffered extortion and harassment from its troops. All this produced popular unrest, protests were to be heard everywhere and the contradictions between the feudal rulers and the people further sharpened. Refusals of land rent and other small-scale peasant struggles took place all over the country. At the beginning of 1842, a secret society uprising led by Chung Jen-chieh broke out in Chungyang County, Hupeh Province. Though the uprising was suppressed, it greatly shook the Ching regime, bringing home to it that if the foreign war were not concluded soon, domestic troubles would arise to make the situation even more desperate. At this critical juncture, Liu Yun-ke, Governor of Chekiang Province, memorialized the Tao Kuang Emperor with "10 points for consideration," advising the throne to compromise with the aggressors as soon as possible. Stressing the unstable domestic situation, he reminded the Emperor that if the war continued the people were likely to take the chance to revolt. Other officials who favoured compromise were also doing their best to get the war ended by negotiation at this time.

The development of the people's struggle would have threatened the rule of the landlord class



directly, whereas allowing trade with the British invaders, paying them indemnities and ceding territory to them would not seriously endanger its rule for the time being. The Ching government, therefore, chose to end the war by making concessions to foreign invaders and seeking peace negotiations. After Yiching's defeat in Chekiang, the Tao Kuang Emperor issued an order forbidding any resistance to the British army or the capture of its soldiers by the people. He even decreed that anyone who killed even a single enemy soldier would be subject to capital punishment and the responsible officials would be tried. About the same time, the Emperor sent Chiying, a Manchu noble, who was *Chiang Chun* (Governor) of Shengching in the northeast, and Ilipu, who had been dismissed as Viceroy of the Liangkiang provinces for capitulation to the aggressors, to Chekiang to negotiate with the British.

When they arrived in the province, Chiying and Ilipu wrote to the invaders asking for a truce and peace negotiations. To ingratiate themselves, they unilaterally released the British prisoners. But Pottinger had no intention of negotiating with them at this point. He had had intelligence from missionaries that the Ching government was strengthening its defence to the north around

Taku off Tientsin, while leaving the lower Yangtze very weakly defended. He was aware that this was the richest region of China and that Nanking, being a key port for the Yangtze River and thus the Grand Canal, was vital to the Ching regime. Large amounts of grain and silver collected south of the Yangtze were first amassed in Nanking and then shipped up the Grand Canal, through Chenchiang (Chinkiang), to Peking. Pottinger believed that if his army could capture Nanking it would have a stranglehold on the Ching government and could bring enough pressure to bear to force it to accept all his terms unconditionally. He therefore rejected the peace proposals of Chiying and Ilipu, and decided to push his way up the Yangtze, cut the Grand Canal and so capture Nanking.

In early May 1842, the invaders pulled out of Ningpo and Chenhai taking Choushan Island as their base. On May 18, they occupied Chapu, an important coastal town in Chekiang. Then they began to make incursions up the Yangtze River.

Wusung (Woosung), situated at the mouth of the Yangtze, is the gateway to that great river. Along the nearby Whangpoo River was a series of forts. Before the British attack, the forts on the west side at Wusung were guarded by troops under Chen Hua-cheng, military commander of the Kiangnan

provinces (Kiangsu and Anhwei) who was nearly 70, and those at nearby Paoshan by the more than 3,000 troops under Niu Chien, Viceroy of the Liangkiang provinces. When the British army attacked on June 16, Commander Chen resisted heroically. Braving the heavy enemy fire, he took up his position on a high place and ordered his troops to repulse the enemy with cannon fire. Fierce fighting continued for more than two hours during which some of the British ships were damaged, and the enemy failed to make a landing in the course of its frontal attack. The cunning invaders then tried to force their way on land sailing small boats up a stream to attack the flank of the western forts by going round the back of Wusung. This second plan was also thwarted by the determined resistance of the garrison troops. Learning that Chen's troops had damaged some British ships, Niu Chien brought reinforcements to the Wusung forts. However, on the battlefield the foolish viceroy behaved as if he had been reviewing his guard of honour. When the enemy realized what was going on, they began to fire their big guns. Hearing the shells, Niu Chien plunged out of his sedan-chair, losing his cap and boots as he went, and rushed in among his men to conceal himself. The reinforcements were then routed and

the invaders took the chance to land and make a frontal attack on the western forts. Commander Chen and his men fought bravely, using their spears in hand-to-hand combat showing great combative spirit. He himself continued to fight despite multiple wounds and was finally killed. The western forts fell under attack from all sides. The eastern forts were lost at about the same time and the invaders were thus able to take Paoshan and Shanghai.

They controlled Shanghai for five days not only extorting from its people 500,000 silver dollars as ransom for the city but wantonly plundering it and its outskirts. They took many of the fine decorative objects from inside the City Temple and burned them. They ransacked the pawn-brokers' stores so that at the beginning of summer all the British soldiers were drinking and carousing in the streets with embroidered fans in their hands, wearing silk or satin coats trimmed with expensive fur. This was the much-vaunted "Western civilization" of the imperialist robbers!

At the end of June, more British men-of-war reached Wusung and, in early July, they began to sail up the Yangtze.

The Yangtze estuary widens as it nears the sea, and along the lower section its banks are partly

silted-up while its bed is dotted with sandbanks making the water courses meander around, so this stretch of the river provides good natural defences. But after the Chekiang defeat the Ching government, following a policy of compromise and capitulation, made no attempt to strengthen the defences along the reaches above Wusung. After Niu Chien escaped from Paoshan to Nanking, he was more than ever in awe of the enemy warships and arms, regarding the British as undefeatable by military means alone. He not only shamelessly forbade the troops stationed in the sub-prefectures and counties along the river to fire at the invaders, but ordered that they should present the British with cattle, sheep, wine and other food. Thus the enemy was enabled to send small boats to survey the water courses and continue their westward advance up the river.

On July 15, the British fleet reached the river port of Chenchiang.

Chenchiang, a prospering commercial city of 100,000 households with good natural defences and ample manpower, could certainly have been held and this would have blocked the enemy's offensive against Nanking. However, its garrison was very weak, consisting of more than 1,000 soldiers from among the Eight Banner Corps, and nearly 2,000

men from other provinces who were stationed on the outskirts. On July 21, some 7,000 British troops landed and occupied all the positions outside the city. Then they concentrated their forces for an attack on the city proper. They dynamited the west city gate and used scaling ladders to get over the walls. The garrison resisted unrelentingly. As a British officer wrote in his memoirs, "A most obstinate resistance was made at this point by the Tartars; they disputed every inch of ground, so that each angle and embrasure was carried at the point of bayonet. . . ."\* The resisters would charge against the British bayonets, or sometimes jump on a British sentry, grab him and jump over the city wall still holding him fast. Once or twice a British soldier got thrown over the city wall before he could use his bayonet on his attacker.

The heroic defence of Chenchiang had made things very difficult for the invaders and they retaliated cruelly against the people of the city with savage looting, burning and killing. While denouncing the brutality of the British, Engels had high praise for the combative spirit of Chenchiang's defenders. He wrote: ". . . **However deficient the Tartar-Chinese soldiers might be in military skill,**

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\* J. Elliot Bingham, *Narrative of the Expedition to China*, Henry Colburn, London, 1843, Vol. II, p. 348.

they were not lacking in courage and spirit. These Tartar soldiers, who were only fifteen hundred in number, fought with the utmost desperation, and were killed to a man. . . . The Commander-in-Chief, seeing that the day was lost, set fire to his house and perished in the flames. The English lost a hundred and eighty-five men in the attack — a loss which they revenged by the most horrible excesses in sacking the town — the war having been conducted by the English throughout in a spirit of brutal ferocity, which was a fitting counterpart to the spirit of smuggling cupidity in which it had originated. Had the invaders met with a similar resistance everywhere they never would have reached Nanking.”\*

In spite of the fall of Chenchiang, the Chinese people’s movement to resist British aggression continued to develop. In the meantime a large number of British soldiers died of cholera, which nearly put their army out of action. One of the invaders later recalled, “. . . Ere the week was past, forty more men in that regiment [the 98th Regiment] alone had perished by cholera.”\*\* Actually, there were

\* Frederick Engels, “The New English Expedition in China,” April 1857.

\*\* Arthur Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp’s Recollections of Service in China*, Richard Bentley, London, 1853, p. 98.

many sick men on all enemy ships, whether warships or supply ships, and the British were so short-handed that some of their ships had to abandon their mission. It was said that on one British supply ship all on board died of plague except three sailors and a waiter. In this favourable situation, if the Ching government had resisted firmly or enforced a blockade against the British to cut them off from their provisions, the enemy would have never reached Nanking at all. But this it failed to do because of its domestic policy of hostility to the people and its foreign policy of compromise and capitulation to the invaders. As a result it was doomed to military defeat, although the people, soldiers and some commanders fought heroically and a very favourable situation existed for it to exploit.

*Popular Anti-British Struggles in  
Fukien, Chekiang and the Lower  
Yangtze Valley*

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Wherever the British invaders went, they always met with resistance from the Chinese people. Like their Kwangtung compatriots, the people of Fukien, Chekiang and the lower Yangtze valley displayed great spirit in their resistance against aggression.

In August 1841, when the British troops, having attacked and captured Amoy, were looting everywhere, a villager named Chen organized a force of more than 500 to resist them. This made the invaders feel they could not hold Amoy so they retreated to the islet Kulangyu.

When the British attacked Chenhai, in Chekiang, the local people spontaneously organized a blockade to defend the coast. They repulsed an enemy reconnaissance ship, wounding and capturing an

officer and a number of his men who had dared to land and go looting.

Following the British occupation of Chenhai and Ningpo, Hsu Pao, Chang Tai-huo and Sheng Tatsai organized the Hei Shui Tang (Black Water Party) to harass the enemy. Its members concealed themselves inside and outside the city of Ningpo, with many fast eight-oar rowing boats, ready to make surprise night attacks on the enemy, which created a very tense atmosphere among the invaders at night. This was but one of many famous popular forces, for everywhere in the Chenhai and Ningpo regions the people armed themselves on their own initiative for the struggle. The spontaneous popular resistance in Chekiang caused the invaders great difficulties as their own records often disclosed. For example, on February 18, 1842, a British transport moored at the bank to take on water was left stranded as the tide was ebbing, and its captain was captured and punished by the local people. According to the invaders' own accounts, in the latter period of their occupation of Ningpo, 42 men were taken prisoner by the Chinese people in various ways.

When the British began their advance up the Yangtze, the people living along its banks started a similar struggle against them.

The British occupied Wusung, Paoshan and Shanghai, and tried to advance along the Soochow River to occupy the city of Soochow. They forced a fisherman called Wang Tsai-kun to serve as their guide for their three ships. He cleverly lured them into the shallows where even though they had a boat of shallow draught, they ran aground and were compelled to give up their plan to attack Soochow.

Around the time of the fall of Chenchiang, the people living by the lower Yangtze used fire rafts at night when there was a favourable wind to halt the advance of the British fleet. On July 19, 1842, two days before the British troops attacked the city, the British joint command issued a proclamation forbidding, in threatening language, the use of these fire weapons. This is proof of their fear of such attacks.

The salt makers who were boat dwellers along the northern bank of the Yangtze at Kuachou and Yicheng constituted an important resistance force. Before the British encroachment into the Yangtze valley, some landlords who favoured resistance had written to the Ching government, proposing that the salt makers be enlisted and trained to fight the invaders. They thought thus both to strengthen the Yangtze defences and to bring the salt makers under control, so that the latter would not make

use of their chance to imperil landlord rule. The Ching rulers were consistently hostile to the salt makers. After the British invasion of the Yangtze valley they often warned that the salt makers should be guarded against, and smeared them as possible collaborators with the enemy endangering their regime. In fact, as soon as the British troops neared Chenchiang, the salt makers rose en masse to resist them, which refuted the slanders of the landlord class. But the ruling class considered that the salt makers' resistance was itself a danger. On July 18, a traitor named Yen Chung-li, who was a big salt merchant, took a large quantity of "gifts" on board a British warship which lay at anchor on the river near his hometown of Yicheng. He shamelessly offered to give them 500,000 silver dollars in return for their withdrawal from the city of Yangchow. He also informed them that the salt makers were an anti-British force that was not controlled by the Ching government. At his instigation the British troops launched a surprise night attack bombarding the salt makers' community at Laoheying. Flames lit up the whole sky bringing disaster to several thousand salt makers. This was a bloody crime perpetrated by domestic and foreign reactionaries who colluded to slaughter the Chinese people.

The people in the Chenchiang region adopted the tactic of night attack to keep up constant harassment against the British invaders. A British officer recalled about the occupation of Chenchiang: "During the course of the night we were continually alarmed by small detached portions of the enemy advancing upon our encampment, and firing into it; this was especially harassing to the troops, as they were obliged to be continually prepared to resist an attack, and could obtain no rest whatever."\* The "enemy" referred to in this quotation were, in fact, not "small detached portions" of Chinese troops, but were the people themselves, who felt a deep hatred for the invaders and spontaneously rose against them. This sort of harassment by the people certainly constituted the invaders' greatest problem.

The people of Chingchiang north of the Yangtze organized themselves to punish the hated invaders with the utmost severity. On August 14, when some of the invaders went to the city to raid and extort supplies, the local people shouted, "The foreign devils are coming!" and fought back stoning the intruders from the city wall and killing some who had entered the city to reconnoitre. The peo-

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\* Arthur Cunynghame, *An Aide-de-Camp's Recollections of Service in China*, Richard Bentley, London, 1853, p. 100.

ple living outside the city also attacked the enemy, who were thus forced to flee.

That very night, to prepare for enemy retaliation, the people of Chingchiang and the garrison troops together organized a defence force of about 1,000 men, sharpened bamboo spikes as weapons, repaired guns, and dug up the cannons which had been buried along the river banks on the orders of Niu Chien, who wanted the withdrawal of all the artillery pieces after the British had intruded up the Yangtze. They dug themselves in along the river dyke to attack the enemy. The next day, as had been expected, three British boats arrived on a retaliatory mission. The people of the whole city rose courageously and repulsed them. The invaders no longer dared to attack Chingchiang.

On both the northern and southern banks of the lower Yangtze, the people's resistance movement developed widely and rapidly. Linching, Director-General of River Conservancy, memorialized the throne that in the sub-prefectures along the Yangtze and the townships along the Grand Canal in northern Kiangsu, there were volunteer forces numbering over 90,000 men financed by contributions from the gentry and the people; many people had also donated brass and iron with which to make guns. Meanwhile more than 1,700 able-

bodied men had enlisted in the provincial capital of Soochow. Between June and August 1842, as enemy penetration grew, the popular forces swelled until they numbered more than 100,000 along both banks of the lower Yangtze. This indicated the vigorous upsurge of the people's resistance movement.

The Chinese people's tremendous struggle against the invaders demonstrated their undaunted spirit and their determination never to yield to imperialism or its running dogs.

## *The Treaty of Nanking*

8

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After its defeat in Chekiang, the ruling clique of the Ching Dynasty already intended to surrender. When Chenchiang fell into the hands of the British invaders, it became even more anxious to sue for peace, for two reasons. Firstly, it was frightened by the British incursion into the lower Yangtze valley, which cut communications between the north and south. Secondly, if the war against the external enemy were not concluded quickly the Ching regime would not be able to spare the necessary forces to suppress the imminent popular revolt.

On August 6, 1842, between 70 and 80 British warships arrived rapidly one after another at Nanking. Niu Chien tried to negotiate a surrender. But the British plenipotentiary, Henry Pottinger, refused to talk to him, saying Niu was not a pleni-



potentiary and had no authority to negotiate. Pottinger also threatened to open fire on Nanking if the Ching government did not send a plenipotentiary to negotiate right away. Greatly alarmed, Niu Chien immediately sent an urgent report to Imperial Commissioner Chiying, who was then in Wuhsi (Wusih), urging him to proceed to Nanking at once. On August 10, the British again declared that if a plenipotentiary of the Ching government did not produce his credentials before dawn the next day, they would bombard the city in the morning. Ilipu and Niu Chien hurriedly notified the British that Imperial Commissioner Chiying would soon arrive bringing with him the imperial edict of "everlasting rapprochement." The British were also shown the Tao Kuang Emperor's rescript suing for peace. The invaders deliberately spoke of attacking the city in order to intimidate capitulators like Chiying, Ilipu and Niu Chien into full, immediate and unconditional acceptance of their demands. The British might seem terrifying, but actually they were quite weak. An epidemic of cholera had caused a lot of deaths among their small force of 7,000-8,000, and many more were still sick. The invaders themselves estimated that only 3,400 men were fit to fight whereas there were 8,000 Ching troops to defend Nanking. The de-

fenders could perfectly well have put up a stiff resistance had they only been determined to do so.

Seeing that their threats had produced results, the British changed their tune. They said that Britain only wanted to trade with China, so there was no reason why it should offend the country; that the war which had been going on was a matter beyond its control; and that since there were imperial commissioners empowered to make decisions, they were also ready and willing to negotiate.

The next day, August 11, as soon as Chiying arrived at Nanking, he tried to contact the enemy about the conditions of surrender. To intimidate Chiying, Ilipu and Niu Chien still further so that they would accept the British demands outright, Pottinger invited them to his flagship to show them the British artillery. This manoeuvre was very effective, for Chiying subsequently reported to the Tao Kuang Emperor that the foreign ships were strong and their guns powerful. He said what he had formerly known as hearsay he had now seen with his own eyes and he was consequently convinced that the British could not be subdued by force. This fully reveals the cowardice of the Ching officials before the enemy guns.

In the eyes of the Ching ruling class, the invaders posed such a formidable threat that the only way

out was to surrender unconditionally. On August 22, the Emperor issued a rescript accepting all the British demands. On the 29th, Chiying, Iipu and Niu Chien boarded the British man-of-war *Cornwallis* anchored off Nanking, and signed the Treaty of Nanking, the first unequal treaty in the history of modern China, thus selling out the rights of the Chinese nation.

Though the Treaty of Nanking was signed, many important questions, such as customs tariffs, consular jurisdiction and the unilateral most-favoured-nation treatment, were not yet finally settled. So Sino-British negotiations continued in Kwangtung. On July 22, 1843, the "General Regulations under which the British Trade is to be conducted at the Five Ports of Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai" were published and came into force, and the signing of the Treaty of Humen followed on October 8. These two documents were supplementary to the Treaty of Nanking.

Under the Treaty of Nanking and its supplementary treaties, Britain obtained the following major rights and privileges:

- 1) The forcible occupation of Hongkong. As early as 1830, a letter had been sent by 47 British merchants in China to Parliament in London asking that the British government occupy an island along

China's seacoast for the "protection" of British trade (actually the opium trade). William John Napier, the first to advocate the seizure of Hongkong, thought that this island could be turned into a trading port and naval base for the penetration of China. This sinister design finally materialized with the draft Convention of Chuanpi signed by Charles Elliot and Chishan in 1841. Six days afterwards, the British invaders forcibly occupied Hongkong. Later the British government disavowed the Chuanpi document as being unsatisfactory, but the invaders never returned Hongkong to China, and in the Treaty of Nanking, their occupation of the island was listed as a major item.

- 2) The extortion of large indemnities. The Treaty of Nanking stipulated that China was to pay Britain 6 million silver dollars as compensation for the confiscated British opium, 12 million for its war expenses, and 3 million "on account of debts due to British subjects" by some of the hong merchants. These totalled 21 million silver dollars (excluding the 6 million as ransom for Canton) — an enormous sum extorted by the British from the Chinese people.

- 3) The opening of the five ports. Formerly, Canton was the only port designated by the Ching government for foreign trade. The aggressive

British bourgeoisie had persistently demanded that more Chinese ports be opened. In 1832, Britain sent a spy ship, the *Lord Amherst*, to reconnoitre China's seacoast, collecting political, economic and military intelligence regarding Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai, with particular attention to their waters. These were the very four ports which were opened for the first time under the Treaty of Nanking, a fact which shows that the British invaders had long been scheming towards this end. Canton was their original trade outlet, Shanghai was the gateway to the Yangtze valley, and the other three ports controlled outlets to the sea in Fukien and Chekiang provinces. The opening of these five ports effectively forced the doors to all China's southeastern coastal provinces. With the conclusion of the agreement on customs tariffs, commodities from capitalist countries flooded in, gradually undermining China's original economic foundations and putting its economy onto a semi-colonial path of development.

The Treaty of Nanking allowed British merchants to reside in the five ports with their families, and the Treaty of Humen allowed them to lease land and build houses for permanent residence there. Later the foreign invaders deliberately twisted the meaning of the relevant treaty provi-

sions, taking advantage of all possible occasions to mark out areas in the trading ports and placing them under their direct management. These were the so-called "concessions" over which they enforced a colonial system of control entirely independent of China's own administrative and legal system. They also used the "concessions" as bases from which to strengthen their control of China politically and economically.

4) Tariff agreement. According to the Treaty of Nanking, "a fair and regular tariff of export and import customs and other dues" on British goods was to be fixed by mutual agreement. This meant that China had no right to decide its own tariffs — they had to be agreed with the British. And, as under the General Regulations for trade with Britain at the five ports, the tariff rate on most of the important goods was fixed at 5 per cent *ad valorem*, the customs tariff virtually became fixed at this rate. Thus China completely lost tariff autonomy and the Chinese customs could no longer protect domestic industrial and agricultural production. Foreigners could sell China great amounts of their commodities, turning the country into a market for their industrial products while making its agriculture serve their own needs. For a century or so, imperialism, through control of the Chinese

customs, was able to prey upon the Chinese people.

5) Consular jurisdiction. Article 13 of the General Regulations for trade with Britain at the five ports which concerned disputes between Chinese and British subjects provided that, regarding the punishment of British criminals, the British government would enact the laws necessary to attain that end, and the British consul concerned would be empowered to put them in force. In other words, when a British subject committed a crime in China, Chinese officials had no power to punish him according to Chinese law; he was to be dealt with by a British consul according to British law. This was a serious violation of China's judicial power. Making use of this privilege in China, imperialism perpetrated countless injustices against the Chinese people for a century or so.

6) Unilateral most-favoured-nation treatment. As early as May 1841, Palmerston, in his instructions to Pottinger, had explicitly mentioned acquiring the privilege of unilateral most-favoured-nation treatment in China. The Treaty of Humen stipulated that should China "grant additional privileges or immunities to any of the subjects or citizens of . . . [other] foreign countries, the same privileges and immunities will be extended to and enjoyed by British subjects." This was an especially serious

infringement of China's sovereignty. Similar provisions were included in subsequent Sino-American and Sino-French treaties. Thus, if any other country obtained new rights and privileges from China, Britain would be entitled to them, and vice versa. The various foreign powers became partners in their aggression against China.

The foregoing is the main contents of the Treaty of Nanking and the supplementary treaties. Significantly there was not a word about opium as the direct cause of the war. In a diary entry at the time, a British invader wrote that at a banquet given by Chiying in honour of Pottinger on August 26, 1842, that is, three days before the treaty was signed, Pottinger advised the Ching government to legalize the opium trade, saying enticingly to Chiying that if opium were to be freely imported and openly taxed, smuggling would be reduced and revenue increased — a double gain. Instead of attacking this nonsense, Chiying and his colleagues considered it well-founded. Before the Treaty of Humen was signed, Pottinger sent John Robert Morrison to the Ching officials to demand the lifting of the opium ban with a note giving as his reasons: that China had previously prohibited the opium trade but it had continued at sea between Chinese and British merchants, so that the ban

could only be nominal; and that it would be better to legalize the trade and increase China's revenue. The Ching officials argued it was unnecessary to provide in the treaty for the legalization of the opium trade, for in fact they had already assured Pottinger that China would not question or act against any foreign mercantile ship whether it carried opium or not. With this understanding between the British aggressors and the Ching government, the opium trade flourished even more than it had before the war. Karl Marx pointed out in 1858 that opium smuggling had expanded rather than decreased after **"the first Anglo-Chinese war, the results of which developed themselves in the Chinese rebellion, the utter exhaustion of the imperial exchequer, the successful encroachment of Russia from the north, and the gigantic dimensions assumed by the opium trade in the south."**\*

The Treaty of Nanking was the first unequal treaty the British aggressors imposed upon China, and the first of the fetters which the foreign invaders laid on the Chinese people. It marked the beginning of the impairment of China's sovereignty, the forcing open of its markets, and its transition from an independent feudal society to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. From that

\* Karl Marx, "The Opium Trade," September 1858.

time on, imperialism and feudalism in collaboration intensified their enslavement and exploitation of the Chinese people while the great Chinese people waged a brave, protracted struggle against their domestic and foreign enemies.

*The U.S. and French Invaders  
Follow Suit*

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British aggression against China opened the way for the bourgeoisie of other countries, among them the United States and France, to blackmail China.

Before the Opium War, the United States came second to Britain in trade with China and in the quantity of opium it smuggled into the country, but was more cunning in its methods. The American bourgeoisie was in complete accord with the British over opening China and exploiting its people, and they acted as accomplices of the British throughout the Opium War.

U.S. opium smugglers allied with their British counterparts to sabotage China's anti-opium movement, which began in 1838. When the British were preparing to precipitate a war of aggression in 1839, U.S. merchants in Canton sent a joint let-

ter to Congress in Washington in May of that year asking their government to take action and join with Britain, France and the Netherlands in compelling the Ching government to accept their demand that foreigners be allowed to trade freely in China's various ports.

This letter, which reached Congress in January 1840, attracted much government attention, but the bourgeoisie of the United States did not want direct participation in the British war, believing that fishing in troubled waters would prove more advantageous to them. So during the Opium War, the U.S. government sent its East India squadron under Commodore Lawrence Kearny to China to support the British. The ex-President of the United States, John Quincy Adams, in an address in 1841 defended the British in their war of aggression saying they had been fully justified in declaring it. J. L. Nevius, an American missionary long active in China, ranted that right or wrong the Opium War opened, in accordance with God's will, a new era in the U.S. relationship with the vast Ching empire. The United States collaborated with Britain to the hilt in initiating aggression against China.

With the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking, the American bourgeoisie saw enviously how many

privileges Britain had extorted from China and decided to blackmail the Ching government taking advantage of its post-war weakness.

In December 1842, U.S. President Tyler proposed in a message to Congress the dispatch of a mission to China to take charge of diplomatic and trade affairs. Congress immediately gave consent and appropriated \$40,000 for aggressive activities against China. In May 1843, the U.S. government sent Caleb Cushing, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives, as commissioner and envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary of the United States to China, with F. Webster, son of the U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster, as his secretary. They sailed for China with three warships in July 1843. In its instructions to Cushing, the U.S. government stated that the United States must obtain the same trade conditions as Britain had in China's newly opened ports, otherwise it would not be able to live in peace with China.

Cushing arrived at Macao with his warships in February 1844. He first demanded of the Ching government that he be permitted to proceed to Peking for an audience with the Emperor. Later he declared that he would not negotiate with any official other than an imperial commissioner and

would not recognize Cheng Yu-tsai, Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, as his counterpart in negotiations. The Ching government was not then ready to conclude with the United States an unequal treaty like the Treaty of Nanking, and Cheng more than once politely rejected Cushing's arbitrary demands. Thus frustrated, Cushing resorted to threat of war. In a letter to Cheng on April 24, he revealed his true face, blustering that a continuing refusal to accede to his demands would be regarded as a hostile act against the United States. On May 9 he wrote menacingly to Cheng that not only was an American fleet on its way to China round the Cape of Good Hope, the gunboats of the U.S. Pacific Fleet had also been ordered to come to China.

Unable to hold out against Cushing's threats, the Ching government sent an imperial commissioner, the traitorous Chiying, to Kwangtung to negotiate with him. He arrived at Wanghsia (Wanghia), a village near Macao, on June 17. During the negotiations Cushing demanded that Chiying accept the treaty he had drafted as a condition of his not going to Peking. On July 3, Chiying agreed and the Treaty of Wanghsia, the first unequal treaty extorted by U.S. aggression against China, was signed.

The Treaty of Wanghsia brought the U.S. invaders great advantages in the sphere of trade and other interests because with it they cunningly obtained, in the name of "equal opportunity," the privileges Britain had got from the Treaty of Nanking and its supplementary treaties as well as additional ones which had not been clearly formulated in these documents.

1) Special provision for consular jurisdiction. According to the Treaty of Wanghsia, in case of a dispute between a citizen of the United States and a Chinese, the former would be tried by an American consul; in any litigation between a citizen of the United States and a foreigner in China, Chinese officials could not interfere. Thus China's judicial power was further impaired.

2) The provision violating China's tariff autonomy. In relation to customs tariffs, the Treaty of Nanking had only provided for the establishment by mutual agreement of "a fair and regular tariff of export and import customs and other dues." The Treaty of Wanghsia went a step further by stipulating: "If the Chinese government desire to modify in any respect the said tariff, such modifications shall be made only in consultation with consuls or other functionaries thereto duly authorized in behalf of the United States, and with consent

thereof." Thus the U.S. aggressors encroached upon China's tariff autonomy to an even greater extent.

3) Provisions infringing upon China's territorial waters. Article 14 of the Sino-British General Regulations of trade and Article 10 of the Treaty of Humen had set a bad precedent whereby British cruisers could anchor at China's trading ports. Article 32 of the Treaty of Wanghsia provided that "whenever ships of war of the United States, in cruising for the protection of the commerce of their country, shall arrive at any of the ports of China," they should be received and accommodated by the local Ching authorities. Article 26 provided: "Merchant vessels of the United States lying in the waters of the five ports of China open 'to foreign commerce will be under the jurisdiction of the officers of their own government . . . without control on the part of China.'" Thus foreign ships could enter or leave China's territorial waters unhindered, seriously impairing its sovereignty on the sea.

Furthermore, under Article 17 of the Treaty of Wanghsia, the Americans were to be allowed to build their own churches at the five ports. This prepared the ground for the French demand that the Ching government rescind its ban on the



Catholic religion. The last article providing for treaty revision after 12 years left a way open for future blackmail by foreign powers.

The Treaty of Wanghsia was an unequal treaty with harsher terms than those of the Treaty of Nanking; it was soon to be the model for the Sino-French Treaty of Whampoa and the treaties China concluded with other countries. After the signing of the Wanghsia Treaty, Cushing wrote complacently to the U.S. State Department that the United States and other countries should thank Britain for having concluded the Treaty of Nanking, which opened China's door, but that now Britain and other countries should also thank the United States for having opened this door even wider. Thus he acknowledged that the United States had sought to take advantage of a troubled situation when it followed in Britain's footsteps.

France followed close upon the heels of the United States. Before the Opium War, French trade with China was far behind that of Britain and the United States. When the war broke out, the French bourgeoisie watched its progress closely, hoping to profit from it. In early 1841, the French government sent Colonel A. de Jancigny to China to investigate the situation in the Far East and carry out hostile activity. When the British forces

invaded the Yangtze valley, two French warships, the *Erigone* and the *Favorite*, anchored at Wusung fired salvoes to salute the invading fleet and intruded into the Yangtze infringing upon China's sovereignty. At the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, Captain Cécille of the *Erigone* went on board the British man-of-war *Cornwallis* as an uninvited guest to attend the ceremony.

Using the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking as an opportunity to blackmail China, the French government sent Théodose M. M. J. de Lagrené to China as a plenipotentiary with eight men-of-war.

Lagrené was known as a crafty politician. When he arrived in Macao in August 1844, he would not reveal his real intentions before formal negotiations began, so that the Ching government's Imperial Commissioner Chiyang had to send officials to Macao to find them out. Lagrené purposely spread various rumours: that he wanted to befriend China and help it resist the British; that he wanted to occupy Humen to make trouble with China; that he was demanding an end to the ban on the Catholic religion; or that he would proceed to Peking to have an audience with the Emperor. These confusing versions puzzled Chiyang, who was forced into a passive position waiting uneasily to see what would happen. By early October when formal negotia-

tions opened, Lagrené had studied the Sino-British and Sino-U.S. treaties carefully and knew how the Ching government was placed. When he asked for the conclusion of a commercial treaty on the precedents set by Britain and the United States, Chiying quickly agreed. On October 24, the Sino-French Treaty of Whampoa (or the "General Regulations" for French trade at the five ports of Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai) was signed on a French warship at Whampoa.

By this treaty France easily obtained the great privileges which Britain and the United States had already secured, such as trade at the five ports, an agreed tariff, consular jurisdiction and the unilateral most-favoured-nation treatment, plus some new privileges. What distinguishes the Treaty of Whampoa is that besides granting the French the right to build churches and cemeteries in the five ports, it provided that the local Ching officials should severely punish any trespassers on these places. This provision giving the Ching government the responsibility of protecting French churches and missionaries subsequently proved extremely detrimental to the Chinese people. Under its protection, the invaders openly carried out aggressive activities using the cloak of religion.

The invaders' appetite was unlimited. Not satisfied with the special privileges conceded in the

treaty, Lagrené used the question of the ban on Roman Catholicism as a pretext to extort more from the Ching government.

The Catholic religion had long been an important tool for France in its aggressive foreign policy. The two French Catholic missionaries, Jean-François Gerbillon and Joachim Bouvet, well known among Chinese converts, had been sent to China by King Louis XIV in the Kang Hsi period (1662-1722). However, the religious ban proclaimed by the Ching government in early 1724, under which the practice of the Catholic faith by Chinese and its propagation by foreign missionaries were prohibited, was a serious setback for this policy. Hoping to break the prohibition, France sent missionaries before the Opium War to Macao for long periods to study the Chinese language and Chinese conditions. Catholic missionaries disguised as Chinese went into the provinces of the interior searching for ways to make the Ching government rescind the ban. The French government saw the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking as an opportunity to bring pressure on the Ching government on this issue and this indeed was one of Lagrené's major aims in his mission to China. When he arrived at Macao, he conveyed a hint to Chiying through the French missionary Callery, a resident

there, that while he might give up other demands he would insist on the lifting of the ban.

Though the Treaty of Whampoa had given the French the privilege of building churches in the five ports, if the Ching government did not rescind its ban on Roman Catholicism, the French would still have difficulty in making use of it for their aggressive policy. Lagrené, therefore, decided to press for this demand in addition to what had been gained through the treaty. Under pressure, the Tao Kuang Emperor finally approved the lifting of the ban on November 11, 1844, that is, 17 days after the signing of the Treaty of Whampoa.

However, the Emperor did not issue a proclamation on the matter, for he accepted the French demand only to pacify Lagrené. In August 1845, Lagrené, determined to pursue his objective to the end, made use of the exchange of ratifications of the Treaty of Whampoa to demand that the lifting of the ban be proclaimed. After this he went on a reconnaissance expedition to Shanghai, Ningpo and Amoy, returning to Macao in early December. He alleged that the lifting of the ban had everywhere been nominal rather than real, and once more pressed the Ching government to make a proclamation, saying that otherwise the affairs between the two countries could reach inconceivable passes.

Under this threat, the Tao Kuang Emperor issued in February 1846 a rescript to all provincial officials ending the prohibition on Roman Catholicism. Thus, the French obtained full satisfaction of their aggressive demand.

The privileges France acquired for its missionaries played an evil role in the history of modern imperialist aggression against China. Thenceforth, foreign missionaries, accompanying opium, commodities and guns, streamed into China without hindrance. On the one hand, they bought over traitors, collected intelligence and propagated superstition to lull the people; on the other, they collaborated with the Ching officials, oppressed and bullied the people and did many other bad things. They were in the van of the foreign penetration of China, bringing disaster to the Chinese people.

Thus, in the wake of the signing of the Treaty of Nanking, U.S. and French invaders followed the British in making incursions into China. Many other European countries, too, such as Portugal, Belgium, Sweden and Norway, subsequently demanded the conclusion of commercial treaties, and the decadent Ching rulers granted equal privileges to one and all. Thanks to the Opium War, China's door was open not only to Britain but the entire capitalist world.

*Birth of a Semi-Colonial and  
Semi-Feudal Society*

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China's defeat in the Opium War and the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking had enormous consequences, as from then on China had lost its independence and significant changes occurred within its society. Under the increasingly violent impact of foreign capitalism, China's self-sufficient natural economy gradually disintegrated, while large numbers of peasants and handicraftsmen were bankrupted. To the contradiction between feudalism and the masses of people, the principal contradiction in Chinese society, was now added the contradiction between foreign capitalism and the Chinese nation. Step by step China became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. As the contradiction between imperialism and the Chinese nation and that between feudalism and the masses

of people sharpened, class relationships and class struggle in Chinese society underwent an unprecedented change.

Chairman Mao has pointed out: **“Foreign capitalism played an important part in the disintegration of China's social economy; on the one hand, it undermined the foundations of her self-sufficient natural economy and wrecked the handicraft industries both in the cities and in the peasants' homes, and on the other, it hastened the growth of a commodity economy in town and country.”\***

The role of foreign capitalism in the disintegration of China's social economy became obvious within a few years of the Opium War. As capitalist commodities, especially foreign cloth and yarn, flooded the Chinese market, the handicraft textile industry in areas around the five trading ports — Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai — was the first to suffer. In Sungchiang (Sungkiang), Taitsang and other places near Shanghai, and likewise in Canton and Amoy, it had begun to decline by the mid-1840s. Being the main rural subsidiary occupation and an important component of China's self-contained natural economy, its decline marked

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\* “The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party,” *Selected Works of Mao Tsetung*, FLP, Peking, 1967, Vol. II, p. 309.

the beginning of the disintegration of China's social economy.

At the same time, however, foreign capitalism promoted the development of China's commodity economy in town and country, as shown by the sharp rise of the export of silks and teas. In 1851, nearly 100 million pounds of teas were exported, twice the amount which had been sent out annually before the Opium War. By the end of the 1840s, the export of silks had increased from the pre-war level of 12,000 bales to over 20,000. Such large exports stimulated the production of these two articles. Silk reeling in Kiangsu and Chekiang and tea planting in Hunan increased rapidly. Mills were set up in Shanghai to process tea for export. At that time the export trade in silks and teas was almost entirely controlled by foreigners, mainly the British, who decided the amount and price of the exports. In this way, China began to be made part of the capitalist world market.

Opium smuggling continued to be an important means by which the foreign invaders fleeced the Chinese people. Average annual import of opium increased from 37,000 chests in the 1840s to 70,000 in the 1850s. In the decade or so after the Opium War, some 700,000-800,000 chests valued at 300-400 million silver dollars were imported.

Hongkong became the opium smuggling centre, with Shanghai and Canton serving as the largest opium import ports. The 1848 figures show that there were 35 receiving ships, the so-called "floating fortresses," for opium in China, as against the 22 before the Opium War. Of these, 12 were at Wusung off Shanghai. In 1849, the opium holdings on the Wusung receiving ships exceeded 22,900 chests. The steady drain of silver to pay for imported opium caused a drop in the value of the copper cash in terms of silver — an old problem which became much more serious after the Opium War. In 1845, the rate of exchange was as high as 2,000 copper coins for one tael of silver. So the annual wage of 10,000 coins for a hired labourer was worth only five taels. The widespread use of opium brought even greater disaster to the people.

After the opening of the five trading ports, the foreign invaders set up business firms in them to handle trade and extend their power. Of the five ports, Shanghai developed most rapidly. Wilfully twisting the meaning of the treaty provisions, the British in 1845 were the first to compel local Ching officials to mark off an area along the Whangpoo River as the "British Concession." In 1848, the U.S. invaders seized a section of Shanghai as a residential district for Americans. It was later

amalgamated with the British Concession to form the "International Settlement." In 1849, the French also staked off a district between the north side of the Shanghai County seat and the British Concession and made it the "French Concession." The alien invaders used every opportunity to grab administrative, judicial and police power in the concessions, turning them into "states within a state." After occupying Hongkong, the British made great efforts to develop it into an important base for aggression against China. Also in 1849, the Portuguese colonialists expelled the Chinese officials from Macao, refused to pay land rent and forcibly occupied this coastal port. In this way a number of cities of a colonial and semi-colonial nature appeared along China's southeastern coast.

In these cities there emerged the comprador-merchants. Some were directly employed by foreign firms while others set up business houses or warehouses themselves to sell imported commodities and purchase goods for foreigners to export, exclusively serving capitalist economic aggression. They were not yet, however, numerous enough to form a social force, but their activities helped the foreigners expand their import and export trade through which these comprador-merchants made fat profits and grew rich. Thus

in the history of modern China the comprador bourgeoisie showed itself to be a class which directly served and was fostered by the capitalists of imperialist countries.

With foreign capitalism undermining China's social economy, the contradiction between the forces of aggression and the Chinese people deepened. The five trading ports became the bases for capitalist aggression against China. Foreign war vessels frequently sailed in and out of these ports, or anchored at them. Foreign gangsters and adventurers gathered in these places where robbery, murder and other crimes were common occurrences. Worst of all was the traffic in indentured labour. In Shanghai, Amoy, Swatow, Nantao (Nam-oa, of eastern Kwangtung), Canton and Macao, British, U.S., French, Spanish and Portuguese gangsters used deception or intimidation to seize or kidnap Chinese labouring people (the so-called "coolies") and ship them to North and South America, the West Indies, Africa and other places to do heavy labour. The traffickers also recruited local gangsters throughout the country to be their agents and get hold of more and more Chinese labourers to sell. Thus the British consul, Sir Rutherford Alcock, said in a report that in Canton "when no man could leave his own house,

even in public thoroughfares and open day, without a danger of being hustled, under false pretences of debt or delinquency, and carried off a prisoner in the hands of crimps, to be sold to the purveyors of coolies at so much a head, and carried off to sea, never again to be heard of, the whole population of the city and adjoining districts were aroused to a sense of common peril.”\* In Shanghai, even some working people who came into the foreign concessions to sell farm produce were seized by British traffickers.

The vessels which shipped the kidnapped Chinese labourers out of China, “floating hells” as people called them, were fully armed. The labourers were closely confined in poorly ventilated steerages. This and other forms of inhuman treatment led to a death rate at sea as high as 45 per cent. Many more died from their suffering after arrival at their destinations. The survivors did forced labour and were subjected to ruthless enslavement and exploitation.

The kidnapped Chinese labourers refused to submit and revolt broke out on almost every voyage. In 1852, for example, over 400 “coolies” being carried from Amoy to San Francisco on an

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\* Quoted in H. F. MacNair, *Modern Chinese History, Selected Readings*, Shanghai, 1927, pp. 409-10.

American ship, the *Robert Brown*, mutinied. They killed the captain and tried to force the ship to return to Amoy. Before the mutiny was brutally suppressed, they put up a stiff resistance, preferring to go down with the ship rather than surrender. This incident demonstrated the Chinese people’s persistent courage.

The social changes brought about by the aggression of the Western bourgeoisie and the calamities which consequently befell the Chinese people in the decade after the Opium War show what a sinister influence the war had on China.

Taking advantage of the privileges gained under the unequal treaties, the foreign aggressors, particularly the British, ruthlessly extended their economic plunder, bullying and shackling the Chinese people. This could not but deepen the contradiction between the foreign aggressors and the Chinese people, a fact which found clear expression in the continual occurrence of popular struggles against the invaders in the five trading ports, and in Hongkong and Macao. The longest and largest of these took place in Canton where the people suffered most from the war.

After the famous popular action against the British had taken place in the Sanyuanli area on the outskirts of Canton, the city and country

people of that part of Kwangtung Province set up *sheh hsueh* (societies for education) in order to uphold national dignity and protect themselves. These were actually armed mass organizations devoted to resisting aggression.

Originally *sheh hsueh* had been a type of local school established for feudal education in rural areas. Later they gradually became the basis on which the landlord gentry formed local militias. After the outbreak of the Opium War and the British attack on Canton, especially after the Sanyuanli people's anti-British struggle, the *sheh hsueh* with their new content of struggle grew steadily around Canton.

The earliest of these to be set up was the Sheng Ping Sheh Hsueh (Peace Society for Education) in the Sanyuanli area. Later similar organizations appeared in the city of Canton and the neighbouring districts. The Sheng Ping Sheh Hsueh was the first to organize an armed resistance force and it became the focus of such activity, thanks to its considerable strength. Peasants, handicraftsmen and shop assistants made up the mass membership while some patriotic gentry helped organize these *sheh hsueh*. Through this form of organization, the masses who took part in scattered, spontaneous anti-aggression struggles became a powerful col-

lective force. The membership of *sheh hsueh* exceeded 100,000 volunteers at its maximum.

The influential *sheh hsueh* led many struggles against the British. At the end of 1842 when a British sailor escaped into a foreign factory outside Canton after committing a crime, tens of thousands of people surrounded the building and burned it down. In 1844 when the British attempted to mark off the Honam district south of the Canton River in Canton as a "concession," the people there rose to resist. Over 3,000 demonstrators went to the foreign factory area to protest. The British were compelled to give up, at least temporarily.

The struggle against the foreigners' entry to the city was one of the largest waged by the people of Canton after the setting up of the *sheh hsueh*. Foreign merchants coming to China to trade always stayed in the foreign factories outside Canton. The Treaty of Nanking did not permit the British to enter the city but they deliberately distorted its meaning and insisted on the right of entry. In January 1846, under pressure from the British plenipotentiary, Sir John Davis, Chiying, Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, issued a proclamation permitting the entry of the British to the city. This immediately roused the indignation of the people who tore down the proclamation and



put up many placards warning the officials that if they allowed the invaders to enter the city, "the righteous people would seize these officials and kill them!" Thousands of people rushed into the office of Liu Hsun, Prefect of Canton, but he escaped by climbing over a wall. The indignant people burned his official robes, hat and boots. The *sheh hsueh* issued a notice calling them to assemble on a certain date to attack the foreign factories. Davis had to flee to Hongkong. Thus the Ching government's policy of suppressing the people to appease the foreigners suffered a severe blow.

In 1847 the British made another attempt to enter the city of Canton by threatening the use of force. In April, Davis directed British ships of war carrying more than 1,000 soldiers to force their way through Humen into inland rivers, and again demanded the right of free entry from Chiying. Anxious to conceal his capitulation from the people, Chiying secretly agreed to allow entry after two years had elapsed. The people, however, did not relax their vigilance. In 1849, Hsu Kuang-chin, who had succeeded Chiying as Viceroy of Kwangtung and Kwangsi, dared not implement this secret agreement because of rising anti-British sentiments among the people. When Sir George Bonham, British Governor of Hongkong, positioned warships

outside Humen to compel the Ching government to put the secret agreement into effect, the people of Canton resolutely resisted the intrusion. In and out of the city and in the Honam district, 100,000 people organized an armed force. They drilled day and night, preparing to fight, while the *sheh hsueh* members were on alert at all hours. The merchants declared a boycott of trade with the aggressors. Hsu Kuang-chin, who had to bow to the will of the masses, rejected Bonham's demand, whereupon the latter directed his warships to sail up the Canton River. The people of the surrounding countryside prepared to fight; more than 100,000 lined both banks of the river shouting battle cries. Alarmed, Bonham had to give up his demand and retreated to Hongkong. Hsu Kuang-chin subsequently reported in a memorial to the Emperor: "To prevent the British entering the city might not precipitate war, but indiscreetly to consent to their demand would certainly give rise to immediate hostilities." The Ching government appeared to accede to the people's wishes, but actually it did so only to avert the imminent storm and save its own skin.

The issue of free entry to Canton city was deliberately blown up by the British invaders. They insisted on twisting the relevant provisions of the Treaty of Nanking to attain their end so as

to show that the Ching government had to accept any demand they might make. They had never expected that the Chinese people, entirely different from the Ching rulers, would refuse to yield to an adversary, however powerful it might be. After his failure to force his way into the city in 1849, Bonham wrote in a report to his government that the people and militia around Canton would firmly resist a British entry and that this objective could not be attained unless a large force were used, because popular resistance was much stronger than it had been during its earlier activity in 1841. This was a confession that the invaders would have to defer their demand for fear of the strength of the Chinese people.

While the people of Kwangtung were carrying on their struggle against aggression, the anti-feudal struggle of the peasants was developing throughout the country, and class contradictions within China grew steadily until they were extremely sharp. This was due to the disastrous effect of alien aggression on the one hand and, on the other, to the aggravation of the crisis of the feudal society itself. Marx pointed out in 1853: **“The tribute to be paid to England after the unfortunate war of 1840, the great unproductive consumption of opium, the drain of the precious metals by this**

**trade, the destructive influence of foreign competition on native manufactures, the demoralized condition of the public administration, produced two things: the old taxation became more burdensome and harassing, and new taxation was added to the old.”\*** Inevitably class contradictions and class struggle in Chinese society, which were already very sharp prior to the Opium War, intensified still further in the wake of the war, as new foreign capitalist exploitation was added to the old feudal exploitation.

After the war, the Ching government squeezed the people in every possible way in order to pay the cost of the war expenses and the indemnities, the two items totalling 70 million silver dollars. Public administration became more corrupt than ever as extra levies and extortion by officials at every level multiplied. The despotic gentry and landlords worked closely with the authorities to shift their own burden on to the peasants. Under merciless political oppression and heavy economic exploitation, the masses of people finally rose in revolt. In the *Tung Hua Lu (Annals of the Ching Dynasty)* alone, more than 100 uprisings are mentioned. They were staged by the Han, Hui, Miao,

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\* Karl Marx, “Revolution in China and in Europe,” May 1853.

Tibetan, Yi, Yao, Chuang and other nationalities between 1841 and 1849, and extended over almost the whole country. Many secret organizations, such as the Nien, the Fu, and the Tien Ti Hui (Heaven and Earth Society), became active among the people. All this foreshadowed the great revolutionary upheaval which was to shake the land of China.

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