

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Nick Leggatt for the degree of Masters of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in History,  
History and French presented on December 9, 1998. Title: China and France in the  
Nineteenth Century.

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In studying Western, especially French, imperialist action in China during the nineteenth century, this thesis argues that contemporary Sino-Western relations took various forms across various social strata on both sides, and the general terms used to classify them are erroneous: in effect, there was no “Chinese” response to “the West,” since there were several, and vice-versa. In the first main section of the thesis, the historiographical accepted wisdom about China’s reactions to Western intrusion are repudiated or qualified. The next section of the thesis deals with French imperialism, through the eyes of the French and other Westerners. In so far as one can speak generally of French aims, it is demonstrated that the French both at home and abroad in general exploited China almost solely for national prestige. The next part looks at the variety of responses among four classes of Chinese people to Western intrusion, and the lasting legacy of Western thought as it relates to change in China. It is posited that although imperialist actions certainly served as a catalyst for Chinese nationalism, the transition between “traditional” and “modern” China was not a completely new break caused entirely by Western influence, but a series of rational changes brought about at least as much by China’s domestic structure as external relations.

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies  
thesis of Nick Leggatt presented on December 9, 1998

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China and France in the Nineteenth Century

by

Nick Leggatt

A Thesis Submitted

to

Oregon State University

In Partial Fulfillment of

the requirements for the

degree of

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented December 9, 1998

Commencement June, 1999

## Acknowledgments

Thank you:

Hung-yok Ip

Robert Nye

Carleton Carroll

Roger Penn

and especially...

Robert Nye

...without whom, &c.

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## China and France in the Nineteenth Century

### Introduction: A Note on Historicism

Since this study at points takes a judgmental stance, it must be noted at the outset that all historical judgments are relative; a brief comment on historicism would not, then, be out of place as an introduction. That is, historical stimuli (ideologies, traditions, etc.) often serve as the foundation for the accepted moral values of a certain era, and human beings are predominately shaped by their historical environment rather than vice-versa. In any study of imperialism, it is therefore crucial to note that the nineteenth century was one of growing European expansion worldwide. Africa, South America, and Asia were “opened” by the British, French, Spanish, Russians and others during this time, with varying degrees of success and permanency. Expansionism, as this paper will touch on below, was said to be a part of the Western concept of patriotism; indeed, expansionism was expected of a modernized nation. Therefore, when such things as “national pride” or “prestige” are mentioned in discussing colonialist attitudes, it is important to keep a sense of historical context and realize that such terms would often not have been seen as derogatory by the Europeans to whom they apply. It is good to remember, too, that imperialist avarice for territory was not confined to Europeans; by the late 1800s, Japan had realized that modernization and expansionism went hand in hand, and fought successful wars against China (1894) and Russia (1904) to win Taiwan, Manchuria, and other rights and concessions; in fact, Japan would come to represent for China a much more abusive imperial power than England or France. This point is important, since it prevents us from drawing false lines between “expansionist” and “colonized” peoples on a racial or geographical basis, on which more below. In

sum, where this study does take on judgmental tones, it tries to judge the process rather than the people.

Expansionism is a cultural and political phenomenon that must be understood in order to understand a nation. The justifications that have been used for expansion must be examined and judged in historical perspective so that we can assess the gap between claims and actuality --- not to take the opportunity to accuse a nation of hypocrisy or deception. During the late nineteenth century, territories in east Asia, in particular what was then known as Indo-China, came under French jurisdiction for the first time. The French experience in China proper was of course quite different. Direct sovereign control by foreigners in China was never the case, even for England, which was China's main Western imperialist "adversary." Rather, France, like the other Treaty Powers, enjoyed free trade and the right for its people to be governed by French laws while in China, among other perquisites, while being confined to designated treaty ports. In many ways, France, like America and Germany, followed Britain's lead in "opening" China to Western notions of trade. However, as this study will show, France also had its own particular agendas in Asia, even to the point of fighting a war with China in 1885 over the sovereignty of Annam, an issue France took as its own. I pluralize "agendas" because the activities of the French in China were not motivated by a single mandate.

## 2. The Historicism of Chinese-Western Relations

Imperialism and Orientalism have been the subject of scrutiny from many scholars, of course with varying views. As with any field of inquiry, however, over time a so-called “traditional” way of looking at the clash between the West and China's apparently self-contained and hermetic way of life was addressed and became generally accepted. These days, this “traditional” view of Sino-Western relations has greatly given way, among Sinologist scholars at any rate, to a view which challenges its assumptions and shifts away from examining only the Western experience. Aspects of the traditional view, however, are still to be found today among non-historians, even non-Sinologist historians.

### (i) A Simplified view of Chinese-Western relations

The traditional way of looking at Chinese-Western relations has always been a comparative (and judgmental) one, between “the dizzying changes in post-renaissance Europe [and] the glacial creep of Confucian civilization.”<sup>1</sup> The main assumption made by this traditional view is that China had become stagnant and passive by the time relations with the West came about, and it was the West's example that galvanized China into a state of modernity. The idea that China was backward and unchanging was indebted to the notion that China was profoundly unsettled and changed by the intrusion of Western ideas. A nineteenth-century writer summed up this typical conception, describing China as “preserving its national unity... for four thousand years, without any serious change in its ruling ideas, its social civilization, or in its theory of government.”<sup>2</sup> Some said that China

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<sup>1</sup> Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, *The Ever-Victorious Army*, 4.



had even regressed in terms of civilization. China had been regarded by its rulers and thinkers to be the center of the world, and had always been indisputably xenophobic, but not often externally aggressive; rather, it was indifferent to foreign nations. Chinese rulers saw no need for truck with foreigners because their nation was self-sufficient, harmonious, and homogenous. From the sixteenth century on (and indeed, long before, sporadically), China treated messengers, missionaries and advisers from the West as “barbarians.” This did not necessarily connote an idea of “primitiveness” or a lack of civilization as a Westerner would see them, but indicated the belief that other countries, *all* other countries, did not match the Middle Kingdom's glorious achievements and respectability. Even if the Chinese conceded other states' superior *military* might, this did not enhance their status in Chinese eyes; China's supposedly harmonious system of government was what made it civilized, not its military strength. Proper social and moral relationships – the respect of a son for his father, and a subject for his ruler, being the most important – were all-important, and their absence was what constituted barbarism. Everything had its place, and the traditional view was that the Chinese people were, as a 1967 work on the Boxer Rebellion asserted, “an intelligent and law-abiding though passive race.”<sup>3</sup>

Chinese scholars assumed for centuries that China ruled over literally everything under heaven. Foreign visitors to the Chinese court were made to kowtow just as if they were natural subjects of the empire, and were regarded as tribute bearers, even if the tribute that was brought (clocks and other “curiosities”) was often regarded as useless. China neither needed nor wanted the West. The West, however, seemed to want China, and any show of military force made clear that the West was by far the stronger. Finding this to be the situation around the beginning of the nineteenth

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Behr, *Last Emperor*, 37.

century, the Western nations then set about slicing China “like a melon,” as the oft-used simile has it (known in China as *gua fen*), via vastly unfair “unequal treaties” informed by racist imperialist ideals disguised as a civilizing mission. China, a static and unchanging country, bound in tradition – so the traditional conception had it – had once surpassed the West in any measure of civilization, but had fallen behind somewhere along the line, perhaps because of a new dark age: “[i]t is not in morals alone that the Chinese are in a lower state now, than they were in former times; they have gone backward also in arts and sciences; and there is perhaps even less enterprise in the nation than there was a thousand years ago,” wrote a nineteenth-century British scholar.<sup>4</sup> Being forced to admit defeat because of the Western powers’ clear and overwhelming military superiority, the Chinese either adapted willingly or were made to accept the European powers’ intrusion, and the social upheaval that came with it, until China could gather enough resistance to strike back effectively.

This retaliation, the traditional view holds, took the form of appropriation on the part of China of borrowed Western weapons: the railroad, Western warships, Western tactics, constitutional rule and finally the Western invention of Marxism. In short, while China’s steadfast adherence to ancient values and traditions such as the antiquated “eight-legged essay” writing style impeded her industrialization, modernity was attained through grudging imitation of the West. Christopher Hibbert, who is not a Sinologist and therefore may represent the “general” view more than an expert, holds that the Chinese “looked forward to the day, whether under President or Emperor, when they would be strong enough to break off those contacts [from the West], to proclaim with impunity, ‘China for the Chinese and out

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<sup>4</sup> *Chinese Repository*, vol. II, 8.

with the foreigners!’”<sup>5</sup> The Chinese, then, are said to have simply resumed their ancient xenophobic stance even as that ancient system underwent tremendous change. No one denies that Han Chinese revolutionaries were struggling against the Manchu elite as much as against Western control of China. But the important thing, in this simplified conception, is that the upheavals were a result of “long decline... accelerated by Western intervention in China.” The revolt of 1911, almost entirely internecine in its nature, “was the starting point of a long series of upheavals which gave birth to modern China.”<sup>6</sup>

#### (ii) The Sinologist’s view of Sino-Western relations

This traditional view, obviously, was a simplified way of looking at the events of the nineteenth century, although little in the outline above is completely false. The more modern and informed view of Sino-Western relations questions many of the assumptions made in the previous characterization. These scholars maintain that China was not static or unchanging, but rather changed in a different way than the West. The stereotype persists perhaps because of imperial China’s close identification with its Confucian past. Frederic Wakeman’s 1975 book *The Fall of Imperial China* is an example of the more informed view. In fact, on many levels and for all classes, including the peasantry and the intellectuals, continual domestic change preceded Western intrusion, which change shaped China’s later response. Nor did the Chinese people simply and passively accept Western intrusion on any level, but many Chinese in fact gained from the imperialist powers’ knowledge; others never stopped fighting against it; others ran contrary to popular opinion to espouse modified versions of it. The throne and the people continually used Western

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<sup>5</sup> Hibbert, *The Dragon Wakes*, 367.

<sup>6</sup> Chesneaux, Bastid, and Bergere, *China From the Opium Wars*, 376-77.

ideas to their own advantage where possible, but did not borrow them wholesale. In sum, the modern view contains many arguments that reduce the importance of the West to China's evolution and development. Perhaps the most concise summation of the revisionist view of Chinese-Western relations is Frank Dikötter's when he writes, "[t]here was never a 'clash' between China and the West, only a gradual phenomenon of interaction."<sup>7</sup>

*The West as an entity.* In the same vein, to say "the West" (even though the term is used often in this thesis, for simplicity's sake) is to grossly over-simplify. There was never a simple "Western" agenda, since each country had its own aims and sought to protect its own interests. To carve up China like a melon would have necessitated agreement on the part of those doing the slicing, and this almost never existed. (The times of exception to this general rule – such as when the Russian tsar in 1897 allowed German gunboats to enter the port of Jiaozhou which was held to be a Russian acquisition, replying "cannot approve or disapprove" to the request for permission<sup>8</sup> – demonstrate just how dangerous the Western powers could be when they did briefly put aside their differences. China would indeed have been sliced like a melon if cooperation had been the general rule.) As just one example of how incorrect it would be to say "Western aims" when speaking of China, let us look at China in 1860-62. In 1860, England and France were at war with China: an expedition of Anglo-French forces under Lord Elgin was heading for Beijing, a march which would end in the burning of the Summer Palace. Meanwhile, America maintained a separate peace with China. The British government also, at the same time, was maintaining an official "neutrality" in China's Taiping Rebellion, informing its forces in Chinese ports to refrain from aiding either side. Frederick

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<sup>7</sup> Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race*, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 128. Which approval was regretted later.

Townsend Ward, the American adventurer who headed a force made up of many nationalities against the Taipings, was ridiculed in the foreign press, which gleefully reported his first defeats. Nevertheless, in August 1860, after much debate in the foreign press, the various foreign legations in Shanghai rose up to defend their interests when the Chung Wang, or “faithful king,” of the Taipings threatened to march on that city. Sir Frederick Bruce, British Minister in Beijing, seemed to see no contradiction when he wrote, “without taking any part in this civil contest... we might protect Shanghai from attack.”<sup>9</sup> Afterwards, the mixed Western and Chinese force known as the Ever-Victorious Army marched through China on behalf of Imperial order. This show of support did not stop many foreigners in Shanghai from suggesting in 1862 a “free Shanghai” – that is, the outright theft of the city by the foreign forces, since the Chinese Empire was, in their eyes, mishandling “their” city so badly.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, foreign adventurers from many nations fought on the side of the Taipings, even switching sides throughout the rebellion.

In 1862 as well, the British consul in Canton accused the French of “trying to make political capital out of the Chinese embrouillement” because the Customs Commissioner in Ningpo, Prosper Giquel, was organizing a specifically Franco-Chinese corps in addition to the Ever-Victorious Army. Of course to make political capital at any opportunity was precisely what the English government would have liked to do. An indignant Frederick Bruce told Chinese officials that they should, instead of hiring French, “apply for Prussians” as soldiers.<sup>11</sup> The creation of a separate Franco-Chinese Corps could not have been anything more than a desire to keep up with the English in terms of national prestige. Theirs was a comparatively

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *The Ever-Victorious Army*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Carr, *The Devil Soldier*, 226.

<sup>11</sup> Carr, *The Devil Soldier*, 178.

minor force, and made only one expedition without being accompanied by Gordon's army, in January 1862. This attack saw the death of both its commander Albert Edouard Le Brethon de Caligny and his immediate replacement.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, the Western powers vied with each other for supremacy at least as much as they vied with China. And the preceding takes into account only indications of Western relations within the treaty ports of China. Some external motives for French actions in China actuated by European relations are discussed below; another example might be England's overtures to the American Confederacy, which strained Anglo-American relations at this time as well. In short, there was never an East-West adversarial relationship, but an all-encompassing web of relations determined by national interest. As Frederick Bruce himself said in a letter to General Charles George Gordon, commander of the Ever-Victorious Army, "[w]e have supported this Government [Beijing] from motives of interest, not from sentiment,"<sup>13</sup> and one might add that foreigners attacked the Taiping rebels for the same reason – although many Western officials recorded their disgust with the rampant cruelty and lack of government in Taiping-held areas.

*China's vastly inferior military.* In revising the traditional view of Chinese-Western relations it is also worth noting that the vast military superiority of the Western powers over China, while perhaps not a myth, has often been overstated. For example, the journalist and non-Sinologist Edward Behr wrote (in 1987) of French forces "clobbering China's forces on land and sea" in 1884 – an ill-informed simplification, as detailed below.<sup>14</sup> It cannot be denied that, especially at first, Western nations enjoyed better weapons (especially at sea), and more modern

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<sup>12</sup> Wilson, *Ever-Victorious Army*, 115.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *Ever-Victorious Army*, 216.

<sup>14</sup> Behr, *Last Emperor*, 51.

tactics: one English officer noted that Chinese guns in use against the foreigners gave off showers of sparks which “were admired for their beauty but never dreaded by us.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, one may legitimately generalize that, for a variety of reasons, the Western nations enjoyed more disciplined and more determined armies. The Chinese soldier was often an unwilling conscript, and the Chinese exam system ensured that men with the best minds went to government positions; to use one’s muscles, let alone to enter and eventually command an army, was for a long time not a fine and respected thing as it was in the West. Those forces that were professional, the Manchu bannermen, never numbered more than a quarter million men; England’s army alone, even without Indian troops, was half that size.<sup>16</sup> The unusually unbiased, for a Victorian writer, Andrew Wilson noted in 1868 that “long seclusion... and the primitive character of [China’s] opponents... have prevented them from developing this art [of war] to any high degree.” Conceding the Chinese “considerable genius” at warfare even with these constraints, Wilson remarked that if Europe had enjoyed China’s relatively united rule for the previous millennium, its skill in the art of war would not have developed “to so monstrous a height.”<sup>17</sup> Even so, Wilson assured his readers that combat with the Chinese, even the mostly unskilled and unwilling Taiping troops, was not “a perfect farce,” and attributed the total victory at Quinsan to luck, timing and determination.<sup>18</sup>

One must also consider that in the nineteenth century, China was often besieged on all sides at once – by Russia, Japan, England, France, and other powers such as the United States which were assumed by the Chinese with more or less justification

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Fay, *Opium War*, 224.

<sup>16</sup> Fay, *Opium War*, 345.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *Ever-Victorious Army*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Ever-Victorious Army*, 162-3.

to be just as rapacious as the others.<sup>19</sup> Perceiving this imbalance, China tried often to use an ancient principle of defense – “to use the barbarians against the barbarians” -- but found that no matter how mutually exclusive two Europeans countries’ interests were, the hope that their differences might lead to war over China was a pipe dream.<sup>20</sup> Finally, internal strife was a constant in nineteenth-century China, with the White Lotus Rebellion (1795-1804) and the hugely destructive Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), and there was a host of assorted rebels such as the Nian, Miao tribes, Muslim uprisings, and so on. These factors took their toll on China’s military strength. Chinese officials even had a term for the continual trouble that beset the empire on all sides: “*neiluan waihuan*” (internal disturbance and foreign aggression).

All this *justifies* the traditionally-held view of China’s military helplessness, and the justifications’ truth goes some way in explaining China’s considerable losses. However, detailed study of China’s battles with the West reveals a less one-sided picture than is widely supposed and written. Most historians agree that in terms of sea battles, the picture is closer to the truth, although to read broad accounts, one might think that English and French ships cut through Chinese junks without loss. Contemporary records of the actual fighting reveal that the junks fired with deadly accuracy, causing some of the worst wounds naval surgeons had ever seen. One ship commanded by a Commodore Keppel had five of its six crew killed or wounded in one action. At other sea battles, although clear English victories, the great British navy nevertheless lost as many as one in ten men, “a large average [at that pre-First

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<sup>19</sup> Despite America’s blithe (and ill-founded) assumption that its policies would be clearly different in Chinese eyes from the “real” imperialists of Europe. See Warren I. Cohen’s *America’s Response To China* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> For example, Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response*, 29, 53.



World War era] even for European warfare” according to a contemporary observer.<sup>21</sup> And although the French scored a total naval victory at Fuzhao in 1884, in an attack “roundly condemned for its treachery by most non-French historians,”<sup>22</sup> its naval blockade of Taiwan was mostly ineffectual. Furthermore, Chinese forces successfully repulsed combined English and French naval and land forces at the Taku forts on June 26, 1859 (a defeat later avenged by a more determined Anglo-French expedition).

On land, Chinese armies sometimes held their own against European attackers, as when they kept English forces at bay during the Opium War. The even less willing or trained Taiping army defeated mixed Chinese and European troops at Taitsan, Fushan and many other places during the Taiping Rebellion. When provoked, even villages of peasants armed only with their agricultural implements could threaten to overrun an armed European landing party, such as on Chusan and at Sun-yuan-li during the first Opium War.<sup>23</sup> When China was defeated, it did not fail to learn from its lessons. Augustine Heard, an American merchant, wrote in 1841 that “every six months shows that [the Chinese] are harder to beat than they were before. If they had a few Russian or French officers or West Point cadets, they would soon show a different face”<sup>24</sup> – which they did, in fact, under American and English command during the Taiping Rebellion. However, most scholars agree that the Imperial army benefited greatly from Western military aid during this uprising, but this aid was by no means necessary to its victory.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cooke, *China*, 18, 41-42.

<sup>22</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 157.

<sup>23</sup> Fay, *Opium War*, 227, 301.

<sup>24</sup> Fay, *Opium War*, 348.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Wilson acknowledged this in 1868, refuting the popularly-held belief to the contrary at the time (*The Ever-Victorious Army*, 254, 265).

The Sino-French War of 1883-1885, actually an undeclared war, is considered by Sinologists to be an example of Chinese forces fighting a European power to a standstill, preventing major French victories and with an admittedly minor Chinese victory coming at the end of the war at Lang-Son. Frederic Wakeman, for example, notes that “the French did not gain much more from the war... than treaty recognition of their suzerainty over Vietnam.”<sup>26</sup> It could have been worse; unacceptable French demands such as an inordinately high indemnity were successfully denied. It is also noted, by Frank Dikötter, that “[f]oreign military threats... never matched the intensity, scope and duration of China’s internal military challenges... Moreover the economic impact of the West was so insignificant that it has been aptly described as ‘a flea in the elephant’s ear.’”<sup>27</sup>

*China as a harmonious entity.* The picture of a predatory, warlike and racist West is true to a great extent, but to assume that these qualities came to a previously peaceful, harmonious China from the West is incorrect. The so-called “unequal treaties” were, of course, very unfair and were forced via military might upon a country previously wholly ignorant of the “international law” they were supposedly based upon. But it is worth remembering, if one attempts to cling to the picture of a righteous China mistreated by the machinations of a rapacious West, that the unequal treaties replaced a system of also unequal tribute relations China held for centuries with the lesser Asian states which surrounded it. This is not to disparage China’s sufferings at the hands of various Western nations, merely to help underscore the idea that China, like the Western nations, was a country peopled by citizens with various, sometimes conflicting interests and aims, not a static and passive recipient of either Western might or Western wisdom, and as a state it was ethnocentric to the

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<sup>26</sup> Wakeman, *The Fall of Imperial China*, 190.

<sup>27</sup> Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race*, 33.

point of arrogance. The treaties did not represent for China a novel lesson in how *countries* interacted so much as a humbling lesson in how *China* would interact with others. In other words, China did not need the West to teach it the harsh realities of gunboat diplomacy.

Likewise, occasional claims that the West brought racism to China, claims picked up by Marxist writers, are simply absurd. Leaving aside the fact that foreigners were called “devils” and “ghosts” by many Chinese, Frank Dikötter in his *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* has shown that the West held no monopoly in labeling peoples by color or even ranking them as a result: “[i]t would be an oversimplification... to suggest that the Chinese passively accepted a label invented by Western anthropology.” The darker races were called inferior, Dikötter notes, long before the Western powers arrived. The color white, ironically, symbolized West and death in Chinese antiquity<sup>28</sup>. The Europeans’ “white” skin, nevertheless, was hardly regarded as a desirable quality by most educated Chinese.

China, a homogenous culture in only a very limited sense, over its long history was home to – in addition to Taoists, Muslims, and even a few scattered Western sects such as Manicheans, Nestorians and Zoroastrians – several indigenous ethnic minority groups that were kept marginalized by the Han majority. Again, the change was in *who* was ranked low, not *that* peoples were ranked by color. Neither were sectarian battles unknown in China before the foreigners brought them. Sporadic warfare, accompanied by rape, pillage, and torture, broke out on a local level throughout China’s history: “violent strife,” writes Fairbank, “seems to have been built into the agrarian social system.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race*, 50-56.

<sup>29</sup> Fairbank, *Chinese Revolution*, 51.

*A self-sufficient China.* The importance of the Western powers' intrusion into the Chinese worldview becomes more inflated if one subscribes to the notion that China was economically autonomous. This would imply that the imperialist powers forced the Chinese to trade on unique terms previously unknown to the Chinese, which benefited no one but the imperialists. The idea was possibly given credence early on to European observers by the emperor Qian-long's famous 1793 edict to George III, in which he told his supposed vassal that China "'had never valued ingenious articles' and had not 'the slightest need' of England's manufactures."<sup>30</sup> In reality, the throne simply wished the unwelcome English gone. It turned out that many Chinese merchants would prosper in commerce with the Western trading companies, and officials also benefited through "squeeze" or bribery at all levels of the transaction. Long before the nineteenth century, China had a bustling domestic market, buoyed by its extensive waterways, with a "natural domestic growth of private commercial-social organization." International trade was also far from unknown before the 1800s. A sea trade in all manner of goods between Chinese merchants and the rest of Asia, including tea to Russia and the Mongols, existed for centuries and fed the economy. The existence of both domestic and international trade, as John Fairbank remarks, "cuts the foreign invader down to size."<sup>31</sup> Hong Kong's economic development "owed a great deal" to the trade from the prosperous Canton and Whampoa markets that had existed centuries before the Europeans arrived.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, since China's was a merchant-fueled economy, with no governmental investment in growth industries, one might infer a host of possibilities, such as the strong middle class and weak government necessary for revolution, which might have led to

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<sup>30</sup> Hibbert, *Dragon Wakes*, 53.

<sup>31</sup> Fairbank, *Chinese Revolution*, 58-62.

<sup>32</sup> Tsai, *Hong Kong*, 17.

eventual modernization without the Western invader's impetus. Speculation aside, pre-imperialist trade confirms that China did not need the West to learn about economic relations between states.

*China's imitation of the West.* Finally, modern scholars maintain that China never truly used anything Western, up to and including Marxism, without adapting it to suit its own unique needs. It is true that, after a long ideological, internal struggle of old against new, progressive against conservative, officials in China gradually began to appropriate what they saw as the advantages of Western society. The popular view that China *needed* Western ideals and objects in order to finally become a sovereign power on equal footing with Europe may or may not be true, but again, the statement needs clarifying. A modern view of Sino-Western relations holds that while the physical conflict was initially lost by China, the outcome of the ideological conflict was not as clear-cut. During and after the period of imperialism, Western ideas and achievements were and still are adapted, not appropriated. Western ideas were distorted and misinterpreted: Hong Xiuquan, founder of the Taipings' God-Worshipping Society, read Christian doctrine and, due to a variety of influences (his status as a minority, his rejection in the exams, perhaps seeing his name in the characters of Christian tracts<sup>33</sup>), came to believe that he was God's son and Jesus' brother. Western ideas were rejected altogether: the conservative officials who resisted the implementation of the railroad, for example, as noted in section three below. Western ideas were rejected piecemeal: Mao's wife Jiang Qing, for example, picked and chose which Western ideals she wished to allow, even foster, in China during the Cultural Revolution – a result of her childhood love for the theater and admiration for Western feminist doctrine, according to Ross Terrill's psychological biography, *The White-Boned Demon*. And Western ideas were

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<sup>33</sup> Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 30-33.

accepted and intentionally reshaped, and used to achieve China's ever-changing aims: socialism, for example. All peoples choose, on the basis of their needs at the time, what is borrowed and how it is borrowed from others; "passive acceptance" can never be an explanation for imitation of behavior, and certainly not in the case of China. Modernization and nationalism, socialism and equality have all been applied to Chinese life, bringing challenges to previously unquestioned tradition, and yet China has not become a European-style power. China's brand of socialism, Maoism, was very different from the Soviet Union's. In fact Maoism itself, as Jonathan Spence put it in a book which shows that three centuries of Western advisers in China resulted in China changing them more than vice-versa, has been used in China to "radicalize Western values."<sup>34</sup> A distinction between achievements and ideals or values is important here. Aspects of Western progress *were*, in a sense, appropriated and changed by Chinese idealists, while Western *values* were largely rejected. This has in fact been the pattern of relations between Western ideas and Chinese thinkers from the very start.

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<sup>34</sup> Spence, *To Change China*, xiii.

### 3. French Imperialism

In examining French involvement particularly in China, this study poses four main questions, which are informed by the revisionist view of Sino-Western relations. First, why were the French in China? This question assumes that the reasons given publicly for imperialist activity were not necessarily the reasons that actually motivated various French representatives' imperialist urges. This entails an enumeration of French aims in the East, which aims seem to fall into three types: admitted and true, avowed yet generally untrue, and disavowed publicly yet existent. Examples of these include, respectively, economic gain, a "civilizing" mission, and a spirit of competition for national honor and prestige. Once explored, these aims help show how the French saw China and the Chinese at this time.

Second, what was France's position among the other Western powers in China (the main representatives being Britain and Russia)? This question assumes that the Western Powers did not approach China in an orderly fashion, as competitors and equals somehow agreeing to "divide" a victim nation, but that intense rivalry dominated the Western nations' relations and impeded their separate imperialist agendas; further, dissent existed within the Western powers as to the relative moral standing of each nation's activities in China.

Third, how did the Chinese react to their newfound status vis-à-vis the French? This question assumes that "the Chinese" does not imply some static, homogenous entity which shared a cultural and political outlook. Rather, the reaction of individual Chinese depended on many factors, including racial status, financial position (and the opportunities for financial improvement the foreigners brought) and political viewpoint, which was often intertwined with individual interpretations of the revered Five Classics. Among the conclusions at which this exploration arrives is that the Chinese role in imperialism itself was not entirely passive or fatalistic, even

above and beyond simple resistance, as students of traditional Chinese life might suppose. Rather, the Sino-Western market existed in part because some Chinese were willing to create and maintain trade relations with the West.

Fourth, why did French decolonization occur when it did, in the mid-twentieth century? This question assumes that while China's efforts to shake off the imperialist intruder were the main motivation for its independence, France acted at least in part of its own volition in leaving China. Christianity, individualism, and class and gender equality were ideals that Europe brought to China, and which many Chinese accepted eagerly in place of ancient traditions. A sense of modernism was thus fostered in many Chinese intellectuals. Indirectly, the presence of imperialist powers brought forth a sense of resistance, or nationalism, and with it the socialism that promised to bring the Western ideals to China without the mostly unwelcome "help" of the powers themselves. Ferocious rebel groups such as the Taipings and Boxers, among many other secret societies, gave way to a concerted desire to make China whole and self-sufficient again. The influence of imperialism did not fade, but China retained the right to shape its own values, now using some of the West's ideals, even in altered form.

The emphasis in this paper is on the first two questions; the responses to the latter three are used in large part to support the analysis of the first. (1) Despite lingering claims of financial gain and a "civilizing mission," the French were in China primarily to foster the growth of their own national pride and international status. (2) The French were regarded by the other Western powers as unnecessarily rapacious. Individual French soldiers were roundly criticized for their cruelty by the English, and vice-versa. While this is to be expected, French missionaries were not widely regarded as proponents of a civilizing mission, and French policy in general was criticized during the Sino-French War. (3) There was no unified Chinese response to the West. Chinese merchants used the new foreign trade as best they could to their



advantage. Chinese literati, the ruling classes, reacted with resentment and hostility to the intrusion of the Western powers, but slowly developed a resistance to it, culminating in socialism and nationalism. The ruling Manchus shared the literati's concern, but did not share their brand of nationalism, which entailed the removal of the Manchus from the throne. (4) Finally, decolonization occurred for many reasons of which two are most important: the rise of nationalism in Asia and the concurrent increase of national pride in France after the second World War.

#### (i) Six reasons for French expansion in general

Before investigating France's role in China, it is advisable to outline the reasons for France's expansion in general. I use Christian and Arlette Ambrosi's study of the subject, *La France: 1870-1990*, as the basis for my argument. In this work, the authors present six rationales for French imperialist activity,<sup>35</sup> which will be given below with some comment, and then, throughout this paper, applied to French activity in China. First, the Ambrosis identify a "cause intellectuelle," or the French desire for scientific information about the world. This cause by itself cannot be said to share an equal weight with other causes, if it even existed in a pure form. As the Ambrosis note, "The Geographical Society... did not hide the fact that science was not its sole concern, but its concerns were also national, political, and economical, so as to encourage France's civilizing mission."<sup>36</sup> In addition, a sub-group from the Geographical Society was formed, the Society of Commercial Geography, in 1876. "The avowed aims of the new group were to encourage voyages that would stimulate commercial outlets," and it drew up a world map showing not only areas of French

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<sup>35</sup> Ambrosi and Ambrosi, *La France*, 126-7.

<sup>36</sup> "La Société de Géographie... ne cache pas que la science n'est pas sa seule préoccupation, mais le souci est également national, politique, économique, afin d'encourager la mission civilisatrice de la France."

control in the world but “the potential markets for products produced at Paris.”<sup>37</sup> Obviously, scientific knowledge of other places could have been furthered – with more effort and perhaps less success, it is true – without the exploitation or governing of those places, had knowledge alone been a true incentive. The “cause intellectuelle,” therefore, is actually only a corollary to, or happy side product of, the other causes, and was then used to augment them.

The second and third causes that the Ambrosio list are referred to as the distinct “economic” and “financial” causes.<sup>38</sup> The former’s impetus is continued import of such exotic goods as tea, tobacco, sugar, cocoa, and so on; by the latter is meant the investment of French capital within colonies. They are clearly separate causes, but they share the same motive for material or financial gain, necessarily at the expense of a colony’s people.

The fourth cause is the desire for prestige, or what the Ambrosio term the “cause nationale.” They note, of course, that “the sentiment common to all the countries of Europe was that of the superiority of European civilization,”<sup>39</sup> and certainly France was not unique in exploiting others for her own prestige. The Ambrosio make it clear, however, that France *explicitly* embraced this cause: first, they mention that “in his speech of July 28, 1885 [in the Chamber of Deputies, Jules] Ferry affirmed the rights and the duties of the superior races.” Ferry’s famous justification is referred to below. More tellingly, “France had, in addition, a specific reason: it was necessary that action erase the memory of the defeat [by the German people in 1871].”<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>37</sup> Cady, *French Imperialism*, 291.

<sup>38</sup> “la cause économique” and “la cause financière.”

<sup>39</sup> “Le sentiment commun à tous les pays d’Europe est celui de la supériorité de la civilisation européenne.”

<sup>40</sup> “[D]ans son discours du 28 juillet 1885 Ferry affirme les droits et devoirs des races supérieures [...] La France a en outre une raison particulière : il faut effacer la défaite par l’action.”

importance of this defeat is unarguable and is also dealt with below; the question here is to what degree the desire to compensate for it ruled France's actions and decisions in Asia during the nineteenth century. This thesis argues that prestige was, in fact, the over-riding consideration for the French in constructing their imperialist agenda. This topic will be dealt with at length after quickly reviewing the Ambrosis' next two causes.

The fifth reason for French expansionism is the "cause morale et religieuse." Noting that "the nineteenth century was one of evangelism," the Ambrosis posit that France colonized Africa and Asia in part "to improve the conditions of indigenous peoples."<sup>41</sup> Ferry and others also trumpeted this cause; how true it actually was for the Chinese is discussed below.

Finally, the Ambrosis' sixth cause is a group of "causes individuelles," by which they mean "the initiatives" of missionaries, explorers and adventurers who for their own personal reasons felt the need to open exotic doors to France and thus "brought the attention of the government to a fait accompli."<sup>42</sup> This reason will not be discussed for two reasons. First, in my opinion it seems slightly disingenuous: to call annexation of territory a "fait accompli" misleadingly implies that the French government had no choice but to exploit colonies if its citizens had already begun the process. To say this of any government seems odd, much more so, it seems to me, for the French government which has a tradition of subsuming the freedom and initiative of the individual to the good of the state as a whole. Certainly, explorers staked out territory (such as Louisiana and Canada), but it was up to the government to *develop* (or sell, as with the Louisiana territory in 1803, or virtually ignore, as with

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<sup>41</sup> "Le XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle est un siècle d'évangélisation [...] pour améliorer les conditions de vie des indigènes."

<sup>42</sup> "qui mettent le gouvernement devant le fait accompli."

New France, later Québec, until the 17th century) that territory. Military leaders, as well, ventured into territory without the approval of Paris: in 1903 Herbert Lyautey moved into Morocco in direct disobedience to orders from the Minister of War.<sup>43</sup> Still, this did not stop France from continuing its gradual expansion in North Africa. If Lyautey and other adventurers acted on their own initiative, still it could not be said that they created new policy, but rather sped it up. The second reason is that this rationale does not apply particularly to nineteenth century-century China, which, if it was ever “opened” to modern trade, was done so by official British delegations starting in 1793 with the Lord Macartney expedition. Therefore, because governments, not “individuels,” dictated *policy* for the most part, this study assumes the French government ideology was the impetus for the development of imperialism in China.

#### (ii) Prestige and French imperialism

Prestige was always a motivating force for French expansion throughout the globe, as for example its conquests of economically poor and strategically weak areas such as the Sudan, “a colony largely devoid of use except prestige,” or Mauritania. National glory was reflected in part by international rivalry. The push to Chad, for example, sponsored by the Geographical Society, was brought on by the desire “to conquer new territory, secure as an opening into central Africa, open trade links and – perhaps most importantly – forestall expansion by Britain.”<sup>44</sup> Before looking specifically at French rivalries with other powers in Asia, we should examine the general factors that made rivalry such a national concern. A sense of

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<sup>43</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 32-33.

<sup>44</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 46, 56.

inferiority swept France in the nineteenth century, and this was connected to the defeat France suffered in 1871.

*1871 and national decline.* The 1871 defeat that the Ambrosius mention was one of the major stimuli of late nineteenth-century French expansionism. A very brief sketch of the events leading to it follows; of course the situation was more complicated than this outline allows. In 1870 France had threatened war on Prussia over its candidacy of the Hohenzollern prince Leopold for the throne of Spain. The withdrawal of the candidacy was acceded to, but then France demanded an apology and an assurance that the candidacy would not be renewed. Bismarck published the demands probably in a deliberate attempt to embarrass France, and France accordingly declared war in June of 1870. The southern German states joined Prussia and soon effected the surrender of French troops at the Battle of Sedan, prompting the French government to fall and provoking the eventual institution of a republic in Paris. But Paris was soon surrounded, and its citizens surrendered in January 1871. Even from this rough outline, two things seem apparent: France's initial aggressive confidence in making demands to Prussia, and the shock that must have arisen from a defeat so appalling that it provoked civil war, and so clear-cut that within only a few months the capital city was besieged. In addition, even surrender must not have brought total closure to a weary French populace, as the same war effected the unification of Germany under Wilhelm, creating a new and clearly dangerous enemy. It is clear that the fall that followed pride must have resulted in national shame.

But national shame was not a disease caused by the defeat at Paris; rather, the defeat served to exacerbate the shame that had been growing throughout the century. The importance of the 1871 defeat was magnified by its context as a nineteenth-century French problem. The nineteenth century brought modernization and industrialization across Europe, and along with the beneficial changes that these

progressive movements brought came increased rates of (and higher visibility of) alcoholism, disease, suicide, and other modern psychological problems. France saw its share of these problems decades before the defeat, but its reaction was colored by a negative national self-image. The French people focused on the distinction between France as it was in the prior century, in the ascendant, and as it was compared to Germany's progress in the nineteenth century; these two images took on, Robert Nye says, "a practically ideological status," until "no judgment about the stature of France could be made without some reference to the relative stature of its neighbor *outré- Rhin*."<sup>45</sup> The ramifications of such national neurosis were many, as experts hastened to remedy the perceived "national decline" in virility, military strength, and national glory. Anti-alcohol lobbies, a prevalent discourse on hygiene, propagation propaganda, interest in eugenics, and other crusades attempted to swing the balance in France's favor by ameliorating the plight of the individual, which was seen as inexorably linked with that of the state. Among the solutions that dealt with the nation as a whole was a push toward colonialism, especially because of the potential for increased manpower. This argument seems an illusory reassurance, since troops in Africa could not have helped France's population problem, or protected its borders. As anti-colonialists later argued, overseas French troops merely misdirected French energies for the sake of glory, but without significant material gains at home. In 1871, however, the defeat hit an already insecure France, and national pride took a severe downturn; any solution was welcome.

Koenraad W. Swart titles the chapter in his book that he dedicates to the 1871 defeat "The Year of Disaster" and characterizes it as "the single most important shock to national self-confidence."<sup>46</sup> This is not a judgment made only in retrospect;

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<sup>45</sup> Nye, *Crime, Madness, & Politics*, 138.

<sup>46</sup> Swart, *Sense of Decadence*, 254.

the import of the defeat by the Germans was immediately apparent to the French of the time; Swart mentions the titles of some contemporary pamphlets circulating among the people: *The End of the world; France degenerated; 1871! The Beginnings of decadence; France's catastrophe*; and so on.<sup>47</sup> The intellectual élite shared the popular sentiment. Gustave Flaubert wrote, "I never thought I would see the end of the world. For this is it; we are witnessing the end of the Latin world."<sup>48</sup> (We see here the idea that global prestige and race are linked, an idea that strongly motivated much imperialism.) Swart argues that the French despair gave rise to a tendency toward retreat and self-examination. Across all class lines grew a feeling of French inferiority, the sense that France had over-exerted and over-extended herself. As a sense of inferiority grew more prevalent, patriotism seemed a waste of energy: "[t]he early nineteenth-century nationalism that had called for spreading liberty, equality, and fraternity around the world, lost almost all support." Emile Montégut, a writer who had previously praised what today we would call multiculturalism, wrote after the French defeat, "this is the moment for all French people voluntarily to imprison themselves within their country."<sup>49</sup>

If it is true that the 1870 defeat led to this widespread sense of isolation and retreat from the European agenda, how is it that France continued expanding in Asia afterwards? The Treaty of Saigon, which established a protectorate, in practice, over Annam, which was declared independent, came about in 1874; the Society of Commercial Geography, in 1876. And during 1882-84, the French waged a war in

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<sup>47</sup> *La fin du monde; La France dégénérée; 1871! Les premières phases d'une décadence; La catastrophe de la France.*

<sup>48</sup> "[J]e ne croyais pas voir arriver la fin du monde. Car c'est cela. Nous assistons à la fin du monde latin," in Swart, *Sense of Decadence*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> "C'est le moment pour tout Français de s'emprisonner volontairement dans son pays," in Swart, *Sense of Decadence*, 126-7.

Tonkin which resulted in the destruction of a Chinese fleet off Fuzhou and made official French sovereignty over Indochina, leading also to the undeclared Sino-French War of 1884-85. Clearly, this resurgence of imperialist aims indicates that the isolationism spoken of above was not a movement with staying power. France's participation in imperialist ventures merely receded for about five years following 1870, then the French turned their attention to Asian colonial policy in earnest again around 1880.

Here one may ask why the recrudescence occurred at that point. One specific answer is national debt; the 1871 Treaty of Frankfurt stipulated an indemnity to Germany of five billion francs. France doubtless needed to increase its coffers with external ventures; this was not paid off until 1875. Another reason for renewed imperialism is that after five years, domestic reconstruction may have reached a saturation point. Once a nation feels secure in its borders, attention is then directed outwards. As a result of both of these motivating influences, expansionists came to power in France after the retirement of French president Marie Edmé Patrice de MacMahon in 1879. That year Charles le Myre de Vilers, who oversaw French expansion in Annam, became governor of Cochin China and Jules Ferry became premier in 1880. The prevalent atmosphere of expansion throughout all Europe was also a motivation; France was taking place in the "general scramble for colonial possessions... which so characterized" the period of 1880 to 1904.<sup>50</sup> It was a time when geographers, theorists and explorers from all over Europe forged the idea that overseas expansion was necessary to the continued vitality of a nation. As we have seen, for France this was especially important. Of course, France's participation in

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<sup>50</sup> Bau, *Foreign Relations*, 110.



this scramble was not only a desire to keep up; France had something to prove, especially to the German people.

Speaking of France, Swart writes that “[o]f all other nations, perhaps only the Chinese were less prepared for the debacles befalling them in the nineteenth century.”<sup>51</sup> This may be true, but the crucial difference between the European nation and the Asian one was, of course, that unlike China France was a modernized nation and one which could easily mobilize its wealth, and was practiced in overseas administration and recovery from misfortune. Unlike France, in which every class was shaken by the 1871 defeat, it would take China many such humiliating and costly defeats before it would be able to meet the Western countries on their own nationalistic terms. In order to compensate for its defeat – humiliating because it had been assumed that the Prussian state was less civilized and weaker than France – France would beat Germany on the field of global expansionism. And this France could do; while the German people had attempted before to build a European land empire (and would again in the twentieth century), they had always lagged behind the British and French in overseas colonial power. In some part, then, French colonialism after 1870 stemmed from indirect competition with the Germans in particular. Even in the decolonization process this same sense of competition would again be a factor.

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, however, colonialism was an accepted notion throughout the century. Thus while rivalry with Germany cannot be taken as a root cause for French expansionism except after 1870, rivalry with other European nations in general can be. Since Britain was the primary sea power in Europe, indeed the world, during the nineteenth century, Britain was necessarily the object of France's sense of rivalry. Since Louis XIV, France had aspired to gain territory in

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<sup>51</sup> Swart, *Sense of Decadence*, 243.

Asia. But because its military forces were inadequate, “French prestige in the East had become badly tarnished. The Frenchman, who saw the Union Jack unfurled in ever-increasing brilliance throughout Asia, well knew the taste of gall.”<sup>52</sup>

This rivalry, however, can be differentiated from that with the German people in that the former was, in a sense, an historical accident concerning whichever nation happened to be in the lead in the race for colonial power; the latter was, as documented above, born of resentment and shame, and strove to redress specific grievances. This is not to imply that real animosity between France and England during the later nineteenth century was a non-issue. War between the two nations could have occurred at many points, as when the English fleet bombarded Beirut in 1841. However, an alliance between the two powers was always more of a likelihood than between France and Germany. Thus, for example, when Russia annexed Turkish principalities in 1853, France and England committed themselves to Turkish support, allowing their rivalry in China to take a back seat to the “Eastern Question” of Russian power in the Near East. The Crimean War, incidentally, had the result of buttressing German power by freeing it from Austrian influence, which helped prepare Germany’s 1871 victory, and also helped cement Anglo-French cooperation in China itself.

*International rivalry.* As noted, 1871 was not a cause of the national sense of inferiority, but served as a warning sign that France had reached a low point. The military defeat was not necessary for international rivalry – in other words the quest for prestige – to motivate French expansionism: decades before the defeat, France strove to compete on an international level with other nations. In Asia, events during the Elgin expedition give a revealing example of the sense of prestige that dominated European expansionism. From 1856 to 1860, combined Anglo-French forces

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<sup>52</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 31.

infiltrated China on diverse pretexts. The sack of Canton by these forces in 1858 led to the Treaty of Tientsin (Tianjin), actually a series of treaties with the British, French, Americans and Russians. In 1859 British and French delegates going to exchange ratification papers were met with opposition at the Pei River, resulting in a major invasion by an Anglo-French armed force under Lord Elgin. Here, the Chinese forces were hopelessly outmatched, possibly in part because the Manchu rulers decided to flee Beijing rather than organize a determined resistance. The only main battle of the expedition was fought outside Beijing on September 18, 1858, and on October 13, the emperor's Summer Palace was taken and ordered burnt, probably as a reprisal for Chinese resistance. Prestige had little to do with that decision. But the best example of rivalry for rivalry's sake – not for wealth or territory – came on October 24, 1858. That day, “Lord Elgin entered Peking with utmost pomp... passing through those ancient streets now for the first time... lined with British soldiers.” France, of course, could not let this display go unanswered. “Next day Peking had its second opportunity of witnessing a conqueror's entry as the French, not to be outdone, entered with similar panache.”<sup>53</sup> However, in Lloyd Eastman's image, “France... was like a tail wagging at the rear of the indomitable British lion,” and required independent victories to truly gain prestige.<sup>54</sup> Vietnam would thus prove to be France's own area of influence.

International prestige, in any case, seems to have been mainly the purview of the government in Paris, not of the common soldier. It is to be assumed that during all expansionist expeditions, French soldiers, like all soldiers, had no reason to act with respect toward the subjects of their attacks. However, the Elgin expedition showed the French soldiers in the worst possible light, as observer after observer on the

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<sup>53</sup> Cameron, *Barbarians and Mandarins*, pp. 348-357.

<sup>54</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 32.

English side characterized French looting as the worst. Examples are discussed in the section on other imperialists' views of France. Fault aside, these comments indicate the fact that their country's honor was seldom a constraint on the French forces' behavior. If there were "causes individuelles" for French expansionism in this case, they were the individual soldier's rapacity and capacity for violence, not a noble desire for adventure.

At the other end of the diplomatic spectrum, European alliances helped shape France's position in China. The Dual Alliance with Russia in 1891, the Entente Cordiale with Britain in 1904 and France's part in the International Banking Consortium with the United States and Britain all attest to this. Of course, even the strongest of alliances does not preclude at least a friendly rivalry when it comes to a nation's economic interest; France, the U.S., and Britain cannot be said to have shared many specific interests in Asia.

This is untrue of France and Russia, who remained allies throughout the "scramble" for Chinese territory up to the Boxer rebellion, and who made a counter-declaration to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902. The French Minister in Beijing, M. Auguste Gérard, went so far as to write: "Russia's interests in the Far East being larger in area and more considerable than ours, it is natural and necessary that our aid to them be guaranteed."<sup>55</sup> With this in mind, France, through Gérard, provided most of the funds for the Russo-French loan of 400 million francs to China (at four percent interest over 36 years) in 1895 and for the concession of the proposed Russian, Belgian and French-sponsored Beijing-Hankou railway in 1899.<sup>56</sup> We can see from these joint interests that the desire for material gain played some part separate from

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<sup>55</sup> "Les intérêts de la Russie en Extrême-Orient étant plus étendus et plus considérables que les nôtres, il est naturel et nécessaire que notre concours lui fut assuré," quoted in Bau, *Foreign Relations*, 111.

<sup>56</sup> Bau, *Foreign Relations*, 111-115; also Lee, *Exploitation of China*, 97, 112.

diplomatic intrigue and the race for prestige (putting aside the notion that all gain of any kind means a gain in prestige) in French policy in China. Obviously, Gérard and others were hoping for a return on their investment.

*Financial causes.* But how much did financial concerns dictate France's policy of relations in China, in comparison with other causes? In Ferry's July 28, 1885 "defense" of colonialism, mentioned above, he said "[t]he foundation of a colony is the creation of a market... and is justified from that point of view, in these times and in the crisis through which all European industries are passing."<sup>57</sup> In other words, the prevailing depressed economic conditions were a justification for forced export of French goods, and no doubt also for "cheap labor and an extra military force."<sup>58</sup>

Robert Lee shows that the importance of economic considerations in France has been overstated. Britain consistently far outstripped France in exports to China in terms of percentage of "intermediate" goods – useful items such as cloth, iron, copper, hardware and leather – sold. One problem was that "French products were over-priced and ill suited to Chinese tastes."<sup>59</sup> John F. Cady, citing France's "perennial rivalry with Great Britain," notes that "[t]he basic considerations of French policy in the Far East from the time of Louis XIV to that of Louis Napoleon and Jules Ferry were more political than economic."<sup>60</sup> This was always true: "from the beginning, not one French interest was committed to," writes the very French Faivre. "In 1837, our exports to Canton totaled... fifteen and thirty times fewer than those of the English." In 1838, Adolphe Barrot, the consul general in Indochina,

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<sup>57</sup> Power, *Jules Ferry*, 191.

<sup>58</sup> "une main-d'œuvre à bon marché et une force militaire d'appoint," Ambrosi and Ambrosi, *La France*, 127.

<sup>59</sup> Lee, *Exploitation of China*, 16-17.

<sup>60</sup> Cady, *Roots of French Imperialism*, 295.

wrote “France has furnished nothing to China this year, and I doubt... that a commerce of any importance will open for quite some time.”<sup>61</sup> Barrot’s prediction proved to be right. A table of the value of French sales to China from 1927 to 1937 shows a fluctuating but generally decreasing number of francs, from a high of over 400 million in 1928 to a low of 72 million in 1935. And despite improvements in 1936 and 1937, “France in [1936] occupied only tenth place among the nations exporting goods to China... In 1937 exports to China represented only five per cent of France’s total exports.”<sup>62</sup>

Because of France’s late start in the Asian market and her fine but expensive goods, France’s interests in China were never large enough to justify, in and of themselves, the continued forced treaties, expeditions, and so forth imposed on the East. “We did not know how to adapt the breadth of our sheets to the desires of our customers, as the English [and the Americans] did,” is how Faivre explains it.<sup>63</sup> Perhaps this lack of know-how stemmed from a national temperament toward caution, or a satisfaction in exporting fine crafts to European nations. But the idea that the French were somehow *unable* to adapt their goods to a China market over a century is telling. Of course, Chinese officials were loath to openly encourage trade with the foreigners, and England’s trading companies found great success only in opium. Perhaps France was unwilling to try to set up both a military and a sizable economic presence in China. In any case, the very attempt to set up new markets for

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<sup>61</sup> “à l’origine, aucun intérêt français n’était engagé... En 1837, nos exportations de Canton atteignaient... quinze et trente fois moins que celles des Anglais... la France n’a rien fourni à la Chine cette année, et je ne crois pas... que d’ici à bien longtemps il s’ouvre une commerce de quelque importance.” Faivre, *L’Expansion Française*, p. 382.

<sup>62</sup> Levy, *French Interest and Policies in the Far East*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>63</sup> “Nous n’avons pas su adapter la largeur de nos draps aux désirs de la clientèle, comme on fait les Anglais,” Faivre, *L’Expansion française*, 382.

French goods became an opportunity to “sustain French prestige in the east... [and] to establish the security of existing French possessions in Indo-China” as well as set up new markets outside of Tonkin, preferably in Beijing. Prestige was the key, as Jules Ferry himself wrote in 1883: it was “not a question of wanting to conquer that great Chinese empire... But we must be at the gateway of that rich nation.” What was this imperative? To Ferry, the fact that it was what was expected at the time was reason enough. “See with what eagerness each of these industrial races... strains to take their share in the still unexplored world...”<sup>64</sup> If any cause was treated by the French as an end in and of itself, it was not financial gain but rivalry – competition with the rest of the “civilized races” purely because that was what was being done.

*The civilizing mission.* On the other hand, was this mad rush for China part of a “civilizing” mission in which France wanted to take part, to improve the lives of the Chinese and bring them into the Western world? The answer is both yes and no. Jules Ferry’s three-part justification of colonialism included “humanitarian” explanations. “The superior races have a duty when it comes to the inferior races... They have the duty to civilize the inferior races.”<sup>65</sup> Echoing the view of many of his countrymen was Paul Gaffarel, founder of the Dijon Geographical Society, who wrote in 1882: “[The Asians] are... children who are just being admitted to civilization... Is it not our duty to direct them, to instruct them, to educate them morally?” However, Gaffarel perhaps reveals the true foundation of this line of thought when he adds, “Let us use them, and we shall have accomplished a useful and patriotic work.”<sup>66</sup> Anti-colonialists decried the “mission civilisatrice” as a pretext for numerous abuses, but in general, this cause “evoked the least opposition

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<sup>64</sup> Lee, *Exploitation of China*, 14-15.

<sup>65</sup> “Les races supérieures ont un droit vis-à-vis des races inférieures.... Elles ont le devoir de civiliser les races inférieures,” in Ambrosi and Ambrosi, *La France*, 167.

<sup>66</sup> In Cady, *Roots of French Imperialism*, 294.

from Europeans” when considering the value of the colonial program.”<sup>67</sup> In Asia, most educated Chinese saw through this pretense. The official Zhang Zhidong noted that where “England uses commerce to absorb the profits of China, France uses religion to entice the Chinese people.”<sup>68</sup> Several other memorials equated force with “that equally invidious instrument of the French, Christianity.”<sup>69</sup>

Of course this was a biased outlook, and there were practicing, basically altruistic French orphanages, cathedrals, and doctors in China in the 1800s, who did not mean to “entice” the Chinese into anything harmful to their way of life. While politicians within France thought in terms of global competition, Catholic missionaries thought in terms of the global spread of Christianity. However, one should keep in mind that the Church’s motives were not entirely separate from the French government’s view of expansionism’s *raison d’être*, that being global influence and prestige. Chinese officials and people saw Christianity and military might as two edges of the same sword, and French diplomats did in fact use military might to further the interests of the Church, for example securing by treaty the rights of free movement in the mainland for their missionaries, which the British failed to do. (Certainly, Paris did not leave its missionaries without protection, if only because national honor was at stake. In 1836, a French warship was sent to Tahiti to demand an apology for two expelled missionaries.) While the French state and the Church did not always share the same goals, the former could use the latter as a justification for its expansion, and a mark of prestige, “often asserting herself in religious affairs when she could not challenge the British supremacy in trade.”<sup>70</sup> The struggles between Church and state in France at the time were not worth sacrificing potential gains overseas, apparently.

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<sup>67</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 112.

<sup>68</sup> In Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response*, 129.

<sup>69</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 176.

<sup>70</sup> Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 75.



Actually, any improvements in the Chinese standard of living as a result of French intervention must be seen in the light of ulterior motives. The prestige of the Church, for example, was improved by its charitable deeds, and children raised in their orphanages were captive targets for conversion. This is not to deny that good deeds were done by French priests and doctors, merely that these good deeds were not part of any deliberate, official plan to raise China's standard of living. The Church wanted to convert the Chinese, but this implied controlling them just as much as Paris' policies. One impetus for Chinese anger against the Church in China was its policy of interfering when converts got into trouble with local authorities, demanding their "convert" be treated leniently. Many Chinese "converted" for the rice that was handed out to attract them, as well as this illicit protection from the Church, and were derisively labeled "rice Christians." As such, the Church's right to preach and set up churches throughout China as dictated by treaty served well as part of Ferry's "policy" to help maintain France's prestige in Asia. And, as the military offended with its rapine, the Church caused resentment through misunderstanding and arrogance.

The conduct of the French in China who were not affiliated with the Church belies any desire to "civilize" the Chinese people, even when they were defending the practices of the Church. The causes of the Tientsin Massacre of 1870 are a testament to this conduct. The massacre came at a time when Chinese xenophobia was at its height; anti-Christian sentiment fueled rumors that the orphanage at St. Vincent de Paul was ritually sacrificing children. On June 21, 1870, amidst anti-foreign demonstrations, city leaders asked to be allowed to inspect the cathedral; it was thought that the Church was kidnapping children. At this impudence, the French consul, Monsieur Fontanier, went berserk. He shot at the city prefect, attacked a crowd with his sword and finally shot an official dead. This sparked a riot in which the cathedral was razed and nineteen French residents were killed and mutilated.

Naturally, the Chinese expected war with the French, and prepared for an attack; it was only the war with Prussia, already underway, that prevented it.<sup>71</sup> Fontanier was clearly adverse to engaging in the subtleties of diplomacy with the Chinese people.

And missionaries themselves were said to be less than morally instructive. “I think,” Jean-Henri Baldus, a French Lazarist in China wrote, “that in all things they are decidedly inferior to Europeans, whom indeed the Lord seems to have regarded as his second chosen people.”<sup>72</sup> This was not an unusual comment for a representative of the Church to make. John Fryer, an English observer, wrote that “[t]here is nothing for Merchants and Consuls to fear. The danger is to the missionaries and particularly to the French, because they render themselves very obnoxious to the Chinese, so that the wonder is there has been nothing of this kind sooner.”<sup>73</sup> Still, to give the missionaries their due, because they were allowed to go through the countryside and other foreigners were not, they were often targets for persecution without the protection of their country’s guns. Officially they were protected by Chinese law, but lived from day to day “faced with petty administrative annoyances and the harassment of the people.”<sup>74</sup> The conduct of individual Churchmen aside (whether they sided with Ferry’s policies or not), it is obvious that for an imperialist power to bring its colony up to its own level of industry and strength is hardly in that power’s best interests, since that colony would cease to be a colony in short order. Therefore, all pretensions to a civilizing mission should be

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<sup>71</sup> Fontanier “completely lost control of himself,” says Frederic Wakeman, *Fall Of Imperial China*, 185. Fontanier may have had good reason to panic, but he attacked the prefect unnecessarily.

<sup>72</sup> In Fay, *Opium War*, 333.

<sup>73</sup> Spence, *To Change China*, p. 151.

<sup>74</sup> “en butte aux tracasseries administratives et aux vexations de la foule,” Broc, “Les explorateurs,” 93.

taken with a very large grain of salt, especially since French missionaries shared the general feeling of superiority asserted by the great majority of Europeans of the time.

Another episode in which French interests more patriotic than “civilizing” are revealed is the story of Bishop Lefèbvre, a missionary who, along with others, was held captive in Annam in 1845. He was rescued by a French captain named Levêque, but in 1846 was determined to go back to Annam, despite having been persecuted. In early 1846, the British governor of Singapore offered to take Lefèbvre back to Annam “if he would await the outcome of British negotiations with Annam for the free exercise of the Christian faith and the right of entry for missionaries.” Lefèbvre refused and entered through bribery by himself, and was promptly imprisoned.<sup>75</sup> Doubtless Lefèbvre had recognized that the French foothold in Annam was more political than spiritual, that the free entry of missionaries of all faiths into Annam was less important than a French monopoly on proselytizing there.

In the Taiping Rebellion and the Western backlash against it starting around 1859 despite France and England’s initial declarations of neutrality, we find another interesting display of French attitudes. The rebels were a fragmented and disparate group, but were for the most part and at first an anti-Manchu group rather than an anti-Western one. They were adherents of a pseudo-Christianity, replete with their own ten commandments, and initially tried to forge a friendship with the foreign powers in Shanghai based on this apparently shared set of beliefs. Of course, as with many sects past and present, their regulations were made to suit the group’s political ends and mainly affected the rank and file; by 1863 their leader, Hong Xiuquan, had degenerated into an oblivious recluse, concerned only with his drugs and harem. The Western powers did not rush to the Manchu government’s aid, but they did eventually side with the empire. This was not because they wanted what was best

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<sup>75</sup> Cady, *Roots of French Imperialism*, 73-74.

for China, as “civilizing mission” might imply, but to protect their entrenched economic interests in the existing regime. It would seem anything but political stupidity to support a radical, violent group instead of an established regime to which the Western powers owed the treaties that allowed them to trade in China (and that the Taipings denounced opium was not an endearing quality to the English government, either). Besides, Ssu-yu Teng argues, although the fall of the Taipings came mainly from internal weakness, “[their] stubborn-imperial-feudalistic attitude, with a strong, nationalist spirit, irritated Westerners.”<sup>76</sup>

The French were major participants in this Western scheme of weighing the political pros and cons of the Taiping rebellion, perhaps even to a treacherous extreme. After being beaten back from Shanghai in 1860, Li Xiucheng, the leader of the secret Triad sect, along with other contemporary observers accused the French government of “luring [him] on to his defeat by false representations of the ease and safety with which Shanghai might be occupied.” This may refer to secret and deceptive overtures by French political representatives, but it probably also refers to the French Catholic rapprochement with the Taipings in the 1850s. Besides this “bad faith,” it was charged that the French “received no small amount of money from the imperialists [the Manchus, here] as a reward for protecting Shanghai and killing the Taipings.”<sup>77</sup> The British journalist Andrew Wilson perhaps showed a religious bias when he wrote a few years after the fact that “the Roman Catholic priesthood in China – a very powerful body, with a system of underground communication all over the empire – were bitterly hostile to the Rebellion,” and thus found it “not at all unlikely that some of their agents might have been employed in luring” the Taipings

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<sup>76</sup> S.Y. Teng, *Taiping Rebellion*, p. 412.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Teng, *Taiping Rebellion*, 299.

to their betrayal.<sup>78</sup> Whether the accusation was true, politically motivated, or a misunderstanding, the French eventually threw their military might behind eradicating the Taipings for the same reasons Britain came around to doing so: it was in the interests of the foreigners at Shanghai and other ports.

If the “civilizing mission” also, as Gaffarel wrote, had a moral side apart from the desire to spread Catholicism, France’s quest for empire had little time for it. The diplomatic talks during the Sino-French War showed China what French diplomats thought of moral righteousness, or even the appearance thereof. Although Chinese officials produced a memo providing “iron proof” that the French had started the hostilities, in direct violation of a treaty, at Bac-Le in June 1884, their indignant protests fell on deaf ears. “The French were singularly uninterested in China’s version of the rights and wrongs of the issue.” A deputy who suggested that the Chinese might be in the right was censured “for unpatriotically taking the word of a Chinese rather than a Frenchman.” Later, taking huge advantage of China’s “most amazing respect” for international law, France was allowed entry by treaty to the bay near the arsenal at Fujian and concentrated warships there before hostilities commenced, which gave it an immense tactical advantage in the resulting rout.<sup>79</sup> If anything, France’s mission seemed to be how to ignore diplomatic channels and win an empire at all moral costs.

Ferry’s famous justification of colonialism for humanitarian, economic and political reasons is clearly, as can be seen from the preceding discussion, a not very subtle veil to cover the quest for prestige. In fact, almost as explicitly as Ferry embraced the civilizing mission of superior races, he explicitly advocated the quest for prestige at the expense of others. “To spread through [Africa and the Orient]

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<sup>78</sup> Wilson, *Ever-Victorious Army*, 66.

<sup>79</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 146-7.

without acting... is to abdicate... it is to descend from the first rank to the third or fourth”<sup>80</sup> in the scale of world prestige, he said in his speech, leaving the problem of markets and relying on chauvinism at the end. Moreover, in reading Ferry’s “justification” for French colonialism, it is important to remember that his vaunted philosophy was *ex post facto* and not a motivating force. “He had advanced a policy... that he had inherited from his immediate predecessors... With little economic motivation, except from his general prudent bourgeois regard for French commerce... he had acted chiefly to strengthen the prestige and glory of France.”<sup>81</sup>

### (iii) The French and the other imperialists

The French experience in China has not been widely noted for its lasting impact. The greatest solo French venture, the Sino-French War of 1884-85, ended in a compromise that did not grant France as much as it would have liked in China. There are many reasons for this, the most important being that France was ensconced in northern Africa, Annam (the cause of the Sino-French War) and elsewhere, and thus could not devote a great deal of time and energy to China, a country which, in any case, was not as helpless as it appeared. While I argue above that prestige was by far the main impetus for French action in China, prestige seems not to have been worth extended military expenditure.

*French abuses.* French attempts to wrest a permanent foothold in China may also have been hindered by European opinion. While all the Western powers were guilty of belligerent encroachment to some degree, the French experience in China was marked by extraordinary demands (e.g., for an indemnity during the Sino-

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<sup>80</sup> “Rayonner sans agir... c’est abdiquer... c’est descendre du premier rang au troisième et au quatrième,” Ambrosi et Ambrosi, *La France*, 76.

<sup>81</sup> Power, *Jules Ferry*, 193.

French War), excessive cruelty, and a lack of interest in Chinese culture. While these characteristics have no obvious direct effect on military success, they do impede diplomatic discussions and cooperation of the kind that won Hong Kong for the English. I am not arguing that the English talked China into giving them Hong Kong, but that the English appear to have been more skilled in knowing when to show strength and when to appear to show mercy; their demands were perhaps more palatable since they made their position clearer. The emperor publicly called the surrender of Hong Kong outrageous, and Qishan, the governor-general who negotiated with the British, was sentenced to death (a fate later commuted to exile, and he eventually returned to service) - but this was not an unusual reaction for the Chinese court, which had to maintain its exalted position by finding a scapegoat for defeat. It is the remarks of Queen Victoria that show the restraint of the English: “[a]ll we wanted might have been got, if it had not been for the unaccountably strange conduct of Charles Elliot... who completely disobeyed his instructions and *tried* to get the *lowest* terms he could.”<sup>82</sup> The dissatisfaction of both opposing (and distant) parties notwithstanding, Elliot’s demands were not as strict as they have been, with the English ceding held territory even as they took Hong Kong, and so the outcome was as close to compromise as victory gets. French representatives, on the other hand, seem to have offended their Chinese counterparts with their arrogance, and made demands which they should have known would be unacceptable to Chinese officials. This only hindered France’s own aims, for when they were checked, this gave Chinese officials impetus to negotiate. French brusqueness and cruelty in the field may also have hindered territorial arrangements with French diplomats.

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<sup>82</sup> In Hibbert, *Dragon Wakes*, 155.

There is an endless stream of examples of other Westerners criticizing French activities. One can take it as a truism that in war, each opposing side believes it is right and accuses the other of “atrocities” that when perpetrated by itself seem justified. This maxim appears to be applicable even to the allied English and French forces both on the march to Peking in 1860 under Lord Elgin and during the Taiping Rebellion. The mutual distrust lends further support to two contentions of this thesis: the idea that there was never a united “Western” side in Chinese-Western relations, and the lack of a “civilizing” mission among the French who were in China.

The Elgin expedition of 1860 was marked by cruelties on the parts of Chinese, English and French. For example, the burning of the Summer Palace was caused by, among other things, the torture of European prisoners within it. Witnessing the burning, Charles Gordon (before he commanded the Ever-Victorious Army) wrote that “[e]verybody was wild for plunder,” but then immediately after specified: “[t]he French have smashed everything in the most wanton way.”<sup>83</sup> During the initial attacks on villages on the way to Beijing, none of these was met with any resistance to speak of. For example, “the people of Tangku were subjected to the same violence as those of Pehtang... Numbers of French soldiers rushed down the streets with bayonets fixed, breaking down doors on either side, ransacking houses... British soldiers took what they could when their officers were not looking.”<sup>84</sup> Here the blame is on both sides, but the observer implies that the British army’s discipline helped restrain its soldiers, in direct contract to the open pillaging of the French. Whether discipline was a problem on both sides or not, Lord Elgin blamed bad feeling toward the foreigners among the Chinese people on the French soldiers’

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<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Carr, *Devil Soldier*, 137.

<sup>84</sup> Hurd, *Arrow War*, 211.



behavior: “The French,” he said, “by their exactions and misconduct have already stirred to resistance the peaceful population of China,” and then mocked their bravery, saying they were “indisputably valorous against defenseless villagers and little-footed women.”<sup>85</sup>

The French soldiers’ bravery aside, to blame the French alone for poor East-West relations during an Anglo-French invasion of China is perhaps the height of hypocrisy: “[a]ll that can be said in [Elgin’s] favor is that he thwarted a French design to burn the imperial palace itself.”<sup>86</sup> And of course, if one were to ask a French soldier about plundering, one would get a very different answer: “as for the English, their reputation has been known for a long time; they put us to shame. One cannot find even a nail where they have been.”<sup>87</sup> Many more examples of contemporary blame-setting could be listed. The Anglo-French bickering may seem amusing now, but the animosity between her enemies served as an added burden on China, rather than a relief. In fact, some writers see the burning of the Summer Palace as an indirect result of the “allies” conflict: under a unified, confident command, such a thing may not have been done (as Elgin stopped the burning of the Imperial Palace).

The Taiping Rebellion saw many examples of French cruelties, according to Western observers. Here again we see an example of French prestige taking precedent over any pretense to a “civilizing” mission. The Ever-Victorious Army was the largest Western-Chinese fighting force; there was also the specifically Franco-Chinese army created by Giquel and headed by various generals during its existence. Both of these Western forces were allowed to fight alongside the Imperial

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<sup>85</sup> Hibbert, *Dragon Wakes*, 258.

<sup>86</sup> Cameron, *Barbarians and Mandarins*, 354.

<sup>87</sup> “Quant aux anglais, leur réputation est faite de longtemps, ce sont nos maîtres: on ne trouve pas un clou où ils ont passé,” cited in Hurd, *Arrow War*, p. 211.

army; in consenting to the joint contingent, the French minister in Peking, Monsieur de Bourboulon had predicted that it would be “the foundation of a great and durable influence in China.”<sup>88</sup> The French once again demonstrated their true colors (behaving not too much unlike the other Western powers, certainly) in the battle of Nanjao in May 1862: after Vice-Admiral August Leopold-Protet was killed, “[t]he French avenged themselves by massacring every man, woman, and child in the city when they recaptured it soon afterwards.”<sup>89</sup> This mad thirst for revenge did, however, infect the English forces as well. The *Overland Trade Report*, a English-language Chinese paper, in reporting the killings, concluded that “[t]ruth demands the confession that British soldiers have likewise been guilty of the commission of similar revolting barbarities – not only on the Taipings, but upon the inoffensive helpless country people.”<sup>90</sup> In general, plunder and rape were, allegedly, more common under the Franco-Chinese force than under the Ever-Victorious Army, the commanders of which, Ward and Gordon, both disapproved of plunder. In defending the suburbs of Shanghai on the 18th of August 1860, the French were accused of excessive force by their allies. The *North China Herald* carried a letter a week later by a Westerner to whom “the night’s activities amounted to little more than ‘foul murder.’”<sup>91</sup> An American soldier of fortune also wrote that the French, after helping liberate Chia-ting in 1862, left the city “followed by bullocks, sheep, goats, boys and women – all considered as loot.” The adventurer also unwittingly echoed Lord Elgin’s accusation, alleging that “the French troops showed a bad example to the new Chinese levies.”<sup>92</sup> Thomas Lyster, a British lieutenant, wrote to

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<sup>88</sup> Cited in Teng, *Taiping Rebellion*, 306.

<sup>89</sup> Teng, *Taiping Rebellion*, 312.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Carr, *Devil Soldier*, 264.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Carr, *Devil Soldier*, 128.

<sup>92</sup> Carr, *Devil Soldier*, 255.

his father explaining the manner in which he, like everyone he knew, mistreated the Chinese by knocking them down, poking them with his stick, and so on. He concluded this honest account, “[t]he French soldiers treat them even more roughly than we do.”<sup>93</sup> And complaints about the French did not stop with the Taiping Rebellion. George Morrison, the *Times* correspondent in Beijing, noted for his objectivity and readiness to expose English cruelties as well as those of other nations, witnessed the looting of Beijing after the Boxer Uprising had been put down in 1901 and blamed the French specifically. “Not content with looting,” he wrote, “they commandeer the despoiled Chinese to carry the spoils down to the French camp.”<sup>94</sup> Of course barbaric acts of looting and rapine were not French inventions. Both Opium Wars are peppered with accounts of English beatings, looting and some rape. The number and degree of implications of the French, however, suggest at least that Franco-Chinese relations on a diplomatic level were hindered by individual cruelties.

*Linguistic and social gaps.* Another way in which relations might have been strained is the language barrier. This is certainly true of all nations. Language is, after all, how people communicate, and individual diplomats represent nations. If the language is not correct, or those that use it act in a condescending way, relations become strained between countries. Commerce, diplomatic relations and missionary activity all depend on clear communication, as the foreigners in China realized quickly. According to a nineteenth-century British source, “Wang, a small mandarin... attributes a great deal of the troubles of the British Government in China to the overbearing conduct of our interpreters.”<sup>95</sup> Another contemporary wrote,

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<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Carr, *Devil Soldier*, 286.

<sup>94</sup> Pearl, *Morrison of Peking*, 132.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *Ever-Victorious Army*, 310.

“Could foreigners generally speak the language of the Chinese, and in their intercourse with the people make themselves understood, we should have little apprehension of riotous outbreaks.”<sup>96</sup> One missionary pointed out that encouraging the learning of English among Chinese (the idea of Britons troubling to learn the language of the land apparently not occurring to him) “will give the foreigner power and influence with the Chinese, and over them too.”<sup>97</sup> On the Chinese side, Feng kuei-fen, a scholar who advocated “self-strengthening” through the practical use of Western thought, blamed poor relations with the West on ill-educated, “boorish... shallow... stupid and silly ‘linguists,’” failed examination candidates, “rascals and loafers” with only a smattering of the languages on which their livelihood depended.<sup>98</sup>

There is evidence that the French were less proficient than the English when it came to linguistic achievements in China, and we can assume that this may have hindered France’s progress on a diplomatic level. Much has been written about the origins and use of “pidgin,” the dialect used by foreign traders to communicate with Chinese merchants. Almost entirely English, pidgin used words from Hindi and European languages, with a simplified grammar and diminutive endings attached to the ends of words. Pidgin gives us the word “mandarin,” from the Portuguese *mandar* to command, “chopsticks,” from “chop” meaning stamp in Hindi (when the word for chopsticks in Chinese is the unrelated *kuaizi*), and “pidgin” (business), for example. Since Chinese officials frowned upon the teaching of Chinese to foreigners (at times, the offense carried a death sentence), and most foreign traders had no interest in learning it, pidgin was a good compromise. However, it was not a dialect

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<sup>96</sup> *Chinese Repository*, vol. XIII, 392.

<sup>97</sup> *Chinese Repository*, vol. II, 4-5.

<sup>98</sup> In Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response*, 51.

that made for mutual diplomatic understanding: “being what it was, its universal use practically guaranteed that the *fan kwei* [*fangu*, devil-ghosts] and the Celestials would hold each other in the lowest possible esteem.”<sup>99</sup> The Victorian writer George Wingrove Cooke, whose despatches usually serve as an example of English racist arrogance at its worst, called pidgin “this grotesque caricature of the language of the nursery.”<sup>100</sup> Still, as bad as it was, it was an English invention. The merchants on both sides may have thought their counterparts uncivilized, but they could communicate thanks in large part to British initiative.

French linguistic achievements in this field as a whole were hardly negligible. Some of the earliest Europeans in China were French Jesuit missionaries, who of course became renowned for their Chinese abilities. Despite these pioneering efforts, “the Chinese and their language and literature sunk fast in the esteem of the French” from the end of the 18th century, as the fad of *Chinoiserie* faded. In 1815, the slack was taken up by certain university professors in Paris, but it was British scholars such as John Morrison and British merchants who were credited with opening lines of communication *within* China.<sup>101</sup> Britain’s East India company set up an English-language press in China in 1814. By the 1830s, there were five English presses in China, of both British and American origin. Neither French merchants nor French scholars gained any comparable linguistic foothold within China’s borders; they simply did not bother to try. In his study of French consuls in nineteenth century-century China, Raphael Israeli concludes that although his representative subjects, Baron de Trenquayle in Canton and Dabry de Thiersant in Hankow, tried earnestly to understand China’s power structure, “their innate haughtiness” kept

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<sup>99</sup> Fay, *Opium War*, 86.

<sup>100</sup> Cooke, *China*, 60.

<sup>101</sup> *Chinese Repository*, vol. II, 10-11.

them from creating a smooth channel of communications. Since “they did not attempt to live in China,” they thus, “contrary to diplomats in other places... remained remote, detached and condescending.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Israeli, “Diplomacy of Contempt,” 394.

#### 4. Chinese Reactions to Imperialism

This section will be divided into four parts: the reactions of the throne, that is, mainly the dowager empress Cixi, who ruled China in practice, without ever officially attaining the throne, for almost fifty years (1861-1908); the reactions of the literati (that is, mostly court officials), who were often conservative because they were strictly Confucian and most representative of the idea of a “stagnant” or unchanging China; the reactions of merchants and bankers who profited from foreign trade; and finally the reactions of peasants. This seems an appropriate place to note that, despite a common conception of the despotic and unquestioned rule of the emperor (or de facto empress) of China, power was actually extremely fragmented. “It is indeed almost impossible to say where the chief power lies in China at any given time,” wrote Andrew Wilson.<sup>103</sup> Both scholars and merchants could, and did, regularly impinge on the throne’s authority by submitting memorials with contrary viewpoints or simply refusing to obey orders. China was a very compartmentalized, bureaucratic society, and local rulers rarely had to answer to their ostensible superiors because of the lack of national communication lines and other reasons. The throne rarely had a clear idea of what occurred in the peripheries of the empire. For example, in 1884 during the Sino-French War, the superintendent Li Hung-chang ignored an imperial edict to send his ships to help disband the French fleet blockading Taiwan, reasoning that it would have been a “foolhardy squandering of China’s already meager defense capabilities.”<sup>104</sup> Tseng Guoquan, the hero who suppressed the Taiping Rebellion, also ignored the command; both did so with impunity, while the attack ended in dismal failure. The official in charge of the

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<sup>103</sup> Wilson, *The Ever-Victorious Army*, 294.

<sup>104</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 159.

attack, Chang Pei-lun, noted that “[w]hen there is no alarm, the funds for the southern and northern squadrons are never delivered in full by any of the Maritime Customs offices; when there is an alarm, every province retains for its own use the subsidy for the navy.”<sup>105</sup> He was exiled by the dowager empress for his failure and ended up serving Li Hung-chang: a fate which indicates that the throne knew full well that it could ill afford alienating powerful officials who would be better placated, “even though imperial, or national, interests were at stake.”<sup>106</sup>

#### (i) Reactions of the throne

Perhaps the most important thing to note in discussing the reactions of China’s royal rulers in the nineteenth century is that they were Manchus, as opposed to Han Chinese, the ethnic group which comprised approximately 90 percent of China’s population and who had provided China’s rulers for centuries. Until the late 17th century, the Manchus, or Jurchens, were merely a restive nomadic tribe at China’s northern border. The Manchus consolidated their disparate tribes and in 1644 took Beijing in the wake of general unrest caused by widespread famine, among other factors. Instituting the Qing dynasty, the new rulers did not institute wide-sweeping changes in China’s administrative system, choosing rather to adapt their way of life to the existing structure. For example, the first important (sequentially the third) Manchu emperor, Kangxi, promoted Confucian values, encouraged the value of learning, and maintained Beijing as the capital. Of course, the Manchus were a conquering people, and they took power by force, with massacres in several cities. This could hardly be outweighed by later efforts to make the transition of governments less culturally jarring. and so many Han could not accept that a non-

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<sup>105</sup> In Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response*, 125.

<sup>106</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 160-1.



Chinese sat on the throne, and hostility toward the Manchus was evinced even two hundred years later.

Obviously, with ethnic distinctions remaining such an issue in China, one must assume that the interests of the Manchu rulers were not necessarily the same as those of the Han officials, close to power though they were. That is, to a Han Chinese, dynastic survival might not be as important as to a Manchu. In terms of Chinese-Western relations, this means that to a Han official, threats to the throne might take second place to threats to the integrity of the country, while to the rulers themselves, the two were the same thing. Of course the throne had its Han supporters, who helped suppress the Taiping Rebellion, for example. But an anti-Manchu attitude did exist among the Han Chinese, and this certainly colored the views of later reformers. The dowager empress Cixi's decisions were doubtless influenced by the feeling of being regarded as foreign. Officials had many reasons to dislike Cixi even aside from her ethnicity: she was a female who had practically, if not officially, usurped power from the rightful male heirs; she hoarded finances; there were rumors about her sexual relations with supposed eunuchs; and her rule was marked by more than a few failures. That is, during her management of the empire, foreigners had reached to the very heart of the nation and caused massive damage. This by itself should have been enough to indicate that the mandate of heaven had lapsed and it was time for a new dynasty. In short, Cixi and her entourage had to confront threats from within and without.

Cixi seems to have developed a great hatred for the foreigners. There was ample reason for enmity: the ravages of the Opium Wars, the (perhaps most detestable, to her) burning of her cherished Summer Palace in 1860, and so forth. In 1878, in an interview with the newly-appointed Commissioner to England and France, Cixi mentioned past injuries to China by Western powers and stated, "we must gradually make ourselves strong... The killing of one [foreign] person or the burning of one

[foreign] house [the reference was to a church] definitely cannot be considered as having avenged our grievances.”<sup>107</sup> Cixi often put China’s fortunes second to her own, pocketing the tax money earmarked for the new modernized navy and for the rebuilding of the Summer Palace. Her Machiavellian schemes to ensure that she stay on the throne (by allegedly encouraging the sybaritic lifestyle of her son the nominal emperor, and by illegally decreeing that the son of a cousin of hers was the heir to the throne) indicate that she cared more for personal power than even that of her Manchu dynasty. When Kuangxu, Cixi’s nephew and the legitimate emperor, tried to instigate a reform movement in China in 1886 which eased injunctions against Western ideas such as scientific learning and foreign travel, Cixi had complicit officials beheaded and exiled Kuangxu. The reform movement came to be known as the “Hundred Days” after its short duration of existence. Therefore, she had another reason to hate the foreigners: their presence had instigated the movement for modernization which threatened to cost her money, and brought dangerous ideas of constitutional monarchy which threatened to limit her power. Her desire for revenge would later take shape in royal encouragement of the Boxer movement, about which more is said below.

#### (ii) Reactions of the literati

The most factual blanket way to describe the literati’s assessment of the foreigners would be to say that they felt contempt. This was mainly because the foreigners were not, of course, Confucian – in fact they did not even know of, let alone practice, the principles of harmony and the five relations which led to good government. Therefore, they were barbarians, at best on a par with the illiterate Chinese peasants who also lacked familiarity with the classics. As noted above, the

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<sup>107</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response*, 105.

foreigners' military might did not make them any more worthy of the term "civilized" in the eyes of the Chinese literati. And although Chinese officials prized knowledge above all else, even the foreigner's seemingly advanced knowledge did not make him any less of a barbarian. Feng Kuei-fen, a scholar in Fuzhao, appealed for the spread of Western teachings in this way: "there are many brilliant people in China; there must be some who can learn from the barbarians and surpass them."<sup>108</sup> Foreigners were reviled, by many people of all classes, as "devils" and "barbarians." Scholars took this to a pseudo-scientific level, one scholar comparing foreigners to matter (*wu*), an entity without life."<sup>109</sup> Even up to the early 1900s, educated officials and scholars in China let it be known that Englishmen and other foreigners could not bend their legs (and thus would be helpless if knocked over during battle), would die without Chinese tea and rhubarb, even that they could not walk on land at all. As Dikötter points out in his book on race relations in China, it is impossible to tell whether this contempt stemmed from true feelings of superiority or compliance with the generally accepted view. It seems safe to guess that one fed the other, and that some measure of self-convincing took place within the rhetoric.

A famous memorial of 1844, found in 1858 during the taking of Canton during the Anglo-French war with China, and translated, resulted in the loss of its author's life. In it, the author Qi-ying characterized "the barbarians" as being uncivilized and irrational *because* they were born and bred "outside the frontiers of China." He advocated a policy of conciliation through deceit and hollow palliatives. As a result of the embarrassing memorial, his appointment as a treaty negotiator was rejected by the English and French.<sup>110</sup> After this humiliation, he was allowed by the emperor to

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<sup>108</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 52.

<sup>109</sup> Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, 36.

<sup>110</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 27.

strangle himself. In discussing the memorial's importance, Andrew Wilson wrote that "it is evident that he is expressing his own feelings as well as those of every Chinaman, except persons of the lower classes, who comes in contact with us."<sup>111</sup>

Of course, this was a blanket generalization, and some Chinese officials did admire Western techniques from the outset, and even came to admire a few Westerners. Admiration for the Europeans' advanced tools and methods were evinced by Chinese officials as early as the late sixteenth century, when Matteo Ricci and other Catholic missionaries impressed the Imperial court with their accurate calendars, telescopes, and such. The effective Jesuit-designed cannons went a long way to aiding their acceptance when the Manchu invaders were at Beijing's door. Mainly, however, Ricci and others suffered persecution and expulsion for their foreign ways; Ricci described his first twelve years in China as ones of hardship and humiliation, and blamed Chinese harassment for his prematurely white hair.<sup>112</sup> Later Jesuits became friendly with the court, though "knew their position was fragile, for it was their science alone which supported them," although they certainly dreamed of converting the court. The emperor Kangxi for his part "thought of nothing but using these foreigners... before rejecting them."<sup>113</sup> All the early missionaries accomplished in the end for all their labors was grudging acceptance thanks to the ways in which their scientific knowledge could be applied to Chinese interests. The treatment of the early missionaries foretold how officials would deal with the foreigners for centuries: their practical improvements were used by the court, but their ideologies were not given much credence.

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<sup>111</sup> Wilson, *The Ever-Victorious Army*, 289.

<sup>112</sup> Spence, *Memory Palace*, 56.

<sup>113</sup> "ils savent que leur position est fragile car c'est leur science seule qui les fait supporter... l'empereur ne songe qu'à utiliser ces étrangers... avant de les rejeter," Broc, "'Les explorateurs,'" 92.

Ssu-yu Teng and John Fairbank's work *China's Response to the West* tells the story of how, during the eighteenth century, scholars and officials debated the pros and cons of foreign ideas in China. Some officials rejected everything Western, even practical techniques without ideological attachment such as the railroad, remaining staunchly and blindly faithful to the benefits of Confucian values in the face of foreign encroachment. A few went to the other extreme, advocating adoption of Western teaching, dress, and so forth. Spurts of xenophobia were caused by shocks of foreign aggression in the nineteenth century, followed by renewed investigation and application. Debates also took place over the importance of Western academic disciplines as opposed to Western techniques – that is, whether it would be necessary to accept Western values in order to successfully implement Western machinery – and whether Europeans were needed at first to teach the new ideas, or if the ideas could be appropriated without outside help. Gradually, the prevalent idea that what the country lacked was “men of ability” gave way around 1900 to a nationalistic sense of superiority that urged solidarity among all citizens. In the end, China did what it always had done, which was to take what was useful from the barbarians from every field and adapt it to China's own needs. An 1898 list of Western books by Feng Kuei-fen, for example, makes the Chinese adaptation (rather than blind imitation) of Western ideas explicit, singling out the books on “mathematics, mechanics, optics, light, chemistry, and... geography” as imperative to translate, while “[t]hose which expound the doctrine of Jesus are generally vulgar and not worth knowing.”<sup>114</sup>

It has been charged that China's circuitous and gradual acceptance of Western ideals and techniques demonstrates its backwardness; after all, why would a country refuse for so long to build railroads, for example, when foreign advisers urged

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<sup>114</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 51.

Chinese officials to do so in order to modernize? As so often in this thesis, one should assume that people do things for reasons, and not assume that they ignore their own interests out of contrariness or stupidity. In fact, Chinese officials were not without some justification in hesitating to accept Western advice. First, they were suspicious, and with good reason. Why should they believe representatives of countries that had taken their land, flooded them with opium, and forced China to respect their own laws without respecting China's in return? Many officials suspected that railways through China were a foreign trick, and speculated that in times of war, foreign powers would take control of the rails and use them to speed troops into China's heartland and capital.<sup>115</sup> The Sino-Japanese War of 1905 would show the Chinese both that railroads might have been useful in mobilizing their troops, and that foreign powers could use them to control Chinese territory. Second, officials worried that if railways were built, "then the livelihood of the drivers of carts and mules and of the hotel porters will be ended," as Tseng Guofan, hero of the Taiping Rebellion, wrote.<sup>116</sup>

It may be charged that this only shows the Chinese officials' entrenchment in their system, their refusal to recognize that advances bring new jobs while eliminating antiquated ones. One has only to look at the logging debates in Oregon to see that if this is backwardness, it flourishes today. Of course, other Chinese officials recognized the job-development potentials in the nineteenth century, the rail's convenience leading to more traffic and thus more demand for porters and horses.<sup>117</sup> It remains true that the pressures of Chinese society were the main reason for China's rather slow industrialization: officials were brought up to disdain

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<sup>115</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 110.

<sup>116</sup> In Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 66.

<sup>117</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 99.

mechanical skills, the government did not invest capital, and merchants and managerial personnel who might have adapted to industrialization had no authority to institute new reforms. If this society is defined as backward by modern Western observers, at least it should be remembered that the people of that society worked rationally within their context.

### (iii) Reactions of the merchants

Putting the lie most dramatically to the traditional view of a passive and helpless Chinese response to the West, bankers and merchants were often at loggerheads with their own officials and the throne concerning the foreigners. Many merchants profited greatly from Western trade, especially opium, and even those that did not were loath to have their mainland trade disrupted by conflict with the foreigners. For example, it was a banker (called Taki but whose name was Yang Fang) who financed the Ever-Victorious Army under Ward and then Gordon. This banker and the Shanghai's circuit intendant, or taotai, Wu Hsu, became the protection and support of Ward's army, and quite friendly with Ward himself, who married Yang Fang's daughter. The foreign army's payment by Chinese silver was acknowledged by the governor of the province, though the degree of cooperation between the foreigners and their financiers was not above board. Li Hung-chang, the governor of Jiangsu, criticized the corruption of Yang Fang and the taotai, even while supporting the idea of the Ever-Victorious Army.<sup>118</sup> Criticism, however, would not stop their support, which they gave generously in order to protect their commercial interests, which the ravages of the Taipings disrupted. Clearly, the interests of the local wealthy elite rarely matched those of Beijing's representatives, and interaction with the foreigners only underscored the power struggles between merchants and the throne.

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<sup>118</sup> Carr, *The Devil Soldier*, 284.

Doubtless, merchants and others who profited from the foreigners' interaction with China nevertheless felt, on the whole, ambivalent about the situation. Traders could see opportunities for improving their station, and might leap at the chance to take them, but this does not mean they felt grateful to the foreigners or happy they were in China; they may have simply resigned themselves to making the best of a bad situation. Still, it is certain that they did make the best of it.

When the British occupied the previously desolate island of Hong Kong in 1842, they declared the colony a free port, with no export or import duties. This, in addition to the usual financial opportunities the foreigners brought, "attracted many boat people, laborers, artisans and adventurers who profited" from the new economy, despite Chinese officials' prohibitions against trade with the foreigners during the Opium War. In his study of Hong Kong, Jung-fang Tsai points to the 1850s as the era when Hong Kong's economy began to strengthen; until that decade, merchants used the port to "make a fast fortune" and then return home,<sup>119</sup> using the foreigners for financial gain instead of being used by them. The reason that the 1850s saw merchants permanently settle in Hong Kong was doubtless the spread of the Taiping rebels during this time. Merchants took refuge in Hong Kong for both protection and profit.

#### (iv) Reactions of the peasants

The vast majority of Chinese citizens in the nineteenth century rarely if ever saw any foreigners, since by treaty foreigners, except missionaries after 1860, were not allowed to venture into the countryside. It is difficult to estimate the true reactions of these peasants who were neither literati nor merchants, since their motives and sayings are recorded only by others, such as officials presumably with their own

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<sup>119</sup> Tsai, *Hong Kong*, 18-22.



interests. What the country people may have thought, if anything, about what was happening at the distant peripheries of their country, is a matter of speculation. Rarely, mostly during wars, foreigners were seen in China's countryside, and then opinions certainly depended on who was warring with whom. When, as during the Taiping Rebellion, foreigners went into the countryside to restore order and thereby ameliorate the sufferings of Chinese villages put to the sword by the rampaging Taipings, the Western soldiers were supposedly the objects of gratitude, at least according to Andrew Wilson and others. It is not unlikely, since by both Imperial and Western accounts the Taipings were rapacious and unmercifully cruel. In at least one instance, villagers flocked to help Gordon drive out the Taipings from their homes<sup>120</sup> – though this has more to do with the people's drive for self-preservation than any feelings they may have had for the foreigners. When, as was more often the case, Westerners intruded on the difficult but peaceful (and at least comprehensible, unlike the ways of the foreign devils) way of life the average Chinese peasant forged from day to day, the foreigners were reviled as devils. Westerners who merely strolled peacefully past the limits of their designated areas were quite likely to be pelted with small stones and insulted. These immediate reactions from only sporadic contact may be attributed to the universal human dislike of strange people and things more than genuine revulsion.

The constant presence of foreigners in Canton and Shanghai, of course, must have created a public opinion there. This was largely negative, if only due to the spread of official anti-foreign rhetoric and acceptance of the prevalent discourse. An official in Canton wrote that “even though the people have had social contact with the barbarians, they still call them *fan-kuei*. They do not even consider them human

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<sup>120</sup> Wilson, *The Ever-Victorious Army*, 233.

beings.”<sup>121</sup> The opium traffic, so beneficial to Chinese merchants, seems to have been a source of anger among citizens who did not share in the profits. And at signs of foreign weakness, Chinese citizens would demonstrate en masse their displeasure at Westerners’ presence. After the victory at the Taku forts, for example, Shanghai citizens mobbed the streets and successfully released coolies that they claimed were captives on a French ship. They also burned two Catholic churches.<sup>122</sup>

Some citizens of the treaty ports must have seen the benefits of the foreign presence. During the Anglo-Chinese War of 1856-58, English forces around Canton were sold food surreptitiously, despite the penalty of death for doing so. Peasants around Canton and the Macao area, while the war was in full swing, would go about their labors at total ease under English guns. According to Cooke, “they know that while we are here the Mandarin sailors and soldiers cannot come down and do them spoil and violence, as is their wont.”<sup>123</sup>

In general, popular Chinese opinion seems to have taken the shape of steadily rising xenophobia over the decades of the nineteenth century, culminating in the Boxer Uprising of 1900. Christianity played a large part in alienating the people, since Christianity was the most invasive aspect of Western life. Frederic Wakeman notes that “[d]uring 1869 there was a veritable crescendo of anti-Christian incidents,” leading up to the 1870 Tientsin massacre discussed in the third chapter, above. Many Chinese memorials, written by more sophisticated literati, attribute the people’s anger to misunderstandings: “Christians, when they found orphanages, fail to warn the authorities, and seem to act with mystery. This explains the suspicions and the hatred of the people,” explained one in 1871. The people also resented the

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<sup>121</sup> Dikötter, *Discourse of Race*, 36.

<sup>122</sup> Carr, *Devil Soldier*, 80.

<sup>123</sup> Cooke, *China*, 23.

missionaries' presumption in taking up children and thereafter refusing to let anyone else adopt them --- allegedly, even visit them.<sup>124</sup> Less rationally, superstitious peasants believed that orphanages were merely fronts for the collection of baby's eyes and other strange ingredients for foreign potions. Zanolli, a Fransican missionary and vicar of Hopei, wrote in the aftermath of the Tientsin massacre that because of an edict against "corrupting" sects, "rumor spread that Europeans had brought [to China] people who stupified children by magic formulas and carried them off... Europeans, they say, feed on the flesh of children..."<sup>125</sup>

Western military might was the other major instigator of anti-Western feeling. The French attack on Fuzhao during the Sino-French war, representing the start of hostilities in an undeclared war and seen by many as treacherous, provoked a "display of mass nationalism" marked by instances of "frenzied anti-French and anti-foreign sentiment" among the "common people."<sup>126</sup> The Boxer Uprising, as Joseph Esherick has shown in his incredibly thorough *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, was always a patriotic movement, despite the construction of a later myth (by the Qing court, to foster better relations with the victorious foreigners) that it meant to depose the Manchu rulers as well as eradicate the foreigners in China.<sup>127</sup> Briefly, this uprising, which took place in 1898-1900, was a popular revolt localized in north China, composed of peasants and other poor citizens. The Boxers practiced martial

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<sup>124</sup> "Les chrétiens, lorsqu'ils fondent un orphelinat, n'en donnent pas avis aux autorités, et paraissent agir avec mystère. De là les soupçons et la haine du peuple," in Cordier, *Histoire*, 418.

<sup>125</sup> "le bruit est répandu que les Européens avaient envoyé ici des personnes qui rendaient les enfants hébétés par des procédés magiques, s'en emparaient... Les Européens, ajoutait-on, se nourrissaient de la chair de ces enfants," Cordier, *Histoire*, 335.

<sup>126</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 165.

<sup>127</sup> Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, xiv.

arts and religious ceremonies which were said to (and many apparently believed it) render them temporarily invulnerable to all harm, even from bullets; the uprising's destruction was directed openly, first and foremost, against the heresy of Christianity, which was blamed for adverse weather conditions in the north<sup>128</sup>, as well as very real missionary abuses – and, by extension, all things Western. Many missionaries in the mainland were slain during the uprising. It culminated in 1900 when the legations at Beijing were besieged for several weeks until rescued by foreign troops, mostly British and Japanese, who cut a path of severe destruction on their way to the capital from the port of Tianjin. Although it was a patriotic and conservative movement, unlike that of the Taipings, because of foreign reprisal the Boxer Uprising ended by disrupting hundreds of Chinese peasants' lives.

The Boxer movement was, of course, only the most famous of many more or less successful rebellious movements that plagued China throughout the nineteenth century. Esherick identifies, among others, the White Lotus sect, the Eight Trigrams Sect, and the Big Swords as predecessors and contemporaries of the Boxers. These sects were all prevalent in the north, like the Boxers, which originated in the northwest of Shandong province. This is important because it shows how localized influences among the peasants contributed to mass nationalism. Many influences helped create the Boxer movement, but the primary motives seem to have been, at first, anti-banditry and shamanism. Perennial flooding helped create mass hunger and a wealthy elite in the Shandong region, which already was marked by weak landlordism and a harsh tax system, making the gap between rich and poor that much greater, with no middle-class buffer. Facing starvation and oppression by the rich, thousands of peasants in order to survive turned to banditry, or roamed the province

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<sup>128</sup> From a Boxer placard: "No rain comes from heaven. / The earth is parched and dry. / And all because the churches / Have bottled up the sky." In Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 299.

begging. Other peasants in turn formed militia groups dedicated to defending their villages against bandits. These groups practiced martial arts as well as local shamanistic religious rites, mostly frowned upon or outlawed by the state government, as a means of identification as well as in the belief that these rites offered further protection from harm. As these groups grew, shaminist practice and martial arts became part of the popular culture, and official tolerance of the practices also became more common.<sup>129</sup> Elements of the Boxer ideology – the martial arts, their attraction to heroes in popular culture and drama, trances, chants which protect the utterer from harm, spirit possession – could be found in southern China as well as Shandong, and they continue to be found among Chinese citizens “right up to the present day.”<sup>130</sup>

The point of such emphasis on the roots of the Boxer movement is not simply to dwell on the background of the Boxers and other rebel groups, but to show that the forces that shaped anti-missionary feeling had their start in pre-existing, local popular culture. That is to say, one cannot characterize the Boxer movement as the expected and inevitable result of the stimulus of imperialism: this, once again, would be the insufficient “West acts, China reacts” theory. As Esherick puts it, “[t]o argue that the Spirit Boxers [the active, anti-Christian sect of Boxers most often referred to when one speaks of the Boxer Uprising] were created *de novo* is not to say that they arose *ex nihilo*.”<sup>131</sup> The encroachment of French and German missionaries in the mainland, as well as British intrusions in the ports, gave the Boxer movement an impetus, but imperialism cannot be said to be the “cause” of the Boxer movement or even of its spread. Factors such as the prior acceptance of possession and banditry

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<sup>129</sup> Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 1-67.

<sup>130</sup> Cohen, *Three Keys*, 100.

<sup>131</sup> Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 327.

were the real reasons for the Boxers' existence. Paul Cohen notes the link, too, between the "biophysical linkages between hunger and trance,"<sup>132</sup> further suggesting that environment rather than external politics allowed the Boxers to become successful.

Of course, internal politics also helped the Boxers spread their influence in north China. At the time, xenophobia was the prevalent feeling among influential courtiers. And as noted above, Cixi herself came to develop a distaste for all things foreign before 1900. The court publicly defended villagers' rights to self-defense against banditry, and privately decided that taking military action against the rapidly spreading bands of armed villagers might incite further public support for the movement. The court was, of course, divided, as there were some officials who did not support the Boxers. This division was well known, which further hindered any firm policy against the movement, as people tended to see any anti-Boxer proclamation as the result of bribery on the part of the foreigners, who wished to save their skins from the "invincible" Boxers. (This assumption reflects both the prevalence of corruption in Chinese government, as well as Chinese disregard for their Manchu rulers.) In short, the court's policy was one of tacit and tentative support, but "politically confused and legally contradictory,"<sup>133</sup> which certainly must have helped the Boxers' confidence. After the Boxers were routed by the foreign reinforcements, Cixi backpedaled, and made it seem as if she had tried to suppress the movement all along.

A year after the Boxer Uprising, one memorial to the throne characterized the state of opinion as follows: "the people admire the wealth of foreign countries and despise the poverty of the Middle Kingdom... Therefore our people believe in the

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<sup>132</sup> Cohen, *Three Keys*, 118.

<sup>133</sup> Esherick, *Boxer Uprising*, 274-75.

foreign religion, merchants display foreign flags, and schools register in the names of foreign nationals.”<sup>134</sup> This, however, is almost certainly an exaggeration, since it is written by officials proposing reform measures; and because it probably does not take into account “the people” who did not have much contact with the foreigners. So soon after the Boxer Uprising, it may be surmised that Chinese in the treaty ports, especially merchants, would want to ingratiate themselves with the foreigners. Still, though the memorial may not paint a wholly accurate picture of the people’s views, it does indicate that the Westerners inspired resentment in many citizens, whether toward the foreigners or the ruling classes, by holding out the ideal of a new way of life, when they were not engaged in destroying the old ways.

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<sup>134</sup> In Teng and Fairbank, *China’s Response*, 199.

## 5. The Decline of Colonialism

By 1884, China did not enjoy a sense of nationalism as we know it today; under the emperor, generals and courtiers vied with each other for power and influence. However, it had been studying expansionism for decades, and was ready to fight back. France had established a protectorate in what is now Vietnam in 1874. The insult to China did not concern the territory as such, for China did not own it, but the treaty denied Annam's tribute-state status. Many scholars memorialized to the throne that France's military threat was over-rated and that victory was possible. China went to war over the issue, even as negotiations began, then faltered; plenipotentiaries were recalled and replaced, and talks began again. In 1884, Beijing had had enough, and the treaty was ratified, making French suzerainty over Vietnam official. However, the Sino-French War of 1884-85 showed the Chinese two things. First, fighting back was possible, and would become more possible over time (when one considered that only twenty-five years earlier the Anglo-French joint expedition took Beijing with almost no resistance and very few casualties). Second, it taught China that French policy at home could be decided in the Pacific, and vice-versa. Near the end of the war, "a minor Chinese infantry victory gave the right wing in France an opportunity to overthrow Jules Ferry's cabinet and steer the government back to its *revanchiste* obsession with the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine." In this way "France was momentarily distracted," and the war with China did not go as badly for the Chinese as it could have.<sup>135</sup>

The end of the Sino-French War of 1884 signals the end of French ascension in Asia, and saw the beginnings of nationalist feeling in China. A direct link can be found in the 1884 strikes and riots throughout Hong Kong, fueled by the British

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<sup>135</sup> Wakeman, *Fall of Imperial China*, 190.



welcome of French ships to the port during Sino-French hostilities. Jung-fang Tsai notes that “[t]he people’s initial anti-French sentiment [led to] a popular anti-colonial movement with a nationalistic overtone.”<sup>136</sup> Although decolonization would not come for another sixty years, neither were any further major advantages gained by the French. The satisfactory (to the throne, at least) compromise to that conflict “permitted the Chinese throne and mandarins to lapse again into apathy and self-contentment,”<sup>137</sup> setting the stage for nationalist feeling to grow and turn on the complacent, foreign (non-Han) rulers. The swift growth of the Boxers indicated the rising sense of frustration Chinese felt toward the West and the growing nationalism that was replacing surprise and resentment. Nevertheless, after World War Two, France’s colonies were given a sort of extension, in part to try to control Chinese nationalism and in part due to the increased rivalry between the U.S. and the USSR. Although the United States proclaimed a disapproval of colonialism, a French presence in Vietnam fit American interests perfectly, preventing as it did a socialist revolution there.

The anti-colonial lobby, which existed in France since as long as there were colonies, certainly had a hand in contributing to the end of France’s imperialist era. This lobby was composed of politicians and men of letters such as André Gide and Anatole France. As noted above, the lobby argued that not only was the “mission civilisatrice” merely a cover-up for the perpetration of brutal crimes, enslavement and massacres, the entire colonial process was inefficient and drew precious resources away from France’s domestic problems. This lobby, however, remained “incapable of influencing opinion strongly enough to defeat the expansionists.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Tsai, *Hong Kong*, 129-130.

<sup>137</sup> Eastman, *Throne*, 202.

<sup>138</sup> Aldrich, *Greater France*, 114.

The end, when it came, had to be instigated by those who had created the colonialist regime. If the anti-colonialist lobby became stronger in the mid twentieth century, it was because the practical reasons for withdrawal from the colonies were becoming more and more imminent.

It was at this time that a resurgence of the “orientation européenne” was gathering strength in France under de Gaulle's leadership: the “principal theatre of the struggle is and will remain Europe,” he declared. De Gaulle may have seen Europe as the new crux of world affairs, but he was above all a patriot, and that included, at that time, maintaining the colonial status quo: “no matter what happens, France will not give up Algeria,” he said. The Président du Conseil agreed bluntly: “France must stay in Indochina.” Mitterrand in 1953, however, expressed a sentiment which indicated the true basis for these conservative inclinations: “Let us leave Indochina, to better keep North Africa.”<sup>139</sup>

These statements indicate two things. First, the reluctance to “let go” was doubtless an indication of fear of the future without colonies – de Gaulle's generation worried what decolonization would do to the economy, for example – but there was no sense of true necessity in this call to maintain the status quo. Rather, Mitterrand's remark indicates a sort of “jetons le lest” (dump ballast) attitude. Conserving *something*, even at the expense of other possessions, indicates no economic need, but a political *desire*. Second, none of the remarks made by statesmen on the necessity of conserving the colonies indicates a financial need, much less an urge to “civilize” the indigenous people or lead them to the True Faith. Instead, the sentiments indicate one thing only: a loss of prestige. “If we fall back to our borders,” Edmond

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<sup>139</sup> “le théâtre principal de la lutte est et restera l'Europe... la France quoi qu'il arrive n'abandonnera pas l'Algérie... La France doit rester en Indochine.” “Quittons l'Indochine, afin de mieux conserver l'Afrique du Nord,” Binoche-Guedra, *La France d'outre-mer*, 198-200.

Michelet said in 1957, “will the independence of our country be very different from that of Belorussia or Guatemala?”<sup>140</sup> (This is certainly a conservative view, echoing as it does over seventy years later Ferry’s proclamation about France falling to the “fourth rank.”) A fear that France would be a world laughingstock on a par with third-world nations, a fear that prestige would be lost – this is what was on France’s statesmen’s minds when they spoke of conserving the empire.

The growing European concentration that de Gaulle spoke of, was, however, real and immediate. After five years of occupation, France was wholeheartedly ready to look to its own borders. World War Two – specifically, the terms of the Potsdam conference – had everything to do with French relinquishing its Chinese territory: “the mission entrusted to China by the three Allies... to occupy Tonkin and all of north Indochina... obliged France to engage in negotiations with Chang Kai-shek.” By a treaty of February 28, 1946, “France had abandoned her special rights and privileges in China and handed over French concessions to the Chinese authorities... The agreement also granted to China benefits in Indochina.”<sup>141</sup>

It is interesting that as in 1870, France’s relations with Germany in 1945 had again played their part in determining China’s fate. In 1945, although France had been defeated and occupied by the German people, this time France had emerged as one of the victors. Europe had become by default the most import object of any European power’s resources, so need played a great role in the withdrawal from

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<sup>140</sup> “Si on se replie sur l’Hexagone... l’indépendance de notre pays sera-t-elle très différente de celle de la Biélorussie ou du Guatemala?” Cited in Binoche-Guedra, *La France d’Outre-Mer*, 201.

<sup>141</sup> “La mission confiée à la Chine par les trois Alliés... d’occuper le Tonkin et tout le Nord d’Indochine... contraint la France à engager des négociations avec Tchang Kaï-Chek... la France abandonne ses droits spéciaux et ses privilèges en Chine et remet aux autorités chinoises les concessions françaises... L’accord... accorde aussi des avantages à la Chine en Indochine,” Binoche-Guedra, *La France d’outre-mer*, 210.

colonies. In addition, victory gave rise to a growing sense of national pride and a new confidence in the leadership of de Gaulle; overseas territories would begin to seem superfluous as well as expensive.

## 6. The Legacy of the West

So what was the West's legacy in China by the mid-twentieth century? First let us review what this study has shown it was not. The foreign powers had brought to China racism, inequity, and warfare born of venality, but these evils existed, sometimes in different forms, and always with different referents, in China long before the foreigners. Previously unknown concepts that foreigners did bring were imperialism (as it is commonly meant, since the Chinese habit of demanding tribute could be seen as a form of imperialism) and industrialization. Foreigners also introduced many concrete things to China, such as steam ships, guns more advanced than flintlocks, the railroad, the telegraph, and so on.

These improvements were of course the fruit of industrialization in Europe; it can be asserted that Western foreigners brought modernization (that is, the means for China to become as industrialized as Europe) to China. John King Fairbank, in his interpretive account of China's modern period, argues against what he humorously calls the "we was robbed" theory, that is, that China would have become industrialized and capitalist without the foreign powers' intervention, which in fact impeded China's natural growth toward those stages of development. Fairbank points out the several factors in pre-1840 China which made industrialization unnecessary (and, therefore, unlikely), such as the massive amount of muscle power that made machinery superfluous and the tax system which discouraged international trade, while allowing individual trade to flourish.<sup>142</sup>

The increasing number of Chinese officials who in the late nineteenth century favored the spread of Western ideas and practices, a movement which, however, never swept the nation and continually felt the pull of both extremist xenophobic and

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<sup>142</sup> Fairbank, *Chinese Revolution*, 49.

more moderate self-sufficiency movements, shows that China could and did benefit greatly from the unwelcome intrusion of the West. The modern idea of nationalism, as it applies to a modernized state with diplomatic relations with other sovereign state, is one benefit, as China moved from an indifferent ethnocentrism to an equally proud nation able to interact with other states on their level as well as by its own rules. The socialist idea of land distribution which was such an important goal for the Chinese revolutionaries in the early 1900s was learned from the West, and while it brought much misery and hardship, it did give the Chinese people an alternative to the landlord system, and thus represented one more step on China's evolution as a nation.

The French specifically played an important indirect role in this transmission of ideas. The legacies of the 1789 French Revolution, liberty, equality, and fraternity, were ideals which the reformists sought to emulate. (The resultant massacres were of course to be avoided.) Scholar-revolutionaries such as Chen Duxiu thought that the culture of the West "was represented in its essence by the French."<sup>143</sup> The official declaration of the provisional government under Dr. Sun Yat-sen in 1912 established its intent to overthrow tyranny and to safeguard "the rights of man" from a standpoint of "admiring the systems of equality of the American and the French peoples."<sup>144</sup> Afterwards, the republic was often compared to France after the Revolution, as well as to colonial America, in how the new nation dealt with major disturbances and attempted coups.

The May Fourth movement had, for some of its proponents, direct ideological ties to the French Revolution. Specifically, "the May Fourth movement" refers to events that took place in Beijing on May 4, 1919. The League of Nations, it was

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<sup>143</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 239.

<sup>144</sup> In Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 258.

learned, had decided to concede previously German-held areas to Japan as a reward for Japan's assistance in the First World War. In Beijing, students demonstrated to protest Japanese aggression, the League of Nations' decision, and the Chinese government's conciliatory policy toward the transfer. Gradually the news spread, and demonstrations and strikes occurred all over the country. Used in the broad sense it came to have in the ensuing years, the term "May Fourth Movement" covers a period of several years of social activism, increased political awareness, and intellectual and political revolution. The movement paved the way for the Kuomintang, the Chinese Communist Party and the spread of a popular vernacular in the press, as opposed to the old scholarly system of highly ornate language. Naturally, the movement is regarded as a nationalist and patriotic one, and although it expressed resentment toward its own government for accepting the League of Nations concessions, and utilized Western ideals of freedom and revolution as its *raison d'être* in calling for sweeping reforms, some of its revolutionary ideals were directed toward ending imperialist intrusion.

The French Revolution, of course, was not the only Western ideal to which May Fourth revolutionaries looked for inspiration. A heady mix of European progressive thought found its way into students' hands at the turn of the century: works on utilitarianism and of course Marxism, and works by Montesquieu, Adam Smith, Thomas Huxley, Bertrand Russell and many other influential European thinkers were translated in China before the May Fourth movement. However, the principles of the French Revolution, along with the American Revolution, were "especially highly regarded" by students.<sup>145</sup> Of course, while the principles were valued, the historical context of the revolution was not always taken into account. By 1919 Sun Yat-sen

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<sup>145</sup> Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 294.

was pointing to the political instability following the French Revolution as an argument for the institution of a militaristic republic in China to secure order.<sup>146</sup>

Chinese intellectuals' interpretations of historical precedents differed, but it seems clear that most of them strove to make China more democratic. Although, as noted above, the May Fourth Movement opened the door to the institution of Communism in China, the route intellectuals took to this development was one Hung-yok Ip calls "a 'nation-oriented utilitarian' commitment to democracy" or an "individual-oriented utilitarian" commitment. From a purely practical standpoint, "socialism was regarded as a progressive form of democracy."<sup>147</sup> That is to say, to many intellectuals, socialism seemed the best way to guarantee the ideals of democracy – equality, liberty, a better way of life – for China's oppressed masses, as well as to help China become a first-rate world power.

Chen Duxiu was an intellectual who believed that democracy would save China. Born in 1879, he spent years travelling in Japan and France, and returned committed to the idea that the institution of democracy (*ren quan*, "human rights") was in China's best interests. But he was a democratic socialist with interest in practical changes, the institution of scientific reforms, and the sweeping away of China's old customs. In 1920 he embraced Moscow's version of socialism.<sup>148</sup> The path from democracy to socialism is explainable when one considers that Chen, like every Chinese intellectual, interpreted Western values in his own way. For Chen, France represented the ideal of democratic equality: "Who gave human beings the status of being real humans...? Who but the French are responsible for this great achievement?" he wrote concerning Lafayette's "Déclaration des droits de

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<sup>146</sup> Teng and Fairbank, *China's Response*, 262.

<sup>147</sup> Ip, "Origins of Chinese Communism," 36.

<sup>148</sup> Treadgold, *The West*, 132.



l'homme.” But Chen did not follow the model of the French Revolution explicitly, in all its nationalistic exclusivity. Chen “appreciated democracy from a cosmopolitan- internationalist perspective, envisioning a kind of fraternal alliance, a union transcending national boundaries”<sup>149</sup> – in other words, a democracy that had much in common with Marxist global doctrine. The radical magazine *New Youth*, in a 1919 issue, made clear the distinction between democracy as the West knew it and democracy as China needed it: “...we believe that in a genuine democracy, political rights must be distributed to all people... the criteria for the distribution will be whether people work or not, rather than whether they own property or not.”<sup>150</sup> Obviously, Chinese intellectuals had their own ideas about what in the West was worth saving, what was not, and what should be altered to fit China’s unique needs at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The French Revolution may have influenced many Chinese intellectuals, but the dividing line between the ideals of imperialist French and revolutionary Chinese was still clear and wide. During strikes in Shanghai in June 1919, for example, when one procession entered the French Concession, it was attacked by French police. Later, after the strikes ended, the French consul-general in Shanghai closed the Chinese paper *Jiuguo Jibao* (“Save the Nation daily”) and imprisoned the editor under “the maximum penalty provided by Chinese law”. A law was hastily announced dictating the regulation of all printed matter in the French Concession by the French authorities. The French looked even worse when they attempted to insert into the International Settlement of Shanghai the passage of a bylaw dictating a similar policy of censorship and oppression throughout the foreign settlements. This was met with opposition not only by Chinese of all walks of life but other foreign

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<sup>149</sup> Ip, “Origins of Chinese Communism,” 42.

<sup>150</sup> In Spence, *Gate of Heavenly Peace*, 160.

residents. An American representative noted that the amendment was “against American principles.”<sup>151</sup> This episode demonstrates that while a Chinese radical might classify all Western powers together as imperialist, there were some Western ideas worth saving, even from the most unexpected sources. Once again, “the West” proved to be a conglomeration of divided houses, even though their presence in China made them sufficiently brothers in arms to Chinese anti-imperialist radicals.

The growth of nationalism in China from the late nineteenth century and into the 1900s is indeed a startling and massive change, yet it would be once again taking the simplified view if one did not stress the social and psychological continuity between imperial China’s ethnocentrism and the later government’s nationalism. The idea of a sudden rebirth, a new China, is explicit in the “traditional” view of Sino-Western relations; of course, as this thesis has argued, this so-called “new” China did not appear suddenly, but evolved from its *imperial* roots. Further, this “new” state resembled nothing in the West so much as its aloof, ethnocentric imperial predecessor. For a long time, in fact, the similarity between imperial and socialist China were the source of some anxiety among sinologists. Wakeman, stressing the Chinese outlook and denying the stagnation of Qing China, wrote that “a much more vigorous China emerged” from Western intrusion after “traditional civilization crumbled.”<sup>152</sup> Wolfgang Franke wrote of an unwanted “encounter with the new China” by the West, with China and “her initiatives in the rest of the world.”<sup>153</sup> The terms and phrasing suggest uncertainty as to China’s intentions. When these books were written (1967 and 1975), even these sinologists, in attempting to encapsulate the result of “China’s encounter with the West,” revealed a certain ambiguity in their

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<sup>151</sup> Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 205-207.

<sup>152</sup> Wakeman, *Fall of Imperial China*, 3.

<sup>153</sup> Franke, *China and the West*, 151.

conceptions. That is, was this “new” China one that had returned to its basic indifference to the rest of the world? Or would it not only show the West what it had to offer, but demand that its power be noted? Fears that a socialist China would become a Soviet-style imperialist power were reduced by China's relative lack of appropriations, but this only served as the source for further confusion, as China, even socialist China, again proved to be unlike what the West had seen before. China had met the West, and had changed, but was still unrecognizable, much to Western observers' distress. Decades later, it seems clear to all that China has taken its place in the community of nations, but as usual, it does so on its own terms, not only through Western influences.

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