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External and Internal Challenges to the Qing

The Initial Impact of European Trade and Empire Building

The Qing rulers of China, who practically closed China's door to the world outside its recognized tributary states, were not aware of the fact that from the sixteenth century onwards the maritime powers of Europe had begun carving out colonial empires and spreading their peoples out of Europe to rule other regions of the world. The power which knocked most forcefully on China's door was Britain. By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain ruled India and was the dominant maritime power.

The control of India gave the British great advantages over their European rivals in developing trade with China – incomparably more than the Portuguese enclave at Macau. It provided British merchants opportunities to develop a lucrative local carrying trade along the coast of the Indian subcontinent. The geographical proximity of India and southern China, and the ease of communication between the two areas by sea, enabled this trade to be readily extended to China. Moreover, the possession of India greatly facilitated the logistics of British military intervention in China. It is worth remembering that in this age of imperialism, Britain was ever ready to use force to protect its commercial interests, if these were threatened by a local regime. In fact, British overseas traders were accustomed to look to their home government for military and other forms of support for their foreign commercial ventures.

After having taken possession of India, the British mercantile community tried to develop the triangular trade between Britain, India, and China. During most of the Qing dynasty, maritime trade between China and countries overseas was confined to the single port of Canton (now Guangzhou) in Guangdong, the southernmost province of China. At this port there was a special maritime customs office, the Hoppo (Administrator of the Canton Customs), to levy duties on imports and exports. Also located at this port was a group of merchants who were licenced to conduct foreign trade as a monopoly. They belonged to an association known to the British merchants as the Cohong (*Gonghang*) or Thirteen Hongs of Canton. These Chinese Cohong merchants worked closely with the East India Company, their British counterpart. They acted as an intermediary between the foreign merchants and the Chinese authorities, who found it

convenient to rely on the Cohong merchants to collect the taxes and control the foreign merchants. Finding this regime too restrictive, in 1793 the British East India Company sent an embassy, led by Lord George Macartney, to Beijing for the purpose of asking the Qing court to open more ports for trade, to have a fixed and reduced tariff, to allow a British representative to be stationed at Beijing, and to cede a small offshore island and some land near Canton to Britain to maintain as a base.

Lord Macartney and the emperor Qianlong (*New World Encyclopedia*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Macartney_Embassy)

This embassy brought out the fundamental differences in outlook between Great Britain and Qing China on international relations and trade. An audience was arranged for Lord Macartney with the aging Emperor Qianlong. A difficult situation arose immediately because of the Qing court's woeful ignorance of the developments that had transformed Europe into a collection of powerful modern nation-states, which were in the process of reshaping the world through imperialism. The court officials were not able to see the writing on the wall regarding the fate of the East Asian civilizations centred on China, which operated on the tribute relationship developed by China in its commercial and diplomatic relationships with the smaller and less powerful neighbouring countries, or local maritime environs. Their limited knowledge of the world beyond East Asia led them to treat the British embassy as a tribute-bearing mission, whose representative would be required to perform the kneeling and kowtowing in the presence of the Qing emperor, as a ritual acknowledging China's suzerainty. The gifts and samples of goods the British brought were received as tributes. But Lord Macartney, representing a modern sovereign state, could not possibly have any dealings with Qing China except on the basis of one sovereign power with another. The Qing officials were not aware that Great Britain, as the most powerful nation in Europe, was already in possession of a colonial empire that spanned continents. In this global context, the Qing presumptions seemed preposterous. Because of these differences, and Britain's unacceptable request to the Qing to cede to it two small parcels

of territory, the embassy was a non-starter, and the British requests were refused. Another British embassy in 1816 under Lord Amherst was equally unsuccessful. The Qing court's out-dated idea of international relations, its low esteem for trade, and China's self-sufficiency in cottons and woollens, which were the main British goods then imported into China, together put a temporary brake on the British drive to open more of the Chinese market for overseas trade. Britain did not resort to the use of force after these rebuffs, but that restraint would soon be abandoned.

The First Opium War (1841-1842)

During the eighteenth century, while the Chinese market for British exports was limited, there was considerable demand for Chinese tea, silks, and cotton goods in Britain and Europe. As a result, the balance of trade was very much in China's favour, with a net flow of silver currency in tens of millions of dollars into China. Eventually, as we shall see, this situation was changed by the growth in the import of Indian opium into China by the East India Company. This joint-stock company, founded in 1600 as a monopoly on Indian trade, went on to govern India as a British colony two centuries later. The British found that the opium grown in India, being light and compact, could be easily shipped to China, where a high profit could be made. The market for opium in China was not initially large. During most of the eighteenth century, a few hundred cases (each containing 65 kilograms) per year had been imported into China, where the importers could net 400 to 1,000 dollars per case. However, because of the high rate of profit, the government of British India taxed the trade at more than 300% above cost.

Starting in 1729, the Qing court issued an edict banning the smoking and trading of opium. It considered this highly addictive drug to be a poison, and a social evil that seriously harmed the users and damaged society's moral fabric. The prohibition in China had no effect on the activity of the East India Company. Working closely with the Cohong merchants, it was smuggling into China increasing amounts of the opium it cultivated in India. Besides the East India Company, other British and foreign merchants also participated in this illegal trade. By 1819 more than 4000 cases per year were being shipped into China. Competition from British 'free traders', who were putting pressure on the British government to abolish the monopoly of the East Indian Company, prompted the company to speed up the opium trade while the going was good. More opium was grown in India, and its shipment to China was stepped up from 1819 onwards, as the following table illustrates.

Import of opium into China during the nineteenth century

Years	Number of cases
1729	200
1790	400+
1817-1819	4,228 (average)
Acceleration of opium imports	
1821	5,959
1826-1829	12,851 (average)
1829	16,257
1830	19,956
c.1836	30,000 (roughly)
1838	40,000 (at least)
c.1850	68,000
1873	96,000
1893	Imports began to decline because of price rises
1917	Imports ended; opium produced in China was sufficient for the market

The escalating opium trade, with its enormous profit, was a financial bonanza to the East India Company. For example, in the years before 1818, its revenue of less than one million GBP was more than tripled by 1822. From the 1820s, its receipts from opium alone were growing to equal the interest payment on its debt in Britain. After the 1840s its income from opium kept on rising and dwarfed the debt interest. This business was effectively a means for the transfer of wealth from China to Britain. British India also benefited from the increased tax collected from this rapidly growing trade. For example, between 1829 and 1830, the British-Indian government was estimated to have collected over one million GBP of taxes on the opium exports, an amount equivalent to 10% of its total annual revenue.

The rising opium imports eroded China's favourable balance of trade to such an extent that by 1825, the value of China's imports exceeded its exports. This situation was occurring despite increasing amounts of tea, silks, and cotton cloth that had been exported to Britain and Europe. The result was an accelerated net outflow of silver currency. Between 1800 and 1820, China netted ten million *liang* (tael) of silver in its maritime trade, while between 1831 and 1833, ten million taels of silver were shipped out of China. The

imbalance was largely due to opium imports. For example, from July 1837 to June 1838, the British exported 5,600,000 GBP worth of goods to China, of which 3,560,000 GBP (around 60%) was opium. During the same period, the British imported 3,100,000 GBP worth of goods from China. The balance of trade was a deficit of 2,50,000 GBP on the Chinese account. But for the opium imports, China would have been in surplus. From 1820 to 1840, around 100,000,000 dollars of silver left China. This figure was equivalent to 1/5 of the total silver currency in circulation during that period. The net outflow of silver currency caused the depreciation of the copper cash, which was the currency used in the daily business transactions of the people. But silver was the currency of taxation. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, one tael of silver could exchange for approximately 1000 copper cash. In 1838, it took 1600 copper coins to exchange for one tael of silver – a roughly 60% increase in the tax rate.

The flood of opium into China, as well as the increasing net export of silver from China from the 1820s, was causing alarm in the court of Emperor Daoguang (r.1820-1850) and many high provincial officials. Edict after edict had been issued prohibiting its trade and use by his predecessors, without any effect on curbing, let alone stopping, these illegal activities. On the contrary, the import of opium through smuggling, and the illicit networks in connection with this trade, grew enormously, and with it the bribery and corruption of officials at various levels of the government. Opium smoking spread from the south coast to over ten provinces inland, including Beijing. Shortly before the Opium War, over two million people had succumbed to it. Opium smokers came from all walks of life: gentry, officials, shopkeepers, Daoist priests, day labourers, and soldiers. It was beginning to be seen as an unprecedented disaster for the country, where so many people succumbed to this slow-acting poison that sapped their will, and ruined their health and family life, before killing them. Faced with this critical situation, Daoguang asked the court officials and the governors of the provinces what actions to take.

One option was to continue the prohibition and find ways of making it effective. One high official, who had no illusions as regards the difficult of enforcing such a policy, wrote a memorial to the emperor proposing the opposite - that is, relaxing the ban. Morality aside, as a practical solution to a complex problem his suggestion of lifting the ban had the merit of allowing the government to tax it. On the matter of stopping the outflow of silver, he suggested bartering between the imports and exports without resorting to the use of silver money. He was also in favour of relaxing the ban on the cultivation of opium poppies in China, so that eventually the locally produced drug would replace the foreign import. While he did not think people should be penalized for opium smoking, he was against letting government employees indulge in this ‘evil habit.’ Although the Viceroy of Liangguang (Governor-General of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces) approved of this way of dealing with the problem, many of the high officials the emperor consulted denounced this ‘preposterous’ approach. Most of them were for tightening the enforcement of

the ban and increasing the penalty, against not only the dealers in opium but also the smokers. A few were even in favour of the death penalty against those smokers who could not or would not shake the habit, after a period of grace.

Among the most forceful spokesmen for the most stringent and active enforcement of the ban was Lin Zexu (1785-1850), the Viceroy of Huguang (Governor-General of Hunan and Hubei Provinces}, an official known for his integrity and uprightness. Lin had achieved some success in opium prohibition in the area under his jurisdiction. He did so by seizing all equipment used for opium smoking and severely punishing those who sold opium, offered facilities, or made equipment for the smokers. In 1838, he addressed cogent pleas to Emperor Daoguang, urging the latter to use strong and extraordinary measures to stem the flow of this poison; otherwise, in the not too distant future, there would be neither silver left to pay for the troops, nor soldiers fit enough to fight the country's enemies.

Towards the end of 1838, Emperor Daoguang, persuaded by those who agitated for effective implementation of the ban, despatched Lin Zexu to Canton as the Imperial Commissioner for the purpose of putting an end to the importation of opium. Shortly afterwards, he drew up a set of new regulations on opium prohibition with severe penalties against offenders. These he sent to the provincial governors, enjoining them to follow the directives strictly, with the aim of rooting out the evil entirely. When Lin reached Canton in March 1839, he lost no time in arresting Chinese opium dealers and the officials who took bribes. After destroying the network of the Chinese dealers in opium, he had to contend with the foreign importers to stem the flow of opium from its source. He ordered the foreign merchants to hand over their stock of opium by a fixed date. Under his new regime, foreign vessels had to give a guarantee never to import opium into China again. He even addressed two letters to Queen Victoria appealing for her help. His demands being ignored, he resorted to coercion, by cordoning off the 'Thirteen Factories' outside the city wall of Canton where the small foreign (mainly British) community of 350 traders resided. However, he allowed them their daily necessities, but not the services of their Chinese employees. The British representative, Captain Charles Elliot, was among the residents. He asked the merchants to hand in their stock, with the assurance that he would take responsibility on behalf of the British government for the surrendered stock. After over 20,000 cases of opium were handed over to the Chinese authority, the foreigners were allowed to go free. Then Lin destroyed the opium by burning it for days, as a spectacle in public view. Daoguang was delighted with the action Lin had taken, and soon afterwards appointed him as the Viceroy of Liangguang to take care of the aftermath. Two months later, Captain Elliot and the British merchants retreated to Hong Kong – a relatively uninhabited island south of Canton - from where they continued to trade freely.

In Britain, even before Lin's drastic action to enforce the opium ban, the British mercantile community, bristling from Qing China's restriction on foreign commerce as their trade with China grew, were clamouring for 'free trade.' The interest of the free traders also clashed with that of the East India Company, whose monopoly was terminated in 1814. Where China was concerned, the political campaign for free trade gathered momentum when the British manufacturers, caught up in the industrial revolution and the search for new markets, were also putting pressure on the British government for the opening of the Chinese market for overseas commerce, by force if necessary. Since the British diplomatic efforts had failed to move the Qing to accept trade on the British terms, the use of force to achieve this goal was being considered as a practical option.

Lin Zexu's forceful seizure and burning of opium in 1839 was an act born of desperation rather than a calculated move to precipitate a war with Britain. In fact, soon after he had done so, he declared to the British that the port of Canton was open to trade as usual, but not to trading in opium. He did not know that what he had done played into the hands of the British mercantile and manufacturing communities, who were already pressing for Britain to take a strong stand against China, and who were eager to see China's gates blown open by force. His action provided the British with a *casus belli*. Early in 1840, Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, was preparing for war and instructing Captain Elliot, who had become the British plenipotentiary, regarding the conduct of the war and Britain's demands. With the support of the British Parliament, a British expeditionary force was sent in April 1840 to take military action against China.

Lin must have been aware that his action might lead to war. At the beginning of 1840 he started to strengthen Canton's defences. He drilled troops, drafted physically fit locals, and trained them in maritime warfare. He purchased Western boats and cannons and placed more wooden fences with iron chains around Humen, also known as the Bogue, at the entrance to Canton, where additional cannons were positioned. He also tried to understand the British and the world outside China more, by organizing teams of translators to translate foreign newspapers and books. Thus prepared, he waited for the British to attack.

When the British fleet did arrive in the vicinity of Canton in the summer of 1840, and saw the tight defensive arrangements there, they avoided an engagement and sailed north instead. After overcoming the defences of a coastal city along the way, the fleet began to threaten Beijing from a river nearby. The court grew alarmed, and Lin came under attack by a party of appeasers. A Manchu grandee, Qishan, replaced Lin and coaxed the British back to Canton to conduct peace talks, with the assurance that Lin would be punished, and that the British demands were all negotiable. The patriot Lin was made the scapegoat, although Daoguang had agreed with what he did and had encouraged him to be strict. Found guilty of mishandling the opium prohibition, the aged Lin was sent into exile far away in Xinjiang.

At Canton, Qishan demolished Lin's defences and dispersed the soldiers and sailors to please the British. Intimidated by talk of the British restarting the war, Qishan agreed (verbally) to the British demand of 600,000 dollars (Mexican silver) for compensation, to the reopening of Canton, to diplomatic equality, and to the cession of Hong Kong - a virtually uninhabited island with excellent harbours and a smallish mountain sheltering it against typhoons. But Qishan had agreed to more than he could deliver, because the terms exceeded the limits of what Emperor Daoguang could countenance for appeasing the British. Under British pressure, and without modern communication devices such as telephones or telegraphy, there had been no time for him to consult the court, located about 1500 miles away. After the British occupied Hong Kong in January 1841, the party for resistance got the upper hand. Qishan was removed from office, and the court decided for the first time to fight the British by despatching generals with troops to Canton.

While the Qing court regarded the British demands put forward by Captain Elliott as excessive, the British government rejected them as insufficient. He was recalled and replaced by a new British plenipotentiary, Sir Henry Pottinger. The British government was determined to protect and promote the already considerable commercial interest Britain had developed in China, by forcing the Qing court to yield to its terms through a decisive demonstration of its military superiority. With the benefit of the industrial revolution and the accumulated experience of centuries of naval warfare in Europe, the British warships of the nineteenth century, iron-clad, steam-driven, and armed with the most powerful cannon and shells, were the most advanced and formidable in the world. 'Britannia rules the waves' was no empty claim. For several months in 1841, the small mobile force of British gunboats, initially less than fifty vessels, and several thousand troops (before reinforcement from India), sailed north along the coast of the provinces of Fujian and Zhejiang, destroying batteries, and taking cities with little difficulty. The Qing defenders were intimidated by the *chuan jian pao li* (solid boats and piercing cannon shots) of the seemingly invincible invading force. They were at a loss when confronted by the modern naval force of an alien invasion. By comparison, the Qing's own ships and weapons were hopelessly antiquated. Its navy was virtually non-existent. Like its civil administration, the Qing military was in an advanced stage of decay. The commanding officers were often corrupt and irresponsible, while the poorly paid and badly trained soldiers were better at victimizing their own defenceless people than fighting an enemy. There were individual exceptions, particularly among middle-ranking officers, who defended their cities bravely, but hopelessly and sacrificially against the superior firepower of the British.

A British ship destroying Chinese war junks in the Opium War (*Wikipedia*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Opium_War)

However, the royal relative whom Daoguang sent from Beijing to engage the British was not one for risking his life and limb. On the way south, he was more interested in amusing himself than studying his unfamiliar enemy and making proper strategic combat plans. During the spring of 1842, he became battle shy after his ill-prepared troops suffered a resounding defeat, when they attempted to recover three cities lost simultaneously in Zhejiang. This turn of events softened Daoguang's resolve, and he sent emissaries south to negotiate with the invaders. The British, however, did not think that the Qing emperor had been sufficiently intimidated to accept all their terms for peace, and took their fleet into the Yangtze River valley. After capturing Shanghai and Zhejiang, the British fleet paused in front of the city of Nanjing. At this spot, on a British gunboat, the Qing government yielded to all the terms dictated by the British, and signed, on 29 August 1842, the first of the 'unequal treaties' - the Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking). (The English-language historical document of that period used 'Nanking', which was the earlier Wade-Giles system of transliterating the name of that city into English, while 'Nanjing' is the Pinyin system of transliteration.)

The Unequal Treaty System and the Second Opium War (1856 – 1860)

The Treaty of Nanjing

According to the terms of the Treaty of Nanjing, China was to

1. Open five coastal ports, those of Shanghai, Ningbo, Xiamen, Fuzhou, and Guangzhou (Canton) for trade

2. Cede Hong Kong Island to Britain

3. Pay Britain a compensation of 2,100,000 dollars (silver) of which 600,000 were for destroyed opium, 300,000 for compensating the merchants, and 1,200,000 for military expenses. There was an additional payment of 600,000 dollars as ransom for the city of Canton.

Although this treaty allowed China to retain the right to levy import and export duties, the rates for these had to be approved by the British representative. It meant that China lost the important right to fix its own rate of tariffs on foreign trade. During the two years that followed, a supplementary Treaty of the Bogue, signed in 1843, fixed the import/export tariff rates at a uniform 5%. It also included a clause on *extraterritoriality*, a word we will hear again, meaning that British subjects in China were exempt from Chinese legal jurisdiction. It also allowed British fleets to be stationed at the opened ports. The most-favoured-nation clause enabled the British to enjoy any concession wrung from the Qing by any other country. The British were allowed to lease land in the treaty ports for businesses and residences. The *Zujie*, meaning leased territories or concessions, were governed by the representatives of the British, and developed into small self-contained foreign-run enclaves within China. These foreign concessions were unlike the enclaves of Arab merchants in Canton during the Tang, or Turkish traders from Kokand in Xinjiang in the 1830s, or the Portuguese settlement in Macao, where the Chinese authorities found it convenient to let the foreign communities govern themselves in accordance with their own customs and usage, but where the Chinese authority retained sovereignty over these areas. China had effectively lost its sovereignty as regards the foreign concessions at the treaty ports covered by extraterritoriality. There was no mention of opium in this treaty, the trade for which simply continued, and grew like it had done before Lin tried to stamp it out.

Other Western imperialist nations were not slow to follow the British example. In 1844, under the threat of force, the Qing concluded the Treaty of Wanghia with the United States, and a separate treaty was also concluded with the French, who were more interested in supporting the Catholic missionary movement in China than in trade. With the most-favoured-nation clause, each of these nations enjoyed the same rights and privileges in China as Britain, except for the indemnities and the ceding of territory. The French forced the Qing to remove the ban on Catholicism that began in 1724 under Emperor Yongzheng, after he discovered that the foreign pope also had jurisdiction over his Chinese Christian subjects and the Jesuits in his service. Under the treaty regime, the French won the right for Catholic missionaries to build churches

and proselytize their religion from the treaty ports. Protestant missions, particularly British ones, pressed their national representatives to gain similar rights as the Catholics. They also asked to be allowed to build schools and hospitals in China.

Once the Qing court had been shown to buckle under the threat or the use of force by the foreign powers - Britain, France, the United States, and Russia - there was a tendency for them to encroach more and more on China through an increasing number of new treaties, and to exact ever greater concessions from China. In 1856, when the Qing was preoccupied with major internal rebellions, Britain, allied with France and encouraged by America and Russia, took the opportunity to wage the Second Opium War. It was also called the Arrow War because the Chinese authorities boarded a smugglers' boat of that name, to catch Chinese pirates on what they thought was a Chinese-owned vessel. The British, however, claimed that it was a British boat flying a British flag. The alleged insult to the British flag was used as a pretext for invading China. The French pretext for war was that a French Catholic priest was killed in Guangxi. In 1857, the British laid siege to and then occupied Canton. In 1857, an Anglo-French fleet hurried north to capture Dagu (Taku) near Tianjin, and threaten Beijing.

The Treaty of Tianjin (Tientsin) and the Convention of Beijing (Peking)

By the summer of 1858, the Qing court yielded to the foreign pressure and signed the Treaty of Tianjin. This treaty obliged the Qing to open many more treaty ports. In addition to the original five, the coastal ones were to be extended further to the north and across to Taiwan, while many inland cities along the Yangtze River also became treaty ports with foreign concessions and consular jurisdiction. Foreign merchant fleets were permitted to travel freely along the Yangtze River. Foreigners were allowed to travel into the interior to trade and to preach. Opium, its trade and smuggling having spread further in China, was legalized. An indemnity of around 4,000,000 taels of silver was to be paid to the British and around 2,000,000 taels was to be paid to the French. While confirming that the import and export tariffs were to remain at 5%, a transit tax of 2.5% was fixed on foreign goods travelling into the interior from the treaty ports. America and Russia were also able to acquire the additional rights conferred to the British and the French. This treaty also obliged the unwilling Qing court to allow foreign diplomats to open legations in Beijing.

Shortly afterwards, it became clear that the European powers were still not satisfied. They sought to expand the war by insisting on taking their fleet up to Beijing to exchange the signed treaty at the court. The Qing did not refuse the requested exchange but asked the Anglo-French party to land in Beitang and to proceed to Beijing from there by land. Instead of doing as requested, in 1859 the Anglo-French forces fired at the battery in Dagu, the strategic fort that defended the mouth of the Peiho (Hai River), a river near Tianjin on

the route to Beijing. The defending Qing forces returned the fire, causing several hundred casualties and sinking several ships from the attackers' side.

This provoked a punitive Anglo-French expedition. At the start of 1860, more than 20,000 Anglo-French troops landed in Beitang, after receiving intelligence from the Russians that the place was undefended. The invading force overpowered China's defensive positions along their way to Tianjin. After Tianjin fell, Beijing was in peril. Emperor Xianfeng (r. 1850-1861) fled with the court to Rehe, where he died in 1861. From Beijing, the Russian representative hastened to meet the leaders of the invasion to offer them a map of Beijing and advised them on the weakest point to assault and take over the city. Having control of Beijing, the Anglo-French forces thoroughly looted the 150-year-old Yuanmingyuan, the imperial Summer Palace built in a unique Sino-European style with the help of the Jesuits. After burning for three days, the once magnificent palace was reduced to a pile of rubble, as it remains to this day. With the invaders threatening artillery bombardment of the Imperial Palace in Beijing, the Qing court once more succumbed to the might of superior weaponry.

The ruins of the Summer Palace (*China Daily*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201910/21/WS5dad5c03a310cf3e35571b46.html)

In the autumn of 1860, prince Gong, a member of the imperial family left in charge at Beijing, formally exchanged the Treaty of Tianjin with the British and French representatives. At the same time, he also signed the Convention of Beijing (Peking) with these two imperialist powers, as well as Russia and America. The Convention of Beijing forced China to cede to Britain the southern part of the Kowloon peninsula and add it to Hong Kong, which by this time had already developed into a major entrepôt. Tianjin was opened to foreign trade. The indemnity in the Treaty of Tianjin was increased to 8,000,000 taels of silver to be paid to each of the British and the French. There were also additional charges of hundreds of thousands of taels of silver as compensation for the British and the French armed personnel. The French demanded the opening of the interior for the French Catholic missions to buy land and build churches,

naturally under French jurisdiction. Hoping to dump cheap machine-produced textiles in China, the British demanded the import of textiles to China free of duty. All these demands were incorporated into this treaty. Subsequently, in 1898, the British forced the Qing to lease an area known as the New Territories, the northern part of the Kowloon peninsula, for 99 years.

Problems leading to the establishment of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service

Regarding the administration of customs at the treaty ports, the framers of the Treaty of Tianjin took into account the problems that had been encountered, and how they had been resolved, in implementing the Treaty of Nanjing. The Chinese customs officials at the different treaty ports opened after the Treaty of Nanjing had great difficulty in collecting the fixed rate of customs duty, already set at a low level, from foreign merchants, because their authority was not respected, even though China had not given away the right to impose and to collect customs duty. In addition, extraterritoriality left Chinese authorities no means to use the normal sanctions, such as fines or confiscation of goods, to coerce the foreigners to pay. All they could do was to complain to the foreign consuls who had jurisdiction over the foreign merchants involved. The same was true when the foreigners committed an offence against customs regulations, such as smuggling.

As Shanghai was fast becoming the premier port for foreign trade, the British Consul, Rutherford Alcock, had a vexing time settling disputes between the British traders and the Chinese customs. He stood for strict enforcement of the treaty tariff, and he also disliked the laxity and irregularity associated with the Shanghai customs. As a practical solution to these problems, he hit upon the idea of introducing Chinese-speaking foreign nationals, paid by the Chinese, to assist and supervise the Chinese administration of customs. In 1854, he was instrumental in setting up, with Chinese cooperation, the Foreign Inspectorate of Customs in Shanghai. The inspectors were drawn, one each, from the British, American, and French Consular Services. The support of the foreign consular and other authorities enabled this ad hoc customs office to function successfully during the initial phase of its introduction. The local Chinese Superintendent of Foreign Trade accepted it because it was easier for him to let foreigners manage foreigners and bring in the much-needed revenue. At its inception the status and authority of the foreign inspectors were not clearly defined. Whether they were agents and subordinates of the foreign consuls, or officials of a branch of the Chinese government, was a question that had to be clarified when their status and authority were challenged by some foreign merchants and their consuls.

With this history in mind, the Treaty of Tianjin called for a uniform system of customs administration to be established in all the treaty ports. It further stipulated that the high Chinese official responsible for foreign

trade was free to appoint any British subject to assist him in customs administration, prevention of smuggling, defining port boundaries, serving as a harbour master, and in the distribution and maintenance of lights and beacons and so forth, all to be financed by the tonnage dues which were collected from foreign shipping. These treaty provisions could only be realized if the Shanghai Foreign Inspectorate of Customs was extended to all the treaty ports under a central administration. The conditions for setting up and governing such a centralized customs administration had yet to be put in place on both the Chinese and the foreign sides.

Because the Qing court did not anticipate that the tiny income from its tax on foreign trade at that point was going to grow into a much more significant source of revenue as time went on, it was less agitated about the possibility of foreigners taking over the Chinese Maritime Customs than by the establishment of permanent foreign legations in Beijing. The Treaty of Tianjin obliged the Qing court to prepare itself to face the thorny issue of having foreign ambassadors residing in Beijing, and possibly intruding on the Qing ruler, without observing the traditional protocol of paying obeisance to him like members of the tribute embassies. Besides the question of court etiquette, and after almost two decades of dealing with foreign authorities by proxy through the provincial authorities as matters arose, the Qing indeed needed an office at the central government level to take charge of its intractable relationship with the imperialist powers. In 1861, a ‘general office for the management of the affairs of various nations’, known in its abbreviated form as the *Zongli Yamen* (Romanized as *Tsungli Yamen* prior to the introduction of the Pinyin system), was created at the capital for this purpose. The officials of this new office would meet with the foreign ambassadors at Beijing to settle all official businesses as equals, without the necessity of the emperor being present. As a result, the issue of court etiquette was no longer a pressing concern.

In addition to foreign relations, this office was to take responsibility for international commerce, tariffs on foreign maritime trade, and the foreign-managed customs service. As China began to modernize, it became involved with many of the modernizing sectors, such as the building of railways, construction of steamships, and the opening of mines, as these were often connected with foreign investment or debt. Prince Gong, who signed the Treaty of Tianjin, believed that the best way to deal with the Westerners was through courtesy and good faith. His conciliatory attitude towards the representatives of the Western powers won warm praise from the British ambassador, Sir Frederick Bruce, with whom he developed a cordial personal relationship. During the first two decades after the founding of the *Zongli Yamen*, prince Gong was a prominent leader of this establishment. Though he provided crucial help to the Empress Dowager Cixi in her coup to gain power, he was too independent–minded and not sufficiently subservient to please her. In 1884, she sent him home after stripping him of all offices.

Because future treaties were to be written in English, in 1862 prince Gong initiated, with court approval, the establishment of a school at the capital for training English-language translators, which was called the *Tongwen Guan* (School of Combined Learning). This school, funded with revenue from the maritime customs, broadened its curriculum later to include French, Russian, and modern scientific subjects in its curriculum. Similar schools were also set up in Shanghai and Guangzhou under provincial auspices.

Just as these first steps in framing new institutions for the Qing foreign relations were taking place, Emperor Xianfeng died in August 1861. Before his death, he appointed eight high officials to act as Regents to help his successor, Emperor Tongzhi (r. 1861- 1875), a six-year-old minor, to conduct state affairs. The mother of Tongzhi, an extremely ambitious and ruthless woman, who became the Empress Dowager Cixi (1835-1908), carried out a coup with the support of prince Gong, as well as several other powerful political figures, to bring down the Regents and seize supreme power.

As a deeply conservative ruler, Cixi feared and resented the aggression of the imperialist powers and the modernizing challenges they presented to China. On the other hand, her narrowly focused self-interest and her passionate concern for holding onto the reins of power by whatever means, prompted her not only to appease these powers, but also to seek their military assistance to suppress the Taiping Rebellion (of which more later) which raged from 1850 to 1864. The same impulse led her to work with the group of officials who, like prince Gong in Beijing and Zengguofang, Zuo Zongtang, and Li Hongzhang in the provinces, favoured a conciliatory approach to the foreign powers. They believed that to save herself from continuing foreign aggression, China needed to learn from the West: at the very least to overhaul its war-making capacity, build its own modern gunboats and armaments and train soldiers and sailors who could operate such equipment and conduct modern warfare. The Empress Dowager Cixi went along with their efforts at limited modernization. These officials, dubbed the ‘foreign affairs’ clique, were strongly opposed by some ultra-conservative and reactionary officials, who harboured deep-seated suspicions and hostility to the foreigners and their ‘strangely ingenious’ techniques. They stubbornly resisted change. Cixi played one side against the other to keep her ascendancy over any one group of her ministers. Her own ambivalence toward this key issue of the time prevented her from giving strong, decisive, and unwavering leadership towards modernizing China.

By the early 1860s, to save the dynasty Qing China had been beaten into a receptive mode regarding treaty implementation, for which the imperial powers held it responsible to the last letter. Like all legal documents, the provisions of the treaties were capable of differences in interpretation when applied to actual situations. Sometimes they provided only bare outlines, leaving the details to be worked out. The interpretation of extraterritoriality was an especially thorny issue. After the Treaty of Tianjin and the Beijing Convention, the British desired peace to enjoy the fruits of what they had extracted from China by the wars and treaties.

The American government also favoured a policy of `making an effort to substitute fair diplomatic action in China for force'. The conditions were therefore ripe for the two sides - the *Zongli Yamen* and the ministers of the legations in Beijing - to cooperate in earnest to realize the terms of these treaties, particularly those on the administration of customs for the whole country. Although the French and the Russians had other designs on China, such as encroaching on the territory along China's frontiers, they also stood to gain from the Sino-British negotiation on treaty implementation.

As regards the customs, the most pressing item on the agenda was the extension of the foreign Inspectorate of Customs in Shanghai to all the treaty ports. Before doing so certain issues which arose needed to be settled if it were to continue to function effectively. One was the status and authority of the foreign customs inspectors. Were they officials of the Chinese government or were they agents and subordinates of the foreign consuls? Another was whether the Qing government retained the right to collect tax on foreign trade, and to enforce Chinese customs laws and regulations on foreigners covered by extraterritoriality. The Qing government had no reason to assume that it had lost these rights. The Qing officials maintained that extraterritoriality did not mean that foreigners were permitted to violate Chinese laws, customs laws included, with impunity. It did, however, give the foreign offenders the opportunity to be tried in their own consular courts according to the laws of their own nation. It was also assumed that the foreign consuls were adequate for the judicial role and would conduct their judicial function in good faith. The *Zongli Yamen* had noticed that some foreign merchants doubling as consuls were not sufficiently disinterested or trained to assume the role of judges in consular courts.

In an age of merchant adventurers, some British merchants behaved as if the Chinese government had lost the above-mentioned rights. The British merchants were not pleased when the British inspector of the Chinese customs, Horatio Nelson Lay, tried to establish a new order at the customs house in Shanghai by enforcing the customs law and collecting the treaty tariff 'strictly and impartially' as required by treaty. They particularly objected to his extensive use of legal sanctions such as fines and confiscations against smuggling, fraud, and other illegal acts. They lodged complaints against him with the British consul, D. R. Robertson, who succeeded Rutherford Alcock. Called upon to defend the interests of the British merchants, consul Robertson was offended by Lay's unwarranted independence of action and lack of consultation with himself, given that Lay was his subordinate. He also thought Lay was too zealous in upholding the authority of the Chinese customs. This and other disputes, centring on the status and authority of the British inspector of the Chinese customs, as well as on China's right to collect customs duties itself, brought the British consuls and the Chinese superintendent of customs into conflict.

Partly with the help of the British inspector, these issues were brought to the attention of the British Foreign Office. The successive British Foreign Secretaries, Lord Clarendon and his successor, Lord Russell, both took the view that the British inspectors were Chinese officials, and as such their authority was derived from the Chinese government. In Lord Clarendon's opinion, the British inspectors could be tried in the consular courts as British subjects, but not as Chinese customs officials. Disputes arising when they were performing their official duties would have to be settled politically with the Chinese superintendent of customs, not judicially by the British consul. Lord Russell supported the interpretation of authoritative British legal opinion (consulted by Lay when he was on leave in England) that, in the light of the treaties, China retained her sovereign right to make customs laws and to enforce them through lawful sanctions such as confiscations. But fines, being directed against the person, requiring possibly imprisonment in case of non-compliance, would require consular intervention when extra-territorialized foreigners were involved. The above opinions expressed the official position of the British Foreign Office regarding Chinese customs. The American minister, Anson Burlingame, took a similar stand. The British position enabled the nascent foreign-managed inspectorate of customs to avoid being made into an appendage of various foreign consular services. As such, the foreign inspectors would have been torn between performing their Chinese customs duties and following the bidding of various foreign consuls. Under such circumstances, no uniform system of customs administration would have been possible at even one treaty port, let alone all of them.

The clarification of the British Foreign Office's position on extraterritoriality concerning the Chinese customs and the foreigners working in it paved the way for the authorities of Britain and China to implement the customs provisions of the Treaty of Tianjin. For this purpose, the *Zongli Yamen* summoned Lay to come to Beijing. Lay had been given the title of Inspector General of Customs by the Chinese authorities for him to act as the head of a centralized customs service, to be extended to all the treaty ports as required by the Treaty of Tianjin. As Lay had already decided to take home leave, Robert Hart, one of the two British customs officers who were to stand in for Lay in his absence, was asked to go to Beijing instead.

The youthful and Chinese-speaking Robert Hart, of Northern Irish origin, turned out to be admirably suited for this work as well as for the role of a moderator, which he was called upon to play, between the *Zongli Yamen* and the foreign legations. For a start, the expertise he possessed regarding the operation of the treaty provisions and customs regulations was invaluable for both sides to draw upon. Perhaps even more important was his ability to shape Western requirements into what was practically realizable in Qing China, as he demonstrably had a rare combination of inside knowledge of both foreign, particularly British, objectives, and Qing politics and administration. To undertake the work successfully required administrative skill and political acumen of a high order, with both of which he appears to have been richly

endowed. Unlike many treaty port Westerners of this period, he was not contemptuous of the Chinese. He did not consider it beneath his dignity to work, though only nominally as it turned out, as an official of the Chinese government. He had an attitude of sympathy and good will towards the Chinese and a willingness to see the Chinese point of view. Having a historical perspective, he took a long-term view of the situation in China. Although the China before him was extremely weak, he nevertheless entertained a vision of China as a strong modern nation taking her rightful place in the comity of nations. He saw himself as someone working towards that goal. It was, therefore, not surprising that he soon won the good opinion and trust of the leaders of the *Zongli Yamen*, prince Gong in particular.

The British minister, Sir Frederick Bruce, was extremely appreciative of the part played by Hart in treaty implementation. He wrote to the Lord Russell that without Hart and the foreign-managed customs service, he would 'abandon as hopeless the task of realizing the indemnities and of working out the commercial innovations introduced by the Treaty into China'. He believed that this organization led by people like Robert Hart had a key role to play in helping to effect gradually 'by persuasion such a change in the view of the Imperial government as will admit of the exigencies of foreign commerce, and of foreign treaties, being worked harmoniously with Chinese administration'. The American minister also strongly supported Hart and the new foreign-led Chinese Maritime Customs Service (to be abbreviated as the MCS), that grew out of the Shanghai Foreign Inspectorate of Customs to cover other treaty ports.

The Imperial Maritime Customs House (first building)
(*Wikipedia Commons*: retrieved on 30 November 2023 from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Imperial_Maritime_Customs_House_%28first_building%29.jpg)

The increasing importance of the Maritime Customs Service (MCS)

In 1863, upon his return to China, Lay was dismissed in connection with his attempt to control the gunboats he purchased from England for the Qing government. Hart was appointed the Inspector General (abbreviated as I.G.) of Customs by the *Zongli Yamen* with the support of the ministers of both Britain and America. To facilitate his role as an interface between the Legation and the *Zongli Yamen*, Hart set up the

headquarters of the MCS with a small staff in Beijing. From there he built up the MCS as a uniform system of customs administration with customs houses at most of the treaty ports. By 1905, there were 33 treaty ports with customs houses collecting tariffs on Sino-foreign coastal and riparian trade amounting to around 35,000,000 *Haikwan Tael,* out of which 9% was used for the upkeep of the MCS. With the *Zongli Yamen* giving him virtually a free hand, Hart structured and managed the MCS as a modern centralized hierarchical administrative organization. It was staffed, in its upper echelons, by well-paid foreign personnel each with well-defined authority and capacity, who operated strictly according to a body of rules and regulations laid down by him, to govern every aspect of the organization and its functions.

In charge of each customs house the I.G. installed a foreign commissioner of customs, who was responsible to the I.G. for all the official business transpiring at his port. The I.G. controlled the customs houses of his far-flung empire through regular two-way correspondence, with circulars, directives, reports, and accounts going to and fro between the head office and the ports, and with all the records carefully kept. Being familiar with the modern British civil service, Hart established a regular career structure with attractive salaries and fringe benefits, especially for the elite foreign staff of the MCS. They were selected by examination and recommendation. The number of foreign staff rose to more than 1,000 after 1885. At the base of this organization were several thousand Chinese in clerical or menial positions. Since their pay and their opportunities for career advancement were limited, they were far less costly to employ than the foreigners. The MCS so set up was a semi-colonial establishment, by virtue of the autonomous behaviour of its foreign management vis-à-vis the *Zongli Yamen*, and the powerlessness of its Chinese staff. However, it was an effectively centralized customs administration that functioned efficiently, performing its duty of collecting the treaty tariffs and allowing no leeway for the irregularities and grafts that had characterized the Qing native customs. As an administrative organization, it fitted remarkably well the description of a modern 'rational bureaucracy', or 'legal authority', as categorized by Max Weber in his classic study of social institutions and their historical development. According to Weber, members of this type of organization normally operate more efficiently and with greater financial probity than members of a traditional 'patrimonial' administrative organization like the Qing customs. (The Weberian categories refer to the general principles and actual characteristics applicable to each type of organization, and one should not expect the MCS to be a perfect example of the Weberian categories.)

Although the MCS was a semi-colonial civil service imposed on China, the leading member of the *Zongli Yamen*, prince Gong and his successor, prince Qing, accepted it and worked closely with Robert Hart, who remained as its I.G. until the Qing dynasty ended in 1911. An

important reason for this was that the Chinese authorities had the benefit of the use of the surplus the MCS collected from the revenues of certain ports during the initial decades of its establishment, after deducting the maintenance cost for the MCS and the indemnity payments to foreign countries. Before 1912, the maritime taxes collected at each port were kept and lodged by the Chinese superintendent of trade at the local customs bank of the port concerned, while the MCS handled the assessment of the duties, the examination of the goods, the keeping of records and accounts, and the making of periodic reports to the *Zongli Yamen* of all duties collected and expenses deducted. Being thus informed of the size and location of the revenue, the *Zongli Yamen* was able to direct its use. The cost of the maintenance of the MCS would come out of the superintendents' funds at certain ports. As regards the revenue from the ports to which certain foreign indemnity was attached, such as the Anglo-French Indemnity imposed by the Treaty of Tianjin, the commissioners of customs at those ports would sign as witnesses to the scheduled transfer of the instalments from the Chinese superintendents to the foreign consuls concerned. The sources of revenue directly collected and controlled by the MCS were tonnage dues, which were required by treaty to be used for the lights and aids for navigation, in addition to income from special permits, licences, fines, and the sale of confiscated goods.

The MCS came into existence before the time when China had a diplomatic corps, with foreign language expertise, knowledge of international law, and experience in international affairs. Prior to its establishment, the Qing government was reduced to relying on the advice of Western diplomats who represented the very nations that had aggressive designs on China. From the early 1860s, the Qing were able to turn to their own more trustworthy foreign civil servants in the MCS, the I.G. in particular, for advice and assistance on issues concerning foreign relations. The MCS became their 'window on the West'. Hart participated in the negotiation of many Sino-foreign treaties and conventions, starting with the implementation of the commercial and customs provisions of the Treaty of Tianjin mentioned earlier. He was credited with the successful conclusion of the Protocol of Paris of 1885 that ended the Sino-French War and gave Vietnam to France. He played an important part in the Chongqing Convention of 1890 that opened the upper Yangtze River to foreign trade by steamships. His brother, James Hart, represented China in the negotiations with British India on the opening of Yatung (Nyatong) as a trade mart between India and Tibet in 1893. Before China had permanent diplomatic missions abroad, Hart used his influence in moving the Qing government in this direction. In the 1870s, when the *Zongli Yamen* decided to send representatives to England and France and an ambassador to America, the MCS facilitated these moves by assuming responsibility for making arrangements for their financial support. To the Western governments and public, Hart tried to present the Chinese case, appealing for moderation in foreign demands and warning against forcing changes on China too rapidly. In several cases that turned upon the interpretation of extraterritoriality, he succeeded

in limiting further encroachment of China's sovereignty by the foreign merchants and officials at the treaty ports, through appealing to British legal experts and the British government.

In connection with the competition of the imperialist powers for economic and political advantages in China, the British I.G. of the MCS, being a loyal British citizen, naturally strove to serve the British interest. It was generally recognized that the British interest in China was essentially economic: at first centred on trade, industrial and other investments later also played an important part. Of all the powers, Britain had the largest foreign investments in China. The commercial treaties and the MCS were the necessary legal and administrative structures to support the British objectives. By contrast, the territorial ambitions of Russia, Germany, and Japan, in addition to their economic interests, seemed much more threatening to China, and Hart was fearful and suspicious of these countries' designs on China. He believed that his efforts to advance British interests were also beneficial to China, and he hoped that Britain and China would cooperate closely to resist the other three. Hart used his influence on the ministers of the *Zongli Yamen* in Britain's favour. During the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, Hart advocated British participation in the ownership of the profitable Kaiping coal mines in north China, to pre-empt a possible Japanese takeover, should Japan win. He was instrumental in transmitting to the British minister the message from the Qing government expressing its willingness to lease the north China port of Weihaiwei to Britain, presumably as a counterweight to balance the leasing of Port Arthur to Russia. Foreign procurement for gunboats and armaments in connection with China's modernization, if entrusted to the MCS, went to British firms. The I.G. had posted a resident agent in no other capital city but London. The MCS recognized a superior British claim with respect to its staff appointment: the British occupied 50% or more of the foreign staff positions, the leading ones included. English was the language of internal administration in the MCS.

The British government recognized the MCS as an important British asset in China and gave it British protection and support throughout the Qing. In keeping with the semi-colonial character of the MCS, the I.G. lived and worked in the foreign Legation Quarter in Beijing and belonged in the same social circle as the foreign diplomats. At a lower level, a parallel existed between the foreign commissioners of customs and the foreign consular officials at the treaty ports. This situation enabled Robert Hart and the British ministers, as well as the foreign consuls and commissioners of customs, to have easy access to one another so as to confer and communicate freely without having to inform, or be supervised by, the Chinese authorities. The commissioners of customs of course had to report their important financial or political dealings to their chief, the I.G.

The British domination of the MCS provoked the jealousy of the other treaty powers, though all of them, as well as citizens from some other Western countries, were represented among a foreign staff of some sixteen different nationalities. To keep the support of the other treaty powers, the I.G. made a point of

maintaining contact with the ministers of the other legations, as well as 'a fair attempt' to give the nationals of the chief treaty powers a stake in MCS. Because of the services rendered by the MCS to foreign trade and finance, it was supported by the powers as a common interest.

Robert Hart's desire to be more than a mere collector of customs, and his visionary hope that the MCS would become a dynamic centre for the progressive modernization of China, led to his participation in many endeavours in that direction. Initially from the position of an adviser, he went on to act as an agent for purchasing gunboats and arms from Britain, and for recruiting personnel for the building of China's modern Beiyang Fleet during the 1870s. His ambition to become the Naval Inspector General of a modern Chinese Navy under the Qing central government was thwarted by Li Hongzhang, the powerful Grand Secretary and the Superintendent of Trade of the Northern Ports, who preferred to build his own regional power base. Partly also to counterbalance British predominance in China, Li used Gustav Detring, a German commissioner of customs in Tianjin, to import German technology and personnel to China.

The MCS assumed a host of ancillary functions not closely related to customs collection. These included provision of lights and aids for navigation, hydrographic surveying, the regulation and licensing of pilots, management of harbours with construction of wharves and jetties and the conservancy of the approach to the harbours through dredging. It also dealt with the control of smuggling, administration of quarantine, registration of foreign trademarks, and the organization of trade exhibitions abroad, some of which functions would have been assumed by other specialized departments of the government of a modern country. The MCS organized itself internally to take charge of some functions as required by treaty - examples being the Marine Department for hydrographic surveying, and the sighting and maintenance of lighthouses and other aids for navigation - and others which might need the skills or the personnel of a modern semi-foreign organization.

In addition to the above, the MCS was asked by the *Zongli Yamen* to take responsibility for the conveyance of mail matters between the foreign legations and their consular establishments in the treaty ports. Having established steamship lines for its own internal correspondence between its headquarters at Beijing and the treaty ports, the MCS easily extended this service to include the foreign diplomatic post. Later the MCS extended the postal facility to the public along the same routes. It was Robert Hart's fond hope that a unified state-managed modern postal service would emerge from the service's postal department. To accomplish this the new organization would have to replace the existing official courier service (*Yizhan*), as well as the privately organized traditional courier networks (*Minju*) for the general public, not to mention the foreign postal agencies already set up by foreign residents of the treaty ports. Such a development was strongly resisted not only by the Chinese with a vested interest in the *Minju*, but also by the foreigners of the treaty ports. The customs administration's steadfast pursuit of this goal, in addition to pressures for administrative

reform from other quarters of the Qing government, led eventually to the establishment of the Imperial Post Office in 1896. This new office continued to be located inside the MCS, where it was managed by a Postal Secretary under the I.G. The MCS also subsidized it financially. It became independent of the MCS in 1911, when it came under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Posts and Communications, which was established as a part of administrative modernization inside the Qing government. This was how the modern Chinese postal service emerged out of the MCS.

The clamour for reform of the antiquated Qing institutions, in connection with rising Chinese nationalism and foreign pressure, led to changes in the supervisory organs of the MCS during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1901, the *Zongli Yamen* became the *Waiwu Bu* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In 1908, the *Shuiwu Jiu* (Chinese Maritime Customs Service) was created, and the jurisdiction over the MCS was transferred from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to this fiscal office. During the same year, a new Customs College was also set up to advance the position of the Chinese staff inside the MCS. Robert Hart, who was preparing himself for retirement after nearly half of a century as the I.G., saw this as an irresistible process of Chinese eventually gaining control of the MSC.

For half a century before the Qing dynasty ended in 1911, its finances were severely strained, partly by the payment of the indemnities imposed by the imperialist powers, and on account of the heavy military expenses required in wars against internal rebels and foreign invaders, in addition to many military modernization projects. Because of the lack of facilities for fund raising from internal loans like those which existed in modern nation states such as England and France, foreign loans were introduced by using the surplus of the maritime customs revenue of certain ports as security for repayment, after the foreign indemnities tied to it were met. Because of the supervision of the foreign-controlled MCS in collecting the revenue, the foreign investors, banks, and banking syndicates looked upon these loans as sound investments. During the three decades from 1861 to the time of the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, Qing provincial and local authorities contracted, mostly with the approval of the central government, twenty-five small, short-term foreign loans, each individually secured on the maritime customs revenue of certain ports.

After the Sino-Japanese War, the financially exhausted Qing central government, having to pay Japan a crushing indemnity of 230,000,000 taels, was obliged to borrow from foreign sources. Between 1895 and 1898, it raised three foreign loans of 16,000,000 GBP each: one from a Russo-French syndicate of some half a dozen banks, and the others from an Anglo-German syndicate composed of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (the HSBC of today) and the Deutsch-Asiatische Bank. These loans were issued below par, from 83 to 94 1/8. The interest of 4 to 5 percent was considered high for these long-term loans, which ran for between 36 to 45 years. All three were secured on the maritime customs revenue, which had increased because of the growing Sino-foreign trade. For example, the customs revenue had more than

doubled from just under 10,000,000 Hong Kong taels in 1869 to over 21,000,000 Hong Kong taels in 1895. Although most of the terms on these loans were financial, there were political conditions also. For instance, the Anglo-German loans included a condition that required the status quo of the MCS to be preserved during the duration of this loan. Since the Anglo-German Loan of 1898 ran for 45 years, it would secure the MCS as it was then constituted until 1943.

In 1901, the Western powers and Japan, which had sent troops to China to crush the Boxer Rebellion, imposed in the Boxer Protocol a devastating indemnity of 450,000,000 taels ($333 million at the exchange rate then current) on a prostrate Qing China, the entire annual revenue of which was estimated at around 250,000,000 taels. Since the Qing government was obviously without the resources to pay this sum as a single payment, arrangements were made for it to be paid in instalments over a period of thirty-nine years with 4% interest until the debt was amortized on 31 December 1940, when the principal and interest would reach a total of 982,238,150 taels. Since what was left of the maritime customs revenue after all obligations attached to it were met was insufficient to cover the instalments and interest, revenues from certain Chinese native customs within 50 *li* (about 16 miles) of several major treaty ports were also used for these payments. As a result, the I.G. of the MCS controlled these native customs as well. While the Chinese taxes were collected in silver, this Boxer indemnity and the Japanese indemnity were paid in gold, which continued to appreciate against silver. This made the debt burdens even more onerous to the Chinese. Hart's proposal to adopt a gold base for maritime customs collection was not supported by the foreign trading nations in China. From 1901 to the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and beyond, the primary concern of the MSC in fiscal administration was the collection and repayment of the foreign indemnities and loans.

Internal Challenges: Early Uprisings, the Taiping, and Other Rebellions

Signs of internal decline in the Qing

The Opium Wars and their consequences were the first major challenge to the declining Qing. We must now turn our attention to serious internal challenges, stemming from corruption and laxity in the court, the civil administration, and the army. The frugal regime of the Kangxi and Yongzheng periods gave way to the highly lavish and extravagant lifestyle of the Qianlong (r. 1735-1796) era, with the court setting an unhealthy example in conspicuous consumption. There was rampant corruption. The emperor's favourite Heshen was a notable example. In over twenty years as a high-ranking Manchu official, he amassed a fortune of about 800,000,000 *liang* (Chinese ounce = 1 ¾ oz. avoirdupois) in silver currency. This sum was

equivalent to 50% of the state income during that period. To accumulate such an inordinate amount of wealth, he developed a network of corrupt collaborators. Together they created a predatory climate of squeeze, proliferation of fees, extravagant gifts, and general financial malfeasance that spread like an epidemic in officialdom. The generous stipends to encourage official integrity introduced by Emperor Yongzheng, and various strict measures to control official corruption instituted by all early Qing emperors, were undermined by the middle of the Qianlong era. The civil administration became increasingly lax, ineffective, and irresponsible. As the malaise spread to the military, the erstwhile formidable Banner forces lost their capacity to fight. The Green Battalions suffered the same fate. The once overflowing government treasuries were showing signs of being largely run down, through fraud and corrupt practices. Taxes were increased and fees of all kinds proliferated to make up for the shortfall in government revenue. Selling official posts had once been a rarely used means to raise funds by the Ministry of Finance. During the Qianlong era, it had become a very common practice, or malpractice, which helped to fuel corruption from that time on.

Like several previous dynasties during their time of decline, land became progressively more concentrated in the hands of the rich and powerful through seizure or purchase. The smallholders were reduced to either joining the ranks of a floating population of the dispossessed, or becoming grossly exploited tenant farmers, paying 40-50% of their income as rent to the landowners, on top of the government's land and capitation taxes. But unlike previous dynasties, the unprecedented population growth during the previous one hundred or so years meant a decrease in the amount of arable land per capita. In a country where the per capita share of land was already very small, further shrinkage was bound to lead to economic hardship. The increasing rural economic distress as a result of these developments led to social unrest. Secret anti-Qing movements became active and drew growing support, with or without needing to hide under the cloak of a religious movement. One such movement, the non-religious Heaven and Earth Society, spread in the coastal provinces and in Taiwan. In 1786, their members in Taiwan started an uprising aimed at overthrowing the Qing, restoring the Ming, and redistributing land. This revolt took the Qing over a year to suppress at a cost of over 10,000,000 *liang*.

In 1796, the first year of Emperor Jiaqing (r. 1796-1820), members of the subversive White Lotus Cult, with Buddhist inspiration, rose up in a large co-ordinated rebellion in several provinces in the interior. They stood for the restoration of Han rule and land redistribution. This religious cult had existed as far back as the Song dynasty and had been involved in anti-Yuan rebellions before the beginning of the Ming. The nine year long military campaigns against the rebels exposed the general corruption in the Qing military administration, where large amounts of funds allocated for the troops went into the pockets of the generals and commanders who became rich, while the soldiers were underpaid and clothed in rags like beggars. The

armies – both the Banner forces and the Green Battalions – sent out to fight the rebels were battle-shy. They preferred to follow the rebels from afar rather than engage them in combat. Jiaqing had first to address the weaknesses in the Qing armed forces before an effective strategy could be devised to isolate and annihilate the rebel forces. The cost of 200,000,000 *liang* for the suppression of this rebellion was a heavy burden on the already strained Qing finances.

Although the Qing Court continued to be troubled by smallish uprisings from this time onwards, the major rebellions did not occur until the nineteenth century. Of these, by far the largest was the Taiping Rebellion.

Hong Xiuquan and the formation of the Taiping

The Taiping Rebellion began on 1 January 1851 in Thistle Mountain, a remote mountainous region of Guangxi province in southwest China. Before the leaders of this movement decided to rise, they had already spent several years in this lawless region that harboured many rebel movements on account of its poverty, the presence of significant numbers of ethnic minorities, and the weakness of the local authorities. During the period from the mid-1840s onwards, they tried to gather and indoctrinate adherents, to bond with each other and with their followers, to train a well-disciplined army, to store weapons and other supplies, and to develop an agenda for a radically new social, economic, and political order, with a strong religious tinge that promised to establish the Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace on earth. If some of the above activities in preparation for an uprising did not entirely differentiate the Taiping from the White Lotus type of traditional rebel movements, which endeavoured to draw those who were disaffected with the status quo with promises of a utopian and millenarian future, the Taiping had many features that set it apart, largely on account of the personality, character, and personal experiences of their founder, Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864).

Hong was born into a modest farming family of Hakka origin from a village in the southern coastal province of Guangdong. The Hakka, transcribed from the Cantonese ‘guest people’, were Han Chinese who had migrated from the north during troubled times in the past. Over the centuries, these people retained their separate identity and northern dialect (a variant of Mandarin) and maintained an uneasy relationship of mutual competition and hostility with the original inhabitants among whom they had settled. Having to farm the more marginal or hilly areas, their hardy women toiled on the land and kept their feet unbound. Because Hong was noticeably bright, his family exempted him from farming chores, and made sacrifices to enable him to get an education, hoping that he might raise the economic and social status of himself and the members of his family, if not also the entire Hong lineage group or clan in his village, if he passed the

state-sponsored examinations. As a teenager, he showed promise in a qualifying exam, so he was encouraged to continue his studies of the Confucian classics well into adulthood.

In order earn a living, he became a schoolteacher in his own or other villages nearby. This profession gave him the leisure to prepare for future examinations that took place once every three years in Guangzhou. Should he pass, he would get his entry level degree of *Shengyuan*, popularly known as *Siucai* (refined talent) before the next hurdle of a higher degree. Having failed the examination twice, and already in his thirties, he travelled to Guangzhou for the third time with a desperate urge to succeed. While he was in Guangzhou, he came across a foreigner wearing a long gown, and sporting a hairstyle that made him look like a Daoist priest or a fortune-teller. He and his Chinese companion were handing out pamphlets to the examination candidates. Hong approached them hoping for words of encouragement, which he apparently received along with several of their pamphlets, which he perused casually and then put aside.

After his failure for the third time, he fell seriously ill by the time he reached home, travelling in a sedan chair. In the course of an illness that lasted forty days, he first lost consciousness and then became delirious. This was followed by a prolonged semi-conscious trance-like state, during which he saw vivid visions of himself being taken up in a beautiful sedan chair to a luminous place, where he was saluted by a multitude of fine men and women with expressions of great joy. After he left the sedan, an old woman took him to a river and washed him clean. Then he was led to a great hall, the beauty and splendour of which were beyond description. In this resplendent setting, he was received by a man, who was 'sitting with an imposing attitude upon the highest place'; he was 'venerable in years, with a golden beard, and dressed in a black robe'. The venerable old man bestowed upon Hong a sword and a seal, objects that symbolically stood for power and royal authority. He then revealed his anger and sadness to Hong because the people of the world, who were all produced and sustained by him, had turned away from worshipping him and had rebelled against him. They took his gifts but worshipped demons instead of him. Then the old man commanded Hong to exterminate demons and overcome evil spirits. There was also a middle-aged man whom Hong called his elder brother, who would aid Hong in slaying evil spirits in all corners of the earth. There was, besides, an episode involving the 'venerable old man' rebuking Confucius, who appeared at one stage, for having misled the people by his teachings.

After he recovered from this illness, Hong did not forget the extraordinary visionary encounters he had experienced. His personality, demeanour, and even to some extent his appearance became drastically altered. From being a lively character fond of poking fun at others, he turned into a distinctly solemn, unsmiling, and taciturn man, who took himself extremely seriously. Instead of being quick-tempered, he became truculent and imperious at times. He bore himself with great dignity, walking always with measured steps and holding his body erect while sitting. He struck others as having become a resolute and

uncompromising person. As a tallish man with large penetrating eyes, a long sandy-coloured beard, and handsome features, he had become strikingly impressive to look at. He spoke with a sonorous voice and an authoritative air. As a well-educated person with all these characteristics, Hong had the aspect of someone who readily commanded respect.

The visible changes reflected his new inner life and preoccupations. He changed his given name from Huosiu (meaning fire refined) to Xiuquan (meaning completed refined). The character *quan* was made up of two radicals (the basic building blocks of Chinese characters), one being *wang* (the king) and the other *ren* (the people). This new name contained the hidden meaning of 'king of the people'. Although he intimated some of his thoughts to members of his family, such as telling his perplexed father that 'the venerable old man above had commanded that all men shall turn to me, and all treasures shall flow to me', the exalted vision of himself as a king with a mission to save the world contrasted starkly with the reality of his humdrum life as a member of a humble farming family. Not being able to believe in his 'visions' entirely, or without the means to realize them, he subjected himself to the examination ordeal once more after another six years in school teaching and studying Confucian classics. After all, what other outlet was there for a thirty-nine-year-old village schoolteacher, with a burning ambition to move upwards on the social and economic ladder? Faced with failure again, he did not suffer another nervous breakdown this time, but became very angry. In a defiant spirit Hong denounced the Manchu government and its examination system as corrupt. He vowed never to take the Qing examination again, or ever to wear its official vestments.

After Hong returned home, he had an experience which. together with his visions, truly changed his life. A visiting cousin's curiosity was aroused by the pamphlets given to Hong at Guangzhou, which were lying about. When Hong himself decided to investigate the set of nine pamphlets which had the title 'Good Words for Exhorting the Age', he became extremely excited. He probably did not realize that these were Christian tracts because Christianity was banned in 1836, when he had received them, and so it remained in 1843, when he discovered them again. The tracts spoke of a Sovereign on High (*Shangdi*), a Chinese term for God, first used by the Jesuit Father, Matteo Ricci, and later used in the Protestant Bible translated by Charles Karl Gutzlaff. While the Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century endlessly debated which of half a dozen Chinese terms was the most appropriate one for God, the Catholic Pope Clement XI issued a papal bull that forbade the use of *Shangdi* and *Tian* (Heaven) in referring to God but approved the word *Tianzhu* (Lord of Heaven), which since then became the Chinese Catholics' name for God. According to the tracts and the Bible, which Hong later acquired, the Lord on High was humanity's Heavenly Father, who created the world, and from whom sinful humanity had turned away. Hong immediately recognized this figure as the Venerable Old Man of his 'visions' and concluded that he was the son of this exalted Lord on High.

Regarding the tracts, he was quoted as having said that they were ‘purposely sent by heaven to me to confirm the truth of former experiences’. Otherwise, he would not have dared to believe in his visions alone, as they could have been construed as ‘mere productions of a diseased imagination’. In these Heavenly tracts, he found the objective proof of the validity of what he had experienced in his visions, and the divine revelations specially directed at himself. He became assured that God in the ‘sacred work’ was his Heavenly Father, who had in his visions commanded him to save the benighted Chinese people and turn them back onto the path of righteousness with a Heavenly regime of his own, and with him as the ruler. Had he not been given a sword and a seal? These were Chinese symbols for royal authority. In a moment, Hong had transformed the ancient Chinese belief in the Mandate of Heaven into a belief in the Will of God. He also identified the middle-aged man, who helped him to slay evil spirits, as Jesus Christ, his elder brother, who had already come into the world to save mankind. These revelations made Hong ‘feel as if awakened from a long dream’, and he ‘rejoiced to have in reality a way to heaven, and a sure hope of everlasting life and happiness’.

Hong was not aware that the two men, the bearers of the good news, were missionaries: one of them was thought to have been an American Protestant missionary named Edwin Stevens, and the other was an early Chinese convert to Protestantism called Liang Fa (or Afa), who was the author of the tracts. In missionary activities, Liang had been closely associated with Robert Morrison and many early Protestant missionaries sent to China.

Liang’s tracts contained the most essential messages of the Bible and many of the important elements of orthodox Christian beliefs and practices. First, it was imperative for mankind to believe in God, the universal Father and Creator of all things in Heaven and on earth, and in Jesus Christ as the Saviour of fallen humanity. Then it followed that human beings must worship God, the one and only Lord on High, and must obey God’s command to do good and reject evil. The worship of all idols and other gods and spirits was strictly forbidden. They must observe strictly the Ten Commandments of God and lead a moral life. The good people would have God’s blessings and protection in life, and thereafter would enjoy eternal bliss in Heaven. The unbelievers or evildoers, on the other hand, would suffer calamity on earth and the punishments of hell hereafter. Baptism was a necessary rite for rebirth and regeneration. This summary encapsulated the essential tenets or the religious ideology of the rebel movement Hong was later to establish. He was not troubled by the omission in this work of any mention of himself as God’s second son and the younger brother of Jesus, because he had received that revelation when he was ‘taken up to Heaven’. Neither was he troubled when he later learned about the similarity between the messages contained in these works and Christianity, because the similarity only confirmed what he knew was the universality of the truth. Since Hong’s religious experience emphasized God the father, other items such as the celebration of

Christmas, the Holy Eucharist, Jesus's resurrection, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the New Testament emphasis on love and forgiveness were all omitted. Hong's God was the wrathful jealous God of the Old Testament, who had been much sinned against, and was ready to strike down all idols and fiercely sweep away any other forms of worship.

From that point onwards, Hong's secret life came out into the open. He had become a passionate and unshakable believer in a syncretistic new religion that combined many important elements of Christianity with his own eccentric personal additions and interpretations. He told his cousin, who had already acquainted himself with the contents of the pamphlets, about his visions, and the connection between the two. His cousin became a convert to this new religion. The two prayed to God, promising solemnly 'not to worship idols, not to practise evil things, but to keep the heavenly commandments', and then poured water over their own heads with the words 'purification from all former sins, putting off the old and regeneration'. Although a modern psychiatrist has diagnosed Hong as someone who had suffered an episode of mental disorder which exhibited symptoms of hallucination, paranoia, and delusions of grandeur, he was clearly sufficiently in possession of his faculties a few years after his recovery to tell his story coherently, and with enough passion and conviction to persuade his cousin to believe in the fantastic construction he had made from this mysterious experience and the Christian tracts.

Although Hong would have put his own life and those of his relatives at risk if the Qing authorities had got to know that Hong was destined, or even believed that he was destined, to found a new dynasty, it was relatively safe for him to spread his new religion while leaving out the political implications. He tried to persuade his relatives to accept the new faith and went about preaching in earnest to the people of his own and neighbouring villages. He made a number of converts: two of his cousins, Feng Yunshan and Hong Rengan were among them. Like Hong himself, both were educated but unsuccessful scholars as regards the state examinations. They were such enthusiastic neophytes that they went about 'with a spirit of joy' to spread the new gospel, each in his own village. In the summer of 1843, after attracting an initial following, Hong established the Society of God Worshippers for recruiting new members.

Before long, Hong's iconoclastic monotheism was bound to come into conflict with the long-established Chinese polytheistic religious beliefs and practices, if not also the Qing authorities. China's popular pluralistic religious culture accommodated many different belief systems. As a result, it was commonplace to have ancestor tablets at the family shrines, Confucian tablets at schools, and the Kitchen God might rub shoulders with the God of Wealth in peoples' homes. Buddhist or Daoist temples with their own pantheon of deities dotted the cities and the countryside, not to mention that here and there were shrines with well-known or obscure deified personages. The concept of religious freedom from state interference had not evolved in China through historical experiences as it had in Europe. It had been taken for granted that the

state had a right to regulate and intervene on religious matters, ranging from patronage to prohibition. During the Qing, the state supported an orthodox Confucianism and certain popular cults. Emperor Yongzheng banned Catholicism in 1724 but did not otherwise intrude into the people's religious beliefs and practices unless sedition was suspected. In China's long history, many rebellions were fomented by religious cults, because religious gatherings provided good camouflage for those seeking recruits for seditious activities.

Hong was an example of someone who was using a religious cult with a hidden intention to start a rebellion. His exclusive monotheism was revolutionary for China because it meant that the entire slate of religious beliefs in China's tradition had to be swept away, and the sacred objects associated with them destroyed. While propagating his new faith, he started to denounce idolatry of any kind, including the worship of ancestors and Confucius, and he also sought out idols in the countryside and carried out violent physical attacks on them. The parents of the school where Hong taught kept their children away, because they strongly objected to his removal of the tablet of Confucius. Early in 1844, he lost his teaching post through clashes with the elders of his village on religious issues.

Without employment, Hong decided to leave home together with his cousin Feng Yunshan, who had been let into the secret of his political agenda. Although Feng came from a prosperous farming family, he was ready to throw in his lot with Hong in pursuit of a venture which was enormously risky, because the penalty for sedition was death, not only for those directly involved but also for all relatives several degrees removed. Together the two of them trekked as itinerant preachers, looking for a more suitable place, a remote area sufficiently distant from the surveillance of authorities, where they could find receptive people to build a nursery for their new religion, as well as for the 'great enterprise'. After wandering for several months and visiting some relatives of Hong's in Guangxi, Hong and Feng went in separate directions.

Hong headed east to return home, where he produced a body of writings of religious precepts and verses such as the 'Ten Commandments' and 'Ode for Youth' for the education and edification of his followers. There was a brief interlude of a couple of months, when he and another cousin, Hong Rengang, went to study the Bible in Guangzhou in response to an invitation from Rev. I. J. Roberts, a Southern Baptist Minister of a Protestant mission there. This visit did not seem to have much effect on Hong's basic beliefs, even though he had the full use of the Bible, both the Old and the New Testaments. The lessons he learned from this visit that were going to be useful for his movement were the printing and distribution of Christian tracts, and the conduct of public worship services.

Feng went westward into the remote Thistle Mountain area of Guangxi, where he successfully pursued, with great persistence and effort, the goal of winning followers for the new faith. By the time Hong returned to Guangxi in 1847, he was received with great reverence in Thistle Mountain as the spiritual head of some

3,000 members of the Society of God Worshippers. Even though the establishment of this society was the fruit of Feng's labour, the pre-eminent place in it had been reserved for Hong, because Feng had told the congregation about Hong's experience of being taken up to Heaven to be received by God as his son.

Together, Hong and Feng intensified the indoctrination and established rituals, 'heavenly regulations' (based on the Ten Commandments), and disciplinary measures to govern a society that had taken on a militantly puritanical character. The members had to observe the Ten Commandments strictly and abstain from drinking alcohol and from smoking, not just opium, but also tobacco. Hong and Feng also sent out converts to establish branches of the society in many other parts of both Guangxi and Guangdong.

During the late 1840s, the Qing authorities were unable to maintain law and order in large parts of the mountainous impoverished province of Guangxi. Banditry was rife. Although some bandits were of local origin, many moved into the lawless Guangxi region from around Guangzhou, which had suffered an economic decline following the shift of foreign trade to Shanghai after the Opium Wars. Large gangs of several thousand men might be emboldened to sack small towns. Apart from gangs of outlaws, different communities banded together to advance their common interest, for settling scores, and for mutual protection; in case of serious disputes, they would fight and take the law into their own hands. The rapidly growing Society of God Worshippers became a prominent local group that fought outsiders, with notable success, to defend the interest of their members, or to seek redress against any wrong inflicted on any of their 'brothers' and 'sisters'. Protection and mutual support prompted many vulnerable people to join this society, in addition to religious or other reasons. As the society gathered strength in numbers and other resources, Hong's identity as God's son with a divine mission to establish a new dynasty was coming more and more into the open in his recruitment drive. He had also been openly denouncing the Manchus as alien oppressors, who had robbed the Chinese of their estate and ruined the Chinese economically. Although taking up arms to establish a new dynasty was an extremely risky undertaking, those with little means of economic support, or who had been alienated by the Qing authorities because of corruption or other grievances, might have found joining such a movement an opportunity to improve their lot, or to avenge themselves.

There was a small inner circle of members whom Hon took into his confidence. They had been identified by him as the top echelon of leaders, whose support he needed as generals and ministers of his new kingdom. They were Yang Siuqing, Xiao Chaogui, Shi Dakai, and Wei Changhui, in addition to Feng Yunshan. Hong, re-enacting a celebrated Chinese tradition whereby the head of the Kingdom of Shu became sworn brothers with his two top generals, bonded with these five as a group of sworn brothers. Following Hong's political agenda, they pledged to overthrow the Manchus and establish a new kingdom

according to God’s command. Their motives in being a part of this movement were clearly socio-economic and political because they would belong to the aristocracy or ruling class of the new regime.

The God Worshippers’ hostility to traditional beliefs and their iconoclasm, while intimidating to many, provoked the active hostility of a member of the powerful local gentry, who led a militia to arrest and imprison Feng in 1848. After Hong left for Guangzhou to seek Feng’s release through petitioning higher authorities, the leaderless society was becoming fractious and uneasy. A prominent and exceedingly ambitious member, Yang Siuqing, circulated a story that one day he became deliriously ill when God descended to earth and took possession of his body. God made him His Spokesman as well as the Redeemer of Sickness, so that he would take on the sicknesses of others who would then be spared. A spirit possessing the body of a person and speaking through this person was a role normally assumed by a medium, who might be hired by someone wishing to contact an ancestor. Yang shrewdly exploited this common superstition as a means to gain authority, not just equal to but even higher than that of Hong’s. Soon, Yang’s close ally, Xiao Chaogui, announced that Christ had also descended on him and made him His Spokesman too. Before long, many society members were falling to the ground in a state of delirium and speaking in tongues, each claiming to be God’s Spokesman. After Feng was released, and returned to base with Hong in the summer of 1849, the society was divided into factions, some supporting one and some another of those who had claimed that God had spoken through them. Hong settled the matter with his judgement that the experiences of Yang and Xiao were of God, while the others were of the devil. Hong’s decision unified the members of the society at a critical juncture when the leaders were preparing for an uprising, but it would licence Yang and Xiao to use the same claim to trump Hong’s authority in the future.

By the middle of 1849, the society’s membership had grown to around 10,000. It was not an organization that people joined singly. When a prominent member of a family joined, he often brought into the society his entire family, if not most members of his lineage or clan, which might number in tens or hundreds. In one case over one thousand miners from a certain mining district joined the movement. Because the leading members of this society were Hakkas, and because Guangxi had large settlements of Zhuang and Yao minorities, many Hakkas and these minority people became members. By this time, the society was attracting not just poor peasants, but people from different social levels and walks of life, including rich merchants, wealthy landowners, miners, local militia, and ex-soldiers. Anticipating their uprising, Hong and Feng intensified their recruitment drive to boost their future fighting force. Famine, pestilence, and the increasing communal violence during this time drove many to seek refuge in Hong’s organization. Since all comers were welcome provided they would practise the new religion and obey the society’s puritanical regulations, gangs of pirates and bandits, when pressed by government authorities, sought shelter under the powerful protective umbrella of this society. Among them were two well-known women bandit leaders,

who joined with a few thousand followers. However, many found that they could not abide by the society's strict rules and discipline, and they left. As regards many of the actively seditious Triad secret societies in this part of China, Hong would not associate with them, finding their aim of restoring the Ming, their folk religious practices, and their low moral standards incompatible with his own.

With the number of God Worshippers growing by leaps and bounds to over 20,000 sometime during 1850, and with the escalation of violent conflicts between members of this society and other armed communities, particularly some of the local gentry and militia, the chances of a clash with official government troops became increasingly likely. Had it not been for the Guangxi governor's abdication from his duty to keep order, the clash would probably have occurred much sooner. Sensing the possibility of having to fight government forces sent against them before very long, the leaders of the God Worshippers accelerated their preparation for military actions. In May 1850, Hong and Feng arranged to have their families in Guangdong join them in Guangxi. In the autumn of 1850, Hong commanded the leaders of all branches of the society scattered in other areas to gather all their members with their families, and what belongings they could take along, and to assemble in Jintian (Golden Field), a place near Thistle Mountain, for 'collective camping'. This was effectively an order for a general mobilization of the whole society.

In Jintian, Feng Yunshan, with the help of another scholar, had already drawn up an impressive master plan supposedly derived from the military tradition of the Zhou dynasty (c.1030-207 BCE). Following this plan, they registered all the able-bodied men and assigned them to fill units of a systematically organized army. From corporal to the commander-in-chief, each level of the hierarchically structured army command had a certain number of soldiers with the appropriate number of officers. Through an assignment designated by one of the five elements, a number, and the colour of the vest or flag, each person knew his unique place in the command structure, and his superiors whose orders he was obliged to obey. The men were given printed manuals on camp construction and the different battle formations, together with regulations for troops on the march. A strict code of sixty-two rules had been laid down to govern the conduct of military personnel, with regulations covering not only their behaviour on the battlefield, their relationship with their colleagues and those ranked above and below them, and their treatment of the civilian population, but also their personal and religious life. Penalties for infraction ranged from demotion to death. To show defiance against the Qing, the men were ordered to stop shaving the top of their heads, and to keep their long hair in place with a red turban around their foreheads. While they were known as the 'Long-haired Bandits' on the Qing side, they abusively called all those associated with the Qing 'imps' (imperialists). After this preliminary process, they underwent military training and drilling.

This movement was unusual for having female battalions, partly because of the need to have as many soldiers as possible, and partly because of its ideology regarding the equality of the sexes. Women were

given the opportunity to be combatants, but they constituted only a small auxiliary force to the main body of male fighters. They had separate living quarters and were governed by a hierarchy of female officers. The strong Hakka women with their unbound feet made this situation possible. The non-combatants at Jintian were put into camps of their own, where a strict regime of segregation of the sexes was put into practice. Husbands and wives living in different camps might see each other once a week for a short time under the watchful eyes of chaperons. A hierarchy of officers with various titles managed these camps.

All those who responded to the call of 'collective camping' at Jintian gave up not only their family life, but also all their private property. Their land and houses were sold for cash where possible. All their money and other valuables were put into the Holy Treasury. Many of them probably were poor with few means, but there were rich merchants, and some very wealthy people. For example, Shi Dakai's family contributed 100,000 taels to the community chest. Wei Changhui and another rich landowner turned over their huge stores of grain which could sustain a largeish army for several months. In return, the community supplied the members' basic material needs, such as food and clothing.

Because openly buying weapons for so many soldiers, even if it had been possible, would arouse suspicions, Wei Changhui purchased iron from any source, ostensibly for making agricultural implements. The mountaineers gathered wood and made charcoal. At Wei's village, volunteers worked round the clock to hammer the iron into weapons. They used a large flock of honking geese to mask the noise of these activities. They also made crude cannons, muskets, and explosives. Women were enlisted to make uniforms, flags, and other equipment. They buried all the finished products until needed.

In Beijing, the new emperor Xianfeng (r. 1850-1860), who succeeded Daoguang, did not receive any news of the seditious religious community in faraway Guangxi from the governor of Guangxi, who paid no attention to matters of internal security. After reports from other officials and a delegation of representatives of the gentry sounded the alarm, the emperor dismissed the governor and appointed other civil and military officials to control the crisis. In the winter of 1850, government troops were moving into Jintian and the inevitable armed clashes between Hong's followers and the local soldiers and militia sent against them took place, with the defeat of the government side. Soon after, the Qing sent two larger bodies of troops, one led by a Manchu Brigadier General and the other by a commander from a neighbouring province, to root out these 'religious rebels'. The day before hostilities began on 31 December 1850, four groups of God Worshippers of over 10,000 people arrived for the 'collective camping'. With these reinforcements, the God Worshippers thoroughly routed the Qing forces. Having killed so many Qing soldiers and officers, for the God Worshippers there was no looking back, even for those who had not joined the religious community to engage in a rebellious movement. What had occurred accorded with the plan of Hong and the other leaders of the movement.

On 11 January 1851, on Hong's thirty-eighth birthday - reckoned the Chinese way, which counted from conception so that a person is one year old on the actual date of birth - he assembled all the God Worshippers in Jintian to proclaim himself as the Heavenly King, the supreme leader of a theocratic kingdom, the *Taiping Tianguo* (Taiping Heavenly Kingdom, often abbreviated as the Taiping). From his knowledge of Chinese Classics, Hong chose the word *Taiping* as it referred to a stage of the world where everlasting peace and prosperity reigned, and this was to be the stage which his *Tianguo* (Heavenly Kingdom) ushered into China by the Will of God. He also appointed Yang Siuqing, the naturally gifted military strategist and tactician, to be commander-in-chief of the entire military force, as well as the commander of the Central Army. The other four of his sworn brothers were appointed commanders of the Front, Rear, Right and Left Armies.

The military campaigns of the Taiping and their establishment in Nanjing

Having declared themselves as the enemies of the Qing, the Taiping could not stay in any spot for long. They had to keep on breaking through encirclements by enemy troops or suffer being pursued by them as they marched in their thousands with their elders, and their women and children, first towards the west and then north. The strictly disciplined Taiping soldiers fought bravely. Unlike their Qing counterparts, they did not victimize the civilians of the towns they fought over by looting, burning, raping, and killing. The Taiping on the move had their appeal, and many joined them to start a new life or for other reasons of their own in the areas they traversed. As a result, the movement's fighting complement continued to be strengthened. Because they dealt honestly, vendors willingly sold them supplies they needed. Finally, in September 1851 they captured Yongan, their first walled city, where they stayed until April the following year. They took a breathing spell to structure their civilian government with a system of offices and court etiquette based on those of the Zhou dynasty. Hong's sworn brothers were made kings, with Yang Siuqing leading the others as the East King and Shi Dakai the most junior as the Assistant King. They also created their own solar calendar, rather than the traditional lunar based one. This was another of Feng Yunshan's innovations. They stocked up on supplies and recruited new members. Their total reached almost 40,000, with half that number in the fighting force. For several months, the Qing forces did little to dislodge the Taiping until the Spring of 1852; then over 30,000 Qing soldiers laid siege to Yongan.

The rebels managed to slip out of the besieged city, and attempted to capture Guiling, but without success, though their fighting force had increased to over 60,000. They then proceeded north to the province of Hunan, where they sustained heavy losses at an ambush staged at a narrow ford by a scholar-official leading a quite small militia. The Taiping failed to capture the provincial capital of Changsha after a siege of more than two months, thanks to a large concentration of troops inside the city and the determined resistance of the gentry and officials gathered there. They did succeed in breaking into many

county seats where they gathered an enormous number of weapons, ammunition, guns, gunpowder, and other supplies. In Hunan, the Taiping started to issue inflammatory anti-Manchu proclamations urging people to join them and adopt their religion. Although their anti-Manchu revolutionary propaganda won them many recruits amongst the disaffected, outlaws, and the desperately poor, their militant Christianity and their animosity towards Confucianism and other popular religions, together with their iconoclasm, provoked the antagonism of the gentry and scholar-officials, who became their most formidable enemies. In their march north through the watery region of Lake Dongting and the tributaries of the Yangtze River, their fighting force grew to 100,000, and they were able to commandeer thousands of boats to enable them to become waterborne in a fleet, sailing along the Yangtze, to invade the triple city of Wuhan. Thanks to the lack of preparedness of their Qing enemy and the skill of the Taiping miners for exploding city walls with underground tunnels, all three cities fell into the hands of the Taiping within a short time.

The capture of this centre of transportation, communication, and commerce on the Yangtze River was their greatest prize so far. Their Holy Treasury was filled with several million taels of silver from raiding the government offices, and from confiscation of the wealth of the rich. They also collected a large amount of grain. In addition to those who voluntarily joined, they started to conscript people into their army. They had now reached a turning point, where they could drive north to Beijing or east to Nanjing. Their decision not to march rapidly to take Beijing, when they had the revolutionary momentum, was considered a strategic mistake by some, because defensive measures for blocking a Taiping march on Beijing were not in place, and the militia from Hunan, the Xiang army led by scholar-officials, which would eventually defeat them, was not yet in existence at that point. They decided to go east, following the Ming example of siting their capital at Nanjing. This city had been the capital of many dynasties in the past, partly because of its location in the rich and populous lower Yangtze region, and partly because the mountains, and the Yangtze River surrounding it, rendered it easy to defend.

With a fleet of over 20,000 vessels, and a force numbering 500,000 even without ten percent of the conscripted men and over eighty percent of the conscripted women, the Taiping flotilla sailed downstream towards Nanjing on 8 February 1853, with the Heavenly King on a boat decorated with a dragon’s head at its bow and tail at its stern, accompanied by the massive army. Along the way through the province of Jianxi, the Taiping carried away the valuables of the city of Jiujian, its residents and defenders having fled on news of the approaching Taiping. The next major city along the Yangtze was Anqing, the provincial capital of Anhui province, which was also deserted apart from its governor, who awaited his death alone outside the city, after its wall was breached by Taiping artillery fire. From Anqing, the Taiping collected over 300,000 taels of silver in government offices, over one hundred cannons, and an enormous amount of food and other supplies. En route through Anhui, many people came forward to offer money, food, and

sometimes themselves, boosting the Taiping army to nearly 750,000. All along the Taiping's journey to Nanjing, there were sympathetic uprisings of the Triad secret society, whose members then joined this movement. From 6 March 1853, wave after wave of the Taiping arrived at the outskirts of Nanjing, their 'Little Heaven', a little over two years since the uprising had begun in Jintian, over 1000 miles away.

Nanjing, situated on the south bank of the Yangtze River, was a large city with 10 gates protected by 15,000 battlements along a winding 30-mile-long city wall that was thick and high. From the gates of the city, the Taiping presented the awe-inspiring sight of a sea of red-turbaned men covering an area of several square miles. After attacking the city for 13 days, some of the Taiping, who had infiltrated the city, by a stroke of luck killed the governor, and others dressed as monks set fire to houses near the gates, to signal those outside to advance into the Outer City. They then captured the well-guarded Inner City of the Manchu Bannermen by brute force and massacred everyone in sight. After taking possession of Nanjing, the leaders discussed once more whether they should leave a garrison there and proceed north to strike Beijing while the iron was hot. Again, the seductive wealth of the lower Yangtze region caused them to choose Nanjing as their capital, though a British friend of the Taiping, Alexander Lindley, considered this choice a fatal mistake that lost Hong the empire.

On 29 March 1853, amid great pomp and pageantry, the Heavenly King and the other Taiping Kings, together with their families and dignitaries, carried either on resplendent sedan chairs or on the back of horses, accompanied by heralds, musicians and bodyguards, followed by a long line of holy soldiers, entered in triumph into Nanjing, where they were greeted by hundreds of thousands of kneeling soldiers and crowds. Here the Taiping rulers built palaces, laid down defensive measures, organized their government and other institutions to govern the areas under their control, and sent out armies to wrest the rest of the empire from the Qing. They had established in the south a dynasty to rival the Qing in the north.

Had the Taiping marched north immediately after they took Nanjing, overwhelming the resistance the Qing could muster in a short period of time, and capturing Beijing with their huge army of 750,000 before the onset of the cold winter, their Heavenly King's wish might have been fulfilled. Instead, two months after the Taiping entered Nanjing, Yang Siuqing, the Taiping commander-in-chief, despatched two meritorious commanding officers leading a force of about 80,000 to capture Beijing. Although this force was sufficiently large to capture cities and win battles, it suffered losses and defeats as the Qing concentrated troops from all over the north to block the invaders' advance. The Taiping army struggled against many obstacles and challenges to reach within 3 miles of Tianjin, 70 miles from Beijing. However, shortage of ammunition and other supplies, and the failure of the reinforcements to reach it, together with the harshness

of the north China winter, forced it to retreat. On its southward journey the army was split up, continually harassed, often surrounded, and finally destroyed by an elite cavalry force led by the Mongolian Prince, Sengge Rinchen (Senggelinqin in Pinyin) (1811-1865).

Leadership struggles in the Taiping

Cracks began to develop in the Taiping leadership. In terms of military and administrative capacity, Hong Xiuquan could hardly be compared with Emperor Hongshu, Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368-1398), the founder of the Ming. The credit for the establishment of the flourishing Society of God Worshippers at Jintian, and the setting up of the Taiping military systems, belonged to Feng Yunshan. Feng's early death was a great loss for Hong and the Taiping movement. Happy to retire into his literary and religious pursuits, Hong gave the East King, Yang Siuqing, unfettered authority to direct the civil, military, and religions affairs of the Taiping. Yang took the opportunity to concentrate power into his own hands and built up a cohort of supporters. He also became arrogant and oppressive towards other officials, including his brother kings. Despite the disastrous Northern Expedition, Yang gained personal kudos through his success in directing the Taiping forces to make Nanjing secure by capturing certain key cities nearby, and by reclaiming the cities and territories along the Yangtze River all the way to Wuchang and Hanyang, giving the Taiping thereby access to the resources, and the facilities for transportation and communication, of this stretch of the Yangtze valley. Hong's poor judgement of character, and his misplaced trust in Yang, was to cost him and his movement dear.

Not satisfied with the power, position, and the string of honorific titles Hong had already bestowed on him, Yang decided, in the middle of 1856, that the time was ripe for him to make a bid for the leadership. Threatened and alarmed, Hong played for time, and secretly recalled the North King, Wei Changhui, back to the capital to help him. To keep Wei away from the capital during the intended coup, Yang had despatched Wei to the west on a military campaign. As soon as Wei slipped back into Nanjing without Yang's knowledge early in September 1856, he contacted a group loyal to Hong, and they made a plan to kill Yang and his two powerful brothers. Hong approved of this plan. Once the killing started, the situation got out of hand. Out of fear of revenge by Yang's cohorts, Wei and his henchmen initiated a bloodbath, with the killing going on for many days, leading to the death of several tens of thousands of Yang's relatives and associates, including those suspected of being pro-Yang. Hong was appalled. With his own life threatened by Wei, who had fallen out with him, he sent for Shi Dakai, the Assistant King, whom Yang had also sent away to the west ostensibly on a military expedition, but also to keep him out of the way. Before Shi reached Nanjing, Hong's supporters inside the city managed to capture Wei, who was executed by Hong.

Shi was welcomed as a saviour when he appeared, early in the winter of 1856, in the Heavenly Capital which was still shrouded in gloom after the fratricidal frenzy. A young man in his early twenties, Shi had already distinguished himself both on the battlefield and in civil administration. He had a reputation for being lenient, kind, and conciliatory towards the people in Taiping-controlled areas, where taxes were collected at a lower rate than under the Qing. At that point, Shi had the dubious distinction of being the only surviving sworn brother of the Heavenly King. Recognizing that Shi was the only one who could take on the job of managing both the civil and military affairs of the government, Hong honoured Shi and asked him to direct state affairs. Shi promptly set about strengthening the military position of the Heavenly Kingdom and retrieving lost territory in Anhui Province.

Unfortunately, the euphoria did not last long. Hong's two older brothers, being jealous of Shi, succeeded in destroying Hong's trust in Shi, who had been steadfastly loyal to Hong. Soon Shi felt frustrated and thwarted by Hong's mistrust. With his life possibly in jeopardy, in May 1857 Shi decided to leave the Heavenly Capital and take his army of approximately 200,000 to Sichuan and remain there. It was a journey easy to conceive but difficult to accomplish, because by then a new generation of better-trained provincial militia, and the battle-hardened Xiang Army led by scholar-officials under the leadership of Zeng Guofan and his associates, were determined to suppress the Taiping rebels wherever they might be found. After wandering through fifteen provinces and covering almost 6000 miles, Shi and his dwindling army of 7,000 were trapped by Qing forces at a river crossing in Yunnan Province in June 1863. To save his soldiers, he gave himself up. He was executed in August 1863 after writing his confession. The fratricidal bloodletting, and Shi's defection with a substantial Taiping army, were mortal blows to the Taiping Rebellion from which it never fully recovered.

The imperial powers intervene

Thanks to two young and gifted generals, Chen Yucheng and Li Xiucheng, who did not defect with Shi Dakai, the existence of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom was prolonged for another seven years after Shi's departure. Both rose up from the ranks of humble foot soldiers to become top commanders, each with a kingly title, after the first generation of Taiping kings, except for Hong and Shi, lost their lives. Chen was the Heroic Prince (the Brave King) and Li was the *Zong Wan* (the Loyal King). When they cooperated and coordinated in certain strategic military campaigns together, which they did during the period between 1858 and 1860, they recovered a lot of the territory the Taiping had lost in the west after Shi's departure, and they also won a signal victory over the Qing by destroying the two large Qing military camps, the Great Northern and Southern Barracks, which had put the Taiping capital under siege, one from the north and the

other from the south bank of the Yangtze River. Without a sufficiently prestigious and experienced military leader such as Yang Siuqing or Shi Dakai to function as a unified commander in the central government, these two younger generals tended mostly to work separately in their own theatres of war. The *Gan Wang* (Shield King), who was also the new Prime Minister, and the cousin of the *Hong Rengan* (Heavenly King), finally reached the Taiping capital in 1859 after many years trying to do so, but they did not have sufficient experience in military affairs to fill this role adequately. Subsequently, Li sought to expand further to the east to conquer Zhejiang Province and the rest of Jiangsu Province, two of the richest provinces of the Qing. He was successful until the foreign powers decided to intervene.

The naivete and ignorance of the Taiping regarding the imperialist powers was another major factor contributing to the ultimate downfall of their kingdom. Soon after the Taiping settled in Nanjing, the representatives of Britain, France, and the United States each visited their Heavenly Capital on separate occasions to become acquainted with this competing new Chinese regime, which projected power along the Yangtze River. The visitors became aware of the friendliness of the Taiping towards Westerners, whom the Taiping regarded as their 'foreign brethren' because of the perception of their shared Christian faith. However, the foreign diplomats were offended by the Heavenly King's pretension to be a universal ruler, and they would not cooperate with any diplomatic protocols that reinforced it. Concerned that the Taiping were some new kind of militant Protestants, the French received the assurance they sought that the Taiping were not persecuting Catholics. While not recognizing the regime in Nanjing as legitimate, all the representatives of the foreign powers informed the Taiping authorities that their governments adopted a policy of neutrality in the civil war. The positive attitude the Taiping maintained on trade, including foreign trade, which flourished in Taiping-controlled areas prevented friction between the Taiping and the powers, which kept their neutral stance until after the Treaty of Tianjin (1858, discussed previously).

After having wrung such extensive concessions from the Qing through the Treaty of Tianjin, the powers were tempted to abandon their policy of neutrality towards the civil war, in favour of supporting the government in China that had given them the concessions. The Taiping aided this shift in policy when Li Xiucheng led an eastward expansion in the early 1860s, captured the treaty port of Ningbo, and threatened Shanghai. When the Taiping armies attempted to invade Shanghai, the British, French, and Americans in the foreign Concessions were fully ready to cooperate with the local officials, who solicited foreign help to fight against the Taiping. Witnessing the foreign and the Qing forces together attacking Li Xiucheng's army at the outskirts of Shanghai, the Taiping felt betrayed by their 'foreign brethren', for they had hoped that the foreigners would allow them to invade Shanghai. They had appealed to the foreign representatives for understanding the necessity for them to recover Shanghai for God's people and had repeatedly promised

not to harm foreigners or damage their property. Although the Taiping fought bravely against superior foreign weaponry and even won some skirmishes, they had finally to abandon their goal of capturing Shanghai after their fourth attempt in 1862, particularly as the formidable Xiang Army under Li Hongzhang, a protégé of Zeng Guofan, was appointed by the Qing to direct the fight against the Taiping in this theatre of war, with foreign support.

Having abandoned their neutrality, the naval forces of Britain and France joined the war against the Taiping to recover Ningbo and many cities in the vicinity of Shanghai and Ningbo during the early years of the 1860s. The British and the French also helped the Qing by giving some of their army officers leave to lead foreign mercenary forces to fight against the Taiping in this eastern war zone. Among these was Major Charles Gordon, who became a celebrated figure in nineteenth century England as the 'Chinese Gordon', and later as the hero of the siege of Khartoum. Major Gordon became the commander of the 'Ever Victorious Army', a foreign mercenary force operating under Li Hongzhang. This force had been created in Shanghai by an American adventurer called Frederick Townsend Ward, who later perished in action fighting the Taiping near Ningpo. Often supported by the pounding of heavy artillery from British gunboats, Gordon helped the Qing to recover many Taiping-occupied cities, the most famous of which was Suzhou. The French performed similar services for the Qing over the recovery of the city of Hangzhou. The Taiping made a grave mistake in attacking the treaty ports, a consequence of their ignorance of the world outside China and of the power politics between the Qing and the foreign powers.

The Taiping's anti-Confucianism, the development of the Xiang Army by Zeng Guofan, and its defeat of the Taiping

Not the least important of the causes of the Taiping's failure lay in the movement's militant anti-Confucianism. This was probably the result of Hong's own failure in passing the state examination, which was based largely on the Confucian classics. Hong never explained the basic philosophical issues he had with Confucianism. In fact, he interpreted the Lord on High (*Shangdi* or *Huang Shangdi)* in Chinese classics as the Christian God, because the Bible translated by Gutslaff used those Chinese terms for God. In the areas of ethics and morality, similarities between these two different worldviews could easily be found. The problem lay in the militantly exclusive monotheism Hong had fastened upon from reading Liang Fa's pamphlets. The worship of the spirits of ancestors and of Confucius himself was therefore idolatry, a crime punishable by death in the Taiping Kingdom. The militant anti-Confucianism of the Taiping that led them to burn the Confucian classics and destroy Confucian temples, and the tablets of Confucius in schools, was

deeply offensive to the scholar-gentry officials. Having witnessed the uselessness of the regular Qing military forces, these scholar-officials strove to create more potent regular armies out of regional militias. Most of them started their career as scholars, not military officers. There was inevitably some trial and error before they were able to bring these powerful new regional forces successfully to the rescue of their cultural heritage against its destruction by the Taiping. In doing so, they destroyed the rebel dynasty, and gave the Qing a new lease of life. Had Hong adopted the tolerant Jesuit attitude towards Confucianism and the traditional Chinese rites, and kept his armies away from the treaty ports, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom might have lasted a few more decades as a rival dynasty to the Qing.

This was not to be the case, thanks to the scholar-officials. Foremost amongst those who led the war against the Taiping was Zeng Guofan, the creator of the Xiang (another word for the Hunan province) Army. Like Hong, Zeng also came from a poor farming family, and struggled with obtaining a good education and passing the state civil service examination. But unlike Hong, Zeng succeeded in getting the highest degree at age twenty-eight and became, as a member of the Hanlin Academy, an official at the court. He was a staunch supporter of the Confucian world order and the dynasty that benefited him.

During 1853, when the Taiping army invaded Hunan, Zeng was sent back to his home province to raise a militia to support the regular Qing forces and fight the rebels. This experience taught him that a new kind of militia, different from the informally gathered and untrained country folk, was needed to save his province, let alone the Qing dynasty, from the Taiping. He and another scholar set about creating from scratch a blueprint for the organization of this new force. Being careful in his choice of the people who made up this force, from commanding officers down to the common soldiers or ‘braves’, he drew up a list of criteria, such as robustness, courage, physical endurance, honesty and so forth for selection and screening of the recruits. Those who were physically strong but did not pass the character test were used as porters or labourers. The elite group of officers were Confucian scholars of sound moral character, who, after being handpicked and nurtured by Zeng, had distinguished themselves in action. Zeng understood the importance of bonding among the soldiers so they would come to aid and rescue one another. He also laid great emphasis on the personal loyalty of the soldiers to their officers and commanders who picked and trained them. Zeng aimed to develop the Xiang Army into a well-trained and strictly disciplined fighting force with high morale. The soldiers were paid so well that that they could send money back to support their families at home, and they retired after a few years on active duty. Their families were on the army register as surety against defection. Like the Taiping, Zeng also believed in winning the hearts and minds of the people through propaganda. Before he launched what one might describe as a war in defence of China’s Confucian

cultural heritage, he issued a proclamation denouncing the ‘bandits of Guangdong and Guangxi’, detailing their crimes.

The presence of many rivers and lakes in his theatre of war prompted him to build a naval force also. Securing a steady stream of revenue for the support of the costly Xiang Army was a challenge to Zeng at the beginning. When the Qing central government authorized the collection of a new 1% transit tax levied on Chinese goods in passing through certain collection points, Zeng was able to rely on this tax to finance his army.

Although the Xiang Army was more of a match for the Taiping than the Qing regular forces, the first few years of its fight against the Taiping were an uphill struggle. Up to 1857, the regime in Nanjing was still the winner in the military competition for the provinces of Hubei, Jiangxi, and Anhui through the control of their major cities. Zeng’s forces gained ascendancy in this region only after the suicidal massacre in the Taiping capital, and Shi Dakai’s defection with over 200,000 seasoned fighters in the middle of 1857. Thereafter, though there was still much seesawing of cities changing hands between the rebel and the government side, Zeng’s strategy of depriving the Taiping of the wealth and supplies from these provinces began to bear fruit after he seized Anqing from the Taiping permanently, after a three-year effort late in 1861. Around this time, the Taiping lost one of its two remaining best commanders, its Heroic King, Chen Yucheng. Chen was about to launch another Northern Expedition, when he was betrayed by one of his subordinates, who delivered him to a Qing general. Chen’s elimination made the task of recovering the rest of Anhui, and the drive to Nanjing, much easier for the Xiang Army. When Li Xiucheng’s plan of expansion to exploit the rich regions east of Nanjing all the way to the coastal cities of Shanghai, Ningbo and Hangzhou floundered, precipitating the entry of the British and the French on the Qing side in the civil war, the situation for the Taiping became critical. In the Spring of 1862, Zeng was able to make a comprehensive plan of tightening the noose around the Taiping capital. The troops under the command of his brother, Zeng Guoquan, closed in on it from the west, Zuo Zongtang from the south, and Li Hongzhang from the east, as well as some other forces, all under his unified command. Nanjing fell on 19 July 1864, after two years of siege by Zeng Guoquan’s forces, who then swept through the city, killing, looting, and setting fire to palaces and houses, and filling the streets with corpses and piles of rubble.

Before the fall of the Heavenly Capital, Hong Xiuquan died of an unknown cause on 1 June 1864, at age fifty-one, after reigning thirteen and a half years. His last decree stated that the ‘time has come for the Heavenly King to go to Heaven to petition the Heavenly Father and Heavenly Elder Brother to preserve the Heavenly Capital’. Six months before his death Li Xiucheng counselled evacuation from Nanjing to a more

defensible place, but Hong would have none of it. Seeing the desperate shortage of food in the city, Li begged Hong to let the people leave, but Hong balked at the suggestion, and ordered his people to live on 'sweet dew' (grass or weeds), emulating the ancient Israelites living on manna from Heaven in the desert. Li nevertheless let as many leave as possible. After the fall of the Nanjing, Li gathered Hong's three sons, one of whom was the sixteen-year-old Junior Lord, Hong's heir, and a group of Taiping dignitaries and soldiers, all disguised as Qing soldiers, to find a way out of the city. When night fell, they slipped out with their horses through a broken section of the wall.

Their escape was soon discovered, and Zeng sent a party to pursue them. Because Li had exchanged his own excellent mount for the decrepit horse of the Junior Lord, he got left behind. After dismounting from his weary horse, he sheltered himself in a ruined temple. Before long he was found by some villagers, who delivered him to the government camp, hoping for rewards. On completing a 36,100-character confession, he was executed on Zeng Guofan's order on 7 August 1864. The Junior Lord's party, escorted by Hong Rengan, escaped temporarily. His group was captured three months later, after going through several provinces, seeking to meet up with other Taiping troops still operating in southern China. Although the young children in his party were spared, the Junior Lord and the other Taiping dignitaries were all executed. Before his death, Hong Rengan wrote several poems and confessional statements. At this point, there were still tens of thousands of Taiping combatants scattered in several southern provinces under various commanding officers. The Xiang Army pressed them hard: some units surrendered en masse, while a few generals fought doggedly on. The military campaign dragged on until the death of the last Taiping general in February 1866, when the Taiping Rebellion finally came to an end.

Consequences and legacies of the Taiping

Of the countless 'peasant' rebellions in China's long history, the Taiping rebellion was the biggest not only in China but also in the world. Because long periods of intensive fighting took place in the most populous region of China, the estimated death toll of twenty million is probably a very conservative figure. According to Chinese sources, the census figure for the total population of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, and Jiangxi provinces was 136,308, 000 in 1850, but it was only 117,138,441 in 1865. Despite immigration into these depopulated provinces after the end of the rebellion, the population in this region did not recover even one hundred years after the cataclysmic event. Beside the loss of lives, the total economic cost to the people caught up in this destructive war was incalculable. The total military expenditure of the Qing in suppressing this rebellion was estimated to be over 200,000,000 taels, which was about five times its annual land tax revenue in the 1840s. It was a major catastrophe and tragedy for nineteenth century China.

Although the Qing dynasty survived - saved by the Chinese scholar-officials turned generals, and the new regional armies they created - power was no longer so heavily concentrated in the hands of the central government. The court made attempts to cut down or disband the regional armies soon after the fall of the Taiping, but it had then to reverse these acts and turn to Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang and Zuo Zongtang, and ask them to pacify the rising Nian (1851-1868) and Panthay (1856-1873) rebellions (see the following section) after the Manchu (Mongol) Banner forces again proved inadequate for this task. Able to control major military forces and having access to local sources of revenues from *Lijin* and the growing maritime customs, these powerful regional officials, though still loyal to the dynasty during the nineteenth century, represented a growing shift in the balance of power between the central government and the regional powerholders, in favour of the latter.

Although the scholar-generals were conservative Confucianists, reaffirming their attachment to the traditional state and culture, particularly after having experienced and put down the challenge of the Taiping heterodoxy, they were also modernizers, having witnessed at close quarters the power of the Western gunboats and artillery against the Taiping. Their 'self-strengthening' movement aimed at preserving China's traditional institutions and values, by the selective adoption of elements that appeared to account for the strength and wealth of the Western nations. They wanted a *fu* (wealthy) and *qiang* (strong) China without having to go through more wide-ranging reforms as Japan was doing, let alone wholesale modernization or Westernization. Their modernization projects, especially those in connection with Li Hongzhang, included building shipyards and armament factories to make modern steamships and weapons, sending a small number of students to Western countries to receive military and naval training, setting up a national telegraph system, and establishing capitalist enterprises with merchant management, particularly in spheres where modern foreign enterprises were undermining traditional Chinese economic activities, as well as some other initiatives. Late Qing reformist Confucian statesmen and scholars (Zhang Zhidong, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao) utilized the concept of *ti-yong* (essence-practical use) to characterize their circumscribed modernization as Chinese learning for essence, and Western learning for practical use.

The Taiping Rebellion further weakened the Qing regarding its capacity to deal with the foreign powers, particularly Britain and France. These nations took the opportunity, when the Qing was at a low point in its struggle against the Taiping, to wage the Second Opium War in 1856, and to extract further concessions from the Qing through the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858 and the Convention of Beijing in 1860 (as discussed earlier). Since the emperor and the Chinese scholar-officials looked upon the Taiping Rebellion as a 'disease of the heart or vital organs', but the Western encroachment as a 'disease of the skin', they chose to give way, and cooperate with these powers to fight the Taiping rather than make a strong stand against

the foreign invaders. The Qing court was itself a liability as regards China's sovereignty and territorial and administrative integrity because it became a hostage to intimidation by Western diplomats, and succumbed all too readily to threats from Western gunboats and artillery. If the Qing had been as determined to fight the invaders from the West as it fought the Taiping, the court could have made a stand by withdrawing to the interior where gunboats could not reach, and doggedly fighting a prolonged land war if necessary. The cost of such a war and the difficulty of suppling a sizeable army so far away might have discouraged foreign aggression. Once such a seriously threatening rebellion got underway, the Qing had no spare capacity or breathing space to fend off the aggressors from overseas. Instead, the Qing became less resistant and more cooperative with the foreign powers.

Was the Taiping a revolutionary movement that bestowed valuable legacies, or inspired future generations of Chinese people? Apart from the novelty of Christianity, a theocracy presiding over a golden age of justice, purity, prosperity, and peace had ancient Chinese roots. The Yellow Turban Rebellion (184-205 CE) had preached a quasi-religious Taiping Dao (The Way of Great Peace) of Daoist inspiration to support a similar ideal world order, which they strove to establish. The organization of the Taiping military institution, which doubled as their civilian government, as well as their system of land tenure - which existed only on paper - were derived from the leaders' knowledge of history and certain classical literature. But borrowing from the past hardly befits a revolutionary movement.

Those who found the Taiping ideal of equality among men attractive might have become disillusioned, considering the carefully structured hierarchy in their officialdom, which was elevated high above those whom they governed. Theirs was by no means a classless society. However, women did fare better under Taiping rule, for they were allowed to take the civil service examination, hold office, bear arms, and have the same share of land as men. Moreover, foot binding was not allowed. Because the cause failed, these improvements did not become a permanent legacy under the Qing. It might have inspired future movements to improve the position of women in China. But their practice of polygamy, though only those with kingly rank were entitled to this privilege, was a step backward. By limiting commercial activities to take place outside the gates of their cities, they turned their cities into forts. This seemed another backward step, though the ideology of the Taiping was more positive towards merchants and trade than the entrenched Confucian attitude on this subject. Their abolition of private property was a radical communistic type of experiment, but the people's communes in Maoist China, where rural families pooled their land and other resources, and shared the fruits of their labour, arose out of different needs and circumstances. These experiments were ephemeral. As institutions, they had neither historical roots, nor popular appeal in China.

Hong Rengan's modernizing reforms were mostly unimplemented plans on paper, better known to historians than politicians or reformers.

It was nothing new to whip up anti-Manchu ethnic sentiment of the Hans, considering that the Triad society was doing the same. However, Hong Xiuquan's stance against Manchu rule apparently became transformed into the nationalism of the great Chinese patriot and revolutionary leader, Sun Yatsen (1866-1924), who came from the same region in Guangdong province as Hong. As a young boy, Sun proclaimed himself as Hong Xiuquan the Second.

Although the Taiping religion incorporated important elements of Christian beliefs and practices, it was significantly different from mainstream Christianity in the West as represented by Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. Since converting the Chinese to Christianity had been such an uphill battle, some Western missionaries and Christians in China welcomed the Taiping movement as a rare opportunity to Christianize China at a stroke. This was particularly the case during its initial successful phase between 1853 and 1855. Many wrote favourably about the Taiping, and published articles and books, as well as letters to the North China Herald, a treaty port press, to arouse the sympathy of their countrymen and the support of their governments for the Taiping cause, despite the 'errors' they had discovered in the Taiping Christianity.

On closer scrutiny, during and after the 1860s, though a few continued to think well of the Taiping, some of those who had been formerly pro-Taiping expressed their disappointment, and new voices hostile to the movement came to the fore. Some Westerners suspected that the leaders of the Taiping were imposters, and their 'fake religion' was used by the leaders to further their political ambition to overthrow the Manchu dynasty, and perhaps to gain foreign sympathy as well. Hong's claim to be God's son and the younger brother of Jesus, and Yang's claim of speaking for God when he was possessed by the Holy Ghost, appeared shockingly blasphemous to these people. They also found Hong's presumption of being the sovereign of all nations deeply offensive. When the Western powers abandoned their neutrality and joined the Qing to attack the Taiping, they had the blessings of many of their missionaries.

Despite having lost many foreign sympathizers, the Taiping had steadfast foreign advocates and friends, even after the movement was crushed. Notable among these were Thomas T. Meadows, a translator of the British Foreign Service, and August Lindley. Meadows' *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*, and Lindley's writings remain valuable sources for those interested in accounts which had first-hand connection and involvement with the movement.

Because the movement failed, China did not become transformed into a Christian nation, however imperfect Taiping Christianity may have seemed from the point of view of orthodox Western Christian establishments. There was yet another negative legacy of this movement after its suppression during the late Qing. As a heterodox religion hated by the Qing officials and the gentry, the Christianity of the Taiping, though more Protestant than Catholic, was ironically linked in the minds of these people with Catholicism, because it was translated into Chinese as Tian Zhu Jiao (Heavenly Lord Sect). Although the Qing government was forced officially to tolerate and legalize the Catholic Church and its missionary activities, not just at the treaty ports but all over China, after its treaties with France in 1844 and 1858, the Qing authorities were not able to contain public fury whipped up by Chinese conservatives, which sometimes led to persecution against French Catholic missionaries and Chinese Catholics, with dire consequences.

Jumping forward into our own era, although the Communist government of China is officially atheist, it has settled on a policy of permitting the people of China, whether as members of the Han majority or of an ethnic minority, to believe and practice major religious faiths, such as Buddhism (including the Tibetan Lamaist variety of Buddhism), Daoism, Christianity, including Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and the Eastern Orthodox variety, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam. The Chinese authorities seem to find the mainstream orthodox expressions of these faiths easier to accommodate than new offshoots like the more fundamentalist Christian 'house churches'. The Falun Gong was considered subversive, because it resembles the kind of heterodox underground religions, like the White Lotus Sect, the Triads or the Heaven and Earth Society, and the Taiping Christianity, which had tended to destabilize the existing social or political order in China during the last two thousand years. However, contemporary left-wing historians writing from mainland China and Hong Kong find the Taiping praiseworthy, because they regard the movement as a glorious peasant revolution that, irrespective of its failure, left a commendable anti-feudal and anti-imperialist legacy in the history of China.

Other uprisings: the Nian and Panthay rebellions

Around the time of the Taiping rebellion the Qing was threatened by other rebellions, of which the three most serious will be discussed here. The first was the Nian Rebellion (1851-1868) that erupted in Northern China in the same year as the Taiping declared the establishment of their Heavenly Kingdom, although the two movements were not connected at that point. Unlike the Taiping, the Nian had no religious affiliation, socio-economic ideology, strategic goal, or political organization. They did not have a unified command until 1856, when the separate groups elected a leader to coordinate their forces to strengthen themselves

against the Qing. Their origin could be traced back to the 1790s, to groups of bandits roaming in the poverty-stricken border region of several provinces lying north of the flood-prone Huai River. Historically, marshy junctions of provinces were favourite hideouts of outlaws, because they were a no-man's land in terms of law enforcement. Their name, Nian, is likely to have been derived from the torches made from twisted paper, which they carried to rob people at night. Most of them resorted to banditry out of severe economic distress. The late Qing administrative decline led to neglect on flood control work along the Huai and the Yellow rivers, a situation that resulted in more frequent flooding, and crises in the economic situation and physical survival of the people of the areas concerned. By the 1850s, small bands of bandits had coalesced into large armies that rose up in rebellion against the Qing. In 1855, the rebel forces were boosted by the victims of the great flood brought about by the Yellow River breaking its dikes around Kaifeng, and dramatically changing its course of exit into the sea from south to north.

Although the total number of seasoned Nian warriors was not large, ranging from around 30,000 to 50,000, their mobile armies of mixed infantry and cavalry forces, equipped with long spears, swords, and some firearms, wrought havoc by raiding and looting the towns and villages over large, populated areas between Beijing and Nanjing. Many threatened villages fortified themselves and organized militias for self-defence. The Nian also established fortified villages to retreat into after their foraging activities. The united Nian rebels were more than a match for the regular Qing forces sent against them. They developed a kind of guerrilla warfare, whereby they would lead their enemy on a long chase, sometimes over several provinces, and then induce their pursuers to split up into smaller units in some difficult terrain, where they would regroup and pick off their exhausted and divided opponents one unit at a time with overwhelming forces. The Qing found the mobility and guerrilla tactics of the Nian very difficult to deal with. In 1860 when Sengge Rinchen took over the suppression of this rebellion, his formidable Manchu and Mongol cavalry struck hard at the rebels and had the upper hand for a few years. From around this time, the Nian and the Taiping rebels, being both pressed hard by the Qing, sometimes joined forces with one another to fight against their common enemy. In 1865, even Sengge Rinchen and his cavalry were brought down; he himself and most of his men were killed, and five thousand of his company's horses were captured by the Nian using their guerrilla strategy.

After Sengge Rinchen's death, the court ordered Zeng Guofan, the victor against the Taiping, to suppress the Nian. Because he had been obliged, by the jealousy of the Manchu court, to disband the best of his Xiang Army, Zeng had to use the Huai (or Anhui) Army, which had been recruited and trained by Li Hongzhang, whose native province was Anhui (also known as Huai because this river ran across the north of the province). Zeng gave this job to Li in 1886, after he found that, among many obstacles that stood in

his way to success, perhaps the most serious was the difficulty of commanding the loyalty of the officers of the Huai Army. Li also found it hard to pin down and destroy the Nian rebels, who 'moved as freely as mercury' over a large area. Being reduced to waging a slow and patient war of attrition, and by making artillery, guns, and gunboats purchased from the West available to his loyal, well-paid, and well-equipped force, Li was able to overpower the Nian survivors, after having driven them to Shandong, and to bring the rebellion to an end in August 1688.

The two other major upheavals involved Muslims in China's southwest and northwest. The Muslims were a major group of ethnic minorities in China. Those in the southwest grew in number during the Mongol Yuan dynasty and settled in the province of Yunnan. There were also large Muslim settlements in China's northwest, spreading over the provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang. These were descendants of mixed marriages between the Chinese and merchants of Islamic faiths, mostly Arabs and Persians, who came to China over the Silk Road through the Central Asian land routes as early as the Tang (618-907 CE). Some also came by sea and settled in some of the coastal cities in south China. It was these Central Asians who brought Islam to China. To their secular Chinese neighbours, these Muslims were known as *Hui* people, many of whom shared a common surname, Ma. A separate group of ethnic minority Muslims, who settled mainly in Xinjian, were the Uighurs, a Turkish people whose military exploits were well-known in the Tang.

Qing administrative decline and economic distress also affected these ethnic minority communities in the southwest and northwest of China. As ethnic minorities, they had the additional grievance of being discriminated against by the Sino-Manchu authorities. In 1856, the smouldering resentment of the Muslims in Yunnan against the heavy burdens of land taxes and other exactions by the Qing, burst into flames of revolt after clashing violently with the Chinese gentry and officials over rights to the exploitation of gold mines. This was known as the Panthay rebellion (1856-1873). Many rallied to the standard of Du Wenxiu (1823-1872), a local leader of the insurrection, who proclaimed himself as Sultan Suleyman of the Kingdom of the Pacified South (*Pingnan Guo*), with Dali as its capital, after his army captured many cities and overran half the province of Yunnan. Du's ethnically inclusive regime, which included Chinese and Li minorities holding top level military posts, had the support of the people of Yunnan across ethnic lines. It was also popular because the government was actively trying to develop the economy of Yunnan. After several military setbacks at the hands of Du's forces, the Qing tried to induce him to surrender, which he refused to do. Du sent overtures to Shi Dakai when the Taiping general's forces marched into southwest China, but logistic difficulties prevented them from joining together to fight the Qing. After the fall of Shi

and the Taiping, the Qing was able to muster greater forces against Du, whose revolt came to an end after the fall of Dali in 1872.

The Muslim Dungan Revolt in northwest China (1862-1873) was not connected with the turmoil in Yunnan; rather, it was galvanized by the northward intrusion of a Taiping-Nian army in 1862 into Shaanxi, which was already a tinderbox of ethnic tension between the Chinese and the Muslim communities. The revolt spread to Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Gansu, where the Muslim leaders of insurrections, among whom was the revered religious teacher, Ma Hualong (1810-1871), had built hundreds of forts surrounded by ditches to defend their communities. The Qing had no effective measures, military or political, to restore order among these turbulent Muslims, until Zuo Zongtang, a meritorious veteran of the wars against the Taiping and the Nian, was given the task of their suppression in 1868.

Zuo planned his military campaign carefully for the long haul, after obtaining valuable advice from Lin Zexu (who as the reader may recall had been exiled to Xinjiang for several years after he had triggered the Opium War with the burning of opium), and another scholar, who had served Lin and had settled in the northwest. Zuo was also able to tap into the knowledge he had acquired in China's northwest, and on farming through an earlier association. Because of the difficulty of obtaining supplies over the long distance to the troubled areas, Zuo planted crops and established military farms to supply his soldiers with food and their horses with fodder, in addition to building an arsenal in the city of Lanzhou to produce arms for his well-trained soldiers. When he was ready, he applied his well-laid plan to the toughest of the four groups of rebels, who were those under Ma Hualong. After Ma's base at Jinjibao was put under siege for sixteen months, Ma was forced by mass starvation to surrender. To strike terror into the hearts of other rebel leaders, Ma Hualong and his son were punished by being subjected to the cruel 'death by a thousand cuts' form of execution, and many of his top aides were also put to death, while his followers were settled elsewhere, 'never to return'. Zuo applied similar tactics successfully to all the other Muslim rebel groups except those in Xinjiang, and by 1873, apart from a unit of about 2,000 who escaped further west with their families to Kyrgyzstan, the remaining rebels either surrendered or lost their lives.

After Zuo's victorious campaigns, there were still certain pockets of Xinjiang outside Qing control. Several Muslim Khans of this region had rebelled against the Qing periodically since the mid-1820s. Jahangir Khoja (?1788-1828), whose forebears had ruled Kashgar before the Manchu conquest, led an army from Kokand, a Khanate west of the border of Xinjiang, to invade this and other oasis cities in western Xinjiang in 1827. The Qing managed to subdue Jahangir's invasion and the insurrections in 1847 and 1857.

During the 1860s, several ambitious local leaders, taking advantage of Qing preoccupation with other rebellions, declared themselves kings or sovereigns of the pockets of territory under their control, in defiance of the Qing. To strengthen his rule, the 'king' of Kashgar asked the neighbouring state of Kokand for military support. In 1865, Yaqub Beg (1820-1877), a princely relative of the ruler of Kokand, came with an army which, by 1870, occupied all of southern and a part of northern Xinjiang, where he ruled as an independent Khanate. Since both Russia and Britain were interested in expanding territorially into this region, both recognized Beg's regime to weaken the position of the Qing. In 1871, Russia invaded Ili in northern Xinjiang, and signed a commercial treaty with Beg's government the following year. In 1873, in competition with Russia, Britain sent an embassy of 300 strongmen to Kashgar, with gifts of military weapons, such as guns and small cannons, and concluded a treaty with this regime.

Beg's rule was not popular with the local people. He and his supporters imposed Central Asian institutions on this region, whereby they concentrated landholding in the hands of the ruling elites, who extracted taxes and labour services from their subjects at will, without written regulations. They also imposed Sharia law, enforced by Islamic courts and religious officials, who were at liberty to whip women who did not veil their faces on the street, and to punish severely those who infringed upon any religious regulations in the slightest way. Non-Muslims who refused to convert to Islam were put to death. Many rose up in revolt against this harsh regime and waited anxiously for rescue to come from the Qing.

At the Qing court, which was trying to deal with the Japanese invasion of Taiwan in 1874 (to be discussed later), there was a heated debate on whether the government should concentrate its limited financial and military resources on defending the east coast or on the far northwest. Li Hongzhang, who was the most powerful Chinese official after the death of Zeng Guofan in 1872, argued strongly in favour of defending the coast, where he had a strong power base after building a fleet of modern gunboats and a naval force at Fuzhou. He was even prepared to abandon Xinjiang. Zuo Zongtang pleaded for retrieving Xinjiang from the aggressor, and he persuaded the court to secure a foreign loan with the help of the Inspector General of MCS, Robert Hart, for defraying the military cost. In 1875, Zuo was authorized by the court to proceed with a military campaign against Beg. On his arrival in Xinjiang, the Uighurs and other ethnic communities greeted him with offerings of food and horses. Zuo's forces repeatedly defeated Beg, who killed himself in 1877. By 1878, Zuo had recovered all of Xinjiang apart from Ili, which had been under Russian occupation since 1781.

After bringing peace to Xinjiang, Zuo tried to reorganize government administration, reform the system of taxation, and retore the economic health of this war-ravaged region. To the returning refugees, he provided food, seeds, and animals, to get agricultural production going. He also developed civilian and military agricultural colonies in Xinjiang. In 1884, the Qing court adopted Zuo's proposal to make Xinjiang a province, providing it with regular civilian administration. Subsequently, the Qing introduced many projects for developing the education, communication, and the economy of this new province, which is now known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

References for the Qing will be found at the end of chapter 7.