



## Footnotes

## The Newsletter of FPRI's [Wachman Center](#) China's Encounter with the West: A History Institute for Teachers

By Trudy Kuehner, Reporter

On March 1-2, 2008, FPRI's [Wachman Center](#) presented a weekend of discussion on [China's Encounter with the West](#) for 45 teachers from 21 states across the country, held at and co-sponsored by the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Asia Program. Additional participants logged in for the webcast from around the country and the world. See [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org) for videocasts and texts of lectures. The Wachman Center's [History Institute for Teachers](#) is co-chaired by [David Eisenhower](#) and [Walter A. McDougall](#). Core support is provided by The Annenberg Foundation; additional support for specific programs is provided by W.W. Keen Butcher, Bruce H. Hooper, John M. Templeton, Jr., the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. The next history weekends are [America in the Civil War Era](#), May 17-18 (Kenosha, WI); [What Students Need To Know About America's Wars, Part I: 1622-1919](#), July 26-27 (Wheaton, IL); and [Teaching the History of Innovation](#), October 18-19 (Kansas City, MO).

### China's Early Encounters with the West: A History in Reverse

**Andrew Wilson** of the U.S. Naval War College explained how the image of a weak backward China adrift in a modern world, bullied by Western powers, dominates China's historical memory and national identity. Its early encounters with the West are viewed through the prism of the Qing Dynasty's (1644-1911) nineteenth-century humiliations, exemplified by a series of Western military victories enshrined in "unequal treaties." But in China's earliest encounters with the West, the Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing held the economic, technological, and military advantages. Both of these narratives—China as the "Sick Man of Asia" and China as a regional hegemon—need to be understood.

The fall of the Qing in 1911-12 was the result of a series of body blows to China's power, key among them the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1900, a foreign relations blunder for the Qing, which incited it by blaming flood and famine in North China on Western rail and telegraph lines that were disrupting the region's fengshui. After the rebellion was suppressed by foreign intervention, the Qing court was made to accept permanent garrisons of foreign troops in the capital and along the routes between Beijing and the sea.

Other defeats included a war with Japan in 1894-95 over China's traditional sphere of influence in Korea that ended in Japanese victories on land and sea and the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki, in which China lost control of Taiwan, Korea, Manchuria, the lower Yangzi region, the Southeast coast, Burma, and Tibet. That war was preceded by the loss of another traditional buffer, Vietnam to French control in the Sino-French War of 1884-5. There had also been the Arrow War (1856-60), or Second Opium War, which ended when a combined Franco-British army invaded Beijing, forced the imperial family to flee, burned the Summer Palace, and imposed a punitive settlement on the Qing. These defeats and humiliating concessions began with the Opium War of 1839-42, occasioned when Qing authorities tried to halt the British opium trade that was draining its silver. The 1842 Treaty of Nanjing opened four additional ports, ceded Hong Kong, and set the model for all subsequent treaties. The defeat called into question whether a China-centered balance-of-power system could survive.

And yet in 1799, at the end of Emperor Qianlong's reign, the empire stretched from Mongolia to the borders of Vietnam, Taiwan to Central Asia. Qianlong was the most powerful monarch of the eighteenth century, and the Qing the most powerful land power of the age and most sophisticated state to that point in history. But Qianlong failed to foresee that Great Britain would emerge from the Napoleonic Wars capable of projecting the military and economic power that would so weaken the Qing's gravitational pull.

Even back in the sixteenth century, the Chinese state, then ruled by Han Chinese, thought very much like Qianlong.

Europeans made their first forays into East Asian waters in the early sixteenth century and by the 1580s had established extensive trading enclaves. They were drawn there because China was driving the world economy and because they now had the European and American silver to pay for Chinese luxury goods. But they were still far from being great Western powers. They were bit players in a regional drama that culminated in the the Imjin War (1592–98) between Ming China, its Korean ally (the Choson dynasty) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Japan. This was the first globalized war, and the ultimate victor was Ming China.

China today is no longer a failed state, nor is it a regional hegemon. Its economic pull is powerful, but it has neither the hard nor the soft power that the high Qing or the late Ming states enjoyed. But whereas Qianlong and the late Ming viewed their empire as at the apex of the family of nations, Chinese today have been conditioned to see China as a victim and to view with skepticism rosy projections of the benefits of further relaxing what we view as anachronistic claims of sovereignty and authoritarianism.

## Political Ideas

**Edward Friedman** of the University of Wisconsin explained China's tradition of borrowing, including political ideas. When China first rose, around 450 CE, it borrowed a great deal from its south: wet rice from Cambodia, shipbuilding from the Malays, fabric dyes from India. But China in the sixteenth century began to focus more in a continental direction, moving away from the oceans. By taking itself out of interaction, China made itself backwards, vulnerable to even a small island country like Britain.

The Chinese view of its history turns on the Opium War: it was doing wonderfully, but was weakened by the capitalist imperialists. Confronted by the industrializing nation-state, China froze a certain vision of its past as its tradition. China today believes that it is again becoming the glorious power it supposedly always was owing to its superior Confucian culture and tradition.

Friedman warned against thinking in categories that pit an ancient, deeply rooted "tradition" against an alien, imported Western "freedom." Since the late nineteenth century, many Chinese have risked their lives to try to bring freedom to China, including in the June 1989 Tiananmen massacre.

China's entrenched interests inveigh against constitutional governance as alien Westernization and have a large stake in our equating democracy with the West. But political liberties are not alien to Asian cultures: Japan modernized without surrendering its culture, as have Taiwan and South Korea. Actually, more people enjoy democracy in Asia than in any other world region. The notion of Western democracy comes out of the Cold War, in which the CCP got its idea that democracy was a Western evil, a dictatorship of capitalist imperialists. Chinese are taught to identify it with problems in Kosovo, Lebanon, Hamas, and India. Most politically conscious Chinese seem persuaded that Chinese authoritarianism is rooted in deep Chinese tradition and is the source of China's rise. "Chineseness" keeps out an immoral West of divorce, abandoning elderly parents, and the spreading of HIV/AIDS.

It is therefore difficult to imagine the Beijing regime democratizing in any foreseeable future. Neither of the country's two political camps—the economic reformists and left conservatives (or right populists)—is promoting democracy. The economic reformers will likely keep on winning in a relatively stable China, but they will do so by making huge side payments to the left conservatives, including continued military budget gains. If the economic reformers do not hold onto power, the left conservatives' agenda will win out, not alien Western democracy.

## Economic Influence

**Thomas Rawski** of the University of Pittsburgh recalled that in the 1960s, the China development literature focused on two themes, both of which were mistaken: (1) that participation in the international marketplace was unlikely to help poor countries develop; and (2) that China's culture and social structure were inimical to development.

China was already becoming an important factor in the world economy in the late sixteenth century, when the discovery of the New World and its silver led to a price revolution in Europe. Chinese traders were willing to pay much higher prices for the silver than the Europeans, and most of the Mexican silver ended up in China, where it fueled economic expansion.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the unequal treaty system imposed a free trade regime on China, which was required to allow more or less unlimited trade in commodities and then foreign investment. China's opening led to price integration. By the end of the 1880s, the price of rice in Shanghai, for example, was linked to the price of rice all up and down the Yangtze River Valley, and also linked to the international price. This tied everybody in the Yangtze River area, anybody who grew, ate, or traded in rice, into the international system. The kind of commodities China was able to sell into the international market under this forced free trade regime were low in price and labor intensive, such as tea and silk. So this trade increased demand for China's labor, shifting the economy's production structure in the labor-using direction.

Notwithstanding the country's long history of scientific and technological accomplishment, the Industrial Revolution took longer to get to China than to Japan because, unlike the population of a small island country like Japan, most of which (e.g., the founder of Toyota) lived near enough to treaty ports to be exposed to new ideas, most Chinese had little chance to find out about new technologies, living in inland places beyond their reach. Moreover, the Chinese government lacked the resources to devote to development.

The republican period saw considerable foreign investment and the extension of telegraph and railroads, which reduced the communication costs on trade. There was also dramatic change prior to World War II in the monetary sector, a shift from metallic to paper currency, which cut transaction costs. During the Depression, Chinese banks were so successful in persuading people to hold banknotes rather than silver that the Chinese money did not decline, despite massive outflows of silver, and China experienced no monetary contraction.

When the ROC established its headquarters in Taiwan in 1949, it sought to build its economy by avoiding international trade and instead pursuing self-reliant development. But then in the late 1950s a group of academics persuaded the Taiwan government to participate in the international economy. This was such a success, the idea of taking advantage of rather than hiding from globalization spread across Asia, most recently to China, with enormously beneficial results.

The economic boom in China over the last thirty years is a major event in global economic history. China has grown faster over these years than even Japan in its high-growth period. China is well aware of the enormous shift in its economic, technological, security, and diplomatic power given its boon. Expanding its military accordingly is part of its plan, and the community of nations will have to adjust to this. Because China depends on economic growth for stability and legitimacy, and because its economic growth is deeply linked to the global economy, its policymakers are more inclined to cooperate than to look for conflict. This creates opportunities for leaders of China's trade and diplomatic partners.

## Legal Learning

**Jacques deLisle**, director of FPRI's Asia Program and Professor of Law at the University of Pennsylvania, explained how in China's legal encounter with the West, there were frictions as early as 1800, when a British gunner fired a salute and accidentally hit some Chinese ships, killing a few Chinese. China, fearing that the gunner would not be punished, demanded that he be handed over; they then strangled him. This was the beginning of Western rejection of subjection to the Chinese legal system.

The West included in its unequal treaties of the nineteenth century the creation of "foreign" courts for cases involving foreigners. With China forced open and under pressure to reform its legal system, many Chinese recognize the weaknesses in their system, and Chinese intellectuals started seriously studying Western law. The West, however, did not feel that China rated international law even if it studied it. Only the club of civilized, "Christian nations" were fit to enjoy the rights of sovereign states under international law. In any event, the notion emerged in China that there was something about constitutional governance that explained the West's power and that the sovereignty of the emperor could be reconciled with things borrowed from the West.

Missions were sent out to the West to study the way things were done, and a Qing constitution was put in place to save the country from the dire straits into which it had fallen. Finally, after the fall of the Qing comes revolutionary change in the person of Sun Yatsen. Sun did not feel that the Chinese were quite ready for democracy. While a constitution had been passed, it was thought that the country needed a period of tutelary democracy. That notion of a good set of laws on the books but a sense of being unready to implement them arguably still has resonance today. Mao, who founded the

PRC, borrowed a great deal from the West, too, but more often from the Soviet Union. It is a notion of governance that accepts mass input, but citizens don't have many rights or claims against the state.

Since the reform era began in 1979, China has had assistance from the UN and NGOs on administrative procedure, contract law, securities law, company law, and intellectual property law. There are constant flows of legal delegations between Chinese and Western jurists. The diffusion of Western legal ideas is also aided by joint legal programs with Western schools. Another important channel is Hong Kong, which still has a British-style legal system that interacts on a daily basis with the Chinese legal system. Law firms are another channel, since most large Western firms now have offices in Shanghai and/or Beijing.

Other important ways information gets in include the media, especially the internet, and through China's undertaking international legal obligations (e.g., in the WTO) to change its domestic laws. After many years of rejecting international human rights as a Western plot, China has signed on to the idea that there are universal human rights. It has signed the International Covenant for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. China's constitution now ensures freedom of speech and assembly, religion, from unreasonable search and seizure. (Still, under Chinese law, one can, for example, be detained without trial for three years.)

Foreign law also gets in through domestic legal mechanisms designed to attract foreign capital, or when Chinese firms go outside China to seek capital. Listing on the NYSE or HKSE requires conformance to their law on transparency, reporting, and company structure issues (though these can be undermined by establishing subsidiaries). Similarly, trade consequences lead to backward pressure into China to change its laws to conform to other countries' domestic laws.

There are also indirect pressures on China to strengthen its environmental laws, with its pollution going over to Korea, and even Hong Kong on bad days. SARS led to pressure on China to strengthen its public health law. Finally, as Chinese parties litigate and sue abroad, they learn and adapt to outside laws.

China has a strong notion of sovereignty that is non-interference in other states' domestic, political, legal and human rights systems. There is now talk of a Beijing consensus—a market-oriented, politically authoritarian, not terribly human rights regarding, opaque state system. This sells well in some African countries and elsewhere. That has part of the success of China's recent diplomacy, which has now been cast as a quest for a harmonious world.

## Taiwan and Hong Kong

**Nancy Bernkopf Tucker** of Georgetown University explained why Taiwan and Hong Kong have always been crucial symbols of China's emergence as a strong state in the international system, fundamental to the CCP's legitimacy and a continuing challenge to China's nationalism and its potential as a great power. To China, so long as Hong Kong and Taiwan remain beyond its control, its century of humiliation at the hands of Westerners is not over.

The territories of Taiwan and Hong Kong became pawns in the struggle between China and the West early on, but not until the West arrived in force in the mid-nineteenth century did they constitute a danger to China's development. The treaty that ended the Opium War gave to the British Hong Kong island, at that time a barren outcrop. That territory was supplemented in 1860 by the Kowloon Peninsula, and then in 1898 by a 99-year lease on the New Territories. Acquisition of the New Territories, which make up about 90 percent of Hong Kong's territory, made it possible for Hong Kong to survive.

China found itself increasingly vulnerable to foreign incursions. Even worse, London managed to use Hong Kong's extraordinary harbor to undermine the livelihood of cities like Huangjo along the coast, and then turned it into a political refuge for those who sought to overthrow China's government. At the end of the century, foreign greed led to a "scramble for concessions," partitioning China into spheres not effectively controlled from the center. This encouraged Japan to seek security by projecting its own strength through territorial acquisition. In 1894-5, Japan waged a spectacularly successful war against China, as a result of which Taiwan became part of the Japanese empire.

Hong Kong and Taiwan would remain in foreign hands well into the twentieth century. Hong Kong survived as a Western enclave dependent for water and food on China but ruled as a colony from London, host to a multinational

expatriate community, both a military base and a center for espionage for the West. China had no choice but to permit this: in 1965 alone China earned \$500 million in foreign exchange from trade carried on through Hong Kong. And so China bided its time.

When the end of the 99-year lease was approaching, the British, not fully understanding Hong Kong's symbolic significance, believed the Chinese might be willing to leave Hong Kong in their hands. But the Chinese insisted upon ending that relationship. The 1984 Sino-British agreement rolled back British control. China implemented a policy of one country, two systems, which originally was intended to facilitate unification with Taiwan but which it decided to put into effect vis-à-vis Hong Kong. Hong Kong became a special administrative region of China, ostensibly autonomous, its foreign relations and defense policy in Chinese hands but internal affairs under local control. Democracy has not been eliminated, but it has been much delayed—the first direct election of the chief executive is expected to occur no sooner than 2017.

In Taiwan, when the Japanese were ousted in 1945, Americans became the decisive force on the island. Taiwan became home to what Beijing would consider a rump regime protected by capitalist enemies. Washington and Taipei work together cautiously and distrustfully, but nevertheless, this wary partnership has managed to keep China at bay decade after decade.

In 1982, under pressure from China to stop selling Taiwan arms, the U.S. came to an agreement with the mainland but also gave Taiwan six security assurances. Taiwan of course also had become a democracy, which came as a rude surprise to China, as did the resilience of Taiwanese and the continued power of Taiwan's military. Over the past decades, as a distinct Taiwanese identity has evolved, China's leaders have rallied people on the mainland in demonstrations against changes in Taiwan. China has sought to intimidate, divide and conquer, and even to bribe Taiwan's people into renouncing independence. It has fired missiles in Taiwan's direction, passed an anti-secession law, and passed trade deals aimed specifically at commerce, agriculture, industry, in the southern part of Taiwan, the stronghold of pro-independence forces, thereby sending a warning to Taiwanese not to support pro-independence parties, if they want continued prosperity.

Taiwan remains the only important irredentist issue that continues to roil Chinese nationalism. Whether Taiwan is eventually absorbed, remains separate, or becomes independent, and how that result is achieved, could end up triggering the first hot war between nuclear armed great powers. Much as Americans might say, "That's crazy, why would we want to go to war over Taiwan?" it's very possible. We should all be thinking about that and teaching students why this is an important problem that they need to understand if we are to avoid that future.

## Changing Security Relationships

**Warren I. Cohen** of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, observed that while Chinese elites have long spoken about the century of humiliation, the years in which their country was plagued by foreign imperialists, they speak less of the humiliations they inflicted on their neighbors over thousands of years of building their empire, in which effort the Chinese were no less ruthless than the Europeans, Japanese, or Americans in the creation of theirs. There is no reason to expect China now to act any less ruthlessly than have other great powers over the millennia.

China's GNP is expected to surpass that of the U.S. by mid-century, and China intends to become a great power and to achieve preeminence in East Asia. Most analysts project that China's ascent will stay on track, but it may not. There is massive dissatisfaction in the countryside with corruption, rural youth are poorly educated, inequality is pronounced, and demographic and environmental problems are growing, as are problems of tainted food, water, and medicine. China also faces rising labor costs as foreign-owned factories move to Vietnam, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, where they can find still cheaper labor.

The odds are that the government will prevail, but with declining legitimacy because of the corruption and inequality. It has a monopoly on force and has demonstrated its willingness to use it, and it has done a good job of controlling the flow of information. In the cities, it offers national pride, material benefits, and social freedom beyond comprehension 15-20 years ago in exchange for its continued rule.

China will not in our lifetimes have a military capable of challenging the U.S. Nonetheless, the enormous buildup of

Chinese submarine forces is worrisome. It is clearly targeted at the U.S. in case of a conflict over Taiwan. In the mid-1990s, Chinese leaders, especially Jiang Zemin, made stable U.S. relations their highest priority, since they needed the American market and U.S. technology. That strategy was sorely tested in 1999. First, President Clinton mishandled Chinese efforts to enter the WTO. Then NATO attacked Serbia during the Kosovo crisis, which the Chinese perceived as a precedent for U.S. interference in sovereign states' affairs. Then came NATO's accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, which many Chinese will never believe was an accident. All of this prompted intense debate within China over its foreign policy. In the end, Jiang prevailed, and when the next crisis occurred (in April 2001, when a U.S. spy plane collided with a Chinese interceptor), his policy survived again. After 9/11, the improvement in relations between Sino-U.S. accelerated. The Chinese were happy to join the war on terror, particularly since the U.S. was going to include Uighurs in Xinjiang among the terrorists to which it was opposed.

Current U.S.-China relations are the best they have been in years. China wants to appear to be a responsible stakeholder in the international community. There are indications that it is willing to abide by international norms, if they can be convinced that these are really international and not simply American norms. There are two flashpoints that could lead to disaster: Taiwan and Japan. However, the likely winner of Taiwan's presidential election this month, Ma Ying-jeou, is determined to ease tensions between Taiwan and the PRC, and tensions between China and Japan seem to be easing, despite historical issues going back to Japan's World War II atrocities, energy competition, and territorial disputes. There has never before been a time when both Japan and China were strong simultaneously, and shots could be fired between Japanese and Chinese ships and planes. The U.S. would then have no choice but to support its ally.

In East Asia, China is already challenging U.S. dominance. It is too early to tell the direction of Lee Myung-bak, the new president of South Korea, which was sliding rapidly out of the U.S. orbit. But after all the years in which the U.S. was the dominant force, it is now the Chinese who call the shots there. China's optimal goal is for the U.S. to retreat from East Asia, so it can seize control of Taiwan and intimidate Japan. For the time being, it will settle for America's exerting more pressure on Taiwan and Japan. While Beijing's current emphasis remains China's peaceful rise, this is almost certainly tactical. If the history of great powers and China is any indicator, a more powerful China will become more aggressive in Asia.

Even if China holds together and continues its economic growth, it will not become a democratic country, and China's government will not come to respect human rights. We will see the perpetuation of an authoritarian state, an alternative model to Western democracy. The U.S. and China are not friends, but nor are they adversaries. There will continue to be tensions over events in Taiwan and human rights, but that is the world in which we live.

## The 2008 Olympics

In panel discussion, first Dr. Friedman discussed how, as the August 2008 Beijing Olympics approach, attention is drawn to pollution and human rights problems. The CCP is investing tremendous resources to contain these, and is devoted to making these Olympics a success.

Dr. deLisle compared the two different stories China is presenting the world with the Olympics. First is the happy narrative of a prosperous, normal, globalized, orderly, and harmonious China, making its debut in the international equivalent of a debutante ball, as Seoul did in 1960 and Tokyo did in 1964. Like Munich, Tokyo and Rome before it, it will show its comeback from disaster (Tiananmen). But there is also a darker, nationalist narrative. China has returned from old humiliations and is owed its due. While all will likely go well, the influx of journalists could humiliate the regime as groups like Falun Gong and Tibetans take the opportunity to gain attention.

**Zibin Guo**, an associate professor of anthropology at UT-Chattanooga and a medical anthropologist by training, recounted his work with the Chinese Olympic committee toward including a demonstration of Wushu Tai Chi for the disabled in the opening ceremonies.

Dr. deLisle did not feel the Olympics would be a step toward Chinese democratization, as the Seoul Olympics were for South Korea. The circumstances are different. Symbolically, they will make it safer for China to engage more deeply with outside world, which will aid idea diffusion. But they will not be transformative.

## Teaching About China and the West

FPRI Fellow **Lucien Ellington**, co-director of the Asia Program at UT-Chattanooga, discussed the historical approach to teaching China. One can focus on the economic dynamism of China and East Asia. Many Americans grow up learning that China was an Oriental despotism, rich at one point in time but now isolated. That was certainly untrue at critical junctures in China's history. He recommended Stewart Gordon's *When Asia was the World: Travelling Merchants, Scholars, Warriors and Monks who created the 'Riches of the East'*; James Watson, ed., *Golden Arches East*; the *Teaching about Asia* Columbia's Asia for Educators, and *Education about Asia's* websites, and John Lott's play for high school students on the important 1793 Qinglong/Lord Macartney meeting.

**Paul Dickler** reminded that the Chinese take a very long view of history—the last one hundred years are considered quite recent history. Teachers can think in terms of several topics: economics, diplomacy, and international relations, politics and cultural transformation (see the essays by Victor Mair, Melanie Manion, and Edward Friedman at [www.fpri.org/education/china/](http://www.fpri.org/education/china/)), geography and geopolitics.

Discussion also touched on how the Wade Giles/PinYang transliteration transition may have intimidated teachers. One can use this as an opportunity to teach students the reasons for the change as China rises. Students also may wish to look at China Google, where they can see how information on the Tiananmen massacre is blocked, or the political uses of the 1937 Nanjing Massacre that killed more than 200,000 Chinese.

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