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IMPERIALISM IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY CHINA (II)

The Unequal Treaty System: Infrastructure of Irresponsible Imperialism

We publish below PROF. TAN CHUNG'S second article in the series 'Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China'. In his first article (CHINA REPORT, vol. xvii, no. 2, March-April 1981), PROF. TAN elaborated Britain's employing opium as a well-calculated mode in her imperialist aggression on 19th-century China, reinforcing his well-known theory of 'opium imperialism'. In the present article, the author focuses attention on the unequal treaties or the 'Treaty System' and develops a new theory of 'Irresponsible Imperialism'. The articles are revised and reorganized versions of class lectures which PROF. TAN has delivered to the M.A. students in history over the years. In our future numbers, we shall publish his remaining articles in this series on Finance Imperialism, Spheres of Influence and the 'Open Door' Policy, and Christian Missionary Activities in China. We welcome discussion on the issues raised by PROF. TAN.—EDITOR

JOSEPH STALIN'S maxim that imperialism is a universal system which exploits all colonies, all races and all nations is included in George Seldes' *The Great Quotations* (New York, 1960), but it finds no place in the memory of Marxist commentators the world over. Was there such a 'universal system' operating in the history of 19th-century China? This is a pertinent question for students who have witnessed enough of the game of hide and seek which learned studies are playing with the concept of imperialism in China. One has to pay due respect to such studies before venturing an answer.

I

The term 'Treaty System' or 'Treaty-Port System' is an invention of Prof. John King

Fairbank, retired maestro of Harvard University, whose other equally famous invention is the term 'Tribute System'. These two systems summarize the Fairbankian perspective of the entire history of China's foreign relations, with the Opium War (1840-42) as the dividing line, and with the Treaty System as the Tribute System's successor or replacement. There is hardly any other specialist on this subject. We must, therefore, pay more attention to Fairbank's writings.

Fairbank is not only a prolific writer, but almost all his writings are studies of Chinese history. Hence they are relevant to our present discussion. His name is associated with two famous books. The first is *East Asia* (first published, Boston, 1965) in collaboration with Edwin O. Reischauer and Albert Craig. The second, *The United States*

and China (first published, Harvard, 1940), which has been constantly revised and perfected with its fourth edition (Harvard, 1979) in current appearance is indeed one of the best short surveys of Chinese history.

Yet, the most important of his books concerning our discussion is still the never-revised monograph *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports 1842-1854* (first published by Harvard University Press in 1953). The book, being a product of the scholar's formative years, is the foundation-stone of the Fairbankian perspective. The edifice raised on this foundation includes 'The Creation of the Treaty System' (in Fairbank [ed.], *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. x, pt. i, 1978); 'Synarchy Under the Treaties' in Fairbank, (ed.), *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, Chicago, 1957; 'Tributary Trade and China's Relations With the West', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, 1:2, 1942; *New Views of China's Tradition and Modernization*, Washington, 1968; and *China Perceived: Images and Policies in Chinese-American Relations*, New York, 1974.

The starting point of the Fairbankian perspective is the 'cultural conflict' between China and the West, which transformed into the contradiction between 'trade' and 'tribute' in the Chinese scene in recent centuries. 'The rub came when the foreign trade expanded and finally... eclipsed tribute entirely' (*Trade and Diplomacy*, p. 33). This is how Fairbank conceives the earth-shaking changes in China's destiny during mid-19th-century. What many others might see as the swallowing of an age-old independent empire by the international monster of imperialism is softly defined as a Sino-western 'rub' between the Chinese obsession of 'tribute' and the western obsession of open-door free trade. What follows logically 'should make it plain', says Fairbank, 'that the treaty system gradually became a basic component of the power structure of the

Chinese state. The westerner in this period was a partner in a Sino-western rule over China, which by degrees came to supplant the Manchu-Chinese synarchy of the Ch'ing [Qing] period' (*Ibid.*, p. 467).

Fairbank further characterizes the new Chinese order, i.e. 'the Treaty System' as a 'new rickshaw-culture', with the bicycle wheel of the rickshaw symbolizing the progressive western civilization, and the coolie power of the rickshaw puller symbolizing the resilient Chinese tradition (*Ibid.*, p. 466). The Treaty System is described as a joint invention of Chinese tradition and western expansion which were mutually complementary. Evidence: western gunboats which exacted concessions from the Chinese government also helped it to suppress piracy. The westerners who enjoyed the material value of China trade much more than their ancient tribute-trade predecessors from Arabia, Persia and other foreign lands, were also driven by their own 'self-interest' to save the moral values of the Manchu rulers in order 'to maintain the shrunken prestige of the regime' (*Ibid.*, p. 465).

A vivid analogy, indeed. Its only weakness lies in the fact that the rickshaw puller was not his own inventor. And who is the rickshaw rider? Here the missing link is too important to ignore, as both the rickshaw wheel and the rickshaw puller exist for the rickshaw rider.

Fairbank seems to think of 19th-century China as cut out for western domination. The intrusion of the westerners not only fell in line with China's historical development, but the new Sino-barbarian ruling system wrought by China's European conquerers was also harmoniously wedded with the Chinese socio-political reality. 'The agrarian-bureaucratic state could be headed by Manchus, and the latter could even be assisted by Anglo-Saxons, so long as the Chinese landlord-scholar-official class retained its customary position' (*Ibid.*, p. 468).

While the Fairbankian perspective hardly threatens to chasten the Prince of Imperialism, it has unmistakably taken Chinese culture as the whipping-boy. This can be detected from Fairbank's confusion over the spirit of equality, or the want of it, in the conclusion of treaties between China and the western powers. Here is a typical observation: 'Although the [post-Opium War] new treaties were signed as between equal sovereign powers, they were actually quite unequal in that China was placed against her will in a weaker position. . . ' (*U.S. and China*, 3rd edn., p. 143). If so, how could China be regarded as an 'equal sovereign power' before the victorious western aggressors at the time when she was forced to sign the treaties by the latter at gun point? But, Fairbank seems to have anticipated this question, and wanted to convince his readers that even though the western powers had an edge over China militarily, they were not quite China's equal in diplomatic manoeuvring in concluding the post-war treaties, so much so that the British 'were less certain how to capitalize' their victories, and 'they found themselves in a diplomatic contest which was more evenly balanced' (*Trade and Diplomacy*, p. 83). How easily said than done that the Chinese could surface themselves as equals in the diplomatic contest every time after they had gone under in the military combat! Later in this essay we shall illustrate how the British diplomats prevailed over their Chinese counterparts at negotiation tables with the same ease as British fighters did in the battlefields.

The fact that Fairbank has used the terms 'Treaty System' and 'Unequal Treaty System' alternately betrays his lack of clarity in mind, which can be further illustrated by comparing two of his observations about the subject: 'The unequal treaty system in China lasted a full century from 1842 to 1943 as a semipermanent form of Western intervention in Chinese life It was also

an East Asian wing of Europe's worldwide hegemony, specially an arm of British informal empire . . . ' (*China Perceived*, p. 86). 'The British were able after the Opium War to set forth a new structure of ideas including such elements as free trade and the equality of states, which were all expressed in the words of the treaties . . . they were far from dominant in the day-to-day situation and could not dictate Chinese action. In fact, the path of progress for the British often lay in a judicious accommodation of Western ways to those of the Middle Kingdom' ('Synarchy', pp. 216-17).

If the Treaty System was a 'semipermanent form of Western intervention in Chinese life', how was it that the intervening forces 'were far from dominant in the day-to-day situation'? If there was British hegemony in China, how could there be 'judicious accommodation' on the British part to the Chinese ways? We shall return to this point later.

Fairbank's Treaty System theory is a comment on the nature of imperialist aggression on China in the first place, but even more an exposition of China's absorption of imperialist aggression. The latter aspect is embodied in his well-known theory of 'Synarchy'. He coined this term partly to draw a parallel and partly to distinguish between the 'intricate institution of joint Sino-foreign administration of the government of China' and the 'dyarchy' of British Indian history.

There is a third eye in the Fairbankian vision to detect the presence of a foreign force in China's internal governance. 'Alien rule is one of the commonplaces of the Chinese political tradition', comments Fairbank. 'Throughout East Asian history runs this motif of the marriage of the steppe and the sown. . . . Inner Asian barbarians . . . always participated in one way or another in the government of the Chinese empire'

('Synarchy', p. 204). This over-generalization has been extended to the point of absurdity by equating the dominant Soviet influence in China in the early 1950s with the 'steppe barbarians'. When he was penning the conclusion of *Trade and Diplomacy*, he saw the 'vestiges of the past' 'even in the midst of the continuing [communist] revolution'. 'Once more, a foreign element, again from the north, plays a leading part in China' (*Trade and Diplomacy*, p. 468).

What Fairbank wants to drive home is that 'the Chinese state, from its rich experience with the barbarians of Inner Asia, had no lack of institutional devices by which to accommodate foreign intruders in the domestic power structure' (*Ibid*). 'The role played by non-Chinese in the Chinese state during the Northern Wei, Liao, Chin [Jin], Yuan [Mongol] and Ch'ing [Qing, i.e. Manchu] periods... had some sort of historical relationship to the role played... by the British and other Western powers under the unequal treaty system, by the Japanese invaders in their "co-prosperity sphere" subsequently, and perhaps by the Russians under communism most recently' ('Synarchy', p. 205). Under 'Synarchy', says Fairbank, 'both the Manchus and the British sought to make their new order work and foster its economic prosperity. Where the Manchu emperors became the patrons of agricultural development... the British... sought to foster international and local free trade' (*Ibid*, p. 221).

Here the cat comes out of the bag. To Fairbank who thinks 'the theory of imperialism is not the only avenue of approach' to the study of Chinese history, Britain and other western powers were no imperialist intruders, but only partners of the Chinese rulers in the Sino-barbarian institutions of 'Synarchy' to work jointly for the economic prosperity of China!

With this theory of 'Synarchy' at the back of our mind, we are able to understand

the true meaning of his condemnation of imperialism which is a recent development of Fairbankian scholarship. In his latest essay on Treaty System in the *Cambridge History*, Fairbank seems to move away from the earlier beat-the-whipping-boy attitude. He comments that from the western point of view, the Treaty System was 'an institutional structure' which gradually grew into 'the Chinese state and society'. From the Chinese point of view, 'the treaties were vehicles of imperialist invasion' (p. 214). He then unfolds the phased development of the Treaty System, which may be summarized as follows:

Phase I : the first two decades (1840s and 1850s)—emergence of 'a new order in China's foreign relations'.

Phase II : the second generation (1860s to 1890s)—treaty ports becoming 'urban centres of a Sino-foreign condominium and hybrid culture'.

Phase III : the third generation (1890s to 1920s)—foreign, influence transforming into 'an invading flood' changing and damaging 'China's traditional state and society'.

Phase IV : the fourth generation (1920s to 1950s)—'the treaty system first largely supplanted by Japanese aggression and then supplanted by the Communist-led revolutionary order of a new day'.

This 'treaty system interlude', observes Fairbank, existed throughout a century of 'dynastic interregnum'. He adds: '... the treaty century saw the onset and then the height of imperialist penetration of China as well as the phases of the Chinese people's increasingly revolutionary response to it. Under the treaties, China's sovereignty was increasingly impaired; with the rise of nationalism and revolution, it was by degree reasserted (p. 214).

All these quotations from Fairbank contradict his theory of 'Synarchy' and his apology for western, particularly British, imperialism in China which we have cited

earlier. It would be interesting to hear the latest comments of Fairbank who is bitten by the bug of the perspective of imperialism on all he had written earlier about the Treaty System. Not a single word of this in the *Cambridge History* article. Has he abandoned his earlier position?

Stray observations do seem to indicate a departure from the classical Fairbankian perspective. For instance, he now thinks that 'the treaty system had been set up by gunfire and had to be maintained by gunboat diplomacy'. Again, 'gunboat diplomacy betrayed the unsolved struggle as to who should call the tune in Sino-Western contact' (p. 232). But the thrust of the new article is still the reiteration of the 'Synarchy' theory, albeit in a new garb. The statement below in the latest essay removes any doubt: 'One secret of the British success in China was the tacit community of interest between the British and Ch'ing [Qing] administrators. Each side represented a conquering power that had learned to rule its conquests by qualities of moral commitment and administrative skill.... The treaty settlement was thus a *modus vivendi* worked out between the, representatives of two aristocratic, British and Manchu, empires' (p. 217).

To get to the bottom of Fairbankian analysis about the nature of the imperialist domination in 19th-century China, the latest article, in keeping with Fairbank's consistent stand, says that Britain wanted the Treaty System partly 'to foster the established interests' and partly to express 'Britain's worldwide commercial expansion'. He adds: 'Specially, the British aim was to give stability and opportunity to the triangular trade between British India, China, and the British Isles. This meant safeguarding the China market for Indian opium exports and the Chinese supply of teas and silks for London.' He adds further that 'the British treaty makers' were meant to 'find security for trade in the rule of law', offering a 'charter

of rights primarily for merchants' (pp. 216-17). By now we get tired of pointing out Fairbank's self-contradiction. If British imperialism had any respect for the rule of law in China, it would not have pushed the 'Indian opium exports' to the point of madness, as shown in my last article (see *China Report*, vol., 17, 2 March-April, 1981, 'Foreign Mud on Good Earth: British Opium Enterprise'). But Fairbank paints 19th-century Britain as a champion of both the rule of law and also the most notorious international narcotic traffic in modern civilization! In any case, Fairbank's stand *vis-à-vis* the British aggression on China is fairly clear. It is summarized in these words in the *Cambridge History*: 'Britain wanted, not to rule the Chinese empire as a colony, but to get it to follow British ways of international contact and free trade under the rule of law, which open the door to British commercial profit' (p. 232).

Even while using terms like 'imperialism', 'domination', 'hegemony', 'gunboat diplomacy', the Fairbankian perspective essentially negates the theory of imperialism which is generally understood as a system of colonial oppression and capitalist exploitation of foreign peoples. But the Treaty System conceived by Fairbank was a kind of international alliance, or an international community in which the native (Chinese) and foreign partners drew mutual benefit from each other. Such a perspective cannot provide any basis of understanding imperialism in 19th-century China.

II

Paradoxically, the alternative to the Fairbankian perspective is envisaged unwittingly in Fairbank's own writing. I have already quoted from his *Cambridge History*, two sets of views: the Treaty System as a western

'institutional structure' gradually growing into 'the Chinese state and society' (which is the western viewpoint), and the unequal treaties being regarded as 'vehicles of imperialist invasion' (which is the Chinese viewpoint). While Fairbank has pursued neither viewpoint, the combination of them would seem to provide an understanding of the Treaty System.

As the Chinese intellectuals carried out a relentless struggle against the imperialist Treaty System right from the end of the 19th century, there is a near-unanimous viewpoint which is anti-treaty oriented and considers the Treaty System an imperialist yoke. Jiang Jieshi and Mao Zedong were united on this point. Mao and his comrades conceived the 19th-century imperialist domination over China as one of the two mountains which had crushed the Chinese people underneath (the other being 'feudalism'). Mao's anti-imperialist patriotism was also wedded with his belief in Marxism-Leninism, which subscribes to the theory of imperialism jointly propounded by J.A. Hobson and Lenin. Both Hobson and Lenin have traced the growth of imperialism in Europe, and its spread all over the world.

Hobson's analysis of the phenomenon of imperialism has a weighty economic content: 'The chief economic source of imperialism has been found in the inequality of industrial opportunities by which a favoured class accumulates superfluous elements of income which, in their search for profitable investments, press ever further afield....'¹ Lenin and Stalin developed Hobson's imperialism into 'the contradiction', as Stalin says, 'between the handful of "civilized" nations and the hundreds of millions of the colonial and dependent peoples of the world'. Stalin adds: 'Imperialism is the most barefaced exploitation and the most inhuman oppression of hundreds of millions of people inhabiting vast colonies and dependent countries. The purpose of this exploitation and of

this oppression is to squeeze out super-profits.'²

One need not be ideologically committed to concede the superiority of Stalin's analysis as compared to Fairbank's. Why did Britain and other western powers employ gunboats and treaty diplomacy in 19th century? Super-profit is definitely a better answer than 'Synarchy'.

When Lenin talked about the epoch of imperialism as the highest stage of the development of capitalism, he had in mind a time-scale beginning from the last couple of decades of the 19th century. This has created a widespread impression among scholars that there had been different stages of imperialist domination in China. Parker T. Moon, who also subscribes to the theory of imperialism, observes: 'The Nanking [Nanjing] Treaty and its supplements were inspired, clearly, by a British desire for free access to the Chinese market, but not by latter-day imperialism. Great Britain could have taken a large slice of territory; she was content with the tiny island of Hong Kong. She could have asked for exclusive privileges; she was willing that other nations enjoy the same rights.'³ Moon further adds: 'Why Europe invaded the Far East?... European industrial nations desired first of all an open door for their merchants, marines, and missionaries. . . . This was not true imperialism; on the contrary, the open door is almost the opposite of imperialism. But the opening of the Far East led inevitably to a desire for monopoly of markets, mines, and railway-building, hence for monopolist spheres of influence, and also for naval bases, and in some cases, territory. This was genuine imperialism....'⁴

John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in their famous essay 'The Imperialism of Free Trade' in *The Economic History Review*, (Second Series, vol. vi, no. 1, August 1953), point out that Hobson, Lenin and Moon, the exponents of the imperialist theory,

actually agreed with their liberal opponents that 'late-Victorian imperialism was a qualitative change in the nature of British expansion and a sharp deviation from the innocent and static liberalism of the middle of the century.' They further add: 'For all their disagreement these two doctrines [of imperialism and non-imperialism] pointed to one interpretation; that mid-Victorian "indifference" and late-Victorian "enthusiasm" for empire were directly related to the rise and decline in free-trade beliefs' (p. 2).

The two scholars have put forward the theory of 'imperialism of free trade', pointing out the fact that imperialist territorial expansion started long before the end of the 19th century, hence exposing the myth of the so-called anti-imperialist mid-Victorian free-trade era. A critic, D.C.M. Platt, summarizes the Gallagher-Robinson thesis in the following words: 'They claimed that from the beginning of the last century British officials were spreading the rule of free trade from Buenos Aires to Constantinople, from the Niger and the Oxus to the Yangtse-kiang [Yangtziang]. The British political arm had first to break open each area to trade before the technique of central control through collaborating classes could operate, and this, in official thinking, was necessary work for diplomats with gunboats in the offing.'⁵ Both Platt and W.G. Hynes think that the Gallagher-Robinson theory provides a bridge between the apparently disparate periods of mid-Victorian anti-imperialism and the "New Imperialism" of late-Victorian Britain', and also 'the governing principle and the unifying factor in a century of British policy no less in the "informal empire" than in the Empire of formal rule.'⁶

Prof. John S. Galbraith lends support to the Gallagher-Robinson theory in his own way, refuting the existence of a 'Little England Era' (in contrast to the great British Empire) between Waterloo and the 1970s which was

supposed to be 'dominated by a merchant-industrialist aristocracy dedicated to efficiency and laissez faire'. 'Yet', says Galbraith, 'in an era of anti-annexation the Empire continued to grow in India and elsewhere.' He adds: 'When profitable markets were disrupted by the breakdown of order or by the hostility of a government, this apparent indifference[to empire and conquest] abruptly ended. The "Opium War" of 1839-1842 was a demonstration that Britain in the free-trade era was prepared to use force...to support trade.'⁷

While Galbraith mentions the Opium War as a demonstration of imperialist expansion, Gallagher and Robinson point to the frequent use of treaties by Britain as 'the most common political technique of British expansion' (*EcHR*, p. 11). The Gallagher-Robinson definition of imperialism reads thus: 'Imperialism, perhaps, may be defined as a sufficient political function of this process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy; its character is largely decided by the various and changing relationships between the political and economic elements of expansion in any particular region and time' (*Ibid.*, p. 5).

This definition provides food for thought. The essence of imperialism lies in the expansion of the metropolitan economy into other regions—colonies and other dependent areas, in the words of Stalin. The expansion takes place by unfolding a 'process of integrating' the latter into the economic forces of the metropolis. But mere economic force would not accomplish the economic goal of imperialism. It has to be helped by the political process, which includes the use of armed forces. Gallagher and Robinson are right in identifying such political process as the mechanics of imperialism, for it is the presence and absence of this political mechanics which distinguishes an imperialist metropolitan-peripheral economic linkage

from free trade between two independent sovereign countries.

In the case of China, as long as she was her own master in her economic intercourse with Britain and other western powers she was not under the impact of western imperialism. A qualitative change first took place in 1821 with British opium traders embarking upon armed delivery of the drug under the protection of the Union Jack, and with British men of war standing by. So the political process of British imperialism had already been initiated two decades before the outbreak of the Opium War, symbolizing the beginning of British opium imperialism. Though no Chinese territory was lost, there was illegal occupation of small off-shore islands and also China's territorial waters by British war ships and armed opium carriers.

With the launching of the Opium War on China and binding her by the Treaty of Nanjing, Britain certainly went a step further in integrating China into her expansive economic order. The inauguration of British imperialism in China was three-pronged: (a) the threat of use of force, (b) the war, and (c) the treaty. Britain followed this pattern in almost all the areas which ultimately fell victims to *Pax Britannica*. What was peculiar to the Chinese scene was that whereas in other areas, like India, Britain had escalated the political process until complete take-over of the colonial administration, in China the process was never escalated but only repeated. This peculiarity has led many scholars to exclude China from the history of imperialist domination, or to assign non-imperialist patterns to modern Chinese history, as Fairbank does.

Once again, the Gallagher-Robinson perspective can be used to fit the peculiarity of the Chinese case into the general pattern of western imperialist expansion. Discussing the British imperialist expansion, they notice the flexible use of various economic and

political techniques, such as the 'mercantilist techniques of formal empire' and the 'informal techniques of free trade', etc. They add: '... in a particular region, if economic opportunity seems large but political security small, then full absorption into the extending economy tends to be frustrated until power is exerted upon the state in question. Conversely, in proportion as satisfactory political frameworks are brought into being in this way, the frequency of imperialist intervention lessens and imperialist control is correspondingly relaxed' (*EcHR*, p. 6).

The insight provided by this perspective helps us look at the problem of imperialism in China in a new light. First, since the crux of the imperialist strategy *vis-a-vis* China lay in the integration of China into the expansive imperialist economic order, the imperialist devices to achieve this integration had to depend upon their rational employment and optimum effect. Complete subjugation of China into a colony could not be on the agenda of any western government.

Here we may pause for a moment to reflect on Moon's proposition cited earlier. By saying that the first Opium War and the Treaty of Nanjing did not constitute an imperialist aggression on China, Moon restricts the definition of imperialism within the narrow confines of territorial occupation, building of naval bases and carving out spheres of influence in other countries. The Gallagher-Robinson definition of imperialism has deeper insight than Moon's perspective and treats the acquisition of territories, naval bases and spheres of influence as the means, not the goal. On the other hand, the Gallagher-Robinson perspective looks upon the so-called 'free-trade' offensive as a part and parcel of imperialist devices for the expansion, viz. integration of other regions into the economic order of the metropolis. In this way, both the early British presence in China under the umbrella of the Treaty of Nanjing and the late 19th-century British

participation in the scramble for territories, navel bases and spheres of influence bore the same birth mark of imperialism.

That Britain never intended to make China a second India is a historical fact recognized by historians of varying perspectives. In other words, Britain's ultimate goal was not to conquer China and subject her to direct British rule. This was the consistent British strategy *vis-a-vis* China from the early treaty days to the end of the 19th century. Yet this does not exonerate Britain from imperialist aggression against China, as China was very much a target of the imperialist process of absorbing her into the fold of *Pax Britannica*.

Paradoxically, in their article in *The Economic History Review*, Gallagher and Robinson have not applied this logical proposition on Chinese history. Hence, when they discuss British expansion *vis-a-vis* China they employ a very un-Gallagher-Robinson prism to project an anti-Free-Trade-Imperialism spectrum by echoing the 19th-century British complaint about the unbreakable Chinese economic self-sufficiency *vis-a-vis* British economic penetration. This led to an un-Gallagher-Robinson conclusion that Britain felt embarrassed by the strain in Chinese society (resulting in the Taiping and other rebellions) caused by the British economic assault. Subsequently, Britain adopted an attitude of self-denial, and the later part of the 19th century saw Britain playing the 'honest broker' by which she won over the Chinese government (*EcHR*, pp. 10-11). We shall discuss the inaccuracy of this assessment a little later.

Secondly, the Gallagher-Robinson definition of imperialism points to the flexibility of the economic and political devices of the imperialist powers, particularly Britain, according to the situation they faced. 'Thus mercantilist techniques of formal empire were being employed to develop India in the mid-Victorian age at the same time as in-

formal techniques of free trade were being used in Latin America for the same purpose' (*Ibid.*, p. 6). The reasoning here is that whatever be the strategies or combinations of political and economic devices the imperialist powers might adopt in varying situations, their 'purpose' was the same—economic integration. The logic of this argument implies that there was one model of imperialist domination in India, and another in China. And the nature of imperialist domination, whether in India or China, remained identical. By the same logic, imperialism was capable of both assault and retreat. Then, even when Britain restrained itself, considering the growing tensions within the Chinese society caused by British economic assault, this should be treated only as a tactical halt or retreat and not as a moral attitude of self-denial. We hasten to add here that during the treaty period in 19th-century Chinese history, the self-restraint of British imperialism was a rarity, if not a total non-event. Everyone knows that when internal tension rose to a climax with the Manchu government crumbling down under the weight of Taiping Revolution at the end of 1850s, Britain launched two wars against the Beijing regime, occupied Beijing, and exacted two treaties from the Chinese government—the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858 and the Treaty of Beijing in 1866.

In view of the unsatisfactory analysis by Gallagher and Robinson for our purpose of analysing the nature of imperialist domination on China, let us name the new perspective emerging from the above discussion as the 'integration theory', viz. treating imperialism as a combination of political and economic processes to integrate another country or region with an expansive metropolitan economic order. This Integration Theory treats all efforts at achieving such an integration as imperialist actions. If it can be proved that the unequal treaties concluded by western powers with the

Chinese government during the 19th century were instruments of integration, then the Treaty System was surely a form of imperialist domination.

III

We need an empirical study to test the validity of this Integration Theory. Space allows us to highlight only the British actions in China as an illustration. The importance of Britain in the Treaty System need not be stressed. First of all, Britain was the main actor on the China stage. Not only had she inaugurated the Treaty Era in Chinese history, all the unequal treaties signed between the Chinese and other governments also bore the British stamp. The non-British treaties were either replicas of the British treaties or their mini-versions. This was not because other imperialist powers were less inventive, but Britain was, in a way, the sole arbiter in China's foreign affairs. No country could conclude a treaty with China during the 19th century without the explicit or implicit approval of Britain. Secondly, British interests and involvements in China in the 19th century far exceeded those of other imperialist powers put together. Britain had the lion's share of the imperialist presence in 19th-century China. Geographically also British hegemony was a fact. While Britain's serious contenders were only nibbling off China's border regions, Britain was the only power which had penetrated into the interior of China proper. Thus, by singling out British involvement in the Treaty System we are in a position to grasp the main stream of developments with minimum risk of omission.

In tracing the genesis of the Treaty System, let us first ascertain whether the evolution of the treaties was the outcome of Chinese efforts to neutralize British military victory, as the Fairbankian perspective wants us to

believe or otherwise. Gallagher and Robinson have indicated the contrary by enumerating the British-imposed treaties 'of free trade and friendship' on 'weaker' countries: 'The treaties with Persia of 1836 and 1857, the Turkish treaties of 1838 and 1861, the Japanese treaty of 1858, the favours extracted from Zanzibar, Siam and Morocco, the hundreds of anti-slavery treaties signed with crosses by African chiefs...' (*EcHR*, p. 11). While signing treaties with other countries was a global strategy of Britain, the Chinese government had very little experience in treaty diplomacy, and could not comprehend the implications of the documents on the dotted lines of which they were forced by Britain to sign.

Let us begin by briefly recounting the events that led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanjing which inaugurated the Treaty Era in China. I have observed elsewhere the extraordinary feature of the British expeditionary force in China in the Opium War. It had no commander-in-chief by designation, but the fighting machine was placed under the exclusive control of an officer who was appointed by London as Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary. Clearly, the purpose of this war was to conclude a treaty with China. This war was unfamiliar to China, the past master of Synarchical Sino-barbarian equations of Fairbank's descriptions. We know that it was out of a sense of despair and disgust that the Chinese government agreed to sign the Treaty of Nanjing at the end of two years of stubborn resistance. This sense of disgust was reflected in an edict issued by Emperor Daoguang during the Opium War: 'The English are like whales and crocodiles of the sea.... But, seven of our provinces have to be alerted to face the menace. All the counties and prefectures adjacent to the coast have to make defence preparations. Yet our might and power cannot be employed in storming the enemy forts and

conquering the enemy grounds. Can there be any justification for our wasting the energy of the military and the civilians as well as the resources of the nation in this manner? ... Is it not far better to use a word and a sheet of paper than to deploy millions of troops?"⁸ This edict clearly proves that the Treaty of Nanjing was forced on China by Britain's gunboat diplomacy, a fact even Fairbank has conceded in his *Cambridge History* article. It is but fair to say that the first Sino-British Treaty was a British design to expand her economic order in China. As for the Chinese government, far from gaining an upper hand in the game of diplomacy, they were lured by the illusion created by the British aggressors that with the conclusion of the treaty and the grant of political, economic and territorial concessions to the invaders they could live in peace with Britain for ever. It was this illusion that made them name the Treaty of Nanjing 'Wannian heyue' (Peace Treaty for Ten thousand Years).

It did not take them long to realize their miscalculations. In ten years Britain began to pick up the dust of dissatisfaction over the implementation of the treaty and of the necessity for its revision. A provision for revision of the trade agreement was written in Article 34 of the Sino-American Treaty of Wangxia (Wanghsia) in 1844. But the Treaty of Nanjing was a political treaty. It was a peace treaty intended to stabilize and perpetuate a peaceful and friendly atmosphere between Britain and China. Neither was the treaty meant for future revision, nor was there any provision for revision in it. Yet, British diplomacy in those years of 'might is right' was unscrupulous, having little regard for propriety and fairness. British diplomats in China raised the question of revision of the Treaty of Nanjing on the pretext that the most favoured nation clause of the treaty granted the right of revising the Treaty of Nanjing to equalize the US

privilege of revising the trade agreement under the Treaty of Wangxia. S.G. Bonham, British Ambassador to China (1848-54), was instructed by London in May 1853 to take up the matter with Beijing, demanding: (i) all Chinese cities and ports be open to British traders without reservation, and (ii) British citizens be allowed to travel throughout China without restriction. Seeing the difficulties faced by the Manchu government in tackling the Taiping Revolution which was marching towards Tianjin at the time the instructions were received, Bonham exercised his discretion to place the matter in abeyance.⁹

Bonham was succeeded by the notoriously aggressive former Consul to Guangzhou, John Bowring, as British Ambassador in 1854. Shortly after his promotion, Bowring sailed from Hong Kong to the port of Dagou, the gateway of Beijing, in the company of the US envoy, R. M. McLane, and the secretary in the French Embassy, Kleczkowski, and laid a charter of 18 demands before the Chinese government, which included: (a) the opening of entire China, (b) legalization of opium trade, (c) abolition of excise and all additional levies on British goods after the payment of import duty, and (d) permanent residency of the British envoy at the Chinese capital, Beijing.¹⁰ Bowring made two fruitless northward trips to demand what was termed in British circles as the 'second settlement'. Annoyed by Chinese indifference he declared that 'negotiations unsupported by a considerable fleet will terminate in disappointment and discomfiture'.¹¹ He, then, picked up the 'Arrow incident' and started the second war against China in 1856.

This 'second settlement'—with the conclusion of two Sino-British treaties at Tianjin (1858) and Beijing (1860), the brief Anglo-French occupation of Beijing in October 1860, the barbarous destruction of Yuanmingyuan, the luxurious imperial summer

palace, and the captivity of the Viceroy of the Two Guang provinces, Ye Mingchen in Fort William, Calcutta, as a precious piece of war booty by Britain—was apparently a much more cruel version of the ‘first settlement’. In content, the Treaty System which was fortified by the Treaty of Beijing was a substantial escalation of the System founded by the Treaty of Nanjing. The legalization of the opium trade, the British access to the Valley of Changjiang, the additional treaty ports both along the sea coast north of Changjiang and along its banks, lighter taxation for imported British goods, permission for Chinese workers to settle down in British colonies, and the mortgage of tariff control to a foreign cadre under the leadership of a British nation—all these marked greater integration of China into *Pax Britannica* than ever before.

Here, then, was a typical case of Free-Trade Imperialism or Integration Imperialism. A great leap forward was achieved by Britain’s colonial economic expansion in China by moderate use of force and a tightening of treaty control in lieu of direct involvement in China’s internal governance by the British Crown. The treaty, thus, played a central role in the advancement of British imperialism in China making a special brand of imperialist domination of the world, which we may call ‘Treaty Imperialism’. Here, we have applied the Integration Theory to show that the Treaty System was most effective in helping Britain to semi-colonize China, i.e. to milk her resources for the growth of the same British Empire which India and other colonies had laid the foundation of. I have illustrated in my last article in this series the vital importance of China to British prosperity due to her consumption of British-Indian opium alone. I shall further illustrate the Chinese contribution in other fields to British empire-building in my next essay.

The Integration Theory can furnish a

better understanding of Britain’s non-empire-building strategy in furtherance of her economic gains in China, than the analyses of Fairbank, Moon, and even Gallagher and Robinson. Edmund S. Wehrle, who has also attempted to see British imperialism in China through the spectrum of the Free-Trade-Imperialism perspective, has made the following significant observation in his book *Britain, China, and the Antimissionary Riots 1891-1900* (Minnesota University, 1966): ‘Clearly, Britain’s primary interest in China was commercial. It wanted the Manchu regime to keep an open door for the trade of all—which meant, in practice, continued economic dominance by Britain. There was no desire on Britain’s part to undertake the expense or risk the danger involved in the creation of an “Indian Empire” in the Valley of Yangtze. The result was that China provided a classic example of that type of “informal imperialism” which characterized nineteenth-century British economic expansion from South America to Asia’ (p. 6).

By using the term ‘informal imperialism’, Wehrle has implicitly suggested the importance of the supra-territorial element in imperialism-formation. Economic exploitation is the essence of this element. Here, we see the subtle distinction between empire-formation and imperialism-formation. While empire-formation is territory-based, imperialism-formation can include or avoid empire-formation. Territorial acquisition is important to imperialism only when it registers a gain in the acquisition of super-profits. Otherwise, it becomes a burden. British politicians in the 19th century often talked about this burden in India to ward off criticism of Britain’s colonial policies in India. India, the brightest jewel on the diadem of British Empire, could not have been a burden in the general sense. However, it would be unrealistic to deny the British entailment of administrative expenses and risks in running an empire of India’s size. Thus, the British

experiment in China—the advantages of informal imperialism’—constituted a higher stage of imperialism-formation.

The eternal theme of ‘ledger and sword’ has shown the interconnection between profit and conquest, the pros and cons of which had always been weighted in the minds of the imperialist strategicians in the 19th century. Michael Edwardes has picked up the supra-territorial thread in the British mind, voiced in the British Parliament by the famous British minister Thomas Babington Macaulay: ‘To trade with a civilized man is infinitely more profitable than to govern a savage.’ Quoting this in his book *The Vest in Asia 1850-1914* (New York, 1967), Edwardes humorously summarized the British strategic thinking as: ‘To civilize a native was to create a customer. To oppress him merely cost money’ (p. 167). Edwardes has underlined the inner connection between ‘free trade’ and imperialism. In summing up what Fairbank, Moon, Wehrle and Edwardes have said about Britain’s interest in expanding trade in China and the non-establishment of another Indian empire in the British sphere of influence in China, we can see the profit-acquisition propensity of British imperialism eclipsing the territory-acquisition propensity when she marched into the Treaty Era in China. Treaty Imperialism or Informal Imperialism was no inferior to its classical form exemplified by the British Raj in India.

The history after the conclusion of the Treaty of Beijing demonstrates the fact that the Treaty System was the best guarantee for the expansion of British economic interests in China. There is a famous Chinese novel by Wu Cheng’en (d. 1582) entitled *Xi you ji* and known in the English circles as *The Monkey*, depicting two heroes, the famous Chinese pilgrim to India, Xuanzang and his assistant, the monkey king, Sun Wukong. While the monkey was an immortal with supernatural powers, the pilgrim was

an ordinary monk-scholar. The monkey was assigned the duty of escorting the monk on the perilous journey to India, passing through lands of various devils. Sun Wukong proved to be an intelligent and able escort on the whole, but the brute’s nature occasionally got the better of him making things difficult for the pilgrim. Lord Buddha, who had visualized this, tied a ring in the monkey’s neck which the latter could not get rid of. And Xuanzang was armed with a spell which would make the ring shrink in size to suffocate the monkey. The spell was cast whenever the monkey became disobedient. It made him do whatever the master bade him. The Treaty System was such a magic ring which Britain had put round China’s neck. Whenever the Chinese government did not concede British demands, Britain tightened the Treaty ring and Beijing had to be obedient.

Events leading to the conclusion of the Sino-British Treaty of Yantai, better known in history as the Chefoo Convention in 1876, provide an example of Britain tightening the treaty ring round China’s neck. One and a half decade had passed since the Treaty of Beijing was signed. There had been a revision of agreement between the two countries in 1868, according to the provision of the Treaty of Tianjin. There were differences between various pressure groups in England about the concessions to be exacted from China, and the revised treaty was signed by Britain with a delay of almost a year (Britain signed the treaty on 23 October 1869). Having tasted blood a tiger becomes for ever greedy for animal flesh. British imperialist interests always felt that the Chinese concessions were not adequate. In July 1870, London declared its refusal to ratify the revised treaty, and the matter hung in the air. Britain was beginning to tighten the ring.

Just as the *Arrow* incident in 1856 provided the pretext for Britain to pressurize the

Chinese government for the second settlement, the murder of a British interpreter, A.R. Margary, in Yunnan in February 1875 was another godsend. The British Ambassador, Thomas F. Wade, used all the cold war tactics. He half closed the British legation in Beijing, unfurled the Union Jack and retreated to the sea coast, along which the British fleet menacingly manoeuvred. The Manchu government got frightened. It sent senior courtier Li Hongzhang to chase Thomas Wade, and finally, the two sides signed a new treaty at Yantai. The Chefoo Convention virtually transformed Changjiang into the Thames by opening new treaty ports, and allowing anchoring facilities at other havens. The treaty ports, old and new, were given exemption of the Lijin levies, and new regulations were provided for the levy of duties on opium in China. Beijing agreed to send an ambassador to London, whose first protocol obligation was to tender an apology on behalf of the Chinese emperor for the murder of Margary.

The Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, the chain-treaties of Tianjin (1858) and Beijing (1860) and the Chefoo Convention (1876) stand out as the three landmarks of the Treaty Era. In a way they also mark three different stages of integration of China into the economic order of *Pax Britannica*. In the first settlement, Britain consolidated the victory of the Opium War by establishing in the eyes of the Chinese government the dignity and touch-me-not-ness of the opium trade on the one hand, and on the other by commencing a new economic order in China with Hong Kong and Shanghai and other treaty ports controlling the lion's share of China's external trade. In the second settlement, this new economic order was further consolidated with British outposts (the treaty parts) forming a network to control the Chinese economy according to the needs of British industrial and commercial expansion. A British national's taking over admini-

stration of Chinese maritime customs amounted to a British control over the Chinese tariff, demolishing any protection to indigenous industry. Meanwhile, opium trade was legalized, and China officially converted into a Nation of Opium Smokers. The Chefoo Convention which represented the third settlement enabled Britain to further penetrate into the Changjiang valley, the richest region in China.

From the political angle, the evolution of the Treaty System in China moved along a cycloid periodically passing through three directions of (i) threat, (ii) fight, and (iii) agreement. The Chefoo Convention can be regarded as the apogee of the cycloid at which the distance between threat and agreement got substantially shortened, escaping fighting. Britain stabilized the Treaty System at a moderate cost of two Opium Wars. If there had not been the Boxer Movement at the end of the 19th century, China and Britain would not have become belligerent once more. A durable peace was wrought by the Treaty System, albeit a very different kind of peace from the dream of the Manchu rulers. The Manchu rulers found that they had bought peace only by obeying the order of the British diplomats. The arrogance of the British officers in China was comparable to the British Nabobs in India, which indicates that the Treaty System in China was only a variation of British Raj in India. Treaty Imperialism or Informal Imperialism was a fact beyond dispute.

IV

Let us now examine the components of the Treaty System. It combined the following political devices to facilitate imperialist interests to fasten their tentacles on the Chinese economy: (a) treaty diplomacy, (b)

treaty ports, (c) tariff control, (d) interference in Chinese jurisprudence, and (e) interference in China's foreign affairs.

We have likened British treaty diplomacy in China to the legendary tightening of the magic ring around monkey Sun's neck. The Fairbankian perspective would think this a necessity as the Chinese diplomatic tradition was as unmanageable according to modern norms of international intercourse as the monkey's indisciplined behaviour. Superficially this has a point. But when we cross-examine the international behaviour of Britain and other western powers, we can see that the only norm in international relations was 'might is right'. The most unequal aspect of the unequal treaties was the absence of reciprocity. There was only one-way traffic, although on paper it did not look so. The treaties were in no way binding prodigal China to international behaviour. They rather wrought the tradition of direct interference in a sovereign country's affairs. The western powers' treatment of 19th-century China can be compared to present-day international attitude towards South Africa. For its minority regime apartheid, the South African government is not endeared to the majority of the international community. But no country is waging war on her and concluding treaties with her to prohibit her from various commissions and omissions. China in the 19th century did not seem to be so unreasonable as South Africa is today. Even if she was. Britain and other western powers (if they were genuinely committed to international norms and justice) should have only severed relations with her and imposed economic sanctions on her. To use war and treaty pressure to uphold norms of international behaviour only compounds the sin.

It was not just the treaties, but a pattern of international behaviour had been woven along with the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanjing. This pattern of behaviour may be

characterized as, from the British standpoint, an attitude of you-should-never-touch-me and I-should-always-touch-you. The Opium War chopped off the Manchu government's prohibitory hand on opium to give immunity to an international crime which no modern government can tolerate. While the Chinese government was taught by the Opium War to refrain from curtailing the 'freedom' of British and other 'foreign devils', it discovered to its regret that western, particularly British, interference was close on its heels like a shadow. While before the Opium War foreign traders used to be advised by the Hoppo [Customs Superintendent] at Guangzhou to 'mind your own business', the Chinese defence line of touch-me-not crumbled against British gunfire and had to put up with the intervening hand from abroad. Ye Mingchen, the last Mohegan of Chinese anti-interference resistance, died in captivity in Fort William in 1859.

Contrary to Fairbank's observation, the Chinese government was utterly unprepared for the western treaty diplomatic offensive. There was no foreign ministry in Beijing, and foreign affairs had always been entrusted to the Viceroy of the two Guang provinces, because Guangzhou, where the Viceroy's office was based, was the only Chinese port where European traders (except the Russians) were admitted during the 'Canton [Guangzhou] Trade Period'. One of the results of the 'second settlement' was the establishment of *Zongli yamen* in the imperial court which was China's first modern foreign office.

Characteristic of imperialist treaty diplomacy was the western powers' preference to deal with certain courtiers who were prone to submission. One such courtier was Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), virtually China's Secretary of State and roving ambassador in the last three decades of the 19th century. The foreign powers liked him because not only they could bend him to the maximum, but he also wielded enormous power in the

imperial court. Besides, a large number of foreign nationals were employed by him as assistants, agents, and advisors.¹² In Li there was a built-in mechanism in Chinese society for collaboration with foreign aggressors. On many occasions, the foreign powers made it clear to the Beijing rulers that they would enter into negotiations only if the Chinese side was represented by Li Hongzhang. When Thomas Wade was blowing hot and cold with Beijing before the conclusion of the Chefoo Convention, he ultimately raised the condition for treaty negotiation, i.e. the Chinese government should appoint a plenipotentiary who could be trusted by the British to talk with him, making it amply clear that the man he had in mind was Li Hongzhang.¹³ This mode of treaty diplomacy does not befit international dealings between equal sovereign countries. It amounted to interference by Britain in China's internal affairs. Besides, for a protocol-conscious Briton to name a top-ranking Manchu courtier to sit at the negotiation table with a much junior ranking ambassador from Britain is unthinkable. But the truth was that under the Treaty System, the status of China was no better than a British vassal.

The treaty ports constituted an important part of the Treaty System. The abnormality of such ports violated all norms of international behaviour. In 1981, if all the Indian ports are closed to ships from Israel, the latter can do nothing except protest. Naming specific Chinese ports to be opened to British shipping in Sino-British treaties on the pretext that China should open to the 'free trade' of Britain was already imperialist aggression. But this was not all.

In the beginning, the Treaty of Nanjing only prescribed that five Chinese ports should be open to British trade. Shanghai was one. But the history of Shanghai illustrates what British imperialism was up to in giving prominence to the opening of ports in a triumphal treaty. The opening of Shanghai was

marked by the arrival of one hundred British nationals at the port representing 25 British firms in November 1843. Although the Chinese government was adhering to both the letter and the spirit of the Treaty of Nanjing, Britain raised new problems in 1845 by demanding a permanent leasehold of land in Shanghai, which was never provided in the treaty. No modern government, however small, would yield to such a demand even if it were from a superpower. At that time, the British argued: since you have conceded my right to free trade on your soil you have to provide me with an exclusive place to stay, for I cannot live with your filthy and uncouth people, and I need the exclusiveness as my security. The Manchu government which did not know how to defend China's national interest conceded the demand.

Britain established her settlement in Shanghai in 1848. The Americans followed suit, as if to flock together with birds of the same feather. But, to their chagrin, when the Americans hoisted the Stars and Stripes emulating their imperialist elder brother, they got a rebuff from the elder brother—that the land on which they had set their feet was exclusive British territory, hence no flag other than the Union Jack could be put up. The British protest was extraordinary, because the leased land had never been ceded to Britain. Anyway, the Americans learnt their first lesson in Treaty System, and promptly got a separate American settlement created. A year later, in 1849, the French also got a similar settlement. This was how the famous 'foreign concessions' in Shanghai acquired their legitimacy—by grabbing. The Manchu government was so innocent that the imperialist powers did not have to invoke arms to obtain such a vital concession. Pressure within the Treaty System was all the imperialist powers needed to achieve it.

In 1854, the three foreign 'concessions'

(settlements) formed a Municipality and forced the Chinese government to grant new Land Regulations which virtually gave away Chinese sovereignty for a song. The Regulations empowered the foreigners to administer Shanghai proper (i.e. the foreign settlements) by themselves with the power of taxation and right to maintain a police force. The Municipal Council of Shanghai split into two in 1863: (i) the International Settlement (British and US), and (ii) the French Concession.

In 1869, Britain and other powers further forced the Chinese government to revise the Land Regulations to empower the foreigners to establish a Court of Consuls in the foreign concessions. By this act, the powers removed any claim of Chinese jurisdiction over Shanghai. The Municipal Council (International) also expanded the limits of the settlement. By the end of 19th century, Shanghai [the foreigners' Shanghai] became one of the few great cities of the world with immense wealth and a population of one million, the overwhelming majority being Chinese.

The story of the growth of Shanghai reads like the proverbial story of the Arab and the Camel. When the imperialist powers first demanded the port to be opened for 'free trade', it was like the camel beseeching sympathy from the Arab to allow him to put his head into the Arab's tent for warmth. When the imperialists asked the Chinese government to lease some land for foreign traders to have a settled life in Shanghai, it was like the camel asking the Arab to allow him to put his front legs into the tent. When the imperialists asked for the right of municipal administration, including revenue and police, it was like the camel further asking permission to get his back into the Arab's tent. Finally, when the imperialists established a Court of Consuls at Shanghai and completely excluded the place from Chinese jurisdiction, it was like the camel telling the

Arab after fully entering into the tent that the tent was just big enough for him and had no room for the Arab.

This Arab-camel relationship in the growth of treaty ports helps us understand the true nature of the 'free trade' expansion. In the name of free trade, western powers, particularly Britain, carved out exclusive pockets on Chinese soil which are generally described as *imperium in imperio* (empire within empire). The treaty ports were not only mini-empires of the foreigners within the Chinese empire, but also outposts of the imperialist powers in China. It was through these outposts that the imperialist powers could exercise remote control over Chinese affairs, to regulate the 'semi-automatic switch-board', to borrow E. J. Hobsbawm's description. Indeed, it was British ingenuity to settle for the treaty ports in China to make super-profits but avoid governing the savages. In other words, a comprehensive network of treaty ports in China was a much improved version of the British Raj in India. This explains why Britain was demanding more and more treaty ports in the three settlements of treaty history, five in the first (Nanjing) settlement, eleven more in the second (Tianjin and Beijing) settlement, and four more in the third (Chefoo) settlement making a total of twenty treaty ports extending from Tianjin, the main entrepot in the north to China's southernmost haven Guangzhou, and from the upper stream of Changjiang in the west to the coast of Taiwan in the east.

With a network of treaty ports the imperialist powers ruled China by proxy. This fact is taken cognizance of by Fairbank, who sees the emergence of a new ruling elite whom he calls the 'treaty port mandarins'. Had the Synarchy theory not preoccupied his mind, Fairbank could have given us a vivid picture of the treaty port governance of China through these 'treaty port mandarin' collaborators. Here our difference lies

in that while Fairbank is more interested in the aspect of Chinese collaboration in this governance, we are concerned with the imperialist rule in it. This rule through treaty ports can be seen in both the political and economic fields.

Politically, the centre of gravity in each treaty port lay in the administrative apparatus which the foreign powers (mainly Britain) had established around the personality of the foreign consul(s). These consuls of young age and low ranking (according to their home hierarchical structure) wielded no less political influence than their colleagues in other countries, say India. By political influence we exclude direct participation in routine domestic Chinese affairs, which is what Fairbank means by Britain being 'far away from dominant in the day-to-day situation'. But the day-to-day situation in the political field was gradually being altered through imperialist influence resulting in a centrifugal tendency which culminated in the famous declaration of neutrality by six southern Chinese provinces at a time when the allied army of eight foreign countries attacked Chinese capital in 1900. The imperialist powers' ex-patriots in question were Liu Kunyi, Viceroy of Jiangsu and Jiangxi provinces, Zhang Zhidong, Viceroy of Hubei (Hupei) and Hunan provinces, and Li Hongzhang, Viceroy of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, who declared that they would not abide by the Imperial Court's edicts declaring war against the foreign powers. Liu Kunyi disobeyed the order of Beijing to send reinforcement northwards to fight the foreign invaders, while Li Hongzhang did not respond to the Empress Dowager's call to return to Beijing. Furthermore, the famous 'treaty port mandarin' Sheng Xuanhuai (Sheng Hsuan-huai) negotiated with foreign consuls on behalf of the neutral viceroys a protocol to protect the south-eastern provinces in China. The day-to-day situation of those crucial years was

vitiated by the political dominance radiated from the treaty ports. If, in times of hostility, Britain and other imperialist powers could divide the loyalty of Chinese top-ranking politicians, the former's political influence during peace time would be much greater. The treaty ports had played an important role in forming an undeclared British sphere of influence in the Changjiang valley much before the notorious scramble for 'cutting the Chinese melon' took place at the end of the 19th century.

That top-ranking Chinese officials were amenable to the treaty port influence had a deep-rooted cause. Here I regret to have to use the word 'ex-patriots' to describe Li Hongzhang and other two Viceroys, for at heart these mandarins sincerely wished China to be strong and all of them had been in the forefront of the 'self-strengthening' movement. However, since they were all seasoned careerists, they knew how to swim with the tide. The examples of anti-imperialist hard-liners like Lin Zexu [Lin Tse-hsu], Deng Tingzhen, Ye Mingchen projected a near-tragedy of individual imperial careers. The lesson of such characters conveyed to Li and company the truth that the foreign powers could be humoured but not challenged. Moreover, any politician of vision could see that the Manchu rulers were like the setting sun, while the pro-western forces were like the rising stars in China. The treaty ports symbolized the superiority of the economic, political, and military power of western imperialism, and also a daily reminder of the disastrous wars and humiliating defeats to Li Hongzhang and others, who seemed to be warned by the intruders with the ancient Chinese maxim: 'If you obey me, you prosper; if you defy me, you die.' (*Shun wo zhe chang, ni wo zhe wang.*) They were coerced and coaxed to do the imperialist bidding.

Here, I must draw the readers' attention to a perspective projected by Nathan A.

Pelcovits in his famous book *Old China Hands and the Foreign Office* (New York, 1948, reprint, 1969). Pelcovits has gained an insight from his study of conflicting interests within Britain *vis-a-vis* her expansion in 19th-century China, and characterized British politicians presiding over Britain's China policy as a restraining force against the greedy commercial expansionists. On the one hand, British merchants demanded that their government 'force open the Chinese oyster with a sword' and 'gather the pearl'. On the other hand, the British government adopted a 'policy of piecemeal and gradual extension of the frontiers of economic opportunity in China' (p. 3). The treaty ports and corresponding arrangements, he adds, were the result of the 'constant struggle between the mercantile demand for an all-out attack on Chinese backwardness at whatever cost, and governmental reluctance to undertake the responsibility even of quasi-sovereignty in China' (p. 2). While the British government was forced by circumstances, says Pelcovits, to scramble for spheres of influence and to grab Chinese naval bases at the end of the 19th century in order to 'counterpoise' Russian and German expansions, it resisted the demands of dealing 'directly with the Yangtse viceroys as the Government of India with the Maharajas', and 'China never became another India' (pp. 30002).

There is no gainsaying that the Foreign Office in London showed insight and prudence in its China policy *vis-a-vis* the lobby for naked aggression on and blatant exploitation of China. But the difference between the British government policy and commercial war cries was only that between sophistication and the want of it. To conceive British government prudence as a counterweight to her economic aggression on China is not viewing events in their true historical perspective. The treaty ports were the very expression of an 'all-out attack on Chinese

backwardness', if by this Pelcovits means to describe British economic exploitation of China. Pelcovits' presentation of the 'struggle' between British doves and hawks, in fact, has mixed up two different issues: direct rule of China and an all-out economic offensive. Regarding direct rule, there was conflict between the government lobby and the 'Old China Hand' lobby, while the two were united in the effort to bleed China white. I venture to say that British economic onslaught against China which was not under her direct rule was even more ruthless and intensive than that against India which was under her direct rule. Just to mention British export of Indian opium and Indian cotton yarn to China is evidence enough. British opium policy not only saved India from being 'poisoned', but allowed her some residual profit, so that from out of the Indian opium traders in China emerged one of modern India's top-ranking family of national bourgeoisie, the Tatas. On the other hand, the dumping of large quantity of Indian mill cotton yarn in China served to promote industrial growth in India while nipping Chinese entrepreneurial initiatives in the bud. British indirect rule and all-out economic exploitation in China fitted each other like hand in glove. Britain's treaty-oriented policy was certainly not the 'piecemeal' expansion of British economic order in China. Nor can the treaty ports be regarded as a compromise arrangement so far as the 'opening of the Chinese oyster' is concerned.

Before we take up the economic aspects of the treaty ports, let us discuss an ugly spot allegedly associated with China's treaty ports, viz. there were prohibited areas with open notification that Chinese and dogs were denied admission. This was vehemently contested by an English writer who says: 'One may take this opportunity to try to nail down another particularly mischievous and persistent slander—that at the gates of

the Public Gardens in Shanghai there used to be a notice "Dogs and Chinese not admitted". During the First World War, after the entry into it of both China and America, the United States Government sent an inquiry into the Municipal Council of Shanghai as to the truth of this legend. The Council made a thorough investigation right back to the beginning of the Gardens and was able to show conclusively that the alleged notice was a myth. Nothing of the kind ever existed. A full statement on the subject was published in the *Municipal Gazette* and the local papers. Yet it seems impossible to kill that story, which in recent years I have seen repeatedly in books on China....'¹⁴

The feeling echoed above is like the lament of a hardened thief who, for once, has been charged with a theft he has actually not committed. However, it has been common knowledge and an undeniable fact that the Chinese who had actually contributed to the prosperity of Shanghai was never treated with dignity by the imperialist Municipal authorities of the city. Even in the 1930s, long after the First World War, Chinese were not admitted into the public park on the Bund, while their yellow-skinned brothers from Japan were admitted, and so were their brown-skinned Indian brethren. Below is evidence furnished by no less a person than Guo Mojo (1892-1978), one of China's eminent modern writers, scholars and statesmen, and the first President of the Chinese Academy of Sciences of the People's Republic of China till his death. Guo narrated his experience in the thirties: 'Unable to enter the Park on the Bund. All right. I put on a Western suit to enter it as an impersonation of Japanese. The pitiable Stateless Slaves! Pity that we are not even as good as the Stateless Slaves. Even the Indians can enter it freely. Only we Chinese are dogs.'¹⁵

The last sentence is clearly a reference to the insulting notice. Incidentally, Guo Mojo was a renowned historian and also an

archaeologist who knew how to distinguish historical fact from legend. We need not guess whether his reference to 'Chinese and dogs' had the backing of archival inquiry. Even without it we have proof that Guo himself as a Japan-returned highly educated Chinese had the feeling that Chinese were treated by the treaty ports as no better than dogs. There is an even more significant aspect to Guo's grievance, viz. China's semi-colonial status or 'informal' membership of Britain's colonial order was even more unenviable than that of the Indian colony in the political structure of the British Empire. Chinese remained 'savages' in the eyes of the imperialist powers even if they were not directly governed, and were supposed to have been dealt with 'free trade' politics. Free Trade Imperialism was a pill which tasted even more bitter than imperialist direct rule.

Economically, the treaty ports' first and foremost role was to integrate the Chinese economy into the imperialist world order. In this aspect, the difference between 'formal' and 'informal' empires was even thinner than in the political aspect. In the formal empire, say India, metropolitan Britain became her landlord and collected land revenue from Indian soil. This was not done in China, and here was a major difference. However, as I have dealt with elsewhere, the Indian goose was kept alive and fat to lay golden eggs for Britain permanently by diverting the relentless drain onto China through 'opium imperialism'. The result was that the informal British empire in China shared the burden with the formal Indian colony to ensure periodical remittances of surplus revenue from India to Britain. Opium imperialism had, thus, equalized the disparity between the 'informal' China and 'formal' India, both of which became 'equal' partners in paying annual tribute to the Exchequer in London. Only the nature of

the tribute remained different—Indians paying land revenue, Chinese opium revenue.

Coming to exploitation through commercial and financial avenues, there was no inherent disparity between the formal and informal situations. Britain, for instance, could exploit informal China and formal India with equal ease if she could neutralize interference from the Chinese political authorities which were not under the direct control of Britain. Here comes the relevance of the treaty system. Every treaty concluded between Britain and China bore a central theme, i.e. to neutralize Chinese political interference in British trade to the maximum possible extent. The meaning of 'free trade' lies in freedom from Chinese political interference. Having achieved this, the disparity between the formal and informal situations became non-existent. For, we know that Adam Smith (1723-90) and his disciples had already gifted to mankind a global exploitation system through the manipulation of money and goods. This system can effectively employ the talents of the whole world to earn super-profits for a handful of people who only exercise remote control. On-the-spot presence is not required for financial, industrial and commercial monopolists to exploit a far-flung area. The Jardine-Matheson Company could achieve optimum operation both in British India and 'informal' British-China.

The treaty ports played a dual role in facilitating the above mentioned universal exploitation in China. First, they acted as protectors of the freedom of such an exploitation, warding off local political interference. Second, they provided bases of operation for international enterprises. The treaty ports facilitated the establishment of commercial and financial networks which linked individual Chinese small-scale producers and consumers with economic headquarters in the Atlantic. For instance, the Jardine Company could get direct supply of

raw silk from silk-worm farmers in the Changjiang valley, and British and Indian cotton yarn was delivered directly to Chinese handloom weavers in the vicinity of treaty concessions. In this way, the economic integration of China into international finance and commercial capitalism was as complete as that of India.

By providing bases for international economic forces, the treaty ports themselves emerged as new economic centres in China. The Chinese economy became an export-import-oriented treaty port economy, while the treaty ports became economically, even more than politically, China's centres of gravity.

About tariff control, one of the characteristics of the Treaty System, it was a repetition of the story of the Arab and the camel. First, foreign traders complained that the Chinese customs duties were too high during the Canton Trade period. Hence the proviso of limiting them to 5 per cent *ad valorem* (according to invoiced value of the goods) in the treaties of the first settlement. Then efforts were made to interfere in China's internal taxation structure, which resulted in the foreigners' taking over the maritime custom services of China. Two peculiar monuments of the Treaty Era were: (a) the foreign cadre of China's customs office, and (b) Robert Hart (1835-1911) who remained chief of this custom services for 46 years from 1863 till he retired in 1908. Hart was not only Inspector General of Manchu government's Directorate of Maritime Customs, he was at time virtually China's finance and foreign minister. His interference in China's external and internal affairs could only happen in the jungle of treaty imperialism, so that Fairbank has named him as one of the triumvirate in China along with Empress Dowager and Li Hongzhang to prove the case of Manchu-Chinese-Western 'Synarchy' (*Trade and Diplomacy*, p. 465). Here Fair bank very tactfully uses Hart as

a scapegoat for the real culprits of imperialism. As the western pillar of the Synarchy found its personification in Hart (just as Empress Dowager represented the Manchu pillar and Li Hongzhang the Chinese), Fairbank's Synarchy virtually transformed into a personal alliance, with the larger international issues being pushed to the background. We may ask: how an ordinary Englishman like Robert Hart could rise to such importance. And even if it was true that imperialist forces were operating only in the background, in whose boat was Hart standing? There is no doubt that Hart was the very instrument of treaty imperialism, particularly British treaty imperialism.

Hart and his Maritime Customs Services were like a double-edged sword of imperialism. One edge protected the competitive advantages of western, particularly British, imports, including opium, and the other pushed China deeper and deeper into indebtedness to western, particularly British, financial oligarchy. China's maritime customs revenue was not only used as mortgage against foreign loans, but was also made to pay war indemnities which the imperialist powers had imposed on China through the treaties. Thus by allowing foreigners to control the tariff, the Chinese government had not only mortgaged China's tariff autonomy, but mortgaged the maritime customs revenue itself.

Imperialist interference in China's jurisprudence was effected through the treaty provision of extra-territorial rights to foreigners in China. Fairbank traces this provision 'back to the custom whereby Arab headmen at medieval Zayton and Canton had taken personal responsibility for their countrymen' (*Trade and Diplomacy*, p. 466). Let us put the record straight.

True, western traders, admitted to the treaty ports, were not the first foreigners to settle in Chinese ports in large numbers. For centuries during Tang and Song dynasties

in the second half of the first millennium A.D., Arabs, Persians, Indians, Sri Lankans and traders from South-east Asia had stayed in China, particularly at Guangzhou and Quanzhou (Marco Polo's 'Zayton'). The Chinese government, for the convenience of both administration and the foreigners, accommodated them in separate colonies called *fanfang* (foreign colony), and asked the foreign settlers to nominate their own chiefs called *fanzhang* (foreign chief) who were treated as Chinese government officials. The 'foreign chief' enjoyed limited judicial authority as arbiter of civil disputes among foreign settlers, but had no jurisdiction over penal law. There was a sea of difference between this ancient foreign autonomy and the modern extra-territoriality.

Ancient Arabs and other foreigners did not reach China by gunboats or other deterrent means. Their exemplary behaviour and respect for local authorities won Chinese good-will and trust. Hence the grant of autonomy to them. But the 19th-century European visitors were notorious trouble-makers, who won for themselves only the Chinese nickname of *yang guizi* (ocean devils). The extra-territorial rights they enjoyed in China were not granted to them on China's own accord, but were the booty of aggressive wars. By making the two cases analogous, Fairbank only reveals the identical Chinese hand giving autonomy to foreigners, but conceals the pistol which modern Europeans struck at the back of the Chinese in sharp contrast to their ancient Arab predecessors who held out only olive branches towards their Chinese hosts.

The genesis of extra-territoriality can only be traced to the arrogance of the imperialist culture and social Darwinism. Those Europeans who were law-abiding at home had the propensity to defy all laws abroad under the influence of imperialist culture. Social Darwinism made them disrespect non-Christian and non-white authorities,

Even during the Canton Trade period, British traders had developed the touch-me-not attitude before Chinese justice. The idea of extra-territorial jurisdiction in China originated from a proposal to the British government by the East India Company's Canton Council headed by W.H. Pigou in 1784 after a European (perhaps British) had been executed by the Chinese government in the well-known *Lady Hughes* incident.¹⁸ Although it took sixty long years for Britain to put the proposal into practice in China, the *Lady Hughes* incident was the fountain-head of British defiance of Chinese justice, which grew stronger with the expansion of British commercial and military power.

That extra-territoriality was an expression of imperialist touch-me-notism can be proved by Article IX of the Sino-British Treaty of Tianjin (1858), which says that Chinese government officials can arrest unlawful Britons on Chinese soil but should not subject them 'to any *ill-usage* in excess of necessary restraint' (*italics added*). This was deterrent enough for Chinese officials. Let us imagine how difficult it was to apprehend a violent foreigner gently. Few criminals would encounter arrest without resistance or an attempt to escape. When a scuffle took place, how could it be guaranteed that no trace of it would remain on the body of the defying foreigner? As the Chinese officials had no power to punish a foreign offender, but had to hand him over to the nearest foreign consul of the offender's nationality, they were not too sure what the foreigner might report. If he complained about 'ill-usage' (a very ambiguous term) to the British Consul, and the latter in turn accused the Chinese officials of violation of treaty provisions, the result would be disastrous for the concerned Chinese officials. This explains why during the Treaty Era, few Chinese officials dared apprehend foreign offenders. Even if they did, few offenders got punished by the authorities of their own

nationality. China under the Treaty System was a paradise for foreign criminals.

Treaty of extra-territoriality was not only exemption of foreign offenders from lawful punishment of the land, it also constituted a foreign interference in China's internal affairs because of the invocation of extra-territorial rights to protect the 'proteges'. Foreigners could name naturalized persons and even Chinese as their proteges, who could then enjoy the same judicial immunity as the foreigners did. This protege clause of the Treaty System gave green signal to the missionaries to meddle with legal disputes between Christian converts and their non-Christian compatriots. Such interventions were mainly responsible for the rise of anti-Christian riots which were widespread in China at the end of the 19th century.

The authority of the Chinese government was further eroded with the protege provision in the treaties. As the famous US missionary, diplomat and scholar, S.W. Williams observes in his classic, *The Middle Kingdom* (vol. ii, London, 1883): '...[Chinese] rulers, ignorant of the real meaning of these principles of ex-territoriality, were tied down to observe them, and found themselves within a few years humbled before those of their own subjects who had begun to look to foreigners for protection' (p. 657).

With the treaty powers putting the magic ring around the neck of the Chinese government and every now and then invoking the spell to tighten it, China maintained her sovereignty in foreign affairs only in name. The treaty powers not only dictated terms to the Chinese government when they dealt with it in bilateral matters, they also did not remain indifferent while watching China's transactions with others. We have quoted P. T. Moon in the second part of this essay in praise of British initiative in introducing the 'most favoured nation' clause in the treaties. It is easy to see how shallow the British claim was for sharing their rights in

China with other nations. Indeed, Britain was the first treaty power to claim the most favoured nation status in China, and remained so throughout the 19th century. While Britain could claim parity with whatever new concessions other nations had exacted from China, the other powers could never equal what Britain had obtained. There was only one Hong Kong to hoist the Union Jack along the entire China coast. The treaty ports in China were all controlled by British consuls, who only tolerated parallel control by the French in Shanghai but nowhere else.

There was a peculiar British relationship with Beijing which other powers could not emulate. The Treaty System was a British strategy to integrate China into *Pax Britannica* according to the dynamics of British economic expansion, while her European counterparts came to China only to claim a share of the spoils. Treaty diplomacy, treaty ports, treaty tariff control, and treaty extra-territoriality were all British political mechanics of, by and for British interests. Others who came to share the spoils only obtained fringe benefits.

There was another peculiarity in Sino-British relations which brooked no imitators, i.e. Robert Hart and his Maritime Customs Service. Hart provided an additional gear to Britain's engine of interference. Apparently Hart was a faithful Chinese official, enjoying the trust of the Beijing government. At heart he had divided loyalty between his employer-country and his own country. Hart's protection of British interests was two-fold: (i) in every important Sino-British negotiation Hart not only supplied vital information about Chinese intentions, calculations, strength and weakness to the British side, but also mobilized influence at his command to persuade the Chinese side to accept British terms; (ii) in a multi-cornered contest among western powers in bidding loans, railway contracts, etc. Hart always threw his weight

in favour of British interest. We may cite a couple of instances to prove this.

On 17 July 1876 Hart addressed a confidential dispatch to his subordinates at the Maritime Customs Office at Tianjin, the contents of which were ultra-political. It starts with a reference to Hart's meeting with the British Ambassador Thomas Wade, who informed Hart that he would leave for Yantai after a week's stay at Shanghai. The dispatch then says (I give below my own English translation of the Chinese version of the dispatch): 'If China is to depute an officer to negotiate [with Wade]... the officer must have the imperial edict appointing him as plenipotentiary. The officer must have new ideas, must be generous in negotiations, should not go a step forward after retreating a step. If [the Chinese government] does not follow this instruction, it would be in vain in sending a negotiator.

'Judging what Ambassador Wade has told, when imperial officers go to the British embassy to announce the imperial edict, it should not just be one officer with a deputy. There must be more people to make the British side feel honoured.

'Judging what Ambassador Wade has told, Britain has, indeed, attached great importance to the matter [dispute out of the murder of Margary], which may not be easily settled. The Inspector General [i.e. Hart himself] had earlier told *Zongli yamen* repeatedly about sending an ambassador to Britain. Generally, all countries send ambassadors to every other country.

'After prolonged deliberation the Inspector General intends to request His Excellency Li (Hongzhang) to memorialize His Majesty either to depute His Excellency alone, or to depute His Excellency Li along with other courtier to go to Yantai to negotiate with Ambassador Wade.... Although the Inspector General cannot guarantee its surety [of a settlement] he wholeheartedly wishes His Excellency Li would do accordingly. Other

courtiers going to Yantai would not be as effective as His Excellency Li personally taking the trip. In case the imperial permission is obtained, he should kindly reach Yantai by August 1st or 2nd. Any delay is undesirable and would spoil the chances of success.¹⁷

A curious document! An internal directive from the Inspector General of Maritime Customs to his subordinates sounds like an indirect British ultimatum to the Chinese government. That the Chinese version of the communication was preserved in Beijing's imperial archives shows that it had not only been read by Li Hongzhang who was the unnamed addressee of the letter but must have also been read by the imperial court, if not by Empress Dowager herself, after it was forwarded to Beijing by Li Hongzhang. And it worked. Li was appointed Plenipotentiary to negotiate with Wade by imperial edict of 28 July, and he left Tianjin for Yantai on 17 August—a two weeks' delay to impress the British that he, a top-ranking Chinese courtier could not be shuffled around by foreign powers like a pawn.

Hart, as a private British citizen and an employee in Chinese government service, had the audacity to tell the imperial court of China what to do, who to appoint negotiator, and what attitude he should adopt, etc. when there was high tension between Britain and China. Obviously, it was not any kind of Synarchy which made it so ridiculous. The plain truth behind all this was the powerful imperialist treaty system, which greatly restricted Chinese initiatives in foreign affairs. Hart constituted an important component of this treaty system.

About Hart's role in building up British influence in China over and above other imperialist powers, we can cite one instance. Britain and Germany vied with each other in penetrating into China's newly organized modern military force. Hart was instrumental

in sending more British advisers into the new Chinese army, and in getting more British armaments and naval ships sold to China than Germany could. Again it was through Hart's good office that an Englishman, W. M. Lang, took charge of training in 1882 of the North Sea Fleet, which was virtually Li Hongzhang's personal property.¹⁸

We should not leave out the intermediary role of Hart in peace-making at the end of the Sino-French War (1884-85) which was a classical example of imperialist interference in China's foreign affairs. In July 1884, *Zongli yaman* instructed Hart to get in touch with J. Patenotre, French Ambassador, at Shanghai to negotiate a peace settlement with France. This instruction made Hart arrogate to himself the role of China's Plenipotentiary. A large number of people including foreign representatives were in the field as peace-makers. But Hart manoeuvred over others and sent, in January 1885, his officer in the Maritime Customs Service, James Duncan Cambell, to the French capital to conduct negotiations with the French Premier, Jules Ferry. Cambell finally signed a cease-fire protocol in Paris on behalf of the Chinese government on 4 April 1885 which laid the ground for the final conclusion of the Sino-French Treaty of Tianjin signed by Li Hongzhang and Patenotre.¹⁹ I may recount the well-known fact that the Chinese fought well during the Sino-French war, and that the Manchu government demonstrated total imbecility in concluding an unequal treaty with France while China was emerging a winner in the war. Hart was partially responsible for deceiving the Manchu court.

Treaty diplomacy, treaty ports, treaty tariff, treaty extra-territoriality and the treaty system's overall interference in China's internal and external affairs are the indisputable evidence of the existence of a

well-conceived and comprehensive infrastructure of governance which the imperialist powers, particularly Britain, had imposed on China. Whether one calls it 'treaty imperialism' or 'integration imperialism', or 'informal' imperialism, or 'free trade' imperialism, or even Synarchy, makes little difference.

V

Throughout this essay we have borrowed the idea of integration imperialism from the Gallagher-Robinson perspective to trace the vertical evolution of the Treaty System and the horizontal components of it. The integration perspective has helped us ascertain the true nature of imperialism in the various stages of treaty-formation and various institutions under the treaty umbrella. From the British angle, particularly, it is crystal clear that every step taken from Nanjing to Yantai, and every institution built up from treaty port municipal council to the Inspector General's office had its eyes set on super-profits—the pearl from the Chinese oyster—the increasing flow of which could only be permanently ensured by integrating China securely and soundly into *Pax Britannica*. Once again, let us reiterate that the governance of *Pax Britannica* was a sophisticated and complicated international edifice, which involved 'responsible' or other types of government, as observed by Gallagher and Robinson: '...throughout the Victorian period responsible government was withheld from colonies if it involved sacrificing or endangering British paramountcy or interests. Wherever there was a fear of a foreign challenge to British supremacy in the continent or sub-continent concerned, wherever the colony could not provide financially full responsibility, or, if they had already devolved it, intervened directly to secure their interests once more. In other words, responsible government, far from being a

separate device, was simply a change from direct to indirect methods of maintaining British interests. By slackening the formal political bond at the appropriate time, it was possible to rely on economic dependence and mutual good-feeling to keep the colonies bound to Britain while still using them as agents for further British expansion' (*EcHR*, p. 4).

In this paragraph are packed a lot of concepts which need to be sorted out to reinforce our new perspective. First of all, Gallagher and Robinson have suggested two kinds of British overseas governance. One was 'responsible government' or 'direct method of maintaining British interests'. This involved Britain assuming 'full responsibility' of governance of the colony concerned, especially 'financial' responsibility. The other was of British overseas governance which the two scholars have hinted at as an 'indirect method of maintaining British interests', but have not given a name to it. This unnamed governance relied on 'economic dependence' of the colony concerned on Britain, and on 'mutual good-feeling' between the British metropolis and the colony to keep it 'bound to Britain'.

The governance unnamed by the two scholars can most appropriately be called 'irresponsible' as distinguishable from 'responsible government'. The difference between the two does not lie in the presence or absence of moral responsibility. Since we have already a definite notion of imperialism, which is one of the worst forms of human aggression and exploitation, there is no question of its ever having a sense of moral responsibility. What we mean by 'responsible government' in British imperialism, or call it 'responsible imperialism' for short, is the imperialist power taking up full responsibility, especially financial responsibility in the governance of a colony, as Britain did in India. The term 'irresponsible governance' or irresponsible imperialism' means the abstention from

assuming such full responsibility on the part of the imperialist power. Yet there is an 'indirect' device which binds the colony concerned with the metropolis. The treaty system in 19th-century China was a version of this irresponsible imperialism. The Treaty System was the indirect governance with which Britain not only maintained but developed her interests in China.

Hobson, father of the theory of imperialism, has also conceived three different types of British colonies: (a) 'Crown colonies' in which the British Crown controlled the responsible government of the colony, (b) 'colonies possessing representative institutions' in which neither the Crown nor the colony assumed 'responsible government' or full control of government, and (c) 'colonies possessing representative institutions and responsible government' with the British Crown maintaining only a veto on colonial legislation, and control over the 'governor' of the colony.²⁰ The last type is a reference to British colonies like Australia and Canada. China in the 19th century fell into a different category, in the sense that on the one hand there was less freedom than it appeared for China to run her own 'responsible government', while on the other, Britain had a complex network of control which might even exceed British control over Australia or Canada through the British-appointed governor. Hobson did not intend to use the term 'irresponsible governance' to describe the British position in the second and third category of colonies. But he has implicitly highlighted the existence of alternative forms to Britain assuming responsible government in the colonies. This encourages us to develop the 'irresponsible imperialism' perspective.

Michael Edwardes in his book, already referred to in the third part of this essay, describes China in the 19th century as 'the victim of imperialism without annexation' (p. 113). He adds that Britain had indulged

in 'cooperative pillage' in China without the 'risks of attempting domination' (pp. 113-14). He further observes that in the era of 'highly developed imperialism', the 'weapons were no longer armies and navies, but loans and concessions' (p. 114). Edwardes has suggested that in its highly developed stage, imperialism has outgrown the old methods of territorial annexation, political domination, and the dependence of armies and navies for colonial supremacy. New or 'indirect' methods, such as loans and concessions could do as efficiently a job as the old in achieving the goals of imperialism in China.

Taking off from the perspectives provided by Gallagher and Robinson, Hobson and Edwardes, we shall conclude that China in the 19th century was dominated by British and other western irresponsible imperialism which was a highly developed and sophisticated form of imperialism distinguishable from the classical form of imperialist domination as propounded by Hobson, Lenin, Moon and others. The characteristics of this irresponsible imperialism can be highlighted according to its manifestations in 19th-century China.

In the first place, irresponsible imperialism, like absentee landlordism, was a form of domination characterized by its deliberate omission. This form of domination skips responsible government, refrains from territorial annexation but does not totally give it up, and restricts the use of armies, navies, and police forces but maintains them as a deterrence while occasionally using them when things go beyond control. In 19th-century China, people did not sing 'God save the king/queen' as national anthem, the Union Jack did not fly over government buildings, government orders and correspondence were not in the name of His/Her Gracious Britannic Majesty but in the name of the regning title of the Manchu emperor, and the armed forces and other para-military personnel did not wear British insignia and

did not unfurl British standards. A visitor to China and India during those days saw the apparent presence and absence of the British Raj in the two countries. Yet those who knew the details of Britain's overseas interests could tell in general terms that as many British ships sailed to China as to India, that Britain had as great a stake in China as she had in India, as much super-profits flowed from China to Britain as they were from India. The term 'irresponsible imperialism' combines both omission and commission. The first part of the term suggests the omission of 'responsible government' the second part suggests the commission of exploitation and domination. It was a paradoxical situation, but very much a historical fact in China during the 19th century.

Secondly, as the experience of China shows, irresponsible imperialism is neither an accidental happening nor a short-lived phenomenon. It is a well-conceived and well-designed system, and a permanent form of governance. It is a higher stage than classical or 'responsible' imperialism, a master-piece in the history of imperialism. Only a highly experienced metropolis and a highly sophisticated imperialist culture can conceive and practise it. Fairbank has devoted years of study to present an example of sophisticated, though pathetic and Quixotic, pattern of the Chinese, a people of long experience of suffering taking foreign aggression and domination in their stride. One always wonders why so much attention should be paid to expose the dark spot of the vanquished, but not those of the vanquisher. A similar devotion to the British example of ingenuity, competence and tenacity in subjugating and exploiting foreign peoples who were numerically hundreds of times greater than the population of the British Isles, would be far more meaningful at least to the developing world than all the studies of Synarchy and Sino-barbarian equations put

together. With the Fairbankian perspective prevailing in Chinese history circles, we have forgotten the genius of imperialist governance, i.e. Britain.

Here I am tempted to quote the observations of a renowned personality in 19th-century China, Liang Qichao (1873-1929) who wrote in the early 20th century: 'As the proverb goes: 'Ten thousands of kites are not worthy one osprey'. This explains why several tens of thousands of Britons can rule over three hundred million Indians. There are no less than several millions of my countrymen settling abroad, but they are only the oxen and horses to the other peoples. There are no more than ten thousand foreigners in my country, but they control our sovereignty.'²¹ I do not subscribe to Liang's social Darwinism, exalting the superiority of the Anglo-Saxons. But the phenomenon of less than ten thousand Britons perpetuating an irresponsible imperialist treaty system in China, a country of four hundred million, for more than half a century (comparable to less than a hundred thousand Britons perpetuating the British Raj in India for nearly two centuries) should not be so quickly forgotten. Indeed, it deserves an inquiry as to how such a miracle was possible.

British irresponsible imperialism over China represented the magic power of universal management of capitalist economy, in addition to Britain's ability to stabilize the existing socio-political order in China. Accumulated experience in the Far East had made Britons experts in dealing with various segments of China's ruling elite, how to deter them, coax them, divide them, deceive them and disarm them. British imperialism was not face to face with the Chinese masses in the 'indirect' treaty rule, with the Chinese ruling elite forming a barrier. When the masses showed hostility to the new governance, British arms were at the ready to deal with them without mercy. But the

Chinese casualties under irresponsible imperialism were caused mainly by British bullets, not so much by British killing—bullets were fired on Britain's behalf by Chinese and Indian soldiers. In this aspect, Liang Qichao's conception of ten thousand Britons versus four hundred million Chinese is misconceived. For, during the 19th century not even one hundred thousand among the four hundred million Chinese had united to fight the ten thousand. Before they could confront the British, they had first to overthrow the national ruling machine, which was a gigantic task. British irresponsible imperialism had, in fact, integrated itself with China's national ruling machine in dealing with the masses. Such an integration had given British irresponsible imperialism vitality to survive until the overthrow of the national ruling machine.

Irresponsible imperialism, in this sense, is a sophisticated alliance of native and foreign rulers. By alliance, I do not mean Synarchy, which is a culture-oriented perspective, while the alliance between imperialism and national ruling elite in China had a deep socio-economic root—exploiting the masses for their parasitical but indulgent existence. Of course, the alliance was no real commonwealth of co-prosperity. It was a combination of collusion and collision, charged by hot-and-cold struggle-compromise and love-hate relationships. But there was give-and-take, mutual sharing of economic gains and mutual reinforcement of political security. The superiority of irresponsible imperialism over the 'responsible' one lies in the fact that the indigenous power structure is by and large preserved intact.

The Treaty System in 19th-century China, as we have seen, had only added an aspect of remote control to the existing ruling system of the land. The strength and weakness of this system thus centred round over-dependence on China's *ancien regime*. The British irresponsible governance in China

virtually died the day the Manchu government was overthrown. Thereafter Japan and United States made attempts to revitalize irresponsible imperialism in China under their aegis without much success, simply because China's internal political situation was undergoing a convulsion. Finally, it was the American guns captured by the communist army which boomed the death knell of both the *ancien regime* and irresponsible imperialism in China.

Let us now come to the third characteristic of irresponsible imperialism by examining the inter-relationship between the imperialist power's 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' overseas governance. Although we have conceived irresponsible governance as a superior and more sophisticated form of imperialist domination as compared with responsible government presided over by the metropolitan power, we should not forget that the latter is the foundation of the former. The Treaty System in China would have been unthinkable if there had not been British Raj in India. We have often compared India and China as a pair of colonial twins which was a fact. However, in the international order of *Pax Britannica*, the two countries were placed in different roles by the London rulers. This may be briefly spelled out.

It was as if there was a chain-reaction, with the downfall of India leading to that of China. In many ways, British conquest of China was a corollary of her conquest of India. First, there was the triangular trade and opium which I have discussed elsewhere. Suffice it to say that if there had been no Indian opium the pattern of British aggression against China would have taken a totally different turn. Second, the two Sino-British wars nicked 'opium' which had laid the foundation of the Treaty System could never have been fought had India not been a British colony. For, the British expeditionary forces were assembled in India and mostly

manned by Indian sailors and soldiers. Third, the security forces in the British concessions of the treaty ports were dominantly Indian, thousands of turbaned Sikhs being employed as security police, traffic constables and gatemen, earning the nickname 'Red-headed' (because of the red turban) among local Chinese. Fourth, India was British Empire's military, political and economic headquarters in the East; the British officers in China, including the Governor of Hong Kong, had to take orders from India. In a way, India was a step closer to the metropolis than China. Fifth, there was a difference between 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' imperialism in Britain's economic strategy. As I have discussed in my last article, in the scheme of British policymakers Indians were to be the major consumers of British cotton textiles, while Chinese were to be the major consumers of Indian opium. One of the aims of selling Indian opium in China was to augment the Indian purchasing power for British textiles.

Irresponsible imperialism was made more irresponsible by the linkage between the treaty system and opium imperialism. This is illustrated by an observation of Fairbank: 'In the cases of the consular service and opium trade there is some verisimilitude, for the superintendent of British trade, who was concurrently H.M.'s minister plenipotentiary of China and governor of Hongkong, was the administrative head to whom the consuls looked for instructions, while the beautiful harbor of Hongkong and its city of Victoria were the entrepot where opium cargoes from India were stored to await shipment to the receiving stations [in China]' (*Trade and Diplomacy*, p. 156).

To prove this 'verisimilitude', let us cite 'The Hong Kong government Ordinance No. 2 of 1858' enacted by 'His Excellency Sir John Bowring, Knight, LL.D., Governor and Commander in Chief of the Colony of

Hong Kong and its Dependencies, and Vice Admiral of the same, Her Majesty's Plenipotentiary and Chief Superintendent of the trade of British Subjects in China'. The title of the Ordinance reads: 'An Ordinance for Licensing and Regulating the Sale of prepared Opium.' Explaining the purpose of issuing the Ordinance in his letter addressed to his superior authority in London, Bowring regarded opium 'an article pre-eminently suited for taxation' by the Hong Kong government. He also enunciated a new policy of freeing the trade in 'raw opium' (meaning the opium imported from India) from 'fiscal interference' and subjecting 'prepared opium' (meaning the opium extract prepared by Chinese for the pipes of the opium-smokers) to strict Hong Kong government monopoly. The Ordinance (approved by the Crown) armed Bowring with an additional authority—licensing the trading enterprises 'to boil and prepare opium, and to sell and retail opium so boiled and prepared'.²² Bowring thus became a six-headed Prince of Darkness with the sixth head as the licensing chief for preparing and selling opium extracts in China in addition to the five heads already listed in his Ordinance.

Responsible and irresponsible imperialism are mutually complementary, just as India and China were in 19th century within the *Pax Britannica*. As the British enterprises in China were unthinkable without the foundation of British Raj in India, the latter's survival and prosperity were equally unthinkable without the opium trade and Treaty System in China. Money and goods flowed from the domain of Britain's responsible government in India into the domain of Britain's irresponsible governance in China and vice versa. Both flows formed a confluence of super-profits for the metropolis.

If imperialism is the highest stage of development of capitalism, irresponsible imperialism is the highest stage of imperialist

development. The Treaty System in China was the highest stage of British imperialism. However, by resorting to irresponsible imperialism in China, Britain was expanding her economic power and political influence to the extent of imbalance—much beyond what the narrow base of the British Isles could sustain. When the Treaty System in China collapsed at the onslaught of Chinese nationalist movement and with the exhaustion of the First World War, it was the beginning of a downward trend for *Pax Britannica*. The British lion was truly the

jungle king of the predatory international order when the Treaty System in China yielded the best results for her in the last three decades of the 19th century. With the loss of both China and India by 1947, the British lion shrank to the size of a cat. After Britain no imperialist power has had any success with irresponsible imperialism, now virtually vanished. The Treaty System in China was, thus, the only success story of irresponsible imperialism. Its rise and fall deserves a more careful and exhaustive study than is possible in the present essay.

NOTES

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3. P.T. Moon, *Imperialism and World Politics*, Macmillan, 1926, p. 321.
4. *Ibid.*
5. D.C.M. Platt, 'Further Objections to an "Imperialism of Free Trade" 1830-60', *Economic History Review* (2nd ser.), vol. xxvi, no. 1, February 1973, p. 78.
6. *Ibid.*, W.G. Hynes, 'British Mercantile Attitude Towards imperial Expansion', *The Historical Journal*, xix: 4, 1976, p. 969.
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8. Tan Chung, *China and the Brave New World: A Study of the Origins of the Opium War 1840-42*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1978, p. 220.
9. Ding Mingnan *et al.*, *Diguo zhuyi qinhuo shi* (History of Imperialist Aggression on China), 2nd edn. vol. i Beijing, 1973, p. 119.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
11. J.Y. Wong, *Yeh Ming-ch'en: Viceroy of Liang Kuang 1852-58*, Cambridge University, 1976, p. 163.
12. Some of Li's foreign proteges are portrayed in R.K. Douglas, *Li Hungchang*, London, 1895, pp. 223-29.
13. Fan Wenlan, *Zhongguo jindai shi* (History of Modern China), vol. I, Beijing, 1961, p. 223.
14. O. M. Green, *The Foreigner in China*, London, 1942, p. 58.
15. Guo Mojo, 'Yue Shi' (Lunar Eclipse) in *Zhongguo xinwenxue daxi* (Great Collection of China's New Literature), Shanghai, 1935, vol. xi (Zhou Zuoren, ed.), p. 191.
16. H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834*, Oxford, 1926, vol. 2, p. 107.
17. Jiang Tingfu [T.F. Tsiang], *Jindai zhongguo waijiaoshi ziliao jiyao* (Collection of Important Source Materials in the Diplomatic History of Modern China), 1st edn., 1934, reprint, Taipei, 1959, vol. ii, pp. 157-58.
18. Ding Mingnan *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 299.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 295-314.
20. Hobson, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
21. Liang Qichao, 'Jin zaohun yi' (On Prohibiting Early Marriage) in *Yinpingshi guanji* (Collected Essays From the 'Ice Drinking Study'), reprint, Taipei, 1974, p. 136.
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