


RESOURCES FROM ALPHA EDUCATION'S
UNEQUAL TREATIES PROJECT



DECOLONIZING HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

THROUGH CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES IN ASIAN HISTORY



HOW DO WE DECOLONIZE HISTORY EDUCATION ?

THE UNEQUAL TREATIES PROJECT

The resources included here were written by law student interns for ALPHA Education. The hope is that these materials will aid teachers interested in developing a unit, or in teaching and integrating lessons about colonialism as it affected Asian countries and peoples.

Above detail from the painting or the Qi court by William Alexander, an artist appointed to record Lord Macartney's embassy to China., 1793-1794

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ENGENDERING GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

PROJECT RATIONALE

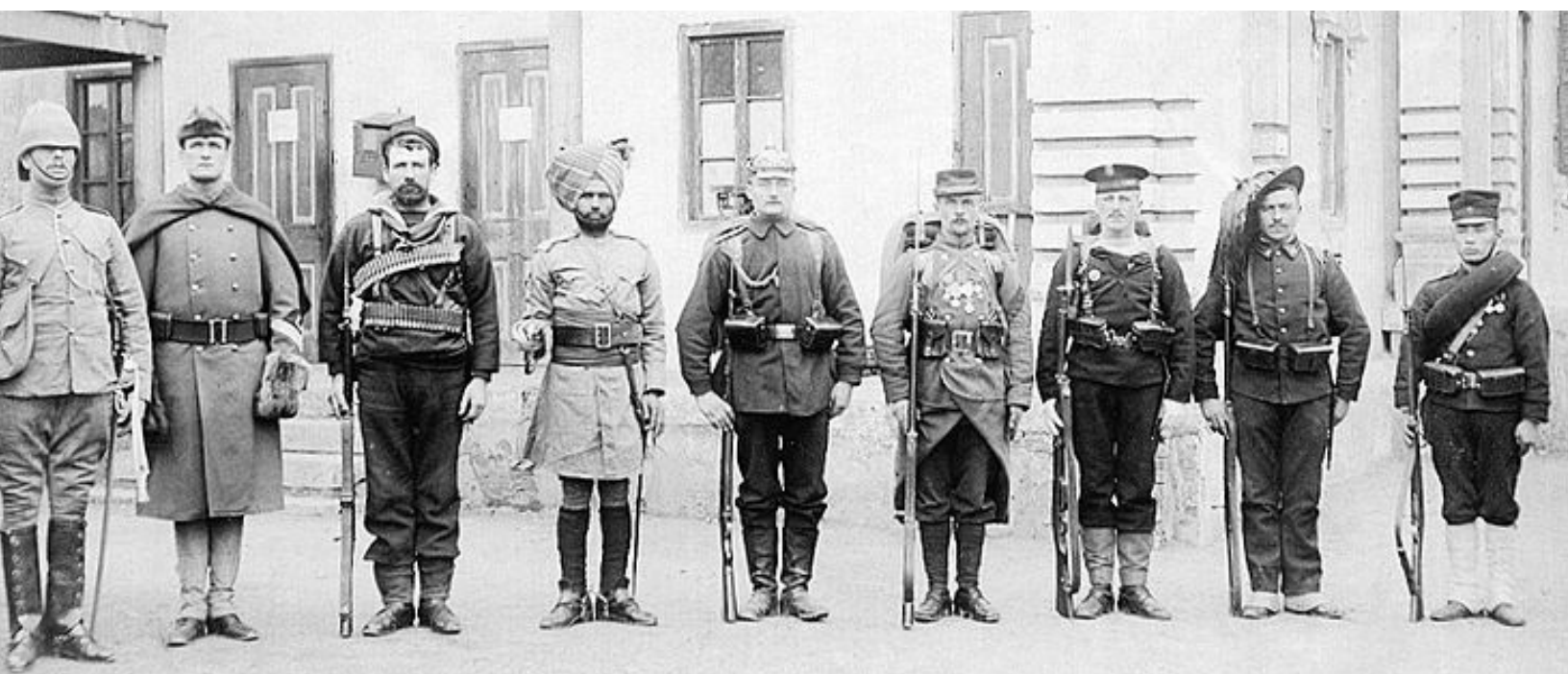
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Teaching about Asia in North America has been persistently problematic because of the problem of eurocentrism, which often leads in the failure to include or a tendency to marginalize North American links to Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Price, 2011, 2). Eurocentrism in history pertains to the presumed centrality and dominance of Europe in global historical affairs. This perspective carries with it assumptions about the purported superiority of Europe over the rest of the world. Nakip adds: "It is the assumption that since Europe grew richer and more powerful than all other societies it is "superior" to them; its perspective, therefore, ought to be privileged over all others." (Nakip: 2014)

Compared to the United States, Canadian history writing leaves out, even more, when it comes to the story of World War II. Depictions of Canada's past tend to be Atlantic-centered and focused on European immigrant experience, which both displaces First Nations peoples and Canadian links to the Pacific. However, such attempts to correct Eurocentric narratives have met resistance as well as accusations of "killing" or diluting Canadian history. (Price: 2011)

Contrary to such fears, introducing more globally balanced and cross-cultural and historical content into the curriculum can actually impart important life skills and develop the capacities of Canadian students, which can help them to become more globally informed, culturally competent, and sensitive citizens. Exposing students to multiple perspectives and encouraging them to take a historical perspective as they make sense of their own heritage can help broaden their understanding of the world around them.

Below: The 8 power Alliance (Detail of Japanese soldier)
Inset: Full Photograph taken by Captain C.F. O'Keefe.



WESTERN IMPERIALISM IN CHINA

Britain extracted favorable trade conditions from China in the treaty. China had to pay an indemnity of twenty-one million dollars. Britain established consulates in these cities. In addition, China ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain.

SUMMARY

By Jonathan Yi Jiang Hou, Pro Bono Students Canada, 2019

The Treaty of Nanking was signed in 1842 after China's defeat against Britain in the Opium War. Britain started planning for war in 1839, in response to Lin Zexu's confiscation of opium from British merchants. Charles Elliott, the Chief Superintendent, suggested to Lord Palmerston that Britain needed to wage war for revenge and establish a colony that would provide safety for British merchants. Britain ultimately declared war and its victory compelled China to sign the treaty. The treaty marked the beginning of Western imperialism's impact on Chinese sovereignty.

Political Cartoon by Henri Meyer, 1898



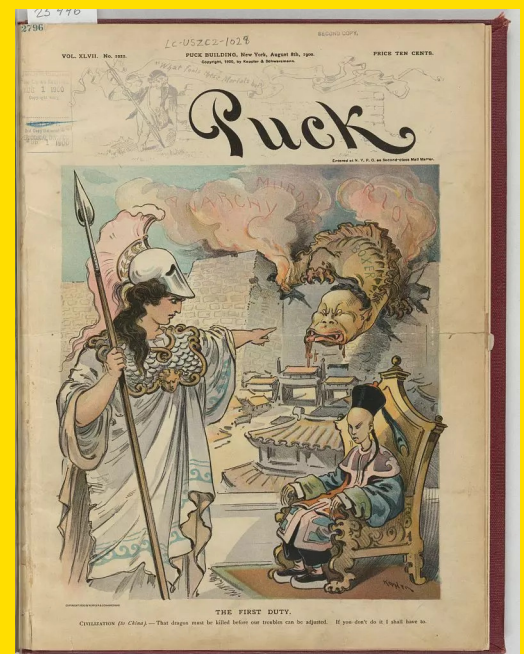
**THE TREATY OF NANKING
(1842)**

Britain extracted favorable trade conditions from China in the treaty. China had to pay an indemnity of twenty-one million dollars. In addition to Guangzhou (Canton), the government opened the ports of Xiamen (Amoy), Fuzhou (Foochow), Ningbo (Ningpo), and Shanghai for trade and Britain established consulates in these cities. In addition, China ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain. The treaty abolished the Hong system and China promised moderate duties on British goods. China also agreed to release British subjects in captivity and grant amnesty to Chinese subjects who had helped the British. In return, Britain would withdraw its troops from Nanjing (Nanking), the Grand Canal, and Zhenhai (Chinhai) after receiving six million dollars. It would keep its troops in Gulangyu (Koolangsoo) and Zhoushan (Chusan) until China paid off all indemnities.

The British government was very pleased with the treaty as it addressed the problems that Britain faced in its trade with China. China, however, resented the Treaty of Nanjing and its subsequent treaties with Western powers. It was not ready to accept Western international law and continued to hold onto its own worldview. Notably, diplomatic representation in Beijing was only established after 1858, as China saw its presence in the capital as a challenge to its tributary system.



Political Cartoons satirizing Imperialist expansion from Puck Magazine (1871-1918).





Detail of the Nagasaki Harbor and Dejima Island. Artwork from Ryosenji Treasure Museum. The Kurofune Art Collection (Shimoda: Ryosenji Temple)

JAPAN OPENS UP TO THE WEST

The Japanese became very concerned about the growing foreign presence in the country after the treaty adopted.

SUMMARY

By Jonathan Yi Jiang Hou, Pro Bono Students Canada, 2019

The Treaty of Kanagawa, signed by Japan and the United States of America (USA) in 1854, opened Japan to the rest of the world. Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived in Japan in July 1853 on the USS Mississippi in order to open Japanese ports to American ships.

He demonstrated the force of his “black ships” in order to compel the Tokugawa Bakufu to accept President Fillmore’s letter. Perry returned in February 1854 and the two parties signed the treaty.

Although the treaty did not deal with trade relations between the two countries, it gave the USA considerable privilege in Japan. Perry was very concerned with the rights and privileges of Americans in Japan, as he stated that “[t]he Americans will never submit to the restrictions which have been imposed upon the Dutch and Chinese...” The treaty opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to American ships, allowed them to purchase necessary commodities, and required Japan to help shipwrecked sailors. Due to the most-favored-nation clause, the United States was also entitled to all future concessions made by Japan to other nations. In addition, the United States would open a consulate in Shimoda. Townsend Harris would become the first US consul general in Japan.

George Feifer suggests that Perry merely unlocked Japan's door with the Treaty of Kanagawa. American merchants in China thought that the Treaty of Kanagawa merely secured essentials for American ships, while the Japanese were concerned about the growing foreign presence in the country. Harris's negotiation for the Treaty of Amity and Commerce in 1858 showed that both the populace and imperial court were concerned about the disturbance of Japan's traditions and laws. The bakufu's submission to the US demands ultimately damaged its reputation in Japan and led to greater political instability.



“Portrait of Perry, a North American,”
woodblock print, ca. 1854 (left)
Nagasaki Prefecture Collection

THE TREATY OF SHIMONOSEKI (1895)



Image: 930 Commemorative Postcard: Karafuto (southern Sakhalin), Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, Kyushu, Korea, Taiwan, the Kurile Islands and the Kwantung Leased Territory (southern Liaoning) with the Imperial residence (Tokyo) in the center. East Asia Image Collection, Michael Lewis Taiwan Postcard Collection, Lafayette College.

JAPAN'S INDUSTRIALIZATION

The Treaty of Shimonoseki marked the ascension of Japanese power in East Asia. This treaty also outlines how China figured in Japan's rapid industrialization.

SUMMARY

By Austin Ray, Pro Bono Students Canada, 2019

The Treaty of Shimonoseki was signed between Imperial Japan and Qing China in 1895, at the end of the First Sino-Japanese War. The war was primarily waged primarily as a struggle for suzerainty over Korea. For centuries China had been considered the leading cultural and political power in East Asia but the Japanese victory in the First Sino-Japanese War marked a shift in the balance of power towards the rapidly-industrializing Japan.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki was the most damaging treaty signed by China in the 19th century. The treaty affirmed Japan's ascendancy in East Asia and the nation managed to extract significant concessions from China, including the independence of Korea.

Korea had formerly been a Chinese tributary state, meaning that it had symbolically acknowledged the supremacy of China in exchange for legitimacy and good relations with its powerful neighbor. Korea's independence was short-lived, as it would effectively become a Japanese protectorate following the Russo-Japanese War before being fully annexed by Japan in 1910. There were also significant financial reparations imposed on China by Japan, as well as concessions to Japanese citizens in China and the opening of ports to Japanese businesses, similar to previous agreements reached with Western Powers.

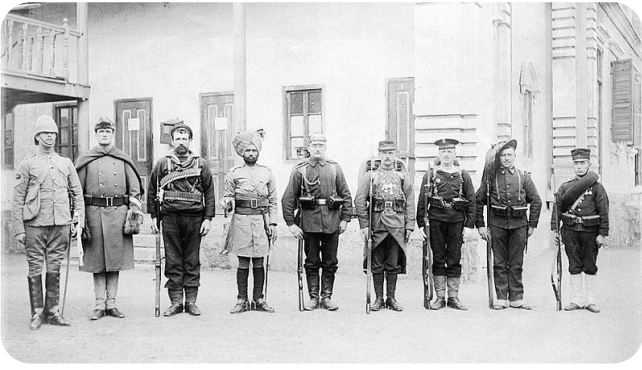
The most significant condition of the treaty was Article 2, which ceded territory to Japan, notably Taiwan and the Liaodong Peninsula. The annexation of Liaodong by Japan directly conflicted with Russian imperial interests, which led to the Triple Intervention by Russia, Germany, and France. These nations put diplomatic pressure on Japan to exchange the Liaodong Peninsula for an enlarged indemnity payment, to which Japan grudgingly acceded. Shortly after the return of Liaodong to China, Russia moved in to secure its interests in the area, sowing the seeds for the Russo-Japanese War a decade later.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki marked the ascension of Japanese power in East Asia. Although Japan was able to aggressively assert its colonial interests, it was not yet strong enough to challenge multiple Western Powers at once. This growth of power would continue, leading to the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War, the first major military victory of an Asian state over a Western Power in the modern era.



Photos of members of Korea's rebels : The Righteous army of Jeongmi (1907)

The photos were taken by F.A. McKenzie, a Canadian Journalist who supported Korean independence from Japanese colonialism.



The 8 power Alliance (Detail of Japanese soldier) Inset: Full Photograph taken by Captain C.F. O'Keefe.

JAPAN'S ALLIANCE WITH WESTERN POWERS

By Austin Ray, Pro Bono
Students Canada, 2019



The Boxer Protocol of 1901 brought an end to the Boxer Rebellion, an anti-foreigner uprising that broke out in China in 1899. During the rebellion, an Eight-Nation Alliance was formed between all major Western Powers and Japan to protect their various interests in China. The Boxer Protocol imposed several conditions on China such as an indemnity payment as well as the execution of specific Chinese officials. The Alliance forced China to allow foreigners to occupy certain parts of the country, destroy several Chinese forts, and prohibit the importation of arms into the country for two years. The Qing emperor was also forced to apologize to the emperors of Germany and Japan for the deaths of two of their officials, and even erect a commemorative arch for the German victim, Baron von Ketteler.

The real damage of the Boxer Protocol was to the prestige and legitimacy of the Qing government, which would be eventually toppled in the Xinhai Revolution of 1912. The Xinhai Revolution established the Republic of China but failed to end the unrest in the country, with the central government struggling to reign in factionalism and assert control over all of China until 1949. The Boxer Protocol also marked the further increase of Japanese influence in East Asia.

Japan contributed by far the most soldiers of any nation to the alliance. Japan's victory in the Boxer Rebellion built upon their previous victory in the First Sino-Japanese War and solidified Japanese influence in the region. A few years later, in 1904 Japan and Russia finally clashed over their conflicting imperial interests in Manchuria and Korea. The resulting Japanese victory stunned the world and shifted the balance of power, making Japan the pre-eminent power in East Asia.

THE TREATY OF NANKING AND THE TREATY OF KANAGAWA: WESTERN IMPERIALISM COMES TO CHINA AND JAPAN

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By Jonathan Yi Jiang Hou, Pro Bono Students Canada, 2019

In this essay, Jonathan outlines the historical context of two key treaties that marked the beginning of Western Imperialism in China (1842) and Japan (1854).

The Treaty of Nanking (Nanjing) marked the beginning of Western imperialism in China and the decline of the Qing Dynasty's authority. Following the Qing's bold measures to suppress the opium trade, the British went to war with China and declared the first Opium War (1839-1842). A second Opium War would follow in 1860. The Treaty of Nanking increased Britain's presence in China and China ended up subsequently signing more unequal treaties.

Origins of the Opium War

Before the Opium War, China's Qing Dynasty only conducted trade with other nations (including Western nations) on the basis of the tribute system. China's tribute system reflected a hierarchy that placed China at the top and placed other countries (particularly its Asian neighbors) beneath it as tributary states. Notably, Japan challenged this hierarchy and had already ended its tributary relationship with China in 1549. Western powers objected to this system, claiming that it was at odds with the concept of "equality between nations." This conflict between worldviews was the key reason why George Macartney's mission on behalf of the British Crown in 1792 failed to achieve its objective of expanding British trade in China. (Chan: 2014)

While some opium use already existed in China prior to the British trade, by the time that the Qing authority started taking the social and economic impact of the widespread trade in opium seriously, opium use in China had reached alarming rates that even the majority of its once-proud Manchu soldiers had become addicted to it.

The British started trading opium in the early 1800s when they found it difficult to sustain the rising costs of importing goods from China (tea, silks, and porcelain) – commodities that they had to pay for in gold and silver. By sourcing opium from India, the British East India Company raised the silver they needed for their imports. The trade grew and even encouraged American speculators to engage in it.

In 1839, Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu ordered British merchants to surrender their opium, confined them in the factories in Canton (Guangzhou), and compelled them to sign a bond promising not to bring any more opium to China (Costin: 1937).

Charles Elliott, the Chief Superintendent, pushed for a British response. He advised Lord Palmerston, the British Foreign Secretary, that there must be “the very prompt and powerful interference of Her Majesty’s government for the just vindication of all wrongs, and the effectual prevention of crime and wretchedness by permanent settlement (Costin: 1937).

Elliott believed that British merchants needed a safe colony protected by British law. The British government ultimately waged war in order to achieve these objectives. Palmerston objected to the arbitrary imprisonment of British merchants by Lin since Chinese officials had previously been tolerating the illegal opium trade Costin: 1937).

From his perspective, the lack of security for British merchants in the upheaval of the status quo became the justification for war.

Lin Zexu’s letter to Queen Victoria indicated that China considered Britain’s opium trade as an application of double standards. Lin was aware that Britain forbade the smoking of opium and questioned why the British Empire would allow opium to be produced in India and then sold in China. He attempted to convince Queen Victoria to think about the morality of the trade, saying that “[n]aturally you would not wish to give unto others what you yourself do not want.” He also highlighted the advantages Britain received in its trade with China. While Britain depended on China for goods such as tea, silk, and chinaware, British goods were only “toys” that were not necessary for daily life. For China, Britain’s profits from its trade relied on the benevolence of the Chinese emperor (Teng & Fairbank: 1954). Lin’s letter suggested that the Qing government’s drastic steps to suppress the opium trade were completely legitimate. Although laws prohibiting the opium trade were not strictly enforced before Lin entered the picture, China still retained the right to enforce these laws.

The Treaty of Nanking

The Opium War ended with the defeat of China and it was forced to sign the Treaty of Nanking. China was forced to cede Hong Kong Island to Britain in perpetuity and to open the ports of Canton (Guangdong), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo), and Shanghai to British trade. In addition, China was compelled to pay an indemnity of 21 million dollars, to release all captured British subjects, and to grant amnesty to Chinese subjects who helped the British forces. In return, Britain

withdrew its troops from Nanking (Nanjing), the Grand Canal, and Changhai (Zhenhai) after China made its first payment of 6 million dollars. But the British retained Koolangsoo (Gulangyu) and Chusan (Zhoushan), subject to China's completion of payments. By securing amnesty for Chinese subjects who supported Britain during the war, the treaty interfered with the Chinese judicial system and portrayed the war as a just war.

The Treaty's Impact

After securing Hong Kong Island as a colony, Britain extended its sovereignty and laws to China's coast. Hong Kong soon became a place where people could retreat to safety and avoid the arbitrary enforcement of Chinese law. The colony also allowed Britain to maintain greater control over its subjects, as it became easier to enforce British law on the Chinese coast. Sir Henry Pottinger was very pleased with the treaty, as Britain now had "a settlement as an Emporium for our trade and a place from which Her Majesty's subjects in China may be alike protected and controlled." In 1843, Britain also obtained extraterritorial jurisdiction over its subjects in China in the Treaty of the Bogue (Chan: 2014). China lost control over the fate of British subjects who violated Chinese laws.

The Qing government resented the treaties because they were forcefully imposed on China and they challenged China's view of its relationship with the rest of the world. In the Treaty of Nanking, China did not grant Britain the right to establish an embassy in Beijing, since a foreign presence in the capital would symbolically challenge the tribute system.

Eventually, however, China granted diplomatic presence in the capital by signing the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858, although it still did not accept the Western notion of international law.

Britain's victory in the Opium War led to the establishment of a colony in Hong Kong Island and the opening of five ports for trade. The Treaty of Nanking would be the first of many treaties that gave Western imperial powers considerable privilege in China.



Le Gateau des Rois... et des Empereurs [In China - the Cake of Kings... and of Emperors] Political Cartoon by Henri Meyer, published in Le Petit Journal, January 16, 1898.

NANKING AND KANAGAWA

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The Treaty of Kanagawa

The arrival of the American Commodore Matthew Perry in Japan with a flotilla of black ships (gunboats) led to the opening of Japan's ports and the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854. This unequal treaty eventually led to further agreements between the two countries that developed their trade relationships and facilitated other Western colonial powers' advance into Japan. However, resentment towards a growing foreign presence established by the agreements eroded the authority of the ruling Tokugawa shogunate in Japan, which eventually collapsed in 1868.

Prior American Attempts to Establish Relations with Japan

Long before Commodore Perry's arrival, the Tokugawa shogunate attempted to keep Japan secluded and free of Western influence. In 1636, Japan issued five sakoku decrees (locking up the country), which prevented most foreigners (except the Chinese, Dutch, and Koreans) from entering the country while prohibiting Japanese subjects from leaving. In 1825, the bakufu passed a law named the Edict to Repel Foreign Vessels, which noted that foreign ships approaching Japan's coastline would be shelled. In 1837, the USA sent out an expedition led by Charles W. King under the merchant ship Morrison, but it was shelled by the Japanese.

The USA, however, was very interested in establishing relations with Japan for the purposes of trade. Japan was a convenient place for American whalers to repair their ships and to obtain coal, food, and drinking water

Japan eventually softened its hostile policy after it saw the fate of Qing China in the Opium War, realizing that the policy could lead to a conflict with the West. In 1842, the Edict for the Provision of Fuel and Water permitted foreign ships to be supplied with food, fuel, and water. Subsequently, the American government sent out Commodore James Biddle in 1846 and Captain John H. Aulick in 1851 to establish relations with Japan. Biddle ultimately failed in his mission because of Japan's refusal to negotiate, as well as the outbreak of the Mexican-American war. Aulick, however, had conflicts with his captains and was relieved by President Millard Fillmore of his command.

Commodore Matthew C. Perry's Arrival in Japan
Perry became responsible for the mission to Japan in March 1852. On July 8, 1853, he arrived at the coast of Uraga on the USS Susquehanna. Perry demanded to the Japanese that he wanted a high-ranking official to deliver a letter from President Fillmore to the Japanese Emperor. Otherwise, he would land in Edo in order to deliver the letter. Perry's firm stance and concern for rankings indicated his belief that the mission's success depended on making a strong impression on the Japanese and maintaining the dignity of his country. Despite Perry's threats, he was actually under orders from President Franklin Pierce not to fire unless it was for self-defense. Japan was not aware of this, and the sight of American warships ultimately compelled Japan to accept the letter at Kurihama, slightly south of Uraga, on July 14. The letter was delivered to the Tokugawa shogunate, rather than the powerless Japanese Emperor.

Perry left Japan on July 17, promising to return in the spring of 1854 with a larger flotilla. He also informed the Japanese that American ships could reach Japan

within 18-20 days, warning them to stop treating Americans with hostility. After he returned to Japan on February 13, 1854, the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed on March 31. Japan opened the ports of Shimoda and Hakodate for American ships, established areas where Americans had the freedom of movement, and promised to supply commodities such as wood, water, provisions, and coal. In addition, it promised to rescue American shipwrecked sailors, permitted trade under temporary Japanese regulations, and allowed US consuls or agents to reside in Shimoda. The two countries would also enter into deliberations if they wanted to arrange business or trade other sorts of goods. Significantly, the treaty also included a most-favored-nation clause. Any privileges or advantages granted by Japan to other nations would also be granted to the USA.

The Treaty's Impact

The USA achieved its objective of establishing relations with Japan, but not everybody was pleased with it. The treaty only secured essential supplies for American ships. In fact, trade relationships between the countries only expanded after Townsend Harris, the US consul general to Japan, helped to negotiate the US-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce. In this sense, Perry merely unlocked Japan's door with the Treaty of Kanagawa, but it was the US-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce that truly opened the door to Japan. Nonetheless, the Treaty of Kanagawa marked the end of Japan's seclusion and there were Americans who were delighted by the new opportunity to explore Japan without fearing for their lives.

However, the Japanese became very concerned about the growing foreign presence in the country

after the Treaty of Kanagawa was signed. The Treaty did not provide substantial positive benefits for Japan and was considered an embarrassment for the Tokugawa shogunate. After Harris arrived in Japan, Japanese officials did not treat him very well and made it clear that his presence in Shimoda was unwanted. Shimoda's residents were warned to be careful about the Americans, while foreign traders received blame for the "insufficient profit from sales of Japanese wares."

Disagreement over how to respond to growing foreign incursion heightened a conflict between the shogunate and the emperor's court. While the shogunate did not wish to provoke the West, Emperor Komei (with the support of dissenting samurai clans) objected to the shogunate's measures. The authority of the shogunate was now being eroded due to the unpopularity of its decisions. In this way, Perry's mission to Japan, the Treaty of Kanagawa, and the subsequent unequal treaties had significant impacts on the Japanese government and politics.

The shogunate's decision to cooperate with the Americans, in its bid to preserve the peace, frustrated those who considered the submission to American demands and the intrusion of foreigners on Japanese territory unacceptable. Eventually, the Tokugawa shogunate was overthrown in 1868, marking the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, which dramatically transformed Japan into one of the world's great powers.

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NANKING AND KANAGAWA

THE TREATY OF SHIMONOSEKI AND THE BOXER PROTOCOL: EARLY IMPERIAL JAPANESE EXPANSION

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

By Austin Ray, Pro Bono Students Canada, 2019

In this essay, Austin outlines the historical context of two key treaties that were pivotal to Japan's shift into a fast-rising economic and military power in the 19th century.

Introduction

Starting with the First Sino-Japanese War, Japan began to take a more aggressive approach in its international affairs. Its Imperial expansionist aims became clearer as the decades wore on and would eventually lead it into direct conflict with other Asian countries as well as its rivals in colonial expansion – Western Imperialist powers. Japan's expansionist agenda led to its opportunistic participation in the First World War, its invasion of Manchuria, a second war with China, the bombing of Pearl Harbour, and ultimately motivated its most ambitious undertaking: the occupation of Southeast Asian and the Pacific countries. The roots of this imperial ambition can be traced to key developments at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki and the Boxer Protocol, two treaties that illustrate Japan's rise to power as a major player on the world stage, provide a window into an important historical moment in global history when Japan reached a turning point. At the turn of the century, Japan was at a crossroads. It had attained fast-paced industrialization wrought by the immense transformations undertaken in the Meiji era, a strategy it had embarked on to counter Western domination. As Japan rose to major power status in a world already largely carved up into separate spheres of influence by the longer-standing colonial powers of Europe and an emerging power, America, it increasingly came to rely on aggressive foreign policy to cement its own standing in the world. The drive to emulate empire-building (the same Western impulse it had resisted beginning in the 1850s) ultimately pushed Japan on its path of military-led expansion. Japan initially set its sights on Korea and China, a move that put it in the crosshairs of competing for Imperialist powers and eventually set it on the course towards war.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki, the Boxer protocol, and their surrounding circumstances provide a glimpse into the birth of a nascent Imperial Japan.

The Opening of Japan

On July 8, 1853, the American Commodore, Mathew C. Perry delivered his government's request to the Japanese for access to its ports. Perry famously delivered this request to the Japanese accompanied by a squadron of four black gunships with a promise to return with more gunboats the following year. Although Japan had a closed-door policy to the West for over two and a half centuries prior to Perry's arrival, some Dutch traders had been permitted to conduct business through the port of Nagasaki. Through their pursuit of Rangaku (Dutch learning), the Japanese kept abreast of developments in the West and some of their scholars were well versed in Dutch. On top of this, they were also aware of China's territorial losses to the British after the First Opium War in 1842. When Commodore Perry delivered on his promise the following year, the Japanese ended up granting the Americans access to two ports. Five additional Japanese ports were opened to foreigners in Japan from 1859 to 1863 as naval commanders from Britain and Russia followed Perry's example.

Following the British led alliance's bombardment of its most strategic ports (Kagoshima and later, Shimonoseki) in 1862-1863, a conflict sparked by a diplomatic row over Japan's refusal to pay indemnity for an attack on a British subject, the Japanese seriously contemplated their vulnerability to foreign incursions. The treaty that Japan was forced to sign at the conclusion of the conflict eventually led to a succession of unequal treaties.

In order to modernize and effectively counter Western domination, Japan looked to the West for inspiration. The revolutionary Japanese agenda "drew inspiration from a fervent curiosity about Euro-American technology and ideas". In the 1870s some of the most powerful figures in the new Japanese government spent eighteen months traveling through the United States and Europe. The Iwakura Mission, as it has come to be known, had three objectives: "first, to negotiate a revision of unequal treaties; second, to observe, investigate, and learn from other advanced countries for the purposes of domestic reform; and third, to enhance friendship among nations."

Although the mission failed to renegotiate the treaties they succeeded in their second objective. Andrew Gordon notes that the "economic power of modern industry and the social power of the educated citizens and subjects of the Western nation-states impressed the mission profoundly" and this led to the widespread adoption of Western institutions and ideas in Japan.

Early Imperial Japanese Expansion

One of the issues facing Japan as it sought to modernize itself was how to fuel this massive effort. Japan possessed relatively sparse natural resources and had to rely heavily on imports. The drive to create a modern nation went hand in hand with a search for the resources to accomplish this task. Much like the Europeans before them, this search took the Japanese beyond their own borders. Early Japanese imperial expansion was focused on Manchuria and the Liadong peninsula in China which bordered Korea to the East and Russia to the north. These resource-rich regions were essential to

the maintenance of Japanese industry and thus the modernized Japanese military as well.

Japanese leaders in the latter half of the nineteenth century possessed ambiguous attitudes towards foreign relations in Asia. The Japanese leadership “sometimes called for an Asia-wide (or “pan-Asian”) solidarity against the predatory imperialism of the Western powers” but yet “at the same time, the 1870s saw the first clear signs of a high-handed Asian diplomacy baked by a scornful attitude that placed Japan above its Asian neighbors” with the Japanese invasion of Taiwan in 1874. Although Japan did not make any territorial gains, “Japan’s rulers not only established a precedent for gunboat diplomacy but also articulated among themselves the concept of a Japanese mission to bring ‘civilization’ to the rest of Asia.” The Japanese “vision of Asian unity placed Japan in charge, as tutor and military hegemon.”

Despite the Japanese expedition to Taiwan, its most important foreign project in the 1870s and 1880’s was Korea which meant competing with China for influence in the region. This political and diplomatic confrontation eventually escalated to a full-blown war between China and Japan in 1894. The Sino-Japanese war ended in “complete Japanese victory by April 1895.” The defeat of Qing China “prompted competition among Western imperial powers to carve out spheres of influence in a weakened China, while Japan in Western eyes came out of the war with vastly increased prestige as the model modernizer of the non-Western world.” This period also marked the end of the unequal treaties between Japan and the Western powers, as they each renegotiated the terms of their previous agreements.

The Japanese press and political parties “wholeheartedly welcomed the new treaties” with minimal reservations.

Japan Imposes its Own Unequal Treaties

The subsequent peace agreement between the parties, the Treaty of Shimonoseki, was the most damaging accord signed by China in the 19th century. To begin with, the treaty forced China to cede valuable commercial concessions and was required to pay an extraordinary indemnity of 360 million yen to Japan. To put this in perspective, this sum constituted “about four and a half times Japan’s annual national budget of the year before the war.” Moreover, the treaty made Japanese “aspirations for an area of advantage well beyond Korea” clear. Beyond the massive financial burden that the treaty placed on China, the Qing government was forced to cede Formosa (Taiwan), the Pescadores, and the Liaodong peninsula to Japan. While Japan maintained that the peninsula was needed for the defense of Korea, Russia “saw it as a threat to her own route to China through Manchuria.”

Accordingly, in April 1895 the Russian representative to Tokyo, supported by those of France and Germany, ‘advised’ Japan “to return the territory to China.” Since Japan could not hope to stand up to the alliance of three major powers, it grudgingly accepted these terms. In this sense, the ‘Triple Intervention’ was “a savage reminder that half a century’s work had still not put Japan in a position to ignore or reject the ‘advice’ of one of the major powers.”

The shock of the intervention “engendered a mood of bitterness” in Japan and encouraged the Japanese leadership to pursue a policy of rearmament “designed to ensure that on any future occasion indignity could be properly resented.” At the turn of the century, “Western institutions and technologies were sources of strength, but the West and Westerners remained a menacing presence” for Japan.

Following its national embarrassment from the Triple Intervention, “Japanese leaders responded with several initiatives to regain control in Korea and to establish themselves as an imperial power in Asia.” Japan saw an opportunity in the alliance that responded to the Boxer Rebellion and anti-foreigner and anti-colonial uprising which broke out in China at the turn of the century.

In 1900-01, “Japan sent ten thousand troops to China – the largest single national contingent – to join the multinational force” that quelled the uprising. This international commitment confirmed, “Japan’s status as an acceptable, if still a junior member of the club of civilized powers.” Japan was able to join the “subsequent peace conference as an equal to the other powers and won the right to station a ‘peace-keeping force’ in the vicinity of Peking.”

The Boxer Protocol, the peace treaty which was drawn up after the rebellion was quashed, “represented in the case of the Western powers the high-water mark of their interference in Chinese domestic affairs.” From the Chinese perspective, the Boxer Protocol “was an instrument of revenge and humiliation.” The terms were harsh and would irreparably damage the credibility of the Qing dynasty, and contribute to its overthrow roughly a

decade later. Among the Western powers “there was a general impression abroad that an inevitable consequence of the Boxer affair must be the break-up of China, the expectation being that when this occurred China would be split into four regions.” In spite of the fact that Japan’s military contribution to the alliance was as large “as the forces of all the other powers combined” the four-part division of China did not envision an enlarged role for Japan. Instead, the interests of France, Britain, Russia, and Germany continued to dominate the postwar negotiations.

But because “partition required agreement among the powers,” China’s division was not forthcoming. Russia retained most of its claims over Manchuria on the pretext that “Boxers threatened the railway installations there” presenting Japan with a challenge to its position in Korea. This move “provoked anxiety in London as well as Tokyo and created suspicion, not untouched by envy, even in Berlin.” With the threat of the Boxers suppressed the great powers once again resumed their competition for influence in China.

Rivalry with Russia and the Annexation of Korea

While Japan occupied a dominant role in Korea throughout the end of the nineteenth century, it did not go by unchallenged. Korean leaders “continued to play foreign powers against each other by turning to Russia for help.” Eventually, “the Russians came to rival the Japanese position in Korea.” This rivalry with Russia, a great power, caused Japan to look to Russia’s greatest imperial rival – Britain – for support. Britain, shedding its policy of ‘Splendid Isolation,’ and in an effort to check Russia’s expansion into the Far East, entered into an alliance with the Japanese

in 1902. The British recognized Japan's special interests in Korea and "each nation pledged to aid the other if Russia and a fourth party attacked either one." With a "colony in Taiwan, troops in Peking, and an alliance with the British, Japan had secured a place as one of Asia's imperial powers."

Japanese leadership was divided on how to respond to Russia at this point in time and in the meantime, continued using diplomacy. Following the Boxer uprising, Russian policy in Asia "though erratic, tended to reflect the influence of progressively adventurous imperial advisers." When it rebuffed the Japanese government's diplomatic efforts, Japan decided to secure its position in Korea and take Manchuria by force. It declared war on Russia. The Russo-Japanese War was Japan's "second major military struggle over Korea in a decade." Although there were some notable victories for the Japanese, the war stood in stark contrast to the Sino-Japanese War just a decade earlier. Neither side emerged the undisputed victor and "aside from territorial rights on the southern half of the virtually uninhabited Sakhalin Island, Japan emerged with no outright gains of land and no financial compensation." This became a cause of growing resentment within Japan. Nevertheless, Japan was now firmly in control of Korea, and in 1910, it annexed Korea outright as its colony. Despite the mixed results of the war, Japan was able to defeat a great power in its own right further cementing international recognition of its meteoric rise as a global power. Reaction to "Japan's emergence as an imperial power ranged from outrage to

imagination." Around the world, to peoples chafing under European domination, "Japan's victory over Russia was invoked by modernizers and anti-imperialist activists as an inspiring harbinger of their own possibilities of nation-building and independence from the West." Far from being a war for freedom, morals, or liberation, however, it was a war for imperial expansion. Less than three decades later, some of the same Asian peoples whose imaginations were captured by Japanese victory against Russia would find themselves at the receiving end of Japan's empire-building.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

[Photographs by Felice Beato](#)
[Historical Photographs of China](#)

[Visualizing Cultures by MIT](#)

[Puck Magazine Archives by the University of Pennsylvania](#)

[About Frederick A. McKenzie](#)

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Royal Navy ship destroying a Chinese flotilla in front of Hong Kong during the Opium War. Edward Duncan, 1843. © National Maritime Museum, London.

These resources can help educate students about the legal and historical bases of institutionalized racism in Canadian society, as well as other Western contexts. While not a substitute for textbooks, these resources can complement Canadian educators' already existing courses and lessons in furtherance of Human Rights Education and Anti-Racism Education.

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