

American Interests in China in Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

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Abstract

Sino-American relations take all the major spotlights of journalists and financial experts nowadays. The relationship between both countries is regarded as one of the most crucial aspects of our globalized world economy in this 21st century. Although specialists of more recent times tend to approach the subject from the Richard Nixon's visit to China and the subsequent recognition, in the 1970's, by the United States, of the People's Republic, Sino-American relations have a deep root in its much longer historical past. We must never forget that everything is imbued by its historical processes. It is the purpose of this essay to analyze one of the most key moments in this long relationship. It is thus divided as the following: 1) the treaty system inaugurated by Great Britain and implemented by the USA; 2) The mid 1890's role of the US as a Diplomatic Power; 3) American reshaping of its foreign policy since the 1898 war with Spain and the Boxer Movement of 1900.

Keywords: Sino-American Relations; Diplomacy; International Commerce.

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Introduction

In 1783, thirteen former British colonies in the East coast of North America formally became an independent country, after years of war. The fuse that sparked the Independence Movement was related to tea, with the British Parliament's Tea Act of 1773 and the famous American response on the "Boston Tea Party". Lives were lost in the struggle for independence, but also the markets of Great Britain and its access to Chinese and Indian tea. Americans needed new grounds to revive their broken shipping industry and acquire tea. Many diverted their attentions to the China trade, sending ships to collect furs, silver, pelts and other goods to trade for tea, porcelain and silk in Guangzhou, a rich city where Westerners were allowed to trade. Such voyages were very profitable and, as John Pomfret puts it, "America's first fortunes

were made in the China trade from 1783 until the early 1800s and profits from that commerce bankrolled America's industrial revolution." (POMFRET, 2016, p. 2).

By the 1830s, the United States, far from being a world power, was already one of China's biggest trading partners, second only to Great Britain by a wide margin. But China was, at the time, the Empire of Great Purity (大清帝国 *dà Qīng dìguó*), or Great Qing. It was not only one of the largest empires in the world, but by far the richest and most populous (400 million people). It had inherited the institutions of the previously conquered Chinese Ming Dynasty, but it was much larger than its predecessor, encompassing Mongolia, Xinjiang, Manchuria and Tibet (Xizang). The ruler of the Great Qing was the Chinese Emperor, but also a Khan from the steppe peoples and a High Priest from Tibetan Buddhism. This great malleability of Qing rulers can be explained, in part, by their Manchurian origin and the need to adapt to the different customs of the many peoples they ruled over, so as to maintain legitimacy. This was true especially towards the Han Chinese, who formed the main axis of the Empire both economically and demographically, and who never forgot the overthrow of their Ming Empire. For that reason, many Chinese rebellions throughout the period used the slogan "Destroy the Qing, Revive the Ming!" (反清复明 *fǎn Qīng fù Míng*).

1. The Treaty System

By the 1830's, the United States also contrabanded opium to China, as did the British. They would either smuggle it from British India or buy from Turkey to resell in China, a sort of narcotrafficking forbidden by imperial law. US companies represented one sixth of all foreign firms conducting trade in Guangzhou and between 25 and 50% of their goods were opium (HUNT, 1983, pp. 7-8; POMFRET, 2016, p. 20). It was people connected to the China trade that founded investment banks, built factories and constructed the first railways of the US, with plans to connect with the Pacific Ocean so as to boost trade with China and Southeast Asia.

At the time, the Guangzhou System (also known as Canton System) restricted the location of trade between the Great Qing and Western merchants to the city of Guangzhou, where there were some twelve factories (*feitorias*) to allocate foreigners. Many British and American trade companies, who were also great opium smugglers, some even former slave traders with many government connections, wished for protection from Chinese law and the

ampliation of the trade system to include other city ports besides Guangzhou. The British were heavily dependent on opium revenue and their merchants pushed harder.

Their wish came true after the Anglo-Chinese Opium War of 1839 and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. It was crucial for laying the foundation of what is commonly called as Treaty System, established between China and foreign powers. In Article XIII of the *General Regulations* section, it stated that “Regarding the punishment of English criminals, the English Government will enact the laws necessary to attain that end, and the Consul will be empowered to put them in force [...]” (THE MARITIME CUSTOMS, 1917, p. 388). This was the “extraterritoriality clause”, an important asset to the later foreign economic, military and religious penetration. It also meant that the Chinese government lost part of its sovereignty and could not enforce its laws towards British subjects. Another important clause was added in the Supplementary Treaty of Humen, 1843, Article VIII:

“[...] it is further agreed, that should the Emperor hereafter, from any cause whatever, be pleased to grant additional privileges or immunities to any of the subjects or Citizens of such Foreign Countries, the same privileges and immunities will be extended to and enjoyed by British Subjects; but it is to be understood that demands or requests are not, on this plea, to be unnecessarily brought forward.” (THE MARITIME CUSTOMS, 1917, p. 393)

This was the “most favored nation clause” and it was this, more than any other, that made possible the creation of the treaty system. It became the basis on which every foreign country tried to approach China diplomatically. The United States was one of the first, having signed with the Great Qing the Treaty of Wangxia (1844), in which we can clearly see the influence of the English agreement as early as in the Article II, which follows:

“If the Chinese Government desire to modify in any respect the said Tariff, such modifications shall be made only in consultation with Consuls or other functionaries thereto duly authorised in behalf of the United States, and with consent thereof. And if additional advantages or privileges of whatever description be conceded hereafter by China to any other nation, the United States and the citizens thereof shall be entitled thereupon to a complete, equal, and impartial participation in the same.” (THE MARITIME CUSTOMS, 1917, p. 678)

Soon followed other nations and every gain one country acquired should be passed to all others. Besides, considering that the treaties were supposed to be revised every ten years or so, the system guaranteed the cohesion of the treaty powers as a bloc against China, since the loss of a nation, although non-transferable, could nonetheless strengthen the Qing government in the

future. The Chinese had a name for such a system: “unequal treaties” (不平等条约 *bùpíngděng tiáoyuē*). But even though there was diplomatic cooperation, rivalry continued to exist between Western countries, especially as they expanded their colonial territories everywhere. The existence of such rivalries fitted well in the traditional Chinese tactic of “using barbarians to counter barbarians”. Even during the Opium War, in 1842, Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794-1857) had noted that “The enemy countries of which the British barbarians are afraid are three: Russia, France, and America.” (TENG & FAIRBANK, 1979, pp. 30 and 32). Later, as most of the European colonial empires took territorial concessions and zones of influence in China, while the Americans remained rhetorically anti-colonialists, the United States was seen as perhaps the most approachable foreign power by the Great Qing.

But this more favorable image of the US did not impede it from benefiting from the treaty system, as it allowed for an easier American economic and religious penetration in China with the establishment of missionary compounds and firms in important foreign concessions. After the Sino-French Treaty of Tianjin, 1858, and its ratification in 1860, missionary activity of all of the treaty powers was allowed throughout the empire, and not just at the major ports. This was also important for Americans at home, since there existed both the missionary fervor and the idea of the US helping with the modernization of China – an association of Christianity and commerce with cultural progress –, something Americans rhetorically also felt about Japan.

The second half of the 19th century saw the growth of colonization everywhere, and steamships, telegraphic lines and railroad networks gave the West a more solid advantage towards the Chinese. But we must never forget that foreign encroachment happened parallel to a great civil unrest, with more than a hundred revolts erupting against the ruling Qing Dynasty between 1850 and 1875. They were mostly caused by demographic pressures, ecological crisis, corruption and anti-Qing sentiment. In the struggle, even a new dynasty proclaimed itself in the most productive region of the country, the Celestial Kingdom of Great Peace (太平天国 *tàipíng tiānguó*). Government assistance became nonexistent and a great number of people died of drought, river floods and hunger in what probably was the deadliest civil war ever in history.

As was said by Yixin 奕訢 (1833-1898), the Prince Gong, in 1861, the priorities were: first, the most threatening rebellions; second, Russia, for its close borders and known ambitions in Manchuria; and third, the British (TENG & FAIRBANK, 1979, p. 48). To the colonial

empires of the West this internal struggle meant opportunity, and most of Asia was colonized by the 1890's: Vietnam was incorporated by the French Colonial Empire in 1885; the Ryukyu Kingdom, a chain of islands in the East China Sea, was formally incorporated by the Japanese Empire in the 1870's; and Central Asia itself was now part of the expanding Russian Empire, who had also acquired parts of Manchuria (Vladivostok can be translated as "ruler of the East" or "conquest of the East"). The Great Qing had lost practically all of its allies to colonization: a very significant geopolitical loss. In cases where conflicts over its allies or the spread of spheres of influence in frontier regions resulted in treaties, the US also benefited from the new ports opened and the commercial rights granted. At the same time, by comparison, American position as a non-colonizer continued to improve its image with Chinese officials.

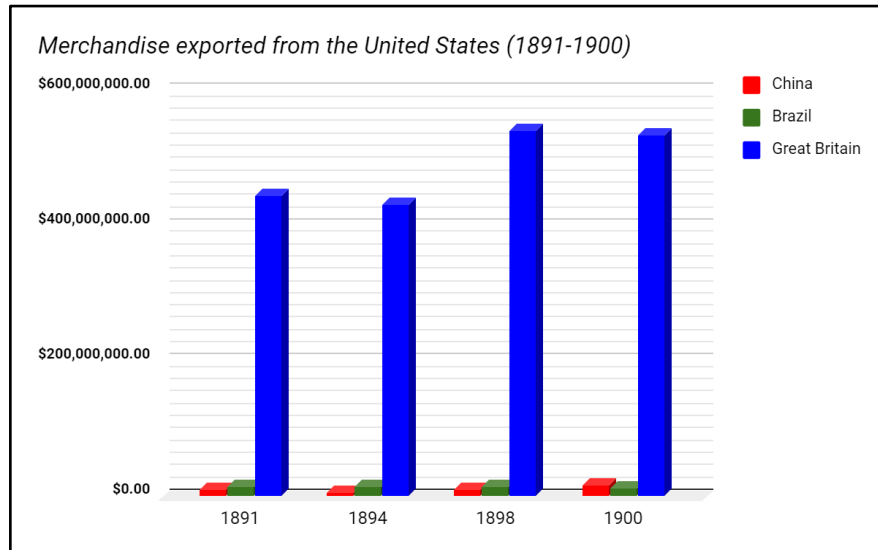
The way the Great Qing dealt with the challenge of how to respond to either rebellions or foreign encroachment can be summed up by Feng Guifen 冯桂芬 (1809-1874)'s famous slogan: "Chinese Learning as substance, Western Learning for [practical] application" (中学为体, 西学为用 *zhōngxué wéitǐ, xīxué wéiyòng*). It meant, in other words, to equip the military with modern weapons and foreign battleships, to enhance communications and, most importantly, to acquire the knowhow and achieve technological independence. This meant also protecting the country's railway system from foreign capital and influence, the careful use of loans so as not to fall into debt traps, and a two-way industrial policy comprised of the stimulation of key industries and the prohibition of the installation of large foreign factories, like in the cotton sector. This was known as Self-Strengthening Movement (自强运动 *zìqiáng yùndòng*) and its financing came not from the center of power, but from influential governors.

Meanwhile, the US was rebuilding its economy: The Civil War of the 1860's was over, as was slavery, and the national territory was much, much larger then before. Ports had been established quite early in California, connected by a railway system, facilitating trade to the Pacific region, as had been dreamed of by the first sailors to China. The China market, on the other hand, had lost most of its importance when compared to other markets, such as Europe and Latin America (see Figure 1). Differently from the UK, who depended on the Chinese opium market for revenue, Americans relied less on China for its commercial balance, selling cotton cloth and other goods now instead of opium. Also, as Americans were not grabbing

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colonies, they pictured economic advances in China based on railway concessions and the installation of firms, such as cotton factories prohibited by the Self-Strengthening policies.

Figure 1. Average value of merchandise exported from the US to China, Brazil and the UK in the 1890s



On the other hand, China was very important to American missionaries, who wished to convert almost one-fifth of the planet's population to Christianity. Although there were anti-foreign protests, some with official connivance, advocates of Self-Strengthening and other groups more radically anti-foreign could legally do little to impede missionary expansion into the interior, since it had been allowed by treaty in 1860. According to Paul Cohen, there were 886 European Catholic priests in 1900 and 3,445 protestant missionaries in 1905, almost all of which were either British or American, half of them women (COHEN, 1978, pp. 554-555). This represented, respectively, a growth of 252% and 1,722% when compared to the numbers of 1870 and 1864. By 1902, Americans were also the third largest foreign population in China's main treaty ports, lagging only behind Great Britain and Japan (DENBY, 1905b, p. 35).

But the Chinese were relevant to Americans not only in Asia, but also at home. The United States' domestic policy constantly discussed the "Chinese question", since there were many immigrants who had been pouring into the country since the 1850's. In the beginning, they were welcomed, as the US required workforce to build its infrastructure, but by the late 19th century these immigrants were more and more undesired. A juridical and even pseudoscientific distinction was elaborated to virtually separate Chinese from Americans, a

reflection of the power relations that existed between both countries. The US was, we must remember, an *apartheid* society whose treatment of selected populations was inherited from its slave past, added by a new “scientific” rhetoric of biological and cultural evolutionism.

One of such juridical measures was, for example, the *Act to Protect Free White Labor Against Competition with Chinese Coolie Labor, and to Discourage the Immigration of the Chinese into the State of California*, of 1862 (before the Federal abolition of slavery), allowed for the charging of \$2.50 to “each person, male and female, of the Mongolian race”. It may not seem much nowadays, but if we take into account that, in the early 1880’s, \$0.01 could buy a dozen eggs and \$0.15 a pound of steak, it gives us a perspective of the impact on the lives of poor immigrants (BROWN, 1957, p.9). Therefore, the discourse that fed anti-Chinese sentiment cited “racial struggle” as argument, but its purpose was mainly economic and political.

2. The US and diplomacy in the 1890’s

In the last decade of the 19th century, American foreign policy towards China was known as “Jackal Diplomacy”, as the jackal is an animal that feeds on carcasses (ANDERSON, 1985, p. 10). This was so because of the treaty system, since Americans could get all the benefits of other nations’ conflicts with the Great Qing without necessarily have to participate directly in them. As shown, the US had a specific immigration policy towards China and a great missionary body in that empire, but economically the China trade was not that relevant when put into perspective. Americans main interests were, therefore, of projection through soft power, mainly by religious effort, and an attempt, through the jackal diplomacy, of not lagging behind.

In the 1890’s, tensions between the Great Qing and Japan were at an all-time high over the Korean Joseon Dynasty. The Korean Peninsula was important for the Chinese, since it was the last ally in the region and served as a buffer state to protect Manchuria. To the Japanese, taking control over Korea was a geopolitical strategy in their agenda since at least the early 1870’s. When in 1893-4 the peasant Donghak Rebellion erupted in Korea’s countryside, King Gojong (1852-1919) asked the Chinese for help, who promptly sent troops. Japan did the same on the pretext of protecting its embassy, but soon gave a coup, installed a pro-Japanese government and sank Chinese ships.

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The United States played an interesting diplomatic role during the war, as it had relations with both belligerent countries and declared neutrality from the beginning (while other countries positioned themselves more openly against Japan). When tensions were high, but war had not yet been declared, both countries accorded that American consuls would protect Chinese subjects in Japan, and vice-versa. British Minister to China and Korea, Sir. Nicholas O'Connor (1843-1908), intended to impede war. Americans tried to insert in a neutral way. Charles Denby, Jr. (1861-1938), *chargé d'affaires* of the American Legation in Beijing, acting-diplomat on behalf of his father, sent a letter to his mother on July 11, 1894, in which he said: "I see a great deal of O'Connor and dine often there. He is trying to play a role in the Korean business. He has the wily Muscovite as an adversary, however, and is somewhat overmatched." (Denby Family Papers, 1894, Box 06). At the time, the most powerful players in the Great Game of Asia were the Russian and the British empires, so, by staying neutral, the US could approach both embassies, and Charles Denby, Jr. said that he would frequently visit the Russian Legation, should the diplomat Arturo Cassini (1836-1919) return to Beijing from Tianjin.

Wars could, nonetheless, change the *statu quo*, and no country that benefited from it would desire its disruption. Nicholas O'Connor's efforts failed and the Great Qing declared war on August the 1st, 1894. Chinese Northern army, equipped with modern vessels such as the battleship Zhenyuan 镇远, acquired from Germany, faced the bulk of the Japanese military forces. But Japan itself had had a process similar to the Chinese Self-Strengthening, with slogans like "Japanese Spirit, Western Learning" (和魂洋才 *Wakon yōsai*) and "Enrich the Country, Strengthen the Military" (富国強兵 *fukoku kyōhei*). The result we can see at Colonel Charles H. Denby's (1830-1904) letter to his wife, November 2, 1894, in which he said: "My dear Wife I have arrived in China in very troublous times. [...] The Chinese army had no guns, provisions, or discipline to speak of, China is in a desperate strait." (Denby Family Papers, 1894, Box 06).

Great Britain and Russia did not want one more strong country to compete with in the region. In October 1894, British diplomat Sir. Edward Goschen (1847-1924) requested that the US government allied with the UK, France, Germany and Russia to intervene in the conflict, compensate Japan and guarantee Korea's independence and protection (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2018, Doc. 56). The Secretary of State answered that, although it was in his

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interest to see the end of the conflict, the US would not participate in any intervention. As the Japanese kept advancing into Manchuria and Shandong province and, possibly, to the capital, as feared by foreign residents, a new request was made, this time also from the Chinese, to the American Minister at Beijing, Charles Denby. He then sent a telegram informing the State Department, stating his opinion was that the US should participate and help mediate the end of the war (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2018, Doc. 63). But it was ordered by the State Department, with the President's consent, that American diplomats would intermediate peace talks only if it was requested by China specifically and uniquely to the US.

At the time, Japanese and Chinese markets were close in importance to the United States – although Japan had a slight advantage with regards to the flow of merchandise in both directions, a gap that would widen in the next years. But even so it wasn't relevant enough for the US to enter directly in confrontation with the interests of Japan, or damage its image with China and the other powers, especially those whose flow of trade was tens of times bigger than that with both belligerent nations combined. But Americans did face the British when what was at stake was of higher priority for US policymakers. In 1895, for example, the United States won its third diplomatic conflict against the UK in South America, evoking the Monroe Doctrine, successfully establishing Latin America as its zone of influence (LaFEBER, 1993, p. 125). It was important for Americans, since although they were not yet a world power, they nonetheless aimed to become one and projected themselves, however timidly, in that direction, allowing more flexibility in the Chinese scenario.

By late 1894, Chinese officials agreed with asking only for the US to mediate talks between the Great Qing and Japan. American diplomats Charles Denby, at Beijing, and Edwin Dun, at Tokyo, had to come up with creative ways to transcribe the Han logographic writing system into telegraphic messages and most arrangements were made through their efforts. Still, no truce was agreed by the Japanese and the conflict continued in spite of the ongoing peace talks. In a letter to his wife, December 14, 1894, Charles Denby wrote about his fears:

“If the Japanese take Peking [Beijing] the Emperor and court will flee, and the dynasty will come to an end. Revolution and anarchy will follow, the southern provinces will go off to themselves. There will be utter confusion, no government will be left, and the situation of the foreigner will be of the utmost danger. Japan will not be able to ensure order among these 400,000,000 of people, and may possibly find that she has been too successful for her own good. She may possibly hold Manchuria and Formosa [Taiwan],

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but there will be no authority left to collect and pay her great indemnity, and commerce and trade will disappear.” (Denby Family Papers, 1894, Box 06)

Finally, in March 1895, the Chinese plenipotentiary signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki, putting a humiliating end to the war. The reasons for the defeat were many. First, the Great Qing underestimated the enemy, a former tributary state whom they regarded as the dwarf people (倭人 *wōrén*). Second, only the Northern army of Governor-General Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823-1901), who signed the treaty with Japan, were present at the fight; others, such as the well-trained Southern Army of the Governor-General Zhang Zhidong 張之洞 (1837-1909), did not participate. Nonetheless, it must be pointed out that the Qing court achieved the objective of “using barbarians to counter barbarians” in its management of American ministers to reach peace and preserve the Dynasty’s grip on power. Such a diplomatic expertise Americans failed to perceive.

Among some of Japan’s demands was that the Liaodong Peninsula would become a Japanese possession, and with it the great fortresses of Lushun and Dalian. The legal consultant of the Chinese Embassy sent to Japan to sign the treaty was the American former Secretary of State John W. Foster (1836-1917), who then leaked the treaty’s content (POMFRET, 2016, pp. 90-91). Russia, France and Germany intervened and Japan had to let go of that demand, but it still acquired Taiwan, more ports opened, a huge indemnity, and the right to build factories.

After the war and the diplomatic clashes against Great Britain in Latin America, the United States had become a diplomatic power both in the American continent and in the Pacific region. Furthermore, it had gained all the benefits of the Japanese treaty, being allowed now to install firms in Chinese cities, such as the once-forbidden cotton factories. So, also in this way, it was a win for Americans. Jean Chesneaux, Marianne Bastid and Marie-Claire Bergère noted that there were 552 foreign firms and 9,350 foreign residents in China in 1894, a number that had doubled by 1900, growing to 1,006 firms and 16,881 residents, while the number of treaty ports had also doubled (CHESNEAUX et. al., 1976, p. 297, 301). Early in 1898, Charles Denby, Jr., the diplomat’s son, published an article titled *America’s Opportunity in Asia*. He wrote that:

“This war has done more to open this vast field to Western commerce and civilization than five hundred years of foreign trade and one hundred years of missionary teaching. The effect has been instantly felt. The country seems to have sprung into life. Railroad lines are under construction, the beginnings of vast contemplated systems. Mines are being opened, new ports established, new lines of commerce developed.” (DENBY JR., 1898, pp. 33-34)

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But the fear his father, Charles Denby discussed with his wife in December 1894 reappeared later in 1898. He wrote about it in a book posthumously published in 1905, in which he stated a very different perspective from that of his son:

“The Japanese war was the beginning of the end for China. She came out of it humiliated and disgraced. She lost her fairest island, Formosa [Taiwan]. She was involved in debt; but, worst of all, she had lost her prestige, -- what the Chinese call ‘face’ [面子 *miànzi*]. She had been regarded as dangerous on account of her great population, but she stood at last before the world a huge giant filled with wind. The nations of the world had learned the lesson that she could not fight, and were prepared on the slightest pretence to seize her territory.” (DENBY, 1905b, pp. 147-148)

Germany was the first, demanding the Jiaozhou Bay and the city of Qingdao as reparations for the murder of two radical missionaries in Shandong province. Then came all the others, through the most-favored-nation clause: the Russians got a piece of Liaodong Peninsula and the port of Lushun, the same ones that the Japanese were forced to let go after the treaty was leaked by John Foster; the British got the nearby port of Weihaiwei to contain the Germans and the Russians; the French got the Guangzhou Bay on the hopes of a future expansion of Indochina, and so the British increased the territory of Hong Kong to counter the French.

The overall rhetoric Western nations used to legitimate their colonial approach based itself in the idea of free trade, of no monopolies and lower tariffs. It was supposedly good for everyone’s economy and a key factor if one wanted technological and cultural progress. Therefore, they proclaimed the so-called “opening up of China” as a positive outcome of the treaty powers’ wars to the Great Qing. But it must be noted that, in the second half of the 19th century, Western economies were not particularly good. The 1870’s crisis, for instance, influenced anti-Chinese sentiment in the US, and by the 1890’s, deflation had hit the economy (many believed it was caused by fluctuations on the silver price and overproduction).

During the economic crisis, few truly believed in the “invisible hand” of the market and most countries actually subsidized their own industries to increase production capability and defeat competition abroad. The free trade discourse was mainly rhetorical and the spread of colonial annexations of Africa and Southeast Asia did not open those markets to everyone’s commerce. On the contrary, a policy was developed by all colonial empires to try to restrict their rivals the most by giving primacy to their own companies. For instance, it is not surprising that in German Shandong zone of influence, German companies won concessions to build railroads, while the Russians got the same benefit in their Manchurian zone of influence, and

the French in Yunnan, the Japanese in Fujian, etc. Hardly, if ever, an American company would win a bidding in another country's zone of influence. The "open up" slogan was a unilateral and imperialist approach that often times meant "open up to me".

For that reason, American diplomats to the Great Qing were worried. The US had no zones of influence or territories leased, so a colonized China meant possible loss of markets and opportunities for American firms in a time of economic crisis and overproduction. According to David Anderson, "[Charles] Denby thought that the State Department's adherence to a policy of noninterference placed American business at a disadvantage." (ANDERSON, 1985, p. 153). The diplomat's son seemed to agree, having written that "Nothing is so badly needed as aggressive American business methods." (DENBY JR., 1898, p. 39). While in the legation, Charles Denby helped American entrepreneurs, especially in the railway sector (he was also a railroad lawyer), stating that a diplomat's job was to do *anything* to help his fellow compatriots, even those who were in the wrong. But he also exploited possible trade benefits from the missionaries, believing that "The missionary, too, is the forerunner of commerce. Inspired by holy zeal, he goes into the interior where the white man's foot had never trod. [...] The drummer follows behind, and foreign commerce begins." (DENBY, 1905a, p. 220).

3. The reshaping of US foreign policy between 1898-1901

As seen, the United States, whose foreign policy was based on the Monroe Doctrine, tried to convey an image of itself as anti-colonialist. But when foreign powers were grabbing concessions in China, the US faced the dilemma of partition. Even zones of influence were problematic enough for the interests of American commerce, let alone full-fledged colonies. On the other hand, to participate in such a scramble, or even to acquire zones of influence, would give the US a colonialist posture that could delegitimize the Monroe Doctrine and bring worse problems than the China market. Things started to take a new shape around 1898. Then, Republican William McKinley was President of a United States that had just come out of recession, and with a very favorable export balance. He had support from the US dominant class, composed of bankers, large farmers and industrialists (LaFEBER, 1993, p. 128).

Since 1895, Cuba was in revolution against Spain and the struggle caught American attention and, slowly, its participation. The idea of war had stimulated industries such as those

related to arms and railroads and by late April, the US had declared war on Spain: a quick one, as expected. The United States, then, acquired a massive amount of territory from the defeated Spanish Empire. Cuba remained independent, but Puerto Rico did not and was promptly annexed, as was Hawaii. In the Pacific, the former Spanish colony of the Philippines, who had also fought its own war of independence, resisted American occupation for a couple more years. The government then launched the First Philippine Commission to decide what to do with the new territory (independence was off the board). Charles Denby, then former diplomat, was a member of that Commission and he quoted the following excerpt from the Commission's Report: "Only through American occupation, therefore, is the idea of a free, self-governing, and united Philippine commonwealth at all conceivable [...]." (DENBY, 1905b, pp. 161-162).

It was the old discourse of "tutelage" that virtually disguised a colony as a protectorate, but it nonetheless changed American influence over the Pacific. The occupation broke, theoretically at least, with American Monroe Doctrine's legitimacy as a non-colonialist nation, and many protested in the US, as exemplified by the formation of the Anti-Imperialist League in Boston. Either way, for the colonial empires in the Pacific region, political reality spoke higher: The United States was turning into a Pacific Power and its interests could now be backed by military strength. American missionary Arthur J. Brown (1863-1856) quoted the following statement of Secretary of State John Hay (1838-1905): "The political storm-centre of the world has shifted steadily eastward [...] to China; and whoever understands that Empire and its people has a key to world-politics for the next five centuries." (BROWN, 1912, p. 192). This puts into perspective that, although the Chinese market was not as vital to the United States as that of, say, Great Britain, it was still very promising. As Charles Denby, Jr. wrote in early 1898:

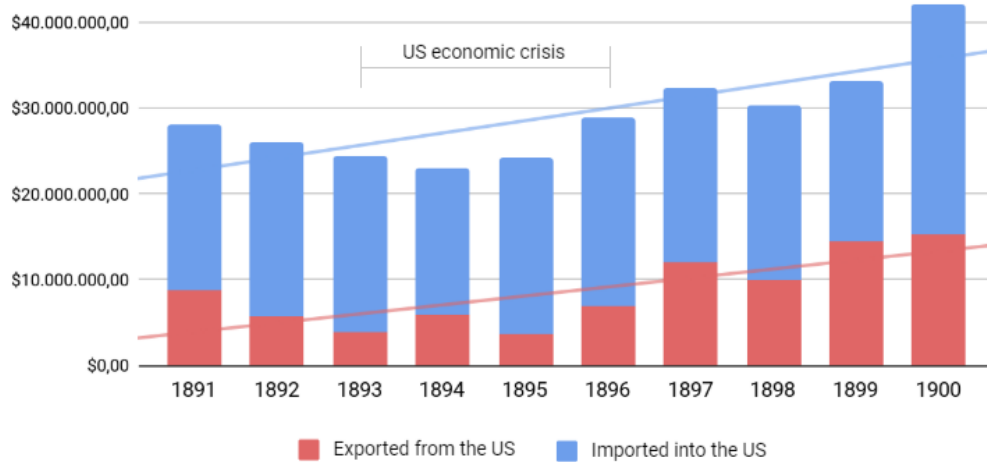
"Though its trade is in its infancy, China to-day is a great market, unable to supply itself with the very manufactured goods we have to sell. To this market we are the nearest neighbors. [...] If to the Empire of China, with its vast population, its vast territory, its limitless resources, the electric spark of American enterprise could be communicated, the trade that would spring into existence would surpass all the records of history." (DENBY JR., 1898, p. 36)

Therefore, economically speaking, it was an investment into the future. In fact, US-China commercial exchanges were actually growing by the end of the century (see Figure 2), especially in cotton and kerosene exports, while American investors envisaged railway concessions, such as the Guangzhou-Hankou line.

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Figure 2. The China market: Merchandise exported from, and imported into, the US in the 1890s



With a foothold on the Philippines and an army stationed there, Americans could better position themselves with regards to the possibility of China's partition, what Charles Denby called "the suicide of commerce" (DENBY, 1905b, p. 152). In a smart move, Secretary of State John Hay and his advisor on Asian matters, William W. Rockhill (1854-1914), devised the Open Door Notes in September 1899. They were sent to American consuls on countries that threatened China's territorial integrity and the demands were actually quite simple: that there should be no restrictions to commerce, even within zones of influence, and that the benefits enjoyed by all treaty powers should remain unquestioned. In this regard, it is worth to point out that these notes were not sent to the Chinese. It was but a reassessment of the *statu quo*.

Nonetheless, it was accepted by the treaty powers. For the British, who were occupied fighting the Boer in South Africa, the notes meant a relief. But acceptance probably came because tensions were so high that many feared that the partition of China would lead to a massive war in Europe, as most countries were already forming alliances to counter each other's interests. With such tension already at play, antagonizing American interests was off the board. The Open Door Policy became the new foreign policy of the United States, one that substituted the Monroe Doctrine as the main axis of legitimacy. The first test came in 1900:

"Attention: all people in markets and villages of all provinces in China – now, owing to the fact that Catholics and Protestants have vilified our gods and sages, have deceived our emperors and ministers above, and oppressed the Chinese people below, both our gods and our people are angry at them, yet we have to keep silent. This forces us to practice the I-ho [义和 *yihé*] magic boxing so as to protect our country, expel the

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foreign bandits and kill Christian converts, in order to save our people from miserable suffering.” (TENG & FAIRBANK, 1979, p. 190)

This is an excerpt from a pamphlet distributed by followers of the Righteous and Harmonious Fists Movement (义和团运动 *yìhétuán yùndòng*), also known as Boxer Movement for their martial arts practice. The movement grew from China's Shandong province, where the scramble for concessions began and where the population was suffering from drought. Their slogan was “Support the Qing, annihilate the Western foreigners” (扶清灭洋 *fú qīng miè yáng*), and it led to the murder of tens of thousands of Chinese Christians and hundreds of foreigners, and to the siege of the Foreign Legations in Beijing. An international army of 16 thousand men was assembled to lift the besieged. In June, 1900, to secure their flanks, they bombarded the Dagou forts (something Americans were reluctant to do at first), near Tianjin, an act of war that led the court to support the Boxer Movement. By August, foreign troops had reached Beijing – the first ones to enter the capital were the Sikh Regiment of the British colonial army. The war had led to the defeat of Qing forces and the removal of Chinese sovereignty in many aspects.

Americans policymakers once again feared that partition would cripple their commerce to China, that the demanded indemnity would reduce the purchasing power of the Chinese, which could then reduce consumption of American goods, and that the whole situation could create a strong anti-foreign sentiment that would be harmful to commerce and missionary activity. Therefore, John Hay and the State Department sent the Second Open Door Notes in early July, 1900. It was basically a repetition of the first one, stressing the defense of Chinese territorial integrity. Again, as tensions were on the high, most agreed with the notes.

Conclusion

It is clear that American interests in China revolved around missionary activity and, apart from specific industries such as cotton and kerosene, the idea of a future market for US goods. As we've seen, missionary activity was also intertwined with commercial expansion, but it also worked the way around as missionaries got more leverage and protection from the treaty system to go to the interior. But the idea of a growing market, of China's geopolitical position as one of the few regions not yet formally colonized, and growing American popular attention towards missionary activity and immigration shaped American interests in China. For these

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reasons, Charles Denby stated: “It thus happens that, except the Embassy to England, that of China is, and has been, the most important of all our foreign missions.” (DENBY, 1905a, p. 103)

As the power of the United States grew, so with it grew the mechanisms with which to guarantee its interests in the region. The period from 1894 to 1901 saw the somewhat resolution of the problem American policymakers dealt with in their foreign relations: either idealism as non-colonialist and defender of freedom, or imperialism towards the building of a powerful empire. David Anderson, in his book *Imperialism and Idealism* (1985), stated that John Hay’s Open Door Policy was the answer that dealt with the dilemma. In a way, he chose both options and none; that is, by not joining the grabbing, but still taking the benefits – something he actually wrote in a letter to a friend (ANDERSON, 1985, p. 183 and 190).

It meant that, although the United States was still not a world power of the likes of Great Britain (the UK’s Asian war fleet was still larger than the entire US fleet), its overall foreign policy towards China was not anymore that of just the Jackal Diplomacy. The US would not stay neutral: it would pick the side of the Open Door. Thus, the Jackal Policy and the Gunboat Diplomacy became somewhat intertwined. The US had now 48 battleships in the Pacific, 150-300 soldiers in the American Legation in China and 2,000-5,000 troops stationed in the Philippines, ready to be deployed if needed (HUNT, pp. 1983, 197-198). As Charles Denby said: “It is safe to say that partition will not be attempted so long as we have a foothold in the East, which is only six hundred miles away from the Chinese coast.” (DENBY, 1905b, p. 240).

But as Americans thought that the West in general could undoubtedly create a massive consumer market for their goods by investing in China’s “modernization”, the Japanese had similar, albeit more aggressive, plans. As the journalist Kawakami Kiyoshi wrote in 1906:

“With her population of four hundred millions fully modernized, and with her tremendous natural resources fully developed, China will undoubtedly furnish a wonderful market, where Japan could procure her raw materials and where she might find an outlet for her surplus products.” (KAWAKAMI, 1906, p. 652)

The stage was setting for the rivalry between American and Japanese interests in China: one set for the Open Door, more an idea than a policy, and the other set for colonization (the Japanese used the term “tutelage”, as Americans had used in the Philippines). None asked what China wanted. As David Anderson noted: it was selfishness disguised as altruism.

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Figure 1. *Average value of merchandise exported from the US to China, Brazil and the UK in the 1890s.* Source: Treasury Department of the United States, 1901, pp. 89, 98 and 103.

Figure 2. *The China market: Merchandise exported from, and imported into, the US in the 1890s.* Source: Treasury Department of the United States, 1901, p. 103.

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