

Treaty of Wangxia

Wàngxià Tiáoyuē 望厦条约

The 1844 Treaty of Wangxia set a pattern for Sino-American relations, as United States diplomats sought to build upon British imperialism and to stand apart from it, to establish principles, and to maximize profit. Chinese usually point to the 1844 treaty as proof that the United States had joined the ranks of the imperialists.

Before the 1840s, the Chinese, then led by the Manchu-dominated Qing dynasty (1644–1912), did not see the United States as important, particularly in the context of British naval power and wealth. The United States was a minor player in the Canton (Guangzhou) System, a monopoly of Chinese merchants created by the Qing to limit trade and contact with the West. The Chinese placed the United States in the context of the traditional tribute system and did not seek the establishment of formal diplomatic ties.

British victory over China in the First Opium War and the subsequent Treaty of Nanking spurred Americans to take more aggressive action. In response to lobbying by merchants, President John Tyler dispatched Caleb Cushing, a Massachusetts lawyer and former congressman, as commissioner to China. Cushing met with Qiyong (Ch'i-ying), who represented the Qing dynasty as governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi, and as superintendent general of trade and foreign intercourse of the five ports. The treaty itself was signed at Wangxia near Macao on 3 July 1844 but was not ratified and in effect

until December 1845. The 1844 agreement was modeled on the 1842 Treaty of Nanking and included the right to trade in five treaty ports, extraterritoriality, and most-favored nation (MFN) status. Extraterritoriality gave Americans in China immunity from Qing criminal and civil law. The Qing, reflecting a traditional Chinese expectation that outsiders would more effectively police themselves, initially accepted extraterritoriality. Westerners portrayed China's criminal procedures as barbaric and biased, and extraterritoriality became one of the most humiliating provisions of the unequal treaties. MFN meant that United States merchants and diplomats would enjoy whatever privileges or benefits were granted in future treaties with other nations. Although the MFN provision would devastate China over the next century, at the time the Qing hoped that it would spur competition among the Western powers to the dynasty's benefit. Other provisions were less onerous to the Chinese. The treaty enabled Americans to benefit from future military conflicts initiated by the British or other European powers. The treaty stated that any ports closed to belligerents would remain open to American merchants with "full respect being paid to the neutrality of the flag of the United States." Wangxia also called for diplomatic equality in official correspondence, in effect undermining the traditional Chinese practice of treating foreigners as "barbarians" because of their lack of knowledge of Confucianism and Chinese culture. Finally, the 1844 treaty outlawed the hated opium trade, although enforcement remained sporadic at best.

This agreement would be further expanded to the advantage of the United States in 1858, which occurred as a

From the Treaty of Wangxia

A clause from Article II of the first treaty between the United States and China, signed on 3 July 1844, reads:

Citizens of the United States resorting to China for the purposes of commerce will pay the duties of import and export prescribed in the tariff, which is fixed by and made a party of this Treaty. They shall, in no case, be subject to other or higher duties than are

or shall be required of the people or any other nation whatever . . . And if additional advantages of privileges, of whatever description, be conceded hereafter by China to any other nations, the United States, and the citizens thereof, shall be entitled there upon, to a complete, equal, and impartial participation in the same.

Source: Ji, Zhaojin. (2003). A history of modern Shanghai banking. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 26.

result of another unequal treaty obtained by the British after the Second Opium War (1856–1860, also called the *Arrow War*). While Americans would dream of a special, benevolent relationship with China, Chinese usually point to the 1844 treaty as proof that the United States had joined the ranks of the imperialists.

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Further Reading

Hunt, M. (1983). *The making of a special relationship: The United States and China to 1914*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Latourette, K. S. (1964). *The history of early relations between the United States and China, 1784–1844*. New York: Kraus Reprint.

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