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The Open Door, Dollar Diplomacy, and the Self-Strengthening Movement: The Birth of  
American Idealist Imperialism in China, 1890 - 1912

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A thesis

presented to the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Masters of Arts in History

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by

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May 2018

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Strengthening Movement

## ABSTRACT

The Open Door, Dollar Diplomacy, and the Self-Strengthening Movement: The Birth of  
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American Foreign Policy at the outset of the Twentieth century evolved from a realist to an idealist position as the United States transitioned to an imperial power. This ideal framework was formed in the crucible of China during the Spheres of Influence and the Open Door. The US had to play delicate game of helping China to maintain their territorial, and administrative integrity while at the same time protecting their newly acquired overseas interests against more established imperial actors. While there were many missteps, and failures during this transition perhaps the most the important result was the change toward the approach of US foreign policy. Not only did the United States have to balance realist geo-political goals, but it had to define what an imperial United States looked like. In a sense the United States was starting from scratch, processing to a completely different game and in order to be successful it had evolve.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

American Foreign Policy at the outset of the twentieth century evolved from a realist to an idealist position during the United States transition to an imperial power. This transition was formed in the crucible of China where the United States had to compete with imperial powers who were more experienced. Unlike the geo-political moves made in the Caribbean and South America the United States was not in a position of strength. Wishing to protect the gains from the newly acquired Philippines the US played a delicate game of trying to navigate amongst Spheres of Influence without over playing its hand. The course of action taken, the Open Door and Dollar Diplomacy, was the idealist approach the United States attempted in China. Both of these contained multiple goals that at times were at odds with each other. At the heart of both policies, and American imperial policy in China, was the commitment to actively open new commercial opportunities for American investors. The second provision was a commitment to maintain the territorial and administrative integrity of China. While there were many missteps and failures during this transition perhaps the most important result was the change toward the approach of US foreign policy. Rather than an extension of favors to political supporters of the President, the United States shifted to an institutional approach; one based more on merit than nepotism. Instead, a reactionary American foreign policy was forced to define itself, and out of that came a professionally trained, bureaucratic apparatus that carried it out. The spread of democratic principles and commerce became the motivation. America began to think of itself as a Great Power; one that was interested in shaping world affairs. In contrast China underwent its own change

as the Qing government weakened and then collapsed due to a combination of internal and external pressures. Thus far, a lot of research has focused on the personalities, Roosevelt and later Wilson in particular, behind the US shifting into a world power. And while they played a pivotal role they were as much swept up by events more often than they shaped them. Thus the impetus for this shift in attitude can be traced more to a combination of world events, technological innovation, and economic transformation both at home and abroad.

This paper focuses on Asia, particularly China, and the nature of Dollar Diplomacy and the Open Door there. While the failure to compete effectively against other foreign powers in China exposed the central weakness of the Open Door Policy as it related to the political realities it also formed the framework of American foreign policy as an imperial power. It was the competition in Asia, the reality of coming into the Great Game late that did more to form American foreign policy; specifically in regards to defining itself as a Global Power than the US's free hand in South America. In the absence of the Monroe Doctrine and later the Roosevelt Corollary, the US was forced to use diplomacy from a militarily weakened position. While the US was schizophrenic at times about building up its military might. In China the United States was in the position of a weaker imperial power. At home the American public did not whole heartedly embrace imperialism if at all. This tension was the catalyst for the embrace of an idealist position. The Open Door was the first example of this idealist position of imperial America.

### ***The Door Swings: The Open Door and the Evolution of American Foreign Policy***

Even though the Open Door (the United States central foreign policy principle in China) failed to compete effectively against other Great Powers it laid the foundation for America's framework as an imperial power. While the Open Door vacillated at times between a realist position to an idealist one, and back again, in order to meet foreign policy goals it remained a palatable notion that US leaders could embrace to expand US influence overseas. The lure of the Open Door was simple; equal privileges for all countries, at least the Great Powers, that operated in China and support for the administrative and territorial integrity of China. Its goal was to minimize conflict or potential spots of aggression. This was particularly important for a newly arrived imperial power like the United States. The weaknesses of the Open Door were often glaring and in many ways unavoidable. Russia, Germany, and Japan, all new powers on the Imperial scene, carved out space against the older, more established powers of Great Britain and France left in the space by Spain which has declined to a non-factor. China's unstable Qing government itself was nearing the end of a long decline and its power to maintain its own sovereignty. Thus, it had much less capacity to act as a stabilizing influence in the region, particularly given the fact it dealt with multiple devastating insurrection and rebellions. As these powers sought to "carve up the melon" conflict inevitably arose.

The Open Door as a policy was first conceived by President William McKinley's Secretary of State, John Hay. For most of its history the United States' point of focus, in terms of expansion, was on the continent of North America. After the acquisition of the Philippines, at the close of the 20th century, the United States now had to contend with

an overseas possession far from their traditional lines of communication amongst a cadre of potential hostile foreign powers. The Open Door thus served a dual purpose during this transition. First, to make imperialism palatable to Americans by couching it in an idealist framework, one that promoted not so much the spread of democracy, that came later, and the opening of new markets. Even though real world events spurred the United States toward becoming an imperial power, realist motives would not suffice. For Imperialism to be implemented as policy in the United States it had to be backed with idealism. While it seems naive today that something like the Open Door, without the threat of real military power, could be enforced on other imperial powers it was the best option the United States had at the time considering the shape of its armed forces. The United States simply was not ready to become an imperial power, though it would learn quickly.

The Open Door represented a was necessity for early American foreign policy. The principle of free trade, and democratically elected governance was part of a deeply embedded cultural identity for the United States though their application was far from reality. But it was this identity that made the application of an idealist policy a much more attractive option for an imperial United States. The idealist notion of free trade contrasted with the realist notion of support for the territorial integrity of China. In order for imperialism to be palatable to the American public it needed to be in line with the American nationalistic identity. Thus, the Open Door evolved and changed in its meaning as each successive administration sought to use it in the best interests of the United States because in its roots it contained an idealist sentiment.



## ***Manifest Destiny Goes Global: Moving from a Continental to Imperial Power***

By the opening of the 20th century the United States was a strong, but continental power. The American Frontier officially closed in 1890. Manifest Destiny, for the most part, had run its course. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner in his famous 1893 essay *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* wondered what this might mean for the future of the nation. Internal challenges to American hegemony, the Native American tribes, were quashed with death toll on a genocidal level. The US's northern neighbor, Canada, if not an ally, was by and large a peaceful neighbor. And even though tensions existed with the United States' southern neighbor, Mexico, the last act of aggression on America would be a minor raid carried out by Pancho Villa on Columbus, New Mexico in 1916. Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Alaska, and Hawaii were still territories on their way to becoming states. In short, there were no more worlds to conquer on the continent of North America. It was this lack of a frontier, an empty space to fill that Turner latched onto in his essay. He warned that without a frontier this drive to settle and expand would be replaced by a European like imperialism.

“Yes, it is an American ideal and an American example for which we fight; but in that ideal and example lies medicine for the healing of nations. It is the best we have to give to Europe, and it is a matter of vital import that we shall safeguard and preserve our power to serve the world, and not be overwhelmed in the flood of imperialistic force that wills the death of democracy and would send the freeman under the yoke.”<sup>1</sup>

Instead of nurturing the impulse of aggression perhaps the United States could cultivate that passion into other fields namely enterprise and technological advancement? “Essential as are our contributions of wealth, the work of our scientists, the toil of our farmers and our workmen in factory and shipyard, priceless as is the stream of young American manhood which we pour forth to stop the flood which flows like molten

lava across the green fields and peaceful hamlets of Europe toward the sea and turns to ashes and death all that it covers, these contributions have their deeper meaning in the American spirit. They are born of the love of Democracy.”<sup>ii</sup> Whatever new form the US’s imperial path would take as it emerged as one of the Great Powers, it was imperative that it needed to retain the moral high ground. Thus, the US’s imperial foreign policy’s roots were, to some degree, idealist.

American imperialism was to be different, at least in initial conception from Rudyard Kipling’s famous “White Man’s Burden”. It had to be a horse of another color, but still a horse in make up. Just over a century after its bloody birth and less than fifty years after the Civil War that almost tore the nation apart the United States jumped into “Great Game”. However, this impulse was not just the desire to spread democracy or even expand territorial borders. Rapid changes in the American economy, specifically the shift from the production of raw materials to finished goods, drove the impetus for America to become an imperial power. And while the United States always contained rich men, even before the founding of the United States, the 19th century produced wealth that was unheralded.

In the later half of the 19th century the American economy produced some of the wealthiest men in the world. With names like Rockefeller, Carnegie, Vanderbilt, and J.P. Morgan these men laid the foundation of what was to be the manufacturing super engine of the 1940’s. This era, the turn of the century of America, was called the Gilded Age, a termed coined by authors Charles Dudley Warner and Mark Twain. Referencing the thin veneer of gold plating popular in decorating at the time the Gilded Age was an age of progress, technological advancement but also one of corrupt politicians, graft

and greed from monopolies and shady dealings. Men of enormous financial power were called captains of industry by their admirers and robber barons by their detractors. These men of influence and power, who more often than not, gained their position through unethical business practices rationalized their methods in order to give them a veneer of nobility. A rationalization to be sure, but one that was grounded in idealistic thinking. Nothing exemplified this more than steel magnate Andrew Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth*.

"This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of Wealth: First, to set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and after doing so to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer, and strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial result for the community the man of wealth thus becoming the sole agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves."<sup>iii</sup>

This reinterpretation of *noblesse oblige* serviced a dual purpose. It was a call to action, even if patronizingly so, for the elite to act for the benefit of society, but it also justified their position by appealing to a higher power. In four decades the United States, just over a century old had endured the bloodiest conflict in its history, more than all of their previous conflicts combined. It had suffered three assassinations, racial tensions from unpacking black slavery, immigration tensions, and a near genocide of native peoples on top of glaring wealth inequality. Baked into American democracy were idealistic notions of equality but it could only be seen through rose-colored glasses. And this young democracy was about to leap into the "Great Game", to jump onto the imperial stage. The spread of democracy would take on pseudo-religious rhetorical framework even if the economic necessity was more of a catalyst for this imperialistic drive.

## ***Panics and Progress: The Pain of Economic Growth***

The four decades after the Civil War the US economy accelerated in growth and development which put it on par with the great powers of Europe. Despite economic downturns, known as “panics”, which were part and parcel of the boom and bust cycles of the National Banking Era (1863-1913), the American economy transitioned from one that was a primary exporter for raw materials into one that manufactured finished goods. The 1870’s and 80’s was a breakaway period in terms of real wages increased along with American GDP (Gross Domestic Product).<sup>iv</sup> By the end of the Spanish American war in 1898 corn crop yields rose by 222% while wheat increased even further by 256% from their respective figures in 1865. While impressive other industries did even better. Railroads continued to be built at a frantic pace. Rail construction had increased by 567% and coal production went even further with an increase of over 800%.<sup>v</sup>

This pace in production was also matched by the impetus of westward expansion which lead to territorial settlement and acquisition. The West was to be tamed. The frontier was settled, and several industries saw revolutions not only in manufacturing, which resulted in changes to daily life. Finished household goods made men like King C. Gillette, who marketed the first Gillette safety razor in 1903, wealthy men, and changed the grooming habits of men. This was made possible not simply because of changes in the process of manufacturing, but also in marketing and delivery of those goods to consumers. Richard M. Sears, founder of the same company which bears his name, published a catalog of consumer products. Its target audience was farmers who switched to Sears because of a feeling of being gouged by local store owners, and the greater se-

lection of finished goods Sears offered. First published in 1888 the Sears Catalog “featuring only watches and jewelry... (but) by 1895 was producing a 532-page catalog with many other items. This book offered shoes, women's garments and millinery, wagons, fishing tackle, stoves, furniture, china, musical instruments, saddles, firearms, buggies, bicycles, baby carriages and glassware, in addition to watches and jewelry.”<sup>vi</sup> No longer simply an exporter of raw material for Great Britain and Europe the American economy transformed into a competitor with finished goods of its own. Thus, American entrepreneurs now sought their own space in international markets in order to sell their wares. Even with the overall growth of the American economy not everyone reaped in the rewards.

Economist Milton Friedman noted that "The highest decadal rate for periods of about ten years was apparently reached in the (eighteen) eighties with approximately 3.8 percent.”<sup>vii</sup> While spurts of phenomenal growth were had during this time it was marked by periods of bust cycles that threatened to disrupt this progress. This boom/bust continued until more stringent banking regulations were put into place during the Great Depression in the 1930's. American workers also began to organize and demand not only better wages but better working conditions as well. The first labor unions, like the Knights of Labor, formed and advocated the need for collective action. Owners of capital pushed back, and soon labor strikes turned into riots resulting in property destruction, injuries, and even death. While not every day occurrences these upheavals, nonetheless, were part and parcel of the transition of the American economy. While there was money to be made by savvy entrepreneurs it could also be lost through a

mistimed investment or a downturn in the economy. It was the need to find other markets and to weather these panics which lead American entrepreneurs to search for other markets abroad. China became a particularly attractive choice.

### ***The Cathay Siren Song: America Keeps Looking West All the Way to the East***

Since the days of Marco Polo the lure of China has called to Western entrepreneurs as means of acquiring vast wealth. From merchants taking the trek along the Silk Road to Christopher Columbus searching for a way by sea by sailing west, the Far East, particularly India and China, was there to be reached then exploited for profit. However these treks from the West were usually in the form of exceptions, rather than the rule. It was not until the British decided to create a more lasting impact by using its navy to force open trade that the market in China was opened up in a big way. This was an example of a merchant with a product in need of a market. This time it was opium. Known as the Anglo-Chinese Wars, or the Opium Wars, the British fought several, small scale conflicts in 1839 to 1842, and again in 1856 to 1860 that opened up parts of China to trade. Needing a market for opium the British fought several successive small scale conflicts to open up parts of China to western trade. In each of these conflicts the British were successful and forced China to sign unequal treaties with the Treaty of Nanjing having the most impact. The Qing government granted the British a multitude of concessions. The first opened five major ports along the coast of China. Also, foreign missionaries were legally permitted to reside in China. Further, if any British citizen were to be tried for a crime it had to take place in a British court and not under a Qing magistrate. This last concession, known as extraterritoriality, proved especially humiliating for the

Qing because it essentially nullified their authority within the boundaries of their own territory. Thus, foreigners who broke the law and harmed their citizens could not be tried in their courts. They were tried in a foreigner's court of law which was more likely to show them leniency. In addition to these concessions the Chinese had to pay an indemnity and the British were under no obligations themselves under these treaties.

Because of the heavily one sided nature of the treaties the Chinese considered them unequal. Further, each subsequent defeat at the hands of western powers brought with it more concessions, and other western powers followed suit in demanding the same. This was known as the "Most Favored Nation" trading clause. Soon China was carved up to spheres of influence, referred to as "slicing the melon" by the Chinese. And with the establishment of these spheres the western powers simply transported their homeland rivalries and grudges to China. By 1898 when the United States gained possession of the Philippines from the Spanish they were already a late arrival to the China spheres of influence game. Something needed to be implemented if the United States had any hope of establishing itself as a major power without inciting another foreign power of imperial conquest. One way was to advocate that the other powers agree to the territorial integrity of China, but this became more and more difficult as the great powers sought to solidify their games. To make matters worse the Qing were on the verge of collapse by the time the United States came into the picture in China. However the Qing did not sit idle and wait for the inevitable. In fact they tried, unsuccessfully, to implement a program of growth much like the Meiji government of Japan would accomplish. While ultimately not a success its purpose was to try and free China from the grasp of foreign control and help China to become a great power.

## CHAPTER 2

### FRACTURED FROM WITHIN: THE FAILURE OF THE SELF STRENGTHENING MOVEMENT

The Self-Strengthening Movement, an attempt to modernize China through the acquisition of western technology and science, was a failure due to numerous factors but mainly due to the rivaled, fractured political factions of the Qing Dynasty. It was because of this fractured nature the Qing never achieved a cohesive strategy that brought these divisive elements together behind a single purpose. It did not help that without exception all Qing officials, from the Empress Dowager Cixi to the lowest regional bureaucrat were suspicious of all things foreign, which was not surprising, but the degree to which they let it influence their actions varied from person to person. While an anti-foreign position was prevalent among the populace it ultimately was the failure of the Qing Imperial Court that hampered efforts for modernization. Instead, modernization in China occurred piecemeal and varied from mandarin to mandarin. It was not carried out as a coherent and comprehensive national policy which was quite the opposite during the Meiji Restoration in Japan. In fact, a leading figure in subtly pushing for it to fail was the Empress Dowager Cixi.

The Empress Dowager Cixi's position in the Imperial Court was always a tennis one. One way she maintained her power base was by playing the political factions against each other. Thus, she vacillated between support for the "belligerent" faction which was anti-foreign, and anti-reform. The "belligerent" faction was much easier to support so ultimately that was where the Empress Dowager would land. The reform faction was headed by Prince Gong of Aisin Gioro clan who served as imperial regent of



the Qing from 1861 to 1865 then later by Li Hongzhang who served as diplomat, general and Viceroy. While in the minority the Reform faction wanted to modernize China in a similar manner Japan was accomplished under Meiji. To clarify, the reform faction was not pro-foreign in terms of keeping the status quo by giving up spheres of influence to imperial powers. The Reform faction felt that using Western methods in science and technology while at the same time reorganizing the government to make it function more efficiently were the keys to China regaining its sovereignty. This lack of central authority was part design, but also part from not fully recovering from calamity that had plagued the Qing Dynasty: internal rebellion on a massive scale. Lingering effects that stemmed from the devastation wrought from the Taiping Rebellion, and the Second Opium War, or Arrow War, were both blows to the governing authority of the Qing government. Then, the Treaty of Tientsin, followed by the Nian rebellion and the Muslim uprisings hampered the recovery. However, the corruption of the civil service bureaucracy was a significant factor as well.

While corruption in any institution is inevitable, it took on a different characteristic under the Qing government, one which was based on culture and was not. Because of this corruption it hampered the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895) and the Tongzhi Restoration (1860–1874). The corruption in the civil service bureaucracy led to the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement and the Tongzhi Restoration as a whole. The endemic corruption was another issue that led to the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement. The leaders of the movement never united behind a single purpose, and while the Confucian ideal was already established in many ways it had become dogmatic, a rote bit of memorization that no longer pushed a vibrant institutional culture.

### ***Leaders Lead: Prince Gong Negotiates the Unequal Treaties***

In 1860, the Qing dynasty was on the verge of collapse. For ten long years the Taiping Rebellion dragged on weakening the Imperial Court. The rebel force held onto some of the most prosperous and populous regions in the south of China. By 1860, the Taiping Rebellion had become a total war for the future of China. Entire cities were wiped from the map. Famine was rampant in some areas as crops were pillaged or simply burned. Bodies piled up as the war became more about revenge and retribution rather than strategic objectives. The Taiping Rebellion took place in the southern region of China and lasted from 1850 to 1864. It was a bloody civil which caused wide spread destruction and destabilized the country. To make matters worse, the Europeans decided enough was enough and a combined expedition bore down on the Qing capital at Peking, modern day Beijing.

On September 22, 1860, the Xianfeng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty left Peking leaving Prince Gong (his half brother) to conduct the inevitable negotiations with the representatives from the English and French whose combined forces were bearing down on the city. The Xianfeng Emperor along with his closest advisors of the Belligerent faction left for the frontier city of Jehol; even though the Qing forces outnumbered the allied Anglo-French expeditionary force by a sizable margin and were lead by famed general Seng-ko-lin-ch'in they'd been defeated. Now the Imperial Court abandoned the capital. This situation for the Qing was dire. The flight of the court was illustrated by Manchu statesman Wen-hsiang:

After I had bade farewell to the Emperor, Prince Kung<sup>viii</sup> and I made the necessary arrangement. Between five and seven o'clock in the evening, I entered the city and climbed to the top of the Ch'ao-yang gate. Then I discovered that for several days the garrison troops had not received

their rice rations and that their weapons were entirely inadequate. Our general position was about to collapse. Matters were so urgent that there was no time to memorialize. The only thing I could do was to open up the storehouses and distribute money and rice, leaving the memorial until later.<sup>ix</sup>

Prince Gong was given no troops to resist the entry of the Anglo-French expeditionary force into the city. The Xianfeng Emperor and his Court having fled and rioting in the streets as the populace of Peking assumed the worst in a city about to be sacked. Before this, Prince Gong had been a man of little merit in the public arena. He had not received great praise, had no major accomplishments to his name, nor did anyone in the Imperial Court think he was capable of performing great accomplishments. He was simply the guy who needed to stay behind and either clean up the mess or take the blame. No one considered him worthy of great praise or even capable of accomplishment. However, with the imperial court's flight from Peking, Prince Gong found himself the de-facto Qing Head of State but more importantly he was the right man for a difficult job. Prince Gong managed to keep the wolves at bay and proved he was a capable, and effective statesman. However, his work was not finished. The Qing needed a reprieve from the Europeans. Thus, the Tongzhi Restoration was off to an inauspicious start.

Before he return to the Imperial Court, Prince Gong was officially appointed to the head of the Qing Office of Foreign Affairs, the Zongli Yamen, and Grand Councilor. He was given power to negotiate with the Europeans. After nearly a month of negotiation as a representative of the Xianfeng Emperor of the Qing Dynasty Prince Gong signed separate treaties with partners of the Expeditionary Force. Thus, the treaty of Tientsin was ratified and the Second Opium War came to an end on October 18, 1860. The British were granted land leases on the Kowloon Peninsula in Hong Kong, without

conditions, in perpetuity. Russia received land to certain regions in Outer Manchuria and rights to territory in Ussuri Krai bringing that region into their sphere of influence. Besides land, one thing these treaties did was legalize the opium trade in China and opened more ports for trade specifically the plum of Nanking. In terms of diplomacy it gave the right of foreign powers to establish legations, if not embassies, in Peking. It also gave Christian missionaries the right to spread their faith. Basically, it not only recognized foreign governments, putting them on equal footing with the Qing government, but also legitimized foreign presence in China.

Under the threat of annihilation Prince Gong signed treaties which made heavy concessions, but it bought the Qing precious time. The Taiping Rebellion dragged on for another four years, and the Qing government hung by a thread. To illustrate just how touch and go it was for the Qing's position the British Commander James Bruce, the 8th Earl of Elgin, wanted to destroy the Forbidden City in reprisal for the torture and confinement of two British envoys along with their small escort of English and Indian troops. Instead, the British settled for demolishing the Old Summer Palace, Yuan Ming Yuan, since it was felt the destruction of the Forbidden City might derail treaty negotiations. In her book *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-Chih Restoration*<sup>x</sup>, 1862-1874 Mary C. Wright illustrated the position Prince Gong and the Qing Government found themselves in at the Peking Convention.

There was a widespread feeling that the dynasty was toppling and that an age of anarchy was at hand. From a Chinese point of view this fate was not only inevitable but just, unless the Manchu ruling house and the Chinese governing class could between them perform a miracle: suppress revolution, check foreign aggression, and re-establish domestic order. What was required was not merely the restoration at the eleventh hour of effective government along traditional lines but the creation of new policies that could ward off *modern* domestic and foreign threats and yet preserve the Confucian society and its ideology.<sup>xi</sup>

### ***Old Ways Meets New Methods: The Tongzhi Restoration***

Named after the tenth Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, 1861-1875 the Tongzhi Restoration, was ambitious in its scope, one of the most impressive, all encompassing overhauls of government during the 19th century. Due to the severity of the crisis everything was on the table in an effort to preserve the state. The civil bureaucracy was reorganized. Plans for the modernization of the military were implemented, new ways of thinking and planning the economy, all while trying to reestablish local control of areas the Qing dynasty held and trying to put down a very bloody rebellion that would not end until 1864. Plus, there were the ever encroaching European powers that always sought more influence, but were also necessary for ideas and implementation of these reforms. All of this was to be carried out with an active anti-foreign political faction that wanted nothing to do with reform, but to simply oust the Europeans who had already proven the Qing's superior from a technological standpoint. Ironically, the goal of the reformers was not radical social change that would wash away the old order. In fact, the Reformers sought to restore the central government of the Qing to prominence. In the minds of these Confucian-scholar bureaucrats like Prince Gong, Zeng Guofan, and Li Hongzhang their ultimate aim was to simply reestablish Confucian principles. They understood if the Qing Dynasty had any hope of survival, it would need to modernize. It was a moral movement steeped in Confucian idealism. Government officials who acted to uphold the Qing structure but implemented modernized practices would return China to a harmonious state. The task before the reformers was Herculean in its proportions, but even so they almost succeeded.

To understand the aims and motivations of each faction it would be a mistake to

characterize them in the modern political parlance of progressive and conservative. Prince Gong's faction was progressive only in the acquisition of Western technology and scientific understanding. It was not a cultural revolution or even an insurrection. There was no attempt to bring about a Western style democracy. Nor, would it be correct to frame the "belligerent" faction, which was headed by the Xianfeng Emperor and later the Dowager Empress Cixi, as opposed to the goals of the reformers. In fact, they shared many of the same goals: strengthen the old Qing ruling order through Confucian ideals and to extricate China from repressive treaties imposed on it by the Europeans. And both aims were to strengthen the territorial integrity of China and uphold the sovereignty of the Qing. Where the tension arose was how to accomplish these aims and the dividing line was how to deal with the Fire Superiority of the Europeans.

For the reform faction an immediate military solution was simply out of the question. The fire superiority of the Anglo Expeditionary Force was without question, particularly the English and the French. Thus, the solution for the Reformers was two fold: acquire superior technology and reform the organization of the military. To bring about this reorganization effort Prince Gong proposed the Self-Strengthening Movement.

On the flip side the belligerent or conservative faction was dogged, almost single minded in its pursuit of expelling foreigners from China immediately. This faction also had sizable support from the populace. After the expulsion of the Europeans, the Qing government could turn its attention to addressing domestic reforms. The conservative faction embraced foreign firearms, artillery, ships, even military training, but retaking the port cities and reestablishing the feudalistic tribute system was the priority.

While the fear of foreign influence was significant in the almost schizophrenic approach to the Tongzhi Restoration ultimately the wounds it suffered were self inflicted. And while the Western powers always had their own best interests in mind and certainly were not altruistic in their motives to help China modernize internal politics contributed to the decline. It would be unfair to characterize Imperial China under the Qing as the exception to suffer with corruption and mismanagement considering those faults are endemic, in one degree or another, in every government throughout history. Where the corruption and mismanagement had a more profound effect was by the vacillation of the Qing government with the Tongzhi Restoration. At times the government took a hands off approach and let regional officials advance their own pet projects as they saw fit. However, if the central government did step in, it was usually to shut something down rather to direct growth in burgeoning, but critical industries. Despite all of this, modernization remained the goal of the Tongzhi Restoration.

An important distinction for the Tongzhi Restoration was that reform be carried out through a Confucian framework. In essence, for the Confucianist effective government is not brought about through institutional oversight, but by individuals. It comes from everyone in society, from the bottom up, acting in a moral way in their everyday life. If there is a Western parallel it would be something akin to Plato's "Republic". And because morality in the Confucian world derives from outside of human existence, then even the Emperor is not about acting in a moral manner. Thus, the Emperor served an important cosmic function. Like a Pharaoh of Egypt who was in place to make sure Ma'at, the cosmic balance between mortal realm and the divine realm, was carried out thus the Emperor must act appropriately to keep the Mandate of Heaven. While this was

more a propaganda tool, an explanation of power like the Divine Right of Kings in Western Europe, the concept of moral harmony in terms of “the Good” not just for the self but for the polis. Without maintaining the Mandate of Heaven, calamity in the form of natural disasters, plagues of illness, even man made calamities such as rebellion or foreign invasion would be visited upon China. Referred to as “Xiao” or filial piety, extended out from the family unit to the rest of the nation, and it was the foundation for Confucian ethics. Thus each person, theoretically, took on not only their family honor, but the honor of the nation itself. It was felt that China had moved away from this notion of “Xiao” and the Reformers felt a restoration of this shared responsibility would extricate China from the crisis. The embrace of military technology and scientific ideas was simply a tool.

The military reform aspect of the Tongzhi Restoration was dubbed, The Self Strengthening Movement. It was a critical piece of the Tongzhi Restoration as a whole.

Military reforms of the Restoration period were of two general types: 1) those aimed at giving armed forces of new types a suitable place in the Chinese domestic order, so as to heighten troop morale, ensure popular support for the army, and reinforce the loyalty to the Qing state developing regional military forces; and (2) those aimed at making China the military equal, in arms and training, of the contemporary West<sup>xii</sup>

One of the first major issues tackled was the need for reorganization of the military. One of the handicaps in terms of effectiveness was the feudalistic structure of the Qing military as a whole. Although the Qing had some centralized forces, the large part of their military structure was based around tribal alliances and feudalistic notions of loyalty. Due the sheer size of the Chinese population and lack of strong foreign enemies, the Qing never had a need to revise this system. In fact, before the Taiping Rebellion, the Qing had managed simply by using their own limited centralized forces. But because of the length in terms of time, scale in terms of sheer numbers of people, and the



brutal nature of the civil conflict of the Taiping Rebellion, the central authority of the Qing eroded. Due to these factors, the Qing government began to rely more and more on regional forces.

Thus, regional forces became a necessity, and over time they exhibited a great deal of autonomy from the central authority of the Emperor. In a short term conflict this would not have been as big of an issue, but in one that dragged on for close to fifteen years it was like a slow acid that dissolved the ability of the central authority effectively govern. This had to do with how these forces were organized and their recruitment methods. Under the feudalistic model, a local commander selected his own officers using whatever criteria he felt appropriate. Further, most of the soldiers under his command were from his area or from his own clan if it was large enough. This was not seen as a hindrance since it was felt that men with these ties would form a more cohesive unit and be more effective on the battlefield.

There were other advantages, particularly in terms of pay:

The new armies were supported by local revenues, independently of the central government. Pay and rations were generous—triple the normal standard of the time. The battalion commander was personally responsible for withholding a large portion of each man's pay and sending it to his family at home. The personal ties thus developed further encouraged a fighting spirit, because no one wanted to be ashamed to return home.<sup>xiii</sup>

Unfortunately, reorganization initiatives after the end of the Taiping Rebellion failed to produce a centralized military force. In fact, what little remained of the Eight Banners, the pre-Qing military organization of the Manchu, were all but abandoned. Regional commanders who'd gained influence and authority during the long civil war did not want to give it up. This led to a trend that would stymie efforts even after the fall of the Qing government and give rise to warlords that plagued China for decades.

The Restoration leaders never found an answer to this dilemma. China was already hollowed out from the long slog of the Taiping Rebellion, and the Qing government did not have the forces or political will to bring regional commanders to heel. They only had the cultural notion of Confucian principles, which while the regional commanders paid lip service to, in practice it was an entirely different matter. The Qing model suffered from the same issues many feudalistic models did with strong regional powers, and a weak central authority. The theory was, the gentry who were literate men, would flock to the Emperor's banners because it was their duty to do so. In reality, this was because they owed their position to the Emperor who had granted it to them. However, during the Taiping Rebellion many of these regional powers had maintained their influence and power on their own. But the emphasis on Confucian practices had been in place for thousands of years and letting them go, even through reform, simply was not going to happen. It was the only cultural framework they had to work from.

Typically with virtue ethics individuals often serve as examples for others to strive for. One such example was Zeng Guofan. Guofan, a leading figure in military reorganization, had gained fame as a leader on the battlefield and held the reputation of a devout Confucian scholar. He "repeatedly emphasized the moral character and training of the Confucian system as virtually the sole basis for the selection of officers."<sup>xiv</sup>

If a military leader did not display justice, humility, and vision, the troops would not obey him. He must be scrupulously honest: "not a copper for private luxury; not an employee for personal reasons." He must rise early and follow a strict schedule; otherwise the business of the army would be neglected.<sup>xv</sup>

For Zeng Guofan leading by example was not just a core moral principle but it was pragmatic. It served as a strong foundation for an effective military force. Top

down, from the Emperor to the lowest member of society, everyone would act in an appropriate manner. While there were issues with the simplicity of assumptions in the Confucian worldview, and not more than a little bit of patronizing regarding those from the lower social strata, still it was not too far-fetched an idea if for nothing more than the reliance on the long cultural tradition Confucian morality and ethics held in high regard in China. There were still practical applications that were missing from this model regardless of the Confucian mindset.

Part of the issue from the outset was the absence of a corps of professionally trained officers at the field grade. The new Western techniques and technologies was a heavy investment in terms of resources, and the implementation of these new methods placed a heavy emphasis on the mid-level commanders. It also placed them in danger like never before, particularly in a military conflict. Under the Qing system officers were not directly in the line of fire. They were placed in the rear and issued commands based on a system of flags. The Western way was for the mid level officers to be closer to the front to issue commands to adjust to a chaotic and ever changing situation. This was a situation that Restoration reformers were never able to fully grapple with. Effective reorganization did not matter if there was no competent officer corps to lead it.

This was the major drawback in the top down approach. While it accounted for future leaders to be lead by example it placed an emphasis on the wrong point, which should have been at the mid level. While the Confucian system was not utterly flawed in terms of its framework it was the synthesis of that ideology with new practices based on new technologies that proved to be too much of a challenge. Without an effective cen-

tral authority and a trained efficient mid level corps of leaders, reorganization was hamstrung before it even began; though the tools were there.

Under the old system, mandarins (who were scholar-bureaucrats) received varying degrees of training in all aspects of governance, and all were required to pass comprehensive tests based on Confucian ideas. Thus, the incorporation of western methodologies with Confucian principles was feasible. Even just in the strict military sense with modernized tactics, technologies, and upholding standards through good order and discipline Confucian principles were not out of step with these new goals. The idea of a pragmatic, but moral officer leading by example was not anything new to Chinese philosophy. Perhaps the most famous dictums, or at least well known, stem from Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.

This was because there was not a structure in place that allowed capable, talented leaders, except under extraordinary circumstances, to rise through the ranks. This was because regional commanders typically selected men who were personally loyal to them and did not wish to see them rise beyond their current station. Thus, development was spotty or entirely lacking. That is why a central authority, an institution that served the purposes of the state, was essential for the success of the Tongzhi Restoration. Without that essential building block in place the Self-Strengthening Movement failed to achieve any lasting impact. Some of the blame falls to the Dowager Empress, since she was at the top of the heap so to speak. Being more consistent and steady in her support of Prince Gong might have made a difference. Even an overhaul on the examination system and a modernization of the Eight Banners might have had an effect as well. But with the devastation wrought from the Taiping Rebellion and the double edged sword

that was accepting help from Western powers, the Tongzhi Restoration simply had too many factors working against it to achieve lasting success.

There were efforts to bring oversight to regional armies. An organization known as the Board of War was implemented and become the central military administration for the Qing government. Its function was oversight of the regional armies. While it did attempt to introduce several measures over the regional commanders, it was hampered financially by the indemnity the Qing had to pay to the Western Powers, the cost of the Taiping rebellion, and the irregular flow of treasure up the logistical chain.

Active conflict, especially a civil one does not make for an ideal situation to institute wide spread reforms no matter how necessary they might be. In short, the economy of China simply hadn't recovered significantly to give the Qing the necessary capital to implement reforms. To make matters worse the more prosperous regions were under the control of the rebels. Furthermore, collection methods were antiquated and ineffective. Thus, all decrees from the Board of War, especially demands for a full review of expenditures, went unheeded because there was no easy way to enforce them. The Qing central government needed the regional commanders more than they needed the Qing. By 1868, the underlying message in the relationship between the regional commanders and the central Qing authority was clear: a national army derived from a centralized authority was out of the question. When the Board of War ordered a review of all military expenditures from each province those orders went unheeded.

However, the sole area of success for the Restoration was in the area of armament modernization if not necessarily its implementation. The use of modern weapons

tactics would be superfluous without the equipment to implement them, and China had seen first hand just how effective those armaments were when they were employed against them in the Second Opium War. During that conflict the Anglo-French expeditionary force, with the assistance of American sailors, captured the Taku forts along the Peiho River which were held by Qing forces who outnumbered the Europeans significantly. This gave the expeditionary force access to Beijing, but more importantly it exposed the weaknesses in the Qing's ability to resist European powers with their technological superiority. The need to acquire these weapons was something both the Restoration movement and the Conservative powers agreed upon.

This was the one area that regionalism did not seem to hinder Restoration events as it had with the Board of War's efforts at reorganization. Rather than simply purchasing firearms from the Europeans, the Restoration leaders sought to create their own advancements, both through the construction of dockyards and manufacturing arms and munitions.

Tso Tsung-t'ang (Zuo Zongtang), who understood the importance of social, political, and economic reconstruction, wrote:

"But from the standpoint of urgency, the casting of guns ranks first; and dredging rivers, drilling wells, and manufacturing woolen cloth come next." Even Tseng Kuo-fan (Zeng Guofan), who held the view that the conduct of war depended on men rather than on arms, devoted some of his efforts to the modernization of arms.<sup>xvi</sup>

A symbol of the success of the Tongzhi Restoration was the Kiangnan Arsenal. The official name was the General Bureau of Machine Manufacture of Kiangnan. The Kiangnan Arsenal served as both an arms manufacturing center and a shipyard. Production began at Kiangnan in 1865, the fourth year of the Self Strengthening Movement.

Located within the American concessions in Shanghai, the site was leased to the Qing government by the American Thomas Hunt & Company. But Reformers were not simply interested in leasing the facility. Combining equipment from two older arsenals, the Anqing and Suzhou, the Qing government then secured workers and purchased the facility outright.

### ***Cooperation and Corruption: Failures from the West and China***

The two men who were responsible for organizing the facility were Zeng Goufan, and Li Hongzhang. Zeng Goufan developed the plans for the facility while Li Hongzhang actually ran the day to day operations as part of his duties as the Viceroy of Liangjiang. Li envisioned a modern facility at Kiangnan. The arsenal was tasked to manufacture Remington style, breeching loading firearms that would be used by the navy. Li was a very hands on administrator. He personally interviewed foreign specialists based in Shanghai, and sought out their expertise in not only establishing the facility but training Chinese workers to eventually transition to run it independently. For his part, Zuo Guofan worked on securing knowledge from abroad. Zuo Guofan sent Yung Wing, a man with the distinction of being the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university, back to the United States to procure necessary equipment for the Kiangnan Arsenal. While other Chinese facilities were created along a similar model Kiangnan was the most ambitious.

The best proofs of the effectiveness of the Kiangnan Arsenal are the detailed reports of foreigners who inspected its accomplishments on the spot and who at the outset were certainly not prejudiced in the Chinese favor. In 1866 Li Hung-chang (Li Hongzhang) was described as having "enormous magazines," "vast numbers" of rifles and guns, "arsenals which for extent may vie with those of the most powerful nations of Europe." In 1867, only two years after the founding of the Arsenal, the North China Herald stated: "It is now in such an efficient condition, that all the tools and machinery needed is manufactured in the shop." In 1868 the first modern-style gunboat built

by Chinese was successfully launched, and the construction for others was planned.<sup>xvii</sup>

But even with the best of efforts from Li and Zuo the Kiangnan Arsenal failed to live up to expectations due to corruption and mismanagement. It was not until 1868, that the Kiangnan Arsenal produced its first modern gunboat, but after calculating production costs it was more than twice the amount it was simply to purchase a British ship of similar quality. With firearms it was even worse. It was not until 1871, that Kiangnan produced a breech loading Remington style rifle, and by 1873 the arsenal had only produced a several thousand which was wholly inadequate to the needs of the Qing armed forces. To make matters worse the rifles produced at Kiangnan Arsenal were of an inferior quality to the American made Remington.

Part of the reason for the Kiangnan Arsenal not living up to expectations was a lack of proper oversight. Li Hongzhang was a Reformer with vision but he also had other obligations as the Viceroy of Liangjiang. He was not able to fully devote his attention to the arsenal and relied on subordinates who did not have the same ability as him. He also played a dual role as civil administrator and military commander as did many Qing government officials of his rank. In 1866, when the Nian Rebellion kicked off in the provinces of Henan and Shandong Li Hongzhang was dispatched to suppress it.

While cost overruns contributed to the failure at Kiangnan, they also had to deal with an antiquated infrastructure and logistical supply lines of raw materials that simply could not support the undertaking. The infrastructure was also in bad shape due to the Taiping rebellion in the south, then followed by the Nian Rebellion in the north. Add in the graft and mismanagement both from the Europeans who assisted in managing the



facility, many who had overestimated their expertise or simply lied about their credentials, and the Qing officials who lacked the expertise to oversee the operations it led up to Kiangnan underperforming.

Even with all of its negatives for a time Kiangnan was the largest modern arsenal in Asia. And even with all the challenges it faced, both in production and the acquisition of raw materials, it demonstrated that Europeans and the Chinese could work together in modernizing China. Combined with the advances in education at the Foochow Shipyard where Chinese students received naval training in engineering and navigation alongside French and English proved that East-West cooperation even with some sputters and spurts was possible. Given time and refinement it might be effective.

Unfortunately, there was a lot of mistrust of the Europeans' motives. While it was not unfounded, the pervasive nature of it is misleading. There were certainly bad apples in the barrel, and the Europeans did not always treat the Chinese fairly in treaties but many Europeans who worked with the Chinese day to day did want to see them succeed and share in that success. This was due to a morally complicated impulse to "civilize" other cultures that were seen as less developed. Open markets, even if they were made so by force, took on an important role even if one of those goods was opium from India. And even when the Qing government attempted to combat opium addiction, the British insisted that its sale continue. However, there were some officials who not only sought to help the Chinese with their transition but wanted to end the unequal treaties as well.

One success story was the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. Established by

the British during the Taping Rebellion, the Chinese Maritime Service Service was under the direction and control of the Qing government. It was staffed by foreigners at the senior administrative level, and while it employed men from all the European powers it was primarily British in make up. The goal was for the Maritime Service to collect taxes and fees that were going unpaid. It wasn't altogether altruistic since those taxes went to the pay for indemnities, but it was to also to stabilize marketplace of which shipping was a chief concern especially to the British.

From April 1863, under the first inspector general Horatio Nelson Lay, the annual collection of taxes was just over eight million taels; the silver based currency used by the Qing. By 1885, under the stewardship of Robert Hart, perhaps the most well known inspector general of the Chinese Maritime Service, the annual collection of duties and fees had almost doubled to fifteen million. Through this revenue collection the Qing was able to pay off, in full, not only the indemnities imposed on China from the Treaty of Tientsin in 1860, but it also generated the funds to finance the Kiangnan Arsenal, the Foochow Shipyard, and send Chinese students to attend European and American universities. Inspector Hart even submitted other proposals beyond simply those which pertained to the Chinese Maritime Service. He was eager to assist the Qing in organizing the naval fleet, establishing a post office, and a national mint. He also became personal friends with Prince Gong during his time as head of the Zongli Yamen, the faction of Reformers. For his service Robert Hart was lauded with awards, honorific titles both from the Qing and the British for his distinguished service in China.

Historian Mary C. Wright argued that Confucian ethics was the main cause for the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement. This is self evident since Confucianism

was part of the cultural fabric of China and had been so for close to two millennia. But this explanation is a bit too simple and ultimately misses the point. While ideas do play a role, it is people who are the make or break, success or failure of the implementation of those ideas. Without execution those ideas are merely words on a page. While they can move people, they do not have an impact outside of action taken. For the Reformers of the Tongzhi Restoration it was a structure, one that was receptive to those who did the day to day work, but was flexible enough to permit implementation of new ideas. It was not so much the philosophy itself but the feudal structure that came along with Confucianism that hampered the reform movement. As Pao Chao Hsieh writes in *The Government of China (1644-1911)*:

The Manchu monarchs were wise enough to elevate their position and concentrate their power at the same time. Huang Chao Wen Hsien Tung Kao bears witness to this point in a short passage:

*From the grand secretaries and ministers of the six departments down to an insignificant clerk in the remote corner of the empire, appointment or dismissal, reward or punishment, is all given directly by the emperor himself. This has never been practiced by rulers heretofore.*

The elevation of position coupled with the concentration of power made the Manchu Emperors more like oriental despots than their predecessors.<sup>xviii</sup>

Thus, Prince Gong retained his position, technically, by the Dowager Empress, and was subsequently dismissed when it proved politically expedient. In fact, the reason she was in her position at all was on the part of the belligerent faction. While it might be easy to simply dismiss the failure of the reform movement from its own internal failings, external pressures from foreign powers did not do it any favors. However the realm of ideas, specifically the issues of territorial integrity for China, and a notion of fairness failed in parallel fashion alongside the Self Strengthening Movement.

## CHAPTER 3

### OFF THE HINGES: THE OPEN DOOR IN CHINA

The acquisition of the Philippines was not the event that brought China to the attention of American entrepreneurs. In fact, American businessmen had been in China right around the time of the founding of the United States. What changed was the way the US government dealt with China. Before the acquisition of the Philippines, the US government took a hands off approach to dealing with China. This limited the ways in which American entrepreneurs were able to conduct business putting them at a significant disadvantage after the Treaty of Nanjing. It meant they were largely on their own, or if they were fortunate enough they operated underneath the umbrella of the British or other European power. These American operators came to be known as the “Old China Hands” by the US government and were at times called upon to assist American diplomats on how to navigate the very unfamiliar cultural framework of the Chinese. This situation changed, though gradually, once the United States acquired the Philippines. However, gunboat diplomacy in China was out. Most of the US Navy consisted of old, outdated wooden hulled ships, and President Roosevelt’s “Great White Fleet” voyage around the world did not take place until the end of 1907. So what was needed was a way for the United States to both enter the influence game in China, but to not appear to rock the boat too much. A further complication was while Manifest Destiny on the North American continent was popular enough American imperialism overseas was a horse of another color. The United States needed a way to enter the game, but to not appear threatening. It needed to expand its power base just to maintain the posses-

sions it already had. Things began to change once the United States became an imperial power. The strategy for this was The Open Door.

The Open Door started as a series of notes by President McKinley's Secretary of State John Hay. Written in 1899 – 1900, it argued that the path of geo-political dominance in Asia was through China. "The storm center of the world has shifted... to China. Whoever understands that mighty Empire... has a key to world politics for the next five centuries," Hay wrote.<sup>xix</sup> Even in the center of the storm the winds were shifting rapidly. In 1895, the island nation of Japan, who had less than thirty years prior lived in a primarily feudalistic, agrarian society defeated the Chinese on the issue of hegemony over Korea. This left the other European powers, namely Russia and Germany, scrambling to see who was going to gobble up the largest slice of pie from this upheaval. However, the United States was not even on the board in 1895, since the acquisition of the Philippines was another three years away along with the annexation of Hawaii in 1898, which put them halfway to Asia. The China question loomed on the horizon.

Still, the US was in a position of weakness thrown into a mercurial situation that constantly shifted from the start. Even the wording of the Open Door had to be crafted in such a way as to not tip the balance too far in any direction. Already, opportunities for American businessmen, especially in the major concerns of mining and railroad construction, were extremely limited. Thus, the US turned to their most stalwart ally, one who shared a common heritage: Great Britain. All things considered the British were not bad allies to have in China. "Up to (this) time the British had been overwhelming master of the Chinese trade. They had 80 per cent of it; all the rest of the countries together, including ourselves (US), had only 20 per cent."<sup>xx</sup> Even before the Open Door

officially came into effect the US and Great Britain paid at least lip service, if not actual shared actual policy goals. They sought equal opportunities, at least for themselves, in trade. They both wished to develop potential commercial markets, and wanted to see the Qing retain their territorial integrity and sovereignty. The Open Door simply put into writing what had been standard practice between each nation and further sought to spread it among the other powers in China. Unfortunately Hay's "Open Door" was not in step with the times in China. Even though lip service was paid to the concept of the Open Door by the close of the 19th century, the spheres of influence in China began to harden, and with the Qing government increasingly becoming more and more unstable it was a matter of time before the situation broke down. As historian Paul Holbo notes:

"The tempo of the imperialist race quickened in 1897. Germany seized Kiaochow in the Shantung Province, France acquired territory in south China, and Russia occupied Port Arthur and appeared ready to take all of Manchuria from China. Great Britain joined the scramble by securing leases of Weihaiwei as a naval base and Kowloon as a port, while she and the other power concluded agreements on investments in China."<sup>xxi</sup>

Military force, not diplomacy, was the go to response in China. In fact, Hay might look like a misguided idealist, but in fact the opposite is true. Hay understood the inherent limitations of the American use of force in China, and what the potential ramifications might be for disrupting other powers' spheres of influence. But Hay still sought to turn to the tide, to find some glimmer of hope that the the situation might turn around. Thus, Hay received cordial replies on his "Open Door" concept, but the point of no return was crossed. Cooperation had turned to competition and conflict. His friend Henry Adams told him "Your open door is already off its hinges."<sup>xxii</sup> It was a respected theory but not one that the other powers wanted to chance putting into practice even if they made public shows of deference supporting the notion. Hay lamented "the inherent

weakness of our position is this: we do not want to rob China ourselves, and our public opinion will not permit us to interfere, with an army. The talk of the paper about 'our preeminent moral position giving us the authority to dictate to the world' is mere flap-doodle."<sup>xxiii</sup> By the time of his death in 1905, Hay thought he had achieved no lasting success in China. But was the Open Door a misconceived notion, a conjuration of wish-ing thinking and hopeful intentions? It was not, at least not completely. In fact, there were signs that such cooperation was possible and would have to be achieved if the current situation were to have any hope holding in China.

In June of 1900, an uprising known as the Boxer Rebellion, broke out among the bottom echelon of Chinese society. Known as the Yihetuan Movement, the rebellion was both proto-nationalistic and anti-foreign in its make up. Not specifically targeted against the spheres of influence the Boxers took aim at the Christian missionaries along with all other foreigners. Although religion was a rallying cry it was not the underlying factor. After a particularly harsh drought famine had grabbed the country and along with it the superstructure of the Chinese economy which had started to shift from an agrarian to a more industrialized one. One example of the change was transportation of goods which had been performed by porters along rivers and drovers with wagons along roads was now handled by locomotives on rails.

Add to the mix the deleterious relationship between the Qing and the foreign powers due to the unequal treaties the situation was a powder keg in want of a spark. Where the cooperation came into play, at least among the foreign powers, was during the rebellion itself. After the Boxers besieged Peking they murdered the German and

Japanese ministers. But besides foreigners, the Boxers also began to slaughter Chinese Christian converts by the thousands. At that point, the public shifted support away from the Boxers and to the foreign powers who could establish some order. Two months after the rebellion began, an allied force arrived in Peking on August 14th, 1900. Its goal was to rescue the besieged Peking litigation. While short lived, the Boxer Rebellion showed that the foreign powers could act in mutual accord and further gain some sort of public support from the Chinese. During the crisis Sec. of State Hay sent a note to Edwin H. Conger, the American minister to China, to “act concurrently with the other powers’ in restoring order and protecting the lives and property of (America’s) nationals and ‘all legitimate American interests.’ In its concluding sentence, however, it added to this purpose a momentous new objective, namely, ‘to seek a solution which may bring about permanent safety and peace to China, preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity, protect all rights guaranteed to friendly powers by treaty and international law, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all part of the Chinese Empire.”<sup>xxiv</sup> The Open Door had arrived in China.

### ***Leave the Stick at the Door: Roosevelt’s Realist Policies***

The Open Door was an ideological framework that was unique to China. Territorial integrity was a buzzword of the day. Even a concept given credence in the abstract, the reality was that foreign powers still carved up China into their respective spheres of influence. And they were increasingly hardening. They were naturally suspicious of any kind of outside mediation even from other powers. “In this Manchurian matter,’ Roosevelt wrote in 1903 ‘we are not striving for any political control or to help any nation with



any political control or to prevent Russia from acquiring any political control of the territory in question.”<sup>xxv</sup> Ironically, it was the commitment to maintaining the territorial integrity of China that did not win the United States any friends amongst the other powers. In fact, it was seen as a power move, a check to keep others from gaining any more power so the United States could gain its own. However, it was this position that became the foundational building block of institutional American foreign policy. A realist position that evolved over time into an idealist position which came about from the limitations of power and what could be accomplished in China.

Americans who understood the American position in China, Conger, Hay, and Root after him grasped the importance of the territorial integrity clause. “They (Conger and Hay) had taken it for granted that foreign spheres of influence and territorial concessions in China would continue to exist, and even to expand.... But the circumstances attending the Boxer Rebellion, following the unfavorable reception of the September (1900) notes, led Hay to the conclusion that the maintenance of the open door in depended on the maintenance of China’s complete sovereignty over her own territories.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Even though the insistence of the territorial integrity might bring cause the other powers to distrust the United States, the effect of the hardening of the spheres of influence meant that American businessmen were closed off from markets. Without that economic power from their entrepreneurs, that meant the US lost one of its biggest foreign policy advantages. This was crucial considering the aggressive moves of Japan who had its own ambitions for a Pan-Asian sphere of hegemony. This was all the more impressive since Japan was a newcomer to the imperial scene, as was the United

States. The irony being that, it was the US who forced Japan to open to the wider world.

### ***Don't Look Directly at the Rising Sun: Japan plays the Great Game Well***

In February of 1854, Commodore Matthew C. Perry was ordered to sail for Japan. This was his second trip. A year prior on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1853, Perry had presented a letter from President of the United States Millard Fillmore along with a white flag of surrender to the Japanese delegates. In addition to the letter Commodore Perry had put on a display of the firepower of the Paixhans guns that fired explosive shells. After such a not so subtle threat the Japanese delegation had agreed to meet in a year. Japan, the island nation which had sealed itself off from the rest of the world was about to be opened up by force.<sup>xxvii</sup> The Shogun, the de-facto head of the Japanese government had no choice but to agree to the United States' terms. When Perry returned to Japan he signed the Convention of Kanagawa on behalf of the United States on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1854. Japan was now open to the outside world, but unlike China it would not be subjected to carving up and spheres of influence. In fact, just fifty years after going from a feudalistic society it would defeat a Great Power though one in decline. Thus, the United States seeking to expand markets for their own entrepreneurs unwittingly served as the catalyst for Japan to modernize quick, fast, and in a hurry both in terms of economic industrialization and military effectiveness.

A major milestone, a break from the past, came about during the era of what was known as the Meiji Restoration which was officially recognized in 1868. This placed the reins of power back in the hands of the Japanese Emperor Meiji from the its previ-

ous holder the Tokugawa Shogun. In less than thirty years the Meiji government oversaw a rapid pace of not only technological development but aggressive expansion. In 1895, the Japanese defeated a weakened China to gain concessions in Korea and ten years after that defeated Russia. Even after the conflict in 1905, the Russian and Japanese had tensions in Manchuria as both powers sought to protect their own interests. The Open Door while a declaration of neutrality in many ways was also a way for Japan to work with a potential ally. Both McKinley's successor Teddy Roosevelt along with his Secretary of State Elihu Root viewed the Japanese in similar vein. Even if the United States and Japan were not possible allies the Japanese were at least worthy of respect.

For Roosevelt the Japanese were an exception. Like many of his contemporaries Roosevelt held Asians were lesser than Anglo-Saxon based nations but even the Japanese were to be counted among great powers in his estimation. "The Japs interest me and I like them,' he wrote his British friend Spring Rice. To another friend he called the Japanese 'a wonderful and civilized people' who were 'entitled to stand on an absolute equality with all the other peoples of the civilized world.' What impressed him was Japan's energy, technical prowess, culture, industrial achievement, and growing military strength. Japan, like America, was in a heroic phase of political and economic development."<sup>xxviii</sup> While somewhat wistful, if patronizing, this was also a politically expedient view as well. The British had come to view Japan as an ally, a check against Germany who was growing in power throughout Europe and the world. Since Roosevelt favored the British, the Japanese became favored as well. While Roosevelt respected the Japanese, he was hamstrung domestically due to virulent racism and anti-immigration sentiment at home in America. On May 6th, 1882, The Chinese Exclusion Act passed into

law. An anti-immigration policy that made exceptions for skilled labor and labor related to mining. It also went a step further and stated that any Chinese person who was in the United States after the passage of the law had to reapply for admission. This presented Chinese immigrants, most of which were men, with a very difficult choice. They could either stay in the United States and never see their families again, or go back to China and most likely never be allowed back into the United States. In effect, Chinese men who made up most of the immigrants to the United States had to make the choice of staying in America and never seeing their families again or going back to China but never coming back to the United States. Legislation was passed against Japanese immigrants as well after Japan began to rise in prominence. It was these racial tensions, the fear of the “Yellow Peril” at home, counterbalanced with the need for allies in the Pacific that Roosevelt had to balance. It was the juggling act of respect for a worthy power even if the nation’s domestic policies were outright hostile and even shameful to that foreign power. While Roosevelt understood this notion it was a lesson the Russians would learn very soon.

### ***A Sign of Things to Come: The Russo-Japanese War***

On February 8, 1904, the Japanese launched a surprise night attack on Port Arthur badly damaging three of the Russian Empire’s heaviest cruisers in the Eastern fleet. Although the Japanese admiral Tōgō Heihachirō was unable to successfully capture Port Arthur, attack provided a distraction for the Japanese to land troops near Incheon on the Korean peninsula. The conflict, which came to be known as the Russo-Japanese war, ultimately ended with a Japanese victory. More importantly, it shifted the

balanced of power in Manchuria and was the spark that led to a weakening of absolute authority held by the Czar of Russia Nicholas II. While the United States as a nominal ally of Japan, the realist foreign policy goal for Roosevelt was for Japan to come out on top of Russia by just enough. Where Roosevelt performed a foreign policy coup was by the United States inserting itself into the peace process between Russia and Japan. By doing this the United States cloaked itself in the garb of the disinterested player. Roosevelt put his presidency on the line and in doing so earned himself a Noble Peace Prize. Through back channel diplomacy Roosevelt, with the help of his Secretary of War Howard Taft, brought about the Treaty of Portsmouth. Out of this settlement the United States gained some desperately need prestige as a peacemaker, particularly Roosevelt, in China. Unfortunately, it would not last.

This was the end of the road for any gains the United States could make using the Open Door and back channel diplomacy in China. Tensions and territorial ambitions began to take precedence over any faux posturing on territorial integrity toward China. Although the Russians and the Japanese were bitter enemies they would join forces three years later to shut out the US from meddling in Manchuria. By the time of the Root–Takahira Agreement in 1908, the United States was in a weakened position. Although the agreement reaffirmed China’s territorial integrity, recognized the Philippines and Hawaii as American possessions, the United States recognized Japan’s interest in Korea and Manchuria. Japan’s position was strengthened in China and there was no turning back. The Open Door had closed. In a letter to his successor, President Taft, Roosevelt remarked. “The ‘open-door’ policy in China was an excellent thing, and will I hope be a good thing in the future, so far as it can be maintained by general diplomatic

agreement; but as has been proved by the whole history of Manchuria, alike under Russia, and under Japan, the 'open-door' policy, as a matter of fact, completely disappears as soon as a powerful nation determines to disregard it, and is willing to run the risk of war rather than forego its intention."<sup>xxix</sup>

Although it failed to achieve its stated objectives, the Open Door formed the basis of American foreign policy in China and served as an ideological framework as the United States moved forward as an imperial power. The ideas of free international trade and territorial integrity would evolve into self-determination and the spread of democracy after World War I. What was a realist political document became an idealist policy for Presidents after Roosevelt. However, the institutional and diplomatic accomplishments have been overshadowed by the men who both rode and brought about a shift in the direction of American imperialism. Roosevelt and Taft both had similar ideas, but stark personality contrasts which ultimately lead to conflict. Even still, it was Dollar Diplomacy that was tried and failed to produce results in China.

### ***The Taft Justification: Transition and Tumult for the US in China***

"The Diplomacy of the present administration has sought to respond to modern ideas of commercial intercourse. This policy has been characterized as substituting dollars for bullets. It is one that appeals alike to idealistic humanitarian sentiments, to the dictates of sound policy, and to legitimate commercial aims." This was the heart of President Taft's farewell address to a joint session of Congress on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1912. It is the phrase "substituting dollar for bullets" which has become shortened and coined

in the phrase “dollar diplomacy”. It is also the phrase that has summed up for historians the Taft Administration’s foreign policy in China. It is usually not a kindly critique. Part apologia and part idealistic overreach, Taft’s “Dollar Diplomacy” conjures up images of miscalculation, diplomatic naivety, especially regarding China and the power of the “Open Door” and outright, abject failure. The scale is weighted even more so because Taft’s foreign policy successes are contrasted against his more successful predecessor President Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt. But while “Dollar Diplomacy” was unsuccessful in achieving its goals in China, it did lay the basis for what would be the future of American foreign policy specifically the use of financial capital to achieve geopolitical aims.

From the beginning the Taft Administration’s foreign policy efforts were hampered both by a flawed abstract idealism, which when implemented into reality wasn’t mitigated by experienced operatives. However, it is important to keep in mind that the United States as a global power was still less than a generation old. And given that China was a pressure cooker that was boiling over with new, more imperial inclined players such as Germany and Japan, it is easy to see how a young imperial power not yet accustomed to playing the game would be a challenge for any President.

While recent scholarship has humanized President Roosevelt he’s still a semi-legendary figure that has become part of the American Mythos. His face is carved on the side of Mount Rushmore. He has been the subject of books, artwork, and movies. He has a popular children’s toy that still bears his name: the Teddy bear. Teddy Roosevelt is an icon of Americana. Taft, a one term president with very few monuments, is known for being a very large man who once got stuck in a bathtub (He actually did not). The comparison is hardly a fair one considering the flow of events in Asia would have

been a tough for any American President to contend with. However, Roosevelt did have some advantages over his groomed successor. Roosevelt had a natural charisma and boundless energy which made him a natural statesman and diplomat. In a career filled with numerous examples perhaps his most memorable one was brokering a peace agreement between Russia and Japan in 1905 for a cessation of hostilities ending Russo-Japanese war. This earned him a Nobel Peace Prize. He would follow up that success again in a year, 1906, by mediating another conflict between France and Germany over Morocco.

In contrast, Taft largely stayed out of the affairs of an increasingly tense Europe. By the time a second crisis happened in Morocco in 1911, Taft was not personally involved. He did support efforts to mediate a crisis between Italy and Turkey. Because of Taft's tendency to not involve himself personally in European affairs he is judged as being somewhat of a foreign policy dilettante. However, Taft did have diplomatic interests in other regions of the globe specifically Latin America and the Far East. And it is in these two regions of the world the US could not have been more vastly different. In South America thanks to the Monroe Doctrine and shifting economic power the US operated with mostly a free hand. In China however, it was late to the party and jumping into a game that in which the more established players already had designs of their own.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the Great Powers were stuck between old ways of thinking and new technological advances that spurred not only growth, but new ideas. It was during this tumultuous time that America joined the "Great Game" in China. The foundation of America's foreign policy was based on the Monroe Doctrine, but up



until that point besides a few isolated incidents the United States was not considered a colonial power. With a continent to territorially expand upon and an aversion toward large military expenditures especially in the wake of the Civil War, the United States was still very much a North American power. However, the Monroe Doctrine was a handy document. It was used as a pretext during the Spanish American War which resulted in the United States gaining possession of two former Spanish Colonies, one in the Caribbean, Puerto Rico, and the other in the Far East, the Philippines. President McKinley while giving independence to Cuba decided to hang onto the Philippines and Puerto Rico. And the man who McKinley wanted to run this enterprise was William H. Taft. Taft was a man of very limited diplomatic and foreign policy experience. Up to this point in his life Taft's focus was strictly in the legal profession particularly as a judge. His passion for the law formed the basis for how Taft saw the world and it was one he would return to again and again.

When selected as Chairman of the Philippine Commission by President McKinley, Taft was a judge in the United States Court of Appeals, Sixth District. At first, Taft declined the posting stating he wished to stay a judge. However, both McKinley and Taft were part of the Ohio Republicans power block which was comprised of a lot of Civil War veterans. A combination of familial pressure, personal ambition, and McKinley's assurance that Taft would be gone no longer than a year Taft relented and made plans to leave for the Philippines.<sup>xxx</sup>

In June of 1900, Taft arrived in the Philippines. Rather than a year, Taft stayed close to four years departing in February of 1904. While there were some scandals from the American Occupation of the Philippines, Taft's tenure as Chairman of the Philippine

Commission was relatively popular. He was given wide latitude on the development of civil services. Through the Philippine Commission Taft set up a court system, created multiple bureaus which included Mining, Census, Health, Forestry, and an Inspector of Customs. This was in line with President McKinley in creating a new government, one based on the American model, for the Philippines. It was quintessential nation building, but the possession of the Philippines had a more profound effect for the change in American foreign policy and the course of the nation one in which would be lead by McKinley's predecessor.

American foreign policy in the Far East was almost nonexistent before the Roosevelt Administration. That is not to say there was no foreign policy, but the approach by the United States was "hands off". Part of this was lack of political, or wide spread economic interest, and the other was simply logistics. Having no sphere of influence, or naval might to carve one out let alone the national interest in imperialism, the Far East, specifically China, was a low priority at best. Prior to McKinley and the Spanish American War the United States government focused mainly on continental matters specifically westward expansion and the wars with Native Americans. Even during Roosevelt's time this hands off approach persisted. Roosevelt's US Minister to China, William Rockhill, was notorious for refusing to assist American businessmen in commercial enterprises in China. American commerce was conducted by "Old China Hands", entrepreneurs who had carved a niche for themselves, and often acted under the preview of the British spheres of influence.

At the turn of the century China was at the center of world changing events. In 1895, China lost in a conflict with the emerging great power Japan. This was over the

“Korea question”. Japan was forced to give up access. China was defeated by the Japanese in 1895 to settle the Korean question, but in the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Japan was forced by Germany, France, and Russia, known as the “Triple Intervention” to give up access to the Liaodong Peninsula. While France and Germany nominally checked Japan’s influence, an ally of Britain, it was Russian interference on the Liaodong Peninsula, along with Russia’s occupation of Port Arthur, in the years after the First Sino-Japanese war of 1895 that led to hostilities between them in the Russo Japanese War. The conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War was the definitive statements that things had changed in Asia. If American politicians were slow to wake up to the new realities of an imperial foreign policy, the American public was less inclined.

In less than a decade, a strong, anti-imperial sentiment developed from a politically considerable portion of the American public. A famous example was Mark Twain who turned from being a “red hot imperialist” to passionately anti-imperialist so much so he joined the American Anti-Imperialist League and became its Vice President. While Americans were generally in favor of westward expansion on the North American continent the establishment and maintenance through blood and treasure of an overseas empire was not a terribly popular notion. Because of this, Roosevelt, already somewhat of an Anglophile, cultivated closer ties with England. Through the British, Roosevelt hoped to gain an ally who would, nominally at least, defend American interests. And while Roosevelt did not want the United States to appear to be Britain’s lapdog, he hoped to accomplish this aim by having England support the Open Door. The plan made sense on paper considering England was the preeminent imperial power in Asia,

if not the world. While Taft did not necessarily disagree with Roosevelt, he wanted to go in a different direction.

Contained within the Open Door was the belief that the driving force of imperialism was through capitalism, at least for Americans. It was the balance sheet, not the barrel of the gun that would drive changes among different cultures. And these markets could only function if they were backed by the rule of law, and that rule was enforced through the establishment of a court system and treaties. This was the paradigm that would form the genesis of institutional US foreign policy in the decades to come in the 21st century. The US Government was not so concerned with the spread of democracy, although it was believed this was the best government for capitalism to thrive in. Rather, it was the opening of new commercial ventures, and creating space within existing markets for American entrepreneurs to find those opportunities. If there was to be an imperialism for the US it would inevitably have to contain that element within it. This was not surprising because it was the rapidly expanding and modernizing American economy that led to changes in how America conducted foreign policy.

A key provision of American foreign policy was business investment in the twentieth century. Up to this point public investment, those made by the government directly, was not a fixture of US foreign policy. In fact, US foreign policy, in terms of power projection, was in its infancy so at first it was the government trying to carve out space for American businessmen in creating abstract notions of capitalism among imperial powers who were very much in favor of monopolies and closed markets. Also, there was unease about lending private money directly to unstable foreign government. This was altogether too common an occurrence in former Spanish colonies in South America.

And although the Qing government of China made payments on any loans and indemnities peeved against it from the Boxer Rebellion, the instability of Qing's China was a cause for concern. However, things had changed and the US took a more active role in encouraging foreign investment. Roosevelt used his personal charm and the power of the presidency. In 1898, when J.P. Morgan wished to sell his shares in the American Development Company which had the commission to build a railroad from Canton to Hankow, President Roosevelt personally asked Morgan to reconsider.<sup>xxxix</sup> President Taft would go a step further than Roosevelt. Under Taft, the United States government would back loans made by private entities for investments or loans made to foreign governments, specifically enterprises in China. It was this guarantee that was the heart of Dollar Diplomacy. While the guarantee often looked a lot like Gunboat Diplomacy, the key difference was the US government did not lead with that, at least not in China where it was strategically impractical. The hope was that the US government and American business would work for a common purpose. The expansion, or inclusion in the marketplace by American businessmen would naturally lead to establishment of democracy which would in turn yield a greater share of the marketplace and so forth. Before the Open Door and Dollar Diplomacy, US foreign policy was more limited in scope since the US government had focused interests on the continent. American foreign investment was largely left on its own, but now they were partnered together, nominally, pushing forward with a singular purpose.

The purpose of Dollar Diplomacy, from the point of view of the US Government, was to stabilize under developed, i.e. "backward", nations into something resembling more modern nations, i.e. democracies with open markets and free trade at least toward

American exports. While Taft had some experience in nation building given his experiences in the Philippines, the man tasked with the job was Philander C. Knox, Taft's Secretary of State. Taft could not have picked a worse man for the position. Philander C. Knox wasn't a neophyte to the government, having served as Teddy Roosevelt's Attorney General, but his mentality was more an attorney than a diplomat. This actually was a preference for Taft whose cabinet was made of up over half of men from the legal profession.

Not only was Knox a gifted attorney, he was considered one of the best in the nation. Like many men Knox moved back and forth between private practice and public service. Knox made his fortune in corporate law, did work for the Carnegie Steel Company, and was a key player in the organization of what became US Steel. This was after his anti-trust work under Roosevelt. But the same qualities that made him an excellent attorney worked against him as a diplomat. As an attorney, Knox advocated strongly for his client as the legal profession is inherently adversarial. Taking that same mindset with him as Secretary of State he treated the US like a client. He was known for not giving an inch in negotiations and had no time for the tedium that comes along with the pomp and ceremony associated with diplomacy. Opinions about Knox from foreign dignitaries were universal. He was cold, immovable, and easily insulted, or concerned over trivialities as lawyers can be with contracts. He and his wife were not fond of social scenes where much of the foundation for diplomatic work was laid. To make matters worse, Knox did not enjoy favorable relations with his former colleagues of the Senate. He was known to be prickly, was not receptive to the suggestions made by

other Senators, and did not do the personal legwork or backroom glad handing to ensure smooth legislative passage of important treaties.<sup>xxxii</sup> And like his boss, President Taft, Knox was not known for his tireless work ethic. Often the day to day running of State was left in the hands of Knox's First Assistant Secretary Francis Huntington-Wilson.

If Knox was a terrible diplomat due to his mindset and work ethic, Francis Huntington-Wilson was not much of an improvement, much of which was due to his temperament. He had the unfortunate combination of being able to antagonize people with ease and of being easily offended himself. He was also suspicious by nature bordering on the point of paranoia. On a 1910 trip to Turkey, he covered the window panes over the door to his room in the American Legation with blue paper.<sup>xxxiii</sup> While this might not seem odd in day and age with cyber warfare and flying drones, the staff at the legation made a note of it due specifically based on the oddity of the scene. However, for all his faults as a diplomat two things that Huntington-Wilson did possess was a desire to advocate for American interests abroad, and he was exceptionally gifted with outstanding organizational abilities. So it was the man who made it a habit to constantly look over his shoulder for eavesdroppers whenever he was in a conversation no matter how casual, was also the one who turned the State Department from a playground of political appointees into a modern, professional diplomatic corps.

Ironically, given the almost free reign from his disinterested boss Huntington-Wilson introduced a slew of reforms upon his appointment. First, he significantly increased the size of the department by hiring more personnel. Next, he instituted changes to the

workload and how information was communicated within the department. He then revamped the hiring standards and introduced an in service training program that lasted over a month. For existing State personnel he instituted a rotation between foreign posts and Washington D.C. which ensured a flow of talent both at home and abroad. He also implemented a promotion system that was based on meritorious service and established a pension for state personnel. This also meant that the old way of assigning cherry posts, which went to men of means and political influence, was abolished.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Because of these reforms the lasting legacy of Francis Huntington-Wilson was a professional diplomatic corps, which continued long after his departure. This change was a critical necessity for if Taft's vision of Dollar Diplomacy had any hope for success the enterprise needed educated, professional diplomats to carry it out. These foreign service personnel, more than the larger than life personalities at the top of the ladder, carried out the heavy lifting to make America the creditor of capitalistic stability and exporter of democracy to the under developed world.

This was crucial because one thing American geo-political ambitions could not count on in China, unlike Latin America, was military intervention. Taft struggled with the same dilemma in that regard as did Roosevelt. The Open Door was only valid as long as other imperial powers sought to follow it. And China would only remain independent if other imperial powers wished for it to be so. Of course, all other imperial powers with spheres of influence publicly expressed support for both the Open Door and China retaining its own sovereignty, the reality was something else entirely.



Whether it was political impotence or naivety, perhaps the greatest failing of the Taft administration in China was his assumption of sincerity from the other imperial powers. However, this assumption was not too far fetched a notion to hope for. Many times other European powers showed a willingness to assist China in succeeding at retaining its sovereignty and becoming more modern. America was instrumental in swaying them to do just that. It was William Rockhill, who convinced the other European power to scale back on the indemnity demands from China after the Boxer Rebellion. He also encouraged them to split it proportionally by who'd suffered the most damage rather than equally among them. Further, Europeans also started many successful multi-national commercial ventures. One example was the shared collection of import duties which were handled by the Maritime Customs Service. The Maritime Customs Service was headed up by an Englishman named Robert Hart. Upon his appointment to the Customs Service, Hart doubled the amount of revenue the Qing government received, thanks in part to the elimination of corrupt Qing officials who'd been siphoning money from it. But by the time Taft was in office the situation in China, or more specifically with the Qing government, was deteriorating rapidly. The balance of power among the imperial powers was shifting faster than it had at any other point. Since the end of the Taiping Rebellion, the Qing government had never fully regained legitimacy and stabilized itself, and with foreign powers "slicing the melon" of China by the time of the Boxer Rebellion, anti-foreign sentiment had reached a fever pitch. Territorial Integrity was a deep concern of the Qing government and nowhere was this more acutely felt but in Manchuria. Since the end of the Russo-Japanese War both the Russians and the Japanese had become more and more bold in their demand for concessions specifically with the

rail lines; the economic veins of Manchuria. The Qing were desperate to re-establish their sovereignty in the region. They reached out to the United States to act as an arbitrator.

The US's motives in Manchuria were not wholly altruistic. If anything, helping China to regain its territorial sovereignty was an added benefit. There were US business interests to consider, and without a significant military presence abroad from the United States or the Chinese both players did not hold many cards. This was a test of Dollar Diplomacy and the Open Door, but instead of top diplomats the US had Knox and Huntington-Wilson. These men, in addition to being unlikable, practiced a style of diplomacy called Shirt Sleeve diplomacy. Named after the sleeves of businessmen who took his coat off in serious negotiations it was characterized by a plain, but direct way of speaking, hard negotiating, and a belief that the other side appreciated those aforementioned qualities. It was quintessentially American and considered to be a departure from what was considered the doublespeak of traditional diplomacy. It was also not very well received by the Europeans in China.

So in Shirt Sleeve Diplomatic style, Taft at first used diplomatic pressure to try and gain a US concession in the Hukuang Loan (1911), along with a mining concern. The Hukuang Loan was meant to finance a railroad through Yangtze Valley, and in order for the US to come in on the loan they had to buy out one of the other members. Taft's first attempt was to buy out the Japanese on the Hukuang Loan but after the foothold Japan had gained in Manchuria, they refused to sell their shares. After that, none of the other powers would budge. So after two years of stonewalling, Taft appealed directly to the Qing Prince Regent. It was only then that the US was allowed to join the

Hukuang Loan consortium. Unfortunately, this aggressive style of diplomacy alienated both Japan and Russia and united the once hostile powers at the US. The US was no longer a disinterested party who wished to act as an arbiter for China. Now they took an active hand in what was perceived as creating their own sphere of interest. It was not long after the US muscled its way onto the Hukuang loan that Russians and Japanese did what they could to curtail US influence in Manchuria. When Secretary Knox proposed a railroad neutralization plan as well as currency reform, which was desperately needed, the US found no allies among its partners in the Hukuang Loan. The final straw was Secretary of State Knox's insistence that any currency reform loan be headed up by an American. Thus, the Open Door was declared deceased by Roosevelt who became more and more critical of the Taft administration. It was an overreach by Knox since the size of the loans needed for Manchurian development were not possible solely for US banking interests. Because of Knox's miscalculation, Europeans interests were of no mind to give favorable terms to US interests. Instead of ensuring free trade and belying suspicion the Open Door was seen by other imperial powers as a hollow sentiment, or worse a financial weapon. And before Taft could revise his approach, he was defeated by Woodrow Wilson in his 1912 re-election Presidential bid after Roosevelt split the Republican vote. Within days of taking office Wilson altered course in China and nullified all concessions from China, which was a moot point considering the instability in China. Thus, ended Taft's Dollar Diplomacy.

Ultimately the Open Door, and Dollar Diplomacy were considered failures since they failed to achieve their stated objectives. They did not uphold the territorial or ad-

ministrative integrity of the Qing. There was some limited success in creating commercial opportunities for American businessmen but with the disregard of the Open Door under Roosevelt followed by its successor Dollar Diplomacy under Taft from the other imperial powers it was a net loss for the United States. That was the biggest contrast between the United States and China. For the United States its missteps were not that severe. It was a learning opportunity in terms of foreign policy. For Qing it was the end of their existence, the collapse of their system. What followed for China was more than a century of periods of instability and conflict. For the United States it only continued to grow as an imperial power even with a period of isolationism following Woodrow Wilson's presidency. Changes were made in the allocation resources to its military, how it sold imperialism to the American public, and how it conducted foreign policy through a reorganized State department which was a legacy of the Taft administration. Money allocated by the government and the encouragement of commercial development became part and parcel for the imperial United States. Those lessons were learned during its first steps in empire building in China as it squared off against formidable rivals.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>v</sup>Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) p 242.
- <sup>vi</sup>Sears Achieves History 1890's, "Mail-order Business Takes Off" <http://www.searsarchives.com/history/history1890s.htm> (Accessed on Nov. 28th, 2017)
- <sup>vii</sup>Milton Friedman, Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960* (1971)p. 93
- <sup>viii</sup> Prince Kung is the Wade-Giles translation. Prince Gong is the pinyin translation. Prince Gong will be used throughout the paper.
- <sup>ix</sup> Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 13.
- <sup>x</sup> T'ung-Chih is the Wades-Giles name for the tenth Emperor of the Qing Dynasty. The pinyan name is the Tongzhi which will be used throughout the paper.
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- <sup>xii</sup> Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 196.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 198.
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- <sup>xv</sup> Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 199
- <sup>xvi</sup> Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 210
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