

EXCERPTS FROM THE TREATY OF NANJING, AUGUST 1842

Introduction

Following China's defeat by the British in the Opium War of 1839-1842, the following conditions were imposed on the Chinese government by the British in a treaty signed in the city of Nanjing (Nanking).

Document Excerpts with Questions

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Excerpts from The Treaty of Nanjing, August 1842

Article I

There shall henceforth be Peace and Friendship between ... (England and China) and between their respective Subjects, who shall enjoy full security and protection for their persons and property within the Dominions of the other.

Article II

His Majesty the Emperor of China agrees that British Subjects, with their families and establishments, shall be allowed to reside, for the purpose of carrying on their commercial pursuits, without molestation or restraint at the Cities and Towns of Canton, Amoy, Foochow-fu, Ningpo, and Shanghai, and Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, etc., will appoint Superintendents or Consular Officers, to reside at each of the above-named Cities or Towns, to be the medium of communication between the Chinese Authorities and the said Merchants, and to see that the just Duties and other Dues of the Chinese Government as hereafter provided for, are duly discharged by Her Britannic Majesty's Subjects.

Article III

It being obviously necessary and desirable, that British Subjects should have some Port whereat they may careen and refit their Ships, when required, and keep Stores for that purpose, His Majesty the Emperor of China cedes to Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, etc., the Island of Hong-Kong, to be possessed in perpetuity by her Britannic Majesty, Her Heirs and Successors, and to be governed by such Laws and Regulations as Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, etc., shall see fit to direct.

Article V

The Government of China having compelled the British Merchants trading at Canton¹ to deal exclusively with certain Chinese Merchants called Hong merchants (or Cohong) who had been licensed by the Chinese Government for that purpose, the Emperor of China agrees to abolish that practice in future at all Ports where British Merchants may reside, and to permit them to carry on their mercantile transactions with whatever persons they please, and His Imperial Majesty further agrees to pay to the British Government the sum of Three Millions of Dollars, on account of Debts due to British Subjects by some of the said Hong Merchants (or Cohong) who have become insolvent, and who owe very large sums of money to Subjects of Her Britannic Majesty.

Article VII

It is agreed that the Total amount of Twenty-one Millions of Dollars, described in the three preceding Articles, shall be paid as follows:

Six Millions immediately.

Six Millions in 1843 ...

Five Millions in 1844 ...

Four Millions in 1845 ...

Article IX

The Emperor of China agrees to publish and promulgate, under his Imperial Sign Manual and Seal, a full and entire amnesty and act of indemnity, to all Subjects of China on account of their having resided under, or having had dealings and intercourse with, or having entered the Service of Her Britannic Majesty, or of Her Majesty's Officers, and His Imperial Majesty further engages to release all Chinese Subjects who may be at this moment in confinement for similar reasons.

Article X

His Majesty the Emperor of China agrees to establish all the Ports which are by the 2nd Article of this Treaty to be thrown open for the resort of British Merchants, a fair and regular Tariff of Export and Import Customs and other Dues, which Tariff shall be publicly notified and promulgated for general information, and the Emperor further engages, that when British Merchandise shall have once paid at any of the said Ports the regulated Customs and Dues

¹ Guangzhou

agreeable to the Tariff, to be hereafter fixed, such Merchandise may be conveyed by Chinese Merchants, to any Province or City in the interior of the Empire of China on paying further amount as Transit Duties which shall not exceed ___ percent² on the tariff value of such goods.

Questions:

1. How would the conditions laid forth in this treaty affect the fiscal health of the Qing empire?
2. In China, (and in many Western texts), the Treaty of Nanjing is called the first of the "unequal treaties." Is the term "unequal treaty" justified by the content and wording of the treaty? Please explain.
3. On the British side, whose interests are best served by this treaty? In other words, who or what kind of people stand to gain?
4. Are there Chinese who might gain something from some of the terms of this treaty? Explain.

² Tariff schedules were not settled at this time. The tariff rates on various goods were fixed after further discussions; they averaged about five percent.