

Document 5.5: Excerpts from the Treaty of Nanjing¹, August 29, 1842

In both Opium Wars, the Chinese military fought with matchlock muskets, bows and arrows, and even spears. The guns, which protected forts and towns, were set in place, unable to swivel as circumstances required. Their vessels maneuvered under sail. British troops, on the other hand, used state-of-the-art Western weaponry; their vessels negotiated the rivers under steam power. The Chinese—inventors of scores of items centuries ahead of Europeans, including gunpowder—had fallen far behind the industrialized Western powers. In the Opium Wars, Chinese soldiers died by the hundreds; British losses were light. Despite these disadvantages, the Chinese resisted in a variety of ways. For example, they countered aggression with passive resistance, letting the climate wear down British troops. Nevertheless, it was just a matter of time before the British forced the Qing government to negotiate the first of several “unequal treaties.” The Treaty of Nanjing was signed aboard Her Majesty’s vessel Cornwallis, anchored in the Yangzi River at Nanjing. Ten months later the treaty was ratified in Hong Kong.

HER MAJESTY the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and His Majesty the Emperor of China, being desirous of putting an end to the misunderstandings and consequent hostilities which have arisen between the two countries, have resolved to conclude a Treaty for that purpose....[and] have agreed upon and concluded the following Articles:

I.

...There shall henceforward be peace and friendship between Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and His Majesty the Emperor of China, and between their respective subjects, who shall enjoy full security and protection for their persons and property within the dominions of the other....

II.

His Majesty the Emperor of China agrees, that British subjects, with their families and establishments, shall be allowed to reside, for the purposes of carrying on their mercantile pursuits, without molestation or restraint, at the cities and towns of Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai; and Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, &c., 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

¹ Formerly known as Nanking

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.

III.

It being obviously necessary and desirable that British subjects should have some port whereat they may [maintain] 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, &c., 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, &c., shall see fit to direct.

IV.

The Emperor of China agrees to pay the sum of 6,000,000 of dollars, as the value of the opium which was delivered up at Guangzhou in the month of March, 1839, as a ransom for the lives of Her Britannic Majesty's Superintendent and subjects, who had been imprisoned and threatened with death by the Chinese High Officers. And it is further stipulated, that interest, at the rate of 5 per cent. per annum, shall be paid by the Government of China on any portion of the above sums that are not punctually discharged at the periods fixed.

V.

The Government of China having compelled the British merchants trading at Guangzhou to deal exclusively with certain Chinese merchants, called Hong merchants (or Co-Hong) . . . 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 3,000,000 of dollars, on account of debts due to British subjects by some of the said Hong merchants, who have become insolvent, and who owe very large sums of money to subjects of Her Britannic Majesty.

VI.

The Government of Her Britannic Majesty having been obliged to send out an expedition to demand and obtain redress for the violent and unjust proceedings of the Chinese High Authorities towards Her Britannic Majesty's officer and subjects, the Emperor of China agrees to pay the sum of 12,000,000 of dollars², on account of the expenses incurred; and Her Britannic Majesty's Plenipotentiary voluntarily agrees, on behalf of Her Majesty, to deduct from the said amount of 12,000,000 of dollars, any sums which may have been received by Her Majesty's combined forces, as ransom for cities and towns in China, subsequent to the 1st day of August, 1841....

² Article VII stipulated exactly when installments of the total \$21 million should be paid.

VIII

The Emperor of China agrees to release, unconditionally, all subjects of Her Britannic Majesty (whether natives of Europe or India), who may be in confinement at this moment in any part of the Chinese empire....

X.

His Majesty the Emperor of China agrees to establish at 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, 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 a further amount as transit duties, which shall not exceed [see Declaration respecting Transit Duties below] on the tariff value of such goods.

XI.

It is agreed that Her Britannic Majesty's Chief High Officer in China shall correspond with the Chinese High Officers, both at the capital and in the provinces, on a footing of perfect equality . . .

On October 8, 1843, Britain and China signed a supplementary treaty. Among its articles was one that included a "most-favored nation" clause. "Should the Emperor hereafter, from any cause whatever, be pleased to grant additional privileges or immunities to any of the subjects or citizens of such foreign countries, the same privileges or immunities will be extended to and enjoyed by British subjects."