

China and the West: from the Opium War to the Olympic Games

Hist31201



Nemesis destroying Chinese junks
7 January 1841



Beijing Olympic opening ceremony
8 August 2008

This is a level three module that focuses on China's relationship with the West. We are interested in why the West engaged with China and how their relationship shaped Chinese history. We began with Britain and the opium wars followed by the invasion of Protestant missionaries in the late 19th century to the “scramble for China” where more Europeans, the Japanese and Americans as well, joined the game of empire. We study Chinese Diaspora and the rise of Chinese nationalism and more importantly the rise of the Chinese Communist Party to see how the Nationalist regime dealt with the West, how the Communist regime reached out to the Third World and even the United States during the Cold War. Sino-West relation is even more interesting to study in the post-Mao era because as China re-asserts her on the international stage, she has not forgotten about her humiliation suffered during the “century of unequal treaties”. What can politics of history teach us about the future?

Assessment:

One primary source analysis 1000 words (20%) and one essays 2000 words (40%)

Answer 2 questions in 2-hour exam (40%)

Sample readings:

Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire*

Yangwen Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China*

Louise Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects: Buddhism, Imperialism and Display*

Jonathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son: the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom*

George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa*

Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migrant Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii*

Knowledge of Chinese history will enhance your job prospects in the future as China rises to be the world's dominant economic power. Whatever job you might take after graduation, it would have something or a lot to do with China. Bragging about your knowledge of China will impress your future employers, as previous students told me. Among those who took this module, several have joined the Foreign Office while others have become journalists and lawyers for international newspapers / law firms.