



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

Title: CHINA'S RECENT HISTORY: HISTORY FROM THE QING DYNASTY TILL 1949

Chairperson: Ms Pooja Bhatt, Research Associate, CAPS

Speaker: Gp Capt (Dr) Vivek Kapur, Senior Fellow, CAPS

Discussant: Dr Puyam Rakesh Singh, Associate Fellow, CAPS

Rapporteur: Mr Piyush Ghasiya, Research Associate, CAPS

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Highlights of the Fellows' Seminar held on August 23, 2017 are as follows:

- The Qing dynasty, which ruled from 1644 till 1911, faced several harsh internal problems apart from being constantly beset with troubles within its borders and along its frontiers. The response by the state to these challenges often led to the state's further weakening.
- From 1796 till 1804 the Qing dynasty faced the White Lotus Rebellion. The White Lotus was a religious sect dating from the period of Mongol rule over China. This faction appealed to the poverty stricken peasants with its dogma of restoration of affluent times, alleviation of poverty and suffering, amongst others.
- Local population helped the rebels and White Lotus rebellion's militia proved more than a match for Imperial troops. The rebellion was suppressed only after a change of emperor.

- After the White Lotus Rebellion, there was another trouble on the Turkestan frontier. The Muslim forces occupied the Kashgar area. Manchu troops defeated Muslims in 1750. However, Muslims recaptured Turkestan by 1816. Finally, in 1827, Qing forces reconquered Kashgar.
- When the European trading companies such as the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company expanded past South Asia towards the Pacific Ocean, these Chinese trading communities provided them with a link to trade with mainland China. The main exports from China at that time were Tea and Silk while it imported silver, woven woollen textiles, and later opium.
- After the British East India Company lost its domination over Britain's trade with China in 1834, a British Government official was sent to administer business in China. The British official refused to deal with the Chinese traders and insisted upon dealing with Qing officials directly by equality.
- The British won the first opium war fought between 1839-1842 which forced the Qing emperor to sign the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. However, the Chinese never fully accepted the concessions made in the treaty.
- A second war between the Qing and the British and French led to the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858. This second war was caused in part by the continuing unwillingness of the Qing to accept the 'unequal' treaties.
- Coexisting economic stagnation with the humiliations heaped by the western powers on the 'superior' Chinese people exposed the tremendous limitation of the Qing Empire and appeared to designate a loss of the 'Mandate of Heaven' to rule.
- The Taiping revolution commenced at this time and lasted for about one decade. As its basis, the Taiping had a religious core based upon an ingeniously Chinese version of Christianity. One famous leader, Hong Xiuquan, claimed to be a son of God and a sibling of Jesus Christ.
- Observing the disorder in the region, Russia also stepped in to attain concessions in the vicinity of Manchuria in the form of territory and access to the Pacific coast in the area of current day port city of Vladivostok. Russia also obtained entrée for trade and political pressure to the whole of north China from Manchuria to Xinjiang.

- In 1876 the Japanese gained some 'treaty ports' in Korea; other western powers followed. A sectarian rebellion in Korea in 1894, similar to the Taiping rebellion of China, led to the Qing sending unsolicited military forces to Korea.
- In 1895 the 'treaty of Shimonoseki' was signed between China and Japan. China was compelled to pay an indemnity five times larger than that extracted by the western powers in 1860, hand over the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Pescadores islands, and the entire Liaodong peninsula, open four new 'treaty ports' and recognise full independence for Korea.
- The conquered nation, China, was forced to make concessions as typically happens after a war ends. This so called 'century of humiliation' finds recurrent mention by the current Communist Party of China (CPC) government of China.
- The Chinese narrative of 'a century of humiliation' appears to be a fitting tool for China to gain the freedom of manoeuvre to do as she pleases without severe sanction by the West.
- In 1903-04 a British expedition led by Colonel Francis Younghusband defeated limited battle from the weaker Tibetan forces and reached Lhasa in August 1904 and 'the treaty of Lhasa' was signed.
- Sun Yat-sen was born in Guangdong but was obliged to move abroad as he worked to gather support for replacing the Qing with a representative government.
- Sun Yat-sen was in the US when, on 09 October 1911, in the Russian controlled area, a bomb being assembled by rebels exploded ahead of time. That triggered a revolution led by rebel sympathisers within the Qing army.
- The new Republic was formally declared on 01 January 1912. From this time China was immersed in a civil war as the new republic, different warlords in all provinces, and the newly formed Communist Party of China (CPC) vied for the upper hand.
- In 1913 President Yuan Shikai of the Chinese Republic acknowledged Tibet's autonomy in exchange for Britain's acknowledgement of the Chinese Republic.
- Initially, the objects of both the Nationalist government and the CPC were similar, and they cooperated to unite China and repel the Japanese invaders. After Dr Sun

Yat-sen's death in 1925 Chiang Kai-shek took over control of the Nationalist Government or the Guomindang (GMD), also called the Kuo min tang (KMT).

- In 1937 Japan started to advance further into China with the apparent intent of occupying all of China. The Allies, once they entered World War (WW)-II against the Germans and Japanese, started to aid the Chinese Nationalist Government to oppose the Japanese as part of their overall war effort.
 - China's significant contribution to the Allied war effort in the East was in tying down substantial numbers of the Japanese infantry on the Chinese Mainland. The Japanese were finally driven out from China only after the victory by the Allies against Japan in 1945 on cessation of WW-II.
 - Then CPC joined the battle against the Japanese forces. However, it was the Nationalist forces that carried out the bulk of the military operations against the Japanese due to the military guidance and availability of supplies from the US.
 - The Nationalists were forced to leave mainland China for the island of Taiwan. Declaring victory, after capturing Beijing from the Nationalist Forces, Mao on 01 October 1949, addressed a large congregation at Tiananmen Square in Beijing and announced the formation of the new People's Republic of China (PRC) as a Communist Nation.
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