
UNIT 3 THE UNEQUAL TREATY SYSTEM IN CHINA*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Period of Co-operation, 1860-1870
 - 3.2.1 The Treaty Ports
 - 3.2.2 The-Foreign Inspectorate of Customs
 - 3.2.3 China's Introduction to Modern Diplomacy
- 3.3 Increasing Foreign Encroachments : Friction and Conflict, 1870-1900
 - 3.3.1 Missionary Activity and Popular Hostility
 - 3.3.2 Foreign Pressure Along China's Periphery
- 3.4 The "Scramble for Concessions"
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to familiarize yourself with the:

- "unequal treaties" signed between China and the Western powers and Japan in the 19th century;
- changing patterns and forms of imperialist expansion in China up to the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911; and
- characteristics of institutions and practices of China's relationship with the foreign powers in this period.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

For a full century from the signing of the Treaty of Nanking in 1842, China was bound by a series of treaties with the Western powers and Japan. These came to be known as the "unequal treaties" because they were imposed by the big powers using their military superiority on a weak and disintegrating China.

Unlike countries such as India, China was never fully colonized by any one foreign power or group of powers. While China was forcibly opened to foreign trade and expansion, and compelled to make one concession after another to the foreign powers, the vestiges of her sovereignty were kept intact. Even if China was powerless to resist the demands of the foreign powers, these demands were given the form of treaties drawn up and mutually agreed upon by two sovereign states. Thus just as India's long interaction with colonialism was best symbolized by the British Raj, China's century of humiliation at the hands of the colonial and imperialist powers was best represented by the series of unequal

treaties. Just as the dismantling of the British Raj was the prime object of the Indian nationalist movement before 1947, the struggle against the unequal treaties was a major focus of Chinese nationalism until the 1940s. This Unit discusses the various unequal treaties; the conditions under which they were imposed and the impact they had on China.

3.2 THE PERIOD OF CO-OPERATION, 1860-1870

In the late 1850s, it appeared as if the Western powers were actively working for the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. The Western assault on Tianjin and the capital Beijing, including the burning down of the imperial summer palace during the Second Opium War, was a heavy blow to the fortunes of the Qing. Equally significant was the Western attitude towards the great Taiping Uprising (See Unit 4) which was then raging through most of Central and South China. Formally, the policy of the Westerners in this civil war was one of neutrality. But in practice, it bordered on sympathy and even a degree of active support for the rebels.

However, after 1860, this trend reversed itself. After winning substantial concessions from the Qing at the Treaty of Tientsin, the Western powers seemed to realize that their interests would be best served by the survival of the dynasty which had made those concessions. Thus, the Western policy changed almost overnight from sympathy for the rebels to active support to the Qing in its drive to put down the Taiping Uprising. They also desisted for the time being from putting more pressure on the Qing Government and instead set about making the best use of the concessions they had already won. The foreign powers also began to assist China's efforts to modernize. One probable reason for this new policy of supporting the Qing Government was the reluctance of the British, the strongest foreign power in China at the time, to increase their direct political/ and military entanglements overseas after the rude jolt to their colonial rule in India in 1857.

The conciliatory mood among the Western powers and their diplomats in Peking was matched by a new mood among the ruling circles in China. The negotiations with the Western powers in 1860, as well as the suppression of the Taiping (which was completed in 1864), brought to prominence a set of high officials who were not so violently anti-foreign, and who believed that China needed above all else a period of peace in which to recover and strengthen herself. These officials included the famous leaders of the Taiping-suppression campaign, Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang, and the Manchu Prince Gong. These leading statesmen believed in learning some things from Western science and technology, as well as Western diplomacy, and were not averse in principle to a limited co-operation with the West in certain spheres.

The result of this change of heart on both sides was the so-called "Co-operative Policy", which ensured that the status quo in Sino-Western relation was maintained for a full ten years with little disturbance. It was in this period that certain institutionalized forms of interaction between China and the West were evolved.

3.2.1 The Treaty Ports

One of the major consequences of the First Opium War was the opening up of five ports to foreign trade and residence, including the original Canton. These came to be known as the "treaty ports". The Treaty of Tientsin that ended the Second Opium War increased the number of treaty ports to sixteen, while

the Zhifu Convention signed between China and Britain in 1876 added five more to the list. Thus, the entire length of the China coast as well as its major navigable waterway, the Yangtze River, came to be dotted with these centres of foreign trade and business.

The treaty ports, and especially the “foreign concessions” (the areas where the foreigners resided together) that grew up within them became a typical feature of Sino-foreign relations from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century. From the point of view of territory they did not amount to vary much. But, from the economic, political and judicial point of view, they represented a sizeable infringement on Chinese sovereignty.

In the foreign concessions, the foreigners governed themselves and the Chinese subjects who lived within them. In many of the treaty ports, the concessions were named after the nationality of the dominant foreign power in them (e.g. the British concession, the French concession, etc.). However, in the largest of the treaty ports—Shanghai, the British and American concessions merged in 1863 to form the famous “International concession”. Generally speaking, the “foreign concessions” were governed by a municipal council which was elected by the foreigners who owned property above a certain value, and which was subject to the approval of the consular corps, the direct representatives of the foreign powers in the treaty ports. The municipal council levied taxes for the maintenance of their concessions, had their own police forces, and in general ran their own police affairs with no interference from the Chinese government. The Chinese residents of the foreign concessions were distinctly second class citizens, who were heavily taxed but had no rights. In some cases, they were even banned from using certain roads, parks, etc. which were reserved exclusively for foreigners.

In the “foreign concessions” were situated the consular courts — foreign courts which tried foreigners involved in legal cases according to their own laws in keeping with the principle of extra-territoriality. Even Chinese residents of the foreign concessions were not tried by Chinese courts, but were liable to stand trial before mixed courts consisting of both Chinese and foreign judges. Needless to say whenever the trial involved a Chinese against a foreigner, the Chinese was at a tremendous disadvantage — not only because of the bias of the foreign judges, but also because the Chinese could not usually comprehend the foreign legal procedures.

As the years passed, the foreign concessions evolved their own distinctive culture and lifestyle that were totally alienated from that of China. Generally speaking, they were enclaves of wealth with relative stability and privilege, amidst the poverty and turmoil of 19th and early 20th century China. They were backed by the gunboats of the foreign powers anchored nearby.

3.2.2 The Foreign Inspectorate of Customs

One of the most prominent features of the treaty ports, as well as one of the most unique institutions in modern China's relations with the foreign powers, was the Foreign Inspectorate of Customs.

In 1854, when Shanghai was besieged by rebels and the Chinese Superintendent of Customs was driven from his post, the foreign consuls in Shanghai got together and took on the collection of customs dues themselves as a temporary measure. However, when peace was restored, this practice was not discontinued but was permanently institutionalized. The Western powers felt that this was in their

interest, as it would ensure that the low tariffs they had won after the Second Opium War would be respected, and there would be no undue extortion by local Chinese officials. The Qing Government too, preferred to continue this arrangement, as it ensured that a large and steady revenue would come directly into its treasury. The system was therefore regularized. The Foreign Inspectorate of Customs shifted its headquarters from Shanghai to Peking in 1865. In every treaty port, there was a Foreign Inspector of Customs, with a large and well-trained staff consisting of both foreigners and Chinese under him. Its main function was of course, the collection and remittance of customs duties and levies. But it gradually expanded its functions to include things like the maintenance of harbours and rivers, making geographical surveys, etc. Although the Qing Government benefitted financially from the activity of the Foreign Inspectorate, it nevertheless represented a further erosion of China's sovereignty in economic and administrative matters.

An interesting feature of the Foreign Inspectorate of Customs was that all its employees, including the foreigners, were formally servants of the Chinese government and not representatives of their own countries. Even Sir Robert Hart, who directed this service for forty years and came to enjoy immense authority, always considered himself to be a loyal employee of Qing Government. Certain modern scholars like J.K. Fairbank have coined the term "synarchy" to describe this phenomenon. They have viewed it not as a form of imperialist control, but as a form of collaboration between the Chinese Empire and individual foreigners which had deep roots in the traditional Chinese form of government. However, it must be remembered that the relationship between China and foreign imperialism in the 19th century had its own unique and unprecedented character. The Chinese Empire in this period was in decline, and the foreign powers were in a commanding position not only militarily, but also from the economic and technological points of view. To the emerging Chinese nationalists, the presence of a large number of foreigners directing the economy and important matters of state was as humiliating as the gunboats of the foreign powers patrolling their rivers and coastline. Particularly as the Qing Government became more dependent on the customs revenue, and also when a large portion of China's finances came to be mortgaged to various foreign powers through indemnities and loans, the control of the customs revenues by foreigners became very significant. It ensured that China could not go back on her treaty obligations, and that an increasing proportion of her wealth would go to the foreign countries.

3.2.3 China's Introduction to Modern Diplomacy

China's shattering defeat in the Second Opium War convinced some of her leading statesmen of the need to revamp her institutions and mechanisms for dealing with the foreign powers. They felt the need to get to know more about the West, and particularly the need to understand and master the theory and practice of modern international law. The Manchu Prince Gong was the prime mover behind this trend, but the Grand Councillor Wenxiang, Li Hongzhang and other high officials also played an important role.

These statesmen began to view international law as a tool which could be used to prevent further arbitrary encroachments on China's sovereignty by other powers. They felt that the existing treaties, although they were decidedly unequal, could be maintained as a limit beyond which no further concessions would be permitted. Their efforts were encouraged by the mood of co-operation that prevailed among the leading Western powers and their representatives in Peking at this time.

Thus, on the recommendation of Prince Gong and Wenxiang, the court agreed to the setting up of a kind of foreign office in March 1861, which was called the Zongli Yamen. Headed by a varying number of high-ranking statesmen, it directed the work of different bureaus assigned to deal with the major Western powers as well as coastal defence. The Foreign Inspectorate of Customs was also attached to this office from 1860 to 1870; it was the leading body which concerned itself with the execution of foreign policy.

Apart from the Zongli Yamen, the system of having two Superintendents of Trade for the northern and southern ports was also set up at Tianjin and Shanghai respectively. When the dynamic Li Hongzhang became the Superintendent of Trade at Tianjin in 1870, he was involved in so many matters concerning the foreign powers, that eventually he eclipsed the Zongli Yamen itself in the conduct of foreign affairs.

Another innovation in this period, also associated with the Zongli Yamen, was the setting up of the Tongwen Guan in 1862. Originally intended as a school to train selected Chinese and Manchu students in the Western languages, it eventually came to include subjects such as modern physics, chemistry, physiology, etc, in its curriculum. It also began to publish translated works of Western international law, philosophy, political economy and science. This school was staffed and headed by foreign professors and scholars.

The Treaty of Tientsin (1860) had contained a provision for the revision of the Treaty after a period of ten years. By the late 1860s, the Zongli Yamen felt sufficiently confident of its expertise in international law and Western-style diplomacy to press actively for treaty revision, hoping that the outcome would be more favourable to China than before. To this end, it took up the offer of the sympathetic American representative at Peking, Anson Burlingame, to undertake a mission to the Western countries on behalf of the Qing Government urging them to renegotiate the treaties. On the whole, the Burlingame Mission was well-received wherever it went. This raised the hopes of the Zongli Yamen and the Qing Government. However, these hopes were soon shattered. In 1870, the British Government rejected the Alcock Convention for the revision of the treaties, which had the approval of the Qing Government. This rejection in effect marked the end of the period of co-operation between the Qing and the Western powers, and the beginning of a period of renewed friction and conflict.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What were the institutions which played a key role in China's dealings with foreigners in the later 19th century? Answer in 10 lines.

.....
.....
.....

- 2) Explain in about five lines the functions of the Foreign Inspectorate of Customs.

.....
.....
.....

3.3 INCREASING FOREIGN ENCROACHMENTS: FRICTION AND CONFLICT, 1870-1900

The last quarter of the 19th century saw a sharp downward trend in China's relations with the big powers. In this period, these powers renewed their offensive against China culminating in the combined military assault on Beijing after the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, and the near partition of China into separate spheres of foreign influence and domination. The impulse for these developments did not lie only within China itself. Britain as well as Tsarist Russia in the last decades of the 19th century was characterized by a strong expansionist drive, as was France of the Third Republic. The United States of America, freed from the pre-occupations of the Civil War, began to look with interest towards the East. Germany, after its unification in 1870, as well as Japan of the Meiji Restoration, developed into strong powers which also coveted overseas markets and territories: It is not surprising that the expansionist drives of all these powers converged on China, which had not yet come under the colonial yoke of any one power, and which seemed to be unable to extricate itself from the process of crisis and decline.

3.3.1 Missionary Activity and Popular Hostility

One of the major irritants in Sino-Western relations in this period was, ironically enough, not the overtly military or economic activities of the Western powers, but the activities of various individual missionaries and missionary organizations. The period in fact began, and ended with major clashes over the issue of missionaries and their activities.

The Treaty of Whampoa signed with France after the First Opium War permitted missionary activity in China, while the Treaty of Tientsin of 1860 permitted the missionaries to reside and carry out their activities anywhere in China. Unlike the Western diplomats and the Western merchants who lived congregated together in selected enclaves in the ports or in the capital, Peking, the missionaries spread out everywhere. This was especially true of the Catholic missionaries. They lived for the most part in small towns and villages, where they intervened actively in the local social and political life. They freely acquired property, and were permitted to re-occupy lands confiscated from the Jesuit missionaries in the 18th century. They converted local residents to their faith, and then proceeded to try and extend their own legal immunity in criminal cases to these converts. They also set up schools and orphanages which were viewed with deep suspicion by the local population, who often believed that the missionaries were kidnapping their children. Particularly obnoxious to the local people and the local authorities was the tendency of the missionaries to appeal to their own countries for protection and support on every issue. It became increasingly common for the gunboats of the foreign powers to sail threateningly up the rivers in a show of force, whenever there was a clash between the missionaries and the local people in some part of China. Thus, popular hostility to the foreigners, which was largely confined to the area around Canton in the period between the two Opium Wars, rapidly spread throughout the interior of China. The 1860s saw innumerable clashes which resulted in physical violence and killings.

This culminated in the Tianjin Massacre of 1870, where a clash over an orphanage led to the death of 21 foreigners and about 30 Chinese Christians. Along with the rejection of the Alcock Convention, this incident marked a turning-point in Sino-Western relations. China was made to pay heavily for it, including the payment of nearly half a million *taels* as indemnity.

The Tianjin Massacre was by no means the last such conflict over the issue of the missionaries. There were frequent riots and clashes, some especially serious, like the riots in Sichuan province in Western China in 1886 and those along the Yangtze River valley in 1891. The latter almost led to a combined Western military invasion of China, which was prevented mainly by the complete capitulation by Qing Government. This capitulation was widely resented by the Chinese, reinforcing anti-Qing sentiments among them, as well as the feeling that the Qing rulers were “traitors” who were in league with the foreigners. Anti-foreign currents thus became intertwined with movements for the overthrow of the dynasty. It was precisely such a fusion of currents that led to the explosive Boxer Rebellion of 1898-1900 in North China. Fearful of losing its power, the Qing made an about turn in its policy and sided with the rebels against the foreigners. However, when the combined armies of the foreign powers sacked North China and once again occupied and destroyed much of Peking, the Qing capitulated again. China survived the crushing defeat of the Boxer Rebellion by another ten years, but only as a shadow of its former self. The imperialist powers further entrenched themselves in China. The extremely harsh terms of the Boxer Protocol which the allied powers imposed on China in 1901 made further deep inroads into China’s economic, financial and political independence.

3.3.2 Foreign Pressure Along China’s Periphery

After 1870, the big powers also began to show renewed interest in territorial expansion at the expense of the Chinese Empire. Initially, the target of their expansionist activities was not the heartland of China itself. They sought to gain control of territories along the periphery of China, which the Qing Government did not effectively control (such as Xinjiang in the West), or else which were traditionally considered tributaries of China (such as Vietnam and Korea). However, each challenge to these peripheral areas directly affected the security and prestige of China and exposed further her increasing weakness.

The first step in this direction was taken by Russia, which took advantage of a rebellion in Xinjiang to occupy the Ili region in 1871. It was only after a protracted diplomatic struggle lasting 10 years that the Qing Government was finally able to get back control of most of the region by the Treaty of St. Petersburg of 1881.

In precisely the same period, Japan began to manoeuvre for control over the island of Taiwan and the Liu Qiu (Ryukyu) islands off the China coast. The Japanese briefly occupied Taiwan in 1874. Finally, a treaty was signed in 1875, which tacitly accepted Japanese sovereignty over the Liu Qiu islands, and in which the Chinese agreed to pay Japan an indemnity of 2 million dollars.

With the Russians and the Japanese, in Ili and Formosa, the Chinese did not directly go to war. But ten years later, China went to war with the French over Vietnam (Annam), which had long been a tributary state of China. The Sino-French war of 1884-85 was a disaster for the Chinese. Although they did not have to pay an indemnity, China had to formally renounce all rights over Vietnam. Even more important was the fact that the defeat represented the clear failure of China’s twenty-year long efforts to modernize and strengthen her military capacity. The failure of this limited modernization inspired some Chinese to advocate more thorough going reforms in the years that followed, while others (like the leader of the 1911 Revolution, Sun Yat-sen) were convinced that nothing short of the overthrow of the Qing could save China from further humiliation.

France followed her victory in Vietnam with the conquest of Laos in 1893. Britain, too, made territorial gains that threatened the security of the Chinese Empire. It annexed Burma in 1886, turned Sikkim into a British protectorate in 1890, and subsequently made inroads into Tibet. Russia began the rapid colonization of Siberia, on China's northern frontier.

Meanwhile Korea, traditionally a tributary state of China and under its strong political and cultural influence, became the focus of interest of several of the powers. Eventually, in 1885, Japan managed to assert its right to intervene in Korean affairs through a Sino-Japanese convention signed in that year. China continued to retain some rights there, but not for long. In 1895, when both Chinese and Japanese troops intervened during a revolt against the Korean King, the Japanese demanded the withdrawal of Chinese troops. This led to a war in which the Chinese were badly defeated and half of their modernized naval fleet was destroyed. In the Treaty of Shimonoseki that followed, China was compelled to accept the most humiliating terms that included complete renunciation of all her rights in Korea, Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands. Even more significant was the clause ceding the Liaodong Peninsula which was part of Manchuria. Eventually, Japan was forced to return Liaodong because of the pressure of Russia, Germany and France, which was motivated by their own rivalry with Japan. However for this intervention by the three powers, the Chinese had to pay a heavy price in the form of more concessions to these powers. This set off a real "scramble for concessions" among all the major powers, which saw even more thorough humiliation and exploitation of China by the imperialist powers.

3.4 THE "SCRAMBLE FOR CONCESSIONS"

The early Western economic interest in China was trade, and it continued to be the predominant interest even after the Opium Wars. The foreign concessions in the treaty ports were acquired not so much to get a territorial foothold in China, as to facilitate the progress of foreign trade. However, side by side with the growth of this trade, other forms of economic activity by the foreigners also developed. Initially, these forms of economic activity, like banking and shipping, were closely related to trade. The first foreign bank was the British-Chartered Oriental Banking Corporation set up in Hong Kong in 1845 and in Shanghai in 1848. The first foreign shipping company was the Shanghai Steam Navigation Company set up by the Americans in 1862.

However, after 1860, foreign firms also ventured into manufacturing with vigour. By 1894, there were more than 87 foreign industrial ventures with a total capital of 13 million *taels* and employing 34,000 people. Initially they were engaged mainly in shipbuilding and repairing, and processing goods for export. But soon they also turned to producing goods for sale in China itself. Locally manufacturing goods for sale in China was one way in which the foreign firms could avoid customs duties and reduce their transportation costs. With their vast capital resources, privileges and technological superiority, they faced little competition from Chinese manufacturers.

With the progress of imperialism in the last quarter of the 19th century, the imperialists' desire for new outlets for their capital increased enormously. China seemed like a vast, and as yet largely untapped, field for their investment. Foreign industrialists and bankers competed fiercely with each other for contracts from the Chinese Government to build hydraulic works, construct fortifications and

arrange arms shipments, build railways and open mines, etc. To be in a stronger position with respect to the Chinese Government as well as with respect to their competitors from other countries, firms from one country began to combine in syndicates which undertook to manage all matters relating to a particular project — from financing it, to supplying technical expertise and personnel, as well as all the necessary equipment.

The economic penetration of China by imperialism developed dramatically after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95. The weakness of China was used to extract maximum economic concessions from her. Following the example of Japan, the three powers which intervened seemingly on China's behalf after the war—Russia, France and Germany—also sought special privilege and concessions. They demanded as a “right” that they should be allowed to build railways, open factories and mines in those parts of China where they felt they were entitled to special influence. Russia, like Japan, demanded and obtained concessions in Manchuria. France was interested in the southern provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi and Guangdong; while Germany was interested in the eastern coastal region of Shandong. Not to be outdone, Britain sought and received concessions in the territories adjoining Hong Kong and the Yangtze River valley, as well as the port of Weihaiwei. Generally speaking, the form adopted by the big powers to win these concessions and establish their own spheres of influence, was to “lease” territories for a long period (like 99 years), during which the Chinese Government would not be allowed to have any rights in those territories, while the concerned foreign power would be allowed to have full control, including the power to station their own police forces in those areas. Or else, the concerned power would secure a promise from the Chinese Government not to give any other country rights in those territories.

The pace of the “scramble for concessions” was so frenzied, that by the turn of the century China resembled a large “melon” carved up into different sections for the enjoyment of others. In each of these sections, a particular foreign power was the virtual overlord. It determined what factories, which mines and which railways were to be developed in its own section, with no consideration other than its own benefit. These powers then concluded agreements amongst themselves — without any reference to the Chinese Government — to respect each other's spheres of influence. Even when the Americans (who did not have any such concessions) got an agreement from all the powers to respect equal opportunity for trade, the Treaty Ports and the customs service in their sphere of influence — the so-called “Open Door” Policy of 1900 — they did not bother to include the Chinese Government in this agreement. Nor did they question the right of these countries to have their own spheres of influence or concessions in China.

Another significant feature of the “scramble for concessions” was the loans extended to the Chinese Government by the foreign powers. The first agreement for such a loan of 400 million francs was obtained by the Franco-Russian Banking Corporation, to enable the Chinese Government to pay back the indemnity Japan had imposed on it after the war of 1894-95. Others were quick to follow suit with other loans. In 1896, British and German banks obtained the contract for another loan to the Chinese Government to meet the second installment of the indemnity to Japan. This loan was concluded on terms even more unfavourable to the Chinese. Not only was the interest rate higher, but it was made clear

that China would not be allowed to pay back the loan in full before 36 years were over, and that no changes would be allowed in the administration of the Foreign Inspectorate of Customs, since a portion of the revenues was pledged against the loan.

Through the loans, the financial and economic grip of the imperialists over China was tightened into a vice from which China could not extricate itself. By the end of the century, the entire customs revenue which had once been used for the modernization of Chinese defence and other sectors, was required just to make the payments on the debts. Moreover, each loan, though highly profitable to the lender, was considered to be a “favour” done to the Chinese Government, for which it was entitled to more “concessions” and other privileges. Thus, an extremely intricate network of economic exploitation was built up.

The extent of China’s humiliation and subjugation at the hands of the foreign imperialists cannot be gauged merely by the formal treaties signed between the Chinese Government and the foreign governments. The economic contracts and agreements which China entered into with various foreign banks, syndicates, etc., also undermined the sovereignty and independence of China to no less a degree. The foreign contracting parties were powerful economic conglomerates which had the full backing of their home governments. China could not run the risk of defaulting on these agreements without getting itself involved in a full-scale war with the imperialists. Thus, even when the Qing Government was overthrown in 1911, its successor governments for many years did not repudiate any of the treaties or economic agreements with the foreign powers, who continued to dominate China economically and politically for three more decades.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines some of the main developments leading to the “scramble for concessions”.

.....

.....

.....

- 2) Outline in about 10 lines the consequences of the Sino-French war of 1884-85.

.....

.....

.....

3.5 LET US SUM UP

China never became a colony directly ruled by any one power. It has been characterized as a “semi-colony”, or even as a “hyper-colony” (a colony of several powers). This made China’s experience of subjugation at the hands of the imperialists quite unique.

In the half-century from 1860 to the Revolution of 1911, China’s economic, political and territorial independence and sovereignty was steadily eroded by the imperialists. The foreign encroachments were enshrined in a series of treaties

in which the Chinese Government agreed to give up one concession after another. They were also reflected in the numerous contracts and economic agreements that China entered into with various foreign firms and banks. However, the legal aspect of these treaties and agreements was not as significant as the actual military and economic weakness of the Chinese Empire. It was this weakness which made the treaties and agreements absolutely binding on China. It was not till China acquired a renewed military and political strength in the course of several decades of revolutionary upheaval, that the Chinese were in a position to successfully repudiate their subordination to the foreign powers.

3.6 KEY WORDS

Foreign concessions: Areas where the foreigners resided in the treaty ports.

Synarchy : Joint administration by Chinese and foreigners.

Missionaries : Christian priests sent abroad to propagate and make converts to Christianity.

Tael: Chinese measure of weights and currency. The word is from the Malay Tahlil that came to China via the Portuguese taes.

Tributaries : States which paid tribute to China.

Syndicates : A group of banks and industrial houses from one country which collaborated to undertake projects in China.

Conglomerates: Monopoly houses.

3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include (a) the Treaty ports and foreign concessions, (b) the Foreign Inspectorate of Customs, (c) the consular courts, (d) the Zongli Yamen. See Sub-sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.
- 2) Your answer should include collection and remittance of customs duties and levies. See Sub-section 3.2.2.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include
 - the breakdown of the policy of cooperation.
 - increasing clashes between China and the big powers over the missionary issue, territorial encroachments by the foreign powers, etc.
 - the rivalry among the imperialists for new markets and outlets for their capital. See Section 3.3.
- 2) Base your answer on Sub-section 3.3.2.