

FEATURE

Olympics and Opium Wars

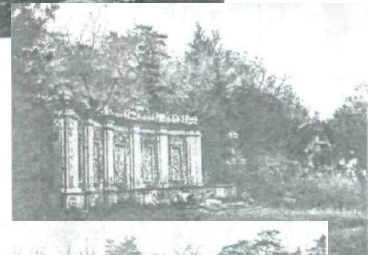
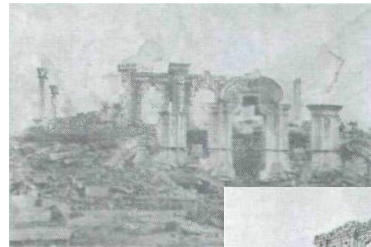
By Richard L King

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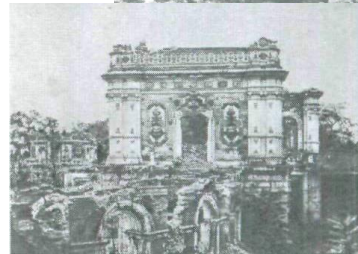
In a few days., the XXIX Summer Olympiad will be held in Beijing. The opening ceremony will begin precisely at 8:08 am on August 8, 2008 or 808.8.8.08. The number 8 is an auspicious number in China, equivalent to lucky 7 in the West - July 7, 2007, saw a rash of weddings all around the US. Hundreds of thousands of foreign visitors - not to mention more than 20,000 journalists – will be descending on China. They will marvel at the ultra-modern architectural wonders. Most will arrive by air, landing in the new Terminal 3 of Beijing International which was designed by British architect Norman Forster.

In the city, visitors will be able to gaze at the "Bird's Nest", the main stadium designed by the Swiss firm Herzog and de Meuron. There are other outstanding buildings such as the National Center for Performing Arts, nicked named "The Egg". Its architect is Paul Andreu of France. There are other outstanding buildings such as China Central TV (CCTV)'s headquarters, designed by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas., and the whimsical Beijing National Aquatics Center nicked named "The Water Cube". But there is another landmark sight that visitors should see: the burned ruins of the former Summer Palace, or Yuan Ming Yuan. It was a collection of palaces containing more than 200 buildings that housed irreplaceable works of art - paintings, sculptures, porcelains and manuscripts. It is located only minutes away from the Olympic park.

But it's a world apart. In the 19th century, when Britain forced opium on China, the Chinese government rightly resisted and this precipitated two so-called "Opium Wars". The Treaty of Nanking in 1842 gave Britain the right to continue to sell opium to China, and China was forced to open five treaty ports granting



*Some of
the ruins of
Yuan Ming
Yuan*



extraterritorial rights to Britain, ceding Hong Kong to Britain in perpetuity. But Britain still was not satisfied; it once again invaded China, this time with France, in 1860. On the order of Lord Thomas Elgin the Summer Palace was burned down. The Hindi word "loot" entered the English lexicon at that time when Anglo-French soldiers stripped the palace of its treasures. China was forced to make further concessions and to pay a huge indemnity to the victors.

The clash between the two empires in the 19th Century was a total mismatch. Britain was at the zenith of Pax Britannia, and China was at the nadir of its long history. Britain had advanced modern weapons, while China was still fighting with bows and arrows. The resulting destruction and slaughter of tens of thousands of Chinese will always be a blot on Britain's history. Some may say that these events took place more than a century and half ago and that China should let bygones be bygones. However, these injustices were righted only recently, especially from the Chinese perspective of its long history. When asked in 1972 what he thought about the success of the French Revolution, the late Zhou En Lai's response was: "Don't you think it's too soon to tell?" The elimination of extra-territorial rights took place only in 1943, a century after being forced on China. And China did not recover Hong Kong until 1997.

If anyone, especially those from the West, wishes to criticize China about human rights, religious freedom and corruption; they should be sensitive to China's sense and sensibility. Forcing opium on China enslaved a generation of Chinese and caused corruption on a scale that dwarfs anything in present-day China.

Quoting Travis Hanes and Frank Sanello's excellent book. *Opium Wars*:

Imagine this scenario: the Medellin cocaine cartel of Columbia mounts a successful

military offensive against the United States, then forces the US to legalize cocaine and allow the cartel to import the drug into five major American cities ... plus the US has to pay war reparations of \$100 billion for the Columbians' cost of waging the war. That scenario is of course preposterous. However, that was exactly what Britain forced on China. Along with opium came Christian missionaries whose zealous attempts to convert "heathen" Chinese destroyed indigenous religions in the process and served as a helping hand to the colonial exploits of the West.

If the new buildings represent China's renaissance, the burned out Summer Palace remains a symbol reminding China of its past weakness and humiliation. In the 1800s, China paid Western imperialists' thirst with blood. Now in the 21st century, China is paying Western thirst for profits in cash, and it can afford to. There is certain irony that two of the main attractions are designed by Forster and Andreu whose forbears were the ones who burned down the Summer Palace. The West, with this stain on its past, lost its moral high ground a long time ago. It will have to earn that trust from China with acts of constructive engagement, not lectures, if we are to see a world that is truly global, and not a continuing clash of civilizations.

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Richard L King, PhD, has been in the investment industry for more than 30 years. He received his PhD in nuclear physics from New York University in 1970 and also attended Stem Graduate School of Business at NYU. He is currently a venture partner at GRP Venture Partners, a large partnership based in Los Angeles which manages more than \$600 million. He is also an adviser to Next, the Finnish venture partnership firm specialising in wireless technologies with offices in Helsinki and in Silicon Valley. Originally from Shanghai, Dr King is a grandson, on both sides of his family, of two of the founders of the Bank of China.

Readers' Comments

- Dr. King speaks with authority from history. Britain pushed opium to the Chinese and then pointed a finger at them as "Sick man of Asia". Robert Morrison, a British missionary came in a British East India Opium Boat to preach Christianity. Extra-Territoriality was his idea to urge Britain to take from China. This term means all foreigners are not subject to the Chinese laws and court. Another term is the most-favored nation clause which means if a foreign power squeezes special privileges from China, all other foreign powers will get them too.

China entered 20th Century with the defeat and humiliation of the invasion of 8 countries with the deed of life in indemnity of principal and interest for 39 years for every Chinese in the Boxer Protocol.

- Walter Ko

walter_ko_ga@yahoo.com

- Jack Peng jackpeng@juno.com wrote: This is an excellent article to remind the American mainstream how the past is related to present.