

**Treaty Ports in China
Their Genesis, Development, and Influence**

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Treaty Ports in China: Their Genesis, Development, and Influence

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Jacques M. Downs (1997/2014). *The Golden Ghetto: The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. 496 pp., appendices, notes, bibliography, index, \$55 (hardback).

Toby Lincoln (2015). *Urbanizing China in War and Peace: The Case of Wuxi County*. Hawaii: The University of Hawaii Press. ix + 268 pp., notes, bibliography, index, \$55 (hardback).

Robert Nield (2015). *China's Foreign Places: The Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era, 1840-1943*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press. xxxix + 359 pp., notes, bibliography, index, \$69.65 (hardback).

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China was forced to open itself to trade by the Western powers in the nineteenth century. Led by the British, these powers wanted to ensure they were able to import their goods (the most lucrative being opium) and waged two wars to do so. The First Opium War was fought between 1839 and 1842, and the Second (also known as the Arrow War) from 1856 to 1860. These Wars led to a series of treaties, beginning with the Treaty of Nanking (signed with the British on August 29, 1842), which ended the First Opium War; the Second Opium War led to the Treaty of Tientsin (actually a series of agreements with Britain and France ending the first phase of the conflict, and signed in June 1858) and the Convention of Peking (three treaties, with Britain, France, and Russia, respectively, signed on November 14, 1860). Known collectively as the “unequal treaties,” these were only three of a number of such “agreements” foisted on an unwilling China and rightly seen as a low point in the country’s history.

The Treaty of Nanking ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain in perpetuity and stipulated that five ports were to be opened to foreign trade: Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo), and Shanghai. These became known as Treaty Ports and were the first in an ever-increasing series of settlements that spread themselves across the country until January 11, 1943, when the Chinese and the British signed the Treaty for the Relinquishment of Extra-Territorial Rights in China, ending the system after 101 years.

A number of recently published books examine the Treaty Ports, as well as their genesis, and influence on urbanization in China. The re-issuing of Jacques M. Downs’s *The Golden Ghetto: The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784-1844* portrays the American community at Canton in the decades up to the First Opium War—a period culminating with the Sino-American Treaty of Wanghia (July 3, 1844). This was a treaty that not only stressed international friendship but also introduced the concept of “extraterritoriality” (immunity to prosecution for foreigners under Chinese law). Robert Nield’s *China’s Foreign Places: The Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era, 1840-1943* is an

encyclopedic gazetteer listing (in alphabetical order) every single foreign settlement in China since the Portuguese established Macau (Aomen) in the sixteenth century. Finally, Toby Lincoln's *Urbanizing China in War and Peace: The Case of Wuxi County* looks in detail at the urbanization of Wuxi County in the first half of the twentieth century. The largest manufacturing center outside of the Treaty Ports, this book paints an interesting portrait of China's efforts to direct its own urban development, which Lincoln acknowledges would not have happened in the way it did without the influence of the Treaty Ports.

Genesis: Canton, the "Golden Ghetto," 1784-1844

Jacques M. Downs's *The Golden Ghetto* was originally published in 1997 (by the Associated University Presses, Inc.) and quickly became a classic. It then, almost as quickly, sold out and went out of print. Recently re-issued as part of Hong Kong University Press's "Echoes" series, it is a richly informative and hugely enjoyable read. Certainly it deserves a wider audience, which hopefully it will now get thanks to the Echoes series (whose general editor, Robert Nield, is author of the second book under consideration here).

Frederic D. Grant's Introduction to Downs's book lets us know that he got his intriguing title from John King Fairbank's description of the foreign factories (the word for buildings containing offices and warehouses) at Canton as being "a sort of ghetto. A golden ghetto because the foreign merchants can make a good deal of money there" (p. 4). Downs's book was the culmination of a life's work and exhibits an impressive dedication to amassing such a wealth of knowledge about the mechanisms of Sino-American business relations in Canton between 1784 and 1844 (the year the Treaty of Wanghia was signed). By focusing on a small but influential (and previously understudied) community, Downs is able to tell us more about American (and Western) relations with China than many other volumes, despite their broader scope. Fortunately, many of the papers of the American residents of Canton have been preserved by their New England and Philadelphian descendants who, as Downs wryly admits, "never discard anything, be it documents, clothes, broken furniture, or outworn institutions" (p. 10).

The book itself is broken into three parts: Part 1 describes the "golden ghetto" itself, its history and daily life because, as Downs says in his Introduction, "I do not believe, for example, that it is possible to understand the American merchants' thinking without knowing the circumstances of their lives in China" (p. 9). Part 2 then looks at the people and firms who operated in Canton, while Part 3 examines, in analytical detail, Caleb Cushing's 1844 mission to China to sign what became known as the Treaty of Wanghia—a treaty that not only introduced the concept of extraterritoriality but also "became a model of early American pacts with the non-Western world" (p. 11).

Peter Ward Fey's Foreword informs us that Downs's book "has a decided moral dimension to it" (p. 8) and wonders "[w]hy cannot the opium traffic, for example, be handled with that simple and uncritical enthusiasm we naturally devote to strange practices in distant lands?" (p. 8). This raises an interesting question: should the academic scholar be so disinterested as to refrain from venturing an opinion about something as controversial (and reprehensible) as drug smuggling? This is, of course, for the reader to decide. I, however, applaud the fact that "Downs was much less tolerant of Western justifications for opium trading than some" (as Frederic D. Grant says in his Introduction on p. 4).

Canton was the farthest Chinese port from Peking (p. 73), and when the Americans arrived, they found a cosmopolitan community dominated by the British (p. 44). Soon they were second only to the British in number but "were self-consciously distinct" (p. 339). The Chinese were prohibited from learning foreign languages, or from teaching foreigners their own (the word "pidgin" was their attempt to pronounce the word "business," p. 74), yet despite this difficulty in communication, "business was transacted more conveniently than perhaps at any other port on the globe" (p. 80). Life was comfortable for the merchants, a high standard of living having been

established by various East India Companies and so even the “most parsimonious Yankee soon became accustomed to luxury” (p. 37). Despite this, Canton residents “worked long and continuously—twelve to fifteen hours a day was usual during busy periods” (p. 37). And, interestingly, “Canton merchants were remarkably bookish in comparison with their late nineteenth-century counterparts” (p. 47).

The typical China trader was from “a respectable but ‘comparatively deprived’ background” (p. 224), often the “poor relations of important merchants” (p. 226). “The whole structure was based on a gifted, prolific, and powerful kinship group in Eastern Massachusetts” (p. 155), a sort of East-Coast commercial aristocracy with members “linked by ties of blood, marriage, religion, business, friendship, and politics” (p. 155). (This included Warren Delano, grandfather of the future President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.) “[T]o go to a spot as remote as Canton took some planning, some connections” (p. 226), and the firms there, “being generally less central to the family interest, were staffed by cousins, nephews, former apprentices, and friends” (p. 227).

One other group of Americans who began to arrive in China from 1830 onward is mentioned in passing in a number of places in the book: “a small band of intense, dedicated missionaries” (p. 43). They “had backgrounds only slightly different from the merchants” (p. 229). “Their education was, on the whole, [even] better than that of the merchants, but none was wealthy and most were financially dependent upon their home boards and the generosity of the Canton community” (p. 229).

Downs notes that “[a]fter the War of 1812, it seems to have become easier for a young man with some family connections to acquire a fortune at Canton” (p. 84), and the average time “was between seven and twelve years” (p. 84). Returning home with a fortune meant “financial independence and even social leadership” (p. 85), and this was to have ramifications for the tone set by the Treaty of Wanghia in 1844, because as Canton returnees had social position thanks to their fortunes, “politicians paid them elaborate attention. Thus Canton graduates exercised strong influence in Washington as well as in their state and local governments” (p. 244). But first let us see what Downs says about what led to the treaty in the first place.

One of the luxuries of life at Canton was tea, and even Americans drank a lot of it, usually green tea (p. 67). They also exported huge quantities of it home, where it was equally popular. Because of commodities such as tea, silk, and porcelain, China was gradually “absorbing a substantial portion of the world’s silver supply” (p. 108). The Western powers (again, led by the British) sought something to redress this imbalance and decided on opium (p. 108). “The first edict against the drug [had] appeared in 1729, but there were few interruptions of the trade. The demand was very small until after the turn of the century” (p. 112). Then, “around 1800, a few restless Scots began to import somewhat larger quantities. Suddenly about 1802, the price began to soar. ‘From 1802 opium was king’” (p. 112).

Opium traffic had its own credit structure, and Downs tells us that the entire China trade was based on it (p. 112). It “had grown up alongside the commerce in bills. Without opium it is difficult to see how the legitimate China trade could have developed much beyond what it had been during the first decade of American participation” (p. 112).

Based as it was on personal and family connections, and involving a commercial and financial world of which none but a few hong merchants were aware, the bill trade was incomprehensible to the Ch’ing government. Without her consent and even without her knowledge, China was pulled into the Western trading and banking system through the actions of smugglers. (p. 112)

In other words, China was being forced to embrace Western capitalism without even knowing it.

China’s “official attitude was always very hostile toward the opium trade. Handicapped by Western technological superiority and by corruption, dedicated mandarins nevertheless would make strenuous efforts to stamp out the traffic” (p. 119). Yet, as Downs tells us, “[t]he more

vigorous the enforcement, the higher were the bribes and the greater the incentive to subvert the law” (p. 119). “Where opium went, other goods followed. By the 1830s, smuggling involved more than drugs” (p. 128). “The British government had always acknowledged the right of the Chinese to prohibit the drug traffic” (p. 135), but (quoting Fairbank) its “economic value outweighed its moral turpitude” (p. 135), and, as Downs points out, “Western military and naval superiority enabled Britain to get away with it” (p. 135). And get away with it they did. They fought, and won, the First Opium War and forced China to sign the Treaty of Nanking on August 29, 1842. Under the terms of the Treaty, China had to pay a \$21 million indemnity, Britain received Hong Kong, and the first five Treaty Ports were opened (p. 140).

Once the Americans saw what the British had achieved, they wanted something similar, something that would accord “with a major commerce and a growing national vanity” (p. 267). We must not forget how relatively small the United States still was in the 1840s. It may have vastly expanded its original thirteen states, particularly with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, but by the early 1840s, it still had not annexed Texas, nor did it have a Pacific coastline. The treaty that the Americans got the Chinese to sign was “[b]y far the most comprehensive of the early ‘unequal treaties’ (p. 319), and it became ‘the model treaty for such instruments years after its signing’” (p. 320). It not only clarified (and extended) the British treaty’s most-favored-nation clause (which guaranteed that any further concessions made by the Chinese to any other foreign power would automatically be granted to the British), but it also introduced the concept of extraterritoriality, thereby creating “a mechanism that was to humiliate China and threaten her sovereignty for a century to come” (p. 320). Drawn up by Caleb Cushing, a Massachusetts lawyer- and journalist-turned politician with connections to the China trade (p. 275), his job was “to secure the best terms for the United States and her citizens” (p. 277), and, as Downs says, “[p]robably no one could have done better” (p. 277).

What informed Cushing’s thinking was that, “like many of his countrymen in Canton, [he] regarded the West as a single entity in its dealings with Asia” (p. 288), and also, more alarmingly for China, “[d]espite his explicit recognition that the Chinese were a ‘highly civilized’ people, [he] classed them with colonials and slaves—that is, people who might legitimately be placed in an inferior status” (p. 289). What further informed this thinking, and was instrumental in creating the instrument of extraterritoriality, was a fear, based on a misunderstanding, of Chinese justice, which seemed quaint, at best, and barbaric at worst (a topic Robert Niell also touches on in *China’s Foreign Places*, p. 13). “[T]he Chinese doctrine of group responsibility for the crimes of individuals had no parallel in Western jurisprudence, except in the ominous case of wartime” (p. 136), and Americans were “alarmed by their experience with what they regarded as official brutality” (p. 61). It did not help that Canton’s execution ground “was less than a mile from the factories, all foreigners were exposed to the ugliest aspects of official Chinese retribution” (p. 61).

This lack of understanding was mutual and led the Chinese to agree to things in the Treaty of Wanghia that they simply did not understand, because for them, trade, and even extraterritoriality, were secondary to their desire to prevent the Cushing mission going to Peking (p. 297). As Downs says, “[t]here can be no question but that the Peking trip was viewed by the Chinese delegation as the central issue of the negotiations. And they were determined at all costs to prevent it” (p. 302). Once Cushing got everything he wanted, he was “quite willing to forgo the long trip to Peking, which Cushing himself called ‘but the means to an end’” (p. 302).

Downs points out that the Cushing Treaty is superior to the Treaty of Nanking because “[w]ith fewer words than the combined British treaties [including the 1843 Supplementary Treaty of the Bogue], it contains more matter” (p. 317). There is also the “the matter of tone. The British treaties are cool, even brusque, implying a confidence in another means of securing compliance—overwhelming force—while the American document contains adjectives and phrases that stress international friendship” (p. 317).

That these treaties were unequal is clear from the fact that their provisions came to be known as “concessions.” To concede something is, as Downs points out, “to surrender it, which implies a defeat for the conceding party and a victory for the other” (p. 319). Henceforth, foreign settlements in the Treaty Ports would be known as “concessions,” an example being Shanghai’s French Concession—the name a permanent reminder of China’s humiliation at the hands of foreigners. Shanghai of course went on to become the most famous of the Treaty Ports, but it was simply heir to what had been established in Canton; what Downs refers to as

treaty-port culture” had been in existence years before the treaty ports were created. The “unequal treaties” opened the northern ports, but they did not create the communities and their special style of life, attitudes, and institutions. Treaty-port culture was an extension of old Canton. (p. 322)

Downs goes on to note that the “‘Shanghai mind’ was not merely greedy self-concern. It also involved an ignorant contempt for Chinese values and life. This attitude took time to develop and to become a part of the common mental equipment” (p. 335). This insidious attitude was “[o]ne of the most significant lines of continuity between old Canton and the treaty ports” (p. 339) because “[b]eginning with the ghetto psychology of Canton and extending to racial attitudes, exploitive frames of mind—the confusion of luxury and necessity—in fact with most of the alterations of traditional democratic and Protestant values, the treaty ports strongly resembled Canton before the Opium War” (p. 339). “Perpetuated and legitimized by the ‘unequal treaties’: the ghetto became a place of privilege and a target for Chinese xenophobia” (p. 339). And because, as we have already seen, “they saw their residence as temporary, and they knew that a fortune was self-justifying at home, Americans were the less willing to disturb the mores of treaty-port culture” (p. 340), and once “they became used to the workings of extraterritoriality, foreign residents’ irresponsibility and arrogance grew proportionately” (p. 340).

Development: Treaty Ports, 1842-1943

Robert Nield’s *China’s Foreign Places: The Foreign Presence in China in the Treaty Port Era, 1840-1943* is a different book to Downs’s. Broader in scope, it is almost encyclopedic in its detail. Not necessarily something to be read cover-to-cover (as the author himself admits), it is a useful reference guide (and is the first such guide since *The Treaty Ports of China and Japan* by Mayers, Dennys, and King was published in 1867). Well-organized and clear, it begins with a timeline listing the various treaties in chronological order. The first was the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk (with Russia—Macau had been established by Portugal in 1557 but never had a treaty). This treaty (in Latin) attempted to agree on a border between the two empires and also established reciprocal trading rights a mere four years after the Kangxi Emperor had declared Chinese ports open to foreign trade (p. xv).

This timeline is followed by an Introduction that neatly outlines the history of China’s Treaty Ports, explaining, among other things, the difference between a concession and a settlement (a concession is where a foreign government leased an area of land, cleared it, laid out roads, and auctioned off individual lots; a settlement was also a discrete area of foreign occupation but one where the title remained with individual Chinese owners, and foreign merchants negotiated leases or purchase, p. 3).

The book also contains alphabetically arranged histories of seventy-six of the most important Treaty Ports, including frontier stations, and ports-of-call on the Yangtze and West Rivers (this excludes missionary stations). There is also a list of every single Treaty Port and foreign station from pages xxxi to xxxv. (The Wade-Giles system is used, but Nield helpfully includes Chinese names in both Pinyin and characters.)

Each entry is intended to stand alone. Most begin with some background, and there are, wherever possible, descriptions of the places today (the author visited sixty-nine of them). Entry length is not determined by importance but where general historical information could be appropriately located, for example, different aspects of the history of Chinese tea are covered in Foochow and Hankow (pp. 89-90 and 100-101, respectively).

The book is also beautifully illustrated (as indeed is *The Golden Ghetto*) with more than 130 photographs, postcards, and maps from the relevant period, many of which have rarely been published before.

More than twenty nations had treaties with China. This includes Peru and the Congo Free State (p. 3). The most important treaty powers were Britain, France, Japan, Russia, Portugal, and Germany (in roughly that order). And apart from Treaty Ports, there were colonies (like Hong Kong), open cities (like Aigun [Aihun]), and various stations (including consular, hill, military, opium-receiving, and trading), as well as ports (including dependent ports, ports-of-call, and landing stages). There were also occupied territories and leased territories, and, finally, industrial centers.

Peking is included because the Legation Quarter established a diplomatic station in 1858. Kashkar (established by Russian Treaty in 1860) stretched the concept of the Treaty Port to its limit, being three thousand kilometers from the nearest navigable water (p. 136). Tientsin (Tianjin—1860 British Treaty) was the most complex, with three original foreign areas growing to fifteen; each is considered separately and includes the usual treaty powers and Belgium, Italy, and the Austro-Hungarian empire (pp. 248-249). Even though the Treaty Port system ended in 1943, Port Arthur (Lüshun) was only relinquished by Russia as late as 1955.

The British Minister in Peking, Sir Rutherford Alcock, drafted the Alcock Convention as a radical review of the 1858 Treaty of Tientsin. After copious correspondence on both sides, the Chinese signed it on October 23, 1869, but the British did not because of resistance from merchants in Hong Kong (p. 5). After 1903, no new Treaty Ports (in the classic sense) were created (p. 9). Japan was forcing China to open new ports unilaterally. “Japan opened more than 50 cities, towns and even villages in China’s north-east, mainly Manchuria, changing the concept of a treaty port from a commercial entity to a purely political one” (p. 9).

The system finally ended on January 11, 1943 when Britain agreed to surrender all its extraterritorial rights in China (p. 22).

After 1949, attempts were made to revive some treaty port communities. Port Arthur and Dairen were occupied by Soviet forces until the mid-1950s. Hong Kong and Macao, now anachronisms, were foreign colonies until the end of the century. For the remainder, the revolution of 1949 closed the door on foreign occupation forever. (p. 22)

Nield says that “[u]ntil the end of the 19th century it was believed that the more treaty ports there were, the more business could be done” (p. 16). This “trade follows the flag” thesis was effectively demolished by J. A. Hobson’s *Imperialism: A Study* in 1902, so it can be no accident that “[f]rom about 1900 the realization gradually dawned that there were extensive and efficient Chinese networks the foreigner could use, rather than compete with. After that there were few new treaty ports, and consuls were withdrawn from others” (p. 16).

In fact, the Treaty Ports rarely measured up to expectations.

The colony of Hong Kong was ridiculed in the British Parliament. Of the five open ports, one (Canton) remained closed, ultimately giving rise to a second war, and two (Foochow and Ningpo) were so disappointing that Britain tried exchanging them for somewhere better, like unsuitable birthday gifts. (The Chinese refused, explaining it would make a complete mockery of the treaty.) Amoy had a slow start and Shanghai, in time becoming bigger than all the others combined, was far smaller than many nearby cities.” (p. 3)

Hong Kong, despite its inauspicious beginning, did go on to “became the distribution centre for all the opium being brought into China” (p. 122), as well as “the service centre for the fledgling treaty ports, particularly those in the south of China” (p. 122). The colony also “became the headquarters for firms operating in the other ports” (p. 123). (Opium was phased out in China from 1907 but was still legal in Hong Kong as late as 1945, p. 130).

Shanghai was undoubtedly the biggest success story; it even contemplated declaring itself a republic in 1862. This proposal was, however, considered unrealistic; besides it would also have contravened the treaties (p. 201). After Shanghai, in no particular order, came “Tientsin, Hankow, Canton, Dairen (Dalian) and Harbin. But the sum of the trade conducted and customs revenue collected at all the others would hardly amount to that of any one of the six just mentioned” (p. 15).

One unintended consequence of the opening of China to international trade was modernization; even the missionaries played a role in this because it was thanks to their “schools and other activities that foreign ideas were being introduced to an increasingly politically aware student population” (p. 204). Nield identifies “[o]ne of the principal and longest-lasting agents of modernization derived from the treaty port system was the complete reorganization of the collection of duty on imports and exports” (p. 9). He sees how “Chinese commercial ideas and trade practices would have developed without Western input, although perhaps on different lines, but the presence of an alien culture accelerated change” (p. 11). Certainly there would be very few who would argue with his statement (quoted from Frank Dikötter) that the Treaty Ports represented “the largest cultural transfer in human history” (p. 11).

Influence: China’s Urbanization in the Twentieth Century

Part of this transfer spilled over into the rest of China, and Toby Lincoln’s *Urbanizing China in War and Peace: The Case of Wuxi County* looks at the urbanization of Wuxi County in the first half of the twentieth century as Wuxi city expanded in both area and population to become the largest manufacturing center outside the Treaty Ports (p. 2). Wuxi had been a tin-mining town in the Han Dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE) and gets its name from the time when the tin was exhausted (Wuxi means “no tin”) (p. 18). Its location made it an important trading center for rice (p. 18), and after the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), the economy of Jiangnan was transformed because Shanghai’s position at the “crossroads of empires meant that it now stood at the intersection of domestic and foreign markets” (p. 19).

Even before its establishment as a Treaty Port, Shanghai had “long been an important economic center, but the foreign presence was the catalyst for the development of a symbiotic relationship between local industry, which was reliant on the produce of the hinterland, and foreign trade” (p. 19). Lincoln identifies something not often credited in Shanghai’s rise to global prominence: the destruction of the late imperial urban centers of Hangzhou and Suzhou during the Taiping Rebellion, coupled with the decline in water transport along the Grand Canal because of poor maintenance and increased coastal shipping, meant that by the mid-1850s, Shanghai had become the focal point for commerce, finance, industrial development, and the destination of choice for migrants from its hinterland (p. 19). “By the turn of the twentieth century, there was no industry in the Lower Yangtze Delta that remained unaffected by links to international markets through Shanghai. And no city that did not, to at least some extent, depend on the treaty port for its prosperity” (p. 19). And “[o]f all the cities in Jiangnan, Wuxi underwent perhaps the most comprehensive transformation” (p. 19).

Lincoln’s book looks at Wuxi’s growth, the families who influenced it, and how their investment in commerce and industry drove the urbanization of the countryside. He looks at the role of the state in the early 1920s, describing how industrialists used political position to secure a measure of municipal autonomy to attract investment and how this contributed to the expansion of the city. He tells how this gave the state the power to drive rural urbanization based on

“developmental discourse” (based on William Kirby’s “developmental state,” p. 11). He then looks at how native-place societies (*tongxianghui*) helped deal with the crises caused by the Japanese invasions of the 1930s. He covers the Japanese occupation itself, the reconstruction after the 1937 invasion, and what life was like under the occupation, when the urbanization of Wuxi County, and region, continued unabated.

Lincoln’s Introduction is succinct and contains a well-argued theoretical foregrounding for the rest of the book. It makes reference to theories by John Friedman, Henri Lefebvre, and William G. Skinner (as well as Carolyn Cartier’s critique of Skinner’s work). Lincoln sees urbanization as “the process by which societies are transformed from those in which the majority of people live in the countryside to ones in which they live in cities” (p. 3), and that “[t]his process has been particularly rapid since the advent of global industrial capitalism but is not reducible to the growth in the number and size of cities” (p. 3).

His book ends with a brief but strong Conclusion highlighting his deliberate avoidance of having used modernity as a primary analytic because he thinks that how “the global discourse of an emerging rural-urban gap during periods of industrialization was manifested in China has influenced historical scholarship to the point that urbanization has been somewhat de-emphasized as an explanatory variable” (p. 184). He also points out that his “analysis does not invalidate the application of modernity, or indeed any other analytic, to China” (p. 184) but sees modernity that encompasses industrialization and the rise of the nation-state as “perhaps the farthest-order causal factor [using Lefebvre’s terminology]” (p. 184).

He warns that “[a]ssigning a specific site to modernity, regardless of whether it is in the city or the countryside, confuses not just the understanding of the relationship between the rural and the urban but also how modernity and its constituent parts have been manifested spatially over time” (p. 7). He further stresses that

in positioning the modern city in contradistinction to the traditional countryside, or more recently focusing on rural modernity, scholars have failed to appreciate how urbanization acted on both spaces and how studying the rural-urban relationship within this context adds to our understanding of change in cities, towns, and villages. (p. 5)

“Wuxi’s experience was not unique, and the prosperity of the Lower Yangtze Delta was emulated elsewhere” (p. 183).

Understanding how the city and the countryside in Wuxi urbanized during this period ultimately tells us much about the impact of wider historical forces on China and provides clues as to their continued effects on the region, the country as a whole, and the world at large. (p. 185)

Lincoln is right to point out that “because urbanization [in China] was not just the result of semi-colonialism but caused by the country’s increasing incorporation into global historical processes” (pp. 184-185), and that “China’s integration into increasingly globalizing trajectories of historical change, and indeed its increasingly prominent position within them, is one of the most important developments of the twenty-first century” (p. 185).

Conclusion

China’s urbanization is today still assimilating these various strands of tradition: the indigenous, and the international, which came about through the semi-colonial Treaty Ports. These hybrid places have allowed China to adjust to globalization, and their legacy is China’s place in the world today. Understanding the forces that acted on the country in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will help us to better understand China. Treaty Ports were the instruments that forced

China to open to the world. China in the nineteenth century, with its ancient traditions, its complacency, its disdain for foreigners, and its deep-seated antipathy to trade, was forced to engage with the world. The trade in opium was unfortunate, but not the real issue. It was the Treaty Ports' introduction of capitalism that would prove to be more important in the long run. Treaty Ports were the thin end of the wedge. They increased in number with every treaty, and made ever greater incursions, not just in territory, but in ideas. And it was this that changed China, leading to the collapse of the imperial system in 1911, the triumph of Communism in 1949, and, eventually, the Open Door policy in 1978, since which time capitalism has been imbued with Chinese characteristics—characteristics that have turned that country once again into one of the world's largest economies. Reading these three books helps us understand the genesis of why and how this happened.

Author Biography

Gregory Bracken is an assistant professor of spatial planning and strategy at TU Delft. His book *The Shanghai Alleyway House: A Vanishing Urban Vernacular* (Routledge, 2013) was translated into Chinese in 2015. He is also the editor of *Asian Cities: Colonial to Global* (Amsterdam University Press, 2015).