



## The Complicated History of Sino-American Relationship in the XIX-First Half of the XX Century

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### Abstract

The article is devoted to the history of relations between the two countries, such as the USA and China in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. The paper gives a general description of the US-Chinese interstate relations since the beginning of the diplomatic interaction between the two countries, highlights the main directions and dynamics of trade and economic relations, examines the influence of the European and Japanese factors on Sino-American relations, analyzes the foreign policy of the American government towards China. It also focuses attention on basic motive forces of Washington foreign policy in the region at that period of time: commercial, industrial capital. Based on the works of Russian and foreign historians, the author reveals the key political and diplomatic problems of interstate relations between the two countries in the study period. Finally, the author of the article concludes that the US policy in China was primarily aimed at protecting its interests and was formed as the resultant of external and internal factors influencing it.

**Keywords:** Sino-American Relations; Railway Concessions; Open Door Policy; Dollar Diplomacy; Stillwell Mission.

### 1. Introduction

By the end of the 19th century, the United States of America became the leading industrial power in the world (Ellings, 2019; Ohl, 2020; Stearns, 2020), they were able to quickly catch up, then surpass the countries of the "old capitalism" both in pace and level of development. American capital was late in dividing China into spheres of influence but hoped that it would be able, on condition of "equal opportunities", not only to quickly catch up with other industrial countries in the division of China but also gradually push other competitors out of the Chinese market. Establishing diplomatic and trade relations between China and Western countries was an extremely difficult task since the Qing government did not want to make concessions to foreign powers, which in turn led to the forcible invasion of Western countries and was accompanied by the imposition of unequal treaties on China (Hu et al., 2020; Rasuljanovna & Rakhmonqulovich, 2020; Whitten, Dai, Fan, & Pang, 2020). Undoubtedly, the XIX and XX centuries became one of the most dramatic periods in the history of China, because as a result of Western aggression China became a semi-feudal colonial state that has lost its independence and became a tool in the hands of the capitalist countries.

US-China relations are one of the most important bilateral relations in the modern world. Relations between the US and China have always included elements of both cooperation and competition. With the advent of Trump, Sino-American relations sharply escalated. The relevance of the research topic is determined by the needs of the current stage of development of Chinese-American relations, which requires an in-depth study and reinterpretation of the history of interstate relations between the two countries.

#### 1.1. Research Objective

The article focuses on the history of relations between the two nations, such as the USA and China in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries.



## 2. Material and Methods

As the research materials in this study, the author used documented normative historical materials representing interstate agreements (Bevans, 1968; Chen & Chine (République Populaire), 1957; Clyde, 1940; Grimm, 1927; Hertslet, 1896; MacMurray, 1921; Mayers, 1902).

In this work, in addition to general research methods (historical and logical), special historical methods were used: comparative-historical, historical-typological, concrete-historical analysis, as well as an interdisciplinary approach.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The theme of Sino-US relations has been widely reflected in world historiography, but not all aspects are fully explored. So, for example, many Soviet historians, in particular, such as (Avarin, 1952; Barnes, 1936; Grigortsevich, 1965; May, 1961; Sevostyanov, 1980; Sevost'yanov, 1985) tried to show the economic and strategic interests of the USA in China. They conducted a comprehensive analysis of the so-called "open door" doctrine, which undoubtedly was an effective tool in the hands of American capitalists.

Modern Russian authors, such as (Kim, 2004; Kitaya, 1987; Kornberg & Faust, 2005; Xiang, 1981; Zevelev, 2015) also showed interest in this issue. The works of modern historians are undoubtedly more objective in the study of this problem since today; Russian authors have already moved away from class positions and the Marxist-Leninist methodology.

In Chinese historiography, relations between China and the United States today are also interpreted in different ways. For example, Chinese authors, such as (Dean, 1978; Sheng, 1951; Steiner, 1952), criticized the US government's policy towards China, but Huang Renwei and Zhang Zhongli evaluated the US policy in positive terms.

In American historiography, there is no consensus on the policy of the United States of America towards China, here we are faced with the diversity and abundance of points of view of American historians. Despite this, many American historians along with (Campbell, 1951; Dennett, 1922; Dorwart, 1975; Fairbank, 1983; Ferrell, 1957; Griswold, 1938; Pugach, 1979; Reinsch, 1922; Tuchman, 2017; Varg, 1968) tried to justify the US policy towards China, explaining this by the fact that the American government took into account the national interests of this country and contributed to the preservation of China's independence in the 19th – early 20th centuries from encroachment by European powers and Japan.

American historian Cohen (2019) believed that America's response to the events in China was mainly due to American politicians who tried to develop a new political course in East Asia, which would be based on the ideals and interests of the American people and take a strong place in the international community. Another American historian, Kitts (1991), admits that Anson Burlingame and President Woodrow Wilson had good intentions for China, but their views were extremely divorced from the realities of the time. The author also strongly criticizes the decision of the California Legislative Committee regarding the Chinese Exclusion Act in the 1880s, using terms such as racism and prejudice

John King Fairbank offered a new look at the relationship between the two countries, explaining that "Sino-US relations will be best seen in the light of cultural differences (Evans, 1988)". According to the American historian, negligence in cultural exchanges between two different countries can lead to isolation, which is a significant obstacle to bilateral relation

Historian Arnold Xiangze Jiang emphasized that America has pursued a consistent policy of supporting corrupt, unpopular and repressive regimes in China. Jiang, in his work, argues that US policy was extremely contradictory, since on the one hand, Americans adhered to the principles of friendliness and sought to hide their true goals in the region (Jiang, 1988). American historian G. H. Chang (Chang, 2015; Li, 2016) believes that relations between the two countries were predetermined by history itself, emphasizing the importance of China for the USA. Chang emphasizes that the construction of transcontinental railroads was primarily dictated by the desire of the United States to have closer ties with China and, in turn, would allow Americans to penetrate the Chinese market. He also draws our attention to the fact that in America they not only admired Chinese culture, but were also horrified by its backwardness and such obvious differences with Western culture. Thus, a very paradoxical situation was formed, namely, Chinese art was the inspiration



for many artists and thinkers in America, but at the same time, American missionaries in China tried to turn this country into one of the "civilized" countries.

The story of relationship between China and the USA is connected with the arrival in 1784 in the Canton port of the first US merchant ship, *Empress of China*. The owner of the vessel, Samuel Shaw, was appointed by the American Congress as an unofficial consul, but he was unable to make contact with Chinese officials or receive diplomatic representation from the United States. However, over the next five years, more than 40 American ships arrived in China, and the first American merchants settled in Canton. The Americans joined the Cantonese system by acquiring traditional Chinese products in China, such as tea, porcelain, and silk in exchange for furs and North American ginseng. The main source of income for American merchants was the smuggling of opium: in 1817, the United States accounted for 42% of all opium imported into China. The vast majority of goods imported by the United States into China were not made in the USA. American merchants primarily played intermediaries.

US statesmen, including former President Adams, considered the beginning of the first opium war unleashed by England to be fairly fair, and the US military squadron even arrived in Chinese waters to support the English troops (Clyde, 1940). In 1844, an American-Chinese treaty was signed, which marked the beginning of a series of enslaving treaties that were used as the "legal basis" for the invasion of China. According to the treaty, the Americans achieved the same rights as the British under the Nanking Treaty of 1842 (Barnes, 1936). This treaty not only extended to the United States all the advantages conquered by England but also contained a broader definition of extraterritoriality than even the Anglo-Chinese agreement of 1843 (Mayers, 1902). In addition, the United States got cabotage rights in Chinese waters on preferential terms; it was also provided for the possibility of revising the concluded agreement in 12 years (Hertslet, 1896). During the Second Opium War, the United States retained the appearance of friendly relations with the Qing government and acted as an intermediary between the warring countries. The US government simultaneously launched a series of hostile acts against the Qing Empire, expressed in particular in the bombing of coastal fortifications in Guangdong by American warships and the participation of the American marines in Canton.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the opium trade was replaced by the export of Chinese workers to the United States, who were recruited fraudulently and often forcibly sent to America. Many authors compare this trade with the slave trade (Narochnitskii, 1956).

After the suppression of the Taiping rebellion, the US was also able to take advantage of the situation; Americans achieved all the benefits of the Anglo-Chinese and Franco-Chinese treaties, which were concluded in 1858 in Tianjin and in 1860 in Beijing (Hunt, 1977). In 1868, the so-called Burlingame Treaty was concluded, which recognized the principle of territorial integrity of China and US non-interference in its domestic policy (Williams, 1912). However, the proclamation of these principles was contrary to practical actions in relation to China. In 1863, US-English cooperation took place, the purpose of which was to unite the English and American concessions in Shanghai. As a result of the unification of these concessions, Shanghai became a stronghold of foreign capital in China (MacMurray, 1921).

At the end of the 19th century, the USA proclaimed the doctrine of "Open doors," which became the basis of politics in China (Bevans, 1968). America advocated the principle of "Open doors and equal opportunities" in order to achieve unlimited access to US goods and capital in China. However, the US government is increasingly combining the doctrine of "Open doors" with other techniques and methods, in particular with "Dollar diplomacy". "Dollar diplomacy" was manifested primarily in the intense struggle of American capital for rail concessions and for participating in the provision of loans to China (Mulhollan, 1967). Railways were an extremely profitable enterprise in terms of investment, they were also an effective means to establish dominance over the entire economy of the country. In 1895, the syndicate "American China Development Company" was formed, which consisted of a group of the largest American banks, railways and other corporations. This company sought concessions for the construction of railways in Manchuria (Hunt, 1973).

The US foreign policy in the first decade of the 20th century was, first of all, aimed at widespread economic and financial expansion. At that time, the United States already moved to first place in the world in terms of pace and level of industrial development. From 1911-1913 The United States supported the reactionary forces within the country, and also actively participated in the struggle against the national liberation movement in China. Formally adhering to the principle of neutrality, the reactionary circles of the United States opposed the leader of revolutionary Chinese democracy, Sun



Yat-sen and his movement. At the same time, they rendered great support to the forces of the counter-revolution led by Yuan Shikai. On May 2, 1913, the United States officially recognized the republican government of Yuan Shikai, and recognition was not limited to a verbal declaration. From 1914 to June 1916, the United States provided China with five loans totaling \$ 31 million (Meiser, 2015; Román & Simmons, 2002).

The approaching end of the First World War made some adjustments to the political situation in the international arena. The United States compromises with Japan, believing that in the postwar years, the economic power of American capital will be decisive. On November 2, 1917, a Lansing-Ishii agreement was signed between the two countries (Grimm, 1927). According to the agreement, the US government recognized Japan's special interests in China, but China rejected the agreement. One of the goals of the American delegation at the Paris Peace Conference 1919-1920 was to eliminate the spheres of influence of other countries in China and, on the basis of their recognition of the "Open Door" doctrine, to strengthen American positions in China. On February 6, 1922, the United States, Britain, France, Japan, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Portugal and China signed an agreement that recognized the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of China. However, this declaration was not backed up by any guarantees, but on the contrary, undermined the foundations of China's integrity and independence.

In 1923, the new US president, C. Coolidge, uttered the phrase: "America's business is business" (Fairbank, 1983). The ruling circles of the United States believed that expansion was an integral attribute of maintaining and strengthening the status quo. The United States of America has always been interested in China, if earlier they did not have the strength to compete with the so-called old capitalist countries, now America had a noticeable financial and economic advantage, therefore, it sought to claim its rights to China to the whole world. The interests of the United States in China directly clashed with the interests of England, which had long-established positions here.

America became an active participant in both the First Civil Revolutionary war in China (1924-1927) and all subsequent ones. The United States, speaking in words of "respecting" the sovereign rights of the Chinese people and "friendship" to them, actually intervened in these wars. Intervention in China's internal political affairs and the full support of the counter-revolutionary forces were the main form of US intervention in this country (Romanova, 2019). After the announcement of the northern campaign in 1926 against the militarists, the USA decided to take advantage of the successes of the revolutionary army to undermine the positions of England and Japan. Chiang Kai-shek became a protégé of the United States. On April 12, 1927, Chiang Kai-shek led a US-led counter-revolutionary coup, and a "national government" came to power in China (Bereznyi, 1982). During the Second Civil Revolutionary War (1927-1936), the United States very closely maintained relations with the reactionary circles of the Kuomintang and personally with Chiang Kai-shek. In July 1928, the United States was the first country to recognize the Nanking government as the central government of all of China. The American government was the first to sign a customs agreement with the government of Chiang Kai-shek (Van Alstyne, 1973). The United States was the supplier of weapons for the Kuomintang troops in all three campaigns in 1930-1931 against revolutionary bases and the Chinese people's army (Sheng, 1951).

For US assistance, Chiang Kai-shek granted the Americans a number of various important privileges in China: in particular, many Americans took up leadership positions in the Chiang Kai-shek government, while others became advisers on military, financial and railway issues. The American company signed a contract under which it received all the rights to operate the Shanghai-Hankow, Nanjing-Beijing, Shanghai-Canton lines. Large American companies received at their disposal a power station, telephone and radio communications in Shanghai. The ranks of economic advisers to the Chiang Kai-shek government included many famous names, such as Ford, Harper, Young etc. (Jiang, 1988).

In the early 30s, the United States provided overwhelming economic assistance to Japan on the eve of and during the period of aggression. After the capture of Jinzhou by Japan on January 7 1932, US Secretary of State Stimson sent notes to the governments of Japan and China, in which the United States refused to recognize the treaties or territorial acquisitions imposed on China by the Japanese government. The provisions formulated by Stimson went down in history under the name of the "Doctrine of Non-Recognition" or the "Doctrine of Stimson" (Schulzinger, 1994). In the late 30s, the United States repeatedly made verbal statements about its disagreement with the aggressive actions of Japan and undertook a series of demonstrative acts aimed supposedly against these actions, but in reality, everything was the same.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, the U.S. government pays closer attention to China. The United States was deeply interested in the idea of creating its own base in China for future expansion in the Far East, and so far,



they have sought to maximize the use of China's numerous human resources against the fight against Japan. From December 1941 to the fall of 1944 US policy in China was called upon to be carried out by US General Joseph Stillwell, Commander-in-Chief of the Sino-Burmese-Indian Theater of War. Stillwell's mission was to deliver a tangible blow to Japan in accordance with the US strategic plans, using China's reserves (Tuchman, 2017). But Chiang Kai-shek delayed military action against Japan, preferring to direct his efforts to the struggle against the people's liberation army.

After the announcement of the extension of the Atlantic Charter to the Pacific countries, the Chiang Kai-shek actively engaged in the problems of "freedom of the Asian peoples", such wide attention from the Kuomintang government to this issue was explained by the desire to expand its influence in Asia. The American government took a very restrained position regarding an active Kuomintang foreign policy program (Penkovtsev, Nikulshin, & Zinnatullin, 2017; Penkovtsev, Shibanova, & Khalid, 2017). The United States sought to take advantage of the Kuomintang plans for neighbouring countries. The American government hoped that after the war ended, China would be able to confront Japan on the Asian continent, so the United States provided huge economic assistance to China: on March 21, 1942, a loan of \$ 500 million was granted to China, and a Lend-Lease agreement was signed in July (Ragozin Dmitry, n.d.).

After the failure to save the anti-communist Kuomintang regime in the civil war through diplomacy and through direct intervention, after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China, the United States moved to a policy of "containment and isolation" of China (Tsou, 1963). The Kuomintang regime was not popular among the Chinese people, due to inefficiency, corruption, repression against progressive elements attempts to conclude a separate peace with Japan. After the war ended, Chiang Kai-shek's government continued to lose public support in China, and in America, itself was sharply criticized by liberal forces. After the surrender of Japan, the United States faced a very difficult situation in China. The ruling circles of the United States were well aware of the situation in the CPC, and the existence of contradictions in its leadership ranks over the relations of the future people's democratic regime with the USSR and the USA, so America was faced with a difficult political choice regarding China. All this, in turn, was reflected in the struggle of opinions on the issue of "Chinese politics" (Penkovtsev, Nikulshin, et al., 2017; Penkovtsev, Shibanova, et al., 2017). In May 1949, secret US-Chinese negotiations began in Nanjing, the CPC leadership attached great importance to the possibility of direct contacts with US Ambassador L. Stewart and discussion of future US-Chinese relations, so it attempted to raise the level of negotiations. An invitation was sent to the American ambassador to visit Beijing as the former president of Yanjing University (Fairbank, 1983). Under pressure from the "Chinese lobby" (a group of influential supporters of Chiang Kai-shek in the United States), the new US President Harry Truman prevented the direct contacts of the American ambassador with the leadership of the CPC. Stuart was called to Washington "for consultations," he left Nanjing on August 2, 1949, and since then until March 1979 the United States of America did not have its ambassador in China (Tsou, 1963).

Washington's policy towards China during this period remained expectant and controversial, as the United States continued to support the Kuomintang regime based in Taiwan. In addition, the issue of relations with the "communist" regime of China has become one of the most acute problems of American domestic political life. On October 1, 1949, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed in Beijing. Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai officially notified the Washington administration through the American Consul General in Beijing of the willingness of the People's Republic of China to establish diplomatic relations with the United States of America. Although heated discussions were still underway in Washington, the United States rejected the proposal to establish diplomatic relations. However, the US government did not abandon attempts to influence the CPC's foreign policy position. So, on January 5, 1950, President Truman stated that "the United States government will not pursue a course that would lead to interference in the civil conflict in China. The United States Government will not provide military assistance or advice to the Chinese forces on Formosa" (Cohen, 2019). Subsequently, until the end of the 60s, the United States of America pursued a policy of "containment and isolation" of the PRC, and US-Chinese relations were characterized by a sharp military-political confrontation, which repeatedly brought these countries to the brink of war.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the middle of the XIX century, the political situation in the world radically changed. The United States of America has become one of the major capitalist powers and began to pursue an active foreign policy in the Far East. The USA actively helped the European powers in turning China into a semi-colony. During the second opium war in China, America was directly involved in military operations, committing acts of direct aggression. At the same time, the



American government covered up its aggressive policies with phrases about peace, friendship and neutrality, seeking to represent the United States as a friend of China. In fact, the United States never missed the opportunity to demonstrate the power and use it in China when it was profitable. Trade was an essential form of US economic ties with China. But with the beginning of the transition of capitalism to imperialism, new forms of economic penetration into China appear the export of capital and the provision of loans. The economic penetration of foreign powers was reinforced by the political enslavement of China.

The conflict between England and the USA continued to grow, in particular, the struggle between the two countries in China intensified. This was manifested primarily in sharp skirmishes, warring factions of reactionary forces and militaristic cliques. The struggle between the various militaristic cliques was a direct reflection of the contradictions and clashes between the various capitalist countries for the strengthening and expansion of their positions in China.

On the eve of the Second World War, the US adhered to a policy of "neutrality" in relation to Japanese aggression, preferring to resolve all "controversial" issues at the expense of China. The chosen foreign policy and direct economic assistance to Japanese militarism from the United States created a favourable environment for Japan's capture of Northeast China, which served as the beginning of further aggression by Japanese imperialism. The outcome of the Second World War significantly changed the balance of power in the international arena, making serious adjustments to the political course of the United States and England towards China. The USA, which became the most economically and militarily powerful country in the capitalist world after the war, openly proclaimed a program to establish a regime of custody of colonial countries in Asia, using the Chiang Kai-shek regime in China for this purpose. After failing to save the anti-communist Kuomintang regime through diplomacy and through direct intervention in the civil war (1945-1949), the United States after the proclamation of the People's Republic of China moved to a policy of "containment and isolation" of China.

Thus, US policy in China was primarily aimed at protecting its interests and was formed as the result of external and internal factors influencing it. The main external factors were the economic interests of the United States of America in China and the positions held by the American community, the diplomatic corps, and troops in this country. The main internal factors were public opinion in the United States, which reflected the interests of various population groups and the attitude of legislative and executive authorities to politics in China.

#### 4.1. Contribution

The author of the article concludes that China's US policy was mainly intended to protect its interests and was created as a result of external and internal factors affecting it.

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