

A New Rape of China

A FORM OF EXPLOITATION developed in ancient times mainly by seafaring peoples is that now known as extra-territoriality; the recent evacuation of Shanghai by the British brings it to mind.

It was customary for strong maritime tribes or nations to demand through negotiation, or to take by force, the right to esconce itself in a coastal city of some prospering people. The landing party was strong enough to hold possession of the city, enforce payment of tribute and to ward off other marauders. Contact was maintained with the home government, whose laws and customs were transplanted.

Provided they paid tribute and generally behaved themselves, the conquered peoples were allowed to follow their own ways. Agreements were sometimes entered into formally for the recognition of autonomous judicial, civil and economic conditions for the foreigners. Local authority could not interfere with these conditions. This was, and is, extra-territoriality.

Since the coastal city was invariably the market place for the hinterland, control of it gave the invaders power to collect tribute from the entire country, either through import or export levies, or levies imposed at the market place; that is, sales taxes. All the tribute was in the nature of rent, for it was payment for permission to do business in the city, and the city was vital to the economic life of the nation.

Revolts sometimes necessitated conquest of the hinterland. This was troublesome and expensive; it necessitated calling for help from the home country and sharing the loot with the newcomers. Extra-territoriality, when it was peacefully accepted, was preferable. Dissatisfaction was often overcome by a division of authority and spoils with native chieftains.

The system sometimes lapsed as a result of such deals, sometimes because the invaders were cut off from their bases, sometimes by assimilation, sometimes by expulsion. Tribute collecting never disappeared.

Shanghai was one of the five ports in which extra-territoriality was imposed on the Chinese after the "Opium" war in 1842. China had opposed the importation of opium from India; Britain made war to force acceptance of this commodity, instead of the currency demanded by the Chinese, as payment for their tea, spices and silks. Britain ob-



tained, among other things, title to some mud flats at the mouth of the Yangtse River.

The place was excellently located for shipping, and the 3,200-mile-long Yangtse drains a very fertile and densely populated area. The forced opening up of trade with the outside world necessitated a mart like the Shanghai that grew up on these mud flats. Extra-territoriality enabled the British interests which got control of Shanghai to collect tribute, partly through customs revenues but mainly through the modern technique of huge monopoly prices.

The graft was too lucrative not to attract other nationals of similar cupidity. And the British were persuaded by continual unrest among the natives to share the loot and the responsibility of maintaining order with the French, Americans and Japanese.

Last month the British were too busy at home to oppose the rapacity of the Japanese in Shanghai. They withdrew their forces. Twelve hundred United States Marines and a negligible French garrison are all that momentarily prevent Japan's exclusive monopoly of extra-territoriality in Shanghai.

If the Japanese can enforce such a monopoly, the nations will be worse off only because the Japanese are more crude in their exploitive technique.