How did China’s involvement in international trade change at the end of the 19th century? A lesson activity designed for 7th-12th grade World History and United States History classrooms with a focus on 21st century skills

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Classroom Connection

How did China’s involvement in international trade change at the end of the 19th century? Following the Opium Wars, China increasingly felt the intrusive presence of both Western and Japanese adversaries. This presence resulted in a weakening of the Qing Dynasty, a level of world trade not seen since the Yuan, and a growing dissatisfaction with both the dynastic system and western imperialism. Combined, these factors would later lead to the Boxer Rebellion along with radical changes in the 20th century.


Handout 1: Secondary Source-Data Charts

Chart 1: China’s foreign trade: imports and exports, 1870-1900 (Value of trade expressed in Haikwan taels-monetary unit)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Net imports</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>&amp; Exports</th>
<th>Import excess (+)</th>
<th>Import excess (-)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>63,693,000</td>
<td>55,295,000</td>
<td>118,988,000</td>
<td>- 8,398,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>67,803,000</td>
<td>68,913,000</td>
<td>136,716,000</td>
<td>+ 1,110,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>79,293,000</td>
<td>77,884,000</td>
<td>157,177,000</td>
<td>- 1,410,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>88,200,000</td>
<td>65,006,000</td>
<td>153,206,000</td>
<td>- 23,194,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>127,093,000</td>
<td>87,144,000</td>
<td>214,238,000</td>
<td>- 39,949,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>171,697,000</td>
<td>143,293,000</td>
<td>314,990,000</td>
<td>- 28,404,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>211,070,000</td>
<td>158,997,000</td>
<td>370,067,000</td>
<td>- 52,074,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How did China’s involvement in international trade change at the end of the 19th century?

Chart 2: The three principal imports and their respective shares in China’s foreign trade, 1871-1903
(Total value of imports = 100%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Opium</th>
<th>Cotton cloth</th>
<th>Cotton yarn</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1871-1873</td>
<td>37.7</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>29.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-1883</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-1893</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901-1903</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Handout 1: Secondary Source- Data Guide**

Chart 1

1. What happens in terms of China’s import economy from 1870-1900?
2. What happens in terms of China’s export economy from 1870-1900?
3. As of 1900, did China have an equal balance of imports and exports? If not, describe the trade situation.
4. What events may explain the changes in trade?

Chart 2

5. In examining the principle imports to China from 1871-1903, what products are increasingly being transported to the Chinese markets?
6. What nations would have an economic interest in providing these products?
7. Based on your knowledge of world history, what technological advances, colonial empires, etc. would aid these interests?

**Suggested Answers**

**Handout 1: Secondary Source- Data Guide**

Chart 1

1. What happens in terms of China’s import economy from 1870-1900?
   - *China experienced an increase from 63,693,000 Haikwaen taels worth of imports in 1870 to 211,070,000 Haikwan taels worth of imports in 1900, an increase of 231%.*
2. What happens in terms of China’s export economy from 1870-1900?

- *China experienced an increase from 55,295,000 Haikwan taels worth of exports in 1870 to 158,997,000 Haikwan taels worth of exports in 1900, an increase of 188%.*

3. As of 1900, did China have an equal balance of imports and exports? If not, describe the trade situation.

- *No. China increasingly began an import market.*

4. What events may explain the changes in trade?

- *The impact of unfair treaties following the Opium Wars and the increasing involvement of industrialized nations.*

Chart 2

5. In examining the principle imports to China from 1871-1903, what products are increasingly being transported to the Chinese markets?

- *Cotton and other products.*

6. What nations would have an economic interest in providing these products?

- *Emerging industrial powers such as the United States and Japan.*

7. Based on your knowledge of world history, what technological advances, colonial empires, etc. would aid these interests?

- *Important technological advances in cotton production, mechanization of textiles combined with the industrial growth of the United States and Japan led to competition with cotton products produced in India for the British Empire.*