

The Tragic Death of China's Gardens; A Triumphant Invasion of the Poppy

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The Opium Wars consisted of two wars, spanning the years of 1839 to 1842 and 1856 to 1860, in which western nations, primarily Great Britain, exported vast amounts of opium into China. In this time of war, the weakening of China's government and system was critical to the survival of revolutionary ideals spread by the opium trade. Due to this western imperialism, China was forced to surrender their way of trade, government and culture through the influence of opium and the seven years of war that accompanied mass addiction and manipulation. This era in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century exemplifies the triumph of western ideals over the tragic loss of eastern life.

Before the First Opium War, China had been successful in avoiding the economic and military influence of Great Britain, France and the United States. It was the western world's goal to spread their way of life, namely a system of "free trade".<sup>1</sup> In contrast, China was a "2,000-year-old bureaucracy... dominated by centuries old and conservative Confucian ideas of political, social, and economic management."<sup>2</sup> This caused their system of foreign trade to be restricted to the Canton System, based in Guangzhou. With the additional developments placed on the system by the Qing Dynasty, as of 1757, Guangzhou was the only port open-to and allowing-of foreign trade.<sup>3</sup> Once ships had landed near Guangzhou, certified merchants, known as Hong merchants, men all wealthy enough to own elaborate houses and vast gardens, had the authority and skill to determine whether or not a shipment was beneficial to the whole of China.<sup>4</sup> This system of trade restricted imports or exports, contrasted with the free trade of the west. In the nineteenth century, a significant part of foreign trade in China came from Great Britain and their colony of India, exporting silver coins and Indian cotton in exchange for Chinese tea, silk and porcelain.<sup>5</sup> These Chinese products were in high demand in Great Britain, thus causing a

near-monopoly on China's end as the English had to pay more and trade more for little return. Great Britain saw the disadvantage they had in this partnership, deciding to replace Indian cotton with Indian opium, all transported by the British East India company. Throughout India, there were numerous areas of opium production, one being Patna, India, that had spacious stacking rooms filled with locally sourced opium.<sup>6</sup> The opium slowly infiltrated the country, beginning in 1810 with an average of four-thousand-and-five-hundred chests.<sup>7</sup> Great Britain began to see an increase in their profit as the Chinese had a demand for opium with its medicinal and recreational uses. With this monetary increase, the amount of opium being exported also increased rapidly. The Qing recognized the dangers of opium, banning the production and importation of opium in the year of 1800, and later outlawing the smoking of opium accompanied by a punishment of one-hundred beatings in 1813. In response to these further restrictions on trade, the East India Company hired private British traders tasked to transport opium to Chinese smugglers, who later passed it on to middlemen within the country.<sup>8</sup> In the year of 1830, an approximated three million residents of China were opium addicts, the amount of crates per trade had reached forty-thousand and eighty-five to ninety-five percent of the globe's opium supply was consumed by China alone.<sup>8</sup> Lin Zexu, a Chinese government official, ultimately halted all foreign trade and "quarantined" areas that contained foreign merchants, ships and goods.<sup>9</sup> The new and complete lack of free trade angered Great Britain. This western nation declared war on China on the basis of "civilizing" a nation that lacked ideals it was not accustomed to, ideals that were harming the lives of millions.

The First Opium War began in November of 1839 until its end on the twenty-fourth of August in 1842 when the Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking) was proposed by Great Britain. The treaty contains thirteen articles:

Article I.

“There shall henceforward be Peace and Friendship between Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and His Majesty of the Emperor of China...”

Article II.

British merchants can live “without molestation or restraint at the Cities and Towns of Canton, Amoy, Foochow-fu, Ningpo, and Shanghai...” with appointed consular officers representing Great Britain.

Article V.

Hong merchants are to be abolished “at all Ports where British Merchants may reside...”

Article VII.

“It is agreed that the Total amount of Twenty-one Millions of Dollars, describes in the three preceding Articles, shall be paid as follows: Six Millions immediately. Six Millions in 1843. Five Millions in 1844. Four Millions in 1845.”

Article VIII.

“...all Subjects of Her Britannia Majesty (whether Natives of Europe or India) who may be in confinement at this moment...” must be released.

Article IX.

“ . . . His Imperial Majesty further engages to release all Chinese Subjects who may be at this moment in confinement . . . ”<sup>10</sup>

The articles within the Treaty of Nanjing allowed the British to continue their opium trade with minimal restrictions over a wider area of land. After the First Opium War, foreign trade in China had developed from minimal and through one port, to none whatsoever and lastly to unrestricted trade in several ports. This type of trade increased after the Second Opium War, resulting in the opening of eleven more ports: Yingkou (Niuzhuang), Dengzhou, Zhenjiang, Tianjin (Tientsin), Nanjing (Nanking), Hankou, Jiujiang, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Haikou and Shantou.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the expanding amount of foreign trading ports, the Convention of Peking (Convention of Beijing) in 1860 signed three treaties into law. The first was between China and Great Britain on the twenty-fourth of August officiating the cession of the Kowloon Peninsula to Great Britain. The second was between China and France on the twenty-fifth of August establishing the Office of Foreign Affairs. The final treaty between China and Russia on the fourteenth of November annexing parts of outer Manchuria to Russia.<sup>12</sup> The Treaty of Tianjin (Tientsin) was signed by China, Great Britain and France declaring that Tianjin was now a free port for trade.<sup>13</sup> Because of the Second Opium War, China's policies in trade were forcefully opened to the western world, mimicking their free trade with minimal tariffs and overwhelming monopolies. These events caused China to be susceptible to further destruction from foreign powers and erased the values and beliefs the Chinese people held in terms of trade and global interaction.

Within China, the nineteenth century marked a time in which the Qing dynasty began to weaken. This regression was caused by the White Lotus Rebellion, a group that strived to return the throne to the Ming dynasty.<sup>14</sup> Emperor Jiaqing survived the uprising only for opium to enter the nation in the early 1800s.<sup>15</sup> The government was overwhelmed by addiction, an economic depression taking hold of the country. To combat this ever-growing issue, the Qing created the opium bans of 1800 and 1813, that of which failed to block shipments and trades. In the year of 1836, Emperor Daoguang centralized the opium issue, closing opium dens and executing Chinese dealers, yet these attempts were not triumphant.<sup>16 17</sup> When the government was tasked with expanding the success of anti-opium acts, Lin Zexu held the most prevalent voice of reason. Zexu was primarily concerned with domestic issues, developing his credibility regarding civilian welfare.<sup>18</sup> Emperor Daoguang allowed Zexu to target those associated with the creation and distribution of opium, resulting in the arrests of over one-thousand-six-hundred Chinese opium dealers and a cease of *all* foreign trade.<sup>19</sup> Zexu's acts halted the opium exchange, yet also was the fuel for Great Britain to declare war on China. After the First Opium War, the Qing government was weakened physically and mentally as the foreigners had triumphed and opium was exponentially more readily accessible to all of China. Lin Zexu was exiled from the nation and Emperor Daoguang held onto his power until 1850 when Xianfeng took control.<sup>20 21</sup> In this same year, the Taiping Rebellion drew the government into another tolling conflict. This uprising was supported by politically and religiously radical citizens of China fighting for ideas brought to these groups by the means of foreign trade, opium being synonymous with this act. This rebellious group quickly developed into a military force of one million, propelling fourteen years of upheaval aimed not only at gaining a westernized government, but the utter destruction of the

Qing dynasty. The invasion of Nanjing reassured the Taipings of their power and influence until the Qing government requested the aid of foreign forces. This ended the rebellion in 1864, with a twenty million person death toll and a ravaged government, too weak to recover.<sup>22</sup> In the midst of Taiping, the Nian Rebellion began. These northeastern citizens utilized the advantage of a distracted government to gain power and control. After the fall of Nanjing, the Taiping combined with the Nian, both parties desperate for the fall of the Qing. They remained starved of “justice” as the Qing gradually blockaded both groups, sedating the revolutions.<sup>23</sup> The government was successful, but not without the exploitation of foreign forces and the collapse of ideals and officials within the Qing dynasty. In order to maintain their straining power over the Chinese, the Qing began to share their positions with worthy citizens, along with the Dowager Empress Cixi and Tongzhi, hoping to appeal to the masses and evenly distribute the damage done to the dynasty.<sup>24</sup> Representatives such as Zongli Yamen were appointed by western personnel.<sup>25</sup> The act of western powers enlisting their own people to “aid” the empire secretly exploited the Qing’s weaknesses and fueled anti-Manchu ideals within the civilians. Before foreign trade was a centralized aspect of China, there were infrequent and manageable uprisings. As Great Britain began to bleed into the lives of the Chinese, the government collapsed with an economic depression caused by the reversed monopoly with the west. This case worsened through the Opium Wars. Foreign nations utilized opium as a vehicle of western ideals that infiltrated and attacked the entirety of China, becoming responsible for the consistent weakening of the Qing and the strengthening of radical ideas and actions.

The culture within China can be characterized by an extensive past. In the early eighteenth century, the social order was based off of jia (family), a system where the head of the household (the patriarch) contained the power to dictate all decisions and actions of each family member.<sup>26</sup> This societal and familial structure represented the government and its hierarchy. Confucianism was also a foundational element of the Qing dynasty. From the beginning to the middle of the nineteenth century, the population tripled, causing the economy to expand to accommodate the growing amount of people. This development ultimately exhausted the surplus of materials from the eighteenth century, partly due to the White Lotus Rebellion, causing fiscal and military weakness. As trade began to increase between Great Britain, commercialism roped far more Chinese into trading, making them susceptible to the unstable fluctuations in the market. This began to shift the pattern of jobs pre-established by kinship.<sup>27</sup> In the 1820s and 1830s, the balance of trade between China and Great Britain shifted against China, plunging the country into an economic depression as their bimetallic system was destroyed by the singular demand for silver. In addition to the depression, addiction to Opium exponentially increased, causing corruption within government officials. The spread of corruption, addiction and the effects of an economic depression all combined to disrupt the way of life the Qing dynasty had created, and realizing this, they began to ban the trade of opium. However, this fueled further corruption in officials and soldiers. Opium smugglers were also capable of operating without any backing by the Qing, worsening the defiance to Chinese law. When Lin Zexu successfully disrupted the opium trade, it plunged China into war with Great Britain, the country lacking any defenses against modern, western warfare, resulting in the near annihilation of China.<sup>28</sup> Anti-Qing thoughts were fueled by Great Britain's claim that they were at war with the



government officials and soldiers of China, not the entire population.<sup>29</sup> As war affects all citizens, taking the lives of many, altering the familial systems and business hierarchies, a rift between the Qing and the people formed, a weakness that western nations exploited fully. Because of the treaties signed after the First Opium War, free trade was rapidly growing, and China was physically losing its cities to the foreigners, Chinese citizens now constantly influenced by ideas of the west. The Second Opium War further weakened the government and the morality of the nation. The Qing lost their privileges within the government, resulting in the alterations of basic Chinese morals and cultural values. Christianity threatened the teachings of Confucianism, one of the establishing ideas of the government. The tributary relationships between China and other nations were destroyed by the central presence of foreigners, the partial collapse of this system ruining the emperor's dynastic rule. Yet, the time before 1860 was managed in the best way possible as the culture of China was somewhat preserved. This all changed after 1860. The Taiping and Nian Rebellions represented the loss of the remaining culture as both rebellions were built on anti-Qing ideals. In the years of 1861 to 1872, the government was forced into modern industrialization in order to "use the barbarians' superior techniques to control the barbarians".<sup>30</sup> By the late nineteenth century, China's citizens were split and divided, some wanting war, some peace, some revolution and some mourning. Confucianism and families had been destroyed by opium and their wars, and as these are the foundation for the Qing dynasty, the government had fallen completely. Without these essential aspects of Chinese life, their culture no longer belonged to them, but instead belonged to the opium, to the west.

A nation is made up of their government and people and how these aspects interact with the rest of the world. China was a harmonious land where government and people functioned synonymously, a minuscule part of this nation laying in the hands of the foreigners. When opium invaded the country and, without stop, poisoned every citizen and area, this harmony began to crack. The wars following the initial destruction totaled China. Rebellions, uprisings, death all caused by the presence of one substance. This unlimited power, the ability to control a deeply-rooted country with one trade deal, characterizes the west and its never ending imperialism. It is a tragedy to witness the loss of life, both physically and metaphorically, that occurred in China during the Opium Wars. From a western perspective, this era is a triumphant stage for the exploitation of a nation, gaining irreversible influences in places that were never intended to be touched by opium, by the west.

## Notes

1. Hayes, Jack Patrick. "The Opium Wars in China." The Opium Wars in China | Asia Pacific Curriculum. Accessed March 19, 2019.  
<https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china>.
2. Hayes. "The Opium Wars in China."
3. Hayes. "The Opium Wars in China."
4. Platt, Stephen R. *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of Chinas Last Golden Age*. 73. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.
5. Hayes. "The Opium Wars in China."
6. Platt. *Imperial Twilight*. 196.
7. World Drug Report. (2008). *A Century of International Drug Control*. 173-177. PDF file.  
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9. Hayes. "The Opium Wars in China."
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<https://china.usc.edu/treaty-nanjing-nanking-1842>.

11. Hayes. "The Opium Wars in China."
12. "A Century of Resilient Tradition: Exhibition of the Republic of China's Diplomatic Archives \_Lessons of History." A Century of Resilient Tradition: Exhibition of the Republic of China's Diplomatic Archives \_ . Accessed March 19, 2019.  
[http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh100/diplomatic/page\\_en02.html](http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh100/diplomatic/page_en02.html).
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<https://www.britannica.com/event/White-Lotus-Rebellion>.
15. Keay, John. *China: A History*. 477. Perseus Books Group, 2011.
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18. Platt. *Imperial Twilight*. 350-351.
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<https://www.britannica.com/event/Taiping-Rebellion>.
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<https://www.britannica.com/event/Nian-Rebellion>.
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25. Chan, Hoklam, and Lynn White. "China." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 12, 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/China/Qing-society>.
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<https://www.britannica.com/place/China/The-first-Opium-War-and-its-aftermath>.
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## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources

"A Century of Resilient Tradition: Exhibition of the Republic of China's Diplomatic Archives \_Lessons of History." A Century of Resilient Tradition: Exhibition of the Republic of China's Diplomatic Archives \_ . Accessed March 19, 2019.  
[http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh100/diplomatic/page\\_en02.html](http://www.npm.gov.tw/exh100/diplomatic/page_en02.html).

The above source was used to accurately describe the treaties that resulted from the Second Opium War. This archive includes pictures of the treaties, accompanied by captions, and this was helpful in placing myself during that time period. Seeing the same papers that the Chinese, British, French, Russians and Americans saw and handled allowed me to grasp the weight of its declarations and compromises. Knowing the destruction that they brought to China also allowed me to write with more sympathy and emotion.

Platt, Stephen R. *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of Chinas Last Golden Age*. 73, 196, 351. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.

This novel included paintings and drawings of specific situations and people such as the Hong merchant's houses, Lin Zexu and a room in Patna, India containing a large amount of opium. I utilized these pictures to properly explain and give context to the power of the Hong, Zexu's aura and credentials and the overwhelming availability of opium. These pictures allowed me to visualize these critical aspects of my research and paper, making me more acquipped to explain their importance.

"Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking), 1842." US. January 01, 1842. Accessed March 19, 2019.  
<https://china.usc.edu/treaty-nanjing-nanking-1842>.

This source provided a direct transcript of the Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking). I used this to exemplify the types of changes that China was forced to make after the First Opium War. Directly reading the treaty clarified some areas where I was confused as to what the treaty was saying. For example, I had read elsewhere that the treaty made the Emperor release all imprisoned Chinese, which did not make sense to me as I did not understand that was referring to the opium smugglers. The actual treaty cleared this up for me.

## Secondary Sources

Boxer, Baruch. "Tianjin." Encyclopædia Britannica. August 02, 2018. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tianjin-China#ref368274>.

This source explained the happenings in Tianjin during the Second Opium War. I used this to explain the Convention of Beijing's purpose and what Tianjin meant to the Chinese and foreigners. This information gave context as to why the Convention of Beijing was so important. It also allowed me to fully understand the events that occurred after the convention due to Tianjin becoming a free trading port.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Nian Rebellion." Encyclopædia Britannica. October 04, 2010. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Nian-Rebellion>.

This source gave in-depth information about the Nian Rebellion that occurred during the Taiping Rebellion. I used this to give an example of the further destruction the Qing faced after the Second Opium War. This source allowed me to create an accurate timeline in my head, as well as visualizing a map of areas of conflict in China during that time. This deepened my understanding as I could see how each event affected the next.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Taiping Rebellion." Encyclopædia Britannica. February 15, 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Taiping-Rebellion>.

This source, like the above one about the Nian Rebellion, provided information about the Taiping Rebellion. I used this source to exemplify the turmoil the entire country faced after the Opium Wars. This source allowed me to understand and see the direct effects of the Second Opium War and the treaties signed during the Convention of Beijing, tying my research together.

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "White Lotus Rebellion." Encyclopædia Britannica. January 07, 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/event/White-Lotus-Rebellion>.

This source provided a summation of the White Lotus Rebellion. I used this information by mentioning the occurrence as an example of revolution before the Opium Wars so I could later compare the revolutions before and after the wars. This source helped me understand the culture in the late eighteenth century before opium became a large problem.

Chan, Hoklam, and Lynn White. "China." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 12, 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/China/Qing-society>.

This source was where I found a lot of general information about the culture and structure of the Qing society. I used this information to write my paragraph about the progression of culture before, during and after the Opium Wars. This source allowed me to understand a wide variety of information about the entirety of China during the Qing dynasty.

Franke, Herbert, and Chusei Suzuki. "China." Encyclopædia Britannica. March 12, 2019. Accessed March 20, 2019.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/China/The-first-Opium-War-and-its-aftermath>.

This source provided information specifically about the effects of the First Opium War, spanning from government to culture. I used this source to explain the major changes in government and culture after the first war. This source helped me understand the miniscule details of the First Opium War, which ended up tying into a lot of my previous research, expanding on the information.

Hayes, Jack Patrick. "The Opium Wars in China." The Opium Wars in China | Asia Pacific Curriculum. Accessed March 19, 2019.

<https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china>.

This source provided simple and precise information about both wars and their effects with visual aids. I used this source to explain the general timeline of the war as well as state the trading ports developments. This source was quite helpful as it had visual aids and easily readable information, breaking up the large paragraphs of information from my other sources.

Keay, John. *China: A History*. 477. Perseus Books Group, 2011.

This novel provided an in-depth history of all of China. I used the information in it to explain the progression of the government in terms of emperors. This source was helpful as it fully explained all concepts in the history of China and provided a timeline of the emperors' reign.

Platt, Stephen R. *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of Chinas Last Golden Age*. 350-351. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018.

This novel provided information specifically pertaining to the Opium Wars. I used this information to describe Lin Zexu and his character and ideals on the opium issue. This source was helpful as it gave an in-depth description of Zexu, explaining why he acted certain ways and deepening my understanding of this critical person in the First Opium War.

World Drug Report. (2008). *A Century of International Drug Control*. 173-177. PDF file. March 18, 2018.

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2008/WDR2008\\_100years\\_drug\\_control\\_origins.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2008/WDR2008_100years_drug_control_origins.pdf)

This source provided information about the statistics of the opium trade. I used this information to give exact figures of the amounts of opium consumed by China, demonstrating the rapid increase of the product and addiction rates. This source was helpful as it provided graphs and other visual aids representing the data, once again breaking up the heavily written aspects of my research.



