

IMPERIAL OPIUM TRADING & ITS CONSEQUENCES

General

As you likely know, in 1600, the British established the EIC primarily for trade with India and Southeast Asia.

Over time, as British influence grew in India, the company became heavily involved in the opium trade with China.

In the 19th century, the British started dealing with drugs, particularly opium, by cultivating it in Bengal and Bihar. And India, became a significant source of opium.

This British involvement in opium trading had a profound impact on the evolution of global trade and politics, which we'll delve into shortly.

What is OPIM?

Opium is a type of drug that can make you feel calm by slowing down the messages between your brain and body & thereby relieving your pain or discomfort.

In the past, opium was used as medicine, but it also had recreational use, despite the fact that it could be addictive.

It's made from the sap of a poppy plant.

Opium has different substances in it, like morphine and codeine, which can help with relieving pain.

Opium can be processed into various forms, like liquids, powders, or pills.

Why British started Opium trading with China?

In the past, the British had a strong liking for Chinese tea, silk, and porcelain, but the Chinese weren't interested in what the British had to offer.

Consequently, when it came time to settle payments for the Chinese goods, the British had to use silver, as the Chinese had little interest in other commodities.

This created a problem because the British were spending more money than they were earning.

To resolve this financial imbalance, the British needed a product that could be sold in large quantities in the Chinese market.

They discovered that opium, which grew in British-controlled India, was in great demand in China.

Two Worlds Collide

In mid-19th century, major powers like Great Britain, France, & US were becoming economically & militarily dominant.

These Western imperial powers were keen on promoting free trade and used their strong armies acted as tools to impose their will on others.

While countries like India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and Vietnam faced foreign takeover more easily, China resisted it.

China, influenced by Confucianism, maintained a

Confucianism, being secular in its character, didn't hinder scientific and modern advancements as much as other belief systems like Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism did elsewhere.

However, when confronted with the modern West, characterized by industrialization, big business, and powerful armies, China struggled.

This struggle resulted in various issues such as unfair treaties, invasions by foreign forces, significant rebellions, internal political conflicts, and social upheaval.

Despite the 1st Opium War, China's ancient imperial system prevailed although it did contribute to the West's increased

The First Opium War

From 1644 to 1912, the Qing Dynasty, the ruling power in China, implemented policies aimed at restricting foreign trade exclusively to the city of Guangzhou, commonly known as Canton.

This regulation was enforced through approved Chinese merchants who held licenses for conducting trade activities.

This move subjected foreign trade to Chinese government regulations.

Consequently, during the Opium War, trade between China and the West took place primarily in the Canton port.

For many years, Britain engaged in a triangular trade,

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, the balance of trade heavily favored China due to the British consumers' strong preference for Chinese tea and other products.

Since the Chinese did not share a similar preference for British goods, opium became a option, given its high demand in the Chinese market.

By the 1820s, the trade balance had reversed in Britain's favor, and the Chinese had to pay with silver.

However, a significant issue emerged within Chinese society.

By this time, a growing number of Chinese individuals were using opium as a recreational drug, leading to widespread

Addicted, individuals would do anything to get access to opium.

Recognizing the social problem, the Chinese government took action in 1800 by banning both the production and importation of opium.

In 1813, it went a step further by outlawing the smoking of opium and imposing a punishment of beating offenders 100 times.

In response, the EIC hired private British & US traders to transport the drug to China.

Chinese smugglers bought the opium from British & US ships anchored off the Guangzhou coast & distributed it within China through a network of Chinese middlemen

This reached a crisis point when, in 1834, the EIC lost its monopoly over British opium.

To compete for customers, dealers lowered their selling price, which made it easier for more people in China to buy opium, thus spreading further use and addiction.

In less than 30 years (1810-1838) opium imports to China increased from 4,500 chests to 40,000.

As Chinese consumed more and more imported opium, the outflow of silver to pay for it increased.

In 1831, the Chinese Emperor, already angry that opium traders were breaking local laws & increasing addiction and smuggling, discovered that members of his army and government were engaged in smoking opium.

By 1836, the Chinese government began to get more serious about enforcing the 1813 ban.

It closed opium dens and executed Chinese dealers but the problem only grew worse.

The emperor called for a debate among Chinese officials on how best to deal with the crisis & opinion were polarized into two sides.

The pragmatic school of thought focused on targeting opium users rather than opium producers.

They argued that the production and sale of opium should be legalized and then taxed by the government.

Their belief was that taxing the drug would make it so expensive that people would give it up.

They also argued that the money collected from taxing the opium trade could help the Chinese government reduce revenue shortfalls and the outflow of silver.

The Idealist school of thought led by Lin Zexu, vehemently disagreed with this 'pragmatic' approach.

Led by Lin Zexu, a very capable and ambitious Chinese government official, argued that the opium trade was a moral issue, and had to be eliminated by any means possible.

If they could not suppress the trade of opium and addiction to it, the Chinese empire would have no peasants to work the land, no townsfolk to pay taxes, no students to study, and no soldiers to fight.

They argued that instead of targeting opium users, they should

In the end, Lin Zexu's side won the argument.

In 1839, he arrived in Guangzhou (Canton) to supervise the ban on the opium trade and to crack down on its use.

He attacked the opium trade on several levels.

He even, wrote an open letter to Queen Victoria questioning Britain's political support for the trade and the morality of pushing drugs.

He enforced the 1813 ban by arresting over 1,600 Chinese dealers and seizing and destroying tens of thousands of opium pipes.

He also demanded that British companies to turn over their supplies of opium in exchange for tea.

After 6 weeks, the foreign merchants gave in to Lin's demands and turned over 2.6 million pounds of opium (over 20,000 chests).

Lin's troops also seized and destroyed the opium that was being held on British ships.

But, the British claimed these ships were in international waters, but Lin claimed they were anchored in and around Chinese islands.

Lin then hired 500 Chinese men to destroy the opium by mixing it with lime and salt and dumping it into the bay.

He also pressured the Portuguese, who had a colony in nearby Macao, to expel the uncooperative British, forcing them to move to the island of Hong Kong.

For the British, Lin's destruction of the opium was an affront to British dignity and their concepts of free trade.

Many British merchants, smugglers, and EIC had argued that China was out of touch with "civilized" nations, which practiced free trade & maintained "normal" international relations through consular officials and treaties.

Finally, in November 1839, the rising tension between the China and Great Britain pushed them towards the 1st Opium War.

In June 1840, 16 British warships arrived at Guangzhou & over the next 02 years, the British forces bombarded forts, fought battles, seized cities, & attempted negotiations.

A preliminary settlement called for China to cede Hong Kong to the British Empire, pay an indemnity, and grant Britain full

Opium War 1 - Aftermath

The 1st Opium War ended in 1842, when Chinese officials signed, at gunpoint, the Treaty of Nanjing that provided some benefits to the British:

An excellent deep-water port at Hong Kong including compensation to be paid to the British government and merchants;

05 Chinese treaty ports at Guangzhou (Canton), Shanghai, Xiamen (Amoy), Ningbo, and Fuzhou, where British merchants and their families could reside & subject to British laws.

A “most favoured nation” clause that any rights gained by other foreign countries would automatically apply to Great Britain as well.

Another unequal treaty was signed between China & US aimed to establish diplomatic & trade relations between 02 nations undermining China's sovereignty & freedom.

Through the most favoured nation clauses, these treaties allowed westerners to build churches & spread Christianity in the treaty ports.

Western free trade had its first great victory in China with this war.

When the Chinese Emperor died in 1850, his successor dismissed these treaties in favour of those who had supported Lin Zexu.

New emperor tried to bring Lin back from exile, but he died.

Second Opium War (1856–1860)

In 1856, 2nd Opium War broke out and continued until 1860, when the British & French captured Beijing and forced on China a new round of unequal treaties, indemnities, and the opening of 11 more treaty ports.

This is known as Treaty of Tientsin (1856,1958) signed between China & several Western powers, including Britain, France, Russia, & US, during the early stages of the 2nd Opium War.

It aimed to address various issues and disputes, but the conflict escalated, leading to further military actions.

This led to increased Christian missionary work & legalization of opium trade.

Even though new ports were opened to British after 1st Opium

In October 1856, Chinese authorities arrested the Chinese crew of a ship operated by the British.

The British used this as an excuse to pressure China militarily to open itself up even further to British merchants and trade.

France, using the execution of a French Christian missionary in China, joined the British in the fight.

Joint French-British forces captured Guangzhou before moving north to the city of Tianjin.

In 1858, the Chinese agreed on paper to a series of western demands but refused to ratify the Tientsin treaty, which led to further hostilities.

In 1860, British & French troops landed near Beijing & fought their way into city.

Negotiations broke down & British forces destroyed Imperial

Shortly after that, the Chinese emperor fled to Manchuria in northeast China.

His brother negotiated the matter which, in addition to ratifying the Treaty of Tientsin, added indemnities & ceded to Britain Kowloon Peninsula across the strait from Hong Kong.

Weakened Qing Dynasty now confronted with the need to rethink its relations with the outside world and to modernize it.

In 1997, the treaty between China-UK expired on July 1, 1997, marking the end of British rule in Hong Kong.

Western Domination Established

The firm exercise of Western imperial powers' supremacy over Asian countries began to take shape in the 19th century, particularly during the era of Western imperialism.

The expansion of Western influence over Asia was driven by a combination of economic, technological, and military factors.

Opium Wars (1839–1842 and 1856–1860) between China and Britain marked a significant episode in the exertion of Western dominance over an Asian power.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, Western powers, including Britain, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, & US, expanded their colonial empires in Southeast Asia & Fareast.

Territories such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the

The latter half of the 19th century saw a "Scramble for Asia" among European powers when western powers colonized/annexed territories:

- **India, Malaya(Malaysia), Burma(Myanmar), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Hong Kong, Singapore: British**
- **Indochina (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos): French Colony**
- **Indonesia: Netherland (Dutch East Indies)**
- **Philippines: Spain & then US**
- **Macau: Portuguese**

Following, Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Japan emerged as a power & marked the decline of China's dominance in East Asia. It also showcased the ability of an Asian nation to resist Western imperialism.

While the process of Western dominance over Asia started in the 19th century, the dynamics & outcomes varied across different regions & continued to evolve into the 20th century.

The aftermath of WWII marked a significant shift, with many Asian countries gaining independence from colonial rule and asserting their