

FEATURE

The Opium Wars

First Opium War

Excepted from Wikipedia

The First Opium War (1839–42), also known as the Opium War and as the Anglo-Chinese War, was fought between Britain and China over their conflicting viewpoints on diplomatic relations, trade, and the administration of justice for foreign nationals.

In the 17th and 18th centuries the demand for Chinese goods (particularly silk, porcelain, and tea) in the European market created a trade imbalance because the market for Western goods in China was virtually non-existent; China was largely self-sufficient and Europeans were not allowed access to China's interior. European silver flowed into China when the Canton System, instituted in the mid-17th century, confined the sea trade to Canton and to the Chinese merchants of Thirteen Hong.

The British East India Company (E.I.C.) had a matching monopoly of British trade. E.I.C. began to auction opium grown on its plantations in India to independent foreign traders in exchange for silver. The opium was then transported to the China coast and sold to Chinese middlemen who retailed the drug inside China. This reverse flow of silver and the increasing numbers of opium addicts alarmed Chinese officials.



In 1839, the Daoguang 皇帝 emperor, rejecting proposals to legalize and tax opium, appointed Lin Zexu 林则徐 to solve the problem by abolishing the trade. Lin confiscated around 20,000 chests of opium (approximately 1210 t or 2.66 million lb) without offering compensation, blockaded trade, and confined foreign merchants to their quarters. The British government, although not officially denying China's right to control imports of the drug, objected to this arbitrary seizure and used its naval and gunnery power to inflict quick and decisive defeat.

In 1842, the Treaty of Nanking—the first of what the Chinese later called the unequal treaties—granted an indemnity and



The Treaty of Nanking

extraterritoriality to Britain, the opening of five treaty ports, and the cession of Hong Kong Island. The failure of the treaty to satisfy British goals of

improved trade and diplomatic relations led to the Second Opium War (1856–60). The war is now considered in China as the beginning of modern Chinese history.

The Treaty of Nanking

This agreement is also called the First Unequal Treaty, because Britain extracted a number of major concessions from the Chinese, while offering nothing in return except for an end to hostilities.

The Treaty of Nanking opened five ports to British traders, instead of requiring them all to trade at Canton. It also provided for a fixed 5% tariff rate on imports into China, which was agreed to by the British and Qing officials rather than being imposed solely by China. Britain was accorded “most favored nation” trade status, and its citizens were granted extraterritorial rights. British consuls gained the right to negotiate directly with local officials, and all British prisoners of war were released. China also ceded the island of Hong Kong to Britain in perpetuity. Finally, the Qing government agreed to pay war reparations totaling 21 million silver dollars over the following three years.

Under this treaty, China suffered economic hardship and a serious loss of sovereignty. Perhaps most damaging, however, was its loss of prestige. Long the super-power of East Asia, the First Opium War exposed Qing China as a paper tiger. The neighbors, particularly Japan, took note of its weakness.

Second Opium War

The Second Opium War, the Second Anglo-Chinese War, the Second China War, the Arrow War, or the Anglo-French expedition to China, was a war pitting the British Empire and the Second French Empire against the Qing Dynasty of China, lasting from 1856 to 1860. It was fought over similar issues as the First Opium War. “Second War”

and “Arrow War” are both used in literature. “Second Opium War” refers to one of the British tactical objectives: legalizing the opium trade, expanding coolie trade, opening all of China to British merchants, and exempting foreign imports from internal transit duties. The “Arrow War” refers to the name of a vessel which became the starting point of the conflict.

Treaties of Tientsin

In June 1858, the first part of the war ended with the four Treaties of Tientsin, to which Britain, France, Russia, and the U.S. were parties. These treaties opened 11 more ports to Western trade. The major points of the treaty were:

1. Britain, France, Russia, and the U.S. would have the right to establish diplomatic legations (small embassies) in Peking (a closed city at the time)
2. Ten more Chinese ports would be opened for foreign trade, including Niuzhuang, Tamsui, Hankou, and Nanjing
3. The right of all foreign vessels including commercial ships to navigate freely on the Yangtze River
4. The right of foreigners to travel in the internal regions of China, which had been formerly banned
5. China was to pay an indemnity of four million taels (In Hong Kong, 1 tael is ~37.7994 g) of silver to Britain and two million to France.



The British, French and the Russians were all granted a permanent diplomatic presence in Beijing. The Chinese had to pay 8 million taels to Britain and France. Britain acquired Kowloon (next to Hong Kong). The opium trade was legalized and Christians were granted full civil rights, including the right to own property, and the right to evangelize.

Britain gets southern Kowloon. Western powers get extraterritorial rights, trade privileges. China's Summer Palaces looted and burned.

The content of the Convention of Peking included:

1. China's signing of the Treaty of Tianjin
2. Opening Tianjin as a trade port
3. Cede No.1 District of Kowloon (south of present day Boundary Street) to Britain
4. Freedom of religion established in China
5. British ships were allowed to carry indentured Chinese to the Americas
6. Indemnity to Britain and France increasing to 8 million taels of silver apiece
7. Legalization of the opium trade