

IMPERIALISM IN CHINA



British and Chinese Imperialism in the 19th Century

European imperialism in the 19th century involved territorial expansion and economic dominance. Imperialism relied upon the acquisition of cheap raw materials and secure markets overseas. Great Britain was the leading imperial power. The country profited from its relationship with territories in India, Africa, and China by maintaining a favorable balance of trade. Profits poured into Great Britain when the British sold more goods to foreign countries than they bought from them.

In the early 19th century China was self-sufficient, reflecting its history as the dominant civilization in Asia. Chinese society had little desire, or need, for foreign goods. However, the Chinese profited from the sale of tea to Great Britain, so they allowed some British merchants access to the port of Canton.

British Merchants & the Opium Trade

With the power of the British Empire behind them, British merchants in India and Africa had little concern for their safety. They enjoyed "extra territoriality," which means that they were exempt from local laws while living in a foreign country. In China, however, British merchants faced a different situation. Prior to the Opium War, the Ch'ing dynasty believed that British merchants were required to obey Chinese law and could be arrested and detained according to Chinese legal procedures. British merchants were accustomed to the British legal system, with its limitations on search and seizure and jury trials. They grew uneasy about the strictness of Chinese imperial laws.

Opium is a drug derived from poppy plants. It can be used in medicine as a pain reliever. However, opium is also a narcotic that is highly addictive. The British grew opium in India and brought to China. Their purpose was to introduce a product that would allow Britain to sell more goods to China than it bought from China. Thus, the British would have a balance of trade that favored them. The result was that by the mid-1830s, nearly two million Chinese had become addicted to opium. Realizing the dangers of this trade, the Ch'ing dynasty outlawed the sale of opium in 1836. But through the black market, British merchants were able to sell increasing amounts of the drug. The Chinese Commissioner in Canton responded by arresting British merchants, confiscating opium, and demanding the British follow Chinese law. When Britain refused, the Chinese moved to bar all British trade. These actions led to the Opium War, and the British sent a fleet of war ships to China.



The First Opium War

The British made an attempt to tell China to let Britain officially export opium into China. But the attempt failed as China refused. The British then decided that they would continue illegal opium trade with China. China created a law that said that opium dealers born in China would be sentenced to death. Another force of action the Chinese took to stop opium trade was to appoint a new strict commissioner to control opium trade at the port of Guangzhou; his name was Lin Zexu. He made it so that the British could no longer trade with the Chinese. He also held all British merchants hostage. The British Superintendent of Trade then took immediate action; he told all of the British subjects to hand over all of their opium at once. The total amount of opium handed in was more than a year supply. The opium was given to Lin Zexu to be destroyed. The British saw this destruction of opium that once belonged to Britain as destruction of their property.

Trade between China and Britain resumed, but the British were not allowed to bring any drugs into China. Lin Zexu then sent a Memorial to Queen Victoria saying that the reasoning of the royal government regarding opium trade was very wrong. And, during this time, the Chinese were doing everything in their power to stop opium trade once and for all. The memorial angered the British and they wanted to legalize opium trade. The British were also angered that the Chinese had destroyed their property without paying for it. So the first Opium War began in 1839 and ended in 1842. The British had two main goals during war. They had to protect their ships with opium on

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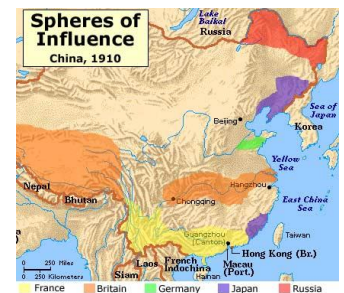
board and they had to destroy places in China so that the Chinese would legalize opium trade. The British won for they had muskets and cannons and a better knowledge in war. When the British attempted to negotiate, they said that they wanted the Chinese to pay for all of the opium that they had destroyed during the battle. The Chinese refused, so the British wreaked havoc on more cities in China. Finally in 1843, the Chinese, at gunpoint, meaning that they were forced to sign it, signed the Treaty of Nanjing. The treaty said that China must surrender Hong Kong and open four extra trading ports to Britain. The Chinese would also pay 21 million dollars to the British to pay for lost opium.

The Second Opium War

The Second Opium War was also called the Arrow War since it had to do with a ship known as the Arrow. The ship had docked in Canton. The ship was registered with British authorities at Hong Kong for one year. The Chinese were searching for a pirate that was said to be on the ship without first getting British permission. When Chinese officials were checking the ship they tore down the British flag that was once on the ship. At the time, the British desperately needed to legalize opium trade with China, so they used this as a reason to start another war. They along with the newly allied French attacked China. The French were helping because one of their missionaries had been killed in China. The United States and Russia did not give any military support, but they sent envoys to China to negotiate. For these many reasons, the second Opium War then began. It lasted from 1856 to 1860. By 1858, the British had already taken over Tianjin. The Europeans together were too strong for the Chinese to handle. So the Chinese had no choice but to sign the Treaty of Tianjin which let the British, French, Russians, and the Americans have permanent diplomatic bases in China, and opened up ten more ports for foreign trade. The Chinese would have to pay for all the British property lost in war.

Spheres of Influence in China

Eventually several European nations followed suit, forcing China to sign a series of unequal treaties. Extraterritoriality guaranteed that European citizens in China were only subject to the laws of their own nation and could only be tried by their own courts. Eventually western nations weary of governing foreign lands, established spheres of influence within China which guaranteed specific trading privileges to each nation within its respective sphere.



Eventually the United States demanded equal trading status within China, and rather than carve out its own sphere of influence, simply announced the Open Door Policy in 1899. This stated that all nations should have equal trading rights regardless of spheres of influence. While this may have prevented the further expansion of spheres of influences, it did little to restore Chinese sovereignty.

Chinese Reaction

Disgusted with the failed efforts of the Manchu Dynasty in ridding China of opium or foreign influence after the Opium Wars, Chinese citizens staged the Taiping Rebellion between 1850-1864. Already weakened, the Chinese officials turned to foreigners for help in putting down the rebellion, killing millions of Chinese in the process.

After the further insult of the Open Door Policy, Chinese nationalist staged the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. Viewed as a threat to the profits they enjoyed in their imperialist spheres of influence, foreign nations formed an international coalition that ended the uprising. With this victory, additional concessions were granted to foreign nations within China.

Finally, 5,000 years of dynastic rule in China came to an end in 1911. China tumbled into civil war as local warlords sought to control their locals, while nationalist leaders such as Sun Yixian sought to unify China. Civil war took hold of China after Sun's death as Mao Zedong and his communist forces battled Sun's successor Jiang Jieshi for control of the country. In 1949, Mao established a communist government in mainland China while Jiang Jieshi fled to Taiwan and established a democratic government there.

Sources: <http://regentsprep.org/Regents/global/themes/imperialism/china.cfm>; <http://library.thinkquest.org/07aug/01291/Ritvik.html>