



Opium Wars: Which side was justified?

Since the days of the Silk Road European merchants have sought to trade in China. Following the age of exploration and the discovery of an all-water route to Asia, European trade expanded exponentially. First the Portuguese won an important concession from the Chinese gaining the right to trade at the port city of Macao. Soon the British won the right to establish a trade settlement at the nearby Chinese city of Canton. No matter where the Europeans traded the exchange was the same, Europeans silver for Chinese commodities such as silk, porcelain and tea. The “China trade” created a HUGE **trade imbalance** for England and the other European nations were forced to empty their treasuries of silver to acquire the premium Chinese goods..... This is where opium enters our story.....



Opium found mainly in the northern parts of India originally served as a medicine for intestinal problems. However its highly addictive hallucinogenic qualities were soon exploited by traders looking to build new markets for goods. European nations quickly banned the importation of opium, however that left the non-European world as willing customers for the illegal drug.

Justified or not justified?

Below is a list of actions taken by both China and Britain during the course of their 40 year trading relationship. For each event decide which nation was justified in its actions by placing a “J” in the box on their side of the ledger.

CHINA

G.B.

1793– Britain requests the opening of a formal trade agreement with China. The Chinese agree to allow British merchants to trade at the port city of Canton. The Chinese also insist that all goods be paid for with European silver.

1799—British merchants unhappy with the amounts of silver they are forced to pay in exchange for Chinese goods, begin introducing opium into the Chinese market as a substitute for silver.

1810—The Chinese government officially bans the importation of opium into China, citing that “*Opium has a harm. Opium is a poison, undermining our good customs and morality*”

1811-1839— British merchants continue to smuggle opium into China at Canton along with at other port cities not officially open to British trade. British merchants are able to do this because of the growing demand for opium and due to the superior sailing abilities of the British ships.

1839—Citing the British disregard for Chinese law, China’s trade commissioner Lin issues the following decree to European merchants: *It is known that foreign vessels come to China and have gained large profits from trade. Are you grateful for these profits? If you are, you must know that in seeking profits for yourselves you are doing harm to others. Why do you bring opium into our land when it is illegal to bring it into yours?....The following law is enacted...whoever deals in opium or whoever establishes houses for smoking it shall instantly suffer the death penalty*”.

1839—British traders continue to smuggle in tens of thousands of chests full of opium. Commissioner Lin surrounds the British settlement at Canton and demands the surrender of all the opium in the settlement or risk imprisonment or death. The mostly unarmed traders in the settlement surrender 30,000 chests full of opium which is destroyed by the Chinese. The traders are allowed to return to the European settlement at Macao.

1839-1842—The First Opium War: Britian sends a fleet of advanced ships to defeat the Chinese and to force the Chinese to pay an indemnity for the lost trade goods and to grant new trade concessions.



I. The Opium Wars were decided relatively quickly the _____ or the English _____ and _____ led to a quick defeat for the Chinese.

II. China was forced to sign the _____ or the _____

The Treaty of Nanjing

This treaty is an agreement of peace between the warring nations of Great Britain and China officially ending the “Opium Wars”.

Article II His Majesty the Emperor of China agrees that British citizens shall be allowed to live without being bothered or restrained by Chinese law and instead will live under the laws of Great Britain in the Chinese cities of Canton, Amoy, Foochow-fu, Ningpo and Shanghai.

Article III It being obviously necessary that British ships should have a port where they may dock and refit their vessels. His Majesty the Emperor of China gives up to Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain the island of Hong Kong to be possessed forever by her Britannic Majesty, her heirs and successors. The island of Hong Kong will be governed by the laws of the British Empire.

Article VI The government of Great Britain having been obliged to send out an expedition to demand and obtain payment for the violent and unjust actions of the Chinese authorities toward British citizens and property, the Emperor of China agrees to pay the sum of twelve million pounds (dollars) to make up for those expenses.

Glossary

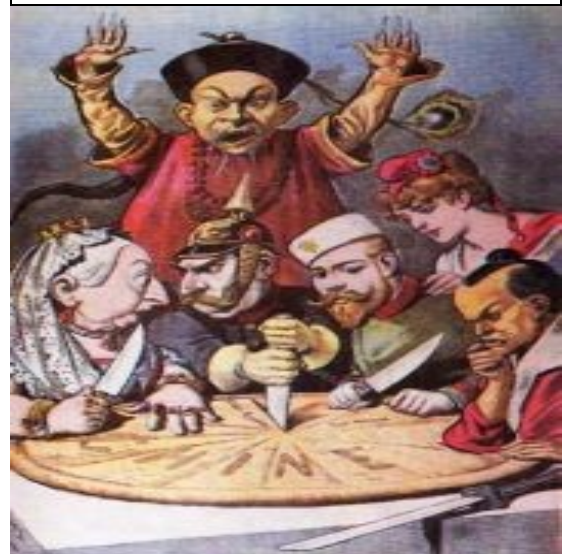
Extraterritorial Rights- Condition unique to China during the age of Imperialism where western residents were above local Chinese law.

Indemnity- A fine paid by the losing nation in a war to the victorious state.

Sphere of Influence- China was carved up by the Europeans each western state claiming rights and power of various sections of China.



Why was Hong Kong at the mouth of the Pearl River (above) such an important concession to the British?



What are the Europeans in the foreground of the picture doing with their “knives”?

What was the primary result of the Opium Wars?

Why do you think the Treaty of Nanjing was called an “unequal treaty”?

