

# Chapter 2

## Opening China

In the nineteenth century China was experiencing serious domestic problems as well as strong pressure from European nations to open up for trade. The external threat was supported by Western military might, which China could not possibly match. Through a series of unequal treaties, which included opening up various ports for trade, China was exposed to foreign influence literally at gunpoint. This opening up of Chinese territories to Westerners also provided opportunities for Christian missionaries to gain a foothold. Thus we see the ecclesiastical empire co-operating as well as competing with the economic empire. This relationship is aptly expressed here:

Time and again the missionary and the trader together represented the face of the West. Like each other or loathe each other, there was no way in which the representatives of God and of Mammon could avoid association. Mission history reflects many carefully enunciated theories of the relation of Christianity and commerce, and many examples of moral dilemmas arising from the practice. The issues could be sharpened when the commodity traded – slaves, arms, gin, opium – forced missions to choose between challenge, connivance, or silence.<sup>1</sup>

These close ties between missionary and trader not infrequently led to Western military expeditions to China during the Qing dynasty. This chapter focusses on the British attempt to enter China, the role of the East India Company, the opium trade and the ensuing war (1839-1842). Missionaries' attitudes towards the opium trade and wars vacillated between silence, connivance and condemnation. From the missionaries' point of view, everything was calculated towards furthering the Great Commission, and so most Christians at that time did not think it was odd that opium trading and Gospel preaching could

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1. Quoted in Jon Miller and Gregory C. Stanczak, 'Redeeming, ruling, and reaping: British missionary societies, the East India Company, and the India-to-China opium trade', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 2 (June 2009), 334.

be endorsed in the same treaty.<sup>1</sup> Opium traffickers and Christian preachers might make strange bedfellows, but in this case they supported the unequal treaties that Britain imposed on China for different reasons.

The relationship between the missionaries and the traders may have been symbiotic, but China had made it abundantly clear that she was not dependent on Britain or any foreign nation for anything. There existed enormous cultural, social and political differences between Britain and China; as Rudyard Kipling said, 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet.' Perhaps the only common characteristic they shared was that both countries regarded each other as barbarians.

As we have observed, in the seventeenth century foreign missionaries had shown great respect for China's cultural, social and religious traditions. But in the nineteenth century, Western powers showed scant respect even for China's territorial integrity. Let us first examine Western perceptions of China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through the eyes of Voltaire and Hegel, which can help us to understand the inevitable clash between China and the West that took place in the nineteenth century.

## Western Image

The French philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778) presented China as a nation with great moral values. He revealed his high regard for China's social structure, technological development and Confucianism. In other words, Voltaire regarded Chinese civilisation as more advanced than Western nations in terms of technology and governance. Desiring to put European arrogance in its place, Voltaire wrote: 'The great misunderstanding over Chinese rites sprang from our judging their practices in light of ours: for we carry the prejudices that spring from our contentious nature to the ends of the world.'<sup>2</sup> Voltaire thought Emperor Qianlong fitted the role of a 'philosopher king'. This positive image of China painted by Voltaire led to an intense fascination with China in Europe both as a cultural curiosity and as a state and culture to be emulated.

1. The Great Commission refers to Matthew 28:18-20: 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' According to Julia Lovell, 'The opium trade produced a rationale for the Christian presence in China, turning the country into a depraved mass of opium sots to be disciplined and improved by salvation-hungry missionaries.' Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China* (London: Picador, 2011), 271.
2. Quoted in Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 132. See also 'The West's view of China', in Jerome Ch'en, *China and the West: Society and Culture 1815-1937* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1979), 39-59.

The German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), however, had a much more negative opinion of Chinese civilisation. Believing China to be dominated by its emperors or despots, Hegel maintained that there was no freedom in the empire to allow self-realisation of the 'World Spirit'. Regarding the administration of the Empire, Hegel wrote: 'We cannot speak, in reference to China, of a Constitution; for this would imply that individuals and corporations have independent rights – partly in respect of their particular interests, partly in respect of the entire State. This element must be wanting here, and we can only speak of an administration of the Empire.'<sup>1</sup> There was no freedom in China, because all powers were vested in the emperor, Hegel maintained, and without freedom, despotism was the only mode of government.

Regarding jurisprudence in China, Hegel demonstrated the contrast between the East and the West: 'This ignoring of the distinction between accident and intention occasions most of the disputes between the English and the Chinese; for should the former be attacked by the latter – should a ship of war, believing itself attacked, defend itself, and a Chinese be killed as the consequence – the Chinese are accustomed to require that the Englishman who fired the fatal shot should lose his life. Everyone who is in any way connected with the transgressor, shares – especially in the case of crimes against the Emperor – the ruin of the actual offender: all his near kinsmen are tortured to death.'<sup>2</sup>

Hegel came to a bleak conclusion regarding China's future saying that, in spite of its glorious history, and cultural and technological achievements, the lack of freedom symbolised by subjection to the emperor would be the main hindrance towards future development and growth. Because of centuries of despotic rule, the people in China thought that their destiny was only to 'drag the car of Imperial Power'. Thus they accepted their fate to be slaves and 'to eat the bitter bread of slavery'. Unlike in India with its caste system, in China there was no distinction conferred by birth. Nonetheless, Hegel held that this very equality of all under the emperor 'testifies to no triumphant assertion of the worth of the inner man, but a servile consciousness'.<sup>3</sup>

Hegel understood China as 'the realm of theocratic despotism' centred on the state religion of China. His contrast of China and the West is summarised in this line: '[T]he East knows that one is free; the Greeks know that some are free; the Germans know that all are free.'<sup>4</sup> Since all authority was vested

1. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 141.

2. Ibid., 146-147.

3. Ibid., 156.

4. Eric Michael Dale, 'Humanism and Despotism: Jaspers and Hegel on Chinese History and Religion', *Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics and the Arts* 5, no. 1 (2010), 23.

in the emperor, the state was supposed to be 'a mirror and representative of the heavenly hierarchy'.<sup>1</sup> Such obsolete ideas, he believed, simply could not raise people beyond the veneration of naked power and state sanctioned rituals and norms.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Baron de Montesquieu held that the Chinese did not enjoy real freedom and that their laws were based on fear rather than reason. In their opinion, the elaborate Chinese education system actually encouraged moral corruption rather than improvement.<sup>2</sup>

Many Westerners at that time believed that China was retrogressing because of her inward-looking policy. But China could not remain isolated forever. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it was a chartered company in Britain that initiated the opening of China in the nineteenth century. Indeed, it was a mercantile company that helped Britain to amass colonies and trading privileges in the East.

## **The East India Company**

Founded in 1600, the East India Company developed from a small operation into an enterprise capable of making huge investments, as well as annexing colonies like the subcontinent of India. During Qianlong's reign in China, the directors of the Company, as well as the British government, were exasperated by the Qing restrictions on trade. For the British government, it was important to gain a foothold in the Far East because the Portuguese had Macau, the Spaniards had Manila, and the Dutch had Batavia. The problem was how to approach China, an inward looking kingdom that had never treated other nations as equals. As an emerging world power, Britain would never allow herself to be treated as a vassal state.

During the eighteenth century, it was not easy for foreign nations to approach the Qing government because, unlike Western nations, it did not have a Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Instead, China conducted her dealings with outsiders through a variety of bureaux and agents.<sup>3</sup> This absence of a government office to handle foreign affairs was meant to show Chinese's cultural superiority. In other words, the Emperor need not have to deal directly with the 'barbarians' from outside. This way of conducting external affairs was also meant to protect China from foreign encroachment into her territories. Needless to say, Christian missionaries also found this policy restrictive and often had to work secretly, protected

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1. Ibid., 29.

2. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 132. See also 'China in European Literature' in Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 891-892.

3. Ibid., 115.

by their converts. If caught by the authorities the punishment was very severe for both parties. Though the China penal system was harsh, it was comparable to that in the West and there was no concession for foreigners.

China's relationships with neighbouring countries and non-Chinese people were conditioned by the concept of 'sinocentrism' and an assumption of her superiority.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese perceived their relationship with foreigners as manifesting outwardly the same internal principles that regulate the state and society. It was hierarchical and non-egalitarian, and so, when a British envoy refused to kowtow, it was considered an act of rebellion. It was as if the barbarian was trying to upset the order of things. China's external order was closely connected to her internal order and it was assumed that one could not exist without the other. There was always a fear that if the barbarian was not submissive, this would serve as an encouragement to more disobedience among the local people.<sup>2</sup> Most dynasties fell when the external order and the internal order gave way to anarchy. Foreign invasion and domestic uprising, it was believed, would inevitably destroy the regime.

In its first attempt to gain entry into the lucrative Chinese trade, the East India Company sent James Flint to negotiate with the Qing government in 1759. Flint, a company trader, had to learn Chinese in order to present complaints against trade restrictions in Canton as well as against the widespread corruption there. Ironically, through bribery and skill, Flint was able to sail to Ningbo and then to Tianjin in a small 70-ton vessel, the *Success*, to present his complaints to the imperial government in Peking. It seemed that initially the emperor was willing to send a commission to investigate Flint's concerns. But *Success* was lost at sea and Flint illegally travelled south on his own.<sup>3</sup> Arrested and imprisoned for three years for breaking Qing laws regarding sailing to northward ports, for wrongly presenting petitions and for learning the Chinese language, James Flint's venture was anything but successful.

After 1760, the Qing government restricted trading in China to one port, Canton. Foreigners had to deal exclusively with the licensed Chinese Hong merchants, who were given the sole privilege of trading with foreigners. Although this situation made trading difficult, some Europeans were able to establish good relationships with the Chinese merchants in this diverse and lucrative trade. British traders used the profit from their textile businesses in India to purchase huge quantities of tea in China for shipment to Europe. It was a complicated and frustrating system, very different from the commercial equality in Europe that Western nations took for granted.<sup>4</sup>

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1. John K. Fairbank, 'A Preliminary Framework' in *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 22.

2. Ibid., 23.

3. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 119.

4. Ibid., 119-120.

As the only merchants allowed to deal with foreigners, the Hong merchants were also held to be responsible for foreigners' conduct and payment of debts. In spite of their power and influence, the Hongs were not respected because doing business was considered a low-class occupation, despised by the mandarins. They were also under the jurisdiction of the local governor and customs officer who had to pay big sums of money to the government every year. To do this, the customs officer levied heavy taxes on foreign ships as well as on the Hong merchants. The Hongs in turn passed the tax burden to the foreign traders. Limited trading ports and high fees paid to the customs officer through the Hong merchants were the main grievances of the Company traders. Naturally, their complaints reached their home countries.

The British government decided to help the merchants by sending their eminent emissary, George Macartney. Born in Belfast, Macartney was an experienced colonial administrator and diplomat. A member of the Irish and British Parliaments, he had been ambassador to Russia and chief secretary for Ireland, as well as governor of the West Indian island of Grenada, and of Madras in India. Considered the most qualified person for the China mission, Macartney was officially designated on 3 May 1792 as 'Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China'.<sup>1</sup>

### The Macartney Mission

On 26 September 1792, the British embassy set out from London with expensive gifts in a man-of-war of sixty guns with two vessels in order to impress the Emperor of China. The gifts included a globe, electrical instruments, carpets, Birmingham and Sheffield goods, copperware and Wedgwood pottery. Once on shore, it was escorted to Peking with pomp but with the official status of 'tribute emissaries'.<sup>2</sup> Macartney kowtowed to the emperor by kneeling on one knee and also made a series of bows. The emperor was satisfied with this compromised kowtow and received him courteously in September 1793 at the summer palace of Rehe. In turn, Macartney requested the British right to diplomatic residence in Peking and the ending of the trade restrictions in Canton. He also asked for the opening of new ports for commerce and the fixing of fair tariffs. The Qing emperor and his ministers duly turned down all his requests. It had been observed that Macartney 'was received with the utmost politeness, treated with the utmost hospitality, watched with the utmost vigilance, and dismissed with the utmost civility'.<sup>3</sup>

1. Immanuel Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 155.

2. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 120. Merchants, missionaries and policy-makers confidently denounced China as exclusive because of the tribute system, which regarded foreign countries as vassals. Lovell, *The Opium War*, 85.

3. Quoted in Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 160-161.

Emperor Qianlong then wrote to King George II: 'We have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country's manufactures. Therefore, O king, as regards your request to send someone to remain at the capital, while it is not in harmony with the regulations of the Celestial Empire we also feel very much that it is of no advantage to your country.'<sup>1</sup>

Returning home empty-handed, George Macartney was able to observe that China, in spite of its external splendour, was internally weak. He wrote in his journal: 'The Empire of China . . . is an old, crazy, first rate man-of-war, which a fortunate succession of able and vigilant officers has contrived to keep afloat for these one hundred and fifty years past, and to overawe their neighbours merely by her bulk and appearance.'<sup>2</sup> He believed that with less capable men in charge, China would slowly drift until 'dashed to pieces on the shore'. In Macartney's opinion, China's opposition to the ambition of the British Empire was futile because she was trying to halt the progress of human knowledge: 'The human mind is of a soaring nature and having once gained the lower steps of the ascent, struggles incessantly against every difficulty to reach the highest.'<sup>3</sup> Britain would not be deterred – her addiction to tea was only matched by her craving for territorial control and free commerce.

The failure of the Macartney mission was due to the lack of understanding between Britain and China, as they possessed very different outlooks. Thus, no treaty or alliance could be forged unless there was a change in attitude on the part of the Qing rulers. But, as far as China was concerned, the western ocean barbarians were a troublesome lot, and even dangerous. It was best to keep them at a distance and treat them as vassals.<sup>4</sup>

One of the reasons given for the failure of the Macartney mission is that China was unable to recognise the new international order of state-to-state relationship, directed by Western powers, and based on equality and mutual respect. China was unwilling to separate diplomatic relations from commercial ties. Its classic defensive strategy of the tribute system could not respond effectively to the demands made by Europeans. Macartney was not able to break through the intellectual and bureaucratic barriers embedded in the tribute system. Cultural blindness, which included anti-commercial and anti-technological prejudices in Confucianism, led to eventual conflict between China and the West.<sup>5</sup> There could not be true diplomacy based on equality because commerce was not highly valued in China.

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1. Quoted in Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 121.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Mission* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1966), 121.

5. James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 11. It was assumed that the purpose of Macartney's mission to China was exclusively



## Made in China

The East India Company had gained nothing from this expensive undertaking, but Macartney was paid handsomely for his effort.<sup>1</sup> This was the beginning of a series of British entreaties to China to remove trade restrictions and to open up more ports for commerce. To promote trade, Britain had to find out what China wanted. It seemed that China already possessed everything. Nowadays, we tend to think of ‘Made in China’ labels as signifying a product that is cheap and inferior, but in the nineteenth century, China produced ‘the best food in the world, rice; the best drink, tea; and the best clothing, cotton, silk, fur’, according to an Englishman, Robert Hart, who directed China’s customs service.<sup>2</sup> The manufactured goods produced in China as well as in India in the nineteenth century were so advanced that Europe before the industrial revolution had almost nothing to match.

According to Peter Fay, ‘[w]hat were Birmingham clocks and musical snuffboxes next to the wallpaper, fabrics, lacquer ware, porcelain, *objets d’art*, and bric-a-brac that poured out of the shops and manufactories of China?’<sup>3</sup> The superiority of Chinese products continued to be acknowledged from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that China needed nothing from Britain, the quantity of tea taken by the Company and others kept increasing. As a result, there existed a big gap in the balance of trade. Britain attempted to entice China with all kinds of exotic goods such as sandalwoods, seal skins, sea slugs, ginseng roots, bird nests, and British staples such as woollens. China would accept silver, but it was hard for the British to get hold of. Besides, silver was a commodity to keep and not to sell.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately for the British, a new commodity appeared – opium.

## The Opium Trade

In order to reduce their trade deficits, the British developed an alternative product in exchange for Chinese goods – opium, a cash crop that helped the government in its balance-of-payments strategy. Investment in the opium trade became an important aspect of Britain’s foreign policy, and the

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economic, but Macartney was also anxious to demonstrate to China the intellectual and scientific accomplishments of Great Britain through the gifts he presented to the Emperor Qianlong. *Ibid.*, 58.

1. Actually, it was not the design of the East India Company (EIC) to make profit from this venture. All monies derived from its trade were passed on to London, and the official salaries were therefore very modest. The personal wealth of the EIC officials was derived from their private trading ventures, opium included.
2. Quoted in Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War (1840-1842)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 53.
3. Fay, *The Opium War*, 53.
4. *Ibid.*, 54.



British conquest of India gave them large areas for production and sale of the cash crop. The East India Company had established a monopoly of the cultivation of opium in India, but sold licences to trade in opium to other selected Western merchants because it did not want to be involved directly in this sordid narcotic business.<sup>1</sup>

The East India Company never shipped opium to China itself, except on one occasion in the 1780s, which turned out to be disastrous. Opium was never an item on the Company's regular cargo.<sup>2</sup> It was, however, the Company officers who privately sent the drug to country ships: Jardine, Matheson and Company, founded by Scots, was the biggest opium trading firm in the Far East. It should be noted that when opium left Calcutta, stored in the ships and consigned to agents in Canton, it was a legal article all the way up the South China Sea. But once it reached the coast of China, it became contraband and had to be smuggled into the country. But who was going to do the smuggling?

It certainly would not be William Jardine or James Matheson, respectable Christian gentlemen of the British Empire! They devised a very smart and simple means of warehousing the opium. In order to avoid smuggling, Jardine, Matheson and others decided to store the opium on receiving ships or floating depots parked permanently on the coast. The selling was done while the opium was still afloat, making it a perfectly legitimate cargo or 'within the letter of the law'. In theory, no one was engaged in smuggling unless he conveyed the goods on shore. In 1840, a Member of Parliament said to John Thacker, a private merchant, 'You make smugglers out of the Chinese, but you are not smugglers yourself.'<sup>3</sup> Thacker replied, 'We supply the means of their smuggling.'<sup>4</sup> Such were the hideous and devious ways of these British traders. But why, in the first place, was there such a huge demand for opium in China in the nineteenth century?

The Chinese during the mid and late Qing dynasty smoked opium to relieve pain, stress and boredom. These addicts could be court officials, wealthy women and soldiers. In the late nineteenth century, rich people smoked opium for relaxation and labourers did it to relieve the pain caused by hauling heavy loads all day. Stressed secretaries from the magistrates' offices and students preparing for the state examinations also smoked

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1. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 169.

2. Fay, *The Opium War*, 44. The East India Company (EIC) tended to abide by the law of the Qing Empire and therefore only attempted to ship opium to Guangzhou once. This attempt was a commercial flop, since recreational opium from Bengal was still too weak and too cheap for a society revelling in ostentatious consumption patterns. The alternative market was Greater Malaya (today's Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia), which became a key market for the EIC's opium exports. Only the Dutch surpassed the British Company in this respect during the 18th century.

3. Quoted in Fay, *The Opium War*, 45.

4. *Ibid.*, 46.

opium, as did soldiers on their way to suppress the rebels. By the end of the nineteenth century, even peasants became addicts, especially those who grew poppies as a cash crop to supplement their income.<sup>1</sup>

Opium addiction had serious economic repercussions in China. It affected the demand for other commodities because most of the money was spent on the drug and hence the market slowed down. The opium addiction resulted in a continuous outflow of silver. In spite of this economic crisis, the opium trade could not be curtailed because China lacked a well-organised customs service, a strong navy, and an honest civil service. Officials in charge of suppressing the drug were corrupt and actually connived with the smugglers. The incompetence and ineffectiveness of the Chinese customs service was matched by the ingenious and enterprising spirit of the British opium traders.<sup>2</sup>

It was a national crisis and the Qing government was determined to stop the drug trade. Opium addiction had toxic effects on the morality and health of the Chinese population, not to mention the drain on the nation's silver. Commissioner Lin Zexu, in charge of suppressing opium, believed that if opium was not banned within a few decades, China would have no soldiers to fight the enemy and no funds to support an army. Lin proposed the destruction of the smoking equipment, along with the punishment of Chinese opium dealers, traders and consumers. An upright and incorruptible civil servant, Lin vowed that he would not quit until the opium problem was dealt with. Aware that Britain was a powerful nation, he hoped to avoid conflict, but opium had to be suppressed even if it meant war. His campaigns against the Chinese opium dealers and corrupt officials were very successful, but less so when dealing with the foreign smugglers.<sup>3</sup>

Lin had tried to reason with the foreigners, encouraging them to stick to trade in tea, silk and rhubarb, and to avoid harming Chinese with opium. In a letter to Queen Victoria, Lin wrote: 'We have heard that in your honourable nation, too . . . the people are not permitted to smoke the drug, and that offenders in this particular expose themselves to sure punishment. . . . In order to remove the source of the evil thoroughly, would it not be better to prohibit its sale and manufacture rather than merely prohibit its consumption?'<sup>4</sup> Further, Lin wrote, 'Suppose there were people from another country who carried opium for sale to England and seduced your people into buying and smoking it; certainly you would deeply hate it and be bitterly aroused.'<sup>5</sup>

1. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 129.

2. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 172.

3. Ibid., 180. See also Arthur Waley, *The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958), 11-157.

4. Quoted in Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 151.

5. Front matter, W. Travis Hanes III and Frank Sanello, *The Opium War: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another* (Naperville, I.L.: Sourcebook, Inc., 2002)

Although a scholar, Lin's letter reveals the typical Chinese's invincible ignorance of the barbarian culture. The Queen of England, unlike the Emperor of China, was a constitutional monarch, with no power to stop the opium trade immediately. Further, opium was not forbidden in Britain. Famous users of opium include Thomas De Quincey, who wrote a bestseller entitled *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* in 1821, and the poet, Samuel Coleridge, who intoxicated the world with his fine verse:

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.  
So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round:  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

The summer palace, built in 1709 by the Kangxi Emperor, was said to have inspired Coleridge to write about his opium-fuelled dream. Incidentally, this palace was destroyed during the Second Opium War in 1860 under the command of Lord Elgin. At any rate, Lin was trying to appeal to the Queen's sense of moral responsibility, but his exhortation fell on deaf ears. He was naïve to think that London would not support the illicit opium trade. Britain needed the money to redress their trade deficits. Lin also thought that 'the British could not live without tea and rhubarb and their soldiers' legs could not stretch because of the puttees'.<sup>1</sup>

On 18 March 1839, Lin ordered the British to surrender all their opium within three days and sign a bond pledging not to engage in the trade in the future. Violation of the bond would incur the death penalty and the confiscation of the drug. Lin also offered a reward of five catties of tea for each chest of opium surrendered.<sup>2</sup> When the foreigners ignored his instruction, Lin ordered the trade to be stopped and a British factory captured when all their Chinese servants and cooks had left. On 27 March 1839, Captain Charles Elliot on behalf of his government ordered all the British traders to surrender their opium to Lin.<sup>3</sup> This was done, but Elliot refused to sign the bond drawn up by Lin; Britain was not going to rest her case.

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1. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 192.

2. Ibid., 181.

3. Ibid., 182.

## The Opium War

'I am so glad to say that our Chief Superintendent seems completely weaned of his hostility to the drug traffic.'

William Jardine, opium trader,  
on Britain's highest-ranking official in China.<sup>1</sup>

As news of the destruction of opium and the blockade reached Britain, there was intense lobbying for Parliament to retaliate. The British Parliament authorised the dispatch of a fleet with troops from India in order to obtain 'satisfaction and reparation' and if needed, 'to hold in custody the ships of the Chinese and their cargoes'.<sup>2</sup> For the British, war was necessary to defend their right to trade, to uphold their national honour and to correct the injustice inflicted on the British officials and their subjects in China. For the Chinese, it was a war against opium trafficking.

Commanded by Admiral George Elliot, the full British fleet, consisting of sixteen warships carrying 540 guns with about 4000 troops and four newly-designed armed steamers, arrived in Canton in June 1840. Four ships then blockaded the entrance of the harbour in Canton and the rest of the force sailed northwards. In July, two ships blockaded Ningbo, seized the main town on the island of Zhoushan off the Zhejiang coast, and from there, they controlled the sea traffic to the Yangzi Delta region.<sup>3</sup>

In August 1841, the British fleet under Henry Pottinger, sailed northward, seized Xiamen and Ningbo and recaptured Zhoushan. In June 1842, the British captured Shanghai and took Zhejiang in July. Refusing to negotiate, Pottinger pushed towards Nanjing and occupied the former capital city.<sup>4</sup>

The firepower and destructive capability of British steam-driven vessels played a significant role in the First Opium War. The *Nemesis*, operating in the waters off Canton, broke the resistance of the Chinese army single-handedly. An eyewitness remarked: 'They are more afraid of her [*Nemesis*] than all the line of battleships put together.'<sup>5</sup> The *Nemesis* was a paddle steamer weighing 660 tons, belonging to the Secret Committee of the East

1. Quoted in Hanes and Sanello, *The Opium War*, 85.

2. Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 153-154. Lovell regards British aggression as 'a strident patriotism that shouted about the civilising missions of Christianity and Free Trade, while trampling over other political, economic and cultural visions. Sino-Western relations are still paying the price of the Opium War's quick fix today.' Lovell, *The Opium War*, 168.

3. *Ibid.*, 155.

4. *Ibid.*, 156.

5. Quoted in Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993), 147.

India Company, but not listed with the ships of the Company's navy. Except for deck, spars and sundries, she was built of iron. Her armament was made up of two pivot mounted thirty-two-pounders, several six-pounders and swivels and a rocket launcher. *Nemesis* was like a private steamer.<sup>1</sup>

The British had used their technological inventions to defend the nation's commercial interest in the Far East with great effect and success. Defeated badly by Britain's superior arms, the Qing government sued for peace. On 29 August 1842 the Treaty of Nanjing was signed with the following terms:

1. An indemnity of US\$21 million: \$12 million for military expenses, \$6 million for the destroyed opium, and \$3 million for the repayment of the Hong merchants' debt to British traders;
2. Abolition of the Cohong guild of Chinese merchants that monopolised foreign trade;
3. Opening of five ports to trade and residence of British consuls and merchants and their families: Canton, Xiamen, Foochow, Ningbo, and Shanghai;
4. Cession of Hong Kong;
5. Equality in official correspondence;
6. A fixed tariff, to be established shortly afterwards.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, at gunpoint, China was forced to sign the treaty without the kind of careful consideration and deliberation that was usually done in the West. It was sheer bullying. Ironically, opium, the main cause of the war, was not mentioned at all. After the British signed the treaty, the Americans and the French came forward requesting similar deals. The Opium War of 1839 dealt a great blow to Chinese self-confidence and the Treaty of Nanjing fundamentally altered the Qing's relationship with foreign powers and ended the strict control of foreigners living in China.

## On the Evils of Opium

Reactions in Britain regarding the opium trade and war were mixed. Here are some of the comments:<sup>3</sup>

1. Fay, *The Opium War*, 261.
2. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, 190.
3. Comments quoted in Hanes and Sanello, *The Opium War* in front matter and on 77. Julia Lovell holds that the term 'Opium War' was satirically coined to draw attention to the 'misdeeds of China' and the 'disgraceful Whig government'. Some felt it was 'the most disgraceful war in our history . . . we lost about 69 men, and killed between 20,000 and 25,000 Chinese. There is no honour to be gained in a war like that.' Another group, which included missionaries, believed that the Chinese deserved to be punished by punitive violence for their heathen cruelty and immorality, among other vices. Lovell, *The Opium War*, 243.

‘Britain earned vast revenues from the opium trade by poisoning a substantial portion of the Chinese population.’

Martin Booth, novelist and poet.

‘A war more unjust in its origin, a war calculated in its progress to cover this country with a permanent disgrace, I do not know and I have not read of . . . [Our] flag is become a pirate flag, to protect an infamous traffic.’

William Gladstone, then an Opposition MP, 1840.

‘The use of opium is not a curse, but a comfort and benefit to the hard-working Chinese.’

1858 press release from the British firm of Jardine, Matheson & Co.,  
China’s biggest opium importer.

‘I am in dread of the judgment of God upon England for our national iniquity towards China.’

William Gladstone, 1842.

One consequence of the First Opium War was the opening of China to Christian missions. But to what extent was the East India Company influenced by Christian principles? The East India Company was a mercantile enterprise, but in 1813 when negotiating for the renewal of the Company’s charter, the British Parliament asked whether the acquisition of empire by the Company included the duty to promote Christianity and, if so, what kind of Christianity would it promote – the established church or all the Protestant denominations? The issue of toleration was also debated in Parliament regarding the Company’s duty.<sup>1</sup>

These issues were never followed up in the Company, as their interest was solely in trading, profit and the acquisition of foreign territories. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Company at first refused even to carry missionaries on board her chartered ships. If the intending missionary was likely to be rejected by the Chinese, he could expect an even more hostile rejection from European traders. The British were in China to trade and disliked having any complications associated with the presence of missionaries in a situation that was already very difficult. On many occasions the British government, both the London office as well as its representatives in China, ‘must devoutly have wished that all missionaries were at the bottom of the sea’.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the traders’ difficulties with the Chinese were due to the presence of missionaries, especially those working in the interior of China. A wise British representative in Peking, Sir Rutherford Alcock said, ‘It would be

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1. Penelope Carson, *The East India Company and Religion, 1698-1858* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2012), 3.
  2. Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Mission*, 147.

decidedly for the peace of China if Christianity and its emissaries were, for the present at least, excluded altogether.' He believed that 'the whole question of missionary difficulties resolves itself into one of peace or war'.<sup>1</sup> In other words, it was simply wrong and unjust that the spread of Christianity should be done with military intervention by one of the Western powers against the will of the rulers and against the moral conviction of the nation.

## Opium and Christ

Some Christians were critical of Britain engaging in a war of aggressive economic imperialism, but they were also excited about the prospect for missionary work in the treaty ports of Foochow, Ningbo, Xiamen and Shanghai, where foreigners were guaranteed the right of residence. Thus the prospect of China opening up attracted the imagination of Christians no less than that of the mercantile free traders from Manchester.<sup>2</sup> The British missionary movement especially welcomed the favourable outcome of the war, and at the same time criticised the morality of this economic aggression. Indeed, there was conflict and compromise between the British imperial economic empire and the ecclesiastical empire, as it were. How to sell opium and Christ at the same time?

In addition, missionaries needed money to travel along the coast and merchants and officials needed reliable cultural brokers to facilitate their dealings with the inscrutable Chinese. Eventually, '[I]t was practically taken for granted that on the China coast the Protestant mission should be England's official interpreting and translating arm.' Furthermore, 'Missionaries, like all Westerners in the Canton area before the Opium War, were dependent on the opium trade and could hardly avoid participating in it, at least passively.'<sup>3</sup>

Evangelical Christians believed that there must be some purpose behind the opium war, which was consistent with God's providence. Samuel Wilberforce put forward this question to a missionary society in 1846:

Will any reasonable man tell me that the providence of God led on a Christian people into that war in which so many of that unhappy people perished unavoidably, in order that the English people might buy that luxury [tea] some penny a pound cheaper than they could have bought it otherwise? I declare that it seems to me tantamount to denying the government of God to harbour such a thought.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 16. See Stuart Creighton Miller, 'Ends and Means: Missionary Justification of Force in Nineteenth Century China', in John King Fairbank, ed., *Missionary Enterprise in China and America* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 251-257.

3. Quoted in Miller and Stanczak, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48.2, 339.

4. Quoted in Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 107.



Some evangelicals believed the first opium war to be ‘an incontrovertible example of God’s characteristic device of using the “wrath of man to praise him” – God was bending “the instrumentality of evils which have arisen through the sin of man and the devices of Satan” to his own saving purposes, and thus leading such evils to work out their own eventual destruction’.<sup>1</sup> Here is another example of Christians condemning the injustice of the war while approving of its outcome, which was the opening of treaty ports for commerce and evangelisation.

Enjoying this new freedom provided by the provision in the Treaty of Nanjing, many missionaries sought to reconcile the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations with the traffic in opium:

[We cannot] look upon the iniquitous cupidity of our opium traffic otherwise than as a great crime, and the war, to which we resorted to enforce it, as at once a national calamity and disgrace. But it is the prerogative of God, out of evils which nations inflict one upon another, to bring forth their greater good, and even to make the very sins of men subserve the designs of his mercy to the world.<sup>2</sup>

However, when the missionaries moved into the villages, towns and cities, they were able to see for themselves the evil consequences of the opium trade and the wretchedness, disease and death that opium addiction had caused. In fact, they witnessed ‘how consumption erected a narcotic barrier that no form of evangelical persuasion could penetrate. Opium “polluted the medium” of conversion and opposition to it now became an unequivocal fixture of their movement.’<sup>3</sup>

Once they had personally witnessed the evils of opium addiction, the missionaries began to campaign against its production, sale and use. But without the opium trade, the missionaries would not be able to move freely to propagate their faith. Thus the relationship between missionaries and opium traders was a complicated one. They could be supportive at one time and resistant at another. Their position shifted between silence, connivance and condemnation. The missionaries had to study carefully how best to advance their religious interest: every move was calculated to push forward the Great Commission.

1. Ibid. Critical of the Protestant missionary lobby in Great Britain, Lovell holds that they were hypocritical when they said, ‘We weep over the miseries let loose on [the Chinese]; but we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that nothing but the strong arm of foreign power can soon open the field for the entrance of the Gospel.’ The missionaries believed that opening the hinterland of China to them was a privilege due ‘to the honour of Great Britain, to the great principles of liberty, and above all to the interests of Christianity’. Lovell, *The Opium War*, 256.
2. Quoted in Miller and Stanczak, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48.2, 346.
3. Ibid., 347.

In general, foreigners without business interests and Christian missionaries shared Commissioner Lin's abhorrence of the opium trade. Some even supported his zero-tolerance strategy to eradicate this evil. The missionaries remained optimistic that opium addiction would be eradicated with strict legislation. But some Protestant missionaries were also critical of the Chinese, believing them to be materialistic and worldly, and ignoring the fact that their indigenous religions had provided them with comfort and consolation. The Chinese generally regarded the Christian religion, accompanied by its Western ideologies, as too foreign for local consumption.

On the whole, the legacy of the encounter between Christianity and China during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries left a very negative impression in the Chinese collective consciousness. Besides its association with Western imperialism, which was bad enough, the sense of European superiority and nationalism on the part of foreign missionaries made it almost impossible for Christianity to flourish on Chinese soil. Furthermore, the reluctance to hand the leadership of the church to local pastors hindered the development of the local church. When Christianity did have a great impact on the local Chinese, positively and negatively, it turned out to be a very violent affair, as revealed by the Taiping Uprising and the Boxer Rebellion, which will be the focus of the next chapter.