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## OPIUM IN CHINA (1700-1860)

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### CHRONOLOGY:

See also [Frequently Asked Questions About Heroin, Morphine, and the Opiates - Heroin/Morphine FAQ](#)

source: (Research Issues 24) Perspectives on the History of Psychoactive Substance Use; NIDA,USDHEW 1978. pgs 134-140

#### c. 1700

Introduction Use of tobacco-opium mixtures (madak) begins in the East Indies (probably Java) spreads to Formosa, Fukien and the South China coast (refs). In 1689, Engelberg Kaempfer inspects primitive dens where the mixture is dispensed (Amoenitates Exoticae, 1712:642-5).

#### 1729

First Edict Reports reach Peking of the evils of opium smoking (shrivelling up the features; early deaths) in Formosa and Fukien; Emperor Yung Chen prohibits the sale of opium and the operation of smoking houses. etc. etc. blah blah blah.....

#### c. 1750

The British East India Company assumes control of Bengal and Bihar, the opium growing districts of eastern India; British shipping dominates the Bengal opium trade out of Calcutta.

#### 1757

Early Trade Britain annexes Bengal; the Chinese confine foreign trade to Canton where it can be restricted and controlled in the interests of revenue for the Chinese. Honk Kong merchants serve as intermediaries between the foreigners and the Chinese authorities.

#### 1767

Opium Imports Rise Opium from Bengal continues to enter China despite the edict of 1729 prohibiting smoking. It increases in frequency from 200 chests annually in 1729 to 1000 annually by 1967. However, much is for medicinal use. Tariffs are collected on the opium.

#### 1772

The East India company establishes a limited monopoly over Bengal opium; the company has general control but the operation is in the hands of contractors, who advance company funds to the farmers, purchase the opium produced, and sell it to the company which then auctions it off to merchants in Calcutta. British companies are the principal shippers.

#### 1773-86

Limited Monopoly Warren Hastings, the first governor general of India, recognizes that opium is harmful and at first opposes increasing production; later he encourages the the control of opium by the company hoping that by monopolizing and limiting the supply he will discourage its consumption. This limited monopoly lasts throughout his administration and beyond, but when the Chinese market is discovered, the monopoly shifts from controlling to expanding cultivation.

#### 1779

Opium Imported First mention of actual trading in opium at Canton.

#### 1780

Prohibition Attempted British traders establish an opium depot at Macao. Another imperial edict prohibits consumption of opium and reiterates prohibition of its sale.

#### 1787

British Trade in opium is still less important than trade debate in commodities; directors of the East India Company, over opium, recognizing China's objections to the importation of opium, make offers to prohibit the export of Indian opium to China. However, company representatives in Canton declare that the Chinese are never sincere in their declared intentions of suppressing illicit traffic, as long as the officials issue prohibitory edicts with one hand and extend the other to receive bribes from the illegal trade.

deletia

#### 1796

Prohibition Alarmed by increasing use, the emperor issues an Attempted edict forbidding importation of opium, as well as export of Chinese silver that is being used as a medium of exchange. Now even legitimate trade is limited to barter. Nonetheless, illegal purchase of opium with silver continues.

#### 1797

Trade Monopoly The company assumes full control of Bengal opium.

#### 1799

Trade, A strong edict by authorities at Canton, cultivation ban, supporting the emperor's decree of 1796, forbids opium trade at that port. A concurrent drive against native poppy growing is initiated. Opium becomes an illicit commodity.

Trade diverted, The 1799 edict increases traffic through smuggling. Macao and other areas beyond government control enabling UNPRECEDENTED GROWTH. The British declare only their legitimate cargo, leave opium on board to be picked up by Chinese merchants who smuggle it ashore in small, fast boats.

#### 1800

Anti-Opium Opium becomes identified with official policy develops. corruption, criminals and antigovernment secret societies. An imperial edict prohibits domestic cultivation and repeats the prohibition against importing opium. China develops an anti-opium policy, at least on paper. Edicts continue to be issued reiterating prohibitions against importation, sale, and consumption of opium.

#### 1804

Canton Trade Resumes Opium trading resumes at the port of Canton. Though the 1799 edict is still in force, it has little effect and no immediate practical change in policy ensues.

#### Opiates Britain 1800-1917

" Patent medicines and opium preparations such as \_Dover's Powder were readily available without restrictions. Indeed, Laudanum (opium mixed with alcohol) was cheaper than beer or wine and readily within the means of the lowest-paid worker. As a result, throughout the first half of the 19th century, the incidence of opium dependence appears to have increased steadily in England, Europe and the United States. Working-class medicinal use of opium-bearing nostrums as sedatives for children was especially prominent in England.

However, despite some well known cases among 19th century English literary and creative personalities--Thomas de Quincey, Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, and Dickens--recreational use was limited, and there is no evidence that use was so excessive as to be a medical or social concern."

#### SOURCE:

Perspectives on the History of Psychoactive Substance Use. REsearch Issues 24; NIDA, USDHEW; pg. 155 [Opiates Britain 1800-1917]

Chronology:

#### 1800-20s

Domestic opium cultivation is encouraged by increased opium use, along with rising prices and problems with Cultivation. adulteration. It declines after the 1820s, but there does not appear to have been any call for controls.

#### 1834-50

An awareness grows of endemic opium use among Fenish peoples, who both tolerate and successfully control their use by informal social mechanisms. Use is particularly widespread among poorer classes, agricultural populations, the inhabitants of small hamlets and isolated farms, and women and babies.

Contemporary observers attribute initiation of use for the rheumatic pains which plague almost everyone in this low-lying marshy area.

#### 1839

Opium and its preparations are responsible for more premature deaths than any other chemical agent. Opiates account for 186 of 543 poisonings, including no fewer than 72 among children.



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