

Peace, War, and a Cup of Tea: A Deconstruction of Imperial “Othering” in Opium-Ridden China

Maya Fillmore

CULS 4401 Directed Study: Drugs

Dr. Randi R. Warne

December 16, 2016

Eloquent opium! that to the hearts of poor and rich alike, for the wounds that will never heal...to the guilty man, for one night givest back the hopes of his youth, and hands washed pure from blood...Thou hast the keys of paradise, oh, just, subtle, and mighty opium!

– Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*

To deconstruct the history of China's last two centuries, it is difficult not to discuss the history of the opium trade, and the devastating effect British Imperialism had on Chinese society. Having the ability to relieve hours of pain and suffering through a few short minutes with the pipe, it is no wonder that opium's use as a worldwide drug had gained so much popularity. The opium trade would become a transformative force in both Britain and China who would fight two wars in its name over the course of the nineteenth century. While the wider history of British trade and imperialism is a critical aspect in the narrative of the Opium Wars, an investigation into the social and cultural motivations of why the British East India Company started its opium trade is essential to one's understanding of what factors brought on the addiction of one empire as well as the corruption of another. As a nation with an uncontrollable addiction to tea, Britain fought to retain the right to supply the Chinese with opium in order to finance the tea trade. The typical Chinese identity became exoticized and "othered" by Eurocentric views of the world based on Western concepts of opium addictions. What would be scrutinized as the first symbolic act of Western aggression, the Opium Wars and unequal treaties resulting from their resolution would lead the British to demoralize the Chinese through years of Imperial domination. This fascinating yet tragic history tells stories of hundreds of years of opium trade resulting in a drug-induced devastation of the Chinese people, a plague which would haunt Sino-Western relations for centuries.

Although it had rarely been discussed by Western scholars prior to the British East India Company's opium trade, the opium poppy was introduced into China long before the years leading up to the Opium Wars. The actual opium poppy was introduced by Arab traders somewhere between the fourth and seventh century.¹ The smoking of tobacco and opium became popular in China due to the trade's availability. However, the Hong Taiji emperor put an end to the drug craze amongst his subjects and outlawed smoking tobacco in 1637, while the Dorgon emperor prohibited opium smoking in 1644.² However, in Lucasz Kamienski's text *Shooting Up*, it is revealed that the prohibition only made the desirability for opium stronger. In his Opium Wars section, Kamienski states that by the end of the seventeenth century, one out of every fourth Chinese was smoking opium.³

The alarming amount of addictions to smoking opium mixed with tobacco encouraged the Peking government to sign an edict in 1729 which prohibited the sale and promotion of opium. Special attention was directed at punishing the sources whose selling of the "social evil" allowed it to thrive, such as the shopkeepers, opium smugglers, and corrupt policemen. Joshua Rowntree, a nineteenth-century researcher of opium addiction, published a number of written works outlining Chinese addiction to the drug. In his 1905 text titled *The Imperial Drug Trade*, Rowntree states that whilst opium use was first convicted, the opium sellers were punished, and not the actual drug users:

Sellers of opium were to bear the wooden collar for a month, and to be banished to the frontier... Their assistants were to be beaten with 100 blows, and banished 1000 miles.

Boat-men, neighbours lending help, soldiers, police-runners, all in any way connected

¹ Chris Feige, and Jeffrey A. Miron, "The Opium Wars, Opium Legalization and Opium Consumption in China." *Applied Economics Letters* 15, no. 12 (2008): 911.

² Lukasz Kamienski, *Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015), 60.

³ *Ibid.*

with the matter, had punishments assigned them... Only the opium smoker was exempted.⁴

It is easily discovered how opium smokers were regarded as the victim who suffered a demoralizing fate, all while others profited from the drug's addiction. It was not only the Peking government who acknowledged rising addictions to opium; as drugs addictions increased, so did its demand for steady import. Numerous Western powers, namely the Portuguese, English, and Dutch, sensed a steady opportunity to accumulate wealth in the East. Out of the Western powers stated above, the British East India Company would grow to dominate the opium trade by using Indian territory, principally on the Ganges plain, to farm opium poppies on land otherwise used to farm cotton.⁵

The British East India Company (EIC) did not physically dirty their hands through opium production, it oversaw East Indian labourers to painstakingly harvest and process the drug. The window of opportunity for opium to be produced and available is limited to a few days between which the poppy flowers drop, and the seed pod matures. After the pod has matured, enormous pressure is placed on labourers, who must seize the limited opportunity in order to harvest standardized quotas of opium gums.⁶ After the flower pod has been scored, a white substance would exude from the cut and oxidise to a reddish-brown colour, this gummy substance opium in its rawest state. After the opium was harvested, it can then be used to smoke, extracted into morphine, and heroin derived.⁷ Raw opium can be eaten or diluted in liquid, however, the most common use of the drug is to boil the opium, then dry it to prepare it for smoking.

⁴ Joshua Rowntree, *The Imperial Drug Trade: A Re-Statement of the Opium Question, in the Light of Recent Evidence and New Developments in the East* (London: Methuen and Co, 1905), 12.

⁵ Richard J Grace, *Opium and Empire: The Lives and Careers of William Jardine and James Matheson* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2014), 87.

⁶ Julia Lovell, *The Opium War* (London: Picador, 2012), 3.

⁷ Oakley Ray, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behaviour* (Saint Louis: The C. V. Mosby Company, 1978), 300.

During the late eighteenth century, the British East India Company had been spiraling into debt due to their extensive tea addiction and trade with China.⁸ As a result the company was experiencing a shortage of silver coins and were in search of a solution which would allow the British to continue their steady export of tea. The EIC eventually proposed a new trading deal which would allow for more freedom in the trading of tea, while effectively saving the company silver. To maximize their profit margin, the East India Company endeavoured to grow opium poppies in India, which would then be converted to opium. The opium trade allowed for British's tea addiction to be satiated at the expense of China's national health. The British opium trade allowed for the exploitation of East Indians to farm and produce opium used to exchange with China for black tea. The tea would be then paid for with the profits made from the opium trade, and finally, the tea would be sold in Britain for an additional profit. By around 1820, tea was easily the most profitable Chinese export commodity, with trade generating profits of about £3 million each year once resold in Britain.⁹

Effectively, the East India Company intended to use their profits from the illegal drug trade to buy tea, which in turn was sold again to make more profit. Eventually, three million sixty-four thousand pounds of opium were being imported into China, all for a cup of tea.¹⁰ Britain's endeavor to establish an opium trade in China first began in an easily managed way, with only 200 chests of opium, about 63.5 kilograms each, entering China in 1729. Just six years after the first British import of opium, the amount of drug chests in 1735 had doubled, and by 1767, the number of chests was recorded at 1,000. To further establish British dominance in the opium market, the East India Company obtained an opium monopoly in both Bengal and

⁸ Feige, and Miron, "The Opium Wars," 911.

⁹ Grace, *Opium and Empire*, 67.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

Bombay in 1773. At the turn of the nineteenth-century, the addiction for more opium increased, therefore, allowing the opium trade to thrive. By 1838, the number of opium chests peaked at 34,000.¹¹ As opium was re-established as a recreational drug, it wrought havoc on Chinese society, effectively enticing much of China's population.

After opium was reintroduced into China, opium smoking was mainly confined to the upper classes, due to their abundance of wealth. However, as the Daoguang Emperor attempted to maintain control and dominance over his subjects, the practice quickly spread throughout the middle and lower classes of Chinese society. Unlike anything before, the intoxication caused by milk of the poppy crossed the strict barriers of social classes, and became a highly sought after, yet cultural destructive commodity.¹² Likewise in many parts of India, the opium farming industry first began as a small operation, but soon became commodified due to the high demand of Chinese civilian's addiction. What once began as a small industry affair, later turned into a highly organized and systematic harvest of the opium poppy. Opium poppies were planted systematically, on a large scale, on the agricultural lands of India. The labour-intensive practice of coaxing the opium at its time of harvest was completed at the expense of their colonial-run Indian labour force.

The mass market demand for raw and processed opium allowed for the East India Company to invest in the industrialization of opium production within India. Standardization for the packaging and pricing of opium was also controlled to ensure that maximum profit intakes were achieved.¹³ In their text, *Globalization, Cultural Change, and the Modern Drug Epidemics*, Yi-Mak and Harrison state that the industrialization processing of the opium sometimes caused:

¹¹ Kamienski, *Shooting Up*, 60.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Kam Yi-Mak, and Larry Harrison, "Globalization, cultural change and the modern drug epidemics: The case of Hong Kong," *Health, Risk & Society* 3, no. 1 (2001): 39-57.

“over production by farmers [which] led to periodic surpluses, resulting in price falls, the reduced prices usually stimulated demand in China, so that the market kept expanding throughout the nineteenth century.”¹⁴ After the opium was harvested, packaged, and boarded upon ships it was exported to China via Calcutta.

In Yangwen Zheng’s article “The Social Life of Opium in China,” he describes how all types of individuals were enticed by the temptations of opium:

Women constituted a large smoking population and their motives for consumption varied dramatically. Like men of letters, soldiers, and eunuchs, they also redefined the social life of opium. Opium was a luxury for the upper and upper middle classes, an aphrodisiac for courtesans and prostitutes, a livelihood for the lower classes and a “pain-killer” for those who chose to end their pains.¹⁵

Opium dens could be found all over Canton and appealed to all classes. Practically all individuals who could afford the pipe were able to indulge in the luxury of opium. The widespread appeal of opium to all classes of Chinese society led to a record in the late 1830s of four million people being addicted to opium.¹⁶ Despite the existing law which condemned the sale or use of opium smoking, addiction became so widespread that the Dowager Empress Cixi herself was an opium addict.¹⁷ As a result of her addiction, the Dowager Empress exempted citizens over the age of sixty from conviction. Consequently, as the Empress Dowager Cixi had become addicted to opium, the substantial poisoning of the Chinese population signified how all citizens, whether they be of low or high status, were vulnerable to the white poison.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵ Yangwen Zheng, “The Social Life of Opium in China, 1483-1999,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 30.

¹⁶ Kamienski, *Shooting Up*, 61.

¹⁷ Travis Hanes, and Frank Sanello. *The Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another*. (Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2004), 295.

As Lucasz Kamienski puts it so wonderfully: “What the West attempted to achieve through its opiate-based ‘moral poisoning’ was numbness, impoverishment, demoralization, and the destruction of the centuries-old Confucian values.”¹⁸ Effectively throughout the Opium Wars, the East India Company enforced and fought the Chinese to accept their free trade in poison. The Opium Wars has been widely discussed as a free trade of British imperialism, and enforced Western standards of health, strength, and dedication to preserving one’s concept of nation. The East India Company gladly fueled Chinese civilian demand for opium as their bodies grew more dependent on their addiction, eventually reaching the state of dysfunction if addicts went without their supply.

By 1839, five million six hundred thirty-nine thousand pounds were imported into China without any regulation. Due to the British encouragement of illegal opium trade within China, opium addiction became widespread across the country resulting in an increase of moral corruption in millions of citizens. The Daoguang Emperor decreed that opium use was a capital offense, and that severing internal trade of opium became a major focus in the during the late Qing dynasty. Focusing on ceasing all trade of opium within China, the Emperor assigned Lin Tseh-Sen as Commissioner of trade to stop the chaotic trade of opium within China.

During this period the First Opium War was started due to the heightened tension between the Emperor and the East India Company. Although Lin successfully seized and destroyed a large quantity of opium, the control maintained by the East India Company was so strong that opium trade continued to be enforced. In response to the British resisting Chinese control, the Chinese severed British food shipments and poisoned a large quantity of the East India Company’s water supply.¹⁹ Over the course of the battle, and as the British gained more

¹⁸ Kamienski, *Shooting Up*, 59.

¹⁹ Lovell, *The Opium War*, 115.

territory in mainland China, the British army began to find opium pipes beside the befallen towers and Chinese cannons. The discovery made by the British army, therefore, revealed that the Chinese resistance was weakened by the very drug it had been fighting against.²⁰ Much of the Chinese army weakened due to their addiction to opium, while the British army embodied discipline, and clarity of mind. This observation further enforced the common Western sentiment that the Chinese were morally corrupt, and uncivilized beings compared to the British troops.²¹ Of course, the British demoralizing the Chinese was horribly hypocritical, as they had been the original force to encourage and sustain opium addiction.

In his book *The Social Life of Opium in China*, Yangwen Zheng supports the concept that opium addiction was one of the largest fallbacks of the eventual defeat of the Chinese army:

Opium had demilitarized the fighting machine, as soldiers found the best way to escape boredom and combat responsibilities. Given seven thousand soldiers out of ten thousand were invalids, any battle would have been lost. Here, however, it was not only the battle against the Yao people that was lost but also the first Opium War itself.²²

Smoking of opium among the Chinese troops not only destroyed the soldier's discipline, but also diminished one's spirit and diluted one's sentiment of military morale. While other sources argue that the soldiers smoked opium to increase their courage to fight, it can be understood that the smoking of opium before or after battle would severely reduce the clarity of the soldier's mind.²³

A series of events ensued, which involved the killing of a Chinese merchant at the hands of two drunk British sailors. Despite enforcing beneficial control over his Chinese citizens, Lin's

²⁰ Kamienski, *Shooting Up*, 61

²¹ Lovell, *The Opium War*, 115.

²² Yangwen Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 92.

²³ Kamienski, *Shooting Up*, 64.

ships were attacked and defeated by the British. The signing of the Treaty of Nanjing took place on August 19, 1842, therefore effectively ended the First Opium War. However, the Treaty of Nanjing is widely regarded as being extremely unfair, as the Chinese suffered many obligations, while Britain had none. The treaty outlined Britain's deliverance of a new colony, Hong Kong, which represented an open opportunity to continue with trade now being even closer to mainland China. The British tried to persuade the emperor to legalize, and regulate the import of opium through taxation. However, the Daogong emperor's higher ethics disagreed, and he was recorded as stating: "I cannot prevent the introduction of the flowing poison; gain-seeking and corrupt men will for profit and sensuality defeat my wishes, but nothing will induce me to derive a revenue from the vice and misery of my people."²⁴

The Second Opium War began in 1856 as a result of Canton officials disgracing the British flag aboard the ship *Arrow*. The Treaty of Tientsin was signed in June of 1858 and attempted to instill a level of peace between the British and the Chinese. Similar with the Treaty of Nanjing, Tientsin contained little reference to the opium trade, with many references to widening and increasing the freedom of trade to clearly benefit the British. These unequal treaties allowed the British more Chinese ports for foreign trade, as well as increasing its ports to international trade. The largest deal within the Treaty of Tientsin was the legalization of opium, which the British proposed as a solution to help control addiction numbers within China; this legalization of course, would allow the EIC to increase the quantity and the price of opium trade in China, therefore adding to their profit margin.²⁵ China attempted to reduce consumption of opium by legalizing the drug in 1858 with a tariff of about 8 percent.²⁶ Both the Treaty of

²⁴ Rowntree, *The Imperial Drug Trade*, 71.

²⁵ Feige, and Miron, "The Opium Wars," 911.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 912.

Tientsin and the Treaty of Nanjing are often referred to as the “unequal treaties,” as their contents only favoured the British. The unequal treaties have also been cited as a landmark in time upon which Western powers increased their control and influence over China through its abuse of the Chinese trade system.²⁷

It is known that opium smoking has had many reputations within China, whether it be regarded as a foreign evil that was forcibly imported into China, or simply as an escape tool, or pain-killer for the lower classes. Other popular speculations often view opium as an aphrodisiac, which is an interesting argument on its own. Even with its erotic association, the real effect of opium smoking has the ability to suppress feelings of desire, activity, and pleasure. Despite opium being a stimulant drug, the after effect of smoking could either result in either calmness, excitement or drowsiness.²⁸ Despite the non-conforming nature of opium, male narcotic users have often reported frequent impotence and delayed ejaculation spans after using the drug.²⁹ Taking all evidence into account, opium smoking is unlikely to be a conducive measure for men to engage in prior to sexual intercourse due to one’s narcotic-induced loss of inhibitions.

Likely connected to the myth of opium as an aphrodisiac was the employment of young women to run teahouses, restaurants, and brothels. As with most advertisements, associating attractive women with a product has been shown to be a strong enticer for male customers. In Zheng’s article, it is noted that as opium addiction became more popular across China, the more women became employed in the service industry. He states that the process of “heating up a tiny globule of opium paste until it bubbled, scooping it up with a small needle, putting it on the bowl of a long-stemmed pipe and holding it above the oil-burning lamp until it was smoked” all turned

²⁷ Jack Beeching, *The Chinese Opium Wars* (New York: Harcourt, 1976), 262.

²⁸ Lovell, *The Opium War*, 19.

²⁹ Ray, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behaviour*, 299.

into a craft.³⁰ Caring for the opium pipe and its smoker was almost certainly done by either prostitutes or female servants. While the sex industry has been a continually successful service industry, the specialty craft of lighting the opium pipe provided a steady income for women in the service industry. The female service of lighting the opium pipe and supplying the paste added an element of dependence upon women to provide men with a service where they could imagine their deepest desires. While it is unlikely that a servant or sex worker would deprive her customer of the pipe, the high demand for supplying the drug gave Chinese women a certain power dynamic, one that certainly was missing from Confucian society.

While opium smoking could be done in the privacy without women, the sources featuring a women's presence undoubtedly outnumber those without her. The companionship of a women in conjunction with the opium pipe is always described in an erotic and sensual manner. Yang Enshou, a popular late-nineteenth-century literary scholar, records in his journals the immense pleasures associated with women sharing intimate spaces with the customers. He describes a popular scene which includes images of beautiful women:

At your first visit to *Taoyuan*, you are invited to play the drama of the smoke-cloud after tea. She, the beautiful, would lie down and languidly extend her luminous white wrist. Opium would be passed between her intertwining fingers, and exhaled slowly as a cloud. Like the *Sizhao* flower, one is never tired of looking at it through the mist...this really is an object of lovesickness.³¹

³⁰ Zheng, "*The Social Life of Opium in China*," 24.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

The erotic description of a woman delicate handling the opium is described in a very slow and pleasing manner. In his description of opium smoking, Enshou also refers to *Taoyuan*, the name of a town in Hunan which is famous for its legends of beautiful women.³²

Having known the context of the two Opium Wars in China, and how the British perceived drug addictions, it is interesting to reflect on how opium was regarded and written about in Pre-Opium War London. To conduct this exploration, an excellent individual to study is an English figure named Thomas De Quincey. In 1805, some thirty-four years before the first Opium War, De Quincey, purchased his first supply of laudanum, a decision which would lead into a life of addiction. Now a well-known English essayist, De Quincey was a twenty-year-old student at Oxford who remedy a toothache he suffered from. De Quincey was able to purchase a small wad of laudanum for just a shilling at his apothecary. In early nineteenth century London, opium was not especially rare, or viewed as exotic, and thus was easily accessible at a pharmacy as a household medicine, or mild painkiller. His description of taking the drug was described as:

I took it: and in an hour, O heavens! Here was a panacea for all human woes; here was the secret of happiness ... [which] might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat-pocket; portable ecstasies might be had corked up in a pint-bottle; and peace of mind could be sent down in gallons by the mail-coach.³³

From this instant, De Quincey was addicted for the rest of his life. In hopes of profiting from his addiction, De Quincey published his writings which gave readers a peek at his opiate-hazed world. In his book *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, De Quincey did not, in fact, eat

³² Coincidentally, Hunan was situated in a region of China which was a constant cross-road for opium transportation, opium importing, and opium farming.

³³ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater: Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar*. (Boston: W.D. Ticknor, 1841), 83-4.

opium, instead “opium eating” referred to laudanum drinking.³⁴ Laudanum, who some say is more destructive than simply smoking opium, was a solution of raw opium in alcohol, which contained about one-twelfth part by weight of the active ingredients of raw opium.³⁵ Despite once finding inspiration and drive to write from opium, De Quincey’s use of the drug was ultimately damaging on his life. After years of writing books based on opium use, De Quincey eventually found himself unable to function as a result of his addiction.³⁶ In terms of De Quincey’s written works, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, has been scrutinized and studied by modern medical practitioners to call upon the effects of heavy and continual opium use.³⁷

During the mid-nineteenth century, Chinese labourers were imported in large numbers to west coast of both Canada and the United States, it was during this period that scholars believed opium was introduced.³⁸ Much of the racialized slurs from Canadians or Americans was a result of an uninterested disconnect between the West and the East. It is likely that Canadians who witnessed Chinese labourers saw exotic looking people whom they did not understand, nor wish to know personally. The theme of Orientalism and “the other” is especially applicable to how Chinese immigrants have been perceived and written of. Representing figures of the unknown, the Chinese were linked with preconceived notions of degradation, vice, and immorally due to their reputations as opium addicts. Malleck argues in Chapter Four how Anglo-Canadian workers viewed Chinese labourers as stealing the jobs from the respected, morally pure Anglo-

³⁴ Ray, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behaviour*, 302.

³⁵ Marcelo Miranda, Anne-Marie Williams, and Diego Garcia-Borreguero. “Thomas De Quincey and his Restless Legs Symptoms as Depicted in ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater,’” *Movement Disorders* 25, no. 13 (2010): 2006.

³⁶ Ray, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behaviour*, 302.

³⁷ Marcelo, Williams, and Garcia-Borreguero. “Thomas De Quincey and his Restless Legs Symptoms as Depicted in ‘Confessions of an English Opium-Eater,’” 2009.

³⁸ Ray, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behaviour*, 305.

Saxon worker.³⁹ The unjust association of being filthy, malnourish, and listless were all attached to opium addicted descriptions. Just as this description is racially charged, it is also an rejection of deprived individuals who originated from lower socio-economic classes. Since any individual was susceptible to an opium addiction, individuals from the lower classes were especially prone to drug addiction as a way to escape one's reality.⁴⁰ Racialized labeling of Chinese labourers was likely encouraged by Western medical personnel who had trouble diagnosing individuals whose culture differed from the dominant Western culture.⁴¹

A piece of legislation related to the nation-building within twentieth-century Canada was the Opium Act of 1908 which prohibited any opium from being imported, produced or sold within the country. Despite the restrictions being enforced across Canada, these constraints only applied to non-medical purposes.⁴² The presence of non-regulated, pharmaceutical control of opium led to the "destruction of health and morality" of citizens across Canada, while also posing a risk to national integrity.⁴³ Opium use among the younger generations became associated with the trope for lassitude and indulgence, likely having been derived from Chinese opium addict stereotypes.⁴⁴ Other stereotypes also associated with the opium smoker were laziness, listlessness was used to comment on one's actions or lack-there-of.⁴⁵

Having investigated the perception of opium use in Pre-Opium War London, an analysis of Post-Opium War London should be equally done. Having experienced over fifty years of the British enforcing the opium trade in China, civilians in Britain were keen to form their own

³⁹ Dan Malleck, *When Good Drugs Go Bad: Opium, Medicine, and the Origins of Canada's Drug Laws*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 100.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

opinions of the Chinese, whether they be unselfish and charitable, or heated and racially spewed. Unfortunately, the later was most often discussed throughout England which regarded the Chinese as weak, and filthy individuals having wallowed in their opium addiction. Criticizing the Chinese from a distance was a popular pastime as they generalized and disconnected themselves with the racially fueled drug problem “over there” in the Far East.⁴⁶ The perceived danger of opium and the Chinese was discussed in a distanced manner until the perceived problem infested the English space with the appearance of Chinese opium dens, therefore soiling the shared conception of “clean,” “safe,” and “familiar.” It was not until the Chinese opium den started to appear across the dingy London locales did the public realize the severity of the opium trade.

Despite many members of the public resisting the temptation and allure of opium, selected few did indulge themselves in the smoking of opium. For individuals who wished to take part in a lifestyle of risk-taking, hedonism, and rebellion against the dominant way of living, traveling to an opium den provided many with an escape from the banality of life.⁴⁷ One literary example of individuals wanting the escape from normality can be found in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Published in 1897, Dorian Gray is an example of a highly regarded Englishman who is tempted into a life of hedonism by his surrounding influences. Dorian’s “education” of immoral impurity eventually leads him to a strong opium addiction. As discussed by Dan Malleck in *When Good Drugs Go Bad*, the perceived danger of the Chinese opium den embodied the fear of “the other” as corrupting innocent children, and highly regarded members of the upper class.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁷ Yi-Mak, and Harrison, “Globalization, cultural change and the modern drug epidemics,” 52.

⁴⁸ Malleck, *When Good Drugs Go Bad*, 158.

Wilde effectively uses the setting of the opium den as a quiet, mysterious, and secluded place which is far away from Dorian's respectable residence. As the Chinese opium den is meant to be a common setting for stories of moral failure, and temptation of "the other," it is fitting that Wilde's description of the den's location goes on endlessly.⁴⁹ Dorian's carriage arrives at a shabby inn which is dimly lit and full of odd characters lurking in the shadows. At the end of the hall inside, a tattered curtain is pulled aside, and he enters a long, dark, low room. Dorian climbs a small staircase at the end of the room, leading to an even darker room finally reaching the center of the "Chinaman's paradise."⁵⁰

Once Dorian smokes opium he is able to experience an unfamiliar "dirty" side of life, within his controlled social bounds so that he does not sink as low as others who are impoverished and dependent on the drug. Caught in a moment of escape, Dorian is able to find freedom from his social and moral expectations. Despite his dreamlike state, he is caught by the ugliness of the "coarse brawl, loathsome den."⁵¹ Attempting to escape from the hideous qualities of reality, Dorian notices the vile appearances of thieves and outcasts who surround him. Dorian's own decision to slum or engage in social dredging is especially intriguing as he believes he is the dominant figure, and in control of his actions. While other members in the opium den may be homeless or near to being so, Dorian is able to call a carriage which will return him to his lavish home, far away from the exotic locales of London's Chinese opium dens.⁵² For a moment Dorian's old sins are forgotten, and with another puff of the opium pipe,

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵¹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Dover Publications, INC, 1993), 135.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 137.

new ones are found. Like so many before him, Dorian was entranced by the appeal that opium help the wounds that would never heal, and provide him with a paradise of pureness and hope.⁵³

Dorian Gray undoubtedly indulged in countless bottles of alcohol, however, some argue that no matter what alcoholic drink you favour, the use of opium is incomparable to any other drug. An investigation into the medical problems caused by alcohol versus opium use was conducted by Anglo-American physicians, Thomas Trotter and Benjamin Rush. In their study conducted in the early-nineteenth century, Trotter and Rush argued that alcohol had a much different and more severe effect on the body when compared to opium use.⁵⁴ In all test subjects, the opium habit was regarded in a more positive light. As described by the English Opium-Eater, De Quincey states that the pleasure given by wine rapidly mounts, and then is halted by a crisis, which then causes the pleasure to rapidly decline. Opium however, results in instant pleasure which is stationary for eight to ten hours. De Quincey sums up the two drugs by informing his readers that while “wine disorders the mental faculties, opium introduces the most exquisite order, legislation, and harmony.”⁵⁵ Coincidentally, opium would be regarded as a useful tool to help treat the condition named “alcoholism” just a generation after Trotter and Rush’s medical tests.⁵⁶ Despite the pureness and sense of happiness achieved from opium use, it is an established fact that no matter how pleasurable the feeling, opium addiction led to serious effects with prolonged use.

To fully comprehend the devastating and tragic effects the opium trade had on China and its civilians, it is crucial to personalize the opium business and put names to the actions of trade. While there are likely hundreds of names associated with the British opium trade, William

⁵³ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 105-6.

⁵⁴ Malleck, *When Good Drugs Go Bad*, 111.

⁵⁵ De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 105-6.

⁵⁶ Malleck, *When Good Drugs Go Bad*, 111.

Jardine and James Matheson are likely two of the most influential businessmen.⁵⁷ Often referred to as conducting “gentlemanly capitalism,” Jardine and Matheson regarded the opium trade as a sound commercial opportunity.⁵⁸ In defiance of the Imperial government’s resistance of opium, Matheson, and specifically Jardine, believed that due to the flowing drug money, and high demand, the Imperial government were not representing what Chinese civilians sincerely wanted.⁵⁹ So long as the two continued to make a profit, Jardine and Matheson saw no ill-deed in their business.

The Scots partners denied any responsibility they had towards the opium-addicted country. They sincerely believed that the responsibility for the Chinese lives in ruin were those who became tempted with the drug in the first place. Despite knowing very well about the Emperor’s edict of opium prohibition in 1729, Jardine stated that “drug abuse was the buyer’s fault rather than the seller’s.”⁶⁰ In order to maintain a steady conscience, Jardine held the belief that the opium trade was simply a matter of business. He saw himself only as a supplier to a ready crowd, and of course, saw no need to regulate his actions; as he received his money, the public received their commodity. Responding to one of his English reporters, Jardine stated with the upmost sincerity that investing in opium was “the most gentlemanlike speculation available.”⁶¹

Although opium traders like Jardine and Matheson experienced criticisms from reformers such as the Evangelicals, and the Quakers, namely through Rowntree’s written works about *The Imperial Drug Trade*, many English businessmen continued their work in the trade industry. The

⁵⁷ Grace, *Opium and Empire*, 342.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, i.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 341.

Jardine Matheson & Co, primarily based from the Jardine House in Bermuda, and Hong Kong continued to be a successful name in business.⁶² The majority of British revenue from the opium trade monopoly was reinvested back in the United Kingdom, however a large amount eventually helped fund the new administration of British Hong Kong. Having been built upon the battleground of blood, used up opium pipes, and empty drug chests, the history of Hong Kong would not exist without the opium trade. In 1893 a moral anti-drug protest against opium trade erupted amongst the Chinese population, however it was not until 1906 did the government support and pass a bill which would cease all drug productions by 1913.⁶³ The destruction of legally imported Indian opium was finally achieved on February 1919.⁶⁴ Despite this laborious achievement, the British government, did not prohibit the sale of opium within Hong Kong until 1943.⁶⁵ Perhaps due to the delayed prohibition of opium, prolonged drug addiction has continued within China. In 1998 alone, over 14,000 heroin users were reported to the Hong Kong Central Registry of Drug Abuse.⁶⁶ Regardless if the opium trade has a direct impact on heroin addictions within Hong Kong, it can be widely agreed that since the late Qing dynasty into modern China, its civilians have suffered to escape the white cloud the opium smoke has left behind.

The long and extensive history of the opium trade represents a period of British Imperial domination of the Chinese international market throughout the entire nineteenth century. The British East India Company first introduced opium in selected quantities, allowing the Chinese population to form their own product demand for the drug. Entirely depending on the Chinese

⁶² Yi-Mak, and Harrison, "Globalization, cultural change and the modern drug epidemics," 48.

⁶³ Ray, *Drugs, Society, and Human Behaviour*, 305.

⁶⁴ Alan Baumler, *The Chinese and Opium Under the Republic: Worse Than Floods and Wild Beasts* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 1.

⁶⁵ Yi-Mak, and Harrison, "Globalization, cultural change and the modern drug epidemics," 48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

becoming drug-induced addicts, the British successfully maintained a supply of wealth which ensured the trade for their own tea-addicted country. Over the course of two Opium Wars, gain-seeking and corrupt business men witnessed the vice and misery shown by weakened, impoverished opium addicted Chinese. What was perceived as a demoralized and drug-enthusiastic nation, much of the West began to harvest anti-Chinese sentiments based on Orientalist concepts of exoticism, and “othering.” The opium trade became a transformative force in both Britain and China, as the addiction of one empire aided the corruption of another. What is recalled as a curse upon Sino-Western relations, the British opium trade in China remains to be a tragic history of Imperial domination which exhausted and enslaved an entire nation.

Bibliography

- Baumler, Alan. *The Chinese and Opium Under the Republic: Worse Than Floods and Wild Beasts*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Beeching, Jack. *The Chinese Opium Wars*. New York: Harcourt, 1976.
- De Quincey, Thomas. *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater: Being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar*. Boston: W.D. Ticknor, 1841.
- Feige, Chris, and Jeffrey A. Miron. "The Opium Wars, Opium Legalization and Opium Consumption in China." *Applied Economics Letters* 15, no. 12 (2008): 911-913.
- Grace, Richard J. *Opium and Empire: The Lives and Careers of William Jardine and James Matheson*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2014.
- Hanes, Travis, and Frank Sanello. *The Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another*. Illinois: Sourcebooks, 2004.
- Kamienski, Lukasz. *Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015.
- Lovell, Julia. *The Opium War*. London: Picador, 2012.
- Malleck, Dan. *When Good Drugs Go Bad: Opium, Medicine, and the Origins of Canada's Drug Laws*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015.
- Miranda, Marcelo, Anne-Marie Williams, and Diego Garcia-Borreguero. "Thomas De Quincey and his Restless Legs Symptoms as Depicted in 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater.'" *Movement Disorders* 25, no. 13 (2010): 2006-2009.
- Ray, Oakley. *Drugs, Society, and Human Behaviour*. Saint Louis: The C. V. Mosby Company, 1978.
- Rowntree, Joshua. *The Imperial Drug Trade: A Re-Statement of the Opium Question, in the Light of Recent Evidence and New Developments in the East*. London: Methuen and Co, 1905.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. New York: Dover Publications, INC, 1993.
- Yi-Mak, Kam, and Larry Harrison. "Globalization, cultural change and the modern drug epidemics: The case of Hong Kong." *Health, Risk & Society* 3, no.1(2001): 39-57.
- Zheng, Yangwen. "The Social Life of Opium in China, 1483-1999." *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2003): 1-39.
- Zheng, Yangwen. *The Social Life of Opium in China*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.