

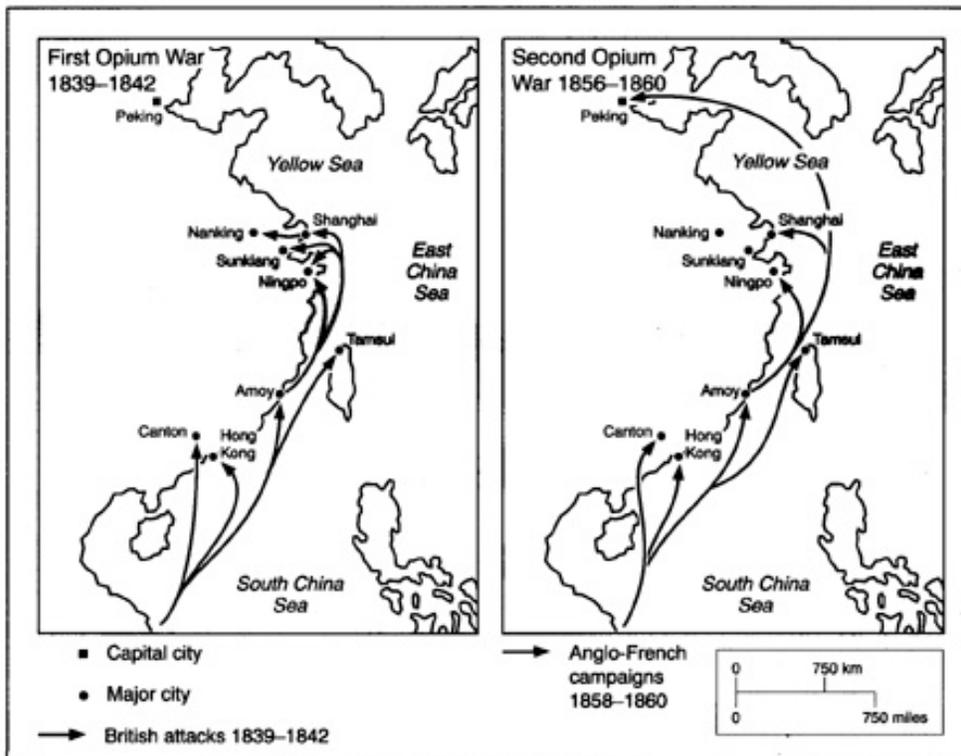
The Opium Wars



British navy sinking Chinese Naval Junks in Canton

CHINA

OPIUM WARS 1839–1864



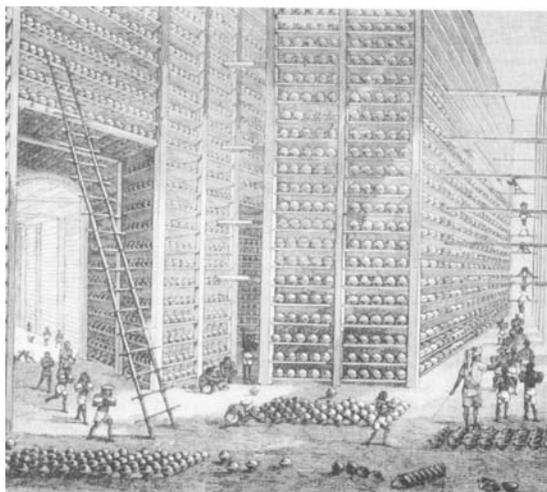
Chinese Opium Imports 1700-1840

Year	Opium Chests
1700	200
1770	1,000
1800	5,000
1820	8,000
1830	20,000
1840	40,000

Note: each chest weights 130-140 lbs. or 60-64 kilos.

Opium became the tool by which the British traders eventually broke open the Chinese market. The Chinese had long known the addictive drug—recreational use among the leisured classes had prompted a ban on the sale and smoking of opium as early as 1729. In 1773 the English East India Company (EEIC) established a monopoly over opium cultivation in India. They marketed the drug in China through Western merchants who were licensed by but not technically members of the EEIC, which had a monopoly on trade in China. The importation and cultivation of opium were outlawed in China in 1796, reflecting the inroads that Indian opium had made there, but the ban was ineffective.

In 1819 greater domestic competition within India lowered opium prices dramatically, causing Chinese consumption to shoot up accordingly. Domestic political developments in Britain led to the breakup of the EEIC monopoly in 1833, allowing new groups of merchants to enter the Chinese market. The following year, British exports to China rose to new heights. The volume of this trade reversed the direction of the flow of silver, and China paid out 34 million Mexican silver dollars (the common international currency of the day) to purchase opium in the 1830s. Although the idle rich were the majority of the Chinese addicts, many poor Chinese became addicted as well, and all suffered from the economic effects of the loss of silver.



British Opium Warehouse

THE FIRST OPIUM WAR

The breakup of the EEIC monopoly was the immediate cause of the First Opium War, both because it led to a huge increase in opium traffic and because, without the EEIC to serve as a buffer, the British government now found itself obliged to intervene more frequently in China. A vocal part of the English public clamored for greater access to China's huge market, and Britain often sought these goals through bluster and the threat of force.

China saw the problem differently and moved to stem the trade imbalance and the opium craze that plagued its people. In late 1838 the Chinese appointed a famed official, Lin Zexu, as imperial commissioner and sent him to Guangzhou to solve the problem. In March 1839 Lin ordered the British merchants to hand over all of their opium stocks within three days and to sign a bond pledging never again to traffic in the drug under penalty of death. When British superintendent of trade Charles Elliot attempted to negotiate, Lin suspended trade and held all foreign merchants hostage. Elliot then ordered the merchants to hand over their opium to him, after which he surrendered it to Lin. Lin washed some 9 million Mexican silver dollars worth of opium into the sea, not realizing that English patriots would view this as destruction of Crown property.

While Lin and the British merchants jostled over the signing of the bonds, officials in England dispatched an armed force to China. The Chinese had prepared for war at Guangzhou, but the British force simply blockaded that city on its way north toward the capital of Beijing, where officials met with the Chinese. The result of subsequent negotiations was the Convention of Quambi in January 1841, in which the bare minimum of British demands were met. The agreement was subsequently rejected by both sides: The emperor was enraged that his representative had made real concessions, while the British felt that Elliot had failed to press his advantage.

Sir Henry Pottinger replaced Elliot in August 1841 and immediately directed his forces to occupy important cities along the coast, including Ningbo and Tianjin. In the spring of 1842 the English renewed their offensive, triumphing readily over valiant but underarmed Chinese resistance. By late June the British occupied Zhenjiang, an important communication center and entry to the Grand Canal, the artery by which rice from the southern regions reached the northern capital. The Chinese agreed to negotiate, and at gunpoint they signed the Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking) on August 29, 1842. The treaty more than fulfilled England's original goals: The cohong was abolished, four more Chinese ports were opened to trade (Fuzhou, Ningbo, Shanghai, and Xiamen), and the island of Hong Kong was ceded to the British.

THE SECOND OPIUM WAR

The Second Opium War was in many ways an inevitable sequel to the first. The Chinese were not eager to implement the terms of a treaty that they saw as unfair. Still, skillful Chinese diplomacy and a number of other political distractions kept the conflict from boiling over for a number of years. On the British side, merchants were unhappy because they did not see a spectacular rise in profits from the China trade after the First Opium War; they blamed their disappointment on Chinese foot-dragging. In addition, the Treaty of Nanjing did not address the opium issue. Opium smuggling continued, and this only increased Chinese resentment of the foreigners.

The *Arrow* Incident of 1856 was the spark that ignited the Second Opium War. The *Arrow* was a ship owned by a Chinese resident of Hong Kong, and it was registered with the British there. On October 8, 1856, Chinese officers searching for a notorious pirate boarded the ship—without British permission—while it was docked off Guangzhou, hauling down the British flag as they did so. This minor incident quickly escalated into a shooting war.

The British sent an expedition to seek redress and were joined by a French task force. (A French missionary had been murdered in inland China in February 1856.) After some delay, the joint force took Guangzhou in December 1857 and then moved north to threaten the capital once again. By June 1858 the superior power of the Europeans and their refusal to compromise culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Tianjin, the most important term of which was the right of foreigners to establish permanent diplomatic residence in China's capital. The treaty also opened ten new ports to foreign trade.

When the foreigners returned to ratify the treaty the following summer, however, angry Chinese forces opened fire, killing more than 400 British men and sinking four ships. A much larger Anglo-French force returned a year later, in August 1860, and invaded the Chinese capital, sending the imperial court into flight and burning the Summer Palace. On October 24, 1860, British leaders forced the Convention of Beijing on the defeated Chinese, establishing once and for all the right of foreign diplomatic representation in China's capital. Many restrictions on foreign travel within China were removed, and missionaries received the right to work and even own property in China. The opium trade, the catalyst for the whole dispute, was legalized.