

# Chapter 1

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## Establishing a Meaning for Opium

The Pudong opium burning was a political ritual that harked back to Commissioner Lin Zexu's destruction of British opium at Humen in 1839, and looked forward to contemporary ideas about public health and public relations. Even today in Taiwan, June 3rd, the date of Lin's event, is celebrated as anti-smoking day and always involves a public burning of illicit drugs.<sup>1</sup> Public destruction of drugs is thus a political ritual which claims to link all opium burnings between 1839 and the present, making them all part of a common narrative of national salvation. Opium burnings were common through the first half of the twentieth century, but the meanings were not the same as those of the single case of destroying opium in 1839 or the modern Taiwanese War on Drugs. The ritual and rhetorical similarities between these events obscure the tremendous differences in opium suppression over the last two hundred years and unify the complex motivations for these campaigns into a single narrative.

There were four central aspects to anti-opium campaigns: (1) control of the opium itself; (2) control of the people; (3) control of the state; and (4) control of the understanding of opium. The first was actual control over opium itself, a notoriously slippery commodity. No premodern state controlled any commodity as closely as the Chinese state attempted to control opium. Opium required close control of the people. The traditional Chinese state had asked very little of most of its subjects, but the new, modernizing state required a new level of commitment from its citizens. The Qing state had tried to eliminate criminal behavior, but this was a fairly small target. Salt smuggling, banditry, and heterodox cults involved smugglers, bandits, and sectarians.<sup>2</sup> Opium involved everyone who grew, sold, or smoked it, and everyone who tolerated those who grew it, sold it

or smoked it, in other words, the entire nation. The state also had to change. Opium suppression would have to be carried out by state employees, who would have to abjure their desire for personal profit from the opium trade. Officials would prove to have a stronger attraction to opium money than to almost any other type of corruption. The problem was not only with individual officials, but from the state itself, considered collectively.<sup>3</sup> Opium became an important part of state budgets and could not be easily removed.

The state had to create and control new ideas about opium both in China and outside. Despite the rhetoric of reformers, concepts of addiction and theories about the dangers opium posed to the people were not self-evident, and if the campaigns were to have popular support, they had to be legitimated through ties to narratives of national salvation and international order. Reformers had to create new explanations of what opium was, how it fit into Chinese society, and persuade or coerce people at home and abroad to accept them. These new discourses could be powerful tools for the Chinese state, as when they convinced the British to end the Indian opium trade, or as tools used against the Chinese state by domestic rivals.

In anti-opium propaganda, progress on these fronts was presented as a secular trend towards light and away from darkness. Lin Zexu had seen the need to control opium, create a new people and government, and convince the Chinese and foreigners to set themselves against the trade. The traditional view of the century that followed 1839 is of years of progress and retreat as more or less honest and enlightened officials encouraged or neglected opium suppression. In practice, the process was not so linear.

On a practical level, controlling opium itself, reality fit the model of steady progress reasonably well. The Chinese state had almost no knowledge about or control over the trade in opium in 1830, but by 1950, this problem had been largely overcome. Even here, however, the traditional narrative conceals important changes in the nature of the opium trade. First, the nature of the trade was becoming more complex. Burning all the opium in China was much easier in 1839 than in 1919. Lin was able to collect “all” the opium in China because Guangdong was the center of the Chinese opium trade in 1839, and the bulk of the opium passed through a handful of foreigners in that province.<sup>4</sup> After 1840, both imports and domestic production expanded and diversified. The state’s task of collecting all the opium in China had become far more difficult—in fact, impossible. While the ability of the state to control the flow of opium had not kept pace with the changing opium trade, this should not obscure the fact that the state had not lagged too far behind. Pudong was a testament to the success of the Beiyang government in coming to grips with the practical problems of controlling opium, a success later governments would build on.

This success, however, was built on a new relationship between the state and opium. Lin Zexu wanted to collect information about opium to eliminate it. From about 1860 to 1906, state interest in the opium trade was driven by a desire to control and tax it. From 1906 to 1919, the state (at least at the national level) returned to the goal of suppression, although much of the knowledge obtained, and the bureaucracy set up to tax opium, was also be used for suppression. From 1919 to 1940, both of these goals, revenue and suppression, were pursued simultaneously.

The state's attempts to get a handle on the opium problem were complex enough when examined at the level of state policy; they become considerably more complex when looked at from the perspective of local government and day-to-day administration. Neither the Qing nor the Republic was a fully Weberian state, with national policy carried out swiftly by a professional and disinterested bureaucracy. Nowhere was this more evident than in opium control. Disputes over opium revenues were one of the most common sources of conflict between different levels of government. Joseph Stillwell claimed that opium lay at the root of the independence of the warlords, calling it "the chief prop of all power in China, both civil and military."<sup>5</sup> He may have exaggerated, but not by much, and the problem stretched well back into the Qing.

The problem also included attempts to control individual bureaucrats. State employees, who used their positions for personal gain rather than for the good of the state; i.e. corruption, was a common, if hard to define, problem for all Chinese governments. Again, the case of opium was more severe than any other. Given the value of opium, the bribes those who dealt in it were willing to pay were enormous. Especially in rural areas, those involved in opium threatened officials physically as well as enticed them financially. Salt had been the traditional commodity most linked to corruption, but it paled in comparison to opium. Zeng Junchen was a salt merchant for thirty years, but in 1935, he left that trade to go into opium, lured by the 800 percent profit he could make. The skills in manipulating officials, that Zeng had learned as a salt merchant, proved useful in his new trade, but he reported that the opium trade required even more outlay on prostitutes, liquor and bribes for officials than salt.<sup>6</sup> Opium, even more so than salt, generated enough profits to blur the line between public and private, corruption and ordinary state action. This was true in remote areas like Sichuan, as well as Shanghai, the center of Chinese modernity, where Du Yuesheng's power as a chief client of the Nationalist state and his position as a public figure were not in conflict with his role as the city's chief opium merchant—in fact, his roles complimented each other. Here again, the secular trend from corruption to purity is not entirely misleading. Individual corruption and malfeasance remained a problem until 1949 and after, but the process of weaning the state off opium revenues had been largely completed by 1940. Although

individual officials would still collect bribes to ignore the opium trade, opium would no longer be central to state finances.

On an ideological level, the Chinese state had mixed success in convincing others (and itself) that opium suppression was a worthwhile goal and that the Chinese state was in fact pursuing it. In 1919, the Pudong burning was possible because the Chinese state had convinced the British state, the Chinese people, and itself of the desirability of ending the opium trade. Internationally, they had been successful by 1919. China had been able to manipulate emerging ideas about the dangers of drugs and value of international cooperation to convince the British to stop defending the India-China opium trade and eventually to participate in its dissolution. The Chinese would have less success using the same weapons against the Japanese for a number of reasons, not least of which was China's inability to live up to its image as a modern state.

The domestic popularity of opium proved to be more intractable. Opium had put down deep roots in China's economy and society. It was smoked by people of all social classes, and as millions of Chinese profited from the opium trade they had an interest in seeing it continue. For Lin Zexu, opium was safely other; by 1919, there were millions who would have called the burning a waste of good opium. Countless peasants raised poppies, merchants sold it, banks financed it, and governments taxed it. Besides the financial profits, millions of Chinese enjoyed smoking opium and enjoyed socializing around an opium pipe.

The process of defining opium as a thing to be eliminated was much more complex in 1919 than in 1839, but it was carried out with some success. By 1919, almost all politically active Chinese were opposed to the opium trade, at least in the abstract. The rapid recrudescence of opium after 1919 was blamed on a handful of ignorant, greedy, corrupt individuals, who either did not understand the meaning of being a citizen of the new nation, or were too self-interested to behave properly. This view was appropriate in any of the Western nations from which the reformers borrowed ideas about opium; drug abuse was the work of deviants; its control was a technical matter of law enforcement and public health.

Although formal commitment to opium suppression was easy enough to win, commitment to act was problematic. From the beginning of the twentieth century, the Chinese state called on popular enthusiasm to make up for the deficiencies of state power, most notably in the railway recovery movement and the various boycott movements. Each of these called on citizens to comprehend and act against an abstract threat to the nation. The railway recovery movement was relatively successful because the things asked of the Chinese people were well-adjusted to the level of national consciousness. In order for the railways to be repurchased, money had to be donated, an act which could be done in a moment and had no impact on the giver's life other than a loss of money. The fact that the movement was more popular among wealthy members of the elite than with (poor) commoners, was probably more help than hindrance.

With the boycott movements the nation eventually asked more of its citizens and had trouble getting results. The basic concept was the same: the state used the economic power of its citizens to compensate for its own lack of power. In the case of the early anti-American boycotts, this was relatively successful.<sup>7</sup> American goods were not ubiquitous in most Chinese markets, and boycott supporters were elite merchants who controlled wholesale purchasing and, in some cases, stood to profit from excluding foreigners. The later, anti-Japanese boycotts were less successful. Japanese goods were everywhere, and for a boycott to be politically effective, millions of ordinary Chinese had to commit themselves to the many inconveniences that came with abjuring Japanese products. In other words, separating Japan out of the Chinese economy of the 1930s was not easy. In the case of the anti-Japanese boycotts, the Chinese state also faced a powerful and active foreign state that opposed the boycott. The opium campaigns proved to be more similar to the complexities of the anti-Japanese boycotts than the simple and effective railway recovery movement. In order to bridge this gap, the state had to find ways of convincing new groups of Chinese that they should accept a new view of their duties to the nation—and to act on it.

Reformers were more complicit in the opium trade than they liked to admit. A great deal of anti-opium rhetoric was generated in China during this period, but those who generated it—in their roles as government officials, revolutionary leaders, journalists and reformers—found themselves financially and morally tied to opium. Building a new China cost a lot of money and required a lot of political power; opium was a seductively easy source of both. Reformers were also tied to opium in a more personal way. Opium smoking was defined as a sinful activity. Using opium even once would eventually lead to the destruction of the individual, but that single use also changed the nature of the individual. Under the new dispensation, there was no such thing as innocent opium-smoking. Smoking opium connected one to the entire narrative of individual and national decay that reformers were working against. Many of these who observed the Pudong opium burning had themselves at one point or another smoked opium. All of them had grown up in a society where opium-smoking was common and the handful of those who had not smoked opium had relatives and friends who had (and still did). Opium-smoking could be defined as other only through hypocrisy (quite common) or a careful rethinking of the nature of the Chinese nation and its citizens.

## OPIUM COMES TO CHINA

Twentieth-century nationalists spoke of China as being invaded by opium in the nineteenth century. This metaphor of invasion fit well with the obsessions of the nineteenth century. Invasion suggested imperialism—the invasion of

China by outsiders. It also suggested disease in the modern medical sense, an invasion of the body politic by an agent that caused illness. Neither of these metaphors entirely fit the Qing approach to opium. Qing officials' view of the opium problem, and the methods at their disposal to deal with it, were fundamentally different than those of their twentieth century counterparts.

Physicians in the ancient Mediterranean were aware of the poppy's use as a medicinal, but attempts to trace the origin of the poppy have proven unsuccessful.<sup>8</sup> Poppy heads had been used as medicine in China as far back as the Tang (609–906 CE). By the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE), Chinese physicians knew how to extract the sap of the poppy from the head, producing a more powerful drug. Opium poppies were grown in China both as a medicinal and ornamental plant, but opium was also imported from India. The Ming court recognized opium as a taxable import in 1589.<sup>9</sup>

Opium only became a problem after it was used "recreationally." This probably began in Java in the mid-seventeenth century. Tobacco leaves were soaked in boiled opium to make *madak*, which was then smoked. This habit may have begun among ethnic Chinese on the island, but in any case, it spread rapidly to Taiwan. Smokers experimented with other leaves and eventually began smoking pure opium.<sup>10</sup>

We know nothing about the motivations of these opium pioneers or their theories of personal leisure. Opium smoking was later seen as an example of recreational drug use, that is, use of a drug that is properly medicinal for purposes of pleasure. This was not possible anywhere in the world in 1650, as there was no medical practice in the modern, professional sense. There were no drugs in 1650. A drug in the modern sense is a powerful chemical that should be used under professional supervision to treat a specific disease.<sup>11</sup> None of these things were possible in 1650. While we cannot recover the medical ideas of seventeenth-century Taiwanese, it is worthwhile to try and understand how they and their actions would have been perceived.

The Javanese who first began to smoke opium were only one of many groups of people who began to experiment with new substances in the seventeenth century. Tobacco, sugar, coffee, and tea all spread widely during this period.<sup>12</sup> These substances are sometimes referred to as drug foods, a term that highlights their most important characteristics. Some of them actually contained chemicals that today are called drugs. All were intended to alter mood. They also came to be used like foods, that is, as necessities of daily life. The drug foods blurred the distinction between food and drugs, or rather did not fit well into the separate categories of foods and drugs that would be created in the nineteenth century.

Worldwide use of drug foods grew in the seventeenth century, a fact which does much to explain the rise of commercial capitalism during this period.<sup>13</sup> Different parts of the world were more in contact with each other after 1492 than they had ever been before, but for the first two centuries the most important impact of this was that people started to take each other's drugs and pro-

duce drugs for export. China was less affected by the rise of the drug foods than many other places. China was exporting a great deal of tea by the mid-Qing, but China had long exported tea and foreign powers were not yet changing China into an economic colony, as in the Caribbean.<sup>14</sup> Consumption rather than production was the issue that mattered in China.

Why did people use drug foods? Part of it was the effect they had on the central nervous system, but this was not the whole story. Consumption of these substances was a social act which had social meaning, initially usually a bad one. Each of these drugs was introduced into different societies in different ways, but in every case they were viewed with suspicion. Attacks were made on substances and their users on a number of grounds, which can be divided into the properties of the substances and the associations of the substances. The attacks on properties were mostly what we would now call medical discourses, focusing on damage to the body. These drugs were also held to weaken the moral character of the user which shades into modern categories of psychological damage. More important, these properties were the associations of the substances.

For English coffee drinkers, coffee gave one an association with the wider world, London commercial society, and the values of the new commercial class. These associations were an anathema to some. Hattox, in his study of coffee-drinking in the Islamic world, was at first puzzled by the vehemence of the opponents of coffee and the weakness of their arguments. Although the arguments he looked at were presented in terms of Islamic law, he concluded that the formal arguments were attempts to give substance to a more generalized dissatisfaction with the newness of this form of behavior and its social associations. The same is true of most other drug foods.<sup>15</sup> The users of these new substances were likely to be young men, and young men, congregating for purposes of pleasure, were likely to arouse suspicion. These drugs also became associated with more specific problems, such as prostitution. This charge was not without foundation. Wherever young men congregated in seventeenth century England, one was likely to find illicit sex. Seditious, both political and social, was also found in the coffee shops. London coffee shops were implicitly places for political discussion, but any place where non-elite people met to talk could become a place for political discussion outside accepted spheres. Socially, any place which offered a position to anyone with money was by definition subversive of the old social order. These drugs were also thought to waste time and drain the nation of specie. As these drugs were the most obvious sign of the new commercial world that was being created it is not surprising that those who found the changes in society either frightening or exhilarating would focus on the drug foods as the symbols of the new life.

It is worth remembering that traditional society usually had few close parallels to the forms of behavior that surrounded the drug foods. Places of consumption where classes mingled, consumption of imported luxuries by the lower classes, people with smoke coming out of their mouths, all of these were unusual and

bizarre. While the medical charges which were made against these drugs were not always without merit, it is this suspicious otherness that holds them all together. Medical arguments may take pride of place in twentieth-century discussions of drugs, but they were only one of several agreements in the early modern period.

In non-Islamic societies, there was one substance which offered some parallels to the drug foods: alcohol. It was a drug food, often consumed in special places, and often associated with improper behavior and crime. Alcohol also had chemical properties that made it fit well with all but the most dangerous of the drug foods; yet in spite this, alcohol was acculturated into most societies as an acceptable substance. While alcohol could be abused, this was obviously the fault of the individual rather than the substance. All drinkers of alcohol could not be deviants, since everyone drank alcohol.

For most of the drug foods this acculturation was the eventual destination.<sup>16</sup> Coffee, tea, and chocolate all became fully acculturated in European societies, but the fact that this happened had more to do with changes in the types of social behavior they were associated with than with new discoveries about their physical effects. Coffee was not very dangerous as a chemical, but it fit well into new discourses about diligence and productivity, and it was hard to fit into the developing discourse of dangerous drugs.<sup>17</sup> It was these discursive connections, rather than the chemical properties of the drink, that led to its acceptance. The history of a drug in any society is not a story of a fixed set of chemical properties being discovered, but of substances caught up the creation of new medical and social discourses that linked them to unacceptable behavior. Usually these were new substances, but not always. The temperance movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was an attempt to apply new medical ideas to a long-established custom, and the surprising success that temperance activists had in passing laws intended to restrict or ban alcohol consumption is a testimony to the power of these new discourses. The failure of American prohibition, however, is an example of how complex the process of changing popular understanding of these discourses was. The political and social developments connected to the successes and failures of the movement had little to do with the chemical properties of alcohol.

#### OPIUM COMES TO CHINA: SEARCH FOR PRECEDENTS

Opium-smoking came to the attention of the Qing court at about the same time as tobacco-smoking. Unsurprisingly, the two substances were regarded as similar and the first edicts against opium, decreed in 1729, were modeled on those against tobacco. Tobacco use was first banned by the Ming court in 1637, and was banned repeatedly thereafter. In 1639, the Manchu court in Shenyang banned it as well. In the 1639 declaration, the Manchu emperor protested that



tobacco had already been banned several times, but he again forbade the eating (*chi*), growing, and selling of tobacco. Two years later, he admitted the prohibitions could not be enforced because the princes continued to smoke in private, but warned that archery practice must not be neglected in favor of tobacco.<sup>18</sup> The strictness of the Chinese/Manchu prohibitions against tobacco are as surprising as the Islamic prohibitions against coffee. Paul Howard speculates that tobacco was disfavored because it was a habit that spread from the lower level of society to the upper, in contradiction to Confucian norms, because it was a valuable good not taxed by the state, or because of the Ming concern with cultural decline, or the Manchu concern with cultural purity.<sup>19</sup> All these factors were involved, but to understand what was happening one needs to look more closely at what Chinese emperors expected from their subjects.

Tobacco eventually became a drug food in China, an ordinary item of consumption. Eventually, opium would become a dangerous drug. China was already familiar with one drug food, tea, and one dangerous drug, alcohol. Tea consumption was completely unregulated, as one would expect for a substance as commonplace and innocuous as tea, although the state did take an interest in tea as a taxable good. We must therefore look to alcohol for precedents for the tobacco and opium prohibitions.

China had a long history of attempts to limit the production and use of alcohol. In the *Classic of History*, the Duke of Zhou himself condemns excessive wine drinking, but clearly distinguishes between drinking wine during rites (which was of course acceptable), and drinking outside of them, which was not. Even during the rites drunkenness was to be avoided, drunkenness in this case apparently referring to disorderly behavior.<sup>20</sup> There were at least two reasons why drinking was dangerous. The first was that drinking had caused the Shang to lose their virtue and thus lose the mandate heaven. Alcohol was connected with loss of virtue, which had led to the destruction of the Shang. Alcohol was also connected with deviant behavior. The Emperor charged: "If you are told that there are companies who drink together, do not fail to apprehend them all, and send them here to Zhou, where I may [will] put them to death."<sup>21</sup>

That these people were to be put to death may seem rather harsh punishment, but they were executed for their social deviance. The officers of the previous Shang dynasty, who had become addicted to wine, were to be educated not to repeat these errors, so these people who drank in groups were presumably commoners. As with other drug foods in other places, the mere sight of commoners congregating for any purpose was suspicious. Alcohol would retain these connections to lack of virtue and lower-class disorder throughout Chinese history, but it also retained its association with proper ritual behavior.

The other connection between alcohol and the concerns of the traditional state was frugality. *Min sheng* (the people's livelihood) was one of the key goals of the Chinese state, and ensuring adequate food supplies was one of the most

important parts of this.<sup>22</sup> Alcohol did not provide any economic benefit, as understood by the court. That is to say some did benefit economically from producing it, but only at the expense of wasting grain that could have been eaten. Alcohol production also wasted time, as did its consumption. All of these were strictly economic agreements, but there was also a strong moral case to be made against alcohol use. William Rowe claims that the model official Chen Hong-mu's crusades against wine and tobacco were "prompted no less by a distrust of the relaxed enjoyment they might bring the consumer than by more strictly economic concerns." While Chen was unusually strict, his obsession with frugality and self-control was typical of Cheng-Zhu Confucians in general and several currents of Qing thought in particular.<sup>23</sup> This mistrust of alcohol would lead to a major campaign against its production during the Qianlong era (1736–1796). This campaign is important for understanding official attitudes towards popular behavior and the ability of the state to control this behavior.

In the early Qianlong period, a ban on yeast production had been suggested as a way of freeing up more grain. The debate on this issue, like the later debate on opium, reflected the state's attitude towards popular behavior and the state's attitude towards its ability to control this behavior. The prohibitions were motivated, not by a huge upsurge in drinking, but by the desire of a new emperor to demonstrate his virtue and a strong classicism on the part of some of his advisors. The prohibitions were not motivated by a concern with lower-class drunkenness, but with wasting grain on the production of alcohol. Food security was a key duty of the state, preventing the waste of grain through liquor production was good policy. Fang Bao, the scholar who, in 1720, proposed a ban on liquor production in North China, had specifically exempted the yellow wine used in sacrifices. Alcohol had an acceptable, even canonical use as an offering to the ancestors. By tying proper use (in sacrifices), to one type of alcohol, Fang could, at least on paper, neatly divide proper and improper use. The fact that yellow wine was the drink of the elite, and burnt liquor was the drink of poor commoners, probably helped to make this distinction. Fang also showed a deep distrust for the ability of commoners to manage their affairs. These measures were needed to prevent people from unwise actions.

Those who opposed the bans shared Fang's concerns with morality and food security, but had a much more favorable view of commoner economic abilities and a much less favorable view of the state's ability to control behavior. Sun Jiagan, as president of the Board of Justice, proposed lifting the ban in 1737, pointing out that it would be all but impossible to prevent people from producing liquor because liquor production was the most profitable way for peasants to turn excess grain into cash. Fang Bao's peasants had no need for money, but for Sun "the tendency of the petty populace to pursue profit is like that of water to flow downwards."<sup>24</sup> Sun was also aware that restricting supply would raise prices and thus encourage production regardless of risk. Sun also had a

more realistic view of the state's ability to control peasant behavior. Eliminating liquor production and sales was impossible, and provided endless opportunities for *yamen* runners to harass the people. These two problems were related. Sun, like most officials, understood that the Qing state had little power to change local society, and that power was exerted by *yamen* runners, a proverbially unreliable tool.<sup>25</sup>

These two sides were somewhat reconciled by the decision to focus on restricting production of yeast. Controlling the relative handful of commercial yeast producers was easier than controlling every still in North China. It was also more ideologically palatable, as those being coerced were wealthy merchants selling a useless luxury rather than common peasants trying to turn grain into cash.<sup>26</sup> The liquor prohibitions themselves were never successful, and became a dead letter once the Qianlong emperor lost interest in them. However, even in the years they were being carried out, the prohibitions created problems. What was the state to do with all the liquor that was being seized? Destroying it seemed wasteful, but selling it was "not consonant with proper dignity."<sup>27</sup> This dilemma is not unlike that posed by opium: what is this good? Smuggled salt was just salt, if seized it could be sold by the state for a profit, it was only in the context of smuggling that made it contraband. Seditious literature was seditious, if seized it could only be destroyed; no context could change its meaning.<sup>28</sup> The Qing court was lucky in the lack of success its restrictions on yeast had. Greater success would have made the problem of defining illegality much more severe, as happened later with opium.

The liquor prohibitions reveal a number of things about the Qing state and social control. Members of the bureaucracy were aware of the limits of state power to exert control over local society, and also of the limits on its ability to understand what was going on at the local level. That state regulation of individual behavior was theoretically appropriate was never in doubt, but barring a major push from above a successful campaign against any social ill was not likely. Only when this social ill drew the attention of the throne might a campaign arise. The opium prohibitions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are best understood in this context, connected to traditional concerns about disorder and frugality rather than as yet unknown ideas of addiction. The attempts to limit alcohol production were also an example of a bureaucratic campaign, a model that would be of great importance in dealing with opium.

## CAMPAIGNS IN THEORY

Chinese states were and are fond of campaigns that focused the efforts of the entire state and the enthusiasm of the people on a particular goal. The establishment of the Qing granary system, Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement,

and Mao's Great Leap were all examples of campaigns. Although campaigns were not properly modern in the Weberian sense, they had the advantage of focusing the limited resources of the state on a single task.<sup>29</sup> More importantly, they relied for their success on the enthusiastic response of officials and commoners. From a Confucian point of view, enthusiasm for imperial commands was caused by the virtue of the emperor, naturally the most solid foundation that any policy could have. Campaigns were an effective way to accomplish a great deal in a very short time, but they also had administrative peculiarities that were important for understanding the anti-opium campaigns both in the Qing and after. All campaigns were started from above, and were likely to peter out after the emperor or other sponsor lost interest. The late imperial state was not a Weberian system with set laws that were enforced at all times, but a series of moral and legal rules that were enforced where appropriate. When it was appropriate, enforcement was largely left up to local officials. Foreign observers in the nineteenth century liked to claim there was no Chinese government at all, which was not the case, but the enforcement of various decrees was a matter of considerable flexibility.<sup>30</sup> Phillip Huang divides the legal duties of local magistrates into moral and practical sides, dividing what would today be considered the practical duties of government and the magistrate's generalized responsibility for moral guidance.<sup>31</sup> Practical matters like tax collection called for taking action, moral leadership was more nebulous, and more important it was not one of the official categories on which local officials were assessed. Some projects eventually graduated from campaign status and became part of the regular work of the government. Once the national granary system had been established, maintaining them became part of the duties of local officials. Other causes did not make this transition. As laws about the insane were being revised in the mid-Qing, it was suggested that control of the insane be made one of the official categories local officials were judged on, but this was never carried out.<sup>32</sup> As a result, while the laws remained on the books, enforcement was a matter of individual whim.

Beyond the official bureaucracy campaigns also implicated the local elite, who might or might not be called upon, by the state or by themselves, to act in a given case. It is apparent that the need to control yeast never reached the minds of nonofficial people, whether gentry members or ordinary commoners. The new initiatives regarding yeast, madness, and sex were confined to the state itself, and were carried out without much enthusiasm even there. In 1738, the Qianlong emperor expressed his dismay that the regulations against yeast were not being properly enforced. "When the regional high officials and local authorities received Our rescript they regarded it as a mere piece of paper and made no solid effort to observe it."<sup>33</sup> Although in this case officials did not respond to imperial desires, some campaigns called on the elite—even the lowest of commoners—to take action. When the Yongzheng emperor eliminated certain base statuses in 1727, he explained that:

Those who have [bad] customs and mores that are long transmitted, and have not been able to shake them off, ought all be given a route toward self-renewal (*zi xin zhi lu*) . . . in order to promote purity and a sense of shame (*li lian chi*) and to extend the transformation of values (*guang feng hua*).<sup>34</sup>

The emperor expected even commoners to take action to reform themselves, and saw it as the duty of the state to provide them with a framework in which to do so by establishing a “route to self-renewal.”

When the state began to act against opium, therefore, it was drawing on a long, if somewhat problematic, history of social reform. There was a general, perhaps growing feeling, among the elite, that the reform of commoner behavior was one of the key duties of the state. There was a clear understanding of the limits of state power to directly coerce behavior, as demonstrated by the reluctance to directly prohibit alcohol. On the other hand, the campaign model provided a way to bring the full resources of the state to bear on social problems. At least in theory, these campaigns were to be actively assisted by both members of the elite and the common people.

#### REASONS FOR THE STATE TO DISLIKE OPIUM

In the 1830s, opium became the target of a state campaign of suppression. In the twentieth century this campaign was presented as the Chinese people’s acceptance of modern ideas about addiction and the beginning of a national campaign against opium that would continue for the next century. While there was a campaign in the 1830s, it did not connect well to the concerns of the twentieth century, and it did not mark the beginning of a sustained interest in opium suppression. Rather, the campaign combined fears about opium’s danger to frugality, fear of lower-class disorder, and fear of foreign intrusion. All of these would be part of the later anti-opium campaigns, but in later campaigns opium suppression would become a national goal in and of itself. In the 1830s these disparate fears were held together by a bureaucratic campaign and would dissipate with the conclusion of the campaign.

Like burnt liquor, opium was a threat to elite concepts of economic productivity. Obviously, drug foods were unnecessary luxuries that wasted the productive capacity of the land. This was an immediate problem with tobacco, which was produced in China almost as soon as it was introduced. Opium was not produced in China on a large scale until after 1858. It was opium, however, not tobacco, cotton, or tea, which came to be associated with famine. On the face of it this was an economically irrational claim. Peasants could not eat opium, but that was true of all cash crops. Given that a successful opium crop brought in far more than the cost of the grain that could have been produced,

poppies were a rational economic choice. While there was no conflict between poppies and food in the economic decision making of peasants, the two conflicted in the minds of the elite, as did production of all nonfood crops. Fiber crops could be defended on the grounds that they were connected to weaving, the canonical occupation of women, or were otherwise attached to worthwhile productive activity. Drug foods were connected only to pleasure. Tobacco was of “no benefit to the common people’s livelihood,” in other words, it did not fit the elite’s concept of proper peasant employment, a claim that could also be made about opium.<sup>35</sup> Although the state’s economic ideas would change considerably over the next two hundred years, limiting unproductive use of land remained important. From the point of view of a peasant, of course, opium was quite productive, but the state defined productivity differently. Besides wasting land, drug foods wasted time and money. The state saw it as its duty to prevent commoners from wasting their time. In 1729, the Yongzheng emperor did not condemn the smokers of opium, but rather the sellers, and they were condemned not for destroying the morals of their customers, but for tricking people into wasting their money.<sup>36</sup>

#### ASSOCIATIONS OF OPIUM

The first edicts against opium and tobacco were based on these economic and moral considerations, but eventually, it was only opium that was rejected. This was partially due to the drug’s social associations. As with most drug foods, opium was associated with those who consumed it. There is almost no data on who used opium in China during this period, although as an imported commodity, it was not used by the poorest classes. Descriptions of the drug constantly associate it with marginals and (understandably) foreigners. The first memorials against opium associated smoking it with Taiwanese. It was also associated with *liu mang* or hoodlums, the blanket term for troublemaking semi-criminal young men. It appealed to them because:

... the power which this substance communicated to those who partake of it, of not closing their eyes for entire nights, and spending them in the gratification of impure and sensual desires.<sup>37</sup>

These accusations are somewhat odd if connected to opium, which is not a stimulant but a narcotic. As with many other claims about drugs, these accusations have less to do with the chemical properties of opium than with its social context. Official reports on Chinese sectarians usually contained the same litany of complaints: they assembled by night and dispersed by day; the members had no fixed profession; their rites were covers for orgies; and they made

bloody sacrifices. It is usually not clear if these acts were actually occurring or if the authors of the reports were just repeating stock accusations. To some extent it does not matter, these accusations were part of the standard rhetoric identifying sectarians as other.

Like sectarians, opium smokers were linked to disorder. As with sectarians, this link was not entirely based on fact. Most heterodox groups were peaceable all of the time, all of them were peaceable most of the time; the same was true of opium smokers. Opium is a narcotic and did not lead to the type of violent behavior caused by alcohol. Still, opium smoking and violent lower-class behavior were linked in official rhetoric. In 1810, the Jiaqing emperor ordered a commoner who had been caught selling opium in the capital to be punished.

Opium has a very violent effect. When an addict smokes it, [the drug] rapidly makes him extremely excited and capable of doing anything he pleases. But before long it kills him. Opium is a poison, undermining our good customs and morality. Its use is prohibited by law. Now the commoner [named] Yang dares to bring it into the [capital]. Indeed he flouts the law! He should be turned over to the Board of Punishments to be tried and severely sentenced.<sup>38</sup>

As Paul Howard observes, a drug that made a commoner capable of doing anything he pleased was a bad drug. It is worth pointing out, however, that the emperor did not see Yang's behavior as symptomatic of a plague destroying the nation and the race. Although he mentions that opium undermines good customs and morality there is nothing in his statement (or more importantly in his actions) to indicate that he saw the opium problem in the same way it was seen in the twentieth century. Opium encouraged individuals to transgress their appointed social roles, but it did not threaten to sweep away the entire society. The appropriate response was for the regular law enforcement apparatus to do its job, rather than turning the entire power of the state and the elite against it.

## OPIMUM AND CRIME

Foreign, especially English, shipments of opium into China began to grow in the late 1700s and grew rapidly after 1820.<sup>39</sup> Eighteen-sixteen was the year of the Amherst mission and as good a date as any for the beginning of serious problems controlling foreigners on the southern coast. Opium was obviously associated with this problem, as the ban on opium imports was one of the chief reasons the British were unhappy with the Canton system. The British response to the ban was to smuggle opium into China, first in the Canton region and then all along the coast. English ships anchored at a safe distance and delivered opium to local Chinese

smugglers who then took it inland.<sup>40</sup> Opium was and remained an eminently smugglable good, since its high profit margins allowed the purchase of fast and powerful boats and hefty bribes for local troops and officials.<sup>41</sup> Foreigners were thus helping to create and finance an entire class of Chinese criminals, and the anti-opium campaigns would be deeply concerned with control of the coasts.

At least in some forms, opium consumption was also seen as a threat, and this was connected to the emergence of the opium den as the center of the state's perception of opium.<sup>42</sup> Opium smokers presumably did something—work, sleep, and study—while they were not smoking opium, but this was not part of their popular perception. Part of the reason for this was that opium use was not yet common. Tobacco smoking was domesticated to the point that it was impossible to refer to tobacco smokers as an abstract type. Instead they were, for example, Manchu princes who smoked tobacco. The anonymous evil of the opium smoker was abetted by the opium den. Unlike tobacco, which was assumed to be smoked everywhere but not in any special place, opium was associated with particular establishments. Again, this was not an accurate view; opium could and was used in many places. Smoking in an opium den stripped smokers of any social identity other than that of people who gathered together to commit a crime.

These concerns, foreigners and smuggling, and the concern with improper use of opium, were enough to lead to a campaign against the trade. But they were not enough to maintain state concern with opium after the campaign ended. Later accounts portrayed this as a period in which China awoke to the dangers of opium and imperialism and began to resist them.<sup>43</sup> In Chinese textbooks to this day, 1840 is the beginning of modern history a period that is dominated by imperialism and Chinese resistance to it. The metaphor of awakening is not particularly apt here, first, because it implies that the meanings of imperialism and opium were self-evident rather than constructed, and second, because it begs the question of why China promptly fell asleep again after 1842 and remained asleep, at least as far as opium was concerned, until 1905. This is not to argue that the campaign was of no importance. The state collected information about the state of the opium trade to develop a fuller understanding of how it worked and how it could be controlled. China's defeat in the Opium War permanently established the opium trade as the most visible form of foreign imperialism, and Lin Zexu became available as a model for the ideal anti-imperialist official, although he would not be used as such for years.

## THE FIRST CRUSADE

The First Opium War (1839–1842) was a war about opium.<sup>44</sup> Although other factors were involved, the war that actually happened would have been unthinkable if the commodity at the center of the dispute had been molasses. This was



partly because opium, unlike molasses, was a dangerous substance; it was also economically unique. Like all the drug foods, it generated enormous profits and created interests that no other commodity did. Opium was of immense importance to the British Empire, and the war of 1839 cannot be understood without realizing that the British crown was willing to go to great lengths to protect the trade.<sup>45</sup> The British claimed the war was the fault of the Chinese, and this was partly true. The war came about, in part, because of more aggressive British attempts to sell opium after 1834, but mainly because of a change of policy on the part of the Chinese government. From 1830, there was increasing debate about opium at the Chinese court, a debate that eventually led to a major change in policy and to Lin Zexu being sent to Canton to end the trade.

### THE DEBATE ON LEGALIZATION

Although the opium prohibitions of 1729 had been repeated occasionally, they had no effect on the gradual growth of the opium trade. Paul Howard points out that in part the law did not make a clear distinction between medicinal and smoking opium, the former still being legal. Also, the court, and therefore local officials, did not regard the prohibitions as important. It was only after 1796 that officials and troops were formally rewarded for capturing opium.<sup>46</sup> It was also not until the late 1700s that the trade began to grow rapidly. From 1780 on, the British East India Company began to expand exports rapidly, and this accelerated after the company lost its monopoly in 1834. It may also have been about this time that the production of smoking opium began in China; by the 1830s it was produced in several provinces. It was in this context that the opium issue became increasingly important to the court.

The first problem the Qing faced was information. What was *ya pian*, who was using it, and where did it come from? Who was buying and selling it, and how could the state control or regulate this trade? As Huang Shaoxiong later put it, opium was like liquid silver, flowing into any channel along the path of least resistance.<sup>47</sup> Chinese states and nonstate actors spent a great deal of time trying to discover what opium was before they could do anything with it and the act of observing usually disturbed the observed. State involvement was one of the key things determining where opium was planted and how it was moved to market; as the state gained knowledge and attempted to act on it these things would change. Opium users moved around less, but locating, controlling, and curing them was also a challenge. The act of gathering and organizing information about opium was crucial.<sup>48</sup>

Early in 1831, provincial officials were ordered to report on the state of the opium trade in their areas, and over the course of the year reports were received from most of the viceroys and some other officials.<sup>49</sup> The emperor was

particularly interested in local growing and production of opium. Most provinces reported that the drug was used, and many reported that it was produced locally. Ruan Yuan, the viceroy of Yunnan and Guizhou reported that opium was imported from Vietnam as well as grown by minorities inside China. It was also grown by Chinese peasants, a practice he tried to discourage by reminding peasants their land might be confiscated if they planted poppies. He also encouraged denunciations of poppy growers. Many provinces reported that opium was being smuggled. Foreigners were no longer content to simply sell opium in Guangdong, and were now moving up the coast. Muslim merchants from the northwest, under the guise of jade merchants, were selling opium paste.<sup>50</sup> Opium dens were opened, which enticed youths from good families to smoke it. Opium was apparently more widely smoked than had been thought, being used by people in many provinces, and particularly by soldiers. According to the censor, Ma Zanzun: "When the people eat it the result is wasting their *shen* (body) *jia* (family) and *shi ye* (loss of employment), when soldiers eat it their muscles grow soft, discipline becomes slack, and drill is not carried out."<sup>51</sup>

### THE POLICY DEBATE

As the opium trade grew, the issue began to attract more attention from the court, and opium began to be associated with other maladies of the state. As opium use was growing and spreading, silver was supposedly flowing out of the country to pay for it.<sup>52</sup> Smugglers were violating China's borders and corrupting her officials. Troops were failing to put down rebellions because of their use of opium. Traditional policy had called for interdicting the supply of foreign opium, but this policy had been completely ineffective, and the drug was also starting to be produced domestically. The growth of the trade led to a court debate on opium policy in the mid 1830's.<sup>53</sup> Although the outcome of this debate was an anti-opium campaign which would serve as a model for twentieth-century campaigns its motivations were quite different.

The most logical option for many officials was legalization of the trade.<sup>54</sup> Legalization would encourage import substitution, prevent corruption in the military, and lower import prices, thus reducing the silver drain. It would also bring in a good deal of revenue to the state rather than wasting money on a program of prohibition that the state could not possibly carry out. It would probably also lead to more opium smoking, a fact which would have made this policy unthinkable sixty years later. For these officials, however, the opium plague was not understood as a plague, but as a typical problem of statecraft. If the economic, military, and political problems that

came with opium could be eliminated that would be an effective solution to the problem.<sup>55</sup>

Legalization found many influential backers, and James Polachek concludes that by 1836, “there was . . . no longer and significant constituency for the trade-control sanction—at least within the bureaucracy itself.”<sup>56</sup> There was a party that opposed legalization, but the reasons they gave were quite different from those of the twentieth century. To some extent, opium was just a convenient political issue. Polachek shows that Lin Zexu and the Spring Purification group pushed for a strict policy because they felt that a campaign against opium would give them a chance to show the effectiveness of their politics of gentry activism and because Lin was convinced that a show of moral resolve would make the British back down. Lin himself saw his appointment to Canton as a springboard to the coveted position of Liangjiang governor-general, where he could at last carry out his plans to reform the grain transport system.

When Lin and his party looked at opium they also saw something different from the race-destroying plague that haunted the Republic. Polachek says that “The awesomely destructive impact of the opium trade—socially, economically, even militarily—simply had not supplied a motive sufficient to force the Qing government into a war-risking embargo.” I would suggest that Qing officials simply did not see opium use as being as awesomely destructive as twentieth-century ideas suggest. It is hard to believe that Lin saw opium as a threat to destroy the nation and the race (a common twentieth-century phrase) as he did not see China as a nation or a race in the modern sense. Despite some heated rhetoric, it is hard to believe that in 1836, many officials thought China was in danger of racial extinction. The anti-opium forces emphasized the silver drain, opium’s corruption of soldiers and officials, and the increasing problems of controlling China’s coasts. The threat to the health of the people was mentioned, but not particularly emphasized. As one antilegalizer put it “The people are the foundation of the state, [and] wealth is produced by the people. If the people become poor, that can be changed, but if they become weak they cannot be cured.”<sup>57</sup> This is fairly typical of much of the rhetoric in this debate.<sup>58</sup> Mentions of the people and the danger to their health are general and fairly vague, unless they are connected to a concrete issue the court could be expected to care about. People who were soldiers or officials were often mentioned, as they were a direct concern of the court. Ordinary people had to be connected to taxes or disorder for them to matter.<sup>59</sup> Nor are the people considered to be a unitary group affected in the same way. Opium was seen as a threat to the minds of the intelligent, but not to the minds of the common people.<sup>60</sup> The Qing court, unsurprisingly, did not see the health of its citizens as the foundation of national power, as it did not understand citizenship, health or national power in the way they would be seen in the twentieth century.

AFTER THE WAR: WHY WERE THERE  
NO OPIUM CAMPAIGNS FOR SIXTY YEARS?

China was defeated in the Opium War and was forced to surrender Hong Kong, grant extraterritoriality, and tolerate opium imports. The ultimate reason for the defeat of the anti-opium campaign was the military defeat of China by Great Britain, which guaranteed the continued importation of Indian opium. It is unlikely that Lin Zexu or anyone else could have done anything to eliminate the trade in the face of continued massive opium imports, but the abandonment of the anti-opium campaigns after Lin's failure is significant. Opium consumption and sale remained illegal, but there would be no state actions comparable to Lin's until 1906. In many accounts, this lack of active prohibition is attributed to the fecklessness of the Qing government.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, this is the only position that makes any sense if one assumes that Lin Zexu had developed modern ideas of opium and addiction and that it was shared by most Chinese. If the danger of opium to the Chinese nation was what caused the anti-opium campaigns, then defeat in the war was no reason to end them, but in reality the war changed everything. Lin had been sent to Canton because opium smuggling was threatening the security of China's coasts; foreign merchants were flouting the law; silver was leaving the country; and the pernicious habit was spreading across China. After 1842, foreign warships, not smugglers threatened China's coast and foreign recalcitrance had grown far beyond Canton. Only the threat of opium to China's moral order remained, and this was apparently not seen as sufficient to lead to major campaigns. Wei Yuan suggested a national system of opium control in 1842, but nothing seems to have come of it.<sup>62</sup> The lack of support for Wei's proposal is not surprising. What he suggested was establishing a national anti-opium bureaucracy, that is, institutionalizing the anti-opium campaigns rather than slipping back into the status of an inactive campaign. This would certainly have been done in the twentieth century, but in the second half of the nineteenth century opium was not seen as a serious enough problem to merit this treatment.

The anti-opium edicts were enforced occasionally over the sixty years following the First Opium War, but enforcement was sporadic, motivated by desire for official promotion rather than a vision of opium suppression as crucial to China's survival. Individual officials might choose to enforce the anti-opium edicts out of personal conviction or to impress superiors with their exemplary zeal. One example is Tan Zhunpei, who rose to the position of Acting Governor of Jiangsu, in part because of his strictness about opium. In 1874, he assumed the post of Prefect of Changzhou and began a campaign to close down the opium dens in his district. This may have been what brought him to the attention of Shen Baochen, who became Viceroy of Liangjiang in 1876. Shen condemned the opium trade upon coming to office, but most of his subordinates

treated these decrees as “one of those solemn enunciations of moral platitudes with which provincial officials of whatever rank usually commence their career.” While stationed in Xuzhou, Tan was one of the few officials to act strongly against opium, closing down opium dens and ordering poppies uprooted.

Tan’s rise in the bureaucracy was rapid, and while he was probably quite efficient at the other parts of his job, opium suppression gave him an opportunity to stand out.<sup>63</sup> Tax collection, keeping the peace, and enforcing justice were the main duties of local officials, but to go beyond this demonstrated a zeal and moral drive that might lead to promotion. Individual conviction might also lead an official to act against opium, but neither of these things could lead to a sustained national or regional campaign against opium.

### THE CHANGING OPIUM TRADE

Not only was the Qing state less concerned with opium than it had been during the campaign, the opium trade was expanding rapidly. Opium production, sales, and smoking were all becoming more common, creating groups of people with a vested interest in the opium trade. As opium became more common it became less “other,” and more part of everyday ordinary social and economic life. Between 1840 and 1940, millions of Chinese smoked opium daily, regularly, or occasionally. Patterns of opium smoking in the twentieth century are discussed later, but given the limited data available for the Qing period it is possible to draw some conclusions about opium use. The first is, obviously, that many Chinese people smoked opium. Opium smoking spread throughout China both geographically and socially after 1840. The most significant change was the move from a luxury good to a mass commodity. Lin Manhong estimates total domestic production, in 1906, of 146,068 *dan*. Total (legal) imports in 1906 were 54,177 *dan*.<sup>64</sup> Assuming consumption of two ounces a month for a regular user this supports a smoking population of about 13.3 million. Dividing total production by two ounces a month assumes that all opium smokers were addicts who smoked a particular amount, which was of course not the case.<sup>65</sup> Later medical ideas held that there was only one pattern of opium use. R. K. Newman estimates that in 1906, 12 percent of Chinese men and 2 percent of Chinese women were “regular moderate” users of opium, with much higher levels of “occasional” and “ceremonial” use.<sup>66</sup> What Newman does with these labels is categorize a diverse series of behaviors in a more helpful way than dividing people into addicts, medicinal users, and nonusers. In the early nineteenth century nonmedical opium smoking was supposedly confined to the elite and the marginal. This was likely true—given the high price of the imported drug. In the late nineteenth century, as production expanded, distribution improved and prices dropped. Consumption expanded and changed, thus encouraging more production and more distribution.<sup>67</sup>

## TRADE AND MONEY

In addition to being smoked by millions of Chinese, opium was also becoming a source of profit, a holder of value and form of capital. As early as the 1850s, foreign merchants were sending opium directly upcountry to be exchanged for tea or silk, a process eventually labeled the Suzhou System. Opium was one of the few holders of value that was lightweight, durable, and found buyers or barter opportunities almost anywhere in China. It was used to pay traveling expenses by both Qing scholars going to the capital for exams and by Republican students traveling to university.<sup>68</sup> Opium was not the most important part of the great monetary expansion of the late Qing, but it was significant.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to its use as money, opium was a fine way to make money. That the foreign merchant community in China was closely tied to the opium trade is of course not news. The major British merchant houses were not able to compete in the trade after the 1860s (having been replaced by Jewish and Armenian merchants), but the trade in foreign opium remained an important part of the coastal economy.<sup>70</sup> Foreign opium was increasingly limited to the luxury end of the market, with the bulk of opium supplied by domestic growers; here too, enormous profits were made. Opium not only made merchants and peasants rich, it altered trade flows and economic relations between the regions of China. Lin Manhong credits the opium trade for a new level of integration among different macro-regions and thus a qualitative change in the nature of the Chinese economy.<sup>71</sup>

## OPIUM AND TAXES

With all this money flowing, it was inevitable that the state would try to get its share. Many senior officials made pronouncements against opium. Li Hongzhang denounced it, as did Zhang Zhidong. However, both of them saw opium as a source of revenue. This began in earnest with the Taiping and associated rebellions in the middle of the nineteenth century. Local and provincial officials began collecting transit taxes, called *likin*, on goods moving through their districts. This, and commercial taxes in general, gradually became a very important part of state finance. In part, this was because opium was an important new trade that could yield new revenues; it was also because the Chinese state was shifting away from land taxes and towards commercial taxes to finance itself.<sup>72</sup>

This table reveals a fundamental change in the Chinese state. Both the Ming and the Qing had relied heavily on agrarian taxes, and thus collecting these taxes, and promoting stability in rural China, were key goals. Now harnessing commercial activities took precedence, and the most important of the commercial taxes was that on opium. Connected with this new focus on urban commerce was a new project. Responding to the West was the overriding duty

TABLE 1.1  
Agrarian and Commercial Revenues as a Percent of Total

	<i>Agrarian</i>	<i>Commercial</i>
1849	77	23
1885	40	51
1911	16	69

of the state, and this meant draining money from remote areas and spending it on modernizing projects mostly located on the coast, as opposed to the more traditional pattern where more prosperous areas subsidized maintenance of order in poorer ones.<sup>73</sup> Control over rural China was no longer as ideologically or economically important as it had been. Remote areas were now important only to the extent that they could provide revenue, and one way that they could provide revenue was through opium. Opium was one of the most valuable goods being shipped, and thus it generated much of the income from the *likin* tax. In the Late Qing Yunnan province received two-hundred thousand to three-hundred thousand taels a year from opium *likin*, which was 60 percent or so of total *likin*.<sup>74</sup> Yunnan was one of the leading opium-producing provinces, but all provinces took in substantial revenue from opium.

Given the financial problems of the Late Qing state, an uncommitted source of revenue was a godsend for local and provincial officials. As a new form of revenue, opium money was unassigned and could, therefore, be used for pet projects, a category that would include most of the Late Qing modernization efforts. Zhang Zhidong's Hubei Arsenal got 30 percent of its revenue from opium between 1895 and 1906.<sup>75</sup> Given these facts, there was no systematic attempt to eliminate the opium trade. The 1858 Treaty of Tianjin tacitly legalized opium imports and domestic production, and in 1891 peasants were formally allowed to grow poppies, and the trade was effectively legalized.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, the state was deeply concerned with opium in the late nineteenth century, but its concern was mostly with taxation. Although opium revenue was substantial, much of it did not end up in the hands of the central government. The court had traditionally tried to prevent local officials from collecting and spending tax money without central government involvement, but during the mid-century, rebellions provincial officials gained considerable freedom to handle tax money. Even after the rebellions had been put down the court never fully regained control of local taxation. In 1906, it was estimated that less than 1/6 of total opium revenue ever reached the central government.<sup>77</sup> At least some of this money (20 percent in Yunnan) was retained at the sub-provincial level. In 1903, the Sichuan provincial government made three-hundred thousand *taels* from opium transit taxes, about the same as a single prefecture, Xuzhou, in the same province.<sup>78</sup> Local governments also imposed countless surcharges and local officials demanded and received bribes for protecting the trade.

In this situation, policy focused on centralizing opium tax collection to guarantee that as much of this revenue as possible ended up in the hands of the central government—or at least the provinces. In 1881, Zuo Zongtang suggested collecting the entire opium *likin* tax at the ports, a proposal seconded by Li Hongzhang.<sup>79</sup> In 1883, opium *likin* receipts jumped to a new level, and then rose again after 1885, when the British agreed to allow all *likin* on imported opium to be collected at the ports.<sup>80</sup>

This new system was attacked by Zhang Zhidong, but by 1895, Zhang was consulting with the French about setting up a national opium monopoly. The French doubtless pointed out that opium monopolies were universal and highly profitable in colonial Asia.<sup>81</sup> A monopoly would bring in revenue, deny revenue to criminals and lower-level governments, and reduce opium use by increasing prices. This last point was something of a throw-in. None of these reformers were deeply concerned with opium smoking as a social problem. They saw it as a problem, but not the disastrous problem the new concept of addiction made it. Li Hongzhang was fond of telling foreigners that “China views the whole question from a moral standpoint; England from a fiscal.” and he assured the anti-opium movement that if they could stop production in India, he would stop production in China.<sup>82</sup> Guo Songdao, however, claimed, in an 1877 letter to Li, that nobody in government was taking opium seriously, meaning in the same way that foreign reformers saw it. He appears to have been correct.<sup>83</sup>

In later Chinese anti-opium propaganda, all these taxes were taken as proof of the weakness and degeneracy of the Qing court. It is better seen, however as a sign that the prohibitory discourse on opium was not yet fully

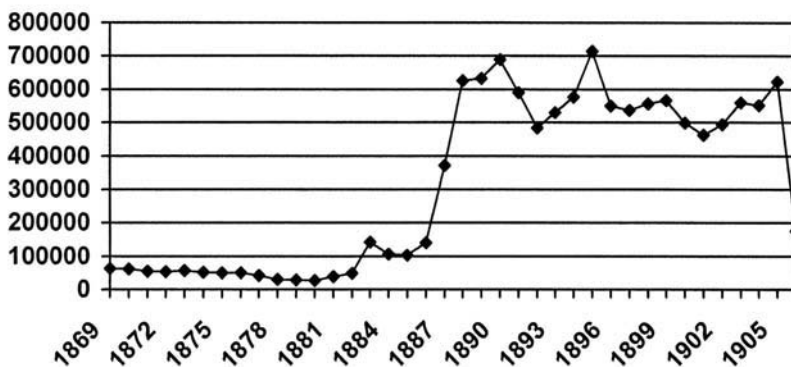


FIG. 1.1. Opium *Likin* Revenue  
From Wang Hongbin p. 267. In Haiguan Tael.



formed. Opium control was at least as important as opium suppression. Opium was already a suspicious substance in the early nineteenth century, but so was the yeast that was used to make wine.

Although total prohibition on opium remained state policy and was occasionally enforced, the state taxed the trade, with a level of success not unlike other state-building measures. Taxing opium was increasingly lucrative and increasingly difficult as the trade spread throughout China—especially as it was produced in China. Had opium been tobacco, the process of taxing and regulating the trade would have been part of Late Qing state-building. Opium was not similar to tobacco, however, and it became less so as new ideas began to be imported into China in the late nineteenth century.

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