

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Opium War (Overview)

**Directions:** Read the handout below and take notes using the 2 column chart.

### A Trade Deficit

In the 19th century, Great Britain was facing a huge trade deficit with China. There was a growing demand in Britain for Chinese products like tea, silk, and porcelain. China, on the other hand, felt itself to be self-sufficient and didn't really desire a great deal of what they considered inferior foreign products. As a result, purchases made from China were costing Britain millions in silver currency.

Some of the imbalance was corrected as Chinese peasants converted some of their cotton-growing land to tea. This created a greater demand for British cotton, but even with this adjustment, Britain was not seeing the profit it wanted to see from its Chinese markets. British merchants needed some other product; they needed to create a demand for a product they could supply in quantity. The solution presented itself in the form of a pretty flower whose juices and pods could be prepared to make a highly enjoyable and highly addictive substance. This substance was opium.

### A Profitable Opportunity

Although opium had been used in China for medicinal purposes, it was not grown in quantity. Its dangers were well known, and by the late 18th century, its recreational use had been banned in China. As a narcotic, it was addictive; it turned a normally active person into a lethargic, slurring lump of flesh. However, the British had a huge supply of opium. It was grown in nearby India, which was controlled by Britain. The taxes on opium actually provided approximately 10% of the total revenue for the British government in India.

By the end of the 18th century, there was somewhat of a demand in China for opium for recreational use, and the British, along with other European nations and the United States, decided to cash in on that demand by first meeting it, then increasing it. Increasing demand would be easy because opium was extremely addictive. Once someone started to use opium, it became very difficult to stop. Britain recognized the dangers and had made the use and importation of opium illegal in its own country. However, supplying China with the narcotic was a different story.

### Smuggling Misery

In 1836, Britain was able to smuggle 8 million pounds of opium into China thanks to the collusion of some Chinese government officials and merchants. With bribes and the promise of great financial rewards, the British partnered with these individuals to slip as much opium into China as possible. The 8 million pounds in 1836 translated into about \$18 million.

Since Britain had only purchased \$17 million in Chinese goods, they were able to effectively negate the trade deficit with China in only one year. Unfortunately, this did not encourage the merchants to reduce the sale of opium. It was far too lucrative to simply stop, despite increasing hostility and pressure from the imperial Chinese government. When this hostility was translated into aggressive action to stop opium smuggling, Britain retaliated with military force.

### War Erupts

The Opium War erupted due to not only a clash of cultures but also the flagrant disregard for the opium restrictions imposed by the imperial Chinese government. In addition to perceived unfair trade restrictions, there were issues concerning who had jurisdiction over crimes committed by foreigners on Chinese soil. The Chinese demanded that foreign transgressors be turned over to the Chinese courts, but the British believed the Chinese legal system to be barbaric and refused to do so. (This is called **extraterritoriality**: the process of a trying a person in one's home court rather than where the crime was committed). The British and other European powers looked at China as a backward, heathen country. The Chinese viewed the foreigners with the disdain born of centuries of culture. In the end, the technological advances made by Britain's military won out. China did not have a chance against modern weapons of warfare and was forced to accept a humiliating defeat.

### The Treaty of Nanjing

The Treaty of Nanjing (1842) was the first of the lopsided treaties that gave the British essentially everything they wanted and forced the Chinese to accept Britain's presence in their country on Britain's terms. The British no longer had to pay the stiff trading tariffs that had cut into profits. Also, the emperor agreed to pay for the opium that had been destroyed. He additionally agreed to give Britain the island of Hong Kong and to open four other ports to British trade. Further, Westerners won the right to extraterritoriality. Sadly, merchants in both countries took advantage of the lifting of trade restrictions to further increase the flow of opium. The opium trade more than doubled in the 30 years following the Treaty of Nanjing. Finally, in the late 1800s, China had disputes with France, Russia, Germany, and the United States, and those countries concluded similar treaties with the Qing emperor. By that time, the Western powers had carved up China into **spheres of influence**. A sphere of influence is an area in which a foreign nation has special economic privileges, such as the right to build railroads and factories. Economic rights also gave Westerners political influence.

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Opium Wars 2 Column Notes

**Common Core Objective:**

**R.H.9-10.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

**Directions:** Using the Opium Wars Overview handout, complete the following chart.

Define "trade deficit."	
Explain two causes of the British trade deficit with China.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
Describe one negative for China regarding the opium trade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>
Explain two reasons why Britain was so successful in the opium trade to China.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
Define "extraterritoriality."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li></ul>
Identify three key aspects of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>
Define "sphere of influence."	
Describe two overall effects of the Treaty of Nanjing (1842)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•</li><li>•</li></ul>