

Submission Guidelines

Collaborate with your team on your case study presentation. When it is complete, the team leader is responsible for submitting it in the Assignment Lab, or for making sure that another team member submits it. Please note that all learners should visit the assignment lab and provide feedback on at least 2 other team presentations, before the deadline.

As a reminder, your presentation should:

1. Be limited to no more than 750 words
2. Engage the materials in the case studies, lectures, and text.
3. You are free to import material from outside the course, but this is not necessary and may detract you and teammates from the task. Don't go overboard!

Instructions

Step 1: Read the case study introduction, background information, and the primary sources below.

Step 2: Work with your team to answer the challenge question for this case study.

Step 3: Go to the Assignment Lab to post your response, and to read and comment on other learners' submissions.

Track **C**, Case study **5**: The Opium Wars

STEP 1

Case Study Introduction

For over a thousand years, China, at the eastern end of the Silk Road, had been an important producer of luxury and other goods and a commercial powerhouse in the east. By the eighteenth century, western powers including the Dutch, the French, the British, and the Americans sought access to this lucrative market. While initially a trade deficit with Qing China disadvantaged Western powers, the rapid growth of the opium trade tilted the balance of power to the West. Unsuccessful attempts by senior Qing officials to curtail the opium trade resulted in the Opium Wars, two disastrous conflicts that crippled China and led, ultimately, to undermining the Qing Dynasty and to the birth of modern China. The Opium Wars and the Treaty of Nanking and other Unequal Treaties gave Britain, through the East India Company, toeholds in China.

Background Information

The middle of the nineteenth century saw Qing China and Victorian Britain clash in the Opium Wars: between Britain and China in the first war (c. 1839-42), and between China and Britain and France in the 'Arrow' or Anglo-French War in China (c.1856-1860). China's losses in each war resulted in trading privileges, legal powers, and territorial gains for Britain (and France). The unequal treaties that followed the wars undermined the sovereignty of the Qing rulers.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Britain, having lost a lucrative colony in America and searching for new markets for its goods, shifted its focus east. As early as 1770, the British East India Company had developed opium-producing poppy plantations in India and soon began to sell the drug in China. Traditionally opium has been available in small, medicinal quantities: the spread of tobacco smoking from the Americas brought new recreational ways of using opium.

Previously the British were disadvantaged in the trade relationship with China, and traded primarily with silver, the only western commodity for which there was a significant demand in China. This was in contrast to the huge market for Chinese made goods such as tea, silks, and porcelains prized in the west. The demand for opium reconfigured this trade imbalance. The resources of the East India Company, primarily in Bengal, led to a British monopoly on opium production (other western countries later capitalized on growing demand too).

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The supply to China was fed from the abundant poppy fields of India, with the EIC reaping the profits. Ever greater quantities of opium were shipped to Canton (Guangzhou), where the British had established a trading post in 1711, with devastating social and economic results for the Chinese.

Qing China tried to halt the opium trade within its borders, eventually relying on force in the British trading enclave. China's Daoguang Emperor tasked Viceroy Lin Zexu to stop the trade. When letters and appeals to the British were ignored, Lin ordered all supplies confiscated and implemented a blockade of foreign ships. The British government in turn sent a military force to China. In the battle that followed the Royal Navy inflicted a series of decisive defeats on Qing vessels.

The Treaty of Nanking of August 29, 1842 was known to the Chinese as the First Unequal Treaty: while Britain gained many advantages and concessions the only benefit to the Chinese was an end to British military attacks. Through the treaty, British influence expanded beyond Canton to five additional ports, made Britain the 'most favored nation' for trade, and conceded extraterritorial rights to the British, and land including Hong Kong. Qing China was also obliged under the Treaty to pay substantial war reparations. The Treaty of Nanking thus undermined both China's sovereignty and the Qing government's power. In Britain, the Treaty was seen as a triumph for progress, commerce, and civilization.

Yet Qing Chinese officials were reluctant to enforce the terms of the Treaty of Nanking (1842) and other 'unequal' treaties from 1843 with France and the United States. In addition, despite its advantages, Britain felt that the treaty of Nanking failed to improve trade and relations with China. By 1854, London demanded the opening of all of China's ports to foreign traders, no tariffs on British imports, and the legalization of the opium trade.

In October 1856, Chinese authorities seized the Arrow, a British-registered ship with an expired license and a Chinese crew. The ship's captain reported to British authorities that the Chinese had removed the ship's British flag and detained the crew. Britain demanded their release. Using the pretext that not all crew members were returned, Britain began a bombardment of forts around Canton as well as the city walls. In Parliament, William Gladstone led Liberals in protest against war but were defeated by the Tories under Lord Palmerston.

The Second Opium War (1856-60), in which Britain, supported by France, further undermined the military and socio-economic power of Qing rulers, contributed to the Taiping Rebellion and shifted the balance of power within the China itself. Again, Britain gained extraterritorial rights and trade privileges.

Primary Sources

Please refer to these primary sources, provided below, for this case study:

1. Letter from from Viceroy Lin Zexu to Queen Victoria (1839).
2. Edward Duncan, "The *Nemesis* bombarding Chinese junks during the First Opium War, Second Battle of Chuenpi, January 7, 1841."
3. John Platt, "The Signing and Sealing of the Treaty of Nanking in the State Cabin of H. M. S. Cornwallis, 29th August, 1842."
4. Walter S. Sherwill, "The Stacking Room," British Opium Factory at Patna, India, 1851
5. J. J. Grandville, "Commerce Anglais," 1839-42, and Honoré Daumier, "Profitant de la circonstance, pour engager les Chinois à se payer pour deux cent millions d'opium....," Le Charivari, December 29, 1858.

Primary Source One: Letter from Viceroy Lin Zexu to Queen Victoria (1839)

Background

Viceroy Lin Zexu was, in 1839, appointed by the Daoguang Emperor of the Qing Dynasty to halt the Canton opium trade by whatever means possible. Lin Zexu first wrote to Queen Victoria, appealing to her moral responsibility to stop the British trade in opium. Receiving no response, he unsuccessfully urged foreign companies to forfeit opium stores in exchange for tea. Lin's letter suggests unease in China in relation to European imperialistic ambitions. A year later, the outbreak of the First Opium War and the subsequent defeat of China proved the validity of these fears.

Letter to the queen of England, from the high Imperial Commissioner Lin, and his colleagues

Lin, high imperial commissioner, a president of the Board of War, viceroy of the two Keäng provinces, &c., Tang, a president of the Board of War, viceroy of the two Kwang provinces, &c., and E, a vice-president of the Board of War, lieut.-governor of Kwangtung, &c., hereby conjointly address this public dispatch to the queen of England for the purpose of giving her clear and distinct information (on the state of affairs) &c.

It is only our high and mighty emperor, who alike supports and cherishes those of the Inner Land, and those from beyond the seas—who looks upon all mankind with equal benevolence—who, if a source of profit exists anywhere, diffuses it over the whole world—who, if the tree of evil takes root anywhere, plucks it up for the benefit of all nations—who, in a word, hath implanted in his breast that heart (by which beneficent nature herself) governs the heavens and the earth! You, the queen of your honorable nation, sit upon a throne occupied through successive generations by predecessors, all of whom have been styled respectful and obedient. Looking over the public documents accompanying the tribute sent (by your predecessors) on various occasions, we find the following: "All the people of my country, arriving at the Central Land for purposes of trade, have to feel grateful to the great emperor for the most perfect justice, for the kindest treatment," and other words to that effect. Delighted did we feel that the kings of your honorable nation so clearly understood the great principles of propriety, and were so deeply grateful for the heavenly goodness (of our emperor):—therefore, it was that we of the heavenly dynasty nourished and cherished your people from afar, and bestowed upon them redoubled proofs of our urbanity and kindness. It is merely from these circumstances, that your country— deriving immense advantage from its commercial intercourse with us, which has endured now two hundred years—has become the rich and flourishing kingdom that it is said to be!

But, during the commercial intercourse which has existed so long, among the numerous foreign merchants resorting hither, are wheat and tares, good and bad; and of these latter are some, who, by means of introducing opium by stealth, have seduced our Chinese people, and caused every province of the land to overflow with that poison. These then know merely to advantage themselves; they care not about injuring others! This is a principle which heaven's Providence finds repugnant; and which mankind conjointly look upon with abhorrence! Moreover, the great emperor hearing of it, actually quivered with indignation, and especially dispatched me, the commissioner, to Canton, that in conjunction with the viceroy and lieut.-governor of the province, means might be taken for its suppression!

Every native of the Inner Land who sells opium, as also all who smoke it, are alike adjudged to death. Were we then to go back and take up the crimes of the foreigners, who, by selling it for many years have induced dreadful calamity and robbed us of enormous wealth, and punish them with equal severity, our laws could not but award to them absolute annihilation! But as for him who again knowingly violates the laws, difficult indeed will it be thus to go on repeatedly pardoning! He or they shall alike be doomed to the penalties of the new statute. We presume that you, the sovereign of your

honorable nation, on pouring out your heart before the altar of eternal justice, cannot but command all foreigners with the deepest respect to reverence our laws! If we only lay clearly before your eyes, what is profitable and what is destructive, you will then know that the statutes of the heavenly dynasty cannot but be obeyed with fear and trembling!

We find that your country is distant from us about sixty or seventy thousand miles, that your foreign ships come hither striving the one with the other for our trade, and for the simple reason of their strong desire to reap a profit. Now, out of the wealth of our Inner Land, if we take a part to bestow upon foreigners from afar, it follows, that the immense wealth which the said foreigners amass, ought properly speaking to be portion of our own native Chinese people. By what principle of reason then, should these foreigners send in return a poisonous drug, which involves in destruction those very natives of China? Without meaning to say that the foreigners harbor such destructive intentions in their hearts, we yet positively assert that from their inordinate thirst after gain, they are perfectly careless about the injuries they inflict upon us! And such being the case, we should like to ask what has become of that conscience which heaven has implanted in the breasts of all men?

We have heard that in your own country opium is prohibited with the utmost strictness and severity: this is a strong proof that you know full well how hurtful it is to mankind. Since then you do not permit it to injure your own country, you ought not to have the injurious drug transferred to another country, and above all others, how much less to the Inner Land! Of the products which China exports to your foreign countries, there is not one which is not beneficial to mankind in some shape or other. There are those which serve for food, those which are useful, and those which are calculated for re-sale; but all are beneficial. Has China (we should like to ask) ever yet sent forth a noxious article from its soil? Not to speak of our tea and rhubarb, things which your foreign countries could not exist a single day without, if we of the Central Land were to grudge you what is beneficial, and not to compassionate your wants, then wherewithal could you foreigners manage to exist? And further, as regards your woolens, camlets, and longells, were it not that you get supplied with our native raw silk, you could not get these manufactured! If China were to grudge you those things which yield a profit, how could you foreigners scheme after any profit at all? Our other articles of food, such as sugar, ginger, cinnamon, &c., and our other articles for use, such as silk piece-goods, chinaware, &c., are all so many necessaries of life to you; how can we reckon up their number! On the other hand, the things that come from your foreign countries are only calculated to make presents of, or serve for mere amusement. It is quite the same to us if we have them, or if we have them not. If then these are of no material consequence to us of the Inner Land, what difficulty would there be in prohibiting and shutting our market against them? It is only that our heavenly dynasty most freely permits you to take off her tea, silk, and other commodities, and convey them for consumption everywhere, without the slightest stint or grudge, for no other reason, but that where a profit exists, we wish that it be diffused abroad for the benefit of all the earth!

Your honorable nation takes away the products of our central land, and not only do you thereby obtain food and support for yourselves, but moreover, by re-selling these products to other countries you reap a threefold profit. Now if you would only not sell opium, this threefold profit would be secured to you: how can you possibly consent to forgo it for a drug that is hurtful to men, and an unbridled craving after gain that seems to know no bounds! Let us suppose that foreigners came from another country, and brought opium into England, and seduced the people of your country to smoke it, would not you, the sovereign of the said country, look upon such a procedure with anger, and in your just indignation endeavor to get rid of it? Now we have always heard that your highness possesses a most kind and benevolent heart, surely then you are incapable of doing or causing to be done unto another, that which you should not wish another to do unto you! We have at the same time heard that your ships which come to Canton do each and every of them carry a document granted by your highness' self, on which are written these words "you shall not be permitted to carry contraband goods;" this shows that the laws of your highness are in their origin both distinct and severe, and we can only suppose that because the ships coming here have been very numerous, due attention has not been given to search and examine; and for this reason it is that we now address you this public

document, that you may clearly know how stern and severe are the laws of the central dynasty, and most certainly you will cause that they be not again rashly violated!

Moreover, we have heard that in London the metropolis where you dwell, as also in Scotland, Ireland, and other such places, no opium whatever is produced. It is only in sundry parts of your colonial kingdom of Hindostan, such as Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Patna, Malwa, Benares, Malacca, and other places where the very hills are covered with the opium plant, where tanks are made for the preparing of the drug; month by month, and year by year, the volume of the poison increases, its unclean stench ascends upwards, until heaven itself grows angry, and the very gods thereat get indignant! You, the queen of the said honorable nation, ought immediately to have the plant in those parts plucked up by the very root! Cause the land there to be hoed up afresh, sow in its stead the five grains, and if any man dare again to plant in these grounds a single poppy, visit his crime with the most severe punishment. By a truly benevolent system of government such as this, will you indeed reap advantage, and do away with a source of evil. Heaven must support you, and the gods will crown you with felicity! This will get for yourself the blessing of long life, and from this will proceed the security and stability of your descendants!

In reference to the foreign merchants who come to this our central land, the food that they eat, and the dwellings that they abide in, proceed entirely from the goodness of our heavenly dynasty: the profits which they reap, and the fortunes which they amass, have their origin only in that portion of benefit which our heavenly dynasty kindly allots them: and as these pass but little of their time in your country, and the greater part of their time in ours, it is a generally received maxim of old and of modern times, that we should conjointly admonish, and clearly make known the punishment that awaits them.

Suppose the subject of another country were to come to England to trade, he would certainly be required to comply with the laws of England, then how much more does this apply to us of the celestial empire! Now it is a fixed statute of this empire, that any native Chinese who sells opium is punishable with death, and even he who merely smokes it, must not less die. Pause and reflect for a moment: if you foreigners did not bring the opium hither, where should our Chinese people get it to re-sell? It is you foreigners who involve our simple natives in the pit of death, and are they alone to be permitted to escape alive? If so much as one of those deprive one of our people of his life, he must forfeit his life in requital for that which he has taken: how much more does this apply to him who by means of opium destroys his fellow-men? Does the havoc which he commits stop with a single life? Therefore it is that those foreigners who now import opium into the Central Land are condemned to be beheaded and strangled by the new statute, and this explains what we said at the beginning about plucking up the tree of evil, wherever it takes root, for the benefit of all nations.

...

Our celestial empire rules over ten thousand kingdoms! Most surely do we possess a measure of godlike majesty which ye cannot fathom! Still we cannot bear to slay or exterminate without previous warning, and it is for this reason that we now clearly make known to you the fixed laws of our land. If the foreign merchants of your said honorable nation desire to continue their commercial intercourse, they then must tremblingly obey our recorded statutes, they must cut off forever the source from which the opium flows, and on no account make an experiment of our laws in their own persons! Let then your highness punish those of your subjects who may be criminal, do not endeavor to screen or conceal them, and thus you will secure peace and quietness to your possessions, thus will you more than ever display a proper sense of respect and obedience, and thus may we unitedly enjoy the common blessings of peace and happiness. What greater joy! What more complete felicity than this!

Let your highness immediately, upon the receipt of this communication, inform us promptly of the state of matters, and of the measure you are pursuing utterly to put a stop to the opium evil. Please let your reply be speedy. Do not on any account make excuses or procrastinate. A most important communication.

P. S. We annex an abstract of the new law, now about to be put in force. "Any foreigner or foreigners bringing opium to the Central Land, with design to sell the same, the principals shall most assuredly

be decapitated, and the accessories strangled; and all property (found on board the same ship) shall be confiscated. The space of a year and a half is granted, within the which, if any one bringing opium by mistake, shall voluntarily step forward and deliver it up, he shall be absolved from all consequences of his crime."

Source: From *The Chinese Repository, 1832-1851*, vol. VIII, no 10, (Canton: Printed for the proprietors, 1940): 497-503.

COMPASS POINTS

- Observe how Lin assumes the moral, spiritual, and economic superiority and power of the Qin dynasty.
- Note how Lin emphasizes the need to respect the laws and borders of other territories and powers.
- Think about the importance the issue must have had for the Emperor if his viceroy Lin Zexu wrote to the Queen herself: by having his viceroy engage the queen the emperor implied his seniority to her, and Chinese power over that of England.

Primary Source Two: The *Nemesis* bombarding Chinese junks during the First Opium War, Second Battle of Chuenpi, January 7, 1841, by Edward Duncan



Source: Edward Duncan, The East India Company iron steam ship *Nemesis*, commanded by Lieutenant W. H. Hall, with boats from the *Sulphur*, *Calliope*, *Larne* and *Starling*, destroying the Chinese war junks in Anson's Bay, on 7 January 1841, May 30, 1843.

Primary Source Three: John Platt, "The Signing and Sealing of the Treaty of Nanking in the State Cabin of H. M. S. Cornwallis, 29th August, 1842," 1846



Source: John Platt, "The Signing and Sealing of the Treaty of Nanking in the State Cabin of H. M. S. Cornwallis, 29th August, 1842," 1846, TreatyNanking, 1846, Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library. Public domain.

COMPASS POINTS

- Note the people in the photograph: the majority are British.
- The signing of the treaty and this image are on a British ship in China.
- The British figures are dressed in uniforms.

Primary Source Four: “The Stacking Room,” British Opium Factory at Patna, India, 1851

Background

In 1851, Bengal Native Infantry Revenue Surveyor Captain Walter S. Sherwill produced a number of tinted lithographs to record British opium production in India. “The Stacking Room,” shows highly organized production and storage of opium balls in stacks at the British East India Company’s Opium factory in Patna, India. Two superintendents and 450 Indian ‘boys’ supervised the production of opium balls. When Sherwill visited the facility there were 300,000 balls worth £900,000 stacked on the racks.



Source: Captain Walter S. Sherwill, “The Stacking Room,” 1851, Tinted lithograph, published by Maclure, MacDonald and MacGregor, London. Public domain.

COMPASS POINTS

- Note the transition to a modern factory production style.
- Think about how the highly efficient organization of both opium production and the British military would have advantaged an ambitious, bureaucratic administration with imperial ambitions.

Primary Source Five: J. J. Grandville, "Commerce Anglais," 1839-42, and Honoré Daumier, "Profitant de la circonstance, pour engager les Chinois à se payer pour deux cent millions d'opium...," Le Charivari, December 29, 1858

Background

These political cartoons from the periods of the first and the second opium wars respectively, show attempts by the British, and then the British and French, to convince China to accept payment with opium.



Source: *Commerce Anglais / La Caricature*, Jean-Jacques Grandville print by Eugène Forest published by Aubert, Paris, 1839-1842, British Museum, Museum Number: 1886.1012.259. Public domain.

COMPASS POINTS

- Translation of title, text within the image, and legend: 'Yé vo dis qu'il faut, que vo ach'lé ce poisonne to d'suite, no vollons que vo emposonniez vo véritablement, pou que'no avions du thé bocoupe pou digerer confortablement nos BeeftaKes'. Translated: 'I tell you to immediately buy the gift here. We want you to poison yourself completely, because we need a lot of tea in order to digest our beefsteaks.'
- Note the tall, thin Englishman and the plump Chinese man, his friend dead on the ground, and his dog at his heels.
- Look at the background figures, especially the main poised to fire his gun. The canon emphasizes the attack.



Source: Honoré Daumier, "Profitant de la circonstance, pour engager les Chinois à se payer pour deux cent millions d'opium..." Le Charivari, December 29, 1858. Benjamin A. and Julia M. Trustman Collection of Honoré Daumier Lithographs, Robert D. Farber University Archives & Special Collections Department, Brandeis University.

COMPASS POINTS

- The translated text is, "Taking advantage of the moment, to engage the Chinese to be paid two hundred million in opium."

- Note the shift from the previous cartoon: no more is it ‘Commerce Anglais’ (Anglo trade): the French are now proactively involved. Note the similarities in posture between the British figure in the first image and the French man in the second: the cartoonist is making an intertextual reference.
- See the shift from instructing the Chinese to use opium to actively pouring it down China’s throat.
- Note the different backdrops.

Case study challenge question

Please answer the following question (750-word response):

Were the Opium Wars a cultural clash or an economic confrontation?

