

Ch. 28 sec. 1: Opium Wars

Wld. Hist. 9

Read the article below and study the map and graph, then answer each of the following questions:

1. What does each square represent in the graph?
2. How many chests did the annual opium imports increase between 1700 and 1800?
3. What is the approximate sailing distance from Singapore to Hong Kong?
4. Why did the British government encourage the opium trade?

In the 1700s, Britain began smuggling from India into China a narcotic known as opium in order to open Chinese trade markets. The English had been desperate to find a product the Chinese would buy. Opium became that product.

The East India Company, the English company chartered to trade in Asia, opened Chinese trade markets by addicting the Chinese to opium. In the beginning, the Company kept the distribution of the narcotic to a small amount in order to increase the price. At that time, opium was a drug used only by wealthy Chinese—it was not yet a drug of the common people. However, in 1819, the British began distributing massive amounts of opium in order to eliminate the competition. Though flooding the market temporarily dropped the price, the cheaper price of the drug increased the amount of

users. Opium became a recreational drug and created a vast market of opium addicts.

The British government had a vested interest in not only maintaining, but increasing the amount of opium sold in China. Silver gained from the sale of opium helped purchase Chinese tea, which the English drank by the millions-of-gallons every year. The tax on this tea provided the British government with ten percent of its revenue.

Britain's expanding sales of opium to China caused the Opium War of 1839. China wanted sales stopped and destroyed an opium shipment at Guangzhou. The British responded by attacking the port cities shown on the map. The war ended in 1842 with a treaty favorable for the victorious British.

