

**Opium War, Improperly So-Called:  
Breaking the Connection between Christianity and Opium-Imperialism**

BY

Alex Shaokai Tseng

VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

2007-11-16

## **Introduction**

While interest in the Opium War (1839-1842) is primarily academic in the West today, this topic continues to wield profound ideological influences on both sides of the Formosa Strait. Elementary school students in both Taiwan and Mainland China are taught that the Sino-British treaties resulting from the two Opium Wars are “Unequal Treaties” aimed at advancing occidental colonialism. While the chief purpose of this political propaganda is to evoke Chinese patriotism, the equation of both Christianity and opium to Western imperialism in China signifies that the vivid memory of this national humiliation still constitutes significant hindrance to evangelism among the Chinese. In this essay, I will extend John Quincy Adam’s thesis<sup>1</sup> to assert that the primary cause of the war was not opium or British colonialism, but Chinese imperialistic arrogance. I will also show that Protestant missionaries acted as the primary agent in China’s deliverance from opium. I will conclude that it is ahistorical to associate Christianity with opium and Western imperialism.

## **Opium, Western Imperialism, and Christianity—A Historical Review**

The ties between Christianity, opium, and Western imperialism arose from the misinterpretation of a convoluted history. Despite Emperor Kangxi’s interest in Western culture and relative hospitality towards Catholic missionaries, his son Yongzheng inherited a

---

<sup>1</sup> Tan Chung, *China and the Brave New World* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1978), 1.

longstanding anti-Christian tradition among Chinese intellectuals. In 1723, Yongzheng issued an imperial edict to ban Christianity and missionary activities in the nation. Robert Morrison's entry into China in 1807 set a new pattern for Protestant missionaries to associate mission with commerce.<sup>2</sup>

The First Opium War forced the Chinese government to allow evangelistic meetings in designated commercial ports.<sup>3</sup> In signing the Treaty of Tianjin after the Second Opium War, the Chinese government finally allowed British and French missionaries to freely evangelize anywhere in the nation.<sup>4</sup>

Because the war opened China's doors for opium and missionaries at the same time, opium and Christianity were at once identified with Western imperial aggression.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, since the people who brought the gospel to China were of the same race as those who brought opium, the ties between opium and Christianity grew even stronger in the minds of the Chinese. In 1892, an editorial in the *Chinese Recorder*, a Christian periodical, reported, "We recoil in horror from that term now coming into use in some parts of China, 'Jesus opium.' And yet these words express the almost universal Chinese idea with reference to the foreign drug."<sup>6</sup>

This tie was further propounded during the May Fourth Movement. Jiang Menglin, a strong

---

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rennstich, *Die zwei Symbole des Kreuzes: Handel und Mission in China und Südostasien* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1988), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Lu Shiqiang, *Anti-Christian Thought among Modern Chinese Intellectuals: A Selection* (近代中國知識分子反基督教問題論文選集) (Taipei: Cosmic Care, 2006), 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Karl Rennstich, *Die zwei Symbole des Kreuzes: Handel und Mission in China und Südostasien* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1988), 197.

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 34.

proponent thereof, famously coined the slogan, “Jesus flew here on a cannonball”—a statement still echoing among anti-Christian Chinese intellectuals today.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the intellectual and progressive nature of the May Fourth Movement provided fertile soil for Marxism. Marxism further advanced the link between opium and Christianity, as Marx asserted that “[Religion] is the opium of the people.”<sup>8</sup> By this, Marx meant that religion anesthetizes the people in the midst of class oppression, thus preventing class struggle and social-economic development. Therefore, in communist China, Christianity not only represents Western imperial aggression, but also obstacle to national development.

Since the humiliating memory of the Opium War is a convenient tool for evoking patriotism, both the Communist and Nationalist Parties continue to use it as political propaganda. For this reason, the memory is kept vivid among Chinese people today. As a side effect, the longstanding animosity against Christianity remains embedded in Chinese culture.

### **Settling the Controversy: Three Models of the War**

John Quincy Adams offered his perspective on the Opium War as early as 1841:

The cause of [Opium] war is the *Kotow*: —the arrogant and insupportable pretensions of China, that she will hold commercial intercourse with the rest of mankind, not upon terms of equal reciprocity, but upon the insulting and degrading forms of relation between lord and vassal.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Solomon Yeh, *Religious Criticism in Modern China* (Taipei: Christian Arts, 1987), 37.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*. Quoted by Karl Rennstich, *Die zwei Symbole des Kreuzes: Handel und Mission in China und Südostasien* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1988), 22. Translation mine.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Though crudely stated and unpopular amongst Chinese intellectuals, this thesis is adopted in more moderate form by Hsin-Pao Chang, a Chinese scholar at Harvard, in his monumental book on this subject, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*.<sup>10</sup> Tan Chung labels Chang's position as "cultural-war theory."<sup>11</sup> Chung names two other perspectives on the war—the "trade-war model," which maintains that the fundamental cause of the war "was the expansion of trade beyond the limits of the ancient Canton system of regulation,"<sup>12</sup> and the "Opium-War perspective," which sees the war as a result of the British seeking to benefit from opium import to China. These three theories are not mutually exclusive, but have differences of emphases. Chang's position may be considered a middle way between the first and the second. While I acknowledge that the British government did seek economic benefits from opium trade, I will argue that the most fundamental cause of the war was Chinese imperialistic pride (cultural-war theory).

Chung refutes Chang's cultural-and-trade-war theory in a chapter titled "Historical Reality and Baseless Theory," arguing by means of linguistic and historical analysis that so-called Chinese imperialistic racism was already absent or merely nominal in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Because of the weight of his arguments, it is necessary for me to defend my position before proceeding.

---

<sup>10</sup> Hsin-Pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964).

<sup>11</sup> Tan Chung, *China and the Brave New World* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1978), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy*, quoted by Tan Chung, *China and the Brave New World* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1978), 9.

Chung's arguments are based on selective examples. For instance, he shows that the terms "Middle Kingdom" and "Son of Heaven" no longer denoted Sino-centrism or absolute imperial power in Qing Dynasty. His analyses of semantic and political changes seem plausible.<sup>13</sup> However, even if these terms were not used to denote Sino-centrism or absolute imperial power, this does not prove that these ideologies were absent in the Chinese mindset at the time. In addition, Chung uses semantic analysis to show that the word 夷 (*yi*), which he claims was misunderstood in the Tianjin Treaty to mean "barbarian," was used at that time simply to denote "foreigners" without derogatory connotations.<sup>14</sup> Even if this were true, however, it does not prove that the Chinese did not see Westerners as an inferior race.

In fact, Chung's examples are so selective, that a few counterexamples will suffice to disprove his thesis. For instance, in 1898, Zhou Han, once aide to General Zuo Zongtang, published a document calling the "servant-citizens (*chen-zi*) of Qing," the "loyal and righteous servants under the heavens," to "use all possible means to prevent the ashes of the [foreign] demons from burning again."<sup>15</sup> In 1876, a memorial to the emperor urging war against Western powers read: "They [Europeans] stand in peripheral lands; we [Chinese] stand in Middle Kingdom; their few are no match for our many. They preach Jesus; we preach Confucius and

---

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-17.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-20.

<sup>15</sup> "大清臣子周孔徒遺囑" from Great Britain, Foreign Office, China, Embassy and Consular Archives, Correspondence, F. O. 228:1096. See Lu Shiqiang, *Anti-Christian Thought among Modern Chinese Intellectuals: A Selection* (近代中國知識分子反基督教問題論文選集) (Taipei: Cosmic Care, 2006), 47. Translation mine.

Mencius; their religion is no match for ours in orthodoxy and correctness.”<sup>16</sup> These two documents well demonstrate Sino-centric racism in Qing Dynasty. As regards the centralization of imperial power, Osterhammel convincingly demonstrates that the emperor’s power, in the tradition of Yongzheng and Qianlong, is “absolute and almost infinite”, and lists five small factors that may hinder the emperor in very limited ways from freely swaying his will.<sup>17</sup> In light of these counter arguments and examples, I believe my position is sustained notwithstanding Chung’s careful analyses.

### **Primary Cause of the Opium War**

Chang states the cause of the Sino-British conflict in moderate terms:

In the broad sense, the Opium War was a clash between two cultures. One was agricultural, Confucian, stagnant, and waist-deep in the quicksand of a declining dynastic cycle... The other society was industrial, capitalistic, progressive, and restless.<sup>18</sup>

This is an understatement of the situations that Chang describes in his book. Since the Han and Tang dynasties, China has been firmly convinced of her superiority as “Celestial Dynasty” over neighbouring countries.<sup>19</sup> Diplomatic relationships operated naturally in a master-tributary

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. Translation mine.

<sup>17</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens—Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1998), 333-334. Translation mine.

<sup>18</sup> Hsin-Pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

framework.<sup>20</sup> China was so abundant in her wealth, that she needed nothing from her neighbours. There was thus little government-approved international commerce. Whatever goods and services brought into Middle Kingdom were considered tributary, and anything that foreigners obtained from the Celestial Dynasty was considered divine grace. No fair trade existed between the Divine State (“*Shenzhou*”) and the barbarians. Rather, what China considered “fair” was for foreign merchants and diplomats to perform *kotow* (or *koutou*, *kowtow*—kneeling down and knocking the head against the floor) to the emperor as sign of worship and obedience. Ignorant of Western modernization, China naturally saw the Europeans as another barbarian race.

When European nations were already competing in global trades, the Qing government graciously allowed foreigners to trade with the Chinese at the port of Canton, a province occupied by “Southern Barbarians” (*Nanman*). Until the Treaty of Nanjing (1842), Canton remained the only port where foreigners could trade legally.<sup>21</sup>

The Canton system was a frustrating experience for British merchants. Imperial edicts frequently altered trade policies.<sup>22</sup> The permanent policies were even more frustrating than unexpected alterations. The most significant problem was the *Gonghang* (or *Cohong*) system, a monopolistic guild formed by Chinese *Hang* (brand, company) merchants in 1720 to regulate foreign trade and mediate between foreign merchants and Chinese authorities.<sup>23</sup> In 1754, Canton

---

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

authorities instituted strict policies for foreign trade, requiring each foreign merchant ship to have one *Hang* merchant on board.<sup>24</sup> The *Hangs* “settled prices, sold goods, guaranteed duties, restrained the foreigners, negotiated with them, controlled smuggling, and leased the factories to them.”<sup>25</sup>

In addition to *Gonghang* policies, foreign merchants had to pay four different duties and various fees to more than ten local authorities and commercial institutions.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, foreign ships were not allowed to travel on inland rivers. Foreign merchants were not allowed to bring women to Canton.<sup>27</sup> Chang rightly comments that “the whole Canton system was built on a central theme of contempt for foreigners and disdain for merchants.”<sup>28</sup>

Another frustration for foreign merchants was unequal trade. China was uninterested in European goods, but Europe had considerable market demands for Chinese tea and rhubarb. The British East Indian Company, which had monopoly over trades with China up to late 18<sup>th</sup> Century, thus resorted to importing opium from India into China.<sup>29</sup> Opium trade soon became Britain’s chief profit source in China. The annual import of opium to China rose from 37,000 chests in 1840 to 70,000 chests in the 1850s.<sup>30</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, private firms began to take over British trade with China from the East

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Rennstich, *Die zwei Symbole des Kreuzes: Handel und Mission in China und Südostasien* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1988), 122.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

Indian Company. By that time, opium had become a widespread problem in China. An alarming percentage of men and women from all social classes became addicted. In Yunnan Province, opium even became a standard monetary currency.<sup>31</sup>

In 1838, Lin Zexu (or Lin Tse-Hsu) was appointed Royal Commissioner to deal with the opium problem in Canton, and was entrusted with the power to command all naval forces in the province.

Though highly educated in the Confucian tradition and enthusiastic about reforming the nation, Lin conducted his business with four mistaken imperialistic assumptions.<sup>32</sup> First, he thought that the livelihood of the foreigners depended on Chinese tea and rhubarb, and that they were thankful to the Chinese for gracing them with business.<sup>33</sup> Second, Lin was convinced that strict enforcement of harsh foreign trade policies would filter out all the foreign “evildoers” and keep only the upright ones.<sup>34</sup> Third, Lin had the misconception that the demand for tea and rhubarb in Europe was so great, that they generated most of the income for British merchants, and that opium trade only brought a small surplus.<sup>35</sup> Lin’s fourth assumption that the British government did not support opium traders was soon proven false when he came into contact with British authorities.<sup>36</sup> With these false assumptions, Lin treated foreign merchants in Canton with

---

<sup>31</sup> Kathleen Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 13-14.

<sup>32</sup> Hsin-Pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), 131-133.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

imperial arrogance and brutality.

An incident occurred in 1839 when Lin decided to take extreme measures to end opium import once and for all: He boycotted the foreigners' supplies, suspended trade, and deprived them of their Chinese employees in order to force them to surrender all their opium.<sup>37</sup> Somehow Lin was convinced that the British and Americans were willing to submit the opium, but were prevented from doing so by the British merchant Lancelot Dent.<sup>38</sup> Lin thus ordered an immediate arrest for Dent on March 22. The procedure of the arrest was questionable. Dent was invited with courtesy by Chinese authorities to discuss the opium matter, and was detained thereafter. When Captain Charles Elliot, Chief Superintendent of British trade in China, learned of Dent's arrest, he hastened to Canton at his own risk to rescue Dent. He understood that if Dent was to be tried and convicted under Chinese law, Dent would face long-term imprisonment even after all the opium had been surrendered.<sup>39</sup> It was Elliot's commitment "to resist to the last the seizure and punishment of a British subject by the Chinese law, be his crime what it might."<sup>40</sup> This was standard British practice in China due to a previous incident where an innocent British soldier was executed by Chinese authorities on false charges without fair trial. The Rule of Law was still a foreign concept to China at that time.

When Elliot came to Dent's rescue, however, the opportunistic Chinese authorities happily

---

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

seized the chance and arrested Elliot as well. Lin then rounded up the 350 or so foreigners in Canton, and set up a blockade to detain them for 47 days.<sup>41</sup> This finally forced the foreign merchants into surrendering all their opium.

Chang rightly comments that in Lin's imperialistic mind, "the detention of the foreign merchants at Canton was the enforcement of Chinese law, the rightful punishment of a group of degraded opium smugglers and a fitting conclusion to the shameful period of the opium trade."<sup>42</sup> To Elliot's modernized thinking, however, "the Chinese government had committed a serious piratical act against British life, liberty, and property and against the dignity of the British crown."<sup>43</sup>

Elliot was now concerned to "revolutionize China's foreign-trade system and to begin a new and honourable era in Britain's relations with China."<sup>44</sup> In line with this purpose, William Jardine, an influential British merchant, suggested to Prime Minister Palmerston the blockade of the principle ports of China to enforce four demands: "(1) an ample apology for the insult incurred by the British in Canton, (2) the payment for the opium surrendered to Commissioner Lin, (3) the conclusion of an equitable commercial treaty to prevent the repetition of such proceedings, and (4) the opening of additional ports to foreign trade."<sup>45</sup> On Oct. 18, 1839, after an interview with Jardine, Palmerston ordered Elliot to blockade Canton. It is clear in the current

---

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-160.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

analysis that the purpose—or the chief cause at least—of the blockade was neither colonial intrusion nor opium import, but the establishment of fair trade and diplomatic equality with China.

Because of the blockade, British merchants retreated from Canton to Macao in May 1839. In July, a difficult issue arose when a clash between British seamen and Chinese villagers in Jianshazui (or Chien-sha-tsui, part of Hong Kong) resulted in the death of a man named Lin Weixi.<sup>46</sup> Elliot was quick to express apology on behalf of the British, and offered a reward of \$200 for information leading to the arrest of the murderer. He also offered \$1,500 at his “private account and risk” to the victim’s family, along with an extra \$100 in case local Chinese officials would tax the family for receiving this large sum. In addition, Elliot offered \$100 to be distributed among the villagers to express his good will and apology.<sup>47</sup>

Elliot held an investigation into the incident, followed by a trial, but it was impossible for him to determine who was responsible for the murder. Commissioner Lin demanded that Elliot hand over the suspects to stand trial under Chinese law, but Elliot, as usual, refused. Lin thus ordered a blockade to cut off all supplies for the British ships, and even poisoned all fresh water sources attainable by the British. Sporadic clashes occurred during the blockade, and a few lives on both sides were lost. In October, Lin, growing impatient with the issue of Lin Weixi,

---

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

threatened to arrest the suspects under Elliot's custody by force.<sup>48</sup>

In the same month, Lin began to allow British ships to enter the port on the condition that they sign a bond agreeing to be subject to thorough examination by Chinese officials. Elliot, eager to establish fair trade with the Chinese, forbade British merchants to sign the bond. Royal Saxon, an English ship that defied Elliot's orders and signed the bond, began sailing towards the port on Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>.<sup>49</sup> In order to stop her, the Volage fired a shot across her bow.<sup>50</sup> Lin's naval forces responded by firing back. A small but full-scale battle broke out to mark the beginning of the Opium War.

The War of 1839-1842 ended with the Treaty of Nanjing. Most articles in this treaty were aimed at establishing fair trade and diplomatic equality between China and Britain. This treaty, as well as the Treaty of Tianjin that resulted from the Second Opium War, has no mention of legalizing opium trade in China. These two treaties allowed foreign opium to flood into China via the agreement of free trade, whereby the Chinese government was no longer able to interfere with British business the way it used to.

The Chinese consider these treaties "unequal" for two major reasons. The first concerns the articles demanding the Chinese government to compensate for British losses during the war. From the British perspective, Britain was forced into the war because all diplomatic attempts at

---

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

establishing fair trade and inter-national equality had failed, so the British felt justified in demanding compensation. From the Chinese perspective, it was fair for the Celestial Dynasty to treat barbarian merchants as inferiors. That the British should resist the divinely instituted order and go to war with China was in itself absurd, not to mention that Britain should demand compensation after the war. For the Chinese this was utterly unfair. The second reason why Chinese people perceive the treaty as unequal has to do with the article agreeing to hand over Hong Kong. It must be noted that the Chinese government at that time considered Hong Kong a savage island in the Barbarian South, which was of no economic or political interest whatsoever. The British wanted to take over Hong Kong and develop it into a commercial port, in order to strengthen its commercial powers in Eastern Asia. The Celestial Dynasty, however, cared a lot about the completeness and unity of its land, just as the communist government today still scorns separatists from Tibet and Taiwan. To conquer a piece of the Divine State constituted blasphemy against the Son of Heaven.

From the current analysis it may be concluded that opium was not the chief cause of the war, nor was British colonialism, though they were indeed causal agents. Rather, it was Chinese oppression against British merchants as a result of Sino-centric imperialistic arrogance.

### **British Missionaries' War against Opium**

Though opium was not the chief cause of the war, it nevertheless was a major agent. British

missionaries saw great evil in their government and countrymen in selling opium to an unconverted race. The missionaries launched a long battle against this evil, and by their efforts, God's Kingdom finally prevailed over the two empires on this matter.

While the missionaries in China were of various nationalities, denominations, and theological convictions, the Rev. Silvester Whitehead observed that "the missionaries in China are absolutely one on this important question [of opium traffic]."<sup>51</sup> Long before anyone else, the medical missionaries were the first to scientifically prove the detrimental effects of opium addiction.<sup>52</sup>

Though the harm of opium was proven, the missionaries were met with strong resistance to their anti-opium movement from both the British and the Chinese governments. For one thing, the Chinese government generated large sums of revenue from opium-related taxation.<sup>53</sup> Opium had also become a standard monetary currency in parts of China.<sup>54</sup> The whole Chinese economy had become addicted to opium.

Meanwhile, the popular opinion in Britain in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was that the Chinese were so addicted, that even if the British stopped selling them opium, they would still buy it from other countries. Since this was a necessary evil, the British happily used it as a means to generate profit. Moreover, Chinese farmers had been growing poppies illegally on domestic soil, and the

---

<sup>51</sup> Kathleen Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium*. (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 30.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

Chinese government was wilfully ignorant of it, which further justified the popular opinion among the British that selling opium to China was irreproachable. To this opinion the missionaries vehemently and repeatedly responded with a moral challenge, powerfully stated by the Rev. Griffith John, “It is not for us to perpetrate murder in order to prevent the Chinese from committing suicide.”<sup>55</sup>

The ecumenical *Chinese Recorder*, published by the Presbyterian Mission Press in Shanghai since 1868, became a major channel for the missionaries to voice their opinion. The periodical also exercised profound influence back home. For instance, an 1891 editorial encouraged missionaries to collect photographs depicting the miseries of Chinese opium addicts and send these pictures to Britain.<sup>56</sup> Such measures inspired Christian politicians back home to take up the matter in Parliament. Politicians like Edward and Joseph Pease were vocal in their opposition against opium trade.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, famous missionary figures like J. Hudson Taylor wielded as much influence as possible to encourage British Christians to oppose opium.<sup>58</sup> European missionaries with one accord, with the single exception of Karl Gützlaff, refused to have any connections with opium traders such as boarding ships carrying opium.<sup>59</sup>

The tenacity of the anti-opium movement and the commitment of the missionaries must be

---

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>59</sup> Karl Rennstich, *Die zwei Symbole des Kreuzes: Handel und Mission in China und Südostasien* (Stuttgart: Quell Verlag, 1988), 26-28.

emphasized. Not even the Boxer Uprising in the late 1890s, a Chinese patriotic movement of which one of the aims was to rid the country of missionaries by means of massacre, was able to stop them. The Uprising drove the Anti-Opium League dormant from 1900 to 1906. However, it continued to exist and re-emerged with the same leaders with strong fervour only to bring the struggle to its final phase.<sup>60</sup> It should bewilder anti-Christian Chinese intellectuals today why these foreign missionaries should dedicate themselves to serving and loving a people that had so barbarously slaughtered their colleagues, countrymen, and families.

Finally, the Liberals took office in 1906. This new Parliament consisted of many members of nonconformist churches that had long served the cause of abolishing opium.<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, revolutionary forces stormed every part of China in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, and most Chinese people had awakened to the fact that opium was detrimental to every aspect of their national well-being. Eventually, the new British government would cooperate with the new Republic of China, established in 1911, in bringing an end to the country's national addiction.

Curiously, Chinese people have not been very thankful to the self-sacrifice of the missionaries. Instead, in the China Centenary Missionary Conference of 1907 in Shanghai, the missionaries thanked the Chinese government for its willingness to cooperate with the British government to end the trade and the use of opium in China. They did not see the abolition of opium as a Chinese responsibility; they saw it as their own. Clearly, if these missionaries had any

---

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Lodwick, *Crusaders against Opium* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 49.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

imperialistic interest at all, it was not for Great Britain, but for the Kingdom of God.

## **Conclusion**

From the current analysis it may be concluded that the popular opinion among Chinese people today that Christianity, like opium, is a form of imperialist aggression is utterly ahistorical. The chief cause of China's sufferings from the Opium War was her own imperialistic arrogance. Britain acted as a causal agent thereof, but China was the primary reason for her own opium addiction. The missionaries did not bring opium into China. Rather, they were by far the most important force in rescuing China from addiction. As a Chinese Christian, I feel indebted to and amazed by their self-sacrifice, as was the Rev. Yen Yung-King, who on his trip to Britain in 1894 marvelled that "those Christian friends should show so cordial an interest in a nation afar off, in a people of another race, another tongue, another religion, and that they should thus be expressing their opposition to a system of trade carried on by their own Government."<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 53