



The Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another

By *W. Travis Hanes, Frank Sanello*



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In this tragic and powerful story, the two Opium Wars of 1839–1842 and 1856–1860 between Britain and China are recounted for the first time through the eyes of the Chinese as well as the Imperial West. Opium entered China during the Middle Ages when Arab traders brought it into China for medicinal purposes. As it took hold as a recreational drug, opium wrought havoc on Chinese society. By the early nineteenth century, 90 percent of the Emperor's court and the majority of the army were opium addicts.

Britain was also a nation addicted-to tea, grown in China, and paid for with profits made from the opium trade. When China tried to ban the use of the drug and bar its Western smugglers from its gates, England decided to fight to keep open China's ports for its importation. England, the superpower of its time, managed to do so in two wars, resulting in a drug-induced devastation of the Chinese people that would last 150 years.

In this page-turning, dramatic and colorful history, *The Opium Wars* responds to past, biased Western accounts by representing the neglected Chinese version of the story and showing how the wars stand as one of the monumental clashes between the cultures of East and West.

"A fine popular account."-Publishers Weekly

"Their account of the causes, military campaigns and tragic effects of these wars is absorbing, frequently macabre and deeply unsettling."-Booklist



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Hanes (*Imperial Diplomacy in the Era of Decolonization*) and film author and former Los Angeles Daily News critic Sanello have teamed up to produce this fine popular account. Beginning in the 18th century, British merchants quickly discovered that by introducing high-quality opium into China, they could earn high profits and use the hard currency to buy more tea. As a result, Chinese society became inundated with opium, and more and more people, including much of the army, became addicted. Twice, from 1839 to 1842 and again from 1856 until 1860, the Chinese government sought to oust the British trade. Hanes and Sanello describe in detail the military operations of both wars, the few Chinese successes and inexorable British wave of victories, culminating in the 1860 sacking and looting of the Imperial Summer Palace and its sumptuous works of art. The opium saturation of China continued until the post-WWII communist takeover, when the Maoist government banned opium, executed dealers and weaned the country (perhaps 10% of the population was addicted) off the drug with progressive rehab programs. The book covers a familiar time and place in history, but the authors make some nice analogies between the brutal economics and empire of the 19th century, and 21st-century forms of money, politics and war.

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Today it seems incredible, but not that long ago a liberal and presumably "progressive" nation forced a weaker one to accept the importation of opium at the point of a sword. Tea grown on Chinese plantations was already a staple of the British diet in the 1830s. Frequently, British merchants paid for the tea with the profits gleaned from massive smuggling of opium into Chinese ports. Opium, first imported into China by Arab traders during the Middle Ages, had cut a devastatingly wide swath through Chinese society, with a large percentage of the army and the bureaucracy addicted. When the Chinese government attempted to prohibit both the use and the smuggling of the drug, Britain launched two wars between 1839 and 1860 to force open Chinese ports. Hanes is a historian and educator who specializes in British imperial history; Sanello is a film critic and author of numerous books on films and history. Their account of the causes, military campaigns, and tragic effects of these wars is absorbing, frequently macabre, and deeply unsettling.

Jay Freeman

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About the Author

Historian and educator W. Travis Hanes III, Ph.D., is an expert on nineteenth-century Britain and holds a doctorate in British Imperial History from the University of Texas at Austin. He has written two books on the twilight of the British Empire in Africa, *Imperial Diplomacy in the Era of Decolonization* and the upcoming *Imperialism or Expatriate Nationalism?*

Frank Sanello is the author of 15 books on films and history. He was the film critic for the Los Angeles Daily News, and his articles have been syndicated worldwide. Both authors live in Los Angeles, California.

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