



■ **Figure 3.9** Chinese official, Lin Zexu, overseeing the destruction of opium in Guangzhou

Lin Zexu attempts to stop the opium trade

In 1838, Emperor Dao Guang, who ruled from 1820 to 1850, sent Commissioner Lin Zexu to Guangzhou to finally end the opium trade. Lin ordered the confiscation of all the British merchants' opium supplies. In all, 20 283 chests of the drug were seized and destroyed. The merchants were furious. The new Superintendent of Trade in China, Captain Charles Elliott, then promised the merchants compensation from the British government.

Lin did not only attempt to end the trade by force, he also appealed to the British monarch, Queen Victoria, to assist the Chinese government.

ACTIVITY: Response to Lin Zexu

■ ATL

■ Critical-thinking skills – Evaluate evidence and arguments

With reference to Lin Zexu's letter (right), answer the following questions:

- 1 In pairs, **identify** the key points made by Lin in his letter and write these out in a bullet point list.
- 2 **Underline** where Lin seems to be trying not to offend the British.
- 3 In pairs, reflect on how you think the British responded to Lin's letter. Write down your ideas.

The Way of Heaven is fairness to all; it does not suffer us to harm others in order to benefit ourselves. Men are alike in this the world over: that they cherish life and hate what endangers life ...

But there is a class of evil foreigner that makes opium and brings it for sale, tempting fools to destroy themselves, merely in order to reap profit ... it appears that this poisonous article is manufactured by certain devilish persons in places subject to your rule. It is not, of course, either made or sold at your bidding, nor do all the countries you rule produce it, but only certain of them. I am told that in your own country opium smoking is forbidden under severe penalties. This means that you are aware of how harmful it is. But better than forbid the smoking of it would be to forbid the sale of it and, better still, to forbid the production of it, which is the only way of cleansing the contamination at its source. So long as you do not take it yourselves, but continue to make it and tempt the people of China to buy it, you will be showing yourselves careful of your own lives, but careless of the lives of other people, indifferent in your greed for gain to the harm you do to others ...

Letter from Lin Zexu to Queen Victoria. Quoted in Waley, A. 1968. The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes.

IMMEDIATE CAUSE OF WAR

Britain claims extraterritoriality

Tension between Britain and China intensified. The trigger for the outbreak of war came not from an incident specifically to do with the opium trade – but as the result of the murder of a Chinese national by drunken British sailors in a fight in the city of Kowloon. Charles Elliott paid compensation to the Chinese man's family, but the Chinese authorities wanted the culprits handed over to stand trial. The British refused, arguing that the men would not get a fair trial under Chinese law as confessions were extracted under torture. They also objected to the public execution the men faced if they were found guilty.

Therefore, the trigger for war was the British attempt to claim **extraterritoriality**.

The British conducted their own trial of the men and did not hand them over to the Chinese authorities. In retaliation, Lin ordered the ports to be **blockaded** and stopped food supplies to foreigners. The British response was to send warships to Guangzhou to 'protect their interests'. These warships then destroyed a large number of inferior Chinese war junks, leading to a huge loss of life.

The British were then expelled from Guangzhou – which led to 20 warships being sent to China with 4000 troops on board. These bombarded Guangzhou and then sailed up and down the coast, causing many deaths and widespread destruction.

i Extraterritoriality

Extraterritoriality is where people are exempted from local law. In the nineteenth century, the British claimed extraterritoriality for their nationals working in China. This meant that if a foreign national committed a crime in Chinese law they could not be prosecuted in China's courts but would be judged under the jurisdiction of their own government.



■ **Figure 3.10** The destruction of Chinese war junks, 1841

THE END OF THE FIRST OPIUM WAR

The First Opium War lasted from 1839 until 1842. The British forces were better trained and better armed – the Chinese were no match for them. The Chinese were fighting to stop the import of opium into their country – and the British fought to protect this lucrative trade. Many historians have suggested that this war was one of the most shameful in British history.

The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing. The treaty did not mention the opium trade, which had been the key cause of the conflict.

i Treaty of Nanjing

The terms of the treaty included:

- Four additional ports were to be opened up to trade with the West.
- The British were no longer to be subject to Chinese law – but were to be subject to the laws of their own country (extraterritoriality).
- The British were to have special rights in areas where they lived, called 'Concession Areas'.
- The Chinese had to pay 21 million silver dollars in compensation for the war. They also had to pay for all the opium they had destroyed.
- In all future dealings, China had to treat Britain as an 'equal'.
- Britain was to be given the port city of Hong Kong.
- Britain was given 'most favoured nation' status, which meant that it could demand the same rights granted by China to any other country.

The Manchu rulers were not consulted on the terms of the treaty, nor did they have any choice but to sign it. British ships threatened to again bombard Chinese coastal towns until the treaty was signed. This was the first 'unequal treaty'. It was unequal because Chinese interests were completely ignored.

After the war, opium flowed into China in ever increasing quantities. The Chinese authorities could only impose harsher and harsher punishments on users to try to cut down on the drug use. For example, possession of the drug was punishable by beheading, and the drug user's family could not sit the civil service exams for three generations. France, the Netherlands and the USA increased their involvement in selling opium in China too.

WHY WAS THERE A SECOND OPIUM WAR?

Another war broke out between China and Britain in 1856. This time the war was triggered by an incident involving a ship called the *Arrow*. The ship was flying a British flag – although it was owned by a Hong Kong Chinese – and it was boarded by Chinese officials who believed that there were some well-known pirates on board. The Chinese police arrested the crew but in the struggle that followed the British flag was torn down. The British were furious and ordered the release of the crew and an official apology for the treatment of the flag. The Chinese returned the crew but did not apologize. Chinese gangs attacked and set fire to British homes and warehouses and the British warships bombarded Guangzhou. War broke out again, and again the Chinese were humiliated. The war ended in 1858 with another unequal treaty, the Treaty of Tientsin.

i Treaty of Tientsin

- Six more ports were opened to foreign trade.
- Opium importation to China was made legal with a small import duty.
- Christian missionaries were to be given complete freedom to convert people.
- Europeans were allowed to travel anywhere in China without restriction.
- Ambassadors of European countries were allowed to set up residence in Beijing – the Imperial capital.

Tension remained high between the British and the Chinese – the latter attempted to resist fully implementing the unequal treaties. In 1860 British and French troops were sent to Beijing to enforce the terms of the treaties. While they were there, allegedly in response to the death of 21 members of a negotiating team, the troops looted and burnt the Imperial Summer Palace and forced the Emperor to flee into exile. The violence was widespread and the Chinese were again forced to sue for 'peace' and grant even more concessions (see information box below).

China had been utterly defeated and demoralized. By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain, France and Germany had seized huge territories in China, which were known as their 'spheres of influence'. Russia had also taken territory in the north, and had gained influence in Manchuria and Mongolia. The final humiliation came in 1894–95, when China was beaten by a much smaller Asian nation – Japan. Japan had formerly been a tributary state. Japan took control of Korea, Taiwan and the Ryukyu islands.

i Concession of Beijing

- Reaffirmed the rights of diplomats to live in Beijing
- Increased the cash compensation China had to pay
- Gave the Kowloon Peninsular to the British

What were the effects of the opium wars on China?

The unequal treaties gave foreign powers certain advantages:

- They had control and/or influence in some Chinese cities.
- The import of opium was now legal.
- The Chinese had to agree low tariffs on imported manufactured goods from Europe, which damaged China's own industries.
- Extraterritoriality meant that the Chinese government had no effective control over foreigners in their own country.
- The tribute system was ended.
- Missionaries were now able to live and work in China (this led to a lot of discontent).
- Britain had 'most favoured nation' status.

China had been thoroughly humiliated by the West, but the social and political structure of China remained intact. The Emperor still controlled the country; however, he needed to deal with the situation that the unequal treaties had created. Some Chinese began to believe that the Mandate of Heaven may have shifted away from the ruling dynasty.

HOW DID WESTERN INFLUENCE AND EXPLOITATION AFFECT CHINA DOMESTICALLY?

While China was facing external threats from the Western powers, it was also having to deal with several internal rebellions. The largest of these was the Taiping Rebellion, which lasted from 1850 to 1864. The rebellion was led by a Christian convert who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus. He said that God had instructed him to drive the Manchu rulers out of China. This was a serious rebellion

and at one time the Taipings controlled one-third of China and had their capital in Nanjing. The rebellion was finally put down by Imperial forces but with the help of European troops. The Europeans wanted to crush the rebellion to prevent the Taipings damaging their trading interests.

The rebellion caused devastation over parts of China. The damage to agriculture and trade meant that fewer people could pay taxes and so government income was reduced. Millions of people died in the fighting which took place between the Taipings and Imperial troops – some historians have estimated there were as many as 20 million casualties.

However, the fact that the Imperial troops had to have assistance from the foreigners to put down this internal rebellion was a further sign of the ruling dynasty's weakness. It demonstrated how dependent the Qing rulers had become on foreign forces to maintain control. It also again showed the significance of the superiority of Western technology.

HOW SHOULD CHINA'S GOVERNMENT RESPOND TO EXCHANGE WITH THE WEST?

In the late 1850s and 1860s contact between Westerners and Chinese increased. This led some Chinese officials to realize that the country would remain weak unless an effort was made to learn Western technology. The leading reformers believed that modernization should be introduced, but without abandoning the Confucian way of life. In other words, their aim was not to Westernize China but to build a strong defence against the foreign powers. The modernizing movement was known as the 'self-strengthening' movement.

THINK–PAIR–SHARE

In the early 1860s, Chinese officials debated whether China should try to learn from the West – and if it should, what aspects of Western knowledge they should learn. Source F and G give two viewpoints from Chinese officials at the time.

Read through each viewpoint. Decide which one seems more sensible. Then **discuss** your thoughts with a partner. Does the rest of the class agree with you?

SOURCE F

Feng Kuei-Fen

'We should set up translation offices at Canton and Shanghai to translate Western books. Brilliant students up to 15 years of age should be selected to live in these schools. Westerners should be invited to teach them Western languages and Chinese teachers should teach them traditional subjects. These students should learn Mathematics. (Note: all Western knowledge is based on Mathematics. Every Westerner of ten years of age or more studies Mathematics. If we wish to adopt Western knowledge we must learn Mathematics.)

'After three years, all students who have memorized the various Western books should become graduates and if there are some very clever ones who are able to suggest changes and improvements, they should be given a higher degree. There are many brilliant people in China – there must be some who can learn from the barbarians and do better than them.

'If we let Chinese customs remain the basis of our society and add Western methods of becoming rich and strong, this would be the best policy.'

▼ Links to: Mathematics

Is there a relationship between Mathematics and the modernization and advancement of Western societies?

Find out more about Mathematics and culture by using the search term **ethnomathematics in classrooms**.

Consider this in relation to your own culture and daily life.

SOURCE G

Wo-Jen

'I agree that scholars should learn Mathematics. But I think that Mathematics are of very little use. If these subjects are going to be taught by Westerners it will do great damage.

'The way to make a country great is for it to behave correctly – according to its customs. If we let the barbarians be teachers the cunning barbarians may not teach us the real secrets of their strength.

'Even if the teachers do genuinely teach, all we will achieve is the training of mathematicians. I have never heard of anyone who could use Mathematics to increase a nation's power. And, our Empire is so big that we have the people with the necessary ability. If Mathematics has to be taught we should find Chinese who have mastered it. Why is it necessary to learn from the barbarians?'

The self-strengthening movement had very limited success in modernizing China. This was, in part, due to the divisions within the movement itself. The movement lasted from 1860 until the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1894. The movement initially just borrowed Western technology. In the later years, it included the development of Western-style industries, schools and improving the transport and communication systems in China.

The fact that China was defeated by Japan in 1895 demonstrated the failure of the self-strengthening movement.

WHY DID SELF-STRENGTHENING FAIL?

- Many of the reforms were carried out at a local level by provincial governors but lacked support from the Imperial court. Many Chinese officials believed that Western learning might weaken their power. This meant there could be no overall coherent plan for modernization.
- The Empress Dowager Cixi, who effectively ruled China from 1861 until her death in 1908, did not believe in reform. She spent the money intended to build a new Imperial navy on a new Summer Palace!
- There was no attempt to introduce a full programme of industrial and social change. The reformers wanted to maintain a society that was based on Confucian ideas, but with Western technology. However, industrialization was impossible without social change.
- There was a lack of money to invest in the new projects.



■ **Figure 3.11** The opening of the first railway in China in 1876; it was built by the British but dismantled by the Chinese government a year later

DISCUSS

Refer back to Chapter 1, which investigated Japan's reaction to Western ideas and influence. **Explore** the differences between the approaches of China and Japan to the West.

ACTIVITY: The new railways come to China

■ ATL

- **Communication skills** – Read critically and for comprehension; Make effective summary notes

Read the following extract from C. Hibbert's *The Dragon Wakes* in Source H. It discusses the Chinese attitude towards the new railways and telegraph systems that began to be built across China between 1864 and 1891.

Briefly **summarize** – in bullet-point notes – the reasons why self-strengthening may have failed according to this extract.

SOURCE H

'Railways carried "fire-carts" and rattling, iron-wheeled wagons all over the country, desecrating burial places, disturbing the spirits of the earth, putting honest carters and porters, trackers and boatmen, muleteers and camel men out of work. Equally obnoxious were the foreign operators of the chugging steamships on the inland waterways, the foreign mining engineers whose deep shafts upset the feng-shui even more than the railway tracks did, the foreign mechanics who put up the wires and the poles for the telegraph companies.

[A member of the Boxer movement who wanted to rid China of the 'foreign devils' commented:]

'The iron roads and iron carriages are disturbing the terrestrial dragon and are destroying the earth's beneficial influences ... the red liquid which keeps dripping from the iron snake [the rust coloured rain water that dripped from the telegraph wires] is nothing but the blood of the out-raged spirits of the air.'

Quoted in Hibbert, C. 1970. *The Dragon Wakes: China and the West, 1793–1911.*