



MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Joint Crisis: The First Opium War (Qing Dynasty)

Chair: Davis Keeffe-Jones '27

Rapporteur: Sarah Ye '28

Hello Delegates!

My name is Davis Keeffe-Jones, and I am a Concord Academy junior from Orleans, Massachusetts. I am beyond excited to welcome you all to campus this April for our Concord Academy Model United Nations Conference, and I am additionally looking forward to hearing what creative debates and solutions are generated during our committee. As to why I chose the Opium Wars for this year, me along with my joint crisis co-chair William (who is chairing the British committee) are both passionate about history, especially 18th and 19th century history. The combination of European and Asian history that the Opium Wars present is truly fascinating, and getting an opportunity to explore other outcomes that might have happened had history gone differently will be thrilling.

Some of the things I enjoy doing outside of Model UN include running on our cross country and track teams, as well as reading the Brontë sisters and Oscar Wilde. I have been doing Model UN for five years now, and this is the first ever committee I am chairing! If any of you have any questions for me, please do not hesitate to reach out!

Davis Keeffe-Jones '27, Chair, Davis.Keeffe-Jones@ConcordAcademy.org

Sarah Ye '28, Rapporteur, Sarah.Ye@ConcordAcademy.org



Commissioner Lin ordering his men to destroy British opium stock

Background

Opium is a substance that is extracted from the immature seed pods of the opium poppy, a flowering plant grown primarily in the Levant and Northern Africa (which Britain controlled and/or traded with at this time). In 18th and 19th century Britain, a common social experience was the usage of opium, and the British public consumed between 10 and 20 tons of opium every year. Opium was used much like people use drugs today, but it was much less taboo and far more common, even being used in medicine for children. In the mid-18th century, the British East India Company began selling opium to the Chinese public, who smoked it rather than ingested it orally as the British did. The opium was given in exchange for tea, which was the main Chinese import of the British East India Company. In this way, the British and Chinese exchanged addictive substances for almost 100 years, but the one that the latter received was far more dangerous.

The Daoguang Emperor, supported by his anti-opium hardliner advisor Lin Zexu, cracked down on opium usage in the Qing dynasty after seeing its disastrous effects on the Chinese population. After a letter to Queen Victoria urging her to stop the opium trade elicited no response (she purportedly never received the letter), he sent his advisors to Canton (now Guangzhou) to publicly destroy 3.1 million pounds of British opium stock on a beach in Humen. Zexu and the emperor also blockaded the Pearl River, trapping British merchants, and boarded English ships to destroy their opium. Enraged, Charles

Elliot, overseer of British trade in China, initially ordered all merchants to resist the destruction of their opium, but after realizing that this could provoke the Qing into war, reversed his order and told merchants to hand over their opium, but promised that the British government would secure them compensation for their lost stock. The Daoguang emperor allowed trade to resume after the opium had been destroyed on the strict condition that no more opium be imported.

Tensions finally boiled over when a drunken group of British merchants beat a Chinese villager, Lin Weixi, to death. Charles Elliot arrested the men and held a trial aboard his ship for them, but the Qing demanded the sailors be handed over in order to be tried under Chinese law. Elliot refused for fear of the men being summarily executed, which had happened in similar incidents previous to the Weixi incident, and the men were kept by the British. Angered by this incident, Lin Zexu issued an order banning the sale of provisions to British sailors and refused to supply Chinese laborers to the British. Elliot then ordered all merchants and their ships to leave China by a set date, but the men began to run out of provisions before the date was reached. Desperate, Elliot dispatched two armed ships to Kowloon, requesting permission to purchase supplies from the local Qing. The men were allowed to land, but, in accordance with Zexu's order, they were denied the sale of food. Elliot set a time of 3:00PM by which the men had to be sold food and allowed to leave, or else the ships would fire on the Chinese. The deadline passed, and Elliot, true to his word, ordered the ships to open fire on the junk ships in the Pearl River. Thus the First Opium War began, and Britain dispatched a military expedition to China in November of 1839.

This is the point in time in which our committee begins. The British have arrived in Kowloon and opened fire upon 12 junk ships, sinking them, and captured the city of Chusan. It is your job, as the high ranking members of the Qing Dynasty, to decide an appropriate retaliation against the British. Do you want to de-escalate tensions? Do you want to negotiate? Do you want to fight until the bitter end? These are all questions you must debate about and answer. The fate of the Qing Dynasty rests in your hands.

Roles

(☠ = later died in battle, but still alive during the period of the committee)

1. **Daoguang Emperor:** The emperor of China who ordered the public destruction of 3.1 million pounds of British opium on Humen beach, thus sparking the First Opium War. Generally described as an ineffectual leader whose reign was marked by foreign intervention and domestic rebellion.
2. **Lin Zexu:** An anti-opium hardliner who was a high official under the Daoguang Emperor. Eventually blamed for the war by the emperor, despite Daoguang's endorsement of his strict anti-opium policy.
3. **Qishan:** Mongol official under the Daoguang Emperor who was sent to negotiate the Convention of Chuenpi with British officer Charles Elliot. After the terms negotiated were released, they were rejected by both sides, and the Daoguang Emperor had Qishan arrested and stripped of all his titles for conceding too much to the British. He was reinstated the following year and sent to be governor of Tibet.
4. ☠ **Guan Tianpei:** Another high ranking Qing official who was commander of the Qing naval forces. He fought in both battles of Chuenpi and the Battle of the Bogue. Tianpei enjoyed friendly relations with the British, and was a supporter of diplomacy.
5. **Keying:** A Manchu statesman who was arguably the most instrumental diplomat in the peace process. Keying was the key person responsible for the negotiation and signing of the Treaty of Nanking, which eventually ended the war. Controversial due to his corruption issues.
6. ☠ **Ge Yunfei:** A close friend of the Daoguang Emperor who led a group of 200 soldiers in Zhenhai when the British attacked in 1841. Served as an assistant brigade commander before this. He was killed during the battle for control of Chusan.
7. **Yishan:** Yishan was the personal bodyguard of the Daoguang Emperor until the outbreak of the war, when he was promoted to be an imperial commissioner to defend Guangzhou against

the British. Yishan, however, failed in 1841 (*after* the time period of our committee) and Guangzhou fell to the British during the Battle of Canton.

8. **Yijing:** The cousin and close confidant of the Daoguang Emperor who was assigned to take command of the forces in Zhejiang after the British took the city. His counter-offensive ultimately failed.
9. **Chen Huacheng:** Originally a naval officer who subdued piracy in China, he was tasked with defending the mouth of the Yangtze River. He eventually led the Qing troops at the Battle of Wusong in the late periods of the war, after the British eventually succeeded in entering the river. He was killed during the battle.
10. **Yang Fang:** An elderly decorated military commander at the beginning of the war, Yang Fang was involved in numerous rebellion suppressions throughout his lifetime, and commanded 1,000 troops in Canton during the war. He fell from favor with the Daoguang Emperor for negotiating with the British to end the Second Battle of Canton instead of continuing to fight.
11. **Yilibu:** A Manchu statesman who assisted in the negotiation of the Treaty of Nanking, which effectively ended the war. Yilibu was one of three Qing officials to sign the treaty.

Questions to Consider

1. How should the Qing government respond to British aggression?
2. Should the British be allowed to continue selling opium to the Chinese public in order to continue the tea trade?
3. What conditions should a peace treaty (if any) include?
4. How should the Qing respond to the British request for control over Hong Kong?
5. Should the British be repaid for the opium destroyed by Lin Zexu?
6. Should opium be outright banned, strictly regulated, or be allowed altogether?
7. How can the Qing continue to fight against a military force that is substantially stronger than them?

Bibliography and Resources for Further Research

1. "British Opium Trade with China." *JSTOR*, 1 Jan. 1839, www.jstor.org/stable/60212219.
2. Wei, Yuan. *Chinese Account of the Opium War*. 1888. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/60227672, <https://doi.org/10.2307/60227672>.
3. Fry, William Storrs. *Facts and Evidence Relating to the Opium Trade with China*. 1840. *JSTOR*, jstor.org/stable/60213009, <https://doi.org/10.2307/60213009>.
4. "First Opium War." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 24 Mar. 2019, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Opium_War.
5. "First Opium War - Trade Deficits and the Macartney Embassy - Extra History - Part 1." *YouTube*, 18 June 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgQahGsYokU.
6. "First Opium War - the Righteous Minister - Extra History - Part 2." *YouTube*, 25 June 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHmuuc7m1AA.
7. "First Opium War - Gunboat Diplomacy - Extra History - Part 3." *YouTube*, 2 July 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAjUqwauf-A.
8. "First Opium War - Conflagration and Surrender - Extra History - Part 4." *YouTube*, 9 July 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9WRmsHFUg0.