

# CONTAGIOUS CONSUMPTION: COMMODITY DEBATES OVER THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY CHINA TRADE<sup>1</sup>

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"It is a curious circumstance that we grow poppy in our Indian territories to poison the people of China in return for a wholesome beverage which they prepare almost exclusively for us."

John Barrow, 1836<sup>3</sup>

"Thus far we have considered opium as an article of internal revenue. We shall now view it as an article of foreign commerce. ...aid of our China trade."

Extract of court's letter to  
Bengal dated 27th March 1787<sup>4</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, tea and opium were inextricably linked through what was known as the China trade. As significant stimulant commodities on the global market, they were extremely profitable and also capable of introducing foreign cultural behaviour and social effect into their respective foreign markets. British traders, merchants and consumers regarded the*

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<sup>3</sup> This often-cited quote is attributed to John Barrow and appeared in *The Quarterly Review*, vol. LVI (April and July 1836): 518.

<sup>4</sup> Board of Control part I. Board's collections 1796–1858 opium F/4/59 1343 British Library, London, England.

*exchange and circulation of commodities between Britain, British India and China not only as a means of accumulating objects and wealth, but also as a possible source of contagion—a vector for the spread of cultural and indeed, economic pathologies. In Britain, Chinese tea imports fueled an economic conflict which revealed concerns about how trade practices could potentially influence and alter national culture. An interesting correlative argument appeared in a Chinese debate which emphasised the importation and consumption of opium, as well as the British influence that accompanied opium smuggling from British India into China. The social effects of commodity exchange—things both exported and imported—became a contested issue within the British-India-China trade and certainly still resonate in today's global economy.*

**Keywords:** China trade, tea, opium, nineteenth-century consumption, commodities

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, tea and opium were inextricably linked through the China–India–Britain trade. As significant stimulant commodities on the global market, they were extremely profitable and also capable of introducing different social effects. British traders, merchants and consumers regarded the exchange and circulation of commodities between Britain and China not only as a means of accumulating objects and wealth, but also as a possible source of contagion—a vector for the spread of cultural and indeed, economic pathologies. The idea of "catching something" from foreign objects of consumption emphasised their dangerous irresistibility: foreign trade could also stealthily introduce foreign ideas and even foreign behaviour.<sup>5</sup> While tea was profitable and circulated as contemporary rhetoric argued it should in a healthy "free market," the British economy could have been crippled if the Chinese did not consume British goods and thus balance the trade. In Britain, Chinese tea imports fueled an economic conflict which revealed concerns about how trade practices could potentially influence and alter national culture. An interesting correlative argument appeared in a Chinese debate which emphasised the importation and consumption of opium, as well as the British influence that accompanied opium smuggling from British India into China. The social effects of commodity exchange—things both exported and imported—became a contested issue within the England-India-China trade

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<sup>5</sup> Mackerras, C., *Western Images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 29.

and certainly still resonate in today's global economy.<sup>6</sup> The debates over the economic impact of foreign trade were veiled by the language of commodity affliction. In particular, British economic and political writers set out to balance out their trade position with China by critically analysing the role of Chinese tea in British society.

The basis of trade contagion is grounded in ideas about consumption: namely, the notion that commodities carry with them more than their respective makeup, uses or even value.<sup>7</sup> Tea and opium, both of which were significant global commodities that assumed even greater importance because of their inter-connections, together reveal a pattern of British and Chinese conceptions of commodity affliction. As Appadurai and others have established, commodities carry more than their "use value" but also spread elements of culture.<sup>8</sup> Chinese tea, a much desired mild stimulant in England, generated domestic profit in both China and Britain, but also carried with it contagious foreign behaviours that prompted apprehension in some quarters because the Chinese were the "most effeminate people on the face of the whole earth" in contrast to the "wise, active and warlike" English.<sup>9</sup> The development of such a characterisation coincided with expanding trade, theories of monopolies and worries over domestic consumption of foreign goods—especially before opium smuggling tipped the trade balance from China toward Britain.

The complicated global nature of consumption in the nineteenth century can be elucidated by an analysis of the relationships between officials in each country and the commodities they traded and regulated. Influential political and mercantile figures in Britain and corresponding officials in China debated and manipulated the perceived link between tea and opium. While opium was often described as a stimulant that could ease

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<sup>6</sup> Commonly referred to, and here also, as "The China Trade."

<sup>7</sup> As opposed to other theories of pollution and contagion in a different context, see for instance, Douglas, M., *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1984), among others.

<sup>8</sup> Appadurai, A., *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986); Marx, K., *Capital* (New York: International Publishers, 1992), 76 and various on commodity fetish; Pietz, W., "The Origin of Fetishism: A Contribution to the History of Theory" (PhD diss., University of Santa Cruz, 1988), 11; Porter, D., "A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33, no. 2 (1999): 181–199; Zheng, Y., "The Social Life of Opium in China, 1483–1999," *Modern Asian Studies* 37, no.1 (2003): 1–39 and Zheng, Y., *The Social Life of Opium in China*.

<sup>9</sup> Hanway, J., *A Journal of Eight Days Journey...to Which is Added, An Essay on Tea* (London: Printed by H. Woodfall, 1756); Porter, "A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England," 183; Kowaleski-Wallace, B., "Consuming Subjects," *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 23 (1994): 131–45.

pain enough to allow for continued productivity in workers, used in different circumstances, it could diminish sensation and dull a potentially restive group of people. It was also described as an aphrodisiac and yet, "...both opium and heroin initially prolong male erection and postpone ejaculation, though in the later stages of addiction, desire decreases markedly."<sup>10</sup> Berridge states that the nineteenth century term "stimulant" referred to the euphoric effects of opium.<sup>11</sup> Although the origins and act of consuming these items were clearly different, their major characteristics made it possible to pull them together and note the reflection between Britain and China: their economic value as two of the more important commodities of the time, their dual identity as stimulant commodities with contagion potential, and because British East India Company (BEIC) opium was being used to pay for Chinese tea.<sup>12</sup>

Global trading partners not only wanted to balance out their trade relationships, they wanted to make sure that imported goods were not consumed in such great amounts that there were grave economic and social consequences. Governments and merchants wanted people to buy things, but they also did not want their respective populations to be so enamoured with foreign items that the consumption of those items changed the nature of the home population. If the English consumed too much Chinese tea, then would they start behaving like the Chinese? Could foreign-grown opium be damaging, rather than medicinally useful, to the Chinese?

A series of pivotal moments marked the trade between China, Britain and British India; at each, Chinese tea from the BEIC-controlled India became the focus of serious political and popular attention. The first of these moments occurred with the commutation of the tea tax in 1784. By 1833 when the BEIC was certainly focusing on the China tea trade, the characterisation of the BEIC's status as a monopoly was the subject of great debate and thus was promoted or contested by different groups of merchants and politicians in various publications that circulated widely in Britain.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup> Spence, J., "Opium Smoking in Ch'ing China," in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, ed. Wakeman Jr., F. and Grant, C., 144 fn4 (Berkeley: University of California Press 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Berridge, V., *Opium and the People* (London: Free Association Books, 1999), xxi.

<sup>12</sup> Martin, R. M., "Opium in China" pamphlet, 6, New York Public Library [NYPL]; McMahon, K., *Fall of the God of Money* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 9; See also, Zheng, "The Social Life of Opium in China, 1483–1999"; Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Kowaleski-Wallace, E., *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Greenberg, M., *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 4. Also, Hoh-Cheung and Mui, L. M., "The Commutation Act and the Tea Trade in Britain,

second set of tea debates happened to occur at the same time that Chinese officials and the Daoguang emperor (r.1782–1852) began to articulate arguments regarding the perception of opium as a "problem." Yet, from the British standpoint, the China trade contained certain potentially useful features, including the promise of great profit for British merchants and correspondingly the possibility of increased British influence abroad. An expansion of the China trade could correct the issue of trade imbalance in China's favour (which would be worked out through the opium trade) and assured British dominance of the China coastal region. A negative effect, however, was the perception that China, through its commodities, could influence British lives. In China, the opium debates centred on ways to regain lost silver due to the trade imbalance and of finding ways to end smuggling. The additional Chinese critique of opium use among Chinese subjects emphasised the deterioration of social order that occurred when opium users were elite members of society and no longer able to represent a positive model for the rest of society.<sup>14</sup>

In the late eighteenth century, the importation of Chinese tea to England, to the extent of creating a trade imbalance and silver deficit, complicated the British idea that the progress of a civilisation was linked to its circulation of money and trade.<sup>15</sup> The prevalent idea was that increased circulation of goods and profit indicated healthy and progressive economic behaviour. Yet, with the addition of tea into the global trade market, trade that circulated out from England also circulated back, bringing more tea that was paid in British silver than the amount of items that left England in the first place. The profit itself was circulating because of this imbalance: British silver paid for Chinese tea, but British products were not being sold or at times even carried, to China. Instead of making profit from foreign consumers of English goods, local traders were making their profits from English consumers of tea. Tea certainly circulated and specific trading houses profited, but the government did not. What was missing was a corresponding British commodity that would circulate also. During this British economic problem of trade imbalance, arguments over the

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1784–1793," *The Economic History Review* 16, no. 2 (1963): 234–253. For earlier tea trade and tea and sugar meanings see Smith, W. D., "Complications of the Commonplace: Tea, Sugar, and Imperialism," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23 (Autumn 1992): 259–278.

<sup>14</sup> Cheng, P-k. et al., *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1999), 111–119; McMahon, K., *Fall of the God of Money*, 37; Baumler, A., ed., *Modern China and Opium: A Reader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 6–21.

<sup>15</sup> Extract of court's letter to Bengal dated 27 March 1787, Board of Control part I. Board's collections 1796–1858 opium F/4/59 1343 British Library [BL], London, England.

consumption of commodities that were stimulants (coffee, tea, sugar—and on some level, opium) were spreading in Britain in the form of pamphlets, books and parliamentary debates.<sup>16</sup>

On the British side, two representative participants serve as a lens for the broader economic and political economy debates over the tea trade's effects which raged in the mid-nineteenth century. John Crawford, former governor of Singapore and participant in a BEIC mission to Thailand, both condemned and supported the China trade in his writings.<sup>17</sup> Robert Montgomery Martin, a journalist and editor who specialised in economic topics, spoke at meetings of the Court of Proprietors of the East India Company. Martin was later appointed Treasurer of Hong Kong (1844–45) and also presented expert testimony before select committees of Parliament. The *Gloucester Chronicle* said of Martin, "No living writer is so capable of doing justice to the vast subject of China as Mr. M. Martin."<sup>18</sup> Both men were versions of "China watchers" who engaged with editors of and writers in prominent journals which, along with pamphlets and newspapers, carried the voices of differing opinions on the China Trade. Their writings reveal the extensive wariness over trade and consumption.<sup>19</sup>

Both England and China were worried about trade contagion during the same time frame, but from opposite angles. The peak of this worry was in 1833, just as the BEIC was about to lose its government charter. Coincidentally, this was a very good opium year for the British. Tea had become a fetish in Britain, stimulating a flurry of publications and even parliamentary debate. British concerns involved the importation of tea and the risk of Chinese influence that accompanied the tea trade.<sup>20</sup> Simultaneously, Chinese authorities discussed the role and meaning of

<sup>16</sup> Early tea debates cited in Porter, "A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England"; Crawford, J. and Staunton, G., *Remarks on the British Relations with China, and the Proposed Plans for Improving Them* (London: Edmund Lloyd; Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1836).

<sup>17</sup> See *British Parliamentary Papers: East India Affairs: China Correspondence*. Letters to the Select Committee of Supracargoes at Canton in China, 7 June 1832 and *Papers Relating to the Affairs of the East India Company 1831–32*, both *Area Studies Series, British Parliamentary Papers, China 39* (Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971).

<sup>18</sup> King, F. H. H. [and] Joynes, S., *Survey our Empire! Robert Montgomery Martin... A Bio-bibliography*. (Centre of Asian Studies. Bibliographies and Research Guides, No. 16. Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong, 1979), xv, xvi. and "Opinions of the Press" on the back page of Martin, R. M., *China: Political, Commercial and Social; in an Official Report to Her Majesty's Government* (London: James Madden, mdcccxlvi)

<sup>19</sup> Gilmartin, K., *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 73.

<sup>20</sup> See Black, J., *The English Press 1621–1861* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2001).

foreign opium in Chinese society; the increases in foreign commerce, foreign pressure over trade and opium smuggling led the Daoguang emperor to request select officials' recommendations for addressing the opium problem in 1836.

Historically, both Great Britain and China sought to control the social and economic effects of foreign imports. From the late-eighteenth century throughout the nineteenth, the economic and discursive practices surrounding the trade with China tied together tea, opium, Christian proselytising and notions of economic "progress." The China trade of this era sustained British tea demands and as this trade increased alongside increased consumption of tea, prompted debates over tea smuggling and the consequences of British subjects consuming Chinese commodities.<sup>21</sup> The debates based in economic concerns reflect and constitute a range of anxieties about cultural, social and political "survival." At this time Britons turned a critical gaze to China, characterising Chinese men as effeminate, Chinese women as merely and only represented by bound feet, and the Chinese government as stubbornly opposed to the "free" trade so vigorously promoted by Great Britain.<sup>22</sup>

Chinese opium consumption and its attendant host of associated social problems increased dramatically alongside British opium smuggling from the Indian colonies in order to pay for the domestic demand for Chinese tea. As a consequence, Chinese viewed the American and European traders in their ports as tainted by association with opium. British tea merchants and the opponents of BEIC used the increased role of tea consumption as a means of discussing everything from taxation and free trade to Chinese behavioural contagion. Tea merchants in particular invested in the trade debates because they not only wanted to procure tea from China easily but also from fear that the results of an end to the BEIC monopoly would impact prices and availability. In China, opium was more consistently discussed as a contagion that destroyed bodies, rather than as one that spread English manners.<sup>23</sup> Thus tea and opium were the media through which each trading partner expressed their trade and imperial anxieties.

By the early 1830s, the BEIC's government charter to control the China-to-Britain trade came up for debate and the tea trade once again became the focus of discussion. In Britain, the status of the BEIC's charter was debated widely in the press by a variety of people with interests in the

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<sup>21</sup> On tea smuggling associated with the BEIC monopoly, see Mui, 234.

<sup>22</sup> See Greenberg et al.

<sup>23</sup> See opium debates in Spence and Baumler, as above.

China trade, British India and the BEIC. As a result of the Commutation Act of 1784, British tea consumption increased and British silver flowed into Chinese coffers, although that trend of silver importation into China was reversed by 1807.<sup>24</sup> British consumption of Chinese tea steadily increased after the British government removed the BEIC's India trade monopoly in 1813. At this point both the consumption of Chinese tea and Chinese—although not yet British—trading practices had come under criticism in England.<sup>25</sup> *The Edinburgh Review* was one journal that gave space and voice to the different arguments over tea imports and the role of the BEIC. Some contributors, such as John Crawford, used the growing Chinese exertion of control at Guangzhou along with anti-monopoly rhetoric to demand a freeing up of the trade.<sup>26</sup> Robert Montgomery Martin, on the other hand, confronted the proposed idea of China as a limitless market and promoted the retention of the BEIC's monopoly over the China trade (although he argued that it was not actually a "true monopoly").<sup>27</sup>

By 1830, in *The Chinese Monopoly Examined*, John Crawford had revised his earlier and highly critical assessment of the Chinese.<sup>28</sup> Crawford now argued that the BEIC monopoly had actually limited tea importation; hence an insufficient supply of tea, which had become a necessity, caused British suffering, poverty and alcohol consumption. His more pressing argument was that if parliament abolished the BEIC's exclusive tea trade, then consumption of tea in Great Britain would double. Therefore, greater access to tea would allow the British to increase profit by becoming carriers

<sup>24</sup> Downes, J., *The Golden Ghetto: The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784–1844* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1997), 108.

<sup>25</sup> Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–42*, 3; Janin, H., *The India-China Opium Trade in the Nineteenth Century*. (North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1999), 37; British Library, India office records: L/MAR Marine Records. President of the board of control, Charles Grant introduced into Parliament on June 13, 1833 the Whig's resolution abolishing the BEIC.

<sup>26</sup> See not only Crawford's articles, but also the *British Parliamentary Papers: East India Affairs: China Correspondence*. Letters to the Select Committee of Supracargoes at Canton in China, 7 June, 1832, and collected *Papers Relating to the Affairs of the East India Company 1831–32*, both published by Irish University Press Area Studies Series, *British Parliamentary Papers, China 39* (Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971).

<sup>27</sup> Crawford, J., *Journal of an Embassy from ... India to ...Siam and CoChinChina* (Bangkok: National Library, 1915); *Chinese Monopoly Examined* (London: J. Ridgway, 1830); Matheson, J., *The Present Position and Prospects of the British Trade with China: Together with an Outline of Some Leading Occurrences in its Past History* (London : Smith, Elder and Co., 1836). And see Melancon, G., "Peaceful Intentions: the First British Trade Commission in China 1833–5," *Historical Research* 73 (February 2000): 33–47.

<sup>28</sup> Crawford, J., *History of the Indian Archipelago: Containing an Account of the Manners...* (Edinburgh: A. Constable and Co., 1820) and Fetter, F. W., "The Authorship of Economic Articles in the Edinburgh Review, 1802–47," *The Journal of Political Economy* 61, no. 3 (June 1953): 249.



to different ports in Europe.<sup>29</sup> In Crawford's view, a lack of tea was detrimental. The commodity and its otherwise ill effects were still a concern, but the greater problem was the misuse of the China trade which limited consumption and potential profit for British traders. Crawford also tried to present China as a potentially open market for all traders.<sup>30</sup> In his previous writings, Crawford had argued that the BEIC prevented an expanded market for the tea trade. If more traders participated in the trade, then the price would be lower and with more tea they could sell more at ports. Contradictory logic is not unusual in Crawford's writing, although other work by writers such as Canning and Robert Grant complements his arguments. What Crawford does not mention directly however, is that the smuggling trade in opium was reducing the silver drain. He commended the Chinese for their long history and "best government and wisest laws of any in Asia,"<sup>31</sup> and yet when it comes to the illegal opium trade, "China has absurd rules, are in opposition to practices of other countries, cannot enforce their rules and their subjects defy, the trade is their consequence."<sup>32</sup> Such a consequence is also a punishment for not conforming to British trade demands or maybe even revenge for the uneven nature of the tea trade.

Crawford's change of position on the China trade (from excessive criticism to market potential) was subject to attack by his adversary, Robert Montgomery Martin, who directly answered Crawford's position on the China trade in his articles and treatises.<sup>33</sup> Although Martin originally published the treatise anonymously, he specifically names Crawford in the text. His pamphlet also engages the then current and general debates over the BEIC's trade monopoly with China and compares Crawford's 1820 published article, wherein he criticises the Chinese, with his later 1830 argument in favour of China's trade practices. Martin argued that China did not welcome foreign (meaning Western) trade, in opposition to Crawford's revised assessment that the Chinese were "...intelligent, active, commercial people very fond of foreign trade and engaging extensively in it."<sup>34</sup> These authors were clearly concerned with the economic effects of global trade but they

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<sup>29</sup> Cited in Martin, the singular copy of Crawford's work is currently unavailable.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, H., Crawford, J. et. al., *Historical and Descriptive Account of China* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, Tweeddale Court; and London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1836).

<sup>31</sup> Crawford, *Historical*, 50.

<sup>32</sup> Crawford, *Historical*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> Martin, R. M., *British Relations with the Chinese Empire* (London: Parbury Allen and Co., 1832); Martin, R. M., *Past and Present State of Tea Trade of England, Europe and America* (London: Parbury Allen and Co., 1832); *Analysis of Parliamentary Evidence on China Trade*, 1832.

<sup>34</sup> Crawford, *Historical*, 50.

also used these debates to characterise the Chinese generally and Chinese trade practices specifically.

In addition to citing Crawford's earlier work, Martin relied upon the accounts of the Macartney mission of 1793 and Lord Amherst's subsequent mission of 1816; Henry Ellis' contemporaneous account of the latter suggested that the Chinese were unwilling to engage in free trade and were furthermore inclined to an "unnatural tendency toward blockage and obstructionism."<sup>35</sup> Martin also refers to C. Toogood Downing, a ship surgeon who in 1838 wrote one of the most referenced contemporary works on China, which was nonetheless criticised by both the English and the Americans residing in China at the time. Downing argued that the abolition of the BEIC monopoly would result in an "increase in opium smuggling, edicts against Christianity and the Christian response to import surgeon-missionaries."<sup>36</sup> The early nineteenth century Company men at port<sup>37</sup> and their country trader counterparts, in the tradition of Lord Macartney, characterised the Chinese as having a "...commercial policy ... to prohibit, as much as possible, every species of manufactures and bullion... holding themselves aloof from Europeans, and particularly jealous of Great Britain... exacting [excessive] fees and port dues on each foreign vessel that enters Canton... imposing severe sea and inland customs and regulations...interdicting some branches of trade" and to further injustice, "...this is the nation which the industrious people of England have been so much cajoled about, when they have been assured that China presents a mine of wealth..."<sup>38</sup> Martin was making this argument within an effort to support the continuation of the BEIC's privileged trading position; as noted, he argued that the BEIC was not, in practice, a monopoly. Martin does not indicate who was making the assurances about the China market, but it could have been any or all of the following: country traders, board of directors of the BEIC or the British government. Thus, one point of debate was the possibility of limitless Chinese market potential.

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<sup>35</sup> Ellis, H., *Journal of the Proceedings of the Late Embassy to China* (London: John Murray, 1817); Porter, "A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England," 181.

<sup>36</sup> Downing, T., *The Stranger in China; or, the Fan-Qui's Visit to the Celestial Empire, in 1836–7* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1838), vi.

<sup>37</sup> An important distinction developed through the nineteenth century between the supercargoes at port and the board of directors back in England. Their different experiences greatly affected their impressions of trade abroad. See Loines, E., *China Trade Post Bag of the Seth Low Family of Salem and New York 1829–1873* (Manchester, Maine: Falmouth Publishing House, 1953).

<sup>38</sup> Martin, *British Relations with the Chinese Empire*, 16.

Martin's equation of "free trade" with a China market so huge as to make every private trader rich seems to have been an important component of the successful arguments which led to the rescinding of the BEIC monopoly on the China trade. Crucially, the BEIC President of the board of control, Charles Grant, supported Martin's critique of the trade situation. Grant's 1833 proposal to Parliament asserted that the BEIC did not exist as a monopoly precisely because of the increased trade activity of the "country traders," independent traders who used BEIC license to trade between India and China and were subject to all matters under the control of the BEIC. According to the position of the BEIC, the country traders could import opium and raw cotton and they could ship tea and silk to India, but they were strictly limited to the India-China trade. They could not trade directly with England.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the country traders were the most active in the opium smuggling into Guangzhou. This problem of defining free trade and the definition of monopolies continued to haunt the China trade, although it had been addressed earlier by Martin in 1831, "I wish the American and English tea trade could be increased to *ten times* its present amount, and that the Chinese could be induced to take the manufactures of both nations in exchange for their tea—to admit the merchants of every country, whether single or incorporated, under less restrictive regulation—and to adopt (that which every man who desires the welfare of his species must ardently hope for) *true principles of free trade*, but which I fear, are as little understood in Europe as in China." [emphasis in text]<sup>40</sup> for Martin, to allow China the sole profit from tea transactions would mean giving power over the British tea drinking public to the Chinese, a people who clearly neither understood how "free trade" was supposed to operate, nor were of the same character as the British, and therefore whose influence would damage the British people socially and economically.<sup>41</sup> Martin touted progressive economic behaviour as the responsibility of any government: "[T]he idea that nations and humans in general should benefit from the circulation and exchange of goods, and that rulers had a moral duty to foster the flow of commodities and the increase of wealth."<sup>42</sup> Thus, in Martin's view, the Chinese government's

<sup>39</sup> Morse, H. B., *Gilds of China, With an Account of the Gild Merchant of Co-Hong or Canton* (London, New York: Longmans, Green, 1909), 83. For more on these debates and the controversy over their significance see Melancon, "Peaceful Intentions: The First British Trade Commission in China 1833–5," 38.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, *British Relations with the Chinese Empire*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> See Hevia, J., "The Scandal of Inequality: Koutou as Signifier," *Positions* 3, no. 1 (1995): 97–118; McMahon, *Fall of the God of Money*, 50.

disengagement from the global trade of imagined free circulation also meant that it was negligent to its subjects.

The expanding tea trade of the eighteenth century and later concerns over the social effects of tea serves as a point from which both the trade in tea and the habits involved in tea consumption led to cultural fears which parallel later British criticisms of Chinese trade, opium use and the supposedly unmanly culture of China.<sup>43</sup> The end of the eighteenth century saw a coming together of ideas about China that associated global trade expansion with progress while at the same time condemning the British tea trade from China because it resulted in British silver shortages. The tea trade arguments fed fears that the practice of "tea sipping" was an effeminate act sure to destroy British masculinity, undermine women's roles in society and ultimately reverse British trade dominance.<sup>44</sup> Tea and opium did not merely inspire debate; nineteenth century imperialism and trade transformed the disputed logic of commerce, which sought to promote exchange, and tea and opium made the very nations benefiting from so-called free trade express concerns of being contaminated by it.

The British were beginning to describe the Chinese population not as economically threatening and powerful, but rather as effeminate tea sippers who were also resistant to progressive ideas of trade, right when the debates over trade were leading to decisions regarding the role of the BEIC. Tea and perceived Chinese gendered behaviour and trading practices became one; the commodity was equal to the culture. Images of elite Chinese culture, the limitation of western trade to the port at Guangzhou and the lack of Chinese consumption of British goods provided proof of these characterisations. If the Chinese drank tea and were considered effeminate, as proposed by authors writing from London at the end of the eighteenth century, then the tea-drinking English would also become emasculated. The issue was not just cultural, but economic: the importation of tea into Britain and British consumption were not the only areas of concern; more importantly the Chinese sold their tea in expectation of payment in silver as opposed to balancing out the tea export with some British import. In Britain, this was a rejection of "free trade" but from the Chinese perspective these debates could alternatively reflect efforts to promote uncontrolled trade and a Chinese

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<sup>43</sup> See Waley-Cohen, J., *The Sextants of Beijing* (New York: Norton, 1999), 128; Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, 24 and citing Hanway, 32.

<sup>44</sup> Porter, "A Peculiar but Uninteresting Nation: China and the Discourse of Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England," 183; Kowaleski-Wallace, "Consuming Subjects."

reluctance to allow foreign trade to infiltrate society fully because of the potential for undesirable cultural practices.<sup>45</sup> For the British, Chinese control over the tea trade would mean relinquishing influence over British consumers. If the Chinese were commercially backward, which is to say resistant to trade generally and opposed to British practices of "free trade" specifically, then the increased importation of tea could reverse British trade progress and rather than continuing to expand and hold privilege within the expansive world trade network, they would regress and as some argued, become "Chinese." In other words, the fetish is embodied by the linked social and economic impact of tea drinking in British eyes.

Porter's thorough examination of the eighteenth century British perception of China is useful and also covers the gendered element here. His argument is not concerned with the contradiction inherent in circulation arguments that promote the circulation of goods, but does not want that circulation to return home. The fearful voice of those concerned with emasculating Chinese commodities, stand in contrast to the subsequent 1830s accusations toward the BEIC for suppressing the tea trade. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that the concept of free trade is promoted from the point of view of those profiting from practices that put them at an advantage.

This cultural debate over foreign trade items in the public sphere began in 1784 but re-emerged again in 1833 in reference to the complementary opium trade that would balance out the silver deficit. For both British and Chinese writers operating in relatively open forums, opium from British India was a frightening and strong stimulant that contained the potential to spread highly contagious behaviours—behaviours which were all the more damaging because the addictive potential of opium meant that its effects were less easily controlled and more likely to increase alongside need for the drug. In addition, opium was the solution to Britain's tea inspired trade imbalance and eventually the problem of China's silver drain.<sup>46</sup>

The desire for, and fear of, foreign objects created a tension in the early China trade and had a dramatic effect on how Britain and China

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<sup>45</sup> See Waley-Cohen, J., *The Sextants of Beijing*, 124–128.

<sup>46</sup> Despite recent scholarship that illuminates more fully the nuanced nature of the trade imbalance, at the time under consideration, opium was considered a panacea for England and the root of all problems for China. See Lin, M.-H., "Late Qing Perceptions of Native Opium," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 64, no. 1 (June 2004): 117–44; Bello states that the Qing government bureaucracy was convinced that the silver drain was from the opium trade. Bello, D., "Opium in Xinjiang and Beyond" in *Opium Regimes: China, Britain and Japan, 1839–1952*, ed. Brook, T. and Wakabayashi, B. T., 127 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

understood one another. While Chinese objects of the Chinoiserie era were desirable commodities that indicated fashion and status and taste, the physically consumed item of Chinese tea and the economic imbalance that resulted in British consumption of it, complicated the culture of consumption of foreign things.<sup>47</sup> This tension allowed for objects to be conflated with perceptions about their origins: a commodity fetish. At the same time, the cloudy perception of trade behaviour—how countries actually traded goods, why they allowed in some things and refused other—had reached a certain peak within the nineteenth century China trade. The Chinese were very interested in technology and trade (especially the very lucrative early trade they were enjoying with Europeans) and yet, they wanted the controlled trade system in place at Guangzhou, referred to by Europeans as the Canton System to remain. The Canton System limited Western trade to the port of Guangzhou and operated through a system of Chinese Hong merchants who controlled trade activity, answered to the Chinese officials for foreign traders' behaviour, oversaw legal requirements and further reported to local officials. The British, in turn, wanted to continue importing Chinese teas. However, they also wanted to trade with the condition of parallel export of British goods to China. The so-called Chinese resistance to trade went against all that the British were seeking to attain, not only in an actual balance of trade but also as participants in the expanding capitalist economy. Without Chinese acceptance of British concepts of "free trade"—which were couched in the broader language of "progress"—British standing within the developing global economy was at risk. The complicated façade of equal trade demands created by trading partners belied actual increasing European and American interest in foreign goods. Nonetheless, the façade mattered: British desire for things foreign warranted a complementary deception of reciprocity if privilege within the trading community was to be maintained for either the Chinese or the British. This is to say that the rhetoric of free trade requires circulation of goods, including those from abroad, but does not allow room when a trading partner (China) does not buy things in equal measure. When the English desire for tea became great enough to put the English in a position of vulnerability, the English demonised the Chinese for not participating equally by consuming English goods. Therefore: desire and fear.

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<sup>47</sup> Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, 7; Porter, D., *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7, 22.

The tea trade had the effect of forcing Britain to re-consider its place in the global market. While tea consumption in England was increasing, China was not importing a significant amount of English goods. Hence China was acquiring more silver while England was "losing" it. Because of the threat of the silver drain and both the foreign nature and stimulant properties of tea, the China trade was considered capable of "enslaving" a people.<sup>48</sup> As Martin stated in 1832 "A taste for the Chinese herb [tea] was created, and carefully fostered"<sup>49</sup> indicating that tea consumption, as for opium use later, was introduced by China traders and further promoted and encouraged to the extent that it would become more than a luxury good for British consumption. As Crawford argued, tea ultimately would become a cultural necessity and a significant source of royal tax revenue. While American and Continental European tea consumption leveled off, English consumption increased, sending British traders (and the government) looking for ways to balance out the effects of imports that were not complemented by equally profitable exports.<sup>50</sup> The threat of British "enslavement" by means of tea sipping, as I see it, was embodied by the Chinese product of tea which could both cripple the British economy and cripple British bodies—making them weak in a physical and economic sense.

It is ironic how tea marked such destruction when it is opium that came to represent the depravity of the Chinese. As John Barrow's quote headlines this essay, "... it is a curious circumstance that we grow poppy in our Indian territories to poison the people of China in return for a wholesome beverage which they prepare almost exclusively for us."<sup>51</sup> If the British saw tea imports and silver drain as a threat, then opium, in turn, could be used as a weapon or as revenge against the onslaught of tea. An American merchant articulating changes to resolve the opium crisis gave voice to the threat in this way, "...To make it the occasion of tendering to China, such guarantees as it is in the pleasure and power of Great Britain to give, against the farther extension of her colonial possessions...Let the rule be made final, that

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<sup>48</sup> Martin, *British Relations with the Chinese Empire*, 8; see also Madancy, J., "Unearthing Popular Attitudes Toward the Opium Trade and Opium Suppression in Late Qing and Early Republican Fujian," *Modern China* 27, no. 4 (2001): 436–83; Madancy, J., *The Troublesome Legacy of Commissioner Lin: The Opium Trade and Opium Suppression in Fujian Province, 1820s to 1920s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> Martin, *British Relations with the Chinese Empire*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> As above, Barrow, J., *The Quarterly Review* LVI (April and July 1836), 518. The journal frequently reviewed publications on China and in this issue included Murray, Crawford et al., *An Historical and Descriptive Account of China*.

boasting, and recrimination, and threats of vengeance, and menaces of territorial occupation, ... be thrown aside..."<sup>52</sup> Martin, though, like many others, argued that, "...the Chinese use opium as the British do wine or spirits, with perhaps less deleterious consequences to their health and less evil results to their morals." But also states, "Unlike many other articles its (tea) consumption is not sensibly increased by habit or time, the consumer of wine, spirits, ale, tobacco or opium will generally, according to his means, augment almost daily the quantity of the stimulant he uses;..."<sup>53</sup> Increased opium exports, it would thus be argued, could balance out both unequal trade and addictive behaviour—British dependence upon tea and Chinese dependence upon opium. Furthermore, it could further function as a doubly revealing substance: opium represented the ability of a foreign power to penetrate and flood the China market which indicated inadequate Chinese economic policies, and British administered opium also revealed China's inability to prevent this foreign pressure. Chinese rule was thus implicated in the (self) destruction of Chinese bodies because of both its trade policies and its weakness in countering British pressure. Luckily for the British, tea was not as potent a destructive force as opium and did not have addictive, deteriorating effect either. To say nothing of the Chinese not pushing tea on the British public as opium was pushed upon China.

The prevalent desire for objects and concomitant fear of them created a tension evidenced most clearly in the mid-eighteenth century British debate over tea consumption. This occurred at the same time that Chinese consumption of opium from British India was becoming more prevalent among the Chinese elite. As Zheng Yangwen has argued, opium was also being taken up by non-elites which aroused anxiety among Chinese officialdom.<sup>54</sup> Mirroring the British tea debates, a concern over opium consumption across classes in China drew the attention of Chinese officials to the foreign trade port at Guangzhou.

Aside from its negotiations with Central Asian rulers and Russia, the Chinese government had actively worked to limit and control foreign trade at its ports from the time of the Macartney embassy until the Opium Wars.

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<sup>52</sup> Attributed to King, C. W., *Opium Crisis. A Letter Addressed to Charles Elliot, Esq. Chief Superintendent of the British Trade With China by an American Merchant Resident at Canton* (London: Edward Suter, 1838).

<sup>53</sup> Martin, *British Relations with the Chinese Empire*, 14 and 22, respectively.

<sup>54</sup> See also DeForges, A., "Opium/Leisure/Shanghai Urban Economies of Consumption" in *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952*, ed. Brook, T. and Wakabayashi, B. T. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).



Waley-Cohen argues that the basis for limiting western foreigners to Guangzhou was not merely a resistance to foreign goods, but also involved promoting the image of a self-reliant empire and asserting control and power within China more broadly.<sup>55</sup> As to European trade and mentioned above, Chinese governmental trade practices were embodied in the establishment of the Canton System. The strict control over non-regional port trade contrasted with the historical trade relationship between Qing Dynasty China (1644–1911) and Central Asia, which was based on an unusually flexible approach toward negotiations over trade. There, trade agreements established familial ties through marriage exchange and created mutually beneficial tribute relationships while determining boundary treaties. Although there were differing approaches to overland trade and maritime trade, control over the amount and nature of foreign consumer goods entering China was still a concern for the Qing. In the late eighteenth century, Europeans dominated an increasingly global trade environment while Chinese success in maintaining its control over trading operations bristled against British demands for increased trading privileges, as embodied by Lord Macartney's visit to the Qianlong court, mentioned above.

In Britain this conflicting approach to trade drew China itself into sharp, trade oriented focus. Underneath concerns over British tea consumption and Chinese infiltration lurked the effects of trade imbalances and disappointed ambitions in the China market. The focus on tea and the negative attributes of the Chinese also overshadowed the enthusiasm for "free trade" and the linkages between trade circulation and progress mentioned above. The contradiction between forcing free trade as a progressive effort and yet actually having to suffer its consequences by means of the tea trade was a tricky line to maintain. And yet, by demonising China itself, the contradiction was buried under negative rhetoric.

In China, the beginning of the nineteenth century saw both greater trade activity and more foreigners in the port of Guangzhou. The country traders were increasingly eager to participate more directly in the China trade. They used the lucrative tea trade as a way to demand an end to the BEIC government-sanctioned trade monopoly. Their demands for equal access to the China market now brought British trading practices under criticism at home, which was reminiscent of the earlier tea trade and BEIC role debates during the era of the Commutation Act.

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<sup>55</sup> Waley-Cohen, J., *The Sextants of Beijing*; Waley-Cohen, J., "China and Western Technology in the Late Eighteenth Century," *American Historical Review* 98, no. 5 (December 1993): 1525–1543.

By the 1830s, as an echo of British attention to tea imports and due to both social and economic concerns, Chinese scholar officials engaged in the pressing debates of their time determined that opium represented what was wrong with China.<sup>56</sup> Lin Zexu, most famous in the West for his pre-Opium War role in the destruction of foreign opium at Guangzhou, noted in 1835 that the opium problem consisted of increased silver export along with increased opium consumption.<sup>57</sup> This understanding was not merely an internal criticism of opium users because the opium problem was clearly linked to growing western trade along the southern coast<sup>58</sup> and the potential for increased native opium farming to adversely affect the growth of necessity (non-cash) crops.<sup>59</sup> Opium was as economically and socially damaging to China because it was being sold within the country as it was for its addictive properties. By 1836, during the governmental opium debates, Xu Naiji, Junior Minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices (1777–1839) characterised opium socially, symbolically and economically: "People do not fear the laws; they are more brazen because of their greed. Opium smokers are idle, lazy vagrants,..no useful purpose before them,..unworthy of regard, or even contempt."<sup>60</sup> Xu Naiji concluded that, as prohibition had only increased social problems, a return to the earlier Qianlong Emperor's dictate was necessary. Thus what came in was taxed and could only be exchanged for goods not money when it went to the customs house. He also argued that sycee silver, a valuable bullion which was melted down from foreign dollars and mixed with some domestic silver was used by weight, to buy opium, should have been placed on the same footing as foreign money and thus should likewise be prohibited from export.<sup>61</sup> Emphasising Confucian concepts of class morality, Xu reiterated the hierarchy mentioned above and called for officers, scholars and soldiers to be held to the highest standard. If caught using opium they should be immediately dismissed. Superiors caught

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<sup>56</sup> McMahan considers the Chinese point of view to be that "the totalisation of emblemisation of opium as the cause of China's problems." McMahan, *Fall of the God of Money*, 37; and "... opium itself is connected to all of the major pathologies that beset Chinese...." Baumler, *Modern China and Opium: A Reader*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Lin further proposed that the growing of native opium would prevent the silver loss. Lin Man-Houng, "Late Qing Perceptions of Native Opium," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 64, no. 1 (June 2004): 123.

<sup>58</sup> On the Western frontier see Bello, "Opium in Xinjiang and Beyond"; and on the Russians, see Widmer, E., *The Russian Ecclesiastical Missions in Peking during the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

<sup>59</sup> Lin, "Late Qing Perceptions of Native Opium," 123.

<sup>60</sup> Cited in Baumler, *Modern China and Opium: A Reader*, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Hunt, *The India-China Opium Trade in the Nineteenth Century*, 16–17.

conniving in or otherwise covering up for or taking advantage of their subordinates should be brought before court. Generally, however, the people would not be sanctioned for their use of opium. For Xu, therefore, the solution to the opium problem was to completely remove the prohibitions rather than enforce them, even though he was aware of the social dangers caused by the opium trade and opium use.<sup>62</sup>

Xu Naiji identifies two social problems caused by opium: merchants selling opium are greedy and hence not concerned with the rest of society. As unproductive members of society, merchants historically sat lower on the Confucian social scale in China. Secondly, opium smokers are unproductive and hence do not function as productive members of society. On the one hand, the negative influence of merchants can possibly increase through the opium trade and on the other hand, society will be damaged if social obligations are disregarded. Good men must behave as such for good behaviour to pass down, which cannot happen if merchants become excessively greedy and working people become idle. Opium use per se is not the problem, but rather problems come from excessive opium use among people who carry an influence-based societal obligation; it was the officials in society who were to set the model for behaviour for everyone else. Hence, if they were using/abusing opium, their role of model would be overturned.

The opium debates clearly reveal that the later stigma of opium—a marker of both trading backwardness, a commodity, and cultural backwardness in its drug form could be linked to earlier British concerns over foreign trade items, notably tea, that returned with trading ships to the shores of Britain. As a commodity, opium represented the way by which the Chinese lost control over import items due to their refusal to concede greater trading privileges to Europeans at Guangzhou. Later, on the global stage, opium became a symbol of China's "sad inability to reform itself so as to resist foreign aggression."<sup>63</sup> In China, debates over opium imports included fears of foreign influence attached to the commodity but they do not reveal a fear of contagious British behaviour, or even signifiers of India, being attached to opium. Rather, the Qing debates over opium focused upon the economically detrimental effects of the opium trade and the "enslavement" of the Chinese by the trade.<sup>64</sup> Indirectly, the fear of colonisation was articulated.

<sup>62</sup> Baumler, *Modern China and Opium: A Reader*, 10.

<sup>63</sup> See Brook and Wakabayashi, *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> This enslavement language is articulated in the opium debates by Zhu Zhun, but also appears in Zhang Yangwen and Lin Man-Houng works.

The potent combination of expanding borders and expanding foreign trade was increasingly evident during the mid nineteenth century as the trade at China's periphery drew global players from farther afield. The BEIC secretary, translator and missionary Robert Morrison noted that "[t]he reason assigned, unofficially, by the Chinese, for disallowing families at Canton, is an apprehension of colonization."<sup>65</sup> Yet the Chinese were not the only ones wary of European encroachment into the region; a British embassy to Siam encountered ministers who perceived Britain's presence as indication of its goal to invade Siam.<sup>66</sup>

The parallel between tea and opium thus was not merely about addictive, or destructive substances, nor only about managing British India through the opium trade or even the balance of trade for Britain because of the silver deficit. Rather, the relationship between the tea and opium trades pivots on the linkages among physical and economic health, conceptions of progress grounded in the circulation of trade and the way by which an established trading country could set out to avoid devolving into the type of trading country that China was perceived as being, i.e., backward and in need of force in order to modernise.

As major commodities of the eighteenth and nineteenth century global trade, tea and opium represented more than items for consumption. Early British promoters of trade found Chinese tea to have potential damaging effects, while later debates over tea included its potential to expand British trade if its circulation did not stop with English consumers, but was extended to Europe. These tea debates seldom mentioned British smuggling of Indian opium to China which was offsetting the trade imbalance represented by tea. The image of China is the locus of the debates, femininity and economic stagnation serving as primary characteristics of the Chinese. In China, the opium debates reveal the ways that governmental officials conjured the Chinese population as representations of the opium problem, rather than focusing on the role of those importing it. The illegal opium trade could undermine Chinese authority and did create societal disruption through an increasingly addicted lower class but the Chinese did not reveal a fear of contracting British behavioural attributes.

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<sup>65</sup> Morrison, R., *Notices Concerning China, and the Port of Canton. Also a Narrative of the Affair of the English Frigate Topaze, 1821–22 with Remarks on Homicides, and an Account of the Fire of Canton.* (Malacca: Mission Press, 1823), iv.

<sup>66</sup> See Crawford, J., *Journal of an Embassy from ... India to ...Siam and CoChinChina* (Bangkok: National Library, 1915).

The negative image of Chinese tea trade policy in Britain was subsequently linked to regressive Chinese behaviour generally, an unforgivable stigma which allowed room for the morally questionable opium trade to be established. According to discourses on progress, the Chinese were found lacking. The progress imbalance placed China and the Chinese not only on a different judgment plane but also detracted from a consideration of them as equals players in global trade. Hence to push opium upon a "lesser" people was not as troubling because it was their self-serving unfair trade policies in the first place that necessitated the opium trade. The influential American trader Robert Fortune found that the issue of opium proved a reversal from Fortune's other characterisations of the Chinese: "As buyers of foreign mud, as it was called, the Chinese are seen as a reprehensible lot that somehow justifies their exploitation as a market for European traders." Furthermore, opium smoking is the difference between the British and the Chinese: "the saved and the damned."<sup>67</sup>

If tea, as a more mild stimulant was both useful in industrial Britain and threatening for its potential to subvert gender roles and make the English "Chinese-like," what then was the potential for opium exported to China?<sup>68</sup> While the debates over the effects of Chinese tea raged for a while in England, the effects of Chinese opium use were considered much more threatening. The British knew of the negative effects of opium use. The Chinese government felt that opium cravings and the subsequent increase in consumption to the point of otherwise bankrupting an individual was threatening to both society and empire. Certainly the opium behaviour of the Chinese was seen as degenerative. Just like the Chinese rhetoric of the threat of "spiritual pollution" and its effects from outside contact, the British corollary was the damaging effects of Chinese "peculiar" trade practices, tea drinking and opium use. The stimulant tea, first became threatening but opium was considered a much greater threat if ever the tide changed and opium use became something other than what the "Chinese did." And yet, just as the fear of Chinese commodities riddled with tea and opium behaviour was articulated in England, British trade, from British India to Guangzhou, was promoted.

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<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Thurin, S. S., *Victorian Travelers and the Opening of China, 1842–1907* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999), 49.

<sup>68</sup> On the feminising effects of tea sipping, and how tea consumption could subvert both class and gender roles, see Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth Century England*, 83, 144; Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*, 24, 36.

Comparisons and analogies were at the centre of the debates that drew China into the analysis. China was certainly fought over in one sense: the China trade was the *potential* key to the greater stakes involved. Successful trade control would allow Britain to maintain and expand control of India, but only if the trade was balanced toward British profits—in the form of either BEIC profit or that of country traders—as long as silver was not drained out of Britain. Trade superiority could not be accomplished if the imbalance continued, or if other factors emerged, such as serious competition from the Americans. In short, the competition over the China trade included the following issues of growing importance: national pride, if not nationalism, in the form of rivalry between Britain, the United States and China; the conflation of a national identification with that of progress—"free" trade as progress; and finally the social divisions over drug circulation and drug use. The perception within China included the characterisation of all westerners at Guangzhou as being tied to the opium traffic, that the poor of China were addicts while the elites were merely users, and also that the Anglo (and others) determination that the Chinese were depraved because they did not pursue trade in the manner that the westerners wanted. The trade-culture link was hence lodged in early tea considerations and it blossomed amid nationally—based competition. Britain was teetering between either greater control in the growing world market or increased vulnerability because of its need for foreign goods. Nineteenth century attention to stimulant and addictive substances, which spanned Europe, China and America, all tied tea drinking and opium smoking together, implicating the Chinese doubly by being the so-called originators of both.

While British critiques of Chinese trade practices have been linked to broader negative perceptions of the Chinese, I argue that the British wanted to have it both ways: to claim progress in the form of consumption and allow the circulation of items, including commodities such as opium that were socially and physically damaging. That is, as long as this operated in a one-way manner and did not promote foreign commodities and behaviour at home. On the other hand, within this exclusive operation of "progress," British influence would convey goods and ideas to others. Hence, the circularity breaks down.