

The Opium Wars

The Opium Wars between the United Kingdom and China lasted from 1839 to 1860 and started because the Chinese government wanted to stop the British from smuggling drugs into China.

From the mid-17th century, Britain imported porcelain, silk and tea from China in large quantities. Because Britain exported very little to China, the British paid for these goods in silver. Eventually, the British government decided to stop this trade deficit. They illegally transported hard drugs from India to China and so created drug addicts in China. More and more Chinese people became addicted to opium and in 1729 the Chinese government prohibited the sale and use of the drug.

In 1757 the British invaded Bengal and after that the British East India Company had the monopoly on opium production and exportation. By the 1830s, the British exported more than a thousand tons of opium to China every year. In 1839, the Chinese Emperor appointed a new commissioner of Canton called Lin Zexu. He confiscated about a thousand tons of the drug from the British and destroyed it. Then he demanded that the British sign a treaty promising to stop dealing drugs to China. The British rejected this proposal so Lin wrote to Queen Victoria to tell her about what was happening. Historians believe she never got the letter.

Suddenly, the British attacked China with warships and an army. They captured Canton and destroyed a lot of Chinese boats on the Yantse River. In 1842 the Treaty of Nanjing was signed to negotiate peace. However, the Chinese had to surrender Hong Kong to the British.

The Second Opium War started when the Chinese authorities conducted a search of a British ship suspected of carrying drugs. This time the British invaded Peking. They stole the art and treasures from the Imperial Summer Palace and annihilated the beautiful buildings and gardens. The stolen objects included famous bronze statues from a fountain which have recently appeared in the news. The destruction of the Imperial Royal Palace is considered a terrible tragedy even today.

339 words

Grammar: D and T regular verbs

