

# **The Opium Trade and the Transformation of the Maritime Trade System in Pre-Opium War China: A Reexamination**

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## **Introduction**

During the past decade, the scholars in the English-speaking world have noted elements of convergence in the development paths followed in northwestern Europe and China up until the 18th century (Wong 1997; Pomeranz 2000). Several economic historians have also compared East Asian countries, such as China and Japan, with northwestern Europe with regard to various economic indicators (Allen 2007; Saito 2008). Although it is important to compare the starting points of development and transition during the modern era using many different indicators, these types of comparison cannot fully explain several time-worn issues: namely, the causes of the crisis that occurred in China during the 19th century and the differences that existed between the core regions of China (viz. the Lower Yangzi and the Pearl River delta) and Japan from the mid-19th century on. The seriousness of the former crisis could be one reason for those latter differences. Therefore, the questions important for Chinese economic history are not why an industrial revolution did not take place and whether there were any great differences between China and northwestern Europe at the beginning of the 19th century, but rather why Chinese institutions, which had worked well during the 18th century, failed in the 19th and were, therefore, ineffectual in preventing the crisis.

With regard to that crisis, many scholars have focused on the pressure arising from the population increase that took place in the 18th century. In addition, some analyses reveal that uprisings, such as the White Lotus and the Taiping Rebellions, broke out partly due to migration into inland areas and the friction that such population move-

ment caused (Yamada 1995; Kikuchi 1998). This strongly implies that such an institution as kinship lineage, formed to stabilize local society, failed to perform that function, owing to the rapid social and economic change that occurred throughout the inland regions. While the coastal areas were enjoying the expansion of trade taking place in Guangzhou and concomitant economic development (Marks 1998: 163–194), foreign trade did not cause sufficient structural change to the economy and society of its hinterland<sup>1</sup> to become one of the causes of the crisis. Dependence on foreign maritime trade was small because of the huge domestic market, and it would be only after the 1880s that the Chinese economy would be integrated into the world economy under the treaty ports system.

However, the inflow of silver did have a significant impact on the Chinese economy, because of the country's market structure (Kishimoto to 1997: 173–212); and Qing Dynasty rule was weakened by the expansion of the opium trade. This is what led to an external crisis and the establishment of the treaty ports system, thus making it vital to analyze this crisis from the viewpoint of maritime trade. This thesis focuses on the maritime trade system, especially its institutions for controlling that system, in considering the reasons for the system's success during the 18th and its failure during the 19th century. While it is true that tea, silk, porcelain and opium were important foreign trade commodities for China during both those centuries, here we will focus on opium, since it exerted greater influence on trade control institutions than any other good. There are also more primary source materials relating to opium than to other commodities, owing to the intensification of the ban on the substance beginning in 1838.

As to the portion of the crisis that can be attributed to the opium trade, the problem of the outflow of silver from China has already been pointed out; and recently, the reasons for that outflow have been linked to global depression, decreases in silver production and silver coin exports from the United States, as well as the refusal to honor coins minted in Latin American countries independent from Spain. At the same time, researchers have stressed that the opium trade was not

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<sup>1</sup> The tea trade in North Fujian from 1757 to 1937 did not cause any structural change (Gardella 1994).

the sole reason for this outflow (Lin 2006: 72–114; von Glahn 2007: 61–62; Irigoien 2009). Nevertheless, the outflow would not have been as momentous without the flourishing trade in foreign opium. The failure of trade control institutions were both the cause of the Opium War and the establishment of the treaty ports system. Hence, it remains crucial to analyze the opium trade itself.

Many scholars have studied the opium trade prior to the Opium War, by focusing on the trade relationship between China and Britain and the activity of private traders (Greenberg 1951; Eto 1968; Cheong 1979; Gong 1999). The opium trade in China as a whole has also been analyzed (Lin Man-Houng 1985); and while Chang (1964) has focused on the role of Lin Zexu 林則徐, Polachek (1992) pays more attention to the relationship between the decision-making processes of the Qing central government and of groups of scholar-officials. Furthermore, the work done by Inoue (2004) and Murao (1985) takes up the policy debate over limited vs. strict prohibitions in the Canton area, while Niimura (2000) focuses on domestic opium production, and Bello (2005) addresses the opium trade in inland areas. With regard to the Guangzhou opium trade, researchers have studied Hong merchants and maritime customs (Liang 1937; Okamoto 1999) and the circumstances surrounding that trade during the 18th century (Morse 1926; Van Dyke 2005), causing the situation around Guangzhou to be well analyzed from a number of general perspectives. Finally, in terms of the people who were directly involved in opium dealing, there are several studies of Chinese “traitors” supposedly active during the Opium War (Tanaka 1964; Zhang 1996; Murakami 2004), and the trade in the coastal area of Fujian has also been discussed (Lin Renchuan 1985; Chen & Chen 1998).

Despite such abundant research, a number of unsolved issues remain. To begin with, both the research emphasizing the role of the West and that focusing on the anti-opium policy of the Qing government has concentrated on the opium trade around Guangzhou and has not dealt fully with the circulation of opium along the coast or the people involved in such distribution. Consequently, we have yet to understand the reasons for the rapid spread of opium along the coast. Secondly, much of the research overlooks the transformation of the maritime trade system in China before the expansion of the opium trade. Consequently, we have yet to understand the impact of that trade on this system. Finally, the research tends to emphasize that it was corruption rife among

Chinese officials and military personnel that was the main reason why efforts to prohibit the import and sale of opium failed. To begin with, endemic corruption in China has always been a serious problem, regardless of time or place, and if we are to emphasize corruption, we must analyze its institutional background. Except for the area around Guangzhou, there has been no consideration to date of the institutional background to the opium trade during the first half of the 19th century, in particular, trade control institutions of the Qing government that were in operation since the 18th century. Therefore, we still lack a full analysis of the expansion of the opium trade and the failure to prohibit it.

Given these unsolved issues, here we will first provide an overview of maritime trade control institutions and their development during the 18th century, reconsidering the variations that occurred in them associated with the development of trade. We then analyze the circulation of opium and its influence before the outbreak of the Opium War. Finally, focusing on the countermeasures implemented by the Qing government regarding the opium trade will enable us to consider the reasons for the failure of the opium ban and the problems that plagued the government regarding maritime trade control institutions. As a point of reference, because the research to date has focused so heavily on the opium trade around Guangzhou, the discussion here will focus on several other major seaports and their surrounding regions, including Amoy, Shanghai and Tianjin.

## **I. The Qing government's trade control institutions and their variations during the 18th century**

### **1. The system**

In 1684, the year following the surrender of the Taiwan-based Zheng family, which posed a serious threat to Qing Dynasty rule, the Qing government lifted its existing ban on maritime trade and established maritime customs in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian and Guangdong. These offices, which initially controlled only trade conducted with Asian countries by private Chinese merchants, eventually came to supervise and regulate all maritime trade, including tribute (*chaogong*) trade and trade with Western countries via Western ships. Each maritime custom office licensed brokers (*yahang* 牙行) and controlled trade

by letting these agents conclude trade contracts and collect taxes. This use of brokers enabled the maritime customs system to handle the various types of trade more flexibly (Okamoto 1999: 60–75).

The basic rules controlling maritime trade at that time were (1) regulations regarding ships, the number of men and the procedure for passage, (2) restrictions on the destinations of merchant ships, (3) time limits on the return of merchant ships, (4) guidelines for mounting and storing weapons, (5) rules pertaining to the loading of gold, silver, saltpeter, sulfur, copper, iron, nails, camphor board and horses, (6) rules relating to rice, (7) rules relating to raw silk, silk fabrics and cotton, (8) restrictions on those ports open to foreign trade, and (9) “tribute” pertaining to fixed regulations (Ryū 1993: 97–100; Liu 2005).

With regard to item (1), merchant ship owners would obtain permission for clearance for embarkation after submitting to the customs office through one of its licensed brokers a list of the personnel on board and a cargo manifest (Zhou 1993: 168–169; Taiwan Yinghang Jingji Yanjiushi 1997: 614–616; Matsuura 2002: 585–587). Under item (4), brokers were required to report the number of weapons carried by each vessel (Tuo 1992, vol. 507). Therefore, when merchant ships either entered or departed, it was the port’s brokers who guaranteed their compliance with the rules. Around Guangzhou, Macao pilots, linguists and compradors also played a major role in the regulation of trade (Van Dyke 2005: 35–93) and effectively acted as *de facto* brokers themselves (Negishi 1948: 72).

In brief, Qing period maritime trade control institutions depended on brokers. Tariff rates were low, and the total amount of trade was not regulated. This loose system was efficient because it relaxed the tension that would have been heightened by stricter controls and also reduced the cost of regulation. That being said, the reason why this particular trade control arrangement worked was that the systems of other East Asian countries, including Japan, Korea and the Ryukyus, enabled the rigid control of trade in their ports. European merchants also generally observed the Qing government’s rules at Guangzhou, and the scale of maritime trade did not reach large proportions until the middle of the 18th century.

## 2. The expansion of maritime trade

It was this loose system of control that allowed China's maritime trade to expand. Although trade with Japan declined during the first half of the 18th century because of the restrictions set in place by the Tokugawa Bakufu, Chinese junks trading in Southeast Asian ports out of Amoy prospered during the mid-18th century, and during the second half of the century, trade at Guangzhou, where Western ships frequented, expanded and captured a rapidly increasing share of China's total foreign trade volume (Kishimoto 1997: 173–212). As for the merchants, trade between China and Southeast Asia was conducted mainly by natives of Fujian and Guangdong (Matsuura 2002: 6–24), while the Hong merchants who traded with Westerners were also chiefly Fujianese or Cantonese (Liang 1937).

Domestic maritime trade also developed during the 18th century due to the economic boom that was occurring domestically and the expansion of the cultivation of cash crops that it brought about. The export of sugar from Fujian and Guangdong in exchange for raw cotton from the Lower Yangzi and South China sugar for beans and bean cakes from Manchuria and North China was conducted via sand junks (*shachuan* 沙船) and Fujian and Guangdong ships. As for the scale of this trade, there were, for example, over 160 Fujian and Guangdong ships operating in Tianjin and more than 3,000 sand junks operating between North China and the Lower Yangzi by the time of the Opium War (Kosaka 1971; Matsuura 1983; Miyata 1986; Matsuura 1988; Matsuura 2004). The development of domestic trade made Tianjin and Shanghai more important economic centers.

However, the Qing government restricted trade to only some specific ports, meaning that trade with Taiwan and Southeast Asia was concentrated in Amoy,<sup>2</sup> while trade with Western countries was concentrated in Guangzhou. As a result, foreign and domestic trade connected at these two entrepôts with Fujianese and Cantonese merchants as agents. Due to this trade expansion, a fixed tariff rate was maintained throughout all sectors of maritime customs, and silver flowed into China. Ide-

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<sup>2</sup> See Ng (1983) for a detailed account of the domestic trade network in Amoy during the early Qing period.

ally, it should not have been a problem for the Qing government to control trade; however, the increase in volume began to cause changes in its trade control institutions from the end of the 18th century on.

### 3. Changes in trade control institutions

In Amoy, as in Guangzhou, influential brokers contracted the operation and taxation of foreign trade in the capacity of *yanghang* 洋行 and of domestic trade as *shanghang* 商行. (Okamoto 1999: 508). According to *Xiamen-Zhi (Gazetteer of Amoy)*, trade in Amoy declined after reaching a peak during the early Qianlong Era (1735–1795). At first, *yanghang*, heavily burdened by tax collection debt, fell into bankruptcy, at which time *shanghang* took their place by contracting tax collection, but then also declined financially (Zhou 1993: 180). This suggests a collapse of trade control institutions in Amoy. Some scholars have cited the expansion of trade via small ships at small ports (such as Zhaoan 詔安 in Zhangzhou 漳州 prefecture), heavy tax burdens, high transaction costs and rampant piracy as reasons for the decline of trade in Amoy (Viraphol 1977: 129–130; Ch'en 1991).

As to where Amoy-based Fujianese merchants then chose to conduct trade, it would appear that the first choice was Guangzhou, where the proportion of trade carried out of that port by Fujian and Chaozhou ships (*Fuchao chuan* 福潮船) increased during the second half of the 18th century (Okamoto 1999: 139–141) and further expanded due to an increase in trade with the West. On the other hand, some Fujianese merchants moved elsewhere. For example, Hugh Hamilton Lindsay, who visited Amoy in 1832, observed that leading merchants stayed away from there, preferring to move to Guangzhou or Shanghai in order to trade with Amoy for the purpose of avoiding the typically heavy taxation there (Lindsay 1833: 14–15). Charles Gutzlaff, who visited Ningpo in 1831, found that the Shanghai trade was conducted mainly by Fujianese and that some Fujianese-owned junks were trading with the East Indian archipelago (Gutzlaff 1834: 101). The fact that Guangzhou, Zhanglin 樟林 (near Chaozhou) and Hainan became more important than Amoy in trade with Singapore (see Table 1) also indicates this same kind of avoidance of Amoy by merchants.

Some Fujianese also moved to Southeast Asia. The period 1800–

Table 1: Chinese Junk Trade in Singapore

Year	Registry	Style of Ship	Number of ships	Number of ships which loaded opium	Total tons	Destination	Amount of opium loaded and place of production	Note
1831	China	Junk	7	0	1075	Guangzhou		
	China	Junk	3	0	760	Zhanglin		
	China	Junk	2	0	370	Shanghai		
	China/Cochin	China	2	2	340	Hainan	2 chests	
	China	Junk	1	0	300	Amoy		
	China	Junk/Tope	4	1	1263	China	Benaras 1 chest	
1832	China	Junk	5	1	1130	Shanghai	Bombay 7 chests; Bengal 1 chest	
	China	Junk	3	1	575	Guangzhou	Bombay 2 chests	
	China	Junk	2	1	505	Zhanglin	Bengal 5 chests; Patna 5 chests	
	China	Junk	2	0	375	Amoy		
		Junk, etc.	3	1		Guangzhou	53 balls	more than 3 ships
1833		Tope, etc.	2			Hainan	Bombay 2 chests; Bengal 54 balls	more than 2 ships
						Zhanglin	Bengal 15 chests; Bombay 6 piculs	
						Shanghai	Bengal 9 piculs	
						Zhanglin	Bengal 62 chests	
		Junk	8				Bengal 25 chests; Bombay 70 catties	
1834		Junk/Tope	5	2-3		Guangzhou		
		Junk	3	0		Amoy		
		Junk	2			Shanghai	Bengal 11 chests; Bombay 6 piculs	
		Tope	1	1		Hainan	Benaras 3.5 chests	
		Junk	7			Hainan	Bengal 40 chests and 22 balls; Other 130 balls	
1835			5	0		Guangzhou		
			2	1		Shanghai	Bengal 15 chests	
			2	1		Amoy	Bengal 1 chest	
1836			1	0		Guangzhou		
			1	1		Hainan	Bombay 1 picul	
			1	1		Shanghai	Bombay 8 piculs	

Source: *Singapore Chronicle and the Commercial Register*

Tope is a small junk. This table does not cover all ships which departed from Singapore. I could not use Vol. 8, 9, 12, 26, 35, 40-42, 49 in 1833, vol. 7, 8, 15, 38, 45-48 in 1834, vol. 16, 17, 19, 23, 27, 34, 36, 47-52 and vol. 32 in 1836. Little data can be obtained regarding 1836. Also, 1837 has been omitted because of a lack of data.



1830 marked an era of Chinese expansion in Southeast Asia, with increases in both the junk trade as the Chinese population residing there increased due to the overall expansion of European business being conducted throughout Asia (Trocki 1990: 30). In Siam up until the 1830s, native Chinese merchants dominated trade with China, and they regarded trade with Shanghai and Ningpo as more profitable than trade with Amoy (Crawford 1967: 409–413; *BPP*, China, vol. 37: 300; Viraphol 1977: 130). This clear pattern suggesting the decline of Amoy did not necessarily mean a decline in trade among the Fujianese, who merely decided to abandon Amoy for the sake of higher profits through a reduction in their tax burden. Consequently, the decline of Amoy led to the collapse of its trade control institutions, but its tax quota was almost still met,<sup>3</sup> despite the decrease in Fujian maritime customs tax revenue (Ch'en 1991: 94–95). Furthermore, the proportion of tax revenue collected from Guangdong maritime customs was relatively large (Kishimoto 1997: 203–204), therefore, the decline of Amoy was apparently fiscally inconsequential for the Qing government.

Guangzhou had now become the center of trade with the West, as well as an important port for both domestic trade and trade with Southeast Asia. Therefore, if trade control institutions had been disturbed there, the Qing government would have been unable to control foreign trade and its connection with domestic trade. During the rapid growth of trade in Guangzhou, Hong merchants who were unable to obtain sufficient capital went into bankruptcy. Therefore, it became difficult to manage trade, and trade control institutions took on a merely nominal appearance (Okamoto 1999: 95–107). Because of the growth in the foreign trade system beginning in the mid-18th century, the Qing government's trade control institutions were now in danger of collapse in the midst of the expanding opium trade.

## **II. Expansion of the opium trade**

### **1. Guangzhou and Southern Fujian**

Guangzhou was the first region to become a center of the opium

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<sup>3</sup> *GZDDG*, vol. 6, pp.168–169 (002703), “Memorial of Song Pu, General of Fuzhou on April 4<sup>th</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

trade, then followed by southern Fujian (around Amoy), and it was from these two centers that the distribution of the substance spread throughout southern China (Lin Man-Houng 1985: 72).

### (1) Guangzhou

Opium dealing had existed around Guangzhou since the first half of the 18th century (Van Dyke 2005: 121–126), and despite the Qing government issuing a ban on the substance in 1729, officials generally overlooked trading activities. The opium trade was carried out in Macao and Huangpu 黄埔 (a southern suburb of Guangzhou), but in 1815, because of pressure applied against the trade in Macao, business became concentrated in Huangpu. In 1821, owing to the enforcement of the government's ban there, the trading moved from Huangpu 黄埔 to hulks anchored at sea around Lingding 零丁, near the mouth of the Pearl River, and consequently, the trade began flourishing in China (Greenberg 1951: 33; Chang 1964: 20–21; Inoue 2004: 34–92). The opium trade that developed around Guangzhou was conducted mainly by native Cantonese merchants joined by Chaozhou 潮州 and Fujianese traders. Opium traders were of various types, including large and small scale merchants, petty officials, soldiers, fishermen, seamen and craftsmen. Few cultivators were involved. Of the Cantonese traders, most were born in the Pearl River delta, but some lived in Macao and had learned “barbarian” languages in order to mediate opium deals with foreigners (Tanaka 1964: 12–26).

With regard to the form which opium trading took, commercial organizations, known as *yaokou* 窖口 comprising dozens of investors, acted as wholesalers and intermediaries. Each *yaokou* owned capital ranging in size from \$20,000 and \$1 million. Opium was supplied by large *yaokou* to small *yaokou* and was then distributed throughout the cities, towns and villages of Guangdong (Chang 1964: 32–33; Tanaka 1964: 19; Murao 1985: 101–102; Nīmura 2000: 250). The operations of *yaokou* were very similar to the *hegu* 合股, a type of business partnership that required each partner to invest a fixed amount of capital. Taking into account the number of investors in small *yaokou*, we may conclude that an enormous number of people claimed membership in these business ventures. The majority of transactions were small scale, due in part to wealthy investors entrusting actual operations to agents in order to avoid risk of arrest. That being said, most business activities in

China at the time were ordinarily very small in scale. This opium trade business style illustrates the fact that Chinese dealers from a variety of backgrounds were seeking opium in any available amount, crowding around foreign ships and hulks to acquire the tools of the trade.

## **(2) Southern Fujian**

It was in Taiwan and Fujian that the practice of smoking opium spread earlier than in any other region of China (Spence 1975; Trocki 1999: 35). The opium trade then expanded from Guangzhou to southern Fujian through the generally developing trade routes, while during the 1820s, foreign merchants attempted to sail to northern ports from Guangzhou, and from 1832 embarked on full-scale operations throughout the coastal regions (Morse 1926, vol. 4: 334–335; Chang 1964: 23–26; Eto 1968: 139–140). Consequently, those who sought to deal in opium would crowd onto the foreign ships arriving in southern Fujian (Collis 2002: 87–88). These dealers on the southern Fujian coast were of both Fujianese and Cantonese origin, the former purchasing their supplies from foreign ships in Guangdong or southern Fujian and the latter also acting as interpreters.<sup>4</sup> As their role of these dealers as middlemen expanded, the retail trade was conducted by all sea-related occupations, merchants, fisherman and seamen alike.

Table 2 shows the opium deals made by Zhang Pan 張潘, who was born in Tongan County, Quanzhou Prefecture.<sup>5</sup> Although these transactions were large in scale, Zhang's partners in the joint venture, the actual dealers and the locations of purchase were by no means fixed. On the whole, however, most of all the known cases of opium dealing were small-scale, joint capital partnerships operating out of small ships, although larger-scale transactions through lineage ties were commonplace in southern Fujian (Tanaka 1964: 20–21; Lin Renchuan 1985: 64–65), suggesting that such transactions stemmed from capital accumulated by groups of kinsfolk or close acquaintances. In southern Fujian, like in Guangzhou, dealers had no particular trade route and thus used any kind of relationship in finding the opportunity to trade in opium.

<sup>4</sup> *YZDS*, vol. 2, pp. 485–487, “Memorial of Deng Tingzhen on September 23<sup>rd</sup> in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>5</sup> *GZDDG*, vol. 5, pp. 319–324(002185); *YZDS*, vol. 1, pp.436–440, “Memorial of Zhong Xiang on November 23<sup>rd</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

Table 2: The opium trade carried out by Zhang Pan

Date	Total amount of investment	The amount of opium purchased	Place of purchase	Seller	Investors	Note
February to March 1833	2,400 dollars	3 chests	Near Dadan	Cantonese ship	Zhang Pan, Zhang Zhe, Zhang Nanshan	Ordered Lin Ju and others to carry out this trade.
March 1833	800 dollars	70 balls	Near Xianwei, Dadan	Ship owned by Li of Canton	Zhang Pan, Zhang Zhe	Ordered Lin Ju and others to carry out this trade.
March to April 1833	800 dollars	70 balls	Near Tazajiao, Jinmen	Ship owned by Wang of Canton	Zhang Pan	Ordered Lin Ju and others to carry out this trade.
April to May 1833	1,600 dollars	130 balls	Shantou, Guangdong	Yichang house	Zhang Pan, Wei Xuan, Lin Shi	Ordered Lin Ju and others to carry out this trade.
April to May 1833	1,600 dollars	120 balls	Near Dadan	Guangdong hongtong ship	Zhang Pan, Zhang Zhe, Zhang Nanshan	Ordered Lin Ju and others to carry out this trade.
May 1833	40 dollars	2 balls	Crossing point of Gaoqli	Man named Shi	Zhang Pan	
October to November 1833	800 dollars	60 balls	Guangdong		Zhang Pan	Asked Wei Xuan and Lin Shi to carry out this trade.
November to December 1833	2,000 dollars	160 balls	Guangdong		Zhang Pan	Asked Lin Qing to carry out this trade.
November to December 1835	4,500 dollars	4 chests	Near Yakou, Jinjiang	Foreign ship	Zhang Pan, Lin Yang, Lin Qing, Zhang Bang	
January 20, 1837	19 large or small sysees and 718 dollars		Dadeng	Guangdong hongtong ship	Zhang Pan, Zhang Qing, Zhan Xian, Zhang Ban, Hon Youlin	Zhang Pan caught by the Left Brigade of Jinmen but escaped.
March or April 1837	2,400 dollars	3 chests	Jinmen	Fishing boat	Zhang Pan, Li Dui, Zhang Ru	

Source: *GZDDG*, vol. 5, pp. 319-324 (002185), "Memorial of Chui Xiang, Governor General of Fujian and Zhejiang on November 23<sup>rd</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era."

Some Cantonese and Fujianese, regardless of occupation or wealth, navigated small ships and gathered at the hulks or foreign ships anchored off shore near Lingding or southern Fujian to buy opium, and as mentioned above, understood foreign languages and were able to mediate transactions directly with foreigners, who benefited from the sales so created and joined their ventures. Consequently, the foreign and domestic opium trades merged just outside Guangzhou. This off shore trade continued to expand from the 1820s on in not only opium but other goods and would become the decisive blow that destroyed the Qing government's trade control institutions. (Morse 1926, vol. 4: 107, 135, 150, 228; Van Dyke 2005: 70, 108).<sup>6</sup> Failing to maintain its control over trade in Guangzhou after the collapse in Amoy, the government lost almost all control over the country's foreign maritime trade.

## **2. Tianjin and Shanghai**

The above-mentioned Fujianese and Cantonese dealers eventually took control of the coastal trade routes out of Fujian and Guangdong into northern China, thus expanding the opium trade to such destinations as Shanghai, Dinghai 定海, Ningpo, Zhapu 乍浦, Tianjin and Gaiping 蓋平 (Sasaki 1958: 24–25; Lin Man-Houng 1985: 75–88). Tianjin and Shanghai in particular became major points of transit.

### **(1) Tianjin**

The sharp growth of the opium trade in Tianjin was due to Fujian- and Guangdong-based ships arriving there to exchange sugar and bean cakes. Around 1839, there were 167 of these ships and more than 10,000 seamen active in Tianjin.<sup>7</sup> However, their activities were not limited to Tianjin. For example, on 26 October 1838, officials detained a Guangdong-based vessel called the *Jingguangxing* 金廣興 and seized about 400 kg of unrefined opium, along with arms and opium smoking paraphernalia. This ship, which was jointly managed by Cantonese and Fujianese traders, had purchased the opium from a foreign ship through

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<sup>6</sup> Other contraband articles, such as saltpeter, were also traded at Lingding. "Commerce of China," *Hunt's Merchant Magazine*, December 1840, p.472.

<sup>7</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 696–697, "Memorial of Qishan on August 24<sup>th</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era."

merchants in Guangzhou and was now on its way from Tianjin to Fengtian (Manchuria).<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Fujian and Guangdong ships were using existing trade routes for sugar and bean cakes in order to link Guangdong and Fujian to Tianjin and Fengtian, as local guilds (*huiguan* 會館) and inn-brokers (*zhanhang* 棧行; innkeepers with storehouses) acted as mediators between the Fujian/Guangdong ships and *yanghuopu* 洋貨鋪 (shops dealing in maritime trade goods).<sup>9</sup> Since these mediators paid the tariffs on behalf of the Fujian and Guangdong ships,<sup>10</sup> they could be interpreted as playing the role of broker, facilitating the flow of opium from the Fujian and Guangdong supply ships to the *yanghuopu* retailers, who were mostly of Fujian origin. A closer look into cases of the opium trade conducted in Tianjin during 1838 and 1839 reveals that the vast majority of those arrested were either Fujian/Guangdong suppliers or managers/employees of *yanghuopu*, and it was these same parties from whom opium was seized. *Yanghuopu* played an important role in mediating between the Fujian/Guangdong ships and local consumers, although most transactions were small in scale (Murakami 2003: 222–224). However, these cases do not illustrate the involvement of brokers, since they did not directly handle the substance.

## (2) Shanghai

Fujian and Guangdong ships also used existing coastal trade routes for sugar and raw cotton to carry opium to Shanghai, employing brokers doing business just outside the East Pass to store the product. Several Fujianese who sold sugar to the sugar brokers and other shops were arrested on 29 September and 6 October 1838.<sup>11</sup> Like in Tianjin, brokers mediated between the Fujian/Guangdong ships and local people, some of whom carried the product from Shanghai to inland consumers.

The expansion of the opium trade through preexisting routes ac-

<sup>8</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 391–393, “Memorial of Qishan on September 19<sup>th</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>9</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 354–356, “Memorial of Qishan on August 2<sup>nd</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>10</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 351–352, “Memorial of Di Ting, the Investigating Sensor in charge of the Jiangxi Circuit on July 27<sup>th</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang Era.”

<sup>11</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 402–405, “Memorial of Tao Shu, Governor General of Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Anhui on October 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

accompanied the overall growth in domestic maritime trade that occurred up until the early 18th century. Brokers mediating between Fujian/Guangdong ships and local people and traveling merchants in Tianjin or Shanghai were also of Fujianese or Cantonese origin and conducted mostly small-scale transactions, a style of trade typically found in Guangdong and southern Fujian, where small ships would crowd around foreign ships and hulks. It was at northern ports such as Tianjin and Shanghai that the Fujian and Guangdong ships would assume the same role as the foreign ships and hulks in the waters off southern China.

### III. Response of the Qing government

Up until the end of the 1820s, the government considered the opium trade only as a problem in the area around Guangzhou (Inoue 2004: 57–135, 169–221), but then fiscal concerns about the appreciation of silver became more serious (Lin 1999), and a lively debate arose over the opium trade as one reason for the outflow of the precious metal. However, only in Guangdong were countermeasures against the opium trade implemented consistently.

On 10 June 1836, Xu Naiji 許乃濟, vice minister of the Court of Imperial Sacrifices, submitted a memorial calling for limited prohibitions. After this appeal was criticized and refused, Huang Juezi 黃爵滋, chief minister of State Ceremonial Affairs, insisted on strict prohibitions in his memorial of 2 June 1838. Drawing on the opinions of the regional governors-general and governors concerning this memorial, the Qing government finally adopted stricter prohibitions called for by Lin Zexu, governor-general of Hubei and Hunan (Chang 1964: 85–94; Inoue 2004: 244–278). On 7 September 1838, an imperial edict was issued ordering generals, governors-general and governors to crack down on opium users and the proprietors of opium dens.<sup>12</sup> Full-scale suppression under the governors-general and governors then began in the coastal areas, a crucial part of which were countermeasures against Fujian and Guangdong trading ships.

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<sup>12</sup> *JDLSD*, vol. 43, p. 290, “Edict on July 19<sup>th</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

## 1. Suppression in Tianjin and Shanghai

### (1) Tianjin

Since Tianjin was located on the opium supply route into Beijing, countermeasures imposed against the opium trade there were just as important as those in Beijing, Guangdong and Fujian and were strictly imposed by Qishan 琦善, deputy governor-general of Zhili, who on 11 November 1838 stipulated “guidelines for finding unrefined opium secretly imported from the seaport of Tianjin,”<sup>13</sup> which were geared towards Fujian and Guangdong ships. The actual wording of these guidelines shows that the inspection system for Fujian/Guangdong ships entering Tianjin was ineffectual and that traders and others were completely ignoring the government’s trade regulations. These regulations amounted to an attempt to regain control over departing and entering ships by intensifying control over brokers. They also made much of filling up the gap (a lack of government control) between departure and entry. In brief, we can divide the problems associated with the trade control system into (i) ship departure, (ii) ship entrance and (iii) the gap between departure and entrance.

With regard to entry, Tianjin customs did not issue clearance permits (*hongdan* 紅單), meaning that all departing merchants had remained unregistered since the establishment of customs there.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, when Fujian and Guangdong ships entered, they relied on brokers to pay their tariffs, meaning that Tianjin customs almost never directly inspected these ships.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, trade control was extremely lax in Tianjin, probably because 1) the amount of tariffs collected satisfied the required amount of revenue<sup>16</sup> and 2) the government was not enforcing its own regulations. In brief, the government had lost direct control

<sup>13</sup> *GZDDG*, vol. 4, pp. 831-836 (001966), “Memorial of Qishan on September 30<sup>th</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>14</sup> *GZDDG*, vol. 3, pp. 35-36 (000933), “Memorial of Tao Yun, the Investigating Senator in charge of the Fujian Circuit on May 16<sup>th</sup> in the 17<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era,”

<sup>15</sup> *YZDS*, vol. 1, pp. 686-687, “Memorial of Qishan on August 16<sup>th</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>16</sup> The fixed amount of maritime revenue required of Tianjin customs was 40,000 *liang*, and about 40,213 *liang* were collected during the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang Era (*GZDDG*, vol. 5: 266 (002168), “Memorial of Qishan on November 21<sup>st</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era”; Shen 1878/1879, vol. 33).



over trade in Tianjin; and gaps between departure and entry show that control over entry by brokers also was not working. The question that arises then is why the brokers did not function at the point of entry and during the gap between departure and entry. If the opium distribution channels were indeed originating from Fujian and Guangdong, flowing to inn-brokers and then on to *yanghuopu*, it would have been enough to regulate the inn-brokers to control trade. However, as mentioned earlier, numerous transactions did not go through these brokers. So what does this situation imply?

The 6 October 1838 memorial of Qishan reported that former inn-brokers still acted as *de facto* brokers and were accumulating opium. However, large-scale transactions in opium had now become more difficult because of the government crackdown. Consequently, small-scale transactions by the Fujian/Guangdong ships and their crews directly with *yanghuopu* and local buyers then increased.<sup>17</sup> This promoted a smaller scale, more diffused trade pattern in Tianjin. Therefore, the Qing government faced the contradiction in which an intensification of actions against brokers would work to lengthen the gaps between departure and entry.

## **(2) Shanghai**

Based on the 19 November 1838 memorial of Tao Shu 陶澍, the governor-general of Jiangsu, Jianxi and Anhui, six guidelines were put in place to investigate and ban the sale of opium at seaports in Jiangsu.<sup>18</sup> The content of these rules show that the situation and countermeasures adopted in Shanghai were very similar to those imposed on Tianjin. Again, the controls targeted Fujian and Guangdong ships and paid close attention to the entry process. The rules in Shanghai also emphasized the gap between departure and entry; i.e., relative lack of control over entry. This shows that control institutions, which depended upon brokers was facing numerous difficulties.

In February 1839, provincial officials in Jiangsu drew up “guidelines for strict inspection of merchant ships suspected of secretly trans-

<sup>17</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 364-365, “Memorial of Qishan on August 18<sup>th</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>18</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 405-406, “Memorial of Tao Shu on October 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

porting opium to Wusong 吳淞,<sup>19</sup> which attempted to strengthen control over Fujian and Guangdong ships before they entered Shanghai. They also pertained to small ships that attempted to connect with Fujian and Guangdong ships concentrated at the mouth of the Wusong River, where brokers played no part. This indicates that gaps between departure and entry were expanding geographically between the mouth of the Wusong River and Shanghai. Therefore, the government had to control this intensively.

The examples of Tianjin and Shanghai indicate that from the beginning, the focus of trade regulation under governors-general and governors was the reinforcement of trade control institutions geared to Fujian and Guangdong ships by brokers during the entry process. It was clearly necessary for the government to strengthen its control over brokers, since they were the middlemen in the opium trade. However, heightened control merely encouraged more smaller-scale transactions during gaps between departure and entry by persons evading the brokers. The various local governments were then obliged to take measures to minimize these gaps, which involved control not only over entry of Fujian and Guangdong ships, but also over their departure from their home ports.

## 2. Regulation in Fujian and Guangdong

The countermeasures taken against the opium trade initially focused on Guangdong. In fact, before the government enforced its strict prohibitions, regulations on Chinese opium traders had already been in place around Guangzhou since 1836 (Chang 1964: 98–104, 111–112). On 31 December 1838, Emperor Daoguang dispatched Lin Zexu to Guangzhou as imperial commissioner to suppress the opium trade. After arriving, Lin strengthened controls, confiscated the opium owned by foreign merchants and destroyed the opium at Humen 虎門 (Chang 1964: 125–175), actions that would be the direct cause of the Opium War.

In Fujian and Guangdong, there was also a strengthening of control, as large amounts of opium were seized and many traders arrested.

<sup>19</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 516–519, “Memorial of Chen Luan on February 30<sup>th</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

Nevertheless, with regard to the departure of Guangdong and Fujian ships, the fact that the control of the opium in this instance depended on brokers in Guangzhou produced a situation similar to Tianjin and Shanghai. However, the control of foreign ships through Hong merchants became impossible because the trading was being conducted outside of Guangzhou (Inoue 2004: 71–72). How then could the government control the Chinese ships? There is a memorial submitted by Deng Tingzhen 鄧廷楨, governor-general of Guangdong and Guangxi responding to the capture of the *Jingguangxing* at Tianjin on 26 October 1838. In it, Deng stated that one Lin Zhihe 林致和, a Fujian/Guangdong ship broker (*Fuchao hang* 福潮行) who guaranteed ships and paid tariffs on their behalf, did not even know about any opium carried out of the port on board a ship under his control.<sup>20</sup> Deng also believed that ships were not loading contraband in Guangzhou because of the broker guarantees. He concluded that the problem was that after their departure ships were trading with foreign vessels.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the focus of control was not departure, but rather the gaps between departure and entry, so there was no attempt to regain control over departure. In Guangzhou, the function of the brokers during departure became meaningless due to the widening of the gaps. Moreover, because of the decrease in trade involving brokers, numerous small-scale transactions were now taking place outside of Guangzhou.

In Fujian, according to the 29 April 1840 memorial of Extraordinary Minister of War Qi Xizao 祁寯藻, ship licenses (*chuanzhao* 船照) were being issued without limit, and the destinations of the ships were also not being regulated. The brokers who ought to have been responsible for these ships had for all practical purposes become dysfunctional.<sup>22</sup> Now almost all Fujian ports had followed Amoy as a victim of the collapse of the trade control system. It was this situation that encouraged small-scale opium transactions in Fujian, as discussed earlier. Because broker-based trade control institutions in Guangdong

<sup>20</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 535–538, “Memorial of Deng Tingzhen on March 24<sup>th</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>21</sup> YZDS, vol. 1, pp. 424–426, “Memorial of Deng Tingzhen on November 16<sup>th</sup> in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

<sup>22</sup> YZDS, vol. 2, pp. 92–93, “Memorial of Qi Xizao on March 27<sup>th</sup> in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the Daoguang era.”

and Fujian did not work at the point of departure, leading to an increase in the gaps between departure and entry, a large number of people were now captured by the Qing government in Fujian and Guangdong. After the Qing Government decided to strictly suppress the opium trade in the coastal areas, it was soon realized that trade control institutions under the direction of brokers who were supposed to be checking ships upon both departure and entry was very lax. In addition, the government had virtually no control over trade in general. In Tianjin and Shanghai, the government attempted to control brokers who helped connect Fujian/Guangdong ships with local buyers; however, this regulation merely promoted smaller-scale and more diffused trading activity below the regulatory radar, leading the government to turn its attention to regulating the traders and small vessels that would gather around the Fujian/Guangdong ships.

After realizing that controlling trade through brokers in Guangdong and Fujian had failed, the government proceeded to deploy troops and began arresting large numbers of suspected opium traders. However, even this type of countermeasure was far from perfect. The original trade control institutions had aimed at minimizing the length of the gaps between departure and entry by limiting points of departure and entry, giving brokers the right to levy tariffs and regulating trade through large-scale concentrated transactions. However, points of departure and entry had now increased owing to the more frequent use of minor ports; and because opium was a banned item, the government could not very well grant brokers the right to tax it and thus regulate it. In any case, brokers failed to control the processes of departure and entry, while strengthening controls over brokers merely caused a widening of the gaps between departure and entrance, further reducing the role of brokers.

With regard to these gaps, it was impossible to control the entire coast outside of specific ports, such as Guangzhou, Amoy, Shanghai and Tianjin, where the government could deploy troops. Foreign merchants, who did not want to abandon the opium trade, as well as Chinese based in Southeast Asia also traded in such ports. Therefore, it became impossible for the Government to limit foreign trade to the ports of Guangzhou and Amoy and thus minimize the gaps between departure and entry by strictly regulating entry and clearance. In short, by depending on brokers to control trade, the government could not regulate

the opium trade, because it had banned it. This is why short-term compulsory suppression of the opium trade was not an effective solution to the problems plaguing the government's trade control institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The reason for the failure of the Qing government's ban on opium was not administrative corruption, but rather the contradictions that developed in its trade control institutions. The expansion which occurred in the opium trade during the first half of the 19th century was due not only to the activities of foreign merchants, but also to those very same institutions. Although corruption was not the primary cause it did exist and stemmed from the structure of concessions involving officials, military personnel and civilians after the opium ban was imposed. This structure also existed outside the previous system by which bureaucrats and brokers had jointly controlled trade, because it was impossible for the government to tax and therefore regulate opium, because it had banned the use and sale of the substance.

Taking a longer-term perspective, from the end of the 17th century on the government had encountered no problems in its coastal regions as long as trade volumes were consistent, tax revenue secured and there was no one resisting government regulation. The government entrusted the control of trade to brokers, which led to laxness in the system and neglect in coping with the decline of Amoy. While loose control reduced regulatory costs and surely contributed to the development of coastal trade, that very development led to the collapse of the system in Amoy and Guangzhou. It was under this loose system that Fujianese and Cantonese merchants also expanded the opium trade along the coast as intermediaries between foreign merchants and Chinese buyers. In the midst of the collapse of trade control institutions, it became impossible for the government to suppress the opium trade indirectly using the system's brokers and thus resorted to confiscating the opium held by foreign merchants, actions which led to the Opium War.

In this sense, the outbreak of that War cannot be thought of as marking the beginning of China's modern era, but rather the result of the collapse of the Qing Dynasty's trade control institutions which had been in place between the mid-18th and early 19th centuries, enabling

the expansion of trade in a modern era that had already arrived. As this study shows, both private foreign and Chinese maritime merchants active along the China coast had already triumphed over the Qing Dynasty long before its defeat at the hands of the British. On the other hand, the Dynasty's loose trade control institutions also promoted and amplified social and economic change and cost the government dearly, for even after its defeat in the Opium War, the government still faced the major problem of how to control a new sphere of trade that had expanded without regulation. In this sense, coastal trade after the collapse of the regulatory system can be defined as *de facto* "free trade;" however, due to the diminutive scale of the transactions involved, while being efficient for "smuggling" purposes, it was not conducive to Western merchants whose trade volumes vastly exceeded that of their Chinese counterparts. Finally, these developments show that it was not wise or appropriate for the Qing government to attempt to regulate its coastal areas, for the post-War reorganization of the trade system and the establishment of treaty ports had already been made an inevitability.

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