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Introduction

Opium Smoking in Ch'ing China by Jonathan Spence is a ground-breaking study that claims to “show opium smoking as a phenomenon that radically affected all levels of Chinese society.”¹ Spence in his discussion takes a close look into the issue of opium addiction in almost all social groups, including the royal family, imperial clans, nobles, eunuchs, soldiers, literati, private secretaries, officials, merchants, students, the wealthy, peasants, workers and paupers. However, his discussion ignores the presence of female addicts. Two decades later, R.K. Newman went on to observe that: “smoking by urban women was [uncommon]; those observers who tried to quantify it usually gave percentages of five or less.”² This continues to represent the common view of opium addiction among Chinese women in the late Qing period.

Records by Protestant missionaries and other Western

observers frequently point to a much more complex picture than the rough impression gained from Spence and Newman. For instance, Dr. Dudgeon, a medical missionary, wrote that “[i]n the drug-producing districts as many as forty to sixty percent of the population smoke. It is not uncommon among women and young persons.”³ Rev. Griffith John, another medical missionary, reckoned 30 percent of the female population of Szechwan to be opium addicts.⁴ Samuel Merwin, claimed that “the ravage [opium] is making in...women and children are deplorable.... I was quite able to realize that any one who had seen the wild abuse of opium in Yunnan would have a wild abhorrence of it.”⁵ Many missionary records suggest that the Empress Dowager too was a drug addict.⁶ In Shanxi, it was documented that there was a place called “opium village” where “women lay among their crumbling houses and empty shops, clad in rags, their faces drawn and leathery, their eyes glazed and dull.”⁷ This paper draws upon these missionary records in order to attempt a gender-sensitive discussion of opium addiction in late Qing. The records I use for this historical research include English and Chinese journal articles, pamphlets, official publications and personal documents. I must at this point give some warning as to the possible problems associated with the use of these records for historical research.

Some have argued that the missionaries perceived China with their egregious presuppositions of Western superiority. Their ultimate purpose was to use opium addiction among Chinese women as an excuse to play down Chinese society. Others have

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even denied missionary records any authenticity, claiming that these records only represented missionary propaganda or a means for acquiring more funding for their missions and presenting their missions as heroic action. According to this view, such records were full of deceitful exaggerations and misleading narratives. Still, Protestant missionaries had good reason to be concerned about opium addiction. Most Chinese people in the late Qing perceived opium as foreign merchandise sold by Westerners. Missionaries as Westerners were often blamed or suspected to be one of the agents for importing drugs to poison China. Some missionaries did engage in smuggling and selling opium for profit. In this regard, the issue of opium caused the missionaries many difficulties in their promotion of Christianity. If they failed to distance themselves from the trade it could damage their credibility. Many missionaries therefore found it necessary to clear their names of these accusations. Many had a strong sense of responsibility to rescue the Chinese people from opium addiction.⁸

At the practical level, the issue of opium hindered their religious imperative as ministries of conversion. The official rule of most missions stipulated that the Church could not receive a person as a member while he/she still smoked opium.⁹ The missionaries had a real need to fight opium addiction in order to justify their presence in China and obtain more converts from the Chinese. In many cases, they became pioneers in dealing with Chinese female opium addicts. Despite the fact their records may contain a Western bias, their records may equally contain some

degree of truth as to what was happening on the ground. Above all, their records are the few existing sources available for us to examine opium addiction among Chinese women in the late Qing period. The “second-hand voice” of these records may still provide with us with useful material for better understanding opium addiction among women in China, at least information on how these women were perceived and how this was related to Western imperialism. As Dorothy Ko pointed out, “there is no ‘authentic’ female voice,” and a “second-hand voice [is] no less real.”¹⁰

Up to now opium addiction among Chinese women during the late Qing period has remained largely unexplored. Zheng Yangwen is one of the few scholars working on this critical research issue. She has looked into the role that recreation has played in the spread of the opium. She has singled out the critical connections between opium consumption, sex, and prostitution. She observed that opium had once represented a desirable object for women to show their social status before it was generally recognized as a lethal drug. Sheh McMahon has also examined the issue of gender. She has illuminated the close interaction between men and women in the practice of opium smoking both in the domestic domain and public domain. When Kathleen Lodwick examined the subject matter in question, she shifted the research focus to the missionaries’ action against opium addiction among Chinese women. She argues that their actions might not have always been successful but their engagement was still of significance in the history of women and opium in China.

Following the insights gained from existing research, I first look at the gender-specific features of opium addiction. I concentrate upon the critical implications of opium in relation to the existential position of Chinese women in society and how opium addiction in practice both elevated and denigrated the status of women. My discussion then examines the spread of opium among Chinese women in the late Qing period. I show how Chinese women became addicted to opium through multiple intended or unintended practices. I indicate the adverse physical and social effects of opium on Chinese women and Chinese society at large. Finally, I discuss the missionaries' efforts to fight the spread of opium among Chinese women. I scrutinize their different approaches to this social problem and the obstacles they faced. My discussion concludes with a reflection upon the current intellectual discourse on China-centered history that ignores the importance of Protestant missionaries and women in contemporary China.

Women and Opium Addiction

In traditional Chinese medical theory and Taoist cosmology, there is a metaphysical dualism that everything in the world (including foods and medicines) is of *yin* or of *yang* in quality. *Yang* represents the elements that are warm, bright, invigorating and masculine while yet *yin* marks the elements that are cold, dark, mollifying and feminine. Accordingly, Peter Lee observed that opium was classified as possessing *yin* qualities for it had the effect

of decreasing the frequency of takers' respiration and their blood pressure.¹¹ Also there was the Chinese belief that "opium simply reinforces their innate female sexuality and further accents their other feminine qualities."¹² *Yin* as the word for feminine elements happens to share the same phonetic transcription with *yin* as the word for "addiction" in Chinese. When Protestant missionaries began paying uninvited visits to China in late nineteenth century, they combined the two words into the notion of *yin's yin* (women's addiction).

The history of opium smoking among Chinese women is traceable back to the Ming Dynasty. Opium then was not a common commodity in Chinese society at that time. Its consumption by Chinese women was limited at a small group of court ladies. Tobacco smoking instead was more common among Chinese women. This also was a practice that eventually led some Chinese women to become opium addicts.¹³ One reason here was that the two Chinese terms for tobacco and opium then differed only by one character. The former was *yan* (literally, smoke) while the later was *tai yan* (literally, great smoke). Such a difference in wording only suggests a difference in magnitude with an impression of opium as a higher-order entertainment. It tells us nothing about the critical difference in terms of their real effect. Furthermore, both involve a kind of smoking activity through a pipe in spite of the obvious differences in their appearance. By the late Qing period opium had overwhelmed tobacco as the drug of choice.

Forms of Chinese Women's Addictions to Opium

The most common (and also most fatal) way for Chinese women to become addicted to opium came through medication. Before the latter half of nineteenth century, many affluent Chinese people, including both men and women, simply took opium as an efficacious self-medication. Merwin wrote that "there was no gender distinction where the medical uses of opium were concerned, and men and women alike intermittently resorted to the pipe as a palliative for a range of ailments."¹⁴ In particular, opium was used as a common relief from chronic illness.¹⁵ However, there was a significant gender bias that made women particularly vulnerable to this form of drug abuse. First of all, women as keepers of the household frequently became the first person in the family to handle opium for the medicinal purposes. As Dikötter pointed out, "a good housewife was expected to be able to blend cough syrups and other opiate remedies at home."¹⁶ Some upper class women even habitually smoked opium after labor due to their general belief that opium would nourish their tired body.¹⁷ Moreover, opium was consumed not only by mothers, but it was also given to infants. Some Chinese women gave their infants a whiff of opium to stop their crying or to enable them to fall asleep at night.¹⁸ This led to the rise of child addiction and exacerbated what was already a serious problem for society.

During the late Qing period, many Chinese women also became opium addicts due to family influence. Missionary records show that most women started opium smoking after their

marriage and learned it from their husbands.¹⁹ In some cases, their husband had been addicted to opium before their marriage. However, some brides' families were more concerned with the wealth and status of the groom's family. They simply let their daughter marry a man with an addiction to opium because it would be profitable for the family. Some matchmakers also concealed the problem in order to ensure their success in matchmaking.²⁰ An example of how women became addicted because of marriage can be found in a record made by Dr. Mary Gale from the Women's Missionary Union in Shanghai. She cited the case of a family where the parents arranged for their young daughter to marry a man who was well-to-do but addicted to opium. As might be expected, it was not long before the daughter became an opium addict and smoked opium with her husband at home.²¹ The critical lesson here was not only about the quick crosscutting of gender barriers in the use of opium addiction, but it was also about social mobility and, by implication, the achievement of equal status with her husband in her conjugal family.

Some Chinese women in the late Qing period became opium addicts even when they were little girls in their natal family under their father's influence. For instance, Merwin mentioned that "one man had a child with him, a girl of some six or eight years of age, and when he had prepared his pipe and smoked it he permitted her to take a whiff or two."²² Very often, when a family discovered their daughter's addiction, they attempted to get rid of the

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daughter by hastening her marriage and thereby passing her on to their husband's family.²³ Equally often, when their husband's family found out about the daughter's addiction to opium, they simply drove her out of their home. In this way, many girls ended up becoming prostitutes in order to support themselves and their addiction.

Apart from men-to-women influence, the spread of opium addiction among Chinese women in the late Qing period was also a consequence of women-to-women influence. A husband's statement found in a missionary record said, "My wife prepared and lit opium smoke for my mother daily. Later my wife found out that whenever she did not prepare opium for my mother, my wife felt tired, exhausted, and could not stop yawning. By then we realized that my wife was also addicted to opium just from lighting the smoke for my mother."²⁴ Materials from other missionary records show that some mother-in-laws requested their daughter-in-law to smoke opium with them. On these occasions, such a request from the mother-in-laws would represent benevolence to their daughter-in-laws, as well as a close bond in between the in-laws. In a similar vein, many mistresses asked their female domestic servants to smoke opium with them. As a result, many female domestic servants became addicted to opium.²⁵

During the late Qing period, opium was also widely popular in various female occupational circles that were well outside of the domestic sphere. In order to attract more customers, many opium

dens in the late Qing period hired young ladies to accompany the customers in smoking opium. For instance, an advertisement from an opium den stated that, "Our den provides special seats, and attractive young ladies who will present thorough services. ... Satisfaction guaranteed for all men!"²⁶ In some dens, the owner even arranged sexual services for their customers and hired prostitutes.²⁷ Many prostitutes because they were addicted to opium went to work in opium dens to support their addiction. Among the prostitutes, there were indications that the destitute ones smoked opium most often for emotional and physical escape from their deplorable conditions. Many employers also induced and even forced their prostitutes to smoke opium in order to maintain their energy and extend their working hours.²⁸ Merwin found that nearly "ninety percent of prostitutes smoked opium."²⁹

Some opium dens in the late Qing period would hire women to work in their facilities without the requiring opium smoking with customers. However, these women were exposed to the opium smoke so frequently that most of them quickly became opium addicts and started to accompany the customers in smoking opium.³⁰ Many opium den owners also purposely fed their female workers opium in order to hold on to them.³¹ Moreover, opium was equally popular among many female entertainers in the late Qing period. Many wealthy people had a habit of smoking opium during watching a performance and viewed such a practice as an essential feature of an evening's entertainment.³² Some audiences would occasionally request the female entertainers to smoke

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opium with them during or after the show. Offstage, some female entertainers on their own relied on opium for relaxation and recuperation. Such a practice was particularly common when the female entertainers needed to work over time and stay awake at night.³³

Overall, opium addiction among Chinese women remained more common in the upper classes as they had the money for opium and the leisure time to indulge in its use.³⁴ A missionary record even showed that “it was considered polite for the gentry’s women to offer women guests opium to smoke.”³⁵ However, when poppies started to be cultivated in China in mid nineteenth century the price of opium declined to the point where it could be used by nearly all segments of society. More and more peasant women and the like were able to purchase opium on a daily basis. The number of female opium smokers rapidly increased.³⁶ By the end of nineteenth century, opium smoking had become a cross-class practice among Chinese women. A missionary record indicated that “it seem[ed] to have become an acceptable way for ladies to go off and amuse themselves together.”³⁷

In practice, many Chinese women intentionally or unintentionally started their opium smoking on special occasions such as festivals and ceremonies. A description from a missionary record reveals that “at funerals, weddings, or feasts, on any occasion when many guests are invited, a number of rooms are prepared for smoking opium on beds, with pipes, lamps and

opium is provided for all smokers.”³⁸ This practice was essentially a manifestation of good hospitality and a demonstration of the hosts’ wealth and status to their guests. In the case of social functions like wedding ceremonies, it was particularly common for the host to provide guests with opium and for some guests to present opium to the bride as a precious gift.³⁹ This became a common source of Chinese women’s addiction.⁴⁰

In addition to women in general, opium smoking spread to some specific female groups that were least expected to be opium addicts. Missionary records indicated that many Buddhist nuns regularly smoked opium.⁴¹ This was an extremely serious sin in terms of Buddhist principles. The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to reach a state of Nirvana; namely, a state of being free from death and suffering by departing from this world and liberating oneself from the cravings of the physical body. Any type of addiction, therefore, is strictly prohibited in Buddhism. However, many nuns smoked opium in order to escape from the boredom of living in Buddhist temples.⁴² Some Buddhist nuns even used opium to facilitate their spiritual pursuits.⁴³ As one missionary record pointed out, they believed that the hallucination from opium smoking enhanced their spirituality and that it enabled them to reach the divine.⁴⁴

Subtle Utilities of Opium

For many Chinese women in the late Qing period, opium meant more than pleasure or enjoyment. First of all, they used opium to

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escape patriarchal bondage at home. A missionary record described the corruption of a woman after her marriage with an opium den owner: "Unhappy in her married life, it was easy for her to yield to the seduction of opium, and living in the den itself and not therefore needing to buy the drug, she soon acquired an enormous appetite."⁴⁵ There was another woman who smoked opium excessively because, as another missionary record pointed out, "she had been refused some liberty she wished for."⁴⁶ She relied on opium to obtain her freedom.

Missionary records indicate that many Chinese women relied on opium for escape from their unsatisfied lives after marriage. On the one hand, in some extreme cases, Chinese women used opium to terminate their lives and took it as an ultimate demonstration of their autonomy. In the late nineteenth century, many Chinese brides, as Merwin pointed out, "commit[ed] suicide by eating opium, owing to the harsh treatment they received" after marriage.⁴⁷ On the other hand, opium became a weapon for Chinese women's resistance to patriarchy. From Lee's observation, some Chinese women discovered that opium could reduce their men's temper and make them mild and gentle because of its calming and pacifying effect.⁴⁸ It could even make men treat their women less harshly and become much more open minded. According to Lee some astute women "preferred men who smoke[d] opium, as long as they used it with caution and moderation."⁴⁹ They also believed that men who smoked opium were less likely to bring concubines to the household and instead

find greater satisfaction in monogamy.⁵⁰

By the same token, some Chinese women found that opium could give them control over their husbands in the bedroom. Medically speaking, opium reduces men's sexual desire and delays ejaculation, thereby prolonging the pleasure of sex, enhancing their appreciation of the experience, and giving them time to enjoy their partner's responses.⁵¹ In other words, men became relatively more gentle and sensitive instead of rushing to climax. Women could enjoy sex more with them in the progress.⁵² In this regard, many missionary records documented that Chinese women actively offered opium to their sex partners. In particular, upper class women often used opium as an aphrodisiac for themselves as well as for their man. However, the use of opium as a sex aid frequently backfired with irrecoverable consequences. Many opium addicts including both males and females lost their sex drive as a result of addiction.⁵³

Despite this danger, many prostitutes used "opium as a means to flirt with objects of sexual attraction" in order to do business and to earn money.⁵⁴ Interestingly, popular fiction during this period often involved stories of how some prostitutes successfully used opium to attract literate and wealthy men and induce them to become their husbands.⁵⁵ In an ideological sense, this kind of fiction not only romanticized the use of opium for love, it also provided Chinese women with the idea that opium could be used to help one move up the socio-economic ladder.⁵⁶

Lethal Effects of Opium

Opium smoking had a destructive effect on the health of women and by extension a catastrophic impact on the family. During the late Qing period, Dr. Galt, a medical missionary, observed that women seemed to suffer more from the effects of opium than men.⁵⁷ Among other disorders opium frequently caused, he wrote, were “poor digestion, constipation, insomnia, heart problems, and irregular menses in women.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, many female smokers were unable to during this period to breastfeed. In some extreme cases, women became barren and thereby failed to fulfill their reproductive role for their family lineage.⁵⁹ A missionary reported that about one-half of the regular opium smokers were childless.⁶⁰ Since many husbands were addicts too, this added to their infertility. Even when the men proceeded to acquire a second wife or concubine, they often failed to father a line of descendants for their family. Many addicts’ families become “extinct in the third generation.”⁶¹ Some medical missionaries during this period debated how addiction would affect the health of their infants in their womb.⁶² Even though they failed to reach a final consensus, they observed that children of female opium addicts tended to be weaker and more diseased. Some of these infants would die very young.⁶³

The spread of opium in the late Qing period brought many other intended or unintended challenges to Chinese women. Given the rapid increase in demand for opium in China, many women were employed in the difficult task of cultivating opium poppies.⁶⁴

Dikötter observed that “the task [of opium cultivation] was often taken over by women and children, leaving the male farmers time to devote themselves to other agricultural work.”⁶⁵ Moreover, a number of Chinese women were injured or captured by the authorities when they were used to smuggle opium. In early twentieth century, the Chinese government decided to ban the opium trade. As a result, the opium trade immediately became an underground business that was increasingly risky but highly profitable. In order to facilitate their illegal operations, many smugglers preferred using women to transport opium. Not only was the cost of female labor cheaper than that of males, but women were also seen to provide a better cover. Among the various methods of carrying opium by women, one common practice was to conceal the opium inside their vaginas and anuses. These female smugglers were referred to as the “water gate team.”⁶⁶ This practice could physically damage their bodies to the extent that they would be unable to bear children. Chinese women who were in some way involved in the opium trade inevitably placed themselves in a highly dangerous and self-destructive situation.

At the collective level, the spread of opium led to the rise of many social problems. Many families suffered from poverty because the head of the family was addicted to opium. As described by the missionaries, “If, as in most cases, he is a working man, when he becomes indolent and unfit for work from the use of opium addiction, he could no longer provide for his family.”⁶⁷

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Many wives had to take special care for their husband if they were addicted to opium and at the same time assume primary financial responsibility for the maintenance of the family. When the wives were also opium addicts, they generally became shamelessly lazy and terribly sluggish.⁶⁸

Chinese observers during this period provide a similar picture of women addicts. For instance, a Chinese writer found that many wives along with their husbands often abandoned their families and their businesses when they were addicted to opium.⁶⁹ Another Chinese author described how opium addiction corrupted a mother who gave no care to her daughter even when her daughter was in a critical lawsuit.⁷⁰ This sort of situation became so commonplace it ultimately provided the basis for an entire genre in popular fiction. McMahon in his fictional account of a female smoker characterized the person as someone who “makes life center around herself as much as she can and continues her opium smoking.”⁷¹

Addicts often squandered their family's wealth to purchase opium. This caused the collapse of many upper class families, as well as lower class families in the late Qing period.⁷² A missionary record states that “wives and children complain bitterly of the husband and father who is addicted to [opium], and who thus impoverishes them.”⁷³ When the women in question also smoked opium, the chances for the family's survival were rather slim. A Chinese observer stated that “The opium smoker could continue

until her last copper was spent and still feel no regret.”⁷⁴ The spread of opium in the late Qing period fundamentally undermined the Chinese family

The spread of opium was often associated with domestic violence. Anna K. Scott, a medical missionary, recorded one such story in her personal journal: “In the Swatow hospital to-day a woman came who had been cruelly beaten by her opium smoking husband. Her little babe died when only three days old.... He had used all their money for opium and she had none wherewith to buy eatables. She was weak and miserable.”⁷⁵ Opium to Chinese women, therefore, meant not only emotional torture and financial burdens, but also physical threat and violent abuse. Furthermore, Dr. Dudgeon, another medical missionary, observed that “The pipe becomes the smoker’s very life, and to satisfy the inexorable demands of the tyrant craving, there is nothing to which [the smoker] would not do.”⁷⁶ When some male addicts had exhausted their family’s wealth for opium, they pawned their family’s property including their wives and children.⁷⁷

Naturally, there would be no market for women addicted to opium. However, in most cases they worked with their husband to sell their children in order to support their common need for opium. In regard to their children it was more common to sell daughters. In some cases, they were sold to rich families either as wives, concubines or servants. These were the lucky children insofar as they had the chance to live in a better environment after

the sale.⁷⁸ However, in other cases the girls were sold into the sex industry. Some men even forced their wives and daughters to engage in prostitution so they could purchase of opium.⁷⁹ When the competition among opium dens became keen, some opium den owners obtained women from their own family – this could be their wife, concubine, daughter or daughter-in-law -- for the provision of sexual services to their customers in order to keep their business going.⁸⁰ In this regard, Harriet Sergeant, a British observer, found that the general age of prostitutes in the late Qing period continued to decline to twelve or thirteen years old.⁸¹ Since opium smoking could erode women's beauty, many prostitutes addicted to opium were eventually abandoned by their bosses.⁸² One missionary record claimed that “No language can describe all the horrors which result from the use of opium in China; it involves a state of existence which the Chinese describe as living in a second hell.”⁸³ In a similar vein, another missionary record remarked that “opium is a most injurious evil...though they do not at once die, they suffer the equivalent of death.”⁸⁴

Missionaries and Female Smokers

When the Protestant missionaries first arrived at China, they promptly singled out what they thought to be the various problematic features of Chinese women's lives. They then attempted to enable Chinese women to deal with the patriarchal bias in society through such methods as prohibiting foot binding, rescuing prostitutes, implementing women's education, and fighting against female opium addiction. As Wang Huiwu in a

feminist journal pointed out, "In terms of belief, the feminist movement differs from gospel preaching, but in terms of concrete work in society, the feminist movement and Christianity both elevate women's position."⁸⁵ We surely should not go so far as to conclude that nineteenth century missionaries were the founding feminists for contemporary China, but we equally should not downplay their work, which produced many improvements in the lives of Chinese women.

Missionaries and Opium

Gregory Blue is right to argue that "The most consistent and ultimately the most influential source of opposition, starting in the 1830s, was missionary objections to the opium trade and to the British government's role in it."⁸⁶ Missionaries were one of the first groups to notice the problem of opium smoking in China. Also missionaries were the first to search for a solution to the problem of opium. However, it would be naïve to maintain that their motives were entirely selfless. Many scholars (including Gregory Blue) have pointed out that "the missionaries' objections arose both from their personal observation of addicts and from the fact that attempts at conversion were frustrated by the Chinese perception that the British opium trade demonstrated the immorality of Christians."⁸⁷ Nevertheless, many missionaries, as a Chinese observer wrote, "wondered why opium was so appealing because it did not look or taste good and its ill effects were so remarkable that even women ... knew about them."⁸⁸ Missionaries published their findings from medical research in order to rectify

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the many misunderstandings of opium.⁸⁹ Missionaries also wrote letters to officials back home in the hopes that they would terminate the opium trade in China. For instance, an article in a missionary journal provides a typical example of this approach to the problem: "The people of England are asleep because [they are] ignorant as to this trade; and the Church will be distinctly responsible if this ignorance and silence continues."⁹⁰ They hoped that an informed public would influence the government to take action against the opium.⁹¹ Eventually, Blue observed their strenuous efforts gained increasing acceptance in Western public opinion.⁹²

In China Protestant missionaries published pamphlets and anti-opium literature in order to educate Chinese people about the dangers of opium. Rev. David Lee, for example, published a pictorial book that clearly illustrated the evil effects of opium. From the comments by missionary Charles Allan, the book was well expressed, edifying and persuasive. It was also used by many Protestant fellows in their fight against opium.⁹³ A pamphlet entitled *Opinions of Over 100 Physicians on the Use of Opium in China* was another prominent booklet published by the missionaries' Anti-Opium League. It compiled the opinions of 106 doctors based on their experiences working with opium addicts. Of these doctors, twenty-five or roughly one-fourth were female physicians who had worked with women addicts in China.⁹⁴ The missionaries also distributed many other general articles to encourage the Chinese people to join the anti-opium movement, particularly their

colleagues and Chinese Christians.⁹⁵

Opium Refuges

Research and publications were not their only weapons in their battle against opium. Missionaries established refuges for Chinese women because they realized the difficulties involved in female opium addicts experienced in giving up their addiction on their own.⁹⁶ They actively sought out female opium addicts and tried to encourage them to come to their opium refuges. The activities of Miss Crickmay provide a good example of the motivation behind the establishment of opium refuges. She was an active community worker who decided to establish the first women's opium refuge in Shanxi after her discovery of many female opium addicts in many local households.⁹⁷ Missionary records also show that most prominent missionary organizations founded and supported opium refuges such as China Inland Mission, London Mission's Society, and Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Missionary organizations were one of the first groups to perform this sort of work for Chinese society.⁹⁸ There were also a number of individual missionaries who set up refuges for Chinese female opium addicts. In short, the missionaries formed an essential work force against the spread of opium among Chinese women.⁹⁹

At the operational level, the missionaries in late Qing received many female opium addicts from both upper and lower class.¹⁰⁰ Funding for their refuges mainly came from their missionary organizations. In most cases, their service for the female opium

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addicts was free of charge. "(T)he [missionary] society will furnish the rooms, provide fire, light and food, and medicine all gratuitously."¹⁰¹ However, some of refuges needed to charge their patients a small fee in order to have enough money to run the refuge.¹⁰² There were other refuges that charged their patients a deposit to ensure their stay in their refuge until the end of their treatment. A missionary record documented the fact that "The in-patients ... are admitted on payment of 2 dols., which in fact pays for their food and the fuel with which it is cooked. It has seemed absolutely necessary to make some charge of this sort ... [because] they would in many instances run away after three or four days."¹⁰³

Resources for running the refuges were extremely limited. Most women's refuges could only operate as a division within larger refuges that were only for men.¹⁰⁴ Toward the end of the nineteenth century, missionaries in China managed to acquire more support and accumulated more resources. Some started to build opium refuges exclusively for women. Miss E. Gauntlett from the China Inland Mission described: "The women's Refuge is quite separate from the men's and they have their own chapel."¹⁰⁵ In this way, they not only created a secure place for Chinese women addicted to opium, but they also facilitated the early development of close, cross-class and cross-background connections among Chinese women.¹⁰⁶

However, most missionaries in China during the late Qing

period were male. They had to overcome many gender biases of their own. For instance, Preacher Cheng, a Chinese Christian fellow, found it awkward to ask women to come to the refuges for treatment. He thus proceeded to, in his words, "put up posters on the streets announcing the meetings, stating that husbands might escort their wives or sons their mothers to the services."¹⁰⁷ In effect, his efforts successfully drew many women to receive treatment. The missionaries also realized the limitations to what a male could do for a female addict. In order to provide proper treatment and the best conditions, the missionaries recruited more female doctors and nurses from their organizations.¹⁰⁸ Despite of this gender-sensitive effort, there were not enough female missionaries in nineteenth century.

As the number of Chinese female addicts continued to increase, many missionaries and pastors called on their wives to work in their ministry. For example, Pastor Hsi frequently traveled with his wife so she could help female opium addicts. When his wife arrived in a province, she began her anti-opium work by gathering all the female addicts and inviting them to the church for treatment.¹⁰⁹ When Mrs. Hsi arrived in the opium refuge, she diligently assisted the female patients to control their opium addiction. According to her female patients, she was so kind and frequently brought them much needed comfort and care.¹¹⁰ Her deep devotion and commitment to her patients also enabled a number of female addicts to abandon their addiction to opium and turn a new leaf of life with real happiness.¹¹¹ In this regard, she

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found that her work was significant not only to the female addicts, but also to their families and society at large. Men were grateful that their wives were now healthy and capable of looking after their children.¹¹² She eventually went on to establish opium refuges in a number of different provinces.

The missionaries in the late Qing period urged Chinese Christian women to join their campaign against female addiction. Even though the women might not have been proficient in medical knowledge and skills, the missionary records indicate that they had certain advantages over Western missionaries in dealing with the Chinese female addicts. Particularly, their presence broke cultural and language barriers. Their presence also enabled the female patients to feel more comfortable when they talked about their problems and struggles. Chinese Christian women therefore became an essential source of support for the missionaries in dealing with female opium addicts. Many missionaries also trained Chinese Christian women to manage the refuges.¹¹³ Many former Chinese female addicts were also active in supporting the missionaries' anti-opium campaign. After their successful relinquishment of their addiction to opium, they not only brought their families to church, but also worked with the missionaries to help other female addicts.¹¹⁴ They could share their own experiences and struggles with female addicts in a way that the missionaries could not.

Medical Cure

In the refuges, missionaries offered female opium addicts different treatments, depending on their physical condition and degree of addiction.¹¹⁵ However, medical knowledge and skills at that time were still quite rudimentary which meant that medical missionaries often disagreed about the best method of treatment. In particular, there was a great deal of controversy about whether to use the termination method or the reduction method. The termination method required immediate cessation of opium smoking by the addicts. Many missionaries preferred this method because they looked on opium as an absolute evil in both a mortal and physical sense. They believed that it should not be used under any circumstances. However, the patients would be in great pain when this method was used. Missionaries who used this approach needed to provide their patients with various medicines for the relief of patients' pain and tranquilization of their addiction. Eventually, the patient would get used to not taking opium and become free from their addiction.

This method could be risky because many addicts could not stand the pain. A missionary record documented a death of a patient due to the application of the termination method.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, many missionaries insisted on this method for treating opium addicts. They believed that "if you try faithfully to break off and die in the effort, would not heaven be yours and God pleased to receive you?"¹¹⁷ Along a similar line of argument, they even maintained that death and the afterlife provided an end to

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suffering and entry into eternity. Still, this remained a critical dilemma to some of them. They were particularly doubtful about non-Christian cases because, from their point of view, hell and eternal damnation awaited them if they died in treatment.

The reduction method, on the other hand, was a relatively moderate way of ceasing to use opium. It did not require addicts to get rid of opium immediately. Instead, the missionaries gradually reduced the amount of opium that was consumed. In practice, the missionaries prepared both medicine and opium pills for the addicts. However, they used opium pills only when a patient could not bear the pain. The key idea here was to use opium just as a temporary device to maintain the patients' lives instead of allowing them to rely on opium. Their ultimate goal was not to use any opium pills for the patients. Many missionaries opposed the reduction method because they maintained that medical missionaries should not administer opium in any form.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, as Merwin notes, some missionaries saw the deaths of addicts and realized the shortcomings of the termination method. Many missionaries eventually ended up adopting the reduction method.¹¹⁹

The fight against opium was a painful process both to the addicts and the missionaries. For instance, according to one missionary record, "as the days passed, the patients grew weaker—some despondent, some really ill, with vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, pains everywhere... groaning...

yawning... knocking their arms or legs against the walls or upon the beds to shake off the pain.”¹²⁰ As a result, the missionaries and refuge workers frequently were on duty throughout the night as they attempted to comfort the miserable patients.¹²¹ Female addicts were generally less violent than the majority of male addicts. Another missionary record indicates they would not throw “stools at the heads of servants” as some men did when the pain from their opium addiction kicked in.¹²² However, many missionary records mention that female patients frequently escaped in the middle of treatment due to their inability to withstand pain or resist temptation.¹²³ Anna Henry, a female missionary, reported that one her female patients had “disheveled hair, clothing not only awry, but almost discarded, and with an utter indifference as to whether her shoes were off or on, three times she escaped from the window in her room, trying to get away to get opium.”¹²⁴

No accurate figures are available concerning the success rate of missionary refuges. However, missionary records from this period are not overly optimistic about the effectiveness of their treatment strategies. For instance one missionary observed that: “The chances, so to speak, of ultimate recovery from the opium-smoking habit were also so slender.”¹²⁵ Many missionaries were also simply exhausted and discouraged due to the low cure rate. Quirnbach, a missionary actively involved in treating opium addiction asked himself, “Why I was foolish enough to try it again?”¹²⁶ Still, some women fully recovered and overcame their opium addiction as a result of the efforts of the missionaries. Anna Henry described one

such case: "Day by day her pathetically appealing face was lifted attentively to hear more, and with praiseworthy persistence she applied herself to studying the little books taught to beginners. ... [She] was bubbling over with appreciative speeches and loving demonstrations."¹²⁷ It was such cases that encouraged many missionaries to continue their fight against opium.

Spiritual Cure

Many missionaries believed that medicines, even as the most advance ones, were not enough. They thus relied more on their religious faith. As Quirnbach pointed out, "physical medicine may help the body but prayer medicine is what you need for the root of your trouble."¹²⁸ This was a common view of many missionaries (including Quirnbach). They therefore urged the addicts to put their trust in God. They also were of the opinion that it would be difficult to end their addiction without God's help for God could do what medicine was not capable of doing.¹²⁹

Spiritual healing entailed religious prayer and education. One common practice was that the Chinese female opium addicts joined with the missionaries to sing hymns and pray on a daily basis.¹³⁰ Through this kind of daily activity missionaries expected that female opium addicts would acknowledge the power of God. This served as a means to acquire strength from the Divine to overcome their problems. In some cases, the missionaries even required the opium addicts to attend religious services for at least three months to learn the gospel and the rudiments of prayer

before they entered the refuges for their treatment.¹³¹ On at least one occasion, the missionaries taught Chinese female opium addicts about the harmful effects of opium on their souls. They informed them that addiction was a form of sin. They must cleanse it through their strong faith to Jesus. The Bible supported this view: "In Your love You kept me from the pit of destruction; You have put all my sins behind Your back."¹³² In other words, the missionaries believed that opium addiction would really only be cured when addicts learned to see it as a sin and overcome it through Christian religious practice. Many female patients in the refuges were also convinced that opium addiction was a sin that enslaved them, and that they would need Jesus' salvation before they could fight their addiction.¹³³

Obstacles

The missionary work for the Chinese female opium addicts was not without numerous obstacles. One of the foremost hindrances that missionaries encountered was official intervention from the local government. Due to tensions between the Qing government and Western powers, many local officials were deeply suspicious of foreigners including missionaries. In many areas, officials attempted to play down the missionaries' activities and their opium refuges. In Hubei Province, for instance, the government prohibited secret gatherings and often classified Christian organizations as suspicious groups. Some missionaries were forced to abandon their plans for an opium refuge in order to avoid conflict with the government.¹³⁴

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Opposition from the addict's family was another common obstacle and the most vexing one against the missionaries' efforts to help the Chinese female opium addicts. In order to provide the female addicts with the necessary treatment, the missionaries frequently needed to deal with their families. They had to persuade their families and obtain their trust to let the women in question enter their refuges. However, their families often refused to let them enter their refuges for treatment. In some cases, the opposition came from the children out of filial piety for mother in that they did not want their mother to go through the pain of the treatment process. A statement from a child against his mother undergoing treatment said that: "How many years more would you smoke, anyway? And won't we provide you with what opium you want? Why should you risk so much and suffer so, while perhaps you may not be able to break it off after all?"¹³⁵

Another obstacle the missionaries encountered was a strong anti-foreign sentiment that had been prevalent since the Opium War. Many Chinese people automatically discounted the missionaries' activities to help the opium addicts.¹³⁶ This situation was further exacerbated during the Boxer Rebellion. During this period, various rumors against the missionaries were spread in order to isolate them from Chinese people. Quirnbach pointed out that many families discouraged and even prohibited their women from receiving treatment from missionaries.¹³⁷ Even when they allowed their women to have the treatment, they closely followed them and observed the process in the missionary hospital.¹³⁸

It should be noted that many opium den owners objected to their women seeking help from missionaries for it directly went against their businesses. These women helped the den owner with the daily operations of the business and provided the customers with company when smoking.¹³⁹ The den owner therefore took it as a threat to his business if he allowed his women to receive missionary treatment. They were worried that their women would fail to continue in their regular jobs if they were successfully treated for addiction.¹⁴⁰

Even after a woman had recovered from her addiction, her family could encourage her to resume her addiction of opium. Mrs. Hsi found that many women quickly resumed their opium addiction when they saw their husband smoking opium after their returned home.¹⁴¹ Dr. Mary Gale of the Women's Missionary Union in Shanghai provides a case in point: "her excuse was that she could not resist the constant sight and odor of opium in her house."¹⁴² There were also cases of husbands inducing their wives to resume their addiction to opium because they wanted company when they smoked opium. Such setbacks affected not only the Chinese female opium addicts, but also the missionaries who had tried to help them quit their addiction to opium. One missionary described a case where a young woman returned to her home and became addicted to opium again and died from it. In this regard, he sadly noted that "I fear from what I heard that the old habit returned, but she died during my absence in England, and I could never ascertain particulars of her death."¹⁴³ Missionary records

indicate that this was a common outcome because re-addiction to opium was often more severe than the first time.¹⁴⁴

Besides these obstacles, Chinese female opium addicts needed to deal with some subtle but critical difficulties when they attempted to quit their addiction to opium. For instance, some Chinese women found it hard to go to the refuge because of their bound feet. To the upper class women, this might not matter as they could go there by sedan chair or by other means. However, many lower class women, rural women in particular, needed to walk to the refuge and that became a real problem for them. A Chinese woman explained to a missionary that: "It was far to walk, and her bound feet were too small to bear a large woman's weight such a distance."¹⁴⁵ Domestic responsibilities also kept women from having the treatment. Many women had to perform various daily chores and household affairs. It was difficult for them to find time for the treatment of their addiction to opium. A statement from a Chinese woman claimed that "[I have] little ones and the home to manage and could not easily attend."¹⁴⁶

The last obstacle to the missionaries' work for Chinese female opium addicts was their common religious faith to Kuan Yin, a female deity of great mercy and compassion in the Chinese belief system.¹⁴⁷ However, the God in Christianity is a male figure, which created a serious gender gap for some Chinese women. Most critically, Christianity was a monotheistic religion. This required that a person must reject all their other deities and religious faiths.

Since the religious aspect or, rather, the spiritual cure, was an integral part of their treatment for opium addiction, the missionaries had to find way to get female opium addicts to accept their God.. Many Chinese women were reluctant to abandon their faith in Kuan Yin and accept Jesus as the one and only true God that would help them to overcome their addiction.¹⁴⁸ Some of them eventually decided not to come to the refuge once they learned about the spiritual aspect of the treatment.

Conclusion

The purpose of the missionaries' campaign against opium addiction among Chinese women is still subject to debate. Their actual practices in the campaign against opium addiction might not have been particularly successful or effective. However, my study indicates that their deep commitment to help Chinese female opium addicts was at least praiseworthy. They should receive recognition for their remarkable role in the social history of contemporary China. In any case, their endeavors had a direct and immediate effect in restricting the spread of opium in China and even facilitated the enactment of a new Chinese law in 1906 that prohibited women or children from entering opium dens.¹⁴⁹

However, the missionaries' campaign against female addiction in the late Qing period has largely gone unnoticed given the current intellectual bias for a China-centered history. As Arif Dirlik pointed out, "China-centered history as conceived by [scholars] is

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in keeping with the epistemological procedures of orientalism, especially in drawing a clear methodological line between Chinese and other histories, and arguing that Chinese history may be understood only in terms that are internal to it.”¹⁵⁰ Chinese history has for years been viewed from a Western perspective and as a result has presented numerous inaccurate depictions of life in China. The missionaries in late Qing period undoubtedly contributed to the rise of orientalism with their accounts of China. Paul Cohen has pointed to the analytical necessity of challenging missionary activities in China. He even pointed to missionaries as a root cause of the ultimate downfall of the Qing dynasty.¹⁵¹ The argument for a more China-centered history is definitely necessary if we are to gain a full picture of Chinese history. However, historians today may have gone to far in this regard. Whilst they recognize the need for the elimination of Western bias in Chinese history, they may have ended up constructing a pristine traditional China that never existed in reality. In effect, they end up discounting many significant aspects of the historical encounter between the East and West. This includes the missionary campaign against opium addiction among Chinese women. As Zhou Yongming has argued, “[a]ny discussion of the spread of anti-opium rhetoric in China would be incomplete without mentioning the role played by foreign missionaries, especially Protestants.”¹⁵²

On top of that, my study has illuminated the complexity of opium addiction among Chinese women, a subject that has largely

gone unnoticed as a result of the dominance of a male-centered view of history. However, Ko is right to suggest that Chinese women were not simply an object-status in Chinese history. On the contrary, she observed that “local histories, private writings, and fictions suggest a contrasting picture of the vitality of women’s domestic and social lives, as well as the degree of informal power and social freedom they apparently enjoyed.”¹⁵³ Inherent in the spread of opium among Chinese women in late Qing was a great deal of indeterminacy, which goes against the idea that there can be a single model of Chinese women as a submissive subject or passive recipient of historical forces. The most critical matter in all this is not simply the destructive effects of opium addiction but instead the gender implications of their addiction. These practices included their daily pursuit for autonomy and freedom, their domestic struggle against patriarchal bondage, and their search for social and economic equality. When the missionaries came to save Chinese women from addiction to opium, their efforts were inevitably colored by Western biases and Christian chauvinism. However, their actions against the spread of opium among Chinese women were real and had an immediate impact. Their presence shaped the historical formation of contemporary China. In short, China, as with all countries, is a product of historical encounters with other societies. The Protestant missionary battle against opium addiction among Chinese women played a significant role in the drama of Chinese history.

Glossary

<i>tai yan</i>	大烟
<i>yan</i>	烟
<i>yang</i>	阳
<i>yin</i>	阴
<i>yin</i>	瘾
<i>yin's yin</i>	阴瘾

Notes

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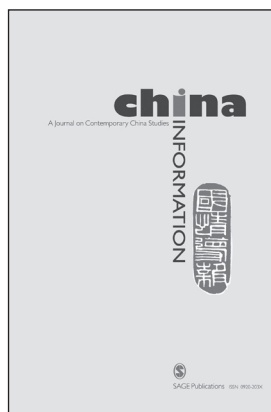
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