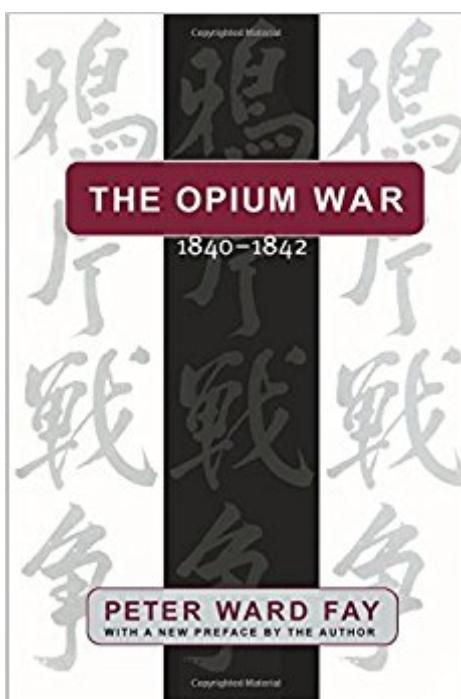


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# Opium War, 1840-1842: Barbarians In The Celestial Empire In The Early Part Of The Nineteenth Century And The War By Which They Forced Her Gates



## Synopsis

This book tells the fascinating story of the war between England and China that delivered Hong Kong to the English, forced the imperial Chinese government to add four ports to Canton as places in which foreigners could live and trade, and rendered irreversible the process that for almost a century thereafter distinguished western relations with this quarter of the globe-- the process that is loosely termed the "opening of China". Originally published by UNC Press in 1975, Peter Ward Fay's study was the first to treat extensively the opium trade from the point of production in India to the point of consumption in China and the first to give both Protestant and Catholic missionaries their due; it remains the most comprehensive account of the first Opium War through western eyes. In a new preface, Fay reflects on the relationship between the events described in the book and Hong Kong's more recent history.

## Book Information

Paperback: 440 pages

Publisher: The University of North Carolina Press; Revised ed. edition (March 16, 1998)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807847143

ISBN-13: 978-0807847145

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 1 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 5 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #791,863 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #21 in Books > History > Asia > Hong Kong #884 in Books > History > Asia > India #1634 in Books > History > Asia > China

## Customer Reviews

Until the 1830s, China was scarcely known to the outside world. When Europeans began to arrive in number in that decade, demanding of the Ching dynasty's rulers access to raw materials and to China's huge domestic markets alike, the Chinese resisted, but, in the end, unsuccessfully. England in particular sought a market for the opium, a crown monopoly produced in India, and it waged a brief war to press its claim--a war that won it that market, the ownership of Hong Kong, and entry into cities like Shanghai and Guangdong. The war also contributed to the eventual collapse of Ching rule. Really a footnote in history, the Opium War, then, had major consequences that color Sino-Western relations even today. Peter Ward Fay tells the story in this well-written, vigorous

narrative. --Gregory McNamee

"Panoramic, thoughtful, and brilliantly presented. ."Pacific Historical Review""Peter Ward Fay has produced a classic study in "The Opium War, 1840-1842."John K. Fairbank, "New York Times Book Review""Fay has pieced together, from an enormous range of firsthand sources, a vivid, microscopically detailed account."Historian""The work is rich in detail and made richer still by the author's forceful and robust writing style."American Historical Review""[D]emonstrates the academic validity and usefulness, as well as the sheer reading pleasure, of narrative historical treatment done properly."Queen's Quarterly""Panoramic, thoughtful, and brilliantly presented. ."Pacific Historical Review" Fay has pieced together, from an enormous range of firsthand sources, a vivid, microscopically detailed account."Historian"ÃƒÂ•DÃ  Â"emonstrates the academic validity and usefulness, as well as the sheer reading pleasure, of narrative historical treatment done properly."Queen's Quarterly"[D]emonstrates the academic validity and usefulness, as well as the sheer reading pleasure, of narrative historical treatment done properly."Queen's Quarterly"Peter Ward Fay has produced a classic study in "The Opium War, 1840-1842".John K. Fairbank, "New York Times Book Review"

This is an incredibly detailed account of the Opium War, with an emphasis on the western source material. It gets very deep into opium production methods in Bombay, the methods in which the merchant ships traded with the Chinese, and it is written in a way that makes you feel as if you are walking down 13 Factory Street. I think Fay's work is a tour-de-force, but I would have liked to have seen more work from the Chinese perspective. I found myself rooting for the English and then had to remember that what they did was horrible and destroyed China. I think that this work should be read with Jack Beeching's work on the same subject.

Thoroughly researched, well-written, history of extraordinary events. Even-keeled treatment with no apparent attitude/bias. Bought this book for my daughter's Chinese History class at Trinity College and ended up reading it cover to cover myself..

Anyone unfortunate enough to have to travel through London's Heathrow Airport today will see Stalinist propaganda from the British Government about how protecting Britain from the evils of drug smuggling requires "tougher checks" (presumably the third rate civil servant who authorized these Orwellian signs meant "more thorough" rather than "tougher", but perhaps Britain today really is a

place where the government wants leather-jacketed toughs hanging around to keep the citizenry in order.) But there was a time, a mere five generations ago, when British government policy was to manufacture and to facilitate and protect the smuggling of as much opium into China as that country could take. The consequences for the people of China were devastating. Eventually the Chinese government decided to take action against the British, having been far more tolerant of British drug dealing than the British are today; and for the impertinence of trying to keep British opium out of their own country poor old China was invaded by Britain. (Before any readers of this review who happen to be US Americans are tempted to wade in against evil, nasty, Imperial Britain, note that Americans were working hand in glove, or perhaps one should say shoulder to shoulder, with the British on this.) This part of British and Chinese, indeed Western and Asian, history is important but almost completely overlooked. Fay's book is valuable and worth reading because it is one of the few books that covers this subject. It is a readable book, but a very frustrating one. "and" "readable" only in the sense that it is possible to read what the author has written, not that his style of writing, grammar, and concept of what a sentence should be makes it enjoyable to do so. Other reviewers have noted the lack of the customary essentials in a work of history, such as a timeline and citations for sources. Two other great weaknesses of Fay as an author, in the case of this book, are that his style is frequently long-winded, unstructured and tedious, and pompous too. If ever there was a great book wanting nothing more than a capable and firm-handed editor for it to emerge from a slag-heap of spoilt sentences and garbled grammar, this is it. The second fault with the author's style is that he will insist on making assertions that at best are mere speculations. Throughout the book he tells or implies how people felt or what their motives were, which while perhaps is intended to make the book readable and approachable, has the effect of making it irritating and detracting from what could have been a good account of a tragic and shameful episode of British and Western failure in morals and leadership. Did I need to write this review? Did I need to be so harsh? Possibly not, but it is a reaction to and a measure of the enormous frustration that this author's style can generate. I decided on a two star score by adding five stars for the importance of the subject with minus three stars for style. I agree with another reviewer, who writes that this is possibly the most frustrating book that he has ever read. Nonetheless, I recommend it, through gritted teeth.

Nearly three decades after it was first published, Fay's book remains the best single volume on the Opium War, and one of the best books on China in the 19th century. It is easy to read, but is scholarly enough for the most fastidious. Unlike the other reviewer I had no particular difficulties with

the timeline, although that can be a problem with any historical narrative. Be advised that this is a narrative history and can be read with joy by those who find social or economic histories tedious, but the background of the war is covered in particular detail as well. Fay is not a professional sinologist, and came to this book through his studies of the East India Company, but the book seems none the worse for his wide knowledge. It was recommended to me by some very distinguished historians of China, and their enthusiasm was justified. It is not a weighty tome, like those of Mary Wright or Vincent Shih on China in the 19th century, but it is authoritative on its subject, and like the best of Fairbank, it is great fun to read. Can one say better things about a book? If you are interested in the Opium War, Qing dynasty history, imperialism, or just like reading a good narrative about a war, please indulge yourself-- and read this book.

Peter Fay's book on the Opium War is one of the most detailed studies of the period between 1838-1842 one can find at anything like the price, and would be a valuable resource except for one major flaw--there is no time-line given, and dates are provided, at most, with day and month, not year. This may seem like an insignificant thing, but given that correspondence took at least six months in one direction from China to England, and that the war was taking place with sailing ships up and down most of China's coast, it quickly becomes impossible to tell, either from the footnotes or the text, what year precisely specific events happened. Since so few dates are given at all, it is impossible to get a good sense of the exact sequence of events, particularly as the fighting part of the war heated up. When the book is next released, it should have a time line!

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