CHAPTER 12

'Shanghai vice'

This chapter studies the consumption of opium in the Nationalist period, 1911–49. It also looks at the post-Mao era, when modern opium derivatives found their way back to China. China was plunged into turmoil after 1911. For opium, this was a period when what was vital to know was not so much who smoked opium but rather who controlled the trade. According to a survey conducted in 1935 some 3,730,399 people out of a total population of 479,084,651 consumed opium or its modern equivalents.[1] Where late Qing politicians had used opium-generated revenues to keep the empire together, their twentieth-century counterparts used it to partition the country. This was the period of the 'opium regimes'. Whoever controlled opium, controlled China. 'Despite much continuity, China from 1800 to 1949 underwent tremendous changes.' Yet despite the changes, 'China's cultural differentness strongly persisted even though it was diminishing.'[2] This can be seen from the social life of opium. What is more, Shanghai vice continued to be Chinese vice right up to the 1990s. Historians of China have studied both its changes and continuity in the twentieth century, but my specific interest here lies in how opium survived and thrived in the midst of quickened disintegration and transition.

'L'AGE D'OR DE LA BOURGEOISIE CHINOISE'

The Republican era witnessed an increasing sophistication and indigenisation of opium smoking. Alexander des Forges was correct when he put opium in the context of leisure and urban economies of consumption. Not only tea houses and restaurants provided opium smoking, tourist destinations and public parks were also equipped with facilities for smoking, in case one fancied a whiff when on a stroll along the river or while relaxing in the park. Even *shuchang* or 'book theatres', where people listened to story-telling, offered opium smoking. In Shanghai, according to local scholar Chi Zhizheng, opium smoking was a must-do:

Every bed has a big mirror, when the electric light is on in the evening, the mirrors shine and lights glitter, they reflect each other. It is as if you are in a glass-made palace full of treasures, they dazzle your eyes and touch your senses. Some dens are restaurants, *Zuileju* on the main street is one. Some dens are tea houses, *Yicenlou, Wucenlou* and *Qingliange* on the fourth street are among them. Some dens are *Shuchang*, they include *Huazhonghui*, *Lunjiaolou* and *Jieyilou*. In the night of wind and rain, one bed and two friends, you face each other and chat. It only costs 100 or so money, one could stay for a half a day. Isn't this the happiness of life? You don't have to be addicted to opium to enjoy this. This really is a must-do for those who visit Shanghai.[3]

Listening to story-telling and sipping tea accompanied by snacks had always been a popular pastime – it was not just a recreation, but also an education. *Shuchang*, like opera houses to the rich and bookstalls to children, were a powerful social institution where knowledge was transmitted to the large masses of the lesser literate population. When opium joined *shuchang*, this sanctioned smoking from a higher if not moral ground. Like tea, opium had become acceptable in a public institution of leisure and learning, another mechanism of culture transmission. *Shuchang* were still common in remote Sichuan and among the rural poor in the 1940s. Cecil Beaton, the British photographer, saw that 'In tea houses of bamboo-matting, the tea-drinkers smoke pipes three feet long, while they listen to the itinerant professional story-teller.'[4] Chi Zhizheng recommended opium smoking to 'those who visit Shanghai'. Among them was Somerset W. Maugham. The many descriptions of Chinese opium dens Maugham had read made his blood run cold. He made sure he visited one:

I was taken into an opium den by a smooth-spoken Eurasian . . . the narrow, winding stairway up which he led me prepared me sufficiently to receive the thrill I expected. I was introduced into a neat enough room, brightly lit, divided into cubicles the raised floor of which, covered with clean matting, formed a convenient couch. In one an elderly gentleman, with a grey head and very beautiful hands, was quietly reading a newspaper, with his long pipe by his side. In another two coolies were lying, with a pipe between them, which they alternately prepared and smoked. They were young men, of a hearty appearance and they smiled at me in a friendly way. One of them offered me a smoke. In a third four men squatted over a chess-board, and a little farther on a man was dandling a baby while the baby's mother, whom I took to be the landlord's wife, a plump, pleasant-faced woman, watched him with a broad smile on her lips. It is a cheerful spot, comfortable, home-like, and cosy. It reminded me somewhat of the little intimate beer-houses of Berlin where the tired working man could go in the evening and spend a peaceful hour. Fiction is stranger than fact.[5]

Gone were the dim lights, dazed eyes and haggard faces. Modern facilities and polite urban consumers replaced filthy dens and awry smokers. The scene seems to mock prohibition and enlightenment. The consumption of opium had modernised just as China itself was modernising. Both entrepreneurs and consumers were improving the service and consumption of opium in the twentieth century. The harmfulness of opium was obvious to all and accepted by many as was, the determination to moderate and improve its consumption. Smoking was being justified from a higher ground. It was mainstream, as is evidenced by the civil and clean smoking facilities. This testifies to the elasticity of the Chinese consumer economy, culture and society. It allows us to see the progress of opium's complete sinicisation. Foreigners appreciated the Chinese way of leisure. It certainly meant more to the Chinese. Hu Xianghan remembered the good old days in the *Small Gazetteer of Shanghai*:

> The spectacle of opium dens in the old days was grander than tea houses, they were what people called the *biggies* in the International Settlement. They were lined up one after another; you couldn't really count them. At the beginning the *Mianyunge* in the French Settlement was the best; then they started to compete with each other. Later *Nanchenxin* was the best. It was spacious, grand, exquisite and sumptuously decorated. Big ones were like a couch bed and small ones were cubicles. Even those who are not addicted like to come and lie down. When evening descended and prostitutes converged, the whole place bustled with excitement. It was not strange that man and woman who never met before shared a bed facing each other. Secret lovers were found here. Businessmen as well as gentlemen frequented and hung around this kind of place.[6]

'L'âge d'or de la bourgeoisie Chinoise', Marie-Claire Bergère labelled the era. The spectacular scene of *Nanchenxin* is featured in the illustrious *Shenjiang Shengjintu*. Sophisticated Shanghainese replaced Ming–Qing scholars and officials as the new urban elite. This more diverse and professionally led class continued to spread the consciousness of consumption. Urban society was being changed and its social structure levelled out. And once again the role of public institutions was being highlighted. Businessmen and gentlemen gentrified public places of leisure, where they downloaded their stresses from work, escaped responsibilities at home and helped galvanise the sex industry. Meanwhile women, still 'prostitutes' in the eyes of a twentieth-century man of letters, found more avenues of upward social mobility. Shanghai was favoured by the bourgeoisie, both Chinese and foreign. It was a most charming city that provided everything, from Turkish baths to French, Russian and American prostitutes, from horse races and jazz bars to Chinese gambling salons, singsong houses and opium dens.

Shanghai was where the East and the West met. Some called it the 'Constantinople of the East', some the 'whore of Asia', some the 'city of Taipans' and others the 'Paris of the East'. Many foreigners made their careers, homes or fortunes in the famous Settlements. *Shili yangchang*, 'ten miles of foreign ground', were dotted with European-style offices. Besides old houses such as Jardine Matheson, there were newcomers – the Sassoons for example. These were the 'Shanghai gentlemen' or the 'greatest boosters of Shanghai'; they were also the 'spoilt children of empire'.

Shanghai was a paradise for the pleasure-seeker and the fortune hunter. But it was also a hell where poverty and vice lived side by side with wealth and God. Percy Finch, an American journalist who worked in Shanghai from the 1920s to the 1940s, summed up the social life of opium there:

> Shanghai was the city of nepenthe. Wrapped in opium dreams, the coolie sloughed off the day's fatigue in some smoky hovel and the banker forgot business cares while he enjoyed ineffable self-satisfaction in his walled compound, with a deft servant to feed his filigree pipe . . . Shanghai was not only far and away the largest consumer of narcotics in the country, it was the reservoir for the stream of poison that slowed through China's veins. Incalculable quantities of mind- and body-wrecking poppy juice and its crystalline laboratory progeny, morphine and heroin, found their way into the city. Where hospital and scientific needs were reckoned in pounds, Shanghai dealt in tons – enough to supply any country, any half-dozen countries, or any continent.[7]

'Tons' was no exaggeration. Opium was 'la fortune de Shanghai' for the individual as well as for the Municipal Council, which profited from both licence fees and tax on sales.[8] Jardine Matheson might have made history. Twentieth-century Shanghai would produce the most sophisticated globally organised crime syndicate. Frederic Wakeman has studied opium's organised crime and the politics of policing, while Brian Martin has examined the rise of the Green Gang, which operated in the French Settlement, and their leader, Du Yuesheng, the 'opium king'.

Opium from India and Sichuan was unloaded and safely stored in the Settlement, where neither Chinese nor foreign laws applied. This required the agreement of and payment to the French consular and the police authorities. Not only did the French co-operate with the Green Gang, they also made some gangsters members of the French detective squad called the Chinese Uniform. Gang members also filled the ranks of the Chinese police and made up the regular spate of smokers, as 'pipes burned within the shadow of the central police station'.[9] Chinese underworld bosses were not in love with the French. They merely needed their extraterritoriality in order to escape the Chinese jurisdiction. The same conflict

and co-operation scenario was to be found in other Sino-foreign business partnerships. The French authority in Shanghai was indeed one of the 'opium regimes'. Not only that, France also controlled part of the supply route – L'indochine. Sichuan and Yunnan opium were smuggled through Indochina to Shanghai and other parts of China. The governor of L'indochine authorised the transport of Chinese opium via Tokin.[10] French historians have studied 'la regie de l'opium en Cochinchine' and 'le monopole au Tonkin et en Annam'.[11] The French profited from L'indochine and the Settlement in Shanghai; they also enjoyed smoking, as Guy Brossollet marvelled: 'quelques Français participent au trafic. Quelques autres, en quete de bonheur artificiels, fument.'[12] The popularity of opium among the French can be seen from *La Belle époque de l'opium* and the photography of Gyula Halasz Brassai.

OPIUM'S MODERNISATION

Opium wrapped and gangster patrolled, Shanghai was a nation in microcosm. China itself was in the hands of political gangsters – the warlords. The issue of commodity control and regulation had become political. The warlords found a sound solution in the cultivation, trafficking and taxation of opium. Donald Gillin wrote about Yen Xishan's 'opium monopoly', James Sheridan about Feng Yuxiang's 'opium fines', Odoric Wou about Wu Peifu's opium taxation and Diana Lary about the Kwangsi Clique's hand in opium. Opium was vital to their survival and expansion. George B. Cressey, an American geologist, travelled to twenty-eight provinces and saw how the political economy of opium worked: 'In many provinces farmers have been forced by the military authorities to raise opium for taxation purposes, and in this way considerable areas of the best land have been removed from food production.'[13] China had a shortage of arable land, but the 'best land' went to grow opium. Richard Henry Tawney, a British geographer, knew why so many cultivated opium: 'Since opium represented a more lucrative source of revenue than other crops, peasants in many provinces were encouraged or compelled to plant poppies.'[14] Peasants in the nineteenth century had responded to market demand and grew opium of their free will. Their twentieth-century counterparts were either 'encouraged' or 'compelled' to grow opium. When the wind of prohibition blew, some fought against eradication in order to protect their livelihoods, while others fought against excessive tax collecting.

H. G. W. Woodhead, veteran journalist in China, saw the fundamental problem: 'Militarism and opium are intimately related. It is the Chinese

Tuchun and his military parasites who have been mainly responsible for the recrudescence of poppy cultivation throughout the country.'[15] *Tuchun* were provincial military commanders. This reminds us of the great warlord Chang Tso-lin, a great opium smoker, and the famous *shuang qiang jun* or 'twin-pipe army'. Anhui provincial forces were known as the 'twin-pipe army' because soldiers carried both *yan qiang* or the 'opium pipe' and *bu qiang* or the 'rifle' on their backs.[16] Warlords needed opium, and so did 'rebels and revolutionaries'.[17] Edward Slack has studied the Nationalists' 'narco-economy', while Alan Baumler has shown that the Nationalists 'attempted, with considerable success, to profit both politically and economically from control of the opium trade and avoid the loss of legitimacy that came with involvement in the trade'.[18] The Nationalists were more sophisticated. On the one hand, they established the Shanghai Opium Suppression Bureau and the National Opium Suppression Committee headed by the paramount leader, Jiang Jieshi himself. On the other hand, the Bureau taxed opium shops and charged a licence fee to addicts while the Committee helped to protect the shipment of 'Jiang's opium'.[19]

China was 'sinned against and sinning'.[20] The 'narco-economy' turned opium into 'China's leading cash crop' and cities such as Peiling into the 'capital of opium', as a correspondent of the *East Magazine* reported in June 1935:

> Peiling lies in the east of Chongqing and south of the Yangtze River. It is the famous capital of opium cultivation in Sichuan province. According to the statistics of the previous government, its annual production was more than 23,000 *dan* and the tax that government levied on it reached the incredible amount of 1,300,000 *yuan*. Local military expenditure depended on this tax, so did all kinds of local government expenditures. In Peiling every family grows opium. The price of opium was high in previous years; peasants had enough for other expenditures after they paid all the taxes.[21]

'Every family' was no exaggeration. John L. Buck, an American agricultural expert, knew that 'only by raising opium can farmers pay such a tax'.[22] Buck carried out a study of 16,786 farms in 168 localities and 38,256 farm families in 22 provinces from 1929 to 1933. Peasants sold only 15 per cent of the rice they cultivated but 74 per cent of the poppies they grew.[23] Domestic cultivation had died down before 1916 because of the ten-year plan and relentless prohibition, but it revived after 1916 and thrived until at least the late 1940s. Many missionaries, journalists, officials and also the League of Nations expressed their concerns. Famine was not the only outcome of the best land being used for opium production; the ultimate consequence was

Table 6 *Confiscated drugs nationwide, 1935–1939*

Items	kg
Raw opium	318283.656
Cooked opium	6331.025
Smoked ashes	4696.935
Mixed material	7539.495
Fake mud	3026.370
Poppy seeds	3215.530
Poppy grains	120.000
Morphine	990.046
Heroin	1477.501
Cocaine	6.737
High heels	120.972
Narcotic pills	15808.865
Narcotic powder	844.64
Toxicant	1639.933
Raw toxic	2085.168
Others	3883.118
Total	370069.991

Source: Hongbin Wang, *Jindu Shijian*, Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1997, p. 436.

rural unrest and revolution. Elizabeth Perry has studied Huaibei region: 'the greatest single cause of rural unrest in Huai-pei at this time were the opium tax'.[24] Local Communists were able to mobilise thousands of peasants for a two-month revolt against the unpopular opium tax.

The Nationalist regime used June the third, the day Commissioner Lin burnt foreign opium in Canton in 1839, to launch a six-year plan in 1935. This plan registered smokers and licensed their consumption; it allowed smokers a period in which to give up smoking. The programme appropriated the paste shops from which addicts bought opium and the dens where they smoked. For those who lived away, the programme would deliver to their doorsteps what was called *guan tu* or 'official mud'. Table 6 gives an idea of the kinds of drugs available on the street from 1935 to 1939.

The paucity of numbers here reflects the nature of prohibition and of government-compiled statistics. Smokable opium was predominant, but morphine, heroin and pills were catching on. Chinese consumers had become modern, and opium itself was modernising. The advent of science and technology made modern derivatives available to opium smokers

and addicts alike. They had in fact surfaced in the late Qing. Morphine and similar extracts were called 'white powder'. They could be injected or mixed with other ingredients to smoke. *Shen Bao* ran advertisements for 'white powder' from the early 1870s which often read 'The foreign white powder that helps one quit smoking'. There were also 'white pearls' and 'red pearls', both made from heroin and smokable from a shorter pipe. These spread quickly, as George Morrison saw in Chongqing in 1894:

Morphia pills are sold in Chungking by the Chinese chemists to cure the opium habit. This profitable remedy was introduced by the foreign chemists of the coast ports and adopted by the Chinese. Its advantage is that it converts a desire for opium into a taste for morphia, a mode of treatment analogous to changing one's stimulant from colonial beer to methylated spirit. In 1893, 15,000 ounces of hydrochlorate of morphia were admitted into Shanghai alone.[25]

In their efforts to quit opium, many smokers sank deeper into addiction. Knowledge about the difference between opium and its derivatives was limited at the time, and many obviously took advantage of this. Here is a picture of Suzhou in 1902:

The smoker finds it cheaper and far more convenient to carry a morphine preparation in his pocket, and take an occasional dose, than to have to lie back and go through the slow process of smoking. It is also injected hypodermically. Ghouls, with dirty hypodermic syringes and morphine solutions made with any water are to be seen in the tea shops or restaurants in Soochow giving injections at the low rate of seven cash [one-fifth of a penny] each. As their victims pass before them each gets his allowance in succession without the needle being even wiped after the previous one.[26]

The book *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* has dealt with this subject in detail. China itself did not possess the science and technology required to manufacture derivatives. Instead, the early industrialised countries would make them available to China. The Revd G. S. Muir, Honorary Secretary of the Edinburgh Committee for the Suppression of the Indo-Chinese Opium Traffic, reported: '2,000 chests of opium are made into morphine in Edinburgh and London annually, and this constitutes about half the world's supply [in 1910]'.[27] He also stated: 'A large proportion of this finds its way, directly or indirectly, to the East.' Muir and his fellow committee members were aware that 'the traffic in non-medical quantities is contraband so far as China is concerned'. Good Christians and anti-opium activists supported prohibition, but only in public and in theory. H. G. W. Woodhead tried to alarm the Chinese authorities. He pointed out that morphine imports through the Maritime Customs had increased

'from 120 ounces in 1909 to 26,092 ounces in 1914' and that 'there had been enormous imports of morphia annually into Hong Kong, where it was smuggled into the southern provinces'.[28] Even if the Chinese authority had heard him, however, a far greater menace than morphine was now confronting the country.

JAPAN'S WAR CRIME AND THE CHONGQING DECADE

'As imperial Britain extricated itself from the nineteenth-century opium regime it had operated in China, imperial Japan began to assemble its own.'[29] John Jennings has studied Japanese drug trafficking in Asia. Japan established opium monopolies in Korea and Taiwan in 1895. As the first industrialised country in Asia, Japan also monopolised derivatives production. The newly published fifteen-volume *Riben Qinhua Zuizheng Dang'an Xinji* or (A New Archival Collection of Japanese Crimes in China) provides substantial evidence of Japanese war and drug crime in China. Japanese merchants opened opium dens in southern Manchuria as early as 1907, and they sold morphine as early as 1910. They established an opium monopoly in Manchukuo in 1932, as opium and narcotics poured into Tianjin. Motohiro Kobayashi has studied 'Tianjin opium' and drug operations by resident Japanese and Koreans in the 1920s and 1930s. Frank W. Price was there during that time:

> In the Japanese Concession at Tientsin last year [1936] I counted over forty tables on one street where opium-smoking and drug-taking paraphernalia were openly sold. I secured the names of 134 shops in the Japanese concession, under euphemistic names, where narcotics and injections were sold. The price was very cheap, often free, for the first injections, until the habit was formed. There were 800,000 drug addicts in the Tientsin area. Doped cigarettes were sold through the villages under Japanese influence. The Chinese protested in vain.[30]

Many foreigners, especially survivors of the 'Rape of Nanjing', witnessed Japanese war and drug crimes. George A. Fitch and Dr M. Searle Bates, members of the International Committee of the Nanking Safety Zone, risked their lives to help the Chinese. They witnessed Japanese atrocities, especially the establishment of opium dens and other drug-using facilities. 'That part of the Nanking Municipality which lies within and adjacent to the walls contains a population of about 480,000. It is served by 30 public stores and by 173 licensed smoking dens; 14 hotels are known to have licenses. There is a large illegal trade, which officials are continually trying to force into channels profitable to themselves. That is the extent of

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"suppression".'[31] Dr Bates estimated that fifty thousand persons, one-eighth of the total population, used heroin. The Japanese army reopened opium dens closed during prohibition; they released addicts from rehabilitation institutions sooner than the doctors could cure them; and they used narcotics as payments for labour and prostitution.[32] Historians have only just begun to examine Japanese war and narcotic crimes. Not only did Koreans collaborate with the Japanese. Timothy Brook has reminded us of the role of the Liang Hongzhi and Wang Jingwei puppet regimes. Opium was helping Japan to subdue China. A century of foreign humiliation and domination was destroying the country, and even the Chinese people themselves could see it. As Sun Zhongshan had predicted earlier, China would become 'extinct' if the Chinese people did not save it.

The threat posed by Japan, coupled with the opium problem, was a wake-up call. Within China there was a dramatic change of attitude towards imperialists in general and towards opium in particular. The whole nation was gripped by anti-Japanese feeling. The Nationalists and the Communists used this consensus to rally support and to strengthen their platforms. The time seemed to be perfect for renouncing opium. 'The sick man of Asia', sickened by opium, was now awakened by opium. It became a symbol of resistance during wartime, as Mark Eykholt has argued.[33] The struggle to free China from opium joined the struggle to free China from the imperialists. For Mao Zedong it was clear that the war against Japan could be traced to the Opium Wars; it represented the Chinese people's continued struggle against the imperialists. Although opium smoking was politically redefined, no one can deny that the opium trade and the unequal treaties represented the hegemonic forces of the imperialists. China fought to free itself from imperialists as epitomised by opium. Opium, seen through the designs and doings of the imperialists, was sentenced to political death at this historical juncture. Mao Zedong might be right about China's struggle against the imperialists being embedded in its struggle against opium; but the fact was that at this point in time the Chinese people were consuming home-grown, not imperialist, opium. Opium and its modern derivatives would return to China in the post-Mao era, when the imperialists were long gone. What would Mao have said? Opium had not yet died.

The determination to drive out the Japanese helped to unite the Chinese people. China, however, was geographically divided after 1937. The Japanese occupied Manchuria, east and central China, the Nationalists moved to the Sichuan and Yunnan while the Communists settled in Shaanxi and Gansu. The south-west and north-west were both steeped in opium. Chongqing was provincial, but it had everything needed to make it a capital. Winnogene

Harpold, for example, found things from London, New York and Honolulu. D. F. Karaka enjoyed its Sing Sing Café and jazz bar. And Daniel Nelson saw that 'the Chungking stores are stacked high with all kinds of merchandise – fountain pens, watches, toys, shoes, toilet articles, bolts of cloth, even luxuries. The restaurants and tea shops are filled with happy-go-lucky civilians.'[34] More than anything else, Chongqing had plenty of opium and its modern derivatives. The hospitable Sichuanese had used opium to entertain guests, Mrs Archibald Little for example, in the late nineteenth century. Han Suyin journeyed through south central China to Chongqing in 1938. She saw many opium dens on the way, and she lodged in village inns that served opium smoking. She arrived in Chongking in time for the Chinese New Year in 1939.

Third Uncle made motions as if to depart, but all Third Grandfather's household pressed us to *shua* a little longer. *Shua* is a Szechwan institution. Strolling in the parks, ambling about the streets, flocking in crowds to temple fairs, going to theatres and cinemas, sitting for hours in the tea shops, smoking tobacco, smoking opium – all is *shua*. Visiting is *shua*. If you have sat for half a day, sipping tea, cracking melon seeds, and eating peanut candy, until all you have to say has been said many times over, yet you are entreated to *shua* awhile longer. If you have stayed three months or more, you and all your family eating at your host's expense, he will gravely protest that it has been a few days only and beg you to *shua* for a few days more. *Shua* means to play, to linger, to idle, to neglect one's duty, to amuse oneself. It expresses that Chinese philosophy of leisure which in Szechwan is carried to the point of utter laziness. It is an attitude of mind remaining from the old days of indolence, when for those who had plenty of money, and for sages and poets to whom money was nothing, there was really nothing to do from morning to evening but gaze at the bamboos reflected in the tranquil river, smoke the water pipe, drink tea from covered teacups and wine from minute wine cups, and lie in the shade exchanging gossip and composing balanced couplets with one's friends.[35]

Han's understanding of *shua* is correct. It was the Chinese style of leisure 'carried to the point of' complete laziness and idleness. *Shua* was not limited to Sichuan. Born and raised in Hunan, I understand precisely the meaning of *shua*. Like 'ti mian', opium lived comfortably with this Chinese socio-cultural institution. *Shua* is yet another Chinese culture integer or law of consumption. Opium smoking helped the Sichuanese to *shua* during the Chinese New Year. It more importantly helped them to endure the long, dark air-raid-filled nights during the Second World War, when only the moon and the opium lamp shed any form of light. Like a beacon, opium guided thousands to their destinations, as the French frigate captain R. de Meurville recognised.

Le soir, le village dévient fantômetique. La lune, quand il y en à, est le seul luminaire: c'est le seul qui ne coute rien. Le passant s'en va, precede de porteurs de lanternes, s'il est riche; en tenant une d'une main prudente, s'il ne l'est pas – et une trique de l'autre. Des la nuit faite, la rue est morte. Les alveoles se referment, comme elles peuvent. Les seules lumières que l'on devine derrière les portes sont les discrets lumignons des lampes a opium, dont l'odeur caractèristique filtre, universelle. Les passants sont rares et se défilent craintivement le long des mûrs, car les attaques nocturnes song toujours dans le domaine des possibilités.[36]

The fragrance of opium and the flickering of the lamp guided wartime Chongqing residents, Chinese or foreign. Opium offered comfort and consolation in times of death and destruction. As the war intensified, some sank further into opium. It delivered them from everyday reality even if the experience was ephemeral. Many foreigners in China at the time enjoyed opium. Some depended on it, others made sure that they tasted it. Herbert O. Yardley, 'the father of cryptography in the United States', was one. A free agent hired by the Nationalists to break Japanese codes, Yardley endured hardship and frustration, but he did not forget there was opium:

To divert my thoughts from these depressing speculations, I asked Schwer if he had ever smoked opium. I had never done so, and it seemed improper to leave Chungking without having been in an opium den. Schwer professed to being an old hand and said it wasn't bad but that 'you sort of need a girl'.[37]

Opium was the single most important symbol of China, and experimenting with opium was a way of tasting the very essence of indigenous culture. Opium was available in many parts of the world, but it was the Chinese who perfected the art of smoking, as Schwer constantly reminded Yardley:

'Here you are', he said. 'It's simple. Hold the pipe bowl at an angle so that the flame touches the opium and suck on the pipe.'
I did as he said and took a few puffs.
'How'm I doing?'
'Just stretch out and keep at it. But it's no fun without a woman.'
. . .
'I told you opium was no good without a woman.'[38]

Schwer summarises the very essence of opium smoking. What matters is not only smoking in a Chinese den or with a few friends, but more importantly the ambience of smoking accompanied by Chinese women. From the 'court ladies' of the mid-Ming to the paste-scooping women of the late Qing and now of war-torn Chongqing, opium remained, amongst other things, an aphrodisiac.

'POPPY FLOWERS UNDER THE SUN'

No political regime of the twentieth century was free of opium, and certainly not the Communists. Whilst they undoubtedly should be credited for stamping out opium after 1949, one should take care to add them to the list of the 'opium regimes'. The Communists came across opium while on the Long March in 1934. Harrison Salisbury and John Service revisited the Long March route accompanied by General Qin Xinghan, a survivor and Director of the National Museum of Military History. Salisbury interviewed many survivors who recalled their encounter with opium:

> Opium poppies were Yunnan's wealth. The Red Army confiscated enormous quantities of opium. It was the bread-and-butter of the countryside. The Red Army used it as money, trading it for supplies, or simply distributed it with a free hand to the peasants, comforting themselves with the thought that it was, after all, the product of peasant toil and sweat.[39]

Like the warlords and the Nationalists, the Red Army confiscated opium and made use of it accordingly. They needed money and supplies, and they certainly could use more support and sympathy. The army itself was made up of smokers and reformed smokers. The commander Zhu De was a reformed addict. In fact, as General Xiao Ke recalled, 'it was not possible to recruit unless the Army accepted opium addicts'.[40] The route of the Long March coincided with centres of opium production. 'Kweichow is famous for three things: hills, rain and opium', while the common saying in Yunnan was that 'out of ten men, eleven smoke opium'.[41] It was easy to defeat opium-soaked regions defended by opium-addicted soldiers. Their destination Yan'an, like Chongqing, was also deep opium country. The Shaanxi–Gansu region sits at the beginning of the Old Silk Road. It was a hub of domestic cultivation and central Asia–western China trade. A representative of the League of Nations saw opium crops in Yan'an in 1924: 'The poppy is grown within a few yards of that city's wall and that opium has been extensively and successfully grown in the district since the spring of 1918.'[42] So too did George Pereira and Edgar Snow. When Snow drove from Xi'an to Yan'an in the summer of 1936, he saw that 'opium poppies nodded their swollen heads, ready for harvest, along the newly completed motor road'.[43] Yan'an was certainly not free of opium before the Communists' arrival, and the Red Army was not about to destroy their best source of income. The Communist regime has maintained an opium-innocent face, but historians have now begun to question this position.

Chen Yongfa of Academic Sinica has pointed out that the Communist regime cultivated opium in Yan'an in order to survive the economic crisis of the 1930s and 1940s.[44] His claim makes sense. First, the Communist revolution was by nature guerrilla warfare. The Red Army was completely depleted when they reached Yan'an. They remained under-supplied and embargoed throughout their tenure there. Secondly, financing the Red Army and maintaining a central apparatus posed a huge problem, not to mention the problems of providing for the thousands of supporters who flooded in. Growing and selling opium to the Nationalists and the Japanese occupied areas would be a sound solution. Chen's evidence comes from the diary of Xie Juezai, one of the five intellectual patriarchs. His entry of 15 January 1945 tells of a meeting where he and other prominent leaders discussed the economic situation in Yan'an:

> The same affair, those with humanist political view would say that they had no alternative. Mao [Zedong] once said that our party committed two mistakes. The first was that we took things from people without asking during the Long March, we won't survive without taking them; and the second was the cultivation of something; we couldn't get through the crisis without cultivating it. Those who lack humanist views considered this method advantageous; they even increased the domestic sale of this commodity.[45]

Chen argued that this 'something' that they had to 'cultivate' in order to survive was indeed opium. And he is most likely right. There is certainly a need to know more about the scale of opium production at this time and about the way in which it was sold. The Communists tried to make sure that their image was opium-clean. But there were Russians on the scene, members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International and other experts who lived and worked with their Chinese comrades. Peter Vladimirov kept a diary. His entry for 2 August 1942 reads:

> Mao Tse-tung invited Yuzhin [Igor Vassilyevich] to his quarters: wanted to teach him how to play Mah-Jongg. During the game Yuzhin asked: 'Comrade Mao Tse-tung, how can it be that the peasants living in the Special Area used to be punished for the illegal traffic in opium, and now even troops and institutions headed by Communists openly engage in opium production?'
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> Mao Tse-tung vouchsafed no reply. The question was answered by Teng Fa [Security Chief]: 'The Special Area previously exported only salt and soda to the Kuomintang provinces. We fitted out caravans loaded with salt and brought back an undernourished purse. And only one! Now we send along an undernourished bag of opium and bring back a caravan loaded with money. The money is used for buying weapons from the Kuomintang, and with it we'll knock down the same Kuomintang!'[46]

Teng Fa justified the Red Army's cultivation and sale of opium to the enemy zones. The Communists' 'narco-economy' did not differ from that of the warlords or the Nationalists. The Communists were political beings endowed with basic instincts. Survival had turned them to whatever they could lay their hands on, as Vladimirov noted: 'Despite the blockade, the Special Area is carrying on a lively trade with the Kuomintang provinces and even with areas under Japanese occupation. From the Area come deliveries of salt, wool, and cattle, and, of late, opium in ever increasing amounts.' Vladimirov and Yuzhin were in Yan'an as *Tass* correspondents. Vladimirov was there from 1942 to 1945. He witnessed and jotted down many behind-the-scenes happenings. Trade with enemy zones went on throughout the war and even intensified towards the end, but the extent of the Communists' opium production and commerce may never come to light, as critical physical evidence may have been destroyed. The Communists knew that whoever controlled the peasants controlled China, and that whoever controlled opium could also control China. Their 'opium regime' deserves further study.

Thirty years of isolation and puritanical revolution helped the Communist regime to stamp out the three evils of opium, gambling and prostitution. They might have been successful inside China, but cultivation and consumption continued to thrive among the Chinese people of south-east Asia, especially in the Golden Triangle. Opium continued to enter China from and via this overland border region, and it continued to live among the Chinese people who lived there, as postcards show (see illustration 14). Chiang Rai, where the Golden Triangle stands, is a mecca for thousands of tourists and travellers every year. The Hall of Opium was under construction when I last visited, in 2002. Initiated by Princess Srinagarindra, late mother of the King of Thailand, the Hall is designed to teach the lessons of opium. It will undoubtedly attract more to the land of opium. The post-Mao era saw economic reform. It also saw the re-emergence of opium and its modern derivatives. 'The poppy flowers blossom again in the north and south' even as the police closed more than 700 underground dens in 1986 and destroyed 3,000,000 poppy shrubs in 1992.[47] Between 1991 and 1995 drug-related cases numbered 125,000 and criminals 189,000; the authorities confiscated 15.8 tons of heroin, 10.6 tons of opium, 3.4 tons of marijuana and 2.3 tons of frozen narcotics.[48]

The Communist regime has again been confronted with the concomitant problems of opium cultivation, trafficking and consumption. History is repeating itself. The 1999 British documentary *Shanghai Vice* explained:

Illustration 14. Thai postcards showing an opium field and an ethnic Chinese smoker in the Golden Triangle area. Opium cultivation and consumption continue among the Chinese in south-east Asia.

The buildings of Shanghai's waterfront echo with memories of the European past. For over seventy years the western powers ruled here in uneasy alliance with the Chinese underworld. Free trade and lax laws propelled an economy driven by opium and vice. Then under Mao, prostitution, gambling and opium addiction all but disappeared. Recently free trade and opportunities have returned to the city, vice has also returned fuelled not by opium but by its modern derivative heroin.

Opium's modern derivatives have come back to haunt China. Opium did not die a natural death during the Japanese war and in the thirty-year hibernation (1949–79). The Chinese people might have truly learned their lessons from history, but history alone does not make China clean of opium. What has saved China was the determination to drive out the imperialists who had humiliated and dominated the country since the Opium Wars. Today's Shanghai resembles yesterday's Shanghai. The underworld is growing. What complicates the case today is Muslim nationalism. Many of today's retailers are Chinese Muslims from the greater Xinjiang and Yunnan regions. They have networked with the suppliers of central and south-east Asia, and have also co-ordinated their activities with Muslim separatists who have intensified their campaign for independence in north-west China and Tibet.

Not only has opium come back to haunt China, but once again it has challenged the country's sovereignty. Thus far, the authorities have skilfully combined the war against opium's modern derivatives with the war against secession. China knows that the old imperialists are on its side in the crusade against drugs, and it also understands that its new platform is freedom and democracy. The events of September 11th have pushed China closer to the West in the common struggle against Islamic fundamentalism, but the war on terror has distanced the Chinese people. The social life of opium continues in the twenty-first century. A century of unequal treaties, 1842–1949, saw opium's institutionalisation in Chinese politics, economics, international relations and in Chinese culture and society. Never before had so many foreign players been involved in the making of Chinese history. Never before had opium lived so modern and political a social life. Opium has survived the destruction of two empires, the eras of the warlords and the Republicans and the ruthless campaign of the Communist regime. It seems true that 'What the Revolution in China wiped out, Reform brought back'.[49] The story of opium echoes the famous Chinese saying: 'Not even a prairie fire can destroy the grass; it grows again when the spring breeze blows.'