

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Kathleen L. Lodwick. *Crusaders Against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874-1917*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996. xiii + 218 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-1924-3.

Reviewed by Alan Sweeten (California State University, Stanislaus)

Published on H-Asia (July, 1998)

Tea, silk, porcelain, and opium: to many Westerners these items are virtually synonymous with China. Many Chinese of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, strongly associated opium with the West. Professor Kathleen Lodwick makes this eminently clear while providing a fine overview of the West's introduction of opium to China and pioneering efforts by Protestant missionaries (mostly British) to eliminate trade in the substance. Missionaries' success came not in getting the Chinese to stop using the drug but in publicizing opium's addictive and pernicious effects. Gradually, missionaries made the British public aware of the drug's evil side and helped sway the British government to terminate its participation in the trade. British's actions came, coincidentally, at a time of emerging Chinese nationalism, but it was surprisingly energetic and capable late Qing officials who acted to curtail the domestic production of opium. They rather than nationalists created an opportunity for the Chinese to gain British agreement to stop growing opium in India for sale in China. The author provides thorough coverage through the early twentieth century although she leaves one wondering if Chinese anti-opium successes continued. In fact, Chinese efforts at opium suppression went up in smoke during the fragmented and chaotic warlord period.

Material in this book is well organized and neatly presented. Early chapters are devoted to background information about opium, its introduction to China, amounts shipped (given inconveniently in piculs instead of in modern measurements), and estimates regarding the number of people who became addicted to it. The author writes that during the late nineteenth century guesses range between one and forty million addicts. If the latter figure is the more accurate of the two then about ten percent of the population used opium. The great unanswered and unanswerable question, as Professor Lodwick points out several times, is why so many users and why at this time. Whatever the answer, some Protestant missionaries early on observed the sad effects of the drug on individual Chinese lives and thus saw opium's use in

moral terms. In addition, medical missionaries compiled data on drug use and shared it via publications like the *Chinese Recorder* or at missionary conferences and meetings. Missionaries eventually formed, in 1896, an Anti-Opium League that proved effective in promoting its position in Britain and in China. Relatively few Chinese, however, joined the organization for a number of reasons, one of which had to do with Chinese association of missionaries with opium. Chinese sometimes embarrassed missionaries by asking them who imported opium and by calling the drug "Jesus opium" (p. 34).

The role played by missionaries in banning opium in China therefore had its limits. Professor Lodwick concludes that "for all the missionaries' efforts and concern, when the great campaign against opium began it was led by Chinese nationalists, and the Protestant missionaries, who had crusaded against the drug for so long, were largely bystanders (p. 6)." Chinese efforts against opium proved surprisingly effective given the dynastic decay typically attributed to the late Qing. Through the efforts of capable officials domestic production of opium decreased and allowed the Chinese to use the provisions of a 1907 agreement with Britain to terminate the importation of opium grown in India. This was a milestone event and the author thoroughly discusses the agreement to terminate the sale of opium in China and the myriad difficulties China faced in implementing it in the chapters entitled "The Anti-Opium Lobby Comes of Age" and "Successes and Failures of Opium Suppression." This is the book's most important and illuminating section.

Although this book is of special interest to scholars of late imperial and modern China, it could easily be used as supplemental reading for an upper-division course on China and even one on colonialism or imperialism. The author presents stimulating new material about the various roles played by Protestant missionaries who took the moral high ground in spite of the difficulties in doing so. Their unique, yes, ironic position, together with how the Chinese perceived them, bring forward many relevant is-

sues for the discussion of China's plight at this juncture in its modern history.

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This

work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@H-Net.MSU.EDU.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:

<http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl>.

Citation: Alan Sweeten. Review of Lodwick, Kathleen L., *Crusaders Against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874-1917*. H-Asia, H-Net Reviews. July, 1998.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2200>

Copyright © 1998 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.