



JCC Opium Wars - Qing Dynasty



High School Crisis Simulation

Background Guide

Virginia Invitational

V I M  N C

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Esteemed Delegates and Sponsors,

Welcome to the thirteenth annual Virginia Invitational Model United Nations Conference. As the MUN year winds down, we hope to provide the best experience yet, with paramount service and attention to detail that creates the greatest conference. From Modern Family and mythological conflict to broad UN organizations and regional bodies, this year's VIMUNC features committees that truly serve every interest. With experienced chairs, czars, and staff, we will ensure that every delegate truly has a positive experience, and we simply hope that you enjoy your time with us.

This year's 22 committees and over 1100 delegates make VIMUNC XIII the largest edition of our conference ever, and we look forward to expanding our outreach across Virginia to continue to provide a wonderful experience for all delegates. With a large MUN team that has years of experience and accolades, we hope that every ounce of effort we put into this year's conference is met with every single minute of the committee being filled with substantive and invigorating debate to create learning experiences that last for years to come.

It has been the absolute dream of my time in high school to lead my club to this very day, and so much hard work has been put into every single crisis update, background guide, and dossier. We sincerely hope that the work and care placed in every single aspect of this conference are displayed in its highest quality. If at any time you feel something about the conference is unsatisfactory, please don't hesitate to talk to your chairs, a staffer, or a member of the Secretariat. So, whether it be solving catastrophes at the 2026 World Cup, making your presence known in one of our 4 JCCs, or experiencing the intricacies of one of VIMUNC's 2 ad-hoc committees, I know deep in my heart that we're ready for VIMUNC XIII. Now, the question becomes: are you?

Sincerely,

Josselyn Gould | Secretary-General, VIMUNC XIII

Letter from the Chair & Czar

Welcome to the Qing Dynasty! Our names are Dhaya Kumaresan and Imaani Haque, and we are thrilled to serve as your chair and czar. In this committee, you will be pitted against the West, specifically the British, throughout the timeline of the Second Opium War. In a two-way joint crisis committee, delegates should anticipate having a coordinated crisis experience where your very own actions can influence the outcome of both committees. We are super excited to see all the crazy arcs and directives you all come up with and lead the Qing to victory! One unique thing about this crisis is that each of the characters is fictional, and each has their own riveting backstory. With that being said, we really want to stress the importance of creativity coupled with strategic maneuvering. No matter if it's your first crisis committee or your tenth, we want to see everything you'll achieve and grow, not just as a delegate but as a person. We want to emphasize the importance of leadership with diplomacy, being able to guide fellow delegates without dominating them. A strong delegate will be able to demonstrate leadership by lifting their peers and ideas, rather than putting them down. Word of advice: don't be afraid to take risks or challenge what is presented. Whether you're looking to incorporate unusual crisis arcs or unorthodox hooks, we're all here for it. Even if you're unsure of what to say, raise that placard and see what may unfold. Most importantly, have fun with the committee. Share that crazy solution that might work during a timed crisis. The world is your oyster here. See you soon, delegates!

Emails: dhayakumaresan0625@gmail.com & imaaniahaque@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Dhaya Kumaresan & Imaani Haque

JCC Opium Wars - Qing Dynasty

Topic A: Resolving the Arrow Incident and Preventing Full-Scale War

Topic B: Negotiating Trade Access and Foreign Relations in China

Overview of Committee

There are two major conflicts within the Opium Wars. This committee will be focused on the start of the second. The first one ended with the Treaty of Nanjing, culminating in China's century of humiliation. In 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing forced China to cede Hong Kong to Britain, lower tariffs on British goods, and pay Great Britain 21 million silver dollars for war reparations. Payments were made in installments over three years with 5% annual interest on late payments, as well as opening five ports spread throughout China. A year later, the Treaty of Bogue followed. This furthered territory and established something known as 'most favoured nation' status, which entitles Britain to priority trade and lower tariffs. Not only this, but the treaty also granted British citizens extraterritorial status in China. The British often justified this series of unequal treaties as "putting China under the aegis of international law." They claimed this would allow sovereign states to operate on a footing of perfect equality. However, local economies were disrupted, and the Chinese government faced massive instability, as proven by the Taiping Rebellion. The Qing government responded by resisting the conditions of the imperialist treaties. Yet, their resistance was continuously met with pushback, specifically from the British in this

timeframe. In 1854, through the Chinese Maritime Customs Service, Westerners would manage China's custom system. Tensions were escalating alongside increasing animosity among Chinese citizens toward foreign influence. In October of 1856, China seized the Arrow, which was a British cargo ship. However, it is accepted among historians that the Arrow was seized because Qing authorities believed it was a ship smuggled by pirates under the guise of the British. The incident served as a *casus belli* for the Second Opium War (or Arrow War), which started in 1856. This was because British authorities argued that the registration stated it was a British ship, even though the registration had technically expired. The British are upset, the Chinese are disconcerted, and the fate of where the war now rests on the shoulders of the Qing citizens in this committee.

Topic A: Resolving the Arrow Incident and Preventing Full-Scale War

Topic Background

To comprehensively understand the Arrow, it is essential to comprehend both the British and Qing sides. Neither party was satisfied with the outcome of the First Opium War. When the Qing official Ye Mingchen seized the ship to support his campaign against Piracy, the British argued that it was a violation of the Treaty of Nanjing. Mingchen was the bridge of communication between China and England during this conflict. He pushed for the fact that this capture was an internal matter and had nothing to do with the British. One of the reasons the British were not content with the First Opium War was the fact that they did not obtain the port in Guangzhou. Now, they had another reason to start a war to try to obtain the most profitable port.

European Involvement:

France, seeing the firm dominance Britain had over China, decided to follow suit. In February of 1856, a French missionary was executed in China, and France then used this as their *casus belli*. This would allow France to expand trade, gain treaty ports, and maintain influence with Britain. The British main concerns were ensuring their imports did not have to face Chinese tariffs, while France wanted to open up a potential market and keep an eye on Britain as it gained eastern influence. Both of these countries wanted to have this power over China, yet they must not go at each other's throats when doing so. The Chinese government managed to restrict foreigners by restricting them to Guangzhou's port for trade, which limited their interactions to specific guilds; this is often known as the Canton System. This system aimed to control foreign trade and cultural influence, but it ultimately failed.

Chinese civilians' attitudes toward foreign influence:

The Canton System promoted hostility towards Europeans among the Chinese citizens. Many anti-foreign movements developed by the Chinese people, which were independent of government control. A

step further was taken by local militancy, where locals would help arm the village society. Often, this would be conflated with being against the government, as many locals felt they had to take action to protect their homes and quality of life. To add on, European missionaries, specifically those who spread Christianity, were viewed as threatening the citizens because of Confucian values and societal norms, which would then fuel resentment towards Westerners. Europeans were commonly viewed as “barbarians,” and this mindset stayed prominent even after the First Opium War, due to the influx of military technology from the British and the ‘savage’ way it would destroy families.

The role of opium itself:

Even before the First Opium War, the British knew that China was the hub of precious goods. That is when the British strategically exploited Bengal to grow opium instead of cash crops. Then, the British used this same Opium to have the Chinese people addicted to the drug, and be forced to trade luxury goods just to feed their addiction. This allowed the British to manage a vulnerable population for their own gain.

Current Situation

It is now up to the Chinese government to decide how to react. The Chinese could offer more concessions, yet risk appearing weak. However, if they stand firm, they may gamble in a war that they do not have the resources to manage. If they prepare defenses, it could all spill into more financial turmoil. Plus, the Chinese have the added burden of navigating internal politics. The court wants firmness, while local officials fear destruction. Commissioner Ye Mingchen continuously argued to the British that the Arrow was a Chinese-owned ship because the British registration had expired. Britain demanded an immediate release of the crew, an acknowledgement, and an apology. However, Ye Mingchen continuously claimed that the British were overreaching because of the ongoing piracy campaign China had; Mingchen believes they did not violate the treaty, and the registration expired. China now stands at a crossroads. Do they release the hostages to try to alleviate British retaliation, or do they stand their ground and stop letting Western powers jostle them around?

Possible Solutions

There are four possible solutions for the Qing to follow. Firstly, they can release the hostages on the Arrow, which would give them a de-escalation without concession. This would consist of releasing the Arrow crew, with no formal apology and no admission of treaty violation. This would buy time to deal with internal crises and avoid immediate naval retaliation. Nevertheless, Britain could interpret this as fragility and have more outrageous demands for the Qing. The second option would be to assert suzerainty and keep the hostages. This would facilitate fixing internal matters as they would show the public their strong anti-piracy enforcement. Not only that, but it appeals to the anti-foreign sentiment within domestic matters. Conversely, a British military response is almost guaranteed, and the Qing does not have the resources or the assets for that. The third option would be to cut Britain off by restricting it both economically and diplomatically. This would then stop British trade access in the most important port of China, Canton. It would almost entirely delay or suspend the regulations of the treaty. This would subversively allow the Qing to abstain from using economic pressure instead of force and to reassert their statehood without having direct violence. This move comes with the jeopardy of Britain attacking with gunboats. Plus, economically, China has been forced to depend on customs revenue, so restarting the government's economic venture would be a challenge. Lastly, the path to appeasement. The Qing government would provide full diplomatic accommodation. This would constitute the immediate release of the hostages, an acknowledgement, a formal apology, and a reconnection to the Treaty's rules. This would avoid war entirely, in theory, and ensure the Chinese government can focus on its internal frailty. It is important to keep in mind that this loses any chance of legitimacy, it lets other foreign powers know that China is weak for future purposes, and it furthers internal backlash.

Questions to Consider

- What precedent does backing down, or escalating, set for future foreign incidents involving Chinese territory and resources?

- How can China balance the need to appear strong domestically while avoiding a war that is nearly impossible to win?
- If war occurs and Britain wins, what are the likely treaty demands Britain will make after the victory?
- How will the Imperial Court in Beijing react to Commissioner Ye's handling of the crisis, and how could this further split China internally?
- What role will France and other Western powers play if military conflict begins?

Topic B: Negotiating Trade Access and Foreign Relations in China

Topic Background

One could argue that the 'Made in China' tag is visible everywhere in the 21st century, yet this is far from a recent phenomenon. From seemingly the start of time, China has been home to the most precious of resources and has been the driver of global trade. Resources such as, but not limited to: tea, silk, porcelain, luxury goods, and jade, which were in the highest demand. Chinese exports would facilitate a consistent trade surplus, which drew vast amounts of global silver into the Chinese economy. Yet, the British were able to destabilize this flow in a cruel yet strategic way. The British East India Company forced Indian farmers to make plantations full of opium rather than the usual cash crops. All this would eventually solve Britain's trade deficit with China, as they would buy the goods but sell little in return. Then, the company smuggled Opium into China to reverse this imbalance and start creating new revenue streams for itself. Chinese Emperor Yongzheng, in 1729, made an attempt to ban opium, yet the trade still flourished alongside widespread addiction among the population. These tensions peaked in 1839, when a Chinese official destroyed over 20,000 chests of British opium in Canton. This gave Britain its justification to send a naval expedition to force trade and reparations. This led to the start of the First Opium War. As the British had a superior naval force, the British inflicted a brutal defeat on China. The First Opium War allowed the British to advance their military further and become miles ahead of China. This militaristic advantage allowed the British to force China into these unequal treaties. While China had more troops, they were outdated. Prior to the war, China had gained massive amounts of silver from the Columbian exchange and even made it its currency. However, when opium came in, it started a severe shortage of silver and put an immense tax burden on peasants. Between 1730 and 1830, opium imports increased by over 200%, which further pushed the shortage of silver. As silver grew scarce, the government struggled to collect taxes. Because taxes were paid in silver, but taxes were calculated based on local currency

value, the scarcity of silver meant peasants had to pay much more in labor or goods to get the necessary silver to pay taxes.

Country Stance

China relied on Britain's trade heavily, while the same did not hold vice versa. This held true as the British manufactured a massive trade deficit in China through opium and forced a coerced dependency on China, resulting in them losing economic autonomy. This made Chinese authorities suspicious of foreign trade, thus the capture of The Arrow, but the steps forward regarding trade since then have been a bit of a mystery. The Western envoys had made it clear that they wanted to continue establishing embassies to bypass the administrative process from the local officials in Canton, as these officials in Canton have to wait for approval from individuals in Peking. Additionally, Western powers want to open more ports. The Chinese court currently has quite a passive attitude towards foreign affairs. China is self-sufficient and has no need to adopt mercantilism, and has no strong urge toward maximizing profit. As Confucianism looks down on merchants and believes that stability and honesty are much more effective, the ruling class is content with maintaining a stable agricultural society. Good management is to ensure that nothing and no one disturbs the peace of the country. The rules and regulations of foreigners, as well as the missionaries, challenge the authority of the Chinese emperor, as they push a different worldview. Additionally, the advancements of Europe are not threatening. Emperor Kangxi has had personal advisors from Europe; the Europeans are advanced, yet they just are not enough to displace China.

Possible Solutions

There are a few advantages China holds over the British, and it is essential these minute advantages are used to their full potential. China is often more strategic, has more troops, knows the terrain, and has the Pearl and Yangtze Rivers, which gave them excellent coastal fortifications at key points. China's large amount of land can be an advantage rather than a flaw if the Qing authority lets it. To use it as an advantage would be flexible

in positional warfare strategy. The way it would be a flaw is if the British were to get through the coastal area and then allow them to have the upper hand on where the battle takes place. It is also essential China does not underestimate Britain's ability to re-supply and reinforce its forces from its many colonies stretching from South Asia to Southeast Asia. Additionally, as Chinese troops have lived in peace for decades, it is important that they are trained adequately. China, on paper, seems to have a strong military of 800,000, with about 35% having firearms. However, that is insignificant if many of them lack training and ambition. The same can be applied to leadership. Leaders have to be truly heroic. In the past, such as in the pivotal Battle of Canton in the Spring of 1841, the leadership was incompetent and cowardly, which resulted in a loss for the Chinese side. It is also important to acknowledge the psychological aspect of this. The British were determined to humiliate the Chinese, and they did this by recruiting Chinese mercenaries to fight for the British, as seen in the battles of control for Humen and Chuanbi in January 1841. The British understand that the Chinese prioritize pride and know that the Treaty of Nanjing takes exactly that away from the Chinese.

All in all, it is essential that the Chinese forces do not give up fighting for their side; every decision just has to be made with intense precision, otherwise, the stability of the country could be up for grabs by Western powers.

Questions to Consider

- Should the Qing government legalize the opium trade to gain tax revenue while simultaneously eliminating smuggling? Does this give way to an immense negative societal cost to Chinese society?
- How can China expand legitimate trade with foreign powers while protecting domestic industries and maintaining economic sovereignty?
- Can China use “most-favored-nation” clauses to its advantage by playing foreign powers against each other, or do these clauses only benefit Western nations?
- Which foreign powers are the most of a threat? Should they be turned against one another?
- The Taiping Rebellion consumes vast military resources. Can the Qing Empire afford to fight an internal and an external conflict?

JCC Opium Wars Empire in Turmoil: Qing Court

Chronology

The First Opium War

Qing official Lin Zexu destroys British opium stocks in Canton, triggering war. British naval superiority forces China to negotiate after defeats at key coastal cities.

1839-1842

Treaty of Nanjing

China cedes Hong Kong, opens five treaty ports (Canton, Shanghai, Ningbo, Fuzhou, Xiamen), pays 21 million silver dollars in indemnities, limits tariffs to 5%, and grants Britain "most-favored-nation" status.

1842

Treaty of Bogue

Britain secures extraterritoriality rights, meaning British subjects in China can only be tried under British law. This creates ongoing jurisdictional disputes and resentment among Chinese officials.

1843

Taiping Rebellion

Massive civil war erupts, with rebels controlling Nanjing by 1853 and threatening the Qing dynasty's survival. Military resources are diverted from coastal defense, weakening China's position against foreign powers.

1850-1856

China Refuses Treaty Revision

Britain requests access to Canton city, legalization of opium trade, and a permanent embassy in Beijing. The Qing court rejects these demands, deepening British frustration with limited trade access.

April, 1854

"Poisoned Bread" Incident

A Hong Kong bakery is accused of attempting to poison the British community. Though charges are dropped, anti-Chinese sentiment among British officials reaches a fever pitch.

January, 1856

The Arrow Seizure

Chinese officials board the *Arrow* in Canton harbor, arrest 12 Chinese crew members for piracy/smuggling, and allegedly lower the British flag. British Consul Harry Parkes immediately protests, claiming the vessel is British-registered and the arrest violates treaty rights.

October 8, 1856

The Standoff

Parkes demands full crew release, formal written apology, and guarantees. Ye Mingchen releases the crew but refuses a written apology, arguing the *Arrow's* registration had expired. Britain rejects this as insufficient.

October 10, 1856

THIS IS WHERE
COMMITTEE STARTS

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