The attack of the British Navy under Captain Elliot on Hu Men Fort of Kwangchow in January 1841

Chartism and the First Opium War

by Shijie Guan

During the first peak period of the Chartist Movement (1838–1842) the British government waged the First Opium War against China. The immediate cause of this war was the British government’s decision to protect its merchants’ lucrative but evil trade smuggling Indian opium into China. The British army was used to force the Chinese imperial government to import opium and also to give up Chinese protective tariffs, thus opening up the Chinese market for British manufactured goods.¹

The rights and wrongs of this aggressive war in East Asia were widely discussed in the columns of European and British middle-class papers at that time. Many pamphlets were written and circulated on this controversial issue² and it is not surprising that the main newspapers of the Chartist Movement should have joined in the debate.³ As far as the poor communications between the two continents permitted, the Chartist papers first carried factual articles at regular intervals about the crisis. Between 1839–1842 they described the landing of British troops at various points along the Chinese coast, reported the British occupation of Kwangchow, Chusan, Xiamen and Ningpo, and related how the British advance was marked, at each step, by robbery and slaughter of Chinese civilians. Then there were editorials in the Chartist press which scrutinized the causes and effects of this conflict on both societies. Finally, the First Opium War became a topic of the letter sections of the papers, and stimulated leaders, such as Ernest Jones, to compose moving poems.⁴ Not having their own reporters in China, the Chartist press had to rely for their accounts of the war on information provided by official government
statements, debates in the Houses of Parliament and articles published by other papers. To have achieved such a high level of independent and sharp analysis of events in China under these difficult circumstances is certainly worthy of praise.

What was the Chartist attitude towards the First Opium War? In recent years, scholars have described and analysed in some detail the relationship between the Chartists and the revolutionary movements of the European continental countries in the mid-nineteenth century and the British colonial expansion in India. But so far as the author is aware, historians have not yet done any detailed research on the Chartist views on the Opium War. This is the purpose of this article. It is thought that an examination of the attitudes of the Chartists to the First Opium War can throw light on the nature of the Chartist movement, its class consciousness and feelings of international solidarity for the oppressed. This article will discuss the causes of the First Opium War as understood by the Chartists and their opposition to the aggressive overseas policy of the British governments in China, with mention of the relationship between the Chartists and philanthropic groups and between the Chartists and the free traders.

During the period 1836–1838, when in Britain the Chartist movement was gradually gaining strength, the British opium smugglers, contravening the Chinese law, were very much more actively pushing their trade than at any time before. During 1834–1835 the number of opium chests (of 140 to 160 lbs each) smuggled into China came to 21,885. By 1838–1839 the number of opium chests had increased to 40,200. Not only did this opium trade harm the Chinese economy by draining off Chinese silver, but it had disastrous effects on the general state of health and morale of the Chinese people. In the interests of national self-preservation, the Qing dynasty rulers in Beijing issued a sterner decree on the suppression of the opium trade and in December 1838 appointed Lin Zexu as special commissioner to Kwangchow. Lin immediately issued new orders prohibiting the smuggling of opium. They fell again on deaf ears of the foreigners. Supported by the local Chinese people, Lin therefore blockaded the section of the city in which British, American and other foreign merchants had their establishments. In this way he forced them to surrender the opium they had on hand – about 2,376,254 lbs. – and between June 3rd and June 25th 1839 had the whole lot destroyed publicly.

This news reached Britain in November 1839. The Chartists reported the incident in their paper and commented that the response of the Chinese government to this illegal opium trade was justified. They recognized that the use of opium had the most pernicious and demoralizing effects on the Chinese population. They referred to the double standard of the British merchants and British government and emphasized that the Chinese emperor showed much greater concern and real care for the moral health of his people than any of the Jewish-Christian merchants and government
officials. ‘We chronicle it as conferring greater lustre upon the Chinese nation, than the most successful victory, or the greatest commercial enterprise. The opium was theirs, it would have been wealth in their treasury, but they nobly scorned the wages of iniquity – they refused the price of blood’.10

However the merchants of Manchester, London, Liverpool, Leeds and Bristol who were directly profiting from this illegal opium trade, together with the committee of the London East India and China Association, immediately signed a memorandum addressed to Her Majesty’s Government demanding to send an expedition to China to take vengeance upon the Chinese ‘for the robbery of our merchants, and the insult offered to the representative of our Sovereign’.11 The Chartists sharply rebuked this action: ‘What an idea the fellows, who write thus, must have of moral or of international justice, thus to describe the suppression of an illicit trade, which was spreading depravity and misery throughout the Chinese empire.’12

On September 4th 1839, a Captain Elliot ordered his men to fire at a Chinese junk at Kowloon. It was the first shot fired in the war. This news arrived in Britain in January 1840 and shocked many people. The Northern Star had carried short news items on the tense situation in China since June 1839, but it was this incident at Kowloon and the reactions to it by a war-clamouring press in Britain which made the Chartists pay closer attention to British foreign policy in China.13 The editorial of The Charter of January 12th 1840 declared that China was

destined to destruction by the horrors of civilised warfare for refusing to be poisoned by opium. We doubt the morality of this, and we tell these journals who prate about National Honour that the working classes of this country will no longer lend themselves to a system of commerce which is supported by such means . . . The day of delusion has passed away – the working classes have begun to think for themselves. They no longer believe (as they were then industriously taught) that war makes good for trade, or that taxation is a benefit.14

The Chartists were very aware that a war with China would be to the great advantage of the British middle class but would certainly not improve the livelihood of the British working class. This can clearly be seen from the title of the Northern Star editorial of January 18th 1840, ‘The Shopkeepers, their “profit” and our “loss” ’. Alluding to Napoleon’s I famous description of Britain being ‘a nation of shopkeepers’, the Chartist editorial maintains that the profession of a shopkeeper by its very nature should not be despised. It is only when the shopkeeper is driven on by a merciless greed to accumulate more and more profits and thereby negates all generally accepted principles of human concern and benevolence for
others that he must be condemned as a ‘heartless shopocrat’. The editorial then makes the accusation that

Mr. Opium Elliot, his master, the Reform Government, and their masters, the ‘shopkeepers’ of India, have chosen to exhibit this whole people to the Chinese empire. They are representatives of this contemptible category of businessmen and politicians, who threatened the Chinese government to withdraw their patronage from its commerce and to return home, who behave like thieves and bullies gloating over the prospects of the bloodshed, the famine, the insurrections among the people and the multiform distress and misery which must follow a blockading of their ports.

The same editorial praises the Chinese imperial government’s human concern for its people and its relatively mild enforcement of its sovereign rights. The upright behaviour of the official Lin is also lauded ‘whose sterling principal and sense of moral right placed him above the reach of British Gold’ and ‘whose name should be honourably handed down to all posterity.’ So the Chartists believed that a war with China would be a reckless and shameless affair. Instead of enhancing the national honour of the British people, as the middle-class papers asserted, the war would soil it.

In the first half of the 19th century opium was the opiate of the British people. It was found in almost every household in a variety of guises – powders, pills, soothing syrup etc. Doctors prescribed it regularly for all kinds of ailments; it was sold freely and without restrictions in small corner shops and street markets. However by the 1840s some people gradually became aware of its dangerous addictive effects on the regular user. Opium was seen as causing the erosion of British family life, thus attacking the very fabric of British society. Demands for professional controls over sale and distribution of opium among the British public were voiced. Thus it is not surprising that all Chartist articles condemned in no uncertain terms the First Opium War as immoral, inhuman and destructive to the mental and physical health of the Chinese people. It was the experience with widespread opium addiction at home and the early beginnings of an anti-opium movement in Britain which made the Chartists admire and side particularly strongly with the Chinese people and the Chinese authorities in their campaign of eradicating the dangerous opium trade in China. To the Chartists the Chinese government appeared to be much more attuned to the values and aspirations of its people; it appeared more enlightened on handling this ‘social disease’ than the British governments in Britain which propagated laissez-faire principles as the best means of intellectual and moral development of the individual and society. By condemning the British actions in China the Chartists primarily attacked the established order in Britain for its political and economic inequalities. They also
attacked fiercely the British established order for its failure to adopt values and ideals that the mass of the British people universally would accept as theirs. It was this latter aspect which united the Chartists and the various philanthropic societies in their opposition to the First Opium War. It was common for Chartists to attend meetings opposing the war which had been organised by temperance societies, anti-slavery societies and missionaries. Publications of these societies were commented upon in the book review page of the *Northern Star*.

In 1839 a curate of the Church of England named Algernon Thelwall published a book entitled *The Iniquities of the Opium Trade with China*. The book had used extensively materials from the *Chinese Repository*, and aimed at exposing the dangers caused by opium addiction, the violation of Chinese law and the anti-Christian nature of such a dirty trade. Thelwall appealed to the British Parliament to investigate openly the opium trade in China. The Chartists were quick at commenting on this Christian concern for the Chinese. They depicted British missionaries in China as preachers offering the Chinese ‘the word in one hand, and fire, blood, and misery in the other.’ The Chartists were very well aware that often British missionaries themselves helped to promote the smuggling of opium in China.

These incidents made the Chartists remark bitterly in the *Northern Star*,

> The Chinese and the Afghans must certainly think us an odd sort of people to send among them one set of men to proclaim ‘peace on the earth and good will towards men’, and another set armed with murderous weapons to cut them at the word of command, murder the flower of their country, and incarnadine their soil with blood. Their priests need not fear the loss of their occupation so long as this is the case, for the whole people cannot but see the necessity of the missionaries returning to their own country to preach peace to the men of blood and plunder.

> ‘We wonder if the cart loads of cannon balls which passed along the streets of Bradford the other day are to be conveyed to their destination in the same ship which conveys the agents of the Missionary Society. If so, it will be quite in keeping with our general method of doing public business.’

On January 16th 1840 Queen Victoria raised the China problem in her speech to the House of Lords. The Chartists were quick to comment sarcastically on this speech as follows: ‘“interest of my subjects” — the opium miscreants; the “Indemnity” — aye, there’s the rub. “The dignity of my Crown” — THAT would be better consulted in this case by sending out a commission to hang the fellows there, as hanging-commissions are whig fancies.’ Soon afterwards George Elliot, the commander-in-chief on the South African station, was appointed by the British government as the...
plenipotentiary to China. In Britain the press was full of comments that British subjects had been insulted in China. The Chinese should be taught a lesson. The Leeds Mercury, the mouthpiece of the Leeds free traders, commented,

Strongly as we condemn the detestable opium traffic, and decidedly as we approve of the persevering and vigorous efforts of the Chinese Government to suppress it, we are not blind to the absurdity, insolence, injustice and even treachery of Commissioner Lin, in his subsequent conduct towards the British, by which he has lost the high ground he before stood upon and seems likely to bring down a heavy retribution upon his country.23

On March 14th 1840 the news of the Governor General to India having declared war on China in the name of the British Government reached Britain. Soon afterwards the British government officially declared war on China in the House of Commons. On April 4th 1840 another editorial of the Northern Star pointed out that the war against China was by its very nature an ‘opium war’. The editorial repudiated the official explanation of the British government about the origin of the war, which the Home Secretary, Lord Russell, had summarised as follows,

The expedition proceeds, first, to obtain reparation for the insults offered to Her Majesty’s Superintendent, and Her Majesty’s subjects by the Chinese Government. Secondly, to obtain for the merchants trading with China an indemnification for the loss of their property, incurred by threats of violence offered by persons under the direction of the Chinese Government. Thirdly, to obtain security for the protection of persons and property in future, and that their trade and commerce shall be placed upon a proper footing.24

The Chartist editorial asserted however that the Chinese had neither insulted Her Majesty’s officials to China nor any of her subjects. The Chinese laws were known and made public and their enforcement within the sovereign jurisdiction of the Chinese empire was legitimate. Furthermore the British opium smugglers had been warned time and again to abstain from this illegal trade. Whatever economic injuries had been endured by the British merchants, they were the consequences of their disobedience to Chinese law. Instead of shielding the opium smugglers from punishment, the British government should have made them account for every penny lost in the China trade and should have handed them over as lawbreakers to the Chinese government. According to the Chartists, then, the real cause of the First Opium War was the protection granted by the British government to an illegal opium trade undertaken by British merchants. Furthermore, the Chartists recognized that in this way the
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Chinese market was opened to British goods at a time when the British economy at home experienced one of its cyclical depressions. This was certainly the view of the Manchester Chartist leader J. Leach. He said at a Chartist meeting held in Birmingham,

The manufacturers, under a notion of free trade were rambling over the world to find whether any person wanted a coat or a shirt off them, whilst the mass of the people at home were naked. They had been trying some of their free trade experiments in China of late, and were shooting them for not allowing themselves to be poisoned for the benefit of commerce.25

As soon as the Chartists learnt about the actual outbreak of the First Opium War, they opposed it by calling first of all on the British working people not to support the government’s war efforts in East Asia.26 However the outbreak of the War coincided with the British government’s first attempt to contain the influence of the Chartist movement. After the failure of the Newport rising in November 1839 the government arrested and imprisoned in a systematic fashion most of the outstanding national leaders of the movement.27 Their trials took place in the early months of 1840. Soon many of the Chartist papers ceased publication and the main concern of the remaining free Chartist leaders was to keep the political movement alive in Britain. Chartist reactions to the First Opium War consequently restricted themselves to condemnations in the remaining Chartist papers28, a few denunciations of British aggression in China at various Chartist meetings up and down the country29, and at meetings arranged by humanitarian organisations opposing any kind of subjugation in the world, be it slavery or the Opium War.30 By summer 1840 many of the Chartist leaders were released from prison one by one. Gradually the movement regained its strength but still concentrated primarily on the reawakening of the British people to the importance of the Charter.

There was another factor which seemed to have dampened slightly the Chartists' interest in Britain’s expansionist actions in China. It was the rival movement organised by David Urquhart which attempted to influence popular opinion. Urquhart believed that the Russians were seeking to encourage a Chartist rising in Britain in order to paralyse the country and thus help to prepare the ground for a Tsarist conquest of Western Europe.31 His aim was to make the British working class aware of the intrigues of Palmerston who was seen as a collaborator with the Russians. Thus Urquhart set up foreign affairs committees, sent working class speakers around the country, and the Northern Liberator of Newcastle-upon-Tyne became the main organ for his views. The Northern Star came out against Urquhart’s Foreign Policy Movement in no uncertain terms, regarding it as a way of distracting the rank and file of the British working class from the fight for the Charter.32 One of the unfortunate ramifications
of this position was that for a while at least the interest of the Chartists in foreign affairs and therefore in the First Opium War had become suspect. This was admitted by the *Northern Star* later on.\(^{33}\)

It was the attack of the British army on Xiamen and Chusan on July 2nd 1840 which seems to have rekindled the Chartists’ interest in the First Opium War. The news about this incident reached Britain at the end of December 1840. The Chartists reacted strongly against the aggression in a letter to the *Northern Star* which was signed by a ‘Junius Rusticus’. In this letter the Chartist writer makes a clear distinction between a just war and an unjust war. According to the writer, only one cause justifies war, namely the fight for man’s basic right, liberty. However the attack on Chinese port cities, their plunder by British troops, the brutal murder of their inhabitants, were acts of violation against the laws of nature and nations. The people of England would certainly dissociate themselves from this gross injustice and brutality.\(^{34}\)

The following months witnessed the adoption of three new strategies by the Chartists in order to promote the Charter. These strategies had been agreed upon when the National Charter Association was founded in July 1840. Firstly, the Chartists were to attend political meetings of other societies; secondly, they favoured sobriety; and thirdly, they were to put forward candidates in forthcoming parliamentary elections. The first opportunity to implement the third strategy arose in June 1841 when the parliamentary election was being held. During the campaign the Chartists made an election issue of the Whigs’ commitment to the waging of the Opium War. Although the Chartists were very conscious that there was no real difference between the Tories and the Whigs, and that they needed to destroy both parties, they decided to work for the downfall of the Whigs first of all during that election campaign. The Whigs were denounced as hypocrites having pledged peace but instead pushed the country into wars with Spain, Portugal, Canada, Egypt and China. In China in particular they had behaved like ‘ruffian-poisoners’.\(^{35}\) The 1841 election was won by the Tory Party, but it soon became clear that the Tories were not willing to change the government’s policy concerning the Opium War. This was not surprising, for in April 1840 during a full-scale Parliamentary debate about the War, the Tories had not objected to the war so much as to the ministerial handling of it by the Melbourne government. If the Tories had made the war an issue, it would only have divided the Party.\(^{36}\) The Lord Chancellor announced in August 1841 that ‘Her Majesty regrets that the negotiations between her Plenipotentiaries in China and the Chinese Government have not yet been brought to a satisfactory conclusion, and that it has been necessary to call into action the forces which her Majesty has sent to the China seas’.\(^{37}\)

The Chartists opposed this move. On August 28th, 1841 Feargus O’Connor left the prison at York and at the Chartist meeting welcoming his release he made a speech on working class patriotism. This stated that
real patriotism, such as that of the British working classes, revealed itself in a man’s attachment to the place he was born, his cottage and his garden; it showed itself in a man’s love for his work. However the false patriotism of Tories and Whigs aimed at enlisting people to leave their country and to fight wars overseas, killing their foreign brothers. The cost of the wars waged around the world by the various British governments were constant bones of contention for the Chartists. The second Petition of 1841 complained about a national debt amounting at that time to eight hundred million pounds. Quite a large proportion of this enormous amount had been accumulated because of cruel and expensive wars for the suppression of liberty and which had not been authorised by the people. The First Opium War could certainly be included in this category of ‘expensive wars for the suppression of all liberty’. By 1842 the costs of conducting the Opium War came to £675,000; the estimated revenue for the year ending April 5th, 1843 was £48,350,000. The Opium War thus amounted to 1.4% of the revenue and 1.3% of the total expenditure for 1842–1843 (£50,819,000). The introduction of the new income tax was to solve the deficit problem, but the budget was severely criticised by the Chartists as it made Britain’s poor pay for an unjust war overseas.

The Chinese army was defeated by British troops at Ningpo in March 1842. All the middle class papers, such as the Morning Chronicle and the Manchester Guardian, cheered this news. The Chartists on the other hand, warned that the British successes in China would be shortlived. The Chinese were a people who did not shrink from pain or danger. The cause of their defeat at the hands of the British troops was primarily backward military equipment and a lack of practical experience of modern warfare. Thus the Opium War was seen as comparable to the unequal struggle between the unarmed Manchester working class and the British soldiers at Peterloo. This siding with the Chinese people by the Chartists was a recurring feature of their analysis and a product of their own experiences of oppression in Britain at that time. However the Chartists predicted that the Chinese people would stand up and win the struggle in the long run. China was a huge territory which could not be controlled effectively by the British troops. Furthermore the Chinese population was huge and would be a constant pool of serving men whose ranks could never be depleted. Britain’s military forces would sooner or later ‘be stretched in sheer exhaustion on the tops of the hecatombs they are slaughtering – passing away like pestilence, famine, and other mysterious visitations.’ Of this, according to the Chartists, both the Chinese people and the Chinese emperor were very well aware.

The Nanjing Treaty was signed on August 29th, 1842 and this news arrived in Britain at the end of November 1842. At that time the Chartists had to cope with the second attack on their movement by the British government. Arrests of Chartist leaders and trade unionists who had favoured a General Strike took place again on a large scale. An estimated
An opium storehouse in India belonging to British merchants of the East India Company at the outbreak of the Opium War in China.

The landing of the British army at Chuan Bi Village near Kwangchow in January 1841.
1,500 arrests would not be far from the mark. About 800 were either released after a short time or sentenced in police-courts, while 710 were tried at the assizes in York, Lancaster, Stafford, Chester and Liverpool. A detailed and critical analysis of the terms of the Nanjing Treaty seemed to be of secondary importance at this urgent moment when all effort concentrated on keeping the Chartist movement intact. This does not mean however that the Chartists had given up their opposition to the War. In later years the First Opium War was often cited by the Chartists as having set a precedent for other European countries' expansionist drives on other continents. When France conquered Tangiers, the Northern Star commented, ‘Our own piracy committed on the Chinese has furnished a “precedent” for the destruction of Tangiers, and for the occupation of any portions of the coast of Africa that the French may desire.’ And when the British intervened in the Portugal affair, J. Harney challenged Palmerston during the election campaign at Tiverton in 1847 by referring to the Opium War. He said that the British had acted like highwaymen placing a pistol at the head of their victims in China and thus had set a precedent for other British adventures of this kind in other parts of the world.

The Chartists were also openly opposed to the ‘forward policy’ in China as promoted by the commercial and manufacturing sections of British society from 1834. Although Asa Briggs has shown that different Chartist groups held different opinions on free trade, their positions on free trade activities in China and East Asia as a whole were in accord. In 1832 twenty-six Britons were trading at Kwangchow, apart from the men of the East India Company. By 1834 there were 66 individual traders and by 1837, 156. Trade with China became hectic and competitive. James Matheson, a fervent free trader, wrote ironically to an American correspondent, ‘We are sighing almost for a return of the Company’s monopoly, in preference to the trouble and endless turmoil of free trade.’ In addition to the London merchant houses there were the firms of the northern industrial towns of Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool which vied to export cotton goods to the Chinese market. After all, the Chinese population was already said to comprise one third of the world’s population at that time, and the transformation of these huge numbers into consumers of British manufactured goods was seen to be a most profitable undertaking. However by 1839 the British interest groups detected signs that the China trade would soon be in jeopardy and addressed letters to Lord Palmerston calling for ‘prompt, vigorous and decided measures on the part of Her Majesty’s Government.’ Once the British government had declared war on China on March 19th 1840 and this war was debated in both Houses of Parliament, it was these free traders, in particular those from Manchester, who wholeheartedly supported the government’s decision and actions. The Manchester Guardian, the Radical-Liberal organ of the north, also justified the war as ‘one which was attempting to obtain redress for past and security against future outrages by the Chinese authorities against
British trade. Subsequent articles in the *Manchester Guardian* mockingly and triumphantly described the slaughters of Chinese by British troops and celebrated the Nanjing Treaty as a great victory of the principle of free trade. The Chartists, on the other hand, opposed the Nanjing Treaty in their articles, referred to it as an unequal treaty which had been forced on the Chinese by necessity, ‘When the Chinese found that they could not cope with us in war, they acceded to speedy terms of peace, and entered into a treaty of commerce, which placed this nation in a far better position than she had before-time occupied in relation to the people we had wronged.

Furthermore, the Chartists regarded the First Opium War as another way of exposing the hypocrisy of Richard Cobden and his free trade-followers who believed in the ‘civilising effects’ and ‘peaceful influences’ of free trade on international relations. On the contrary, many of the British possessions overseas, such as the Indian Empire, had been obtained by sheer violence, and the war with China was another example of ‘the bloody-minded cupidity’ for other nations’ silver displayed so often by Britain’s ‘civilising’ traders. The Chartists pointed out that in reality the British free traders did not abhor war out of moral conviction because people were murdered, but merely because war could unsettle trade, shake credit, and increase taxation at home. War was ‘an expensive luxury’ which could easily backfire. Soldiers had to be paid but as the *Northern Star* mentioned, it was the British working class who actually paid the war expenses. By the 1840s, however, the *Northern Star* warned that the British working class appeared to be less willing to do so any longer.

After having asserted that the search for bigger and bigger profits was the real driving force of the British free traders overseas, the Chartists predicted that the Nanjing Treaty would not really satisfy the traders in the long run. They pointed to the history of British expansion in India and concluded that ‘we have not yet seen the end of our aggressive struggles in China. Our merchant free-booters have always affected great moderation at the outset of their aggression.’ The Second Opium War showed the correctness of this prediction.

The Chartists also foresaw that the British free traders would employ the same techniques of overseas expansion as used in China to conquer the Japanese market a few years later. In 1846 several British journals, in particular the *Morning Chronicle*, advocated that Japan should become a new market for British goods. The Japanese government, however, had restricted the trade with foreigners to twenty-three vessels docking in Japanese ports annually, but not one of them belonged to British traders. The free traders thought this was an intolerable situation, and ways and means were discussed to change it. The Chartists were quick to comment on this wrangling to open the Japanese market, ‘Peaceably if we may, but forcibly if we must’ is the motto of our peace-loving free trade civilizers.’ It meant that if negotiations at an ambassadorial level failed to effect more
equal trading relations with Japan, then British ‘war steamers’ would carry on a contraband trade in defiance of the Japanese government, as they had done earlier in Chinese waters. ‘They would rather pick a quarrel than seek to avoid one’; and finally there ‘will come an imitation of the Chinese war, with the usual results.’ Later events again showed the correctness of the Chartist analysis. Although it was America which forced Japan to open its market to Western goods in 1854, Britain forced Japan to open its doors even wider. In July 1863 British troops attacked Kagoshima. The pretext was that a British subject, called Richardson, had been killed by a Japanese near Yokohama. As in China twenty years earlier, the British government forced Japan to build an army base for British troops on Japanese soil and extorted large sums of reparation. Thus the Chartists were the first to maintain that the Victorians of the mid-19th century did not really pursue a policy of anti-colonialism.

In conclusion, we can state that Chartists developed an independent standpoint on the First Opium War and were steadfast in their condemnation of it. They considered the war to be unjust and immoral, having been waged by the money-greedy ruling class of Britain which did not shy away from contravening basic standards of international politics and human decency. Their feelings of solidarity with the Chinese people grew out of their experience of the class struggle at that time in Britain. Early industrial capitalism faced its first serious economic crisis in Britain. Internally social tensions intensified between the ruling and working classes. At the same time the commercial and industrial sections of British society advocated an expansionist overseas policy in order to overcome the economic depression. The aggressive foreign policy of the British governments was just another form of class oppression dished out to the weaker ones by the British middle class. The physical attacks on the Chinese population by the British troops resembled very much the physical violence instigated by the British state against the Chartists and working classes at home. As representatives of working-class radicalism, the Chartists not only used the British colonial expansion in East Asia to focus their protest against immediate economic grievances at home but also to challenge the legitimacy of the socio-political and ideological order of the day.

NOTES

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1 In January 1841 Lord Palmerston wrote to Lord Auckland: ‘The rivalship of European manufactures is fast excluding our productions from the markets of Europe, and we must unremittingly endeavour to find in other parts of the world new vents for our industry . . . if we succeed in our China expedition, Abyssinia, Arabia, the countries of Indus and the new markets of China will at no distant period give us a most important extension to the range of our foreign commerce.’ Quoted in: Jack Beeching, *The Chinese Opium Wars*, New York, 1975, p. 95.
3 For this study the following papers of the Chartists were used: The Northern Star (1837-1852) (Leeds/London); The Charter (27.1.1839–15.3.1840) (London); The True Scotsman (20.10.1838–March 1841); The Southern Star and London and Brighton Patriot (19.1.1840–12.7.1840); The Evening Star (25.7.1842–28.2.1843); The British Statesman (13.3.1842–21.1.1843); The Charist Circular (28.9.1839–9.7.1842); The People’s Paper (8.5.1852–4.9.1858).
4 Northern Star 18.9.1841, p. 3; British Statesman 17.12.1842, p. 7; Northern Star 4.7.1846, p. 3.
7 The opium trade was prohibited by the Chinese government in 1731. In 1821 the Chinese government repeated this prohibition.
9 Northern Star 16.11.1839, p. 4.
10 Northern Star 18.1.1840, p. 4.
13 The Charter published four editorials on the First Opium War between January 5th and March 15th 1840. See also R. Gammage, History of the Chartist Movement Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1894, p. 182.
16 Parliamentary Debates 3rd ser. 54., 34; Northern Star, 18.1.1840, p. 2.
17 Northern Star, 18.1.1840, p. 4; 30.1.1841, p. 6; 27.1.1838, p. 4.
19 Northern Star, 31.10.1840, p. 7 (Letters).
20 Northern Star, 16.7.1842, p. 5.
24 Northern Star 4.4.1840, p. 4; see also Parliamentary Debates 3rd ser. Vol. 52, 7.2.–23.3.1840, p. 1223.
26 Northern Star 18.1.1840, p. 4; The Charter, 12.1.1840, p. 8; The True Scotsman 9.5.1840, p. 1; Southern Star, 29.3.1840, p. 9.
29 Northern Star 2.5.1840, p. 7.
30 Northern Star, 22.2.1840, p. 1; 2.5.1840, p. 6; Southern Star, 26.4.1840, p. 1; 3.5.1840, p. 4; The Chartist Circular, 11.6.1842, p. 2; The True Scotsman, 14.3.1840, p. 1; 2.5.1840, p. 3.
33 Northern Star, 4.7.1846, p. 7.
34 Northern Star, 2.1.1841; 30.1.1840.
37 Northern Star, 28.8.1841, p. 5.
40 Northern Star, 12.3.1842, p. 7.
41 Northern Star, 23.4.1842, p. 4; 25.6.1842, p. 2; 27.8.1842, p. 2.
42 Northern Star, 9.7.1842, p. 4; 5.11.1842, p. 5; Chartist Circular, 11.6.1842, p. 586, p. 588.
45 Northern Star, 31.8.1844, p. 4.
46 Northern Star, 7.8.1847, p. 4.
47 The Chinese Opium Wars, p. 42.
52 Northern Star, 5.7.1845, p. 4.
53 Northern Star, 14.11.1846, p. 4.
56 Northern Star, 14.11.1846, p. 4.
57 This point was much later put forward by J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, ‘The Imperialism of Free Trade’, in English Historical Review, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1953.