

All the Tea in China by Charlie Taylor

I was recently in China, and we drank hot tea at every meal, and it was quite good. The Chinese believe that their tea is the best in the world, and that it has definite health benefits. One of our hosts gave me a present of a can of green tea that she said was very special, and she said, "You can't buy that outside of China". The history of the growing and manufacturing of tea for consumption goes back about 4000 years in China, and the first written history of drinking tea was in 10th century BC China. It became the common drink of China during the Qin dynasty about 200 BC. Tea was first imported to Europe by the Portuguese in the 16th century AD. Tea first came to Britain about 1660, but it did not become the leading beverage in England until the early 1800s. At that time, almost all of the tea imported to Europe came from China, and it had to be paid for in silver. Since the Chinese had very little demand for European products, this caused a huge trade imbalance with a massive amount of silver moving into Chinese hands. The primary company involved in this trade was the British East India Company. Their solution was to invest heavily in the production of opium to sell in China and redress the trade balance. In the 18th century the East India Company brought huge quantities of opium to the coast of China where they hired Chinese smugglers to distribute the drug in defiance of Chinese law. Aware of the addictive quality of opium and its appeal, the British East India Company, using Chinese nationals did a huge business in China, thus restoring the trade balance. Britain was exporting opium from India to China and importing tea from China to England. By 1820, China was importing 900 tons of opium every year. It is no exaggeration to say that the trade in botanical products was powering the economy of England. They were selling poppies from India and camellias from China in huge volume with a large cut of each for Britain.

In 1838, the British were selling 1400 tons of opium per year to China, and the Emperor of China recognized they had a huge drug problem and moved to stop it. They arrested the opium dealers, and forced all the foreign firms to surrender their stocks of opium to be destroyed. The British government sent expeditionary forces from India to attack the Chinese ports. The two empires of China and Britain went to war over two flowers-the poppy and the camellia. The Chinese were no match for the modern European navy and army, and were forced to seek a settlement. In the Treaty of Nanking in 1843, the first "Opium War" was ended with the Chinese agreeing to open four additional ports to the British and cede Hong Kong over to Queen Victoria. In the House of Commons in England, a member of Parliament named William Gladstone said, "I wonder if there has ever been a war more unjust in its origin!" At this point it is interesting to note that the sale of opium was strictly forbidden in

England, and this law was obeyed within the British Islands.

The Great British Tea Heist

If you thought that wasn't bad enough then guess what our British cousins did next. In 1848-1850, England was importing about 50 million pounds of tea per year. It occurred to the British East India Company that the reason all the tea flowing to Europe was coming from China was that the best tea crop was in China, and all the secrets of manufacturing tea were closely held by the Chinese. A new concern was raised after the Opium War that since China could not prevent the British from distributing opium in China, they would change the law and begin growing it in China. This would break the East India Company's monopoly on selling opium. Therefore it became all the more important to gain all the Chinese secrets on growing and manufacturing tea. The interior of China was closed to foreigners so it was illegal for the English to go and observe the process. The British East India Company did what all civilized businessmen do when they are faced with a dilemma—they lie, cheat, and steal. The British governor of India made it known to the British government and the executives of the East India Co. that there was a large area of India perfectly suitable to grow the camellia plant. All that was necessary was to acquire the best seed and secrets of manufacturing tea. This task required a great plant expert and a great gardener, but mostly a thief and a spy. In 1848, the British East India Co. hired a botanist named Robert Fortune to make a clandestine trip into the interior of China in order to steal the closely guarded secrets of tea horticulture and manufacturing.

Robert Fortune was a very underpaid botanist in England who had previously taken a trip to China to observe, and take Chinese plant specimens back to England. He was very ambitious for fame and fortune, and saw this offer by the East India Co. as an opportunity to make some money, but also a chance to attach his name to the discovery of all the new plant life that might be in the interior of China. He first found a Chinese national who was from the tea growing and manufacturing area of the Wu Yi Shan hills to guide him. This guy named Wang was easily bought and corrupted for personal gain. Fortune then had to shave his head and wear a Chinese wig with a pony tail, and disguise himself in mandarin robes. They ventured deep into China, braving pirates, bad weather, and treachery from his own hired men. They finally arrived at the epicenter of Chinese tea production. Wang introduced Robert Fortune (in disguise) as an honored and wise official from a distant province to inspect a tea factory. The ruse worked with Wang doing all the talking. Fortune discovered that tea is a highly processed product. They dried it, fired it, dried it again, rolled it, and fermented it. The quality of tea came from oils that give the flavor and the caffeine to hot water. Before Robert

Fortune's discovery, it was thought that black tea and green tea came from different plants, but he saw here that the difference was that black tea was fermented and green tea is not. Fortune also discovered that for the tea to be exported to Europe, they added a dye and some gypsum to make it look greener because foreigners preferred the way it looked. Chinese themselves would never dream of drinking colored tea, and large quantities of the dye could actually be poisonous. Later, English officials would use this as an argument to justify British manufactured tea. Travelling further, Robert Fortune was able through bribes and deceit to steal 20,000 tea plants and great quantities of seeds. He was able to sneak these out of the country, and send them to the Darjeeling region of India. It was the greatest act of corporate espionage in history, and contributed greatly to the riches and fate of the British Empire. Large scale plantations grew up in India, and it became the largest producer of tea in the world, as India still is today. It became known as "the Great British Tea Heist".

Not For All the Tea in China

In the nineteenth century the phrase was coined, "I wouldn't do that for all the tea in China". I think originally this was derived from the fact that a man like Fortune was willing to give up all his principles of right and wrong, and also be willing to face the hardship and possible consequence of death if caught, in order to obtain the tea trade from China. Therefore to decline an offer to do something "for all the tea in China" is to be determined not to do it no matter what inducement is offered. Clearly what was done by England in its dealings with China in the 19th century was wrong by any standards as confessed by William Gladstone, but from a biblical standpoint, what caused a man who had been raised according to the Judeo-Christian ethic to do what he knew was wrong? England was a supposedly Christian nation, yet the leadership all applauded their victories in the Opium Wars, and their success in "obtaining" the secrets of tea manufacturing.

Paul gave the answer to all our moral failures in Galatians 5:16-17, where he commanded the church to let their lives be controlled by the Spirit of God instead of their own fleshly desires, "for the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." Consider Robert Fortune, who believed himself under appreciated and unrewarded for his knowledge and ability. He had the chance to vindicate himself, be famous, and make his fortune. The temptation of all his desires met the great opportunity offered by the British East India Co., and he was overwhelmed. Of course this is the way of the world to compromise and buy into all the lies that "the ends justify the means". Let's reap the gains by any means necessary, and then rationalize and justify it later. John wrote something very convicting in his first

epistle, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with all its lusts, but the one who does the will of God abides forever.” (1 Jn.2:15-17) Our problem is that the stuff in the world, our pursuit of pleasure, and our physical desires cause us to lose our spiritual focus. We know what is right, but we get distracted and don’t focus on God, and thus we are driven by selfish desires that are not from God.

Matthew 16:26

I’m sure most of us have heard Jesus’ words, “What will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?”, but did you know that Jesus said this in the context of Peter trying to talk Him out of the crucifixion? In v.21, Jesus told the disciples He must go to Jerusalem to be crucified, and Peter rebuked Him saying “This shall never happen to you.” Peter selfishly did not want to give up His leader and friend, so Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” If your focus is on preserving this life and the stuff of the world, you must lose it, but what Jesus is offering is eternal life that cannot be lost. CHARLIE TAYLOR