Imperialism in China: Opium War and Spheres of Influence

British Imperialism in the 19th Century
European imperialism in the 19th century involved territorial expansion and economic dominance. Imperialism relied upon the acquisition of cheap raw materials and secure markets overseas. Great Britain was the leading imperial power. The country profited from its relationship with territories in India, Africa, and China by maintaining a favorable balance of trade. Profits poured into Great Britain when the British sold more goods to foreign countries than they bought from them.

China and Imperialism
In the early 19th century China was self-sufficient, reflecting its history as the dominant civilization in Asia. Chinese society had little desire, or need, for foreign goods. However, the Chinese profited from the sale of tea to Great Britain, so they allowed some British merchants access to the port of Canton.

British Merchants in China
With the power of the British Empire behind them, British merchants in India and Africa had little concern for their safety. They enjoyed "extra territoriality," which means that they were exempt from local laws while living in a foreign country. In China, however, British merchants faced a different situation. Prior to the Opium War, the Ch'ing dynasty believed that British merchants were required to obey Chinese law and could be arrested and detained according to Chinese legal procedures. British merchants were accustomed to the British legal system, with its limitations on search and seizure and jury trials. They grew uneasy about the strictness of Chinese laws. British merchants were also frustrated because they had to use gold to buy tea. Since they didn't want to waste their gold, they looked for a product the Chinese would want.

Opium and the Balance of Trade
Opium is a drug derived from poppy plants. It can be used in medicine as a pain reliever. However, opium is also a narcotic that is highly addictive. The British grew opium in India and brought it to China. Their purpose was to introduce a product that would allow Britain to sell more goods to China than it bought from China. Thus, the British would have a balance of trade that favored them.

The result was that by the mid-1830s, nearly two million Chinese had become addicted to opium. Realizing the dangers of this trade, the Ch'ing dynasty outlawed the sale of opium in 1836. But through the black market, British merchants were able to sell increasing amounts of the drug. The Chinese Commissioner in Canton responded by arresting British merchants, confiscating opium, and demanding the British follow Chinese law. When Britain refused, the Chinese moved to bar all British trade. These actions led to the Opium War, and the British sent a fleet of war ships to China. Armed with vastly superior weapons, the British easily subdued Chinese forces.

Imperialism in China: “Spheres of Influence”
After the Opium Wars, the British successfully gained influence in China, and China began to weaken. In turn, other European nations became increasingly interested in trade with China in the later 19th century. Since China was highly developed and incredibly unified, it Europeans couldn't conquer and control it completely. Instead, Europeans established spheres of influence in China. This means that Europeans agreed upon areas where a European nation could control trade without interference from other Western nations. In turn, European nations began to economically control parts of China.
## Imperialism in China: Opium War and Spheres of Influence

### Directions
Read the issues in the middle column. Complete the left column by summarizing the Chinese perspective on each issue. In the right column summarize the British perspective on each issue.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>British</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Amount of Chinese tea sold to Great Britain</td>
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<td>Amount of opium Britain sold to China</td>
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<td>Freedom of British traders in China</td>
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What was the result of the Opium War?