

Britain's Responses and Measures to the Opium Import from Yunnan, China to Myanmar in the Late 19th Century

Sai Yan

Abstract

Based on the correspondence between the British Indian Government and British Burma from 1862 to 1863 and the Anglo-Burmese Treaty of Commerce 1862 as core historical materials, this paper focuses on the tariff disputes and diplomatic interactions caused by Yunnan opium imported into Burma. In 1862, Yunnan Chinese merchants arrived in Rangoon with opium, triggering a series of games over quality appraisal, import permission and tax rate verification. As low-quality and low-cost Yunnan opium competed with Indian government-controlled opium, the British Indian government, aiming to safeguard colonial opium revenue, finally set the export duty with reference to the standard of Malwa opium after adjusting tariff policies. Meanwhile, Burma refused special clauses on opium for religious reasons in the treaty negotiation, and opium was governed by the transit rules for general goods, with a 1% transit tariff established to open the Yunnan-Burma trade route. This dispute was essentially a multi-game of colonial hegemony, commercial interests and local trade, reflecting the operation logic of colonial diplomacy and providing empirical evidence for the study of modern Yunnan-Burma-India trade and frontier diplomatic history.