Prelude to the Opium Wars

1729	The Yongzheng Emperor issues the first official edict banning the sale and smoking of opium in China.
1757	The Qianlong Emperor restricts all foreign trade to the port of Canton (Guangzhou) under the Canton System, limiting interactions with foreign traders.
1773	The British East India Company starts to auction opium in Calcutta, marking the beginning of the organized opium trade to China.
1799	The Jiaqing Emperor issues another edict prohibiting the importation of opium, recognizing its growing social and economic impact.

First Opium War (1839-1842)

1834	The British East India Company's monopoly on the China trade ends, leading to an increase in British merchants trading opium.
1838	Lin Zexu is appointed by the Daoguang Emperor as Imperial Commissioner to eradicate the opium trade in Canton.
March 1839	Lin Zexu arrives in Canton and orders the confiscation and destruction of over 20,000 chests of opium from British merchants.

First Opium War (1839-1842) (cont)

June 1839	Lin Zexu writes an open letter to Queen Victoria appealing to her moral sense to stop the opium trade.
July 1839	The First Battle of Chuenpi occurs as tensions escalate between Chinese authorities and British traders.
November 1838	The British Royal Navy enforces a blockade of the Pearl River, preventing Chinese ships from entering or leaving Canton.
January 1841	The British capture the forts at the mouth of the Pearl River, marking the first significant military engagement of the war.
August 1841	The British occupy the city of Amoy (Xiamen) as they expand their military operations.
June 1842	The British capture Shanghai, demonstrating their superior naval power.
29 August 1842	The Treaty of Nanking is signed, officially ending the First Opium War. Key terms include ceding Hong Kong to Britain, opening five treaty ports (Canton, Amoy, Fuzhou, Ningbo, and Shanghai) to British trade, and paying a large indemnity.

Interwar Period (1842-1856)

1844	The Treaty of Wanghia is signed between the United States and China, granting the US the same trading rights as Britain.
1844	The Treaty of Whampoa is signed between France and China, similar to the Treaty of Wanghia.
1847	Tensions continue as the British conduct military operations in Canton to enforce the terms of the Treaty of Nanking.
1854	The Arrow Incident occurs when Chinese authorities board a Chinese-owned ship (registered under the British flag) in Canton, leading to renewed tensions.

Second Opium War (1856-1860)

October 1856	The Arrow Incident escalates when British forces bombard Canton, marking the start of the Second Opium War.
December 1856	French forces join the British, forming an Anglo-French alliance against China after the execution of a French missionary.
June 1857	The British and French forces capture Canton, deposing the local governor and establishing joint control over the city.

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Second Opium War (1856-1860) (cont)

May 1858	The British and French forces advance towards Tianjin, capturing the Dagu Forts along the way.
June 1858	The Treaty of Tientsin is signed, temporarily halting hostilities. Key terms include opening more ports to foreign trade, legalizing the opium trade, and allowing foreign embassies in Beijing.
June 1859	Chinese resistance leads to the Dagu Forts being recaptured by Chinese forces, and hostilities resume.
August 1860	The British and French launch a renewed campaign, capturing the Dagu Forts and advancing on Beijing.
October 1860	The Anglo-French forces capture Beijing and loot and burn the Old Summer Palace (Yuanmingyuan).
24 October 1860	The Convention of Peking is signed, concluding the Second Opium War. China agrees to adhere to the Treaty of Tientsin, cede the Kowloon Peninsula to Britain, and pay further indemnities.

Consequences and Legacy

1861	The establishment of the Zongli Yamen, a Qing government body to manage foreign affairs, marks the beginning of China's modernization efforts in response to the humiliations of the Opium Wars.
1872	The first Chinese students are sent to the United States for education, reflecting China's growing recognition of the need for modernization.
1895	The Treaty of Shimonoseki ends the First Sino-Japanese War, with terms influenced by China's weakened state post-Opium Wars, including the cession of Taiwan to Japan.
1900	The Boxer Rebellion occurs, fueled by anti-foreign sentiment partly resulting from the Opium Wars' legacy. The Eight-Nation Alliance suppresses the rebellion, leading to further concessions from China.
1911	The Xinhai Revolution leads to the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China, ending over two millennia of imperial rule, a process accelerated by the disruptions of the Opium Wars.
1949	The People's Republic of China is established by the Communist Party under Mao Zedong, with the Opium Wars often cited as a pivotal moment in the narrative of China's "century of humiliation."

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