

Paper ID	109
Author(s)	Lingjing Wu
Title	Rethinking 'Richards's Question': An Ecological History of the Opium Cultivation Monopoly System in British India
Abstract	
<p>John Richards, a renowned American scholar of South Asian history, posed a critical question regarding the history of opium cultivation in colonial India: 'Were fiscal returns to the [...] poppy grower commensurate with his impressive investment of labour, skill, land and water? 'Throughout his career, Richards revised his answer, shifting from a negative to a positive assessment. Yet, this question remains unresolved for many scholars of modern Asian opium history and has sparked a series of related inquiries: Did local Indian farmers always profit from opium cultivation? Under what conditions could they earn more by cultivating alternative crops? Were farmers coerced into growing poppies, or did they willingly engage in its production? Beyond profitability, what other factors influenced their decision to cultivate opium?</p> <p>This paper examines the rise of the opium cultivation monopoly and opium growers' decisions in British colonial India through an ecological historical lens. It argues that, in addition to the profitability of opium cultivation, the evolving agricultural ecosystems of opium-producing regions—such as Bihar and Bengal—during the late 18th and early 19th centuries, along with the frequent natural disasters caused by an unstable monsoon climate in northeastern India, compelled many farmers to cultivate opium for the British Empire. Furthermore, many impoverished farmers chose opium cultivation in exchange for interest-free advance payments or loans for agricultural improvements, such as well-digging, despite knowing the labour-intensive and unpredictable nature of poppy farming. Early opium cultivation was fraught with uncertainty, as droughts, floods, and frosts regularly disrupted production, often leaving farmers unable to meet the British demand for opium. In response, British authorities shifted from a prepaid tax system established in 1799 to an agency system, created a specialized opium department in 1819, and sent colonial scientists and officials to improve cultivation techniques, including developing opium varieties suited to Chinese tastes and resistant to environmental stresses.</p> <p>By integrating ecological factors into the analysis of local farmers' decisions, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the opium monopoly system in colonial India, offering new insights into the question posed by Richard</p>	
Keywords	opium history, opium cultivation, British India, agricultural ecosystems, natural disaster

Paper ID	161
Author(s)	Shohei Okubo
Title	Monsoon Dynamics and Opium Commodity Chains Across the Bay of Bengal: Before the British Monopoly
Abstract	
<p>This paper examines the environmental and economic dynamics of the Dutch East India Company's opium trade—the most significant pioneering opium enterprise—and its interactions with local actors across the Bay of Bengal during the eighteenth century, focusing on the period before the establishment of the British opium monopoly in 1773. By introducing monsoon rhythms as a critical analytical framework, the study traces the commodity chain of opium from its production in Bihar, northeast India, through its transportation along</p>	

monsoon-dependent routes via the Ganga River and the Indian Ocean, to its eventual sale in Batavia, west Java.

The analysis underscores the strategic adaptability of the Dutch East India Company, which relied on aligning its operations with seasonal cycles and local commercial practices to sustain and maximize profitability. Monsoon patterns influenced every stage of the commodity chain, from opium procurement and transportation in India to market distribution in Java. These adaptations were crucial for navigating the environmental challenges of maritime Asia while maintaining viable trading operations.

This research reveals the complex interplay between natural forces and economic systems that shaped early modern trading networks in maritime Asia. The findings contribute to environmental history by emphasizing the role of ecological factors in structuring historical commodity chains and providing a better understanding of the interconnected transformations of the economy and environment in the region.

Keywords	Humans, Monsoon rhythms, Commodity chains, The Dutch East India Company, Maritime Asia
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Paper ID	102
Author(s)	Yang Yi
Title	Another “Opium War”— Opium Cultivation and Local Militarization in Chuankang Liangshan during the Late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China
Abstract	
During the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China, the opium poppy in Liangshan was introduced from the Han-Yi contiguous area into the remote Yi area, causing the original complex economic ecosystem to show an increasingly obvious "opiumization", which in turn led to increasing "local militarization". Initially, it was the opium-gun trade that exacerbated the militarization of Nuosu clans, and conflicts within or between ethnic groups, such as population depredation and armed fights, continued to occur. The forceful “Rule the Yi” policy adopted by local military and political elites further deteriorated the situation, shrouding Liangshan in the shadow of militarization for a long time. Especially after the KMT's central forces infiltrated Liangshan in the late 1930s, the power struggle between the central and local governments led to the increasing strengthening of the opium prohibition. The opium prohibition, "Yi affairs", "border affairs" and political struggles at all levels were intertwined, triggering the intensive and diverse "Opium War", bringing heavy disasters to the people of all ethnic groups. This was an ecological system of opiumization with opium cultivation as its core and opium smoking, opium trade, opium finance, opium prohibition, and opium military as its mainstay, which ultimately plunged the entire ecosystem of Liangshan, including humans and nature, into an untenable predicament.	
Keywords	Langshan; opium cultivation; local militarization; prohibition on opium; “Opium War”