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Division of Pacific and Asian History  
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies  
Australian National University  
Canberra ACT 0200, Australia  
Phone +61 2 6125 3140 Fax +61 2 6125 5525  
Email marion.weeks@anu.edu.au

Subscription Enquiries to Subscriptions, *East Asian History*, at the above address, or to  
marion.weeks@anu.edu.au

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Cover calligraphy Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿, Tang calligrapher and statesman

Cover illustration Members of the Korean History Compilation Association having a picnic on a Chosŏn 朝鮮 royal tomb (Archives National Institute of Korean History)

Errata In the previous issue of *East Asian History* (No.28), the article 'Index of Mongol and Chinese Proper and Geographical Names in the *Sheng-wu Ch'in-Cheng lu* 聖武親征錄' by Paul Pelliot and Louis Hambis, edited by Igor de Rachewiltz, was inadvertently left off the Contents page. The article commenced on p.45.

## IN SEARCH OF SMOKERS: A STUDY OF CANTON OPIUM SMOKERS IN THE 1930s

 *Xavier Paulès*

After English opium imports had successfully made their way into the Chinese market in the early nineteenth century, the second half of the century witnessed the spread of opium consumption throughout the whole of Chinese society. In the late-Qing period opium was a diplomatic and international issue, especially since the government was trying to stop the trade in opium from India by entering into negotiations with England. At the same time opium was also an important issue in domestic affairs as a part of the New Policy inaugurated in 1901.<sup>1</sup> In 1906 the Chinese government adopted a plan for the gradual prohibition of the production, transportation and smoking of opium. This suppression plan had the potential to benefit from the new anti-opium commitment on the part of the British, laid out in the 1907 Sino-English agreement, by which Britain undertook gradually to diminish its exports of opium from India. The outcomes of this 1906 plan proved impressive, and opium smoking was in real decline by 1911. But the fall of the dynasty triggered the end of centralised power in around 1916, which in turn allowed opium production and consumption to make a strong comeback. During the early Republican period opium became very important, not as a diplomatic issue or as part of a global project of reform and modernisation, but as a crucial factor in the political crumbling of China. From the mid-1910s, the taxes derived from opium became a keystone in the funding systems of the various Chinese warlords. The control of opium revenues became a *sine qua non* for any power group aiming to reunify the country for its own profit. Consequently, from 1924 on, the Guomindang (KMT 國民黨), which harboured precisely this ambition, undertook the task of depriving its rivals of their opium revenues. At the same time, it strove to make as much profit as possible from opium in order to finance its plans of national reunification.

The way historians nowadays deal with the opium issue during the Republican period is related to its unquestionable importance as a political

I would like to acknowledge the two referees for their useful suggestions, and Christian Henriot for his comments on an early version of this paper. I am grateful also to the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science for its financial support.

<sup>1</sup> The Qing Emperor issued an edict in January 1901 inaugurating this New Policy (*xinzheng* 新政), the chief objective of which was the adoption of certain elements from the West. It included reforms in administration, justice, law, education and the military system. One of its crucial measures was the suppression of the old civil-service examinations system, which had lasted for about 1300 years.

<sup>2</sup> Edward R. Slack, *Opium, State and Society: China's Narco-economy and the Guomindang, 1924–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001); Alan Baumler, "Playing with Fire: The Nationalist Government and Opium in China, 1927–1941," (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1997); Zhou Yongming, *Anti-drug Crusades in Twentieth-century China: Nationalism, History and State Building* (Lanham, Md. Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); Joyce A. Madancy, *The Troublesome Legacy of Commissioner Lin. The Opium Trade and Opium Suppression in Fujian Province, 1820s to 1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003). See also the remarkable collective book, *Opium Regimes, China, Britain and Japan, 1839–1952*, ed. Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Keith MacMahon, "Opium and Sexuality in Late Qing fiction," *Nannü* 2.1 (2000): 129–79; Frank Dikötter, Lars Laamann and Zhou Xun, *Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Zheng Yangwen, *The Social Life of Opium in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> R.K. Newman, "Opium smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration," *Modern Asian Studies* 29 (October 1995): 765–94, p.769; Lin Manhong, "Wan Qing de yapian shui" [The taxation of opium in the late Qing period] *Si yu yan* [Thinking and speaking], 16.5 (1979): 34; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shimian* [Historical evidence about the prohibition movement] (Changsha: Yuelu Shushe, 1997), p.258.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see the *Report of the International Anti-opium Commission* (Shanghai: *North China Daily News*, 1909), pp.67–8. This method produces an estimate of 13.5 million smokers for 1908.

<sup>6</sup> Slack, *Opium, State and Society*, p.42. Su Zhiliang quotes, without any criticism, figures from an NAOA survey of the population of opium smokers; *Zhongguo dupin shi* [History of narcotics in China] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1997), p.333. The survey estimates the proportion of smokers aged between 30 and 50 to be 61.7 percent in 1928; this percentage, according to the same source, unexpectedly drops to only 36 per cent for the following year. Moreover, for 1929, /OVER

concern: they have studied opium in relation to the Guomindang's national unification process, and thus the literature on the role of opium in the making of the modern Chinese state has been growing steadily over the past decade.<sup>2</sup> As a result, scholars have tended to pay attention only to the economic and political side of the opium question. To summarise, the 'supply' side of the question, as opposed to the 'demand' side, has been the focus of historical research.

In the last few years, however, a noticeable interest in the study of opium consumption has emerged among scholars.<sup>3</sup> But no serious study of the population of opium smokers has ever been conducted. This huge gap in the field of historical research could be mistaken for the consequence of a lack of sources. But this point deserves attention, for a lack of sources is not in fact the hindrance to the study of opium smokers. Rather paradoxically, the few scholars who have briefly addressed the issue of smokers have done so at country level, thus encountering the difficulty of having to rely on sources which are neither sufficiently numerous nor sufficiently reliable. Their main concern has generally been to estimate the total number of smokers in China: they calculate the yearly amount of opium available on the Chinese market and divide it by the annual consumption of a so-called average smoker,<sup>4</sup> a method similar to that used at the time.<sup>5</sup> Such a calculation is very problematic, however, as it is certainly very difficult to estimate these two values.

Still on a national scale, some scholars have tried using the estimates provided by the National Anti-Opium Association (or NAOA, *Zhonghua guomin judu hui* 中華民國拒毒會) to give not only the scope but also a more qualitative description of the population of smokers (constituted in terms of age, gender and occupation). The NAOA was a non-official association set up in August 1924. Figures pertaining to opium smokers are available in its various publications. Nevertheless, these figures require a critical analysis that the scholars concerned have failed to undertake.<sup>6</sup> There are several reasons why these figures may not be considered trustworthy. First of all, they are full of miscalculations.<sup>7</sup> When it is possible to trace the origins of the data, it turns out that they were only an aggregated result of scattered local estimates sent by correspondents of the association, and that their representativeness was not taken into account.<sup>8</sup> In the absence of reliable official data, these estimates were purely intuitive. Moreover, despite its claimed national scope, the NAOA's stronghold was clearly Shanghai and the Lower Yangtze region. The scarcity of information about Guangdong published in the periodical *Anti-narcotics monthly* (*Judu yuekan* 拒毒月刊) between 1926 and 1935 clearly indicates that the NAOA lacked active correspondents there.<sup>9</sup> More generally, the aim of the NAOA was not to study the characteristics of opium consumption but to fight for its eradication. The NAOA consequently devoted most of its limited resources<sup>10</sup> to propaganda and lobbying activities. Giving an accurate estimate of the population of Chinese opium smokers and describing its characteristics was simply beyond its reach.

The reason why some historians have based their work on these NAOA figures despite their very questionable reliability is simple: they were the only available accounts, on a national scale, of the number and characteristics of Chinese opium smokers.<sup>11</sup> No official statistics from an administration relying on coercive power are available, with the exception of a couple of pieces of data about crimes in relation to opium.<sup>12</sup> Even the general census of opium smokers launched during the Six Years suppression plan (1934–40) by the Guomindang hardly generated any information other than the recorded total of opium smokers with their distribution in the different provinces.<sup>13</sup>

Consequently, for the Republican era, no reliable national figures addressed such important and basic questions as the number, sex ratio, age structure or occupation of people belonging to the ‘social group’ of opium smokers. However, these questions should clearly not be abandoned. The obvious conclusion is that focusing on the national scale is inappropriate, and that this problem should be processed at the more modest but relevant scale of important cities like Canton.

The question of opium in the city of Canton has already been under the focus of scholarly research. One chapter of Virgil Ho’s recent book on Canton deals with the question of opium smoking there during the Republican period. Ho’s stimulating work successfully challenges several myths relating to opium, especially the devastating effect it was supposed to have on people’s health and prosperity; however, Ho provides no detailed description of the population of smokers in the city.<sup>14</sup>

The aim of this article is to go further. It will demonstrate that a description of opium smokers in terms of age, gender, occupation and importance regarding the total population is possible for this city during the 1930s, as relevant sources are available. First, like all major Chinese cities in the 1930s, Canton had many daily newspapers. Among them, the Yuehua News (*Yuehuabao* 越華報), founded in 1927, devoted a lot of attention to news items related to opium. Many issues of the paper over the years 1930–38 can still be usefully referred to. Another advantage, more specific to Canton, is that the Hong Kong Chinese-language daily press is also available. The Hong Kong press enjoyed a certain freedom of speech when criticising the Cantonese authorities, and some of these Hong Kong newspapers ran inquiries into the opium smoking situation in Canton.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the Committee of the City of Canton for Opium Suppression (*Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui* 禁煙

/miscalculated.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see *Zhongguo yanbuo nianjian* [China yearbook of the opium plague] (Shanghai, 1931), pp.34–8: the figures presented as relevant for the whole country were collected in patchy areas corresponding to a population of only 12 million people.

<sup>9</sup> From mid-1935 onwards, the improvement in both the quantity and quality of information pertaining to Canton was spectacular, especially as it contrasted starkly with the simultaneous decline of the periodical. See, among others, *Judu yuekan*, June 1935, pp.2–9; August 1935, pp.2–7 and 19–26; September 1935, pp.12–15; October 1935, pp.20–2; December 1935, pp.1–4 and 20–2; February 1936, pp.19–21; March 1936, pp.36–8; July 1936, pp.21–2.

<sup>10</sup> After 1931, the NAOA was deprived by the Guomindang of most of its financial means because of its strong opposition to any attempt at legalising the opium trade. See Edward Slack, ‘The National Anti-opium Association and the Guomindang State, 1924–1937,’ in *Opium Regimes*, ed. Brook and Wakabayashi, p.263.

<sup>11</sup> Zhu Qingbao, Jiang Qiuming and Zhang Shijie, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo* [Opium and modern China] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1995), p.197. The authors wisely conclude that no reliable data exist for the total number of opium smokers in the Republic.

<sup>12</sup> Guomin zhengfu zhujichu tongjiju, *Zhonghua minguo tongji tiyao* [Statistical abstract of the Republic of China] (Nanjing, 1935), pp.164–71.

<sup>13</sup> They were counted at 4.1 million in 1936–37: see No.2 National Archives (Nanjing), file 41/78: *Ersbilu niandu jinyan nianbao* [Annual report on the prohibition of opium for the year 1937], p.53.

<sup>14</sup> Virgil Ho, *Understanding Canton: Rethinking Popular Culture in the Republican Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.104–55.

<sup>15</sup> Two newspapers are especially remarkable for the abundance of the information they gave about the opium situation in Canton in the mid-1930s: *Xianggang gongshang ribao* [Hong Kong commerce and industry daily] and *Xunhuan ribao* [Circulation daily].

/the percentages of smokers aged under 30 and over 50 are supposed to be 26.5 and 30 per cent respectively. As we can see, adding up the three age group percentages for 1929 (36 + 26.5 + 30) makes a total of 92.5 rather than 100 per cent.

<sup>7</sup> See note 5. In the March 1931 issue (No.

/47) of the periodical *Judu yuekan*, on page 38, is a table of the breakdown of the population of Chinese opium smokers in 19 different provinces according to five categories: army (*jun* 軍), administration (*zheng* 政), commerce (*shang* 商), education (*xue* 學) and labour (*laodong* 勞動). The average figures for all 19 provinces are

<sup>16</sup> Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui, *Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui gongzuo jiyao* [Summary of the activities of the committee of the city of Canton for opium suppression] (Canton, 1937) (hereafter *GJWGJ*), p.87.

<sup>17</sup> *Guangzhoushi jieyan yiyuan nianbao* [Annual report of the Canton anti-opium clinic] (Canton, 1937) (hereafter *GJYN*) and *Guangdong jinyanliuyisuo chengli yi zhou nian jinian tekan* [Special edition to commemorate the first anniversary of the foundation of the Guangdong Anti-opium Clinic] (Canton, April 1942). Despite its name, the Guangdong Anti-opium Clinic admitted only Canton residents.

委員會) was formed on 28 September 1936 by the Guomindang authorities shortly after they had regained control of Guangdong province. This committee proved very active. It conducted a census of the smoking population in Canton in 1936–37<sup>16</sup> and also founded a clinic to cure addicted smokers. This clinic opened in March 1937 and continued until the period of Japanese occupation (October 1938). Another detoxification clinic was organised by the Cantonese collaborationist government in January 1941. Both clinics published detailed activity reports<sup>17</sup> which provide many details about their patients, sometimes even on an individual basis. Each clinic cured at least a thousand people over the periods covered in the reports.

These sources constitute the bulk of data on which this work is based. Their reliability, taken one by one, is of course questionable. But it is possible to make comparisons between them, and they can also be complemented with a variety of other source materials including foreign diplomatic and Chinese administrative reports, anti-opium periodicals and academic surveys. Moreover, using the abundant administrative source materials pertaining to 1936–37 Canton opium politics, it is possible to put the census results and the data collected in the opium-curing clinics into context and thereby form an opinion about their representativeness. Using this range of sources, this study will characterise the smokers of an important Chinese city for the first time.

The most distinctive feature of the smoking population in Canton was its concentration in specific strata of the population. One may even go as far as to say that a ‘typical’ opium smoker existed: he was a middle-aged male (between 25 and 45) belonging to the working class. Rickshaw pullers stand as a kind of epitome of the smoker we shall briefly deal with their specific case to give an account of the material conditions of drug consumption.

Later in this article, we shall also compare the situation in the 1930s with that of the late-nineteenth century (a relatively well-documented period thanks to the data collected in Canton by the Royal Commission on Opium in 1894) on three key issues: the proportion of smokers in the total population, their age and their occupations. The comparison suggests that deep changes regarding these aspects occurred in the ranks of Canton opium smokers.

The article does not explore the image of opium smokers in public opinion or the meanings of the act of smoking for the smokers themselves. Although these questions are also significant for characterising Republican Canton opium smokers, they are outside the scope of this paper.

### *The Questionable Existence of ‘the Opium Smoker’*

#### *What is an Opium Smoker?*

Behind the self-evidence of the expression ‘opium smokers’ lurks the essential problem of its precise definition. This definition has very important



consequences for our study. The sources, in striving to estimate the number of smokers, never took into account the question of the minimum consumption that one must reach to be considered a smoker rather than an occasional user (a 'layman'). Nevertheless, according to the 1937 clinic records, one can observe that the major proportion of the smokers had a rather small daily consumption (for the majority, less than 3.8 grams a day).<sup>18</sup> The question of the continuum with the non-smoking population should be taken into account: how should we classify the person who only smoked a pipe from time to time when he went out with friends dedicated to the drug? This is by no means a rhetorical question. In the few sources where their viewpoint was made clear, opium smokers expressed the belief that a line could be drawn separating non-addicted from addicted people.<sup>19</sup> A certain number (7 to 10 per cent) of the patients who entered the detoxification clinic in 1937 did not admit that they were sick, and refused treatment accordingly. They probably believed that, as they were not addicted to the drug, their moderate smoking of opium would not harm their health.<sup>20</sup> This point demonstrates that in these people's minds, a clear line could be drawn between true addicts and 'rank-and-file' smokers.

In English, the terms 'opium smoker' and 'opium addict' clearly express a difference in category. The words used in the Canton press and publications of the time, which all considered opium as a scourge, were much more ambiguous. The most common terms were: *yangui* 煙鬼, *daoyou* 道友, *furongxianzi* 芙蓉仙子, *yinjunzi* 癮君子, *zhuangsbi* 壯士, *xian* 仙, *beijizhongren* 黑籍中人 and *chenlunbeiji* 沉淪黑籍. It is worth noting that this list contains no word with the meaning of 'occasional smoker.' An article in the daily *Yuehuabao* of 21 November 1931 is interesting in this regard. Within the context of the prohibition on employing attractive women to serve in the opium dens, it described the fall in attendance among a category of clients whose main reason in going there was to flirt with these women. As the writer had to name this category of persons, in the absence of an *ad hoc* word, he coined a neologism, calling them "non-official smokers" (*feizhengshi daoyou* 非正式道友). More generally speaking, the *Yuehuabao* news items, when referring to a smoker's level of addiction, always described it as "very heavy." Many of the terms qualifying smokers in the press used a metaphor which compared them with divine creatures, and journalists often ironically opposed the "sacred" (*xian* 仙) world of opium smokers to the "profane" (*fan* 凡) sphere of ordinary people.<sup>21</sup>

It can be concluded from these remarks that smokers were considered equal by all sources, however tiny or erratic their consumption might be. This functioned to stigmatise them as if they were all deeply addicted to the drug, and consequently to oppose them to the rest of the population. This vision of smokers as a monolithic group clearly separated from 'normal people' was very representative of the attitudes of official and anti-opium élites during this period.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *GJYN*, statistics, p.8.

<sup>19</sup> *Xianggang gongshang ribao*, 20 June 1935; *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* [Pearl River weekly pictorial] 20: 19.

<sup>20</sup> *GJYN*, statistics, p.5, pp.7–10.

<sup>21</sup> Many examples can be quoted from the Canton press: see, for example, *Yuehuabao*, 5 August 1931, 21 December 1931, 2 February 1932, 4 February 1932.

<sup>22</sup> The anti-opium propaganda attempted, by any possible means, to draw a clear line between opium smokers and 'normal' people: propaganda exaggerated the physical marks of the addicted man (especially skinniness, which was cunningly associated to poverty) to contrast with the healthy (and wealthy) plump non-smokers. The implicit meaning was that there was no intermediate type, no such thing as a 'reasonable' opium smoker (that is to say, an occasional and non-addicted smoker). See Xavier Paulès, "L'opium à Canton, 1912–1937. Essais de mainmise politique et pratiques sociales" [Opium in Canton, 1912–1937. Attempts of political control and social practices] (PhD diss., Lyon 2-Lumière University, 2005), pp.364–408.

As we are relying mainly on official data, we will have to adopt this extensive definition of the opium smoker. However, we shall use the term 'opium addict' only in its strictest meaning, that is to say a person clearly identified as dependent on the drug.

*What Was the Proportion of Smokers in the Whole Population?*

<sup>23</sup> *Xiangganggongshangribao*, 10 December 1936.

<sup>24</sup> *Xunhuan ribao*, 29 December 1936.

<sup>25</sup> *GJYN*, p.2.

<sup>26</sup> *Judu yuekan*, 113 (June 1937): 16.

<sup>27</sup> *GJWGJ*, p.16.

<sup>28</sup> For example, in the district of Huadi only one smoker was registered. This suburb had a total population of more than 15,000 inhabitants. *GJWGJ*, Appendix, p.3.

<sup>29</sup> *GJWGJ*, p.18.

<sup>30</sup> Ho, *Understanding Canton*, pp.125–6.

Estimating the number of smokers in the Cantonese population is by no means an easy task. Very few people of the time tried to evaluate it. In December 1936, the *Hong Kong Commerce and Industry Daily* (*Xianggang gongshang ribao* 香港工商日報),<sup>23</sup> quoting an anonymous member of the Office of the City of Canton for the Management of Opium Dens (*Guangzhoushi shouxisuo guanli chu* 廣州市售吸所管理處), gave a figure of 80,000, while the *Circulation Daily* (*Xunhuan ribao* 循環日報),<sup>24</sup> most probably relying on the same source, estimated it as being between 70,000 and 80,000. In June the following year, the head of the opium clinic gave an estimate of 40,000.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the anti-opium periodical *Judu yuekan* considered 30,000 to be a credible estimate.<sup>26</sup>

These estimates remain very intuitive. The 1936–37 census gives a rather different picture. This systematic compulsory registration of opium smokers was taken with the assistance of the Canton police forces, and it constitutes an essential source in estimating the number of opium smokers, despite its disputable reliability. In May 1937, after a series of postponed deadlines and a campaign of control and forced registrations, a total of 21,721 smokers was finally listed.<sup>27</sup> This figure should nevertheless be considered below the reality, not only because it is much lower than all the above estimates, but also because the figures of the census were outrageously low in some outlying districts of Canton, such as Dongshan or Huadi.<sup>28</sup> This problem may be due to a lack of zeal on the part of the local authorities concerned. But registration problems were not specific to relatively remote districts. Everywhere there were smokers who did not register for the official supply because they expected to be able to find a lower price on the black market. In the first half of 1937, some of these smokers were caught and forced to register (their number amounted to 997 from March to June 1937).<sup>29</sup> In spite of this, it is very likely that many more unregistered smokers were lucky enough to avoid controls and thus remain outside the census.

Another factor deserves attention here. As Virgil Ho rightly points out, opium smokers were much more rational than they were portrayed in anti-opium literature: they could decide to abstain from their indulgence in the drug if circumstances required it.<sup>30</sup> A worried smoking-house manager, interviewed in November 1936, felt that many occasional smokers would not bother to register and would be very likely to give up their habit because of

the stricter new rules for opium consumption.<sup>31</sup> This is an important point. As we have seen, the two estimates of 70–80,000 all dated back to the end of 1936, when the census of opium smokers was just beginning. The estimates of around 40,000 were made half a year later, after the completion of the census: this may indicate that an important proportion of occasional smokers had actually given up opium for the reasons mentioned. So if we consider the situation in mid-1937, it is more likely that the number of smokers might be close to 30–40,000 because a significant number of moderate and occasional smokers simply gave up the habit during the preceding six months.

The figure of 21,721 smokers amounts to only 1.83 per cent of the total population of Canton (in the mid-1930s, Canton had 1.189 million inhabitants), truly a very unimpressive percentage. If we decide that 40,000 is a more realistic figure for regular smokers, the percentage would account for 3.4 per cent of the total population of Canton. Although not negligible, this proportion nevertheless only amounts to a modest part of the population.

The proportion of smokers in the Cantonese population was probably greater in the late-Qing period. In 1894, the Royal Commission on Opium collected testimonies of Cantonese observers from different backgrounds (an English diplomat, foreign missionaries and doctors, Chinese officials, and Chinese smokers of different social origins). Even if (unsurprisingly) they offered varying estimates of how many Cantonese had the opium habit, most of them nevertheless considered that about 60 per cent of male adults were smokers.<sup>32</sup> This would be about 15 per cent of the total population, not taking into account female smokers. The comparison with 1937 figures suggests a general trend of decline.

## *Who Were the Smokers?*

### *Age Groups*

In addressing the age profile of the opium-smoking population, two important sources are at our disposal: the age of each of the 171 smokers cured in December 1941 in the detoxification clinic founded the same year, and the distribution of 1,128 patients of the 1937 clinic into age groups. These figures clearly show that the vast majority of the population of the two clinics was made up of adults between 25 and 45 years of age: this category amounted to 73.4 per cent for the 1937 clinic and 80.7 per cent for the 1941 clinic. (Figures 1 and 2, see overleaf) compare the breakdown of the population of the clinics and that of the male population of Canton (1928 census) according to age groups.<sup>33</sup> They show an impressive degree of concentration of smokers among the 25–45 age bracket. It is worth noting that young adults (15–25) were notably few. Neither did elderly people appear in significant numbers.

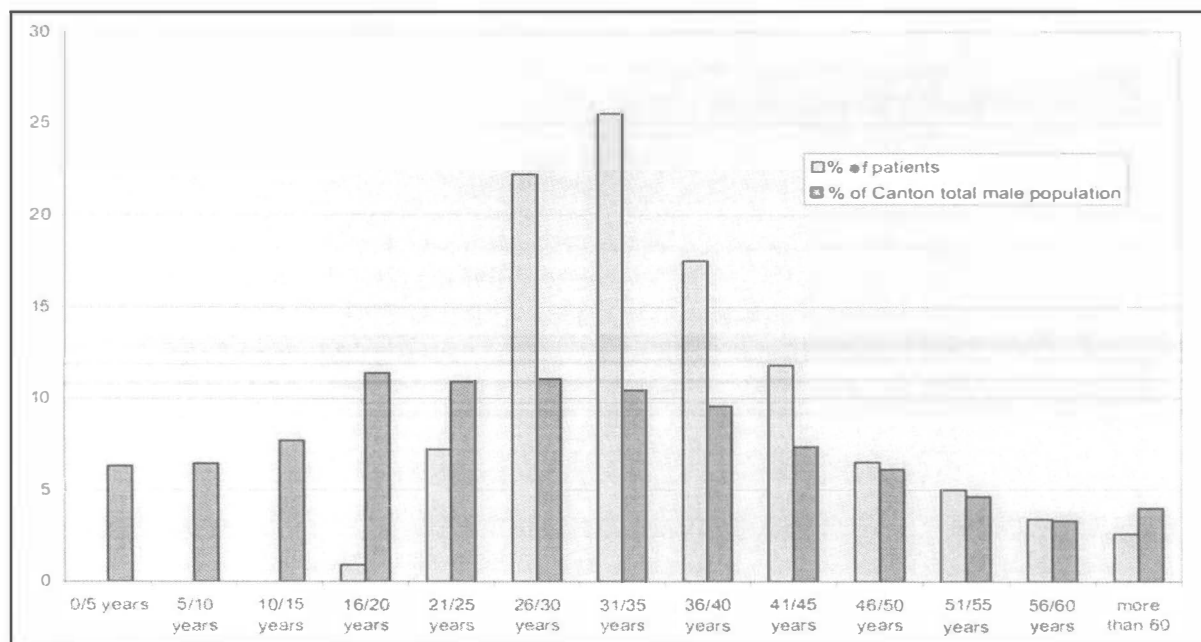
<sup>31</sup> *Yuehuabao*, 20 November 1936.

<sup>32</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Opium* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1894), vol.5, pp.216–28. According to the *Report of the International Anti-opium Commission* (Shanghai: North China Daily News, 1909), vol.2, p.63, the proportion of smokers among adult males prior to the 1906 anti-opium campaign was one-third.

<sup>33</sup> The comparison with the male population of Canton (as opposed to the total population) is justified, as the male patients represent an overwhelming majority in the clinics (99 per cent and 97.1 per cent, see below).

**Figure 1**

Comparison of the breakdown of the population of the 1937 clinic and that of the male population of Canton (1928 census) according to age group. Sources: Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui, Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui gongzuo jiyao (Canton, 1937) and Guang zhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian (Canton, 1929)



<sup>34</sup> *Guangdong jinyanliuyisuo chengli yi zhou nian jinan tekan*, pp.27–40.

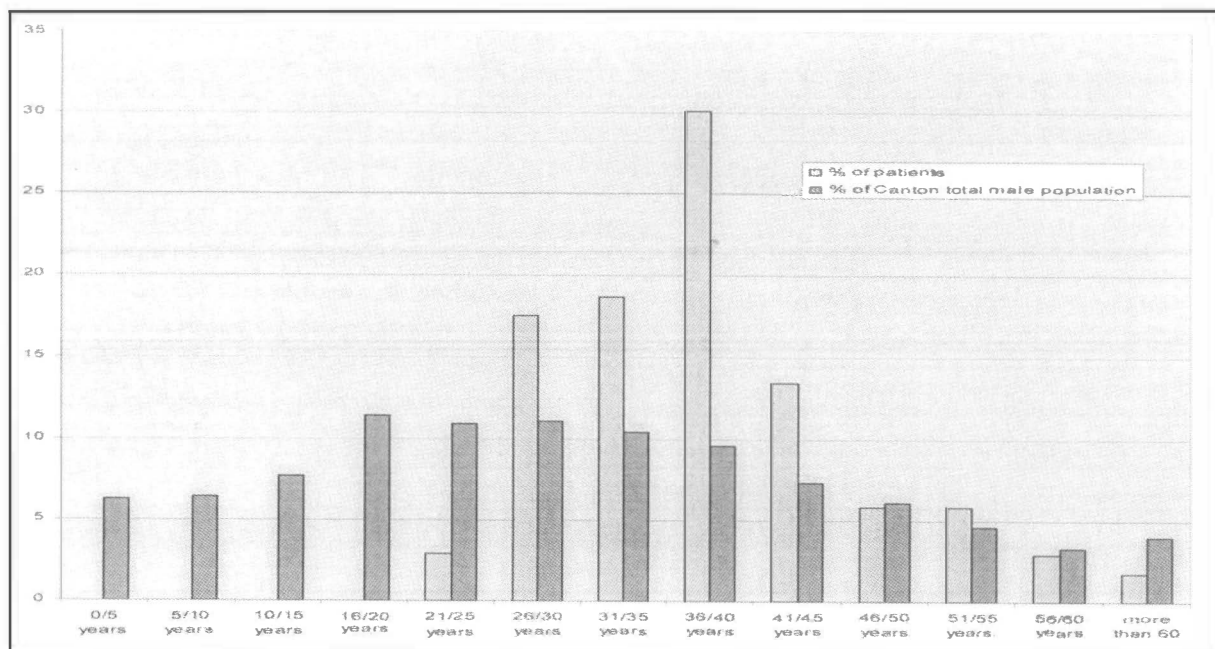
<sup>35</sup> *GJWG*, statistics, pp.5–6. Unfortunately, it is impossible to obtain the figures for the same age group, 25–45, because the census had a category “under 30 years.”

There is no reason to believe that young adults were particularly reluctant to enter the clinics. In December 1941, 18.1 per cent of the patients who entered the clinic were forced to do so by the Anti-opium Bureau (most probably after being caught smoking illegally). If one considers the patients aged over 50 who entered the clinic during the same period, 27.7 per cent were forced to go there by the Anti-opium Bureau. By contrast, this was the case for only 5.2 per cent of the people aged under 30.<sup>34</sup> This seems to indicate that reluctance to enter public treatment could explain a certain under-representation of older smokers (over 50), but certainly not of young adults.

Apart from data from the clinics, there is other evidence of the predominance of middle-aged adults among the smokers. The 1936–37 census included data about the age of smokers: smokers aged 30–45 accounted for 63.3 per cent.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, if we consider the 111 persons arrested by the police between 1930 and 1936 in connection with illicit opium consumption whose age appeared in the *Yuehuabao*, 64.9 per cent of them were between 25 and 45 years old.

**Figure 2**

Comparison of the breakdown of the population of the 1941 clinic and that of the male population of Canton (1928 census) according to age group. Sources: Guangdong jinyanliuyisuo chengli yi zhou nian jinian tekan (1942) and Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian (1929)



It is also worth mentioning that even if they were unable to provide detailed figures, certain qualified persons interviewed by the Commission of Enquiry into the Control of Opium-Smoking in the Far East in 1929–30 mentioned the same lack of interest on the part of the younger generation in opium in two other important harbours of the Pearl River Delta: Hong Kong and Macao.<sup>36</sup>

This set of evidence reasonably allows us to challenge conventional discourses asserting that an important and ever-increasing number of young Cantonese were addicted to the drug.<sup>37</sup> Such statements must be considered an expression of a dramatising stance on the part of anti-opium activists rather than a reliable description of social reality.

The possible reasons for the lack of interest among young people certainly have to do with the success of anti-opium propaganda. The development of primary education may be an important factor, as anti-opium publicity was intense in schools.<sup>38</sup> Most of the people aged 15–25 in the 1930s had probably been told some years before, at school, how nefarious the opium habit was

<sup>36</sup> League of Nations archives (Geneva), files S 196 and S 197: interview of William Edward Leonard Shenton, 28 January 1930; interview of Dr Jose Gaetano Soares, 23 January 1930.

<sup>37</sup> *Xiangganggongshang ribao*, 20 June 1935, *Yuebuabao*, 15 January 1932, 4 February 1932, 27 July 1934.

<sup>38</sup> *Canton Gazette*, 23 January 1929.

<sup>39</sup> League of Nations archives (Geneva), file S 196 displays extracts of Chinese school textbooks that underline the bad influence of opium.

<sup>40</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Opium*, vol.5, pp.216–28. It is also worth observing that the average age of the patients at a missionary clinic for opium addicts, operating in 1881 in Canton, was only 35.3 years. The average age was no less than 38.6 years for the 1941 clinic. See Imperial Maritime Customs, Special Series No.4, *Opium* (Shanghai, 1881); *Guangdong jinyanliu yisuo chengli yi zhou nian jinian tekan*, pp.27–40.

<sup>41</sup> Data about the age of the people arrested in connection with opium violations in the cities of Shanghai, Beijing, Qingdao and Nanjing in 1931 indicate the same predominance of middle-aged adults among the smokers. *Jinyan weiyuanbui*, *Jinyan weiyuanbui gongbao*, vol.7 (July 1931), vol.9 (September 1931), vol.11 (November 1931), vol.12 (December 1931). Inmates aged 25–45 amounted to 76.6 per cent in a detoxification clinic opened in Shanghai in the early 1930s. See Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, p.333.

<sup>42</sup> Ezra Vogel, *Canton under Communism. Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp.31, 65–7, 88; Wang Hongbin, *Jindu shinian*, pp.478–90; Su Zhiliang, *Zhongguo dupin shi*, pp.466–71.

<sup>43</sup> This presentation of the reasons that impel people to start smoking is a rather simplified one. For a more substantial analysis, see Zhu, Jiang and Zhang, *Yapian yu jindai Zhongguo*, pp.159–63 and pp.173–83, or Newman, “Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration,” pp.776–8.

<sup>44</sup> League of Nations archives (Geneva), file S 196, Commission of Enquiry into the Control of Opium-Smoking in the Far East, interview, 20 January 1930.

<sup>45</sup> *Yuebuabao*, 18 July 1930.

and that the drug played a key role in the weakening of China.<sup>39</sup> Patriotic and moral considerations aside, the propaganda (especially anti-opium posters) also cunningly promoted the idea that it was no longer fashionable to smoke. Opium consumption was now associated with poverty and low social status (see below), and was therefore less likely to attract young people.

By contrast, in the late-Qing period it seems that the population of smokers in Canton was not characterised by the predominance of any one age group; at least, witnesses of that period never mention that young adults were noticeably rare among smokers.<sup>40</sup>

This question alone deserves more study and detailed investigation, but despite the current lack of research there are some indications that the age distribution of smokers in 1930s' Canton was representative of other major Chinese cities.<sup>41</sup> And this youthful disaffection probably had a certain influence on the successful eradication of opium smoking by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP 共厘党) fifteen years later (1950–52). This point deserves attention; it would be worth taking more account of the social factors of the preceding decades in order to gain a better and more complete understanding of the astonishing success of this early 1950s' campaign. Classical analyses of this eradication movement are based only on political factors: unification of the national territory, suppression of foreign concessions, determined action by the CCP and, last but not least, the effective support of the masses.<sup>42</sup>

### *How to Become a Smoker*

Unfortunately, reliable figures concerning one important issue are unavailable: the age at which people started smoking. But the study of the 1930s Canton smokers can shed light on another interesting question: the reason why someone started to smoke. The smokers' contemporaries, as well as modern-day historians, proposed two possible options:<sup>43</sup> for diversion or for medical reasons. To reiterate this point: was the case of the Hong Kong coolie who started smoking opium to relieve chest pain (a prophylactic use)<sup>44</sup> more common than the case of the Cantonese merchant whose bad-tempered middle-aged wife refused him a concubine, and who started smoking opium to forget the frustrations of his daily life (diversion)?<sup>45</sup>

It is easy to figure out why Cantonese people might have started to smoke for enjoyment, but the use of opium as a medicine deserves some comment. Because opium contains analgesic substances like morphine, its consumption provided a feeling of pain relief. Opium was also an efficient cure for physical ills like diarrhoea. This constitutes an important argument for scholars aiming to add nuance to our understanding of the damages of opium, as they explain that most of the time the physical exhaustion and frightening skinniness of some smokers was due to a serious illness. Smok-

ing opium was only a way to cure or at least alleviate the suffering resulting from their ailments.<sup>46</sup>

In a couple of recent articles, Zhou Xun has pointed out the importance of therapeutic consumption in the late-Qing,<sup>47</sup> and Lars P. Laamann has compiled a long list of illnesses, including bubonic plague and malaria, that people of the time thought opium could cure.<sup>48</sup> In Republican Canton, during the serious 1932 outbreak of cholera, many people suddenly fell ill in the dens, where they sometimes died.<sup>49</sup> Most probably these people, who were used to dealing with small discomforts by entering a den to smoke a couple of pipes, did the same when confronted with the first symptoms of cholera.

Asked whether the reason they started smoking opium was amusement or illness, the 1937 clinic inmates mentioned illness in only 26 per cent of cases.<sup>50</sup> Since the validity of this figure is based entirely on inmates' accounts, it is important to consider whether they had any interest in making a false statement.

In many *Yuehuabao* news items, when the police caught an illicit smoker in the act, the latter very often requested police indulgence, claiming that an ailment was the cause for his opium consumption.<sup>51</sup> In spring 1937, the new anti-opium authorities of Canton decided that any smoker entering a den should fill out a form. He had to write his name, age, personal address and the reason why he smoked. As a result, all mentioned 'illness' as their reason for smoking opium.<sup>52</sup> I think these two observations demonstrate rather clearly that opium consumption related to illness was considered more 'legitimate' than that for the purpose of personal amusement or diversion.<sup>53</sup> Logically, this should incline clinic inmates to pretend that they started to smoke for medical reasons, even if that was not the case. In spite of this, however no less than 74 per cent of the 1937 clinic patients acknowledged that the reason was enjoyment. One may consider, therefore, that in 1930s' Canton the common route into opium consumption was very likely not its use for therapeutic purposes.

Smokers mostly began to smoke for enjoyment. They were induced to do so by friends in a leisure context.<sup>54</sup> Many *Yuehuabao* articles, describing a frightening den and the unsavoury behaviour of its customers, nevertheless have a small introduction in which the author justifies his visit to the den: he was not a smoker himself, but courtesy forced him to follow an addicted friend who was craving for opium.<sup>55</sup> This little piece, of sometimes doubtful sincerity, nevertheless demonstrates how one could become involved in opium consumption in the context of a friendly relationship. This sort of initiation of beginners by friends took place not only in the dens, but in a wider array of leisure spaces. The importance of opium consumption in the restaurants, gambling dens and, above all, brothels of 1930s' Canton is also an established fact.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>46</sup> R.K. Newman, "Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China," p.776.

<sup>47</sup> Zhou Xun, "Pain and Pleasure: Opium as Medicine in Late Imperial China," *Twentieth-Century China* 28.1 (November 2002): 29.

<sup>48</sup> Lars P. Laamann, "A History of Narcotic Consumption in Modern China," *Twentieth-Century China* 28.1 (November 2002): 3 and 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Yuehuabao*, 17 June 1932, 20 June 1932. According to a French diplomatic report, this outbreak of cholera caused the deaths of more than 2,000 people. See French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter MAE), Nantes, Pékin, Série A, File 191 bis, Report of the French Consul, dated 29 June 1932.

<sup>50</sup> *GJYN* statistics, p.5. The most frequently cited illnesses were stomach ache, cough and venereal diseases.

<sup>51</sup> *Yuehuabao*, 5 June 1931, 26 October 1931, 4 December 1931, 31 December 1931, and 9 March 1934.

<sup>52</sup> *Judu yuekan*, March 1937, pp.21–2.

<sup>53</sup> Asked in 1899 about the reason why the smokers he had cured had begun to smoke, an English doctor in Swatow declared that to smoke because of some ailment was less generally condemned by public opinion than smoking for recreational use. See William Hector Park, *Opinion of Over 100 Physicians on the Use of Opium in China* (Shanghai: American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1899), p.53.

<sup>54</sup> *Zhujiang xingqi huabao* [Pearl River illustrated weekly], 20 (c. 1928) 19; *Xianggang gongshang ribao*, 20 June 1935.

<sup>55</sup> Articles of this kind can be found in *Yuehuabao*, 7 January 1932, 2 February 1932, 11 February 1932.

<sup>56</sup> *Judu yuekan* 91 (August 1935): 19–21; Cun Shi (pseudonym), "Yanhua xueleihua Chentang" [Talks and tears of blood of the opium-den waitresses (煙花) of Chentang district], *Guangdong fengqing lu* [A compilation of romantic Guangdong] (Hong Kong: Zhongyuan Chubanshe, 1987), pp.268–70. It is also worth noting that during the 1930–36 period, a kind of daily temporary licence existed for the consumption of opium in hostels, hotels, restaurants and bordellos: *Guangzhou zazhi* [Guangzhou miscellany] 23 (15 December 1933): 7.

## *Gender*

<sup>57</sup> MacMahon, "Opium and Sexuality in Late Qing fiction," pp.131–5.

<sup>58</sup> *Yuehuabao*, 10 May 1930, 18 October 1930, 5 June 1931, 11 June 1931.

<sup>59</sup> *Yuehuabao*, 6 March 1932.

<sup>60</sup> These two examples are from *Yuehuabao*, 10 May 1930 and 5 June 1931 respectively. Many other examples can be found in the same newspaper, see 18 October 1930, 22 October 1930, 27 April 1933, 10 July 1933, 28 September 1933, 1 February 1934, and 22 September 1935.

<sup>61</sup> *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1935 on the Traffic in Prepared Opium* (Hong Kong: Noronha, 1934); *Report of the Government of Hong Kong for the Calendar Year 1934 on the Traffic in Prepared Opium* (Hong Kong: Noronha, 1935). According to a 1929 report by the French Consul in Hong Kong, 1 or 2 per cent of the women in the colony smoked opium: MAE, League of Nations/Common Affairs Series, file 1642, report by the French Consul in Hong Kong on the question of opium in Hong Kong, 12 December 1929.

<sup>62</sup> Paulès, "L'opium à Canton," p.350.

When considering the proportion of women in the population of Canton opium smokers, we must keep in mind the specific public disapproval for the consumption of opium by women. An article by Keith MacMahon, analysing a corpus of writings of the late-Qing era, demonstrates how opium-smoking women were described as "phallicised," thereby disrupting the traditional social order.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, female smokers were much more stigmatised than their male counterparts. Some articles in the daily periodical *Yuehuabao* indicate that the situation was much the same in the 1930s: they describe women arrested for illegally smoking opium who clearly manifested their shame on the way to the police bureau by hiding their faces under a piece of cloth.<sup>58</sup> It is very uncommon to find mentions of men behaving likewise in the same situation, with the exception of teachers.<sup>59</sup> The systematic collating of news items in relation to opium in the *Yuehuabao* from 1930 to 1936 also shows that women-related stories seemed to attract greater interest and were consequently more likely to be reported. When the police caught illegal women smokers, the very titles of the articles would always mention that women were involved in the affair, as the following examples demonstrate: "Opium-smoking girl caught in hotel" (*juqu lüzhong zhi nüdao you* 拘去旅中之女道友), and "Girl loses face when caught smoking opium" (*junü xiyan beiju zhi langbei* 婦女吸煙被拘之狼狽).<sup>60</sup>

Consequently, one should be very cautious about the percentages of female patients cured in the two clinics, as women were probably very reluctant to accept public treatment. Not surprisingly, only 2.9 per cent of the 1941 clinic patients and 0.97 per cent of the 1937 clinic inmates were women. A comparison with the figures of Hong Kong clinics at the same period is interesting. In the British colony, opium addiction treatment was not compulsory, and in that context women very rarely entered anti-opium hospitals in search of a cure: as an example, the Tung Wah Hospital accommodated no women at all among its 842 smoker patients in the 1934–35 period.<sup>61</sup>

The percentage of women among the patients of the Canton clinics does not seem representative of the true proportion of women among the smokers. In the case of the 1937 clinic, the vast majority of the people who went there were forced to go. But it is worth noticing that they were generally caught without a smoking permit in the place where it was easiest to find them: an opium den. From that perspective, it should be mentioned that after 1932, women were not allowed in opium dens at all.<sup>62</sup> In 1937, they were consequently very unlikely to enter a den to smoke, first because they could simply be refused admittance, and second because their presence there would be too easily noticed by the police. At this time, therefore, whether legally or illegally, women smoked opium at home. The low proportion of women in the 1937 clinic was thus probably due not only to their fear of public treat-



ment, but also to the conditions of arrest of illegal smokers.

The following figures confirm the supposition that the percentages in clinic records are too low to be trustworthy. During the period of January 1928 to June 1929 (at a time when the presence of women in opium dens was not prohibited), 3.5 per cent of those arrested in Canton for offences in connection with clandestine gambling or smoking were women.<sup>63</sup> The figures for people arrested in Canton in connection with opium offences in 1932 show that among 56 persons arrested, five were women (8.9 per cent).<sup>64</sup>

This figure of 8.9 per cent, in spite of the small size of the sample, is remarkably similar to the 1931 national figures for criminals arrested for offences in connection with opium: 2,380 women out of a total of 27,435 (8.7 per cent).<sup>65</sup> Of course, these two figures concern offences like smuggling as well as illegal consumption, but it is likely that cases concerning consumption were predominant.<sup>66</sup>

We have taken due note that the figures provided by the clinics were an underestimate, and this estimation of 8.9 per cent constitutes a much more credible picture of the significance of women in the opium-smoking population of Canton, even if the figure still leaves us walking on thin ice. If one adopts it as plausible, one must also keep in mind that the Cantonese population was counted at 140 men for every 100 women at that time.<sup>67</sup> Thus, women are about seven times less likely to smoke opium than men ( $8.9 \times 1.4 = 12.46$  female smokers for every 91.1 male smokers; the ratio is about 1 to 7.3).

The above-mentioned negative social attitudes towards female smokers certainly contribute to the explanation of why women were reluctant to smoke. Besides this, other factors are worthy of attention. Women were less likely to patronise the leisure places where one learned how to smoke. In the budget of workers' families, the regular smoking of opium by one member represented a significant expense. Even if the family could manage it in the case of the husband, who needed the stimulating power of the drug to support himself in his often exhausting labour, the smoking of opium by the wife stood as an unaffordable luxury.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, numbers of women were extremely low in the occupations (manual workers) where the proportion of opium smokers was the highest. The relationship between occupation and opium smoking will be the focus of the next section.

## Occupations

Concerning this issue, the 1937 clinic report is a source of great interest<sup>69</sup> because of the sample size and the potential, despite small differences in categories, to compare the figures relating smokers' occupations with the

<sup>63</sup> *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian* [Statistical yearbook of the municipal government of Canton] (Canton, 1929), pp.86–9. No distinction is made between the offences concerned with gambling and those concerned with opium.

<sup>64</sup> *Guominzhengfu zhujichu tongjiju, Zhonghua minguo tongji tiyao* [Statistical yearbook of the Republic of China] (Shanghai: Shang Wu Yinshu Guan, 1936), p.423.

<sup>65</sup> *Zhonghua minguo tongji tiyao*, p.165. These figures are very likely to concern mainly the big cities of China, which were endowed with modern police forces.

<sup>66</sup> The following 1922 statement by the Canton police was probably still valid in the 1930s: 80 per cent of the offences in connection with opium concerned illicit consumption and only 20 per cent concerned smuggling. *Minguo ribao* [Republican Daily], 14 February 1922.

<sup>67</sup> *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*, 1929, p.53. This kind of male/female imbalance was very common in the major Chinese cities during that period, and the average proportion was 143 men for 100 women in the six biggest Chinese cities in 1928; see *Benshu bianjibu, Zhongguo jingji nianjian* [China economic yearbook] (Shanghai: Benshu Bianjibu, 1934), pt.C, p.32.

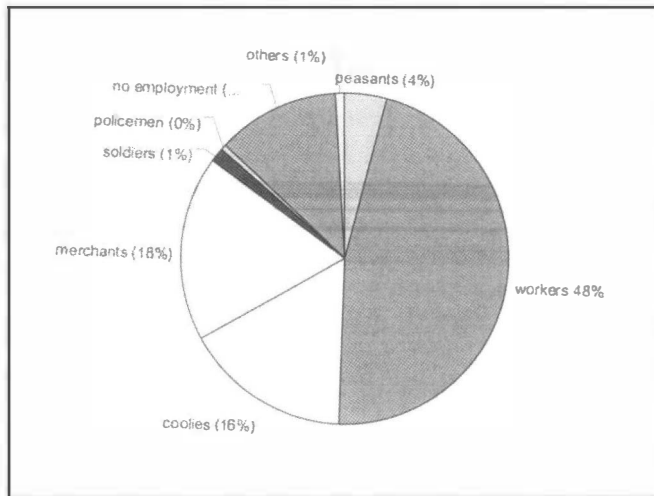
<sup>68</sup> Paulès, "L'opium à Canton," pp.66–7.

<sup>69</sup> *G/YN*, statistics, p.2.

<sup>70</sup> These figures were published in the *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*, 1929. Of course, we are assuming that no significant changes occurred in the redivision of the Cantonese population by profession during the 1928–37 period.

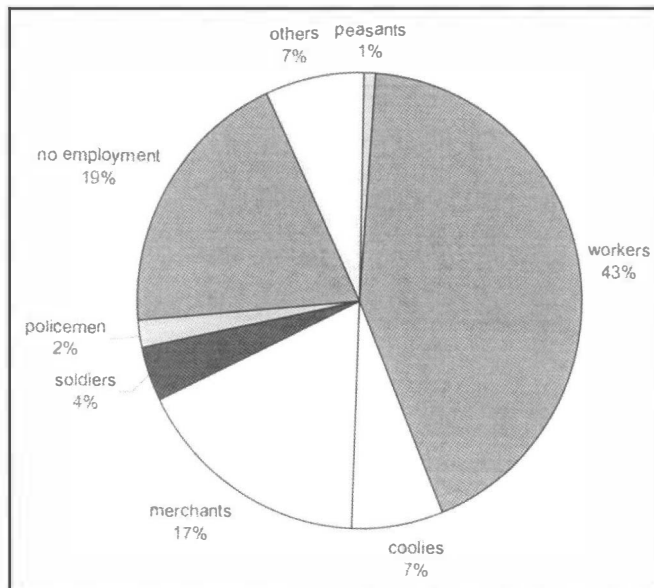
data relating the occupations of male adults in the 1928 city census.<sup>70</sup> (See Figures 3 and 4.)

Even if the different occupational categories sometimes lack precision, the main features of the population of clinic inmates are quite clear: the proportion of coolies was very high (6.6 per cent of the Canton male adult population and 16.3 per cent of the patients). The case of workers was much the same, even if the over-representation is far less spectacular (42.7 per cent



**Figure 3**

*Occupations of the patients at the 1937 clinic. Source: Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui, Guangzhoushi jinyan weiyuanhui gongzuo jiyao (Canton, 1937). (NB: Hawkers and shopkeepers are put in the same category, 'merchants,' in order to compare with the figures of the 1928 census, which does not make that distinction.)*



**Figure 4**

*Occupation of the 1928 population of Cantonese male adult opium smokers. Source: Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian, 1929*

of the adult male population and 47.5 per cent of the patients). Therefore, manual workers (coolies and workers), which make up only 49.3 per cent of Cantonese male adults, represent no less than 63.8 per cent of the clinic inmates.

Peasants also seemed to be involved in opium smoking (0.7 per cent of the population though 4.1 per cent of the patients), but the figures are not significant, as the clinic also probably accommodated people coming from the suburbs of Canton.

Eighteen per cent of the clinic inmates were merchants, a proportion very similar to that of the 1928 census (17 per cent of Canton's male adults). But, in fact, the clinic data are more precise: they provide separate figures for shopkeepers (*shang* 商, 6.1 per cent of the inmates) and hawkers (*fan* 販, 11.9 per cent). For the sake of comparison with the 1928 census, I had to amalgamate the figures for *fan* and *shang* to form a 'merchants' category. Usually, official Guangzhou statistics pertaining to occupations make no reference to hawkers.<sup>71</sup> The presence of this category in the clinic data—and, moreover, its amounting to no less than 11.9 per cent of the patients—is consequently worthy of attention. It may suggest that the importance of hawkers among clinic patients was eye-catching. An article in the periodical *Canton review* (*Guangzhou zazhi* 廣州雜誌) also mentions that opium smoking was very common among these people.<sup>72</sup> As a consequence, hawkers may be considered a group of people where opium smokers were very likely over-represented.

The figures concerning policemen and soldiers convey a rather favourable impression, but they should be viewed with caution. These categories of people would be particularly likely to avoid treatment. The low figures may be due to the quality of recruitment and training of Cantonese policemen and soldiers,<sup>73</sup> as well as to a certain impunity. Just after the retaking of Canton by Nanjing forces in July 1936, the context was nevertheless less favourable to nepotism in the Cantonese administration.<sup>74</sup> It is also important to observe that I found nothing anywhere in the sources to suggest a massive presence of opium smokers in the ranks of the Cantonese police or military forces.<sup>75</sup> Consequently, the low figures of the clinic may reflect the reality of the situation.

The clinic report does not give detailed figures concerning teachers, civil servants or professional men. They all belong to the category of "others," which accounts for only 0.9 per cent of the total. The 1928 census is more precise, and specifies that these three categories amount respectively to 0.8, 0.8 and 1.3 per cent of male adults. Members of social élites were notably under-represented among clinic inmates.<sup>76</sup>

As we can see, the following broad trend emerges from the figures of the 1937 clinic: the lower on the social ladder (coolies, workers and hawkers

<sup>71</sup> See the 1928 census published in the *Guangzhoushi zhengfu tongji nianjian*, 1929, and *Guangzhoushi ershibi nian renkou diaocha baogao* [Report on Guangzhou City 1932 population survey] (Canton: Guangzhoushi Diaocha Renkou Weiyuanhui, 1933).

<sup>72</sup> *Guangzhou zazhi* 30 (1 July 1934): 15.

<sup>73</sup> Two articles dealing with the Canton police force, published in the *China Weekly Review* (29 December 1928 and 29 November 1930) describe it in a very favourable way. Ng Yong Sang, *Canton, City of the Rams* (Canton: M.S. Cheung, 1936), pp.22–3, conveys the same favourable impression. See also a report on the January–March 1924 period by the Canton British Consul to the Embassy in Robert L. Jarman, ed., *China, Political Reports 1911–1960*, (11 vols) (Slough: Archive Editions, 2001), vol.3, p.23.

<sup>74</sup> *Revue Nationale Chinoise* [Chinese national review], October 1936, p.59 and December 1936, p.303.

<sup>75</sup> During other periods of the Republic, many sources state that opium use is noticeable by the soldiers quartered in Canton. For example, see No.2 National Archives (Nanjing), file 679/32385-32399, Canton current events and rumour, 27 August 1913; *Huaguo ribao*, 10 December 1913; FO 228/2461, Canton British Consul to Peking, 23 April 1915; *Bulletin of the International Anti-opium Association*, May 1923. But in the 1930s, not even one source mentions the prevalence of opium smoking among Canton soldiers. According to a 1932 report by the French Consul in Canton, "civil servants, military men and students [were] very rarely devoted to the habit." See MAE, Nantes, Pékin, Série A, File 157, Report of the French Consul, dated 15 December 1932.

<sup>76</sup> See also the 1932 report of the French Consul in Canton quoted in footnote 74.

<sup>77</sup> *GfYN*, statistics, p.1.

<sup>78</sup> *GfYN*, statistics, p.1; *GfWGI*, p.18.

<sup>79</sup> *GfYN*, p.47.

<sup>80</sup> *GfYN*, p.3. The clinic was supposed to cure 500 to 600 people per month.

were among the poorest people), the higher the proportion of patients. The reliability of the figures is, of course, questionable. It is not possible to discuss their representativeness for every occupation. We shall discuss here only the main possible source of distortion: the predominance of the poorest categories may only reflect the condition of entry to the clinic. There is undoubtedly a possibility that more modest categories of the population especially would be unable to avoid public treatment. But as we shall see, the reasons that could lead to an over-representation of coolies and workers as inmates are counterbalanced by others with the opposite effect.

Inmates of the clinic were of two distinctive origins: 988 (86.7 per cent) were forced to enter the clinic after being caught smoking without a permit, and 151 (13.3 per cent) were there voluntarily.<sup>77</sup> A first possible source of distortion may be a massive leakage of rich persons between being arrested by the police and being sent to the clinic. But when one considers the number of non-registered smokers caught by the police in Canton between March and June 1937 (997), it is clear that this number is very similar to the number of patients forced to enter the clinic during the same period (988).<sup>78</sup>

As we have said, the people arrested had no permits. One may speculate whether well-to-do smokers would not be more likely than poor ones to pay the fees for a permit to avoid the shame of an arrest. But in fact there were two categories of permit, and the one for poor people was purposely inexpensive. Moreover, it is also possible that rich people might have been more reluctant to take a permit, thereby publicly acknowledging that they were smokers.

Another argument could challenge the representativeness of the clinic data. It concerns the place where those unwilling to purchase a permit smoked their drug (illegally). Poor people, because of the prohibitive cost of opium paraphernalia and also the space needed, were often unable to smoke at home. Instead they had to patronise opium dens, where the police could more easily pick them out. People who were wealthy enough to buy an opium pipe and lamp could smoke at home, and so were less likely to attract police attention.

On the other hand, one should consider that the rich, who would pay relatively high fees, were certainly over-represented among the voluntary patients (13.3 per cent of the inmates).<sup>79</sup> In his report, the director of the clinic expressed regret that, due to budget restrictions, the clinic could only accommodate 117 free-of-charge patients per month and thereby could not run at full capacity. That means there were people (very likely the most impoverished) who were waiting for free treatment in the clinic, and who therefore do not appear in the clinic data.<sup>80</sup>

After considering the complex set of all these factors, it seems that the ones which may lead to an over-representation of either poor or rich patients are likely to balance each other out.

The observation of the global trend we mentioned (the lower on the social ladder, the higher the proportion of smokers) is not based solely on the clinic data, but is confirmed by other sources. According to a 1925 Foreign Office report to the League of Nations, most of the smokers were sedan-chair coolies, rickshaw pullers and people of the same class.<sup>81</sup> Ten years later, in September 1936, just after Nanjing authorities regained control of Guangdong, an anonymous report pertaining to the opium situation in that province was sent to Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石).<sup>82</sup> It specified that, in Canton, smokers were especially numerous in the lowest class of society and that, among them, going to the dens may be considered a normal habit. Another piece of evidence is a 1929 article in *Judu yuekan*: according to this anti-opium periodical, opium smoking was particularly prevalent among workers in Guangdong province.<sup>83</sup>

It is very interesting to observe that this concentration of smokers among lower-class working people and the disaffection by the élites were new phenomena in comparison to the late-Qing situation. The testimonies collected in 1894 in Canton for the proceedings of the Royal Commission on Opium convey a general impression of the widely spread nature of the practice at all levels of society.<sup>84</sup> According to several diplomatic and missionary sources of the late-Qing period, smoking was common among the administrative élites of Canton.<sup>85</sup> In a 1912 article, "Voyage autour de l'horizon cantonais," Gervais, a Catholic missionary in Canton, evoked the image of the smoker in an interesting way:

The fate of the beggar might be rather pitiful, but I much more deplore the fate of the opium smoker! Even if he has not, like the latter, the misfortune of extreme poverty, he must, on the contrary, support the inconveniences of a well-to-do situation turning to his loss of both fortune and prestige.<sup>86</sup>

In Gervais's mind, the typical smoker was clearly a well-to-do person.

Two factors had mainly contributed to turning the élites of Canton, like the élites of the whole country, away from the drug after 1906. First, the imperial policy of progressive opium suppression (inaugurated in 1906) made it compulsory for the administrative élites to set an example, and strictly forbade civil servants to continue on smoking opium.<sup>87</sup> And during the following decades, many regulations were issued forbidding teachers, civil servants and Guomindang party members from smoking opium.<sup>88</sup> Second, the élites largely accepted the idea that opium not only represented a health hazard but was also intertwined with the arrival of Western domination and was an emblematic factor in the process of China's decline.<sup>89</sup> In this context, the noticeable absence of any literary writings by opium smokers under the Republic (whereas poems celebrating the pleasures of opium were produced in the nineteenth century) is logical and unsurprising. Few well-read people and intellectuals were smokers, and those devoted to the habit did not feel

<sup>81</sup> FO 228/3369: report of the Foreign Office to the League of Nations, 12 March 1925.

<sup>82</sup> No.2 National Archives (Nanjing), file 41/519.

<sup>83</sup> *Judu yuekan* 36 (December 1929): 47.

<sup>84</sup> *Report of the Royal Commission on Opium*, vol.5, pp.216–28.

<sup>85</sup> MAE, New Series/China, file 650: 1909 annual medical report of the Canton station; *The Foreign Field* (Wesleyan Methodist Church monthly), July 1911, p.334, article concerning the Zhongshan district.

<sup>86</sup> Gervais, "Voyage autour de l'horizon cantonais" [Journey around the Cantonese horizon], in *Les Missions catholiques* (a yearly missionary periodical edited by Les oeuvres pontificales missionnaires, Lyon, 1912), p.358.

<sup>87</sup> *Report of the International Anti-opium Commission*, vols.1 and 2 (Shanghai: *North China Daily News*, 1909), pp.72–6.

<sup>88</sup> *Huaguo ribao*, 21 October 1914; *Guangdongsheng zhengfu gongbao*, 1 August 1925, p.30, 20 June 1926, p.13; *Guangzhou minguo ribao*, 25 January 1929, 7 October 1929, 20 November 1928.

<sup>89</sup> MAE, New Series/China, file 592: 21 August 1912, Picot to Poincaré (Minister of Foreign Affairs), *Report of the International Anti-opium Commission*, vol.2, pp.74–6.

Figure 5

Propaganda poster Judu yuekan No.45, November 1930



proud of it.

There was another reason for well-to-do smokers quitting smoking. The anti-opium propaganda posters of that time always displayed skinny smokers dressed in rags, as a way to associate opium consumption with poverty. (See Figure 5).<sup>90</sup> Smokers being thereby associated with the poorest segment of the population, it became a widespread belief that smoking was, in a certain way, 'acting poor.' Under these circumstances, it seems plausible that some well-to-do smokers gave up smoking because they did not want to be associated with the lowest rungs of society. Finally, beyond the statistical realities, this belief by itself contributed to a decrease in the proportion of high-class people within the population of opium smokers.<sup>91</sup>

### *A Case Study: Rickshaw Pullers*

During the Republican period, rickshaw pullers were somehow considered the epitome of the poorest manual workers. Consequently they aroused the interest of the political and intellectual élites, as well as of the press of that time. Their living conditions were scrutinised in academic research and official inquiries. The abundance of information about them is therefore the practical reason for this case study. Also they represented a significant part of the smoking population, as we know that many opium smokers of the 1930s were coolies. This case study will allow us to go further than a purely statistical study and will describe everyday behaviours connected to opium consumption: what kind of opium coolies smoked, for what price, where and how they smoked it.

The strong devotion of the Cantonese rickshaw pullers to opium consumption was documented in a 1928 Japanese tourist guide, which warned the reader about the general slowness and ineffectiveness of Cantonese pullers due to the consumption of opium by the vast majority of them.<sup>92</sup> Some novels written in the 1930s by the famous Cantonese writer Ouyang Shan 歐陽山 described sordid opium dens mostly patronised by rickshaw pullers.<sup>93</sup>

A wide-ranging inquiry by the municipality of Canton confirmed the importance of opium consumption among rickshaw pullers. This public inquiry was based on the questioning of 5,253 individuals. According to this inquiry, when asked, 18.2 per cent of the pullers admitted to smoking opium (that is, a steady consumption, *shihao yapian* 嗜好鴉片).<sup>94</sup> One possible reason to justify this somewhat high percentage in relation to the rest of the population was the use of opium as a tonic to support them in their strenuous job: in a 1991 interview, a former Cantonese rickshaw puller, Zeng Zhaojin 曾昭錦, declared that opium, like alcohol or tobacco, was used because it reduced the user's sense of exhaustion.<sup>95</sup> Opium was for some pullers an

<sup>90</sup> See also the posters published in the *Jinyan hanyuekan* [Anti-opium bimonthly] 1 (June 1936), and those published in the *Jinyan zhuankan* [Special edition for opium prohibition] of June 1937.

<sup>91</sup> This constitutes a typical example of what the sociologist Robert K. Merton calls the self-fulfilling prophecy: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Robert K. Merton, *On Social Structure and Science* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.183.

<sup>92</sup> *Kanton Sadan* [Guide to Canton] (Mura-yama Shigeru, Osaka: Kibunkan, 1928), pp.86–7.

<sup>93</sup> Ouyang Shan, "Pigun shijie" [A world of rogues], in *Ouyang Shan wenji* [Complete works of Ouyang Shan] (Guangzhou: Huacheng Chubanshe, 1988), vol.1, pp.362–77.

<sup>94</sup> *Guangzhou nianjian* [Canton yearbook], (Canton: Guangzhou Nianjian Bianzuan Weiyuanhui, 1935), chapter on *shehui* [society], p.53.

<sup>95</sup> Fung Chi Ming, "History at the Grassroots: Rickshaw Pullers in the Pearl River Delta of South China, 1874–1992," (PhDdiss., University of Hong Kong, 1996), p.180. See also Ho, *Understanding Canton*, pp.113–117.

<sup>96</sup> *Xianggang gongshang ribao*, 25 February 1935; *Guangzhou minguo ribao* [Guangzhou Republican daily], 4 March 1927.

<sup>97</sup> *Yuehuabao*, 4 February 1934 and 9 March 1934.

<sup>98</sup> Besides its very low price, the *yantiao* presented another advantage, as it could be cut and sold in very small portions whereas prepared opium should be sold in specific official sealed porcelain pots bearing the monopoly stamp; cf. *Yuehuabao*, 25 June 1933.

<sup>99</sup> Dross is the substance which remains in the bowl of the opium pipe after smoking. It can be reused, despite its unpleasant taste, as it still contains morphine. In Chinese, dross is called *yanshi* 煙屎, *yapianshi* 鴉片屎, or *yanbui* 煙灰.

<sup>100</sup> *Renjianshi* [Human world], 20 October 1935, pp.19–21.

<sup>101</sup> *Yuehuabao*, 10 April 1934, 25 June 1933.

<sup>102</sup> *Xianggang gongshang ribao*, 25 February 1935.

<sup>103</sup> *Xiangguang gongshang ribao*, 18 June 1935.

<sup>104</sup> *Xianggang gongshang ribao*, 16 March 1936.

indispensable stimulant.

Another reason put forward by many sources concerns the persons who rented rickshaws to the pullers and also provided housing. Some entrepreneurs encouraged their pullers to smoke opium in dens set up in the same place where they were housed.<sup>96</sup> Some of them, arousing massive disapproval in the *Yuehuabao*, went so far as to force the pullers they housed to smoke a fixed quantity of opium every day.<sup>97</sup>

In these dens, they did not smoke opium itself but rather an adulterated and inexpensive substance called *yantiao* 煙條.<sup>98</sup> The *yantiao* was made with the addition of large quantities of dross<sup>99</sup> and rolled into the shape of a stem (hence its name, literally “smoke stick”).<sup>100</sup> It suited the pullers’ demands perfectly: it was cheap and stronger than normal opium and could be smoked much more quickly, as it was immediately ready for consumption. Consequently, three or four minutes were enough for a puller to ‘pass his craving’ (*guoyin* 過癮), whereas using classic prepared opium would take half an hour.<sup>101</sup>

As noted, some opium den managers rented rickshaws to pullers and provided them with free accommodation on the premises (only during the night) if they smoked a certain amount of the drug per day.<sup>102</sup> This had the great advantage of compelling customer loyalty, and didn’t cost the managers a penny as they only let the pullers use the smoking beds during the night, when the dens were closed.

More generally, Cantonese rickshaw pullers were regular customers of the most miserable *yantiao* dens. These dens were called, in Cantonese smokers’ slang, “places for the hard stuff.” 硬嘢館 ‘Hard stuff’ was another name for *yantiao*, probably because, as opposed to normal prepared opium (‘soft stuff’), it was not a liquid.<sup>103</sup>

The frequent use of opium as a tonic, an open supply of cheap and strong *yantiao*, and dynamic sales strategies by both rickshaw entrepreneurs and opium den managers were all contributing factors in making the proportion of true opium addicts particularly high in the ranks of the rickshaw pullers.

In that context, it is very logical that the problem of opium consumption among the pullers attracted the attention of the press and the élite. It may be that 18.2 per cent is a low estimate of the proportion of smokers among them. But certain inquiries should incline us to be cautious, as they suggest that the practice of opium smoking was not uniformly distributed among the pullers, a social group whose apparent homogeneity concealed a true segmentation into subgroups based on dialects, geographical origins and different housing locations. According to an inquiry focusing on the pullers originating from the Huizhou area and living in the district of Dongdi 東堤, opium was prevalent specifically among natives of Canton.<sup>104</sup> This inquiry also draws our attention to the relatively limited prevalence of the drug within this population, as it underlines the fact that alcohol, and not opium, was the



most popular stimulant. The above-mentioned inquiry by the municipality of Canton confirmed that among the total population of Cantonese pullers, more than 53 per cent drank alcohol (*shibaojiu* 嗜好酒).<sup>105</sup>

We should be cautious here, however, because putting stress on one specific group of smokers could convey a stereotyped picture of Cantonese opium smokers. The importance of the practice of opium smoking among pullers in straitened circumstances should not conceal the true existence of different consumption habits in other wealthier categories of smokers. The latter patronised beautifully furnished opium dens set up in multi-storey buildings, with multiple commodities like electric fans in summer and heating systems in winter.<sup>106</sup> In these places, the servants were sometimes beautiful young girls who prepared an expensive and high-quality opium for the customers, entertained them and offered them fruit and cigarettes.<sup>107</sup> This category of smoker did not visit these dens to 'pass their craving' as quickly as possible. On the contrary, they came to have a good time, relax and enjoy a chat with friends. Even though it was the low-class dens that attracted people's attention at that time, there was a certain variety in the supply of opium houses.

### Conclusion

Opium smokers in 1930s Canton represented only a modest part of the city population. The percentage of regular smokers would account for about 3 or 4 per cent of the total population. The concentration of smokers among certain categories of people, mainly manual workers (coolies, workers, hawkers) and middle-aged men, was remarkable. The spectacular disaffection of youth from opium deserves special mention, especially as it challenges conventional discourses of the Republican period which assert that an increasing number of young people were addicted to the drug. Of course, such a description is a simplification: some women, young people and rich merchants were also devoted to opium.

The differences we noted in the smoking population between the late-Qing (pre-1906) period and the 1930s suggest that even if opium consumption had a strong revival after 1916, it had new characteristics. As far as the population of opium smokers in Canton is concerned, the Republican period should not be considered a simple return to the pre-1906 situation, a relapse due to political turmoil. Considering the decrease in the proportion of opium smokers, one could go so far as to say that the opium situation had improved.<sup>108</sup> Among the other changes of the time, the most remarkable was probably the advent of alternative narcotics like morphine or heroin.<sup>109</sup>

The present study focuses on the 1930s, for this was the period in the Republican era for which sources are most abundant. We were able to

<sup>105</sup> *Guangzhou nianjian* 1935, chapter on *shehui* [society], p.53.

<sup>106</sup> *Renjianshi*, 20 October 1935, pp.19–21.

<sup>107</sup> *Minguo ribao*, 27 July 1931.

<sup>108</sup> Many Chinese scholars assert, on the contrary, that the situation under the Republic became even worse than during the pre-1906 period. See Zhu, Jiang and Zhang, *Yapian yu jindai zhongguo*, p.197; Wang Jinxiang, "Er, Sanshi niandai guonei yapian wenti" [The problem of opium in China during the 1920s and 1930s], *Minguo dang'an* [Republican period archives], 1992.2, p.71.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Frank Dikötter, "A Cultural History of the Syringe in Modern China," *Twentieth-Century China* 28.1 (November 2002): 37–56.

<sup>110</sup> Two typical examples, with reference to the situation in Canton are Li Enhan, "Ribei zai Huanan de fandu huodong, 1937–1945" [Japan's involvement in drug-trafficking in the occupied South China regions, 1937–1945], *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History* 31 (1989): 135–65, and Cao Dachen and Zhu Qingbao, *Cidao xia de dubuo* [Poisoning under the threat of the bayonet] (Fuzhou: Fujian Renmin Chubanshe, 2005).

<sup>111</sup> One important difference, however, is that under the Japanese occupation drugs like morphine and heroin, which were previously forbidden, became available on the legal market.

contrast the 1930s situation with that of the late-nineteenth century only in order to characterise some long-term developments. A detailed study of the intermediate period is necessary to determine whether the situation in the 1930s resulted from a progressive ageing of and disaffection within the élites, or whether these changes took place at a certain turning point. One may consider it rather probable that the 1906–16 period was not just an interlude, but that this decade in particular contributed to the reshaping of the population of smokers.

If studies confirm that the smoker population in other parts of China fits this 'Cantonese model,' it may be legitimate to reconsider the reasons for the astonishing success of the communist anti-opium action after 1949. This spectacular achievement may be not only the outcome of the determined action of the CCP, but also a consequence of a hidden factor: the weakness of the population of opium smokers compared to what it was only half a century before.

However, to explore the validity of this hypothesis, it would be necessary to shed light on the almost unexplored situation of opium consumption during the war and the 1945–49 period. As to the war period, many Chinese historians eagerly depict a frightening situation in the zones controlled by the Japanese and their collaborators.<sup>110</sup> In Canton, it is beyond doubt that the Japanese authorities relied extensively on opium sales, for it was a source of income for them, exactly as for their Chinese predecessors.<sup>111</sup> Works devoted to this period, however, have so far failed to demonstrate a serious deterioration in opium consumption compared to the situation before the war.

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*Xavier Paulès*

Institute of Oriental Culture  
University of Tokyo  
7-3-1 Hongo  
Bunkyo-ku 113-0033 Tokyo  
lingnan99@hotmail.com

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