

6. Manufacturers of implements used for supplying opium to smokers, sellers of such implements, and those found in possession thereof with the intention of selling the same, and those who have imported for sale such implements from outside shall be punished with penal servitude of the fourth or lower grade, while the opium implements shall be destroyed.

7. Any customs officers and people assisting them who may import opium from outside or supply opium implements, or allow others to import, shall be punished with penal servitude of the second or third grade, while the opium and the opium implements shall be destroyed.

8. Any police, officials, and person assisting them who become aware of offenses committed against rule 5, and in consequence do not award a suitable penalty, will also, in their turn, be punished in accordance with rule 5.

9. Anyone offending against rule 6 shall be deprived of civil rights either completely or in part. If an official, he shall be removed from office.

10. In addition to the investigation and report made from time to time by the inspecting officer, anyone should publish information in regard to offenses against the above rules as well as against the sections in the Criminal Code dealing with opium. If a false charge is made the accuser shall be punished instead of the accused.

11. The above rules shall come into force from the date of their promulgation.

NOTE

The Opium Trade (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1974), 6:13-14, 100-101.

READING 10

The Chen Family Opium Den

This is an account of a family-run opium den in the city of Yichang. An opium den was a place for people to come to buy and smoke opium. Although the dens could be well-appointed places for a respectable clientele to socialize, most were not, and the bad reputation of opium smoking was connected in part to the bad reputation of the opium dens where it was consumed. Yichang is on the Yangzi River in Hubei and was a key transshipment point for Sichuan opium. Chen Deyuan's story is probably not that different from those of opium den operators in other parts of China, although it does have some unique features. Chen's background was somewhat unusual because, although his family was fairly well connected, he himself could probably be called a liumang (hoodlum).

Unlike most opium den operators Chen was able to avoid government regulation for a long time by taking advantage of extraterritoriality. During the 1930s the Nationalist state made steady attempts to close or regulate opium dens, in addition to providing the ordinary police harassment that such establishments could expect. Chen Deyuan was relatively independent also because he boiled his opium himself, which kept him from being dependent on a larger, often government-controlled, opium wholesaler.

This reading comes from a local history magazine, wenshi ziliao, from Hubei. The Communist government encouraged people of all sorts to record their experiences under the old society. These recollections have become very valuable resources for historians, but they must be approached with care.



During the Republic Yichang had many opium dens, one of them run by my father, Chen Deyuan.

To discuss the origins of our family's opium den we must begin with my

father. After the defeat of the 1898 reforms and the execution of Tan Sitong and others, Tan's compatriot Tang Caichang returned from Japan and created the Establishing Righteousness Society and the Independent Army to unify members of the Elder Brother's Society all along the Yangzi for an uprising. My grandfather Chen Futing joined the Independent army. The army was defeated in the fall of 1900, and Zhang Zhidong, the Hunan-Hubei governor-general, executed the leaders. Chen Futing fled to Shanghai, leaving behind his wife, Chen Sanliang, and their son, Chen Deyuan.

In 1908 Chen Deyuan returned to Yichang from Wuhan. He had worked in a restaurant run by an Anhui man and not only learned how to cook but also the martial arts. At this point he was 15 *sui*. After returning to Yichang he joined the Red Gang.¹ At that time he had no set profession and ate the bread of idleness, cheated at dice, and gambled.

In 1909 he took advantage of an introduction and got a job on a steamship. He was young, hardworking, and good looking. One day in 1910 he saw his father, Chen Futing, on the ship. Chen Futing had already put aside his family affairs and taken the tonsure and was on his way to Mount Omei in Sichuan.² He told his son that the Manchu Qing dynasty had controlled the country for hundreds of years. It was corrupt and incapable and had weakened the nation. It was time for it to be overthrown. "You have studied the martial arts, why not consider using your skills to serve the nation?" Chen Deyuan, hearing his father's charge, immediately went ashore. It was in the same year that he married Li Guoxiu, and not long after he was married he went to work on the Sichuan-Hankou railway.

When the revolution broke out in 1911 the revolutionary party in Yichang organized 100 men into a revolutionary army. Chen Deyuan joined, and because he had joined at the beginning of the uprising he was made a squad leader. At the capture of Jingzhou he was promoted to platoon leader. Chen Deyuan was Chen Sanliang's only child, and she was afraid that he would be killed at the front, where bullets fell like rain, and so she brought her son back home. As she was afraid that he would return to the army she gave him opium. Chen Deyuan slowly sank deeper and deeper into this quagmire and became an opium addict.

Chen Deyuan's wife urged him to open a teahouse. He saved up a little money and bought a small place, hanging up banners in the street announcing the "Drunken Moon Bar." Chen Sanliang saw that there was good profit to be made in opium and urged Deyuan to open an opium den, but he refused. There was a group of northern soldiers who came to the Drunken Moon almost every day, and after they had eaten and drunk their fill they would

smash plates and wreck the place. Soon Chen Deyuan was out of business. This was in 1919.

After Chen Deyuan closed his bar he was still unwilling to open an opium den. After his mother moved in with him he was forced to accede to her wishes and open one. Chen Deyuan was an opium den owner for 20 years, from its opening in 1920 to its closing in 1940, due to the fall of Yichang to the Japanese.

The Flat Altar

The Chen family opium den was in a good location near the south gate, and it always did a better business than any other opium den. Chen Deyuan was a real expert in the opium business. He always went personally to buy his opium, and a few times when he was sick he took me along. He bought his opium from a nearby opium wholesaler. The wholesaler was also named Chen and his son, Jinggou, was a classmate of mine at the Huaying middle school. Chen Deyuan always wanted to use Yunnan opium for his paste. Yunnan opium came in two grades, with the better grade being a bit more expensive. Actually, all Yunnan opium was expensive. I remember it took a whole handkerchief full of banknotes to buy five or six ounces of opium. To save money some wholesalers would mix cheaper Sichuan opium with the Yunnan, but Chen Deyuan never did this. After buying the opium it had to be boiled, which took skill. If it boiled too long it had a scorched taste, if it was not boiled long enough it would be too runny. Chen Deyuan did the boiling himself and was known as being a good opium boiler. He put the opium, old ashes from the bowls of the opium pipes, and water in a wood-handled copper pot. He would then put it on the stove and let it simmer down into a paste. . . .

The Chen family opium den had five or six opium pipes, one of which, called the "Flat Altar," had a special bowl. Of the tens of opium dens in Yichang the Flat Altar was one of the two most famous pipes. (The other was the Ma family's "Little Dream Maker.") The Flat Altar was famous because when someone smoked from it they got high a lot quicker. With other pipes you had to smoke two balls of opium to get high, with it one was plenty. This was enough to make an opium addict's day, and customers loved to come to the Chen family opium den. What was the secret of the Flat Altar? Ordinarily each day after we closed the ashes would be cleaned out of each bowl. After emptying the ashes out of the Flat Altar, however, Chen Deyuan would put a little bit of raw opium inside the shaft of the pipe. As the smoker heated the opium in the bowl the opium in the pipe would melt and give a much stronger smoke

than any other pipe. Chen Deyuan invested a bit in the raw opium, but it brought customers back and was thus profitable.

With the Flat Altar bringing in customers the Chen family opium den prospered, and Chen Deyuan left behind his unsuccessful past. Two years after the den opened, in the fall of 1921, Yichang became a battlefield. Sichuanese troops and northern troops were fighting on both banks of the Yangzi. Chen Deyuan fled, along with many others, and he took the Flat Altar with him. As the fighting continued, Chen Deyuan took his wife and son to Wuhan. On the ship the Flat Altar was hidden on my body (I was seven or eight *sui*). The Anti-Opium Inspectors confiscated quite a few pipes and opium paraphernalia, but did not find the Flat Altar. When Yichang fell in 1940 I went to work in Jianshi County and later brought my family along. My father brought the Flat Altar with him, but it was stolen soon afterward. By that time he was no longer running an opium den and his opium addiction was cured as well.

With the fame of the Flat Altar the Chen family opium den was always full of customers and did a great business. Inside the opium den were six opium couches, each with its own teapot filled with scalding hot tea. After smoking the customers always wanted tea. The first couch had a special teapot decorated with flowers and palms and was reserved for wealthy regulars.

Labor and Management in an Opium Den

The proprietress of the Chen family opium den was Li Guoxiu. First thing every morning she would pack the boxes. Opium boxes were square and came in various sizes, and each morning she would fill several tens of them with the appropriate amount of paste. Preparing food for the customers, collecting money, and keeping the accounts were all her responsibilities. She also kept track of regulars' tabs on either a biweekly or monthly basis.

Li Guoxiu was a very strict person. Although she ran an opium den for twenty years she never smoked a single ball of it. Sometimes when she was sick Chen Deyuan would try to get her to smoke a little to make her better, but she always refused. Other than Chen Deyuan she did not allow anyone else in the family to smoke. I once broke my left foot and due to the pain had trouble sleeping. My maternal grandmother felt for me and wanted to have me smoke a little opium for the pain, but my mother would not agree. I lived in an opium den for over ten years, but because of my mother's stubbornness I never became a prisoner of opium.

Our family only ever had two employees. The first was Zeng Zicheng from Wuhan. Our family gave him room and board, and his wages were paid by giv-

ing him a box of opium every day. He would pay his sundry expenses from tips. The Dragon Boat Festival, Moon Festival, and New Years were the best times to get tips. When he wished customers a happy new year he got a large tip. Zeng would open the doors around six or seven in the morning. He would serve the customers by getting opium, collecting money, lighting the lamps, and changing the pipes. He would also boil water, fetch food, and do similar tasks. He also had less pleasant duties like fanning the fire while the opium boiled, and he was usually busy until about 12 at night when he closed up. Zeng Zicheng was an honest and sincere person, and both our family and the customers liked him. He worked for us for a long time, but when the Resistance War broke out he returned to Wuhan. He wrote to tell us that he had quit smoking opium and was working as a rickshaw puller.

The other employee was Zhang Xiaoer, from Sichuan. He came to work for us when he was about 22. He was crafty. He got tips out of customers by doing cigarette tricks. After Ichang fell my family fled to Sankeping. We heard that Zhang Xiaoer had become a bandit. Not long after he was executed in Sankeping.

About 1925 the opium dens of Yichang changed their method of preparing opium. Instead of providing it in boxes it was prerolled into balls that could be put directly in the opium pipe. The Chen family den hired an expert opium roller. The first was a young Sichuanese called Lefty. He was said to be from a wealthy and educated family and to have been driven out because of his opium addiction and ended up in Ichang. We rewarded him for his skill in rolling opium balls by letting him keep some. He was also good at serving our richer customers and got more opium balls this way, as well as tips. Lefty worked in the Chen opium den for two years, until his mother sent someone to bring him home. The other ball roller was named Zhang. He came from Yanxi, and he also had been driven out of his home for smoking opium. He worked for us for half a year and later opened his own opium den.

Operating an Opium Den and Opium Suppression

The Chen family opium den was originally on Neidihui Street, but Chen Deyuan lost it gambling. About that time an Italian *romin* fled to Yichang, and in 1924 he bought a building on Neidihui Street and opened the "Heavenly Virtue Company."³ The building had two floors, and he got ten opium den owners to open opium dens inside. Among them was one Pei Wenqing, who had been an officer in the Beiyang army and opened this opium den after being demobilized. The Italian made him the manager, in charge of collecting

rent and insurance charges. Chen Deyuan rented space there and opened an opium den.

The Heavenly Virtue Company had an Italian flag over the door. This flag was very useful, since neither Beiyang warlord police nor Nationalist police would dare to enter and cause trouble for fear of creating an "international incident." The opium dens flagrantly sold opium, but they were uncontrollable. The Italian sat back and got rich. When the Resistance War broke out he lowered his flag and went home.

After the Heavenly Virtue Company closed, Chen Deyuan's opium den moved back into an alley. We rented a place, and the family lived on the lower floor while the opium den was on the upper. The upper floor had a window with a view of the street, and when the police came the customers could hurry downstairs and out the back door. If the customers were caught they could be fined or put in jail, so it was in the interests of the opium den to protect them. Some of the customers were quite wealthy and socially prominent, and they especially needed protection. The safety of the customers was one of the key ingredients in an opium den's success.

To run an opium den a certain amount of money had to be given to the police. Both the local patrolman and the chief would want something, as would the policeman in the sentry post down the street. I remember that in the spring of 1938 they wanted more than we could pay, and the police came to arrest people. The customers fled out the back, but my father jumped out of the window and broke his left foot and became deaf in one ear, becoming a cripple. My mother was arrested and put in jail, but thanks to the intervention of a gentryman named He Yuangan she was later freed. That winter I was coming home, and I saw a policeman sitting on a bench. In his right hand he was holding our family's Flat Altar. My crippled father was kneeling beside him begging for mercy. Once the policeman had gotten his money he left. Even now remembering that scene makes my heart ache. When I went to school my classmates would tease me, calling me "Little opium den boss" under their breath. Opium suppression is a good thing, I agree, but the Nationalists only used the name of opium suppression for extortion. It was just a legal way of destroying people.

The Chen family opium den was a middle-rank place. The different classes of opium dens were distinguished by their size, decor, and number of pipes and the quality of their opium. Middle-rank and above places used southern opium, low-rank places used Sichuan opium.⁴ Yichang had very few high-class opium dens. I knew of two, the "Sincerity North" and "Sincerity South." I went to the Sincerity South once. It was set up for the gentry. The opium booths were ornate, and the opium tools were also very beautiful. They also had

women to bring out the opium balls. Sincerity South was large, and it was on a street near the south gate, and when you pulled back the door curtain you would see many opium booths. There was no need to fear being arrested there, however. The manager had connections in the government and paid a bribe to the police every month and thus could afford to be so bold.

Opium's Harm to Customers

British imperialism forced opium on China with the guns of its warships. For over a hundred years millions of people suffered from it. Yichang got a foreign concession early (before Chongqing or Changsha), and when the imperialists set up a concession as an opium distribution center the damage was even worse. Of those who smoked opium most were weak willed and became addicts and ended up as low-class degenerates. Among the customers at the Chen family opium den there were several examples.

Chao Daifeng (a Northerner) and his wife both liked to smoke opium and drink. When they did not have money they would sell their own daughter and daughter-in-law as prostitutes. They would use the money to buy opium and liquor. Chao Daifeng's wife went crazy shortly after setting up a brothel in her home. She would come to the opium den, and after smoking many balls she would rave and gibber. Opium turned her into two different people. It happens that there was a similar case. She was a middle-aged woman named Dai Ma, and she had a daughter in middle school. Dai Ma had no job or profession, but she did have an opium addiction. She relied on the money her daughter made selling her body to buy opium. The daughter was an unlicensed prostitute who would go to rich people's houses to provide "outside activities" on a half-year contract. Dai Ma was a regular customer at the Chen family opium den, and she would sometimes bring her daughter with and have her prepare opium. The daughter was intelligent and kind, and all of those in the opium den were sorry for her.

In those days those who suffered from the "three evils" of opium, prostitution, and gambling were not always different people. Many became prostitutes because of their opium smoking. The Yangzhou brothel had one woman who was a regular customer at the Chen family opium den. When she would come she would be accompanied by either her old attendant or a young man, as they feared she would escape. She was about 27 or 28 and was blind in her left eye and grew her hair long to hide it. She would often go across the railroad tracks to the "House of Dreams" to serve the foreign sailors. She had been ruined to

the point she did not seem human. She was deep in the pit of opium, using it to give her the strength to endure her sufferings. Second Alley was a place for low-class prostitutes, and "Second alley wild chicken" was a common epitaph. These prostitutes were all deeply addicted. They usually had only enough money to go to low-class opium dens; the managers and pimps were at the middle-level dens. The Chen family opium den was near Second Alley, and we saw a lot of them swallowing clouds and spitting up smoke.

An opium den also opened the gate to gambling for many people. One was a young man called Zheng Bainian. He did odd jobs at the boat landing. He was a thief and would steal things from the warehouses at the landing. He would steal relatively valuable things like gold jewelry, watches, and Russian wool blankets. Sometimes when he could not get rid of things he would pawn them at the Chen family opium den. Money came easy to Zheng Bainian, and his opium addiction grew with each smoke. He would bring a friend called Zhou Changkou, who was also a thief, along to smoke with him. After the fall of Yichang Zheng Bainian returned to Qingtan and relied on swindling people to get his opium money. Zhou Changkou became a robber and was later shot. He was 21 when he died.

There was also a man named Chang from Sichuan. He was a leader in the Han River Society. In the Yichang Han River Society he also held a high post. He was very good at martial arts. He became addicted to opium and became a thief to get opium money. He was a "smash and grab" thief, stealing things from people's houses, prying open doors, and breaking locks; there was nothing he would not dare to do. He often smoked opium at the Chen family opium den. There was also a litigator named Chen, who opened a place at the mouth of Alley #4. He had money and influence (as a lawyer he was always going to government offices), and he would often use his influence to bully people in the opium den. Once he got into an argument over the Flat Altar with Chen Wufu, and Chen hit him in the eye. The next time Chen Wufu came to the opium den he could not stand and had to drag himself in on his hands. People said that he had been caught stealing something and had his legs broken. Opium smoking had brought him to a miserable end.

The Qing, the Beiyang government, and the Guomindang all loudly proclaimed opium suppression, but the more they prohibited the more people smoked. The prosperous business the Chen family opium den did during the Resistance War is proof that all their efforts accomplished nothing. It was only after Liberation, with the anti-opium and drug movement, that opium's long harm to the Chinese people was ended. I leave to the people this bitter history.

NOTES

Chen Hongru, "Yi jia yapian yanguan de jiushi" (The story of one family's opium den), *Yichang wenshi ziliao* 8 (1987): 118-26.

1. The Red Gang is a secret society.
2. That is, he had become a Buddhist monk.
3. *Ronin* is the Japanese term for a masterless samurai. The Chinese equivalent was often applied to Japanese adventurers resident in China.
4. Southern, in this case, means Yunnan.