

Garcia da Orta's *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India* and the European Superiority Complex's Effect on the Perception of Asian Use of Opium and Future Consequences



THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

Henry Lee

Garcia da Orta, *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India*, Opium

Garcia da Orta can be crowned as the ultimate representative of the new movement in the geography of medicine and healing arts in the 16th century.

He traveled to India, from Portugal, and practiced medicine, observed plants/herbs, and interacted with Asians there.

His findings led him to write the *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India*, containing 57 chapters, each of which contained a different simple, drug, or herb.

Opium, one of the drugs in the book, comes from the white and red poppy plants and was used in a variety of ways among Asian people.



Opium Wars

European superiority complex can be seen further through the forced trade of Opium between Britain and China. Britain forcing China to participate in opium trade led to conflict, and the opium wars, putting China at an even further disadvantage as they were taken advantage of geographically and financially.

Recreational Opium Use



Used recreationally to help people get away from the daily troubles of their life and raises them above their daily cares, problems, and anxieties. Opium is also used with other substances, recreationally, to enhance the feelings that come with the high.

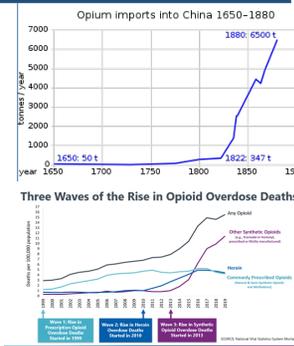
Claims how many Asians in the 16th century were addicted, without comparing its recreational use to European drugs.

Opium use is widespread, with lower classes having access to the drug, causing many people to become addicted.

Da Orta writes how in contrast to the Asian people, he would never try opium, like a good New Christian, and that Opium is not a European medicine, so he doesn't want to waste time on it.

Opioid Epidemic

Today, the impact of Opium can still be felt in the opioid epidemic. The highly addictive drugs are now one of the leading causes of death in the US. The creation of fentanyl, a synthetic opioid has only increased the risk.



Opium Use in Medicinal Practices

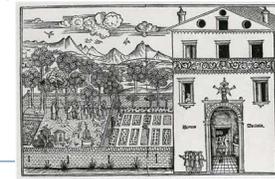
Opium was often used by Asians in medicine as a primary form of treatment, something that da Orta looked down upon.

He gives examples of how Asians rely on opium too much in their medicinal practices, saying it should only be used for pain relief.

Portraying himself as a hero on multiple occasions, he accuses Asians of incorrectly treating patients, causing himself to treat them and save their lives.

In addition to ridiculing their heavy reliance on the drug in medicine, he also states how Asian physicians do not know human anatomy or classifications of various medicines.

His dialogue formatted writing comes off as having a desire to increase his status as a physician in Europe, while also conducting research and integrating himself into Asian culture.



References

Derks, Hans. *History of the Opium Problem The Assault on the East, Ca. 1600-1950*, Brill, Leiden, 2012, pp. 3-32.
"Drug Basics." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 16 Feb. 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/basics/>
Fontes da Costa, Palmira. "Geographical Expansion and the Reconfiguration of Medical Authority: Garcia da Orta's *Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India* (1563)." *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part A*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2012, pp. 74-81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shpsa.2011.09.015>
Meyer, Karl E. "The Opium War's Secret History." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 28 June 1997. <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/28/opinion/the-opium-war-s-secret-history.html>
"Opioids." National Institutes of Health. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 22 Mar. 2022. <https://nida.nih.gov/drug-topics/opioids>
"Opium throughout History | The Opium Kings | Frontline." PBS, Public Broadcasting Service, <https://www.pbs.org/shows/frontline/shows/heroin/heroin-16/history.html>
Orta, Garcia da. "Colloquies on the Simples & Drugs of India, by Garcia Da Orta." *HathiTrust*. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.15262928&view=tun&seq=352&skin=2021&loc=ocm001mi29>
Silva, Manuel Mendes. "Garcia De Orta: The World of Medicinal Plants." *European Urology Today*, https://europeanurology.com/content/uploads/2017/09/Garcia-Orta-33831-EUT_March_english_version.pdf
<https://en.wikipedia.org>
<https://www.jedemeteran.weebly.com/garcia-da-orta-networking-for-asian-medical-knowledge-in-the-16th-century.html>
<https://www.sciencephoto.com/media/1100413/view/opium-spellers-malayia-16th-century-illustration>