

Reflective Essay

The paper I submitted for the Hannon Library Undergraduate Research Award was originally a research project for a class I took on European Imperialism with Professor Drummond, which I subsequently revised for my presentation at the Undergraduate Research Symposium. The specific topic of the essay was up to us, as long as it was related to European imperialism. My research explored the impact that the shift from silver to opium as the primary medium of trade between Britain and China had on both empires. I examine both the social and economic impacts, as well as the way that this shifting trade dynamic influenced British imperialism in both India and China.

I knew early in the semester that I wanted to focus my research on China and the way that European trade with China drove colonization, specifically in the New World with the creation of silver colonies, because of China's reluctance to import almost anything except for silver. However, our class hadn't focused on this era of imperialism, so Professor Drummond suggested that I modify my topic. I wanted to stick with the concept of trade, and keep my focus on China if it was possible, but I wasn't sure how. Then, during a visit to Special Collections, I saw a postcard depicting British India, and I noticed that there was an opium plant in the picture. Recalling my prior courses on Chinese history, I realized that I could use opium as a way to connect China to British imperialism through India. During the initial stages of developing my topic, I found that while most historians talk about the impact of opium in these regions, very few seem to address the important role that silver and the shift away from silver had, so I decided that this was where I would focus.

I started my research by looking at the secondary literature on the early trade developments between Europe and China, focusing on the importance of silver. I used JSTOR and other databases to find a number of scholarly articles, which provided both background information and helped to frame my research questions. Having limitless access to hundreds of articles related to my topic at the click of

a button made the initial stages of my research much more efficient, allowing me to gain a better understanding of the information.

The research paper assignment required me to use a variety of primary sources, for which the *Empire Online* database, to which the library subscribes, became an essential resource. *Empire Online* gave me access to a plethora of primary sources including trade records, Parliamentary records, and missionary journals, which were crucial to my research. While not all of the primary sources that made it into my final draft came from *Empire Online*, many of them did, and it served as a fantastic starting point for understanding the types of documents that I needed to search for in other databases. Additionally, the ability to download and print all of these sources was extremely useful, as it allowed me to work with the sources hands-on and gain a better understanding of them.

Because of my emphasis on trade and my reliance on numbers and data from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I found myself reading through vast trade records and Parliamentary reports, many of which were handwritten. This proved to be a very long and difficult process, and it created the most problems for my research. It taught me the importance of planning and time management, especially when dealing with a project of this size, because I would not have been able to complete my research if I had not started it early. This project has completely changed the way that I approach and plan out all of my writing assignments, regardless of their length.

While I had written other research papers before, this one was by far the most in-depth and the most challenging. Despite these challenges, I found the process to be both interesting and rewarding. I learned how important it is to commit to everything that you do. My determination to write on a subject that I was interested in and passionate about led me to a research topic that was both enjoyable and engaging, and one that drastically improved my research skills. I know that this experience will help me with the future work that I do here at LMU, as well as at law school and in my future career.