

The Tobacco Pipe—Opium Pipe Nexus: Where there's smoke, there are accessories!

By Ben Rapaport

Strange title? Perhaps. A stranger topic, for sure, and the reader may think that I've finally lost it, gone wacko from smoking that other weed, but not so. And, no, I did not get my idea for this article by reading Cesar Chelala's "Tobacco: The Opium War of the 21st Century?" (*The Globalist*, March 2, 2013). Over the last 50 or so years, I've often written about the history of various tobacco pipes and, in 2005, Carlos Armero and I co-authored *The Arts of an Addition: Qing Dynasty Opium Pipes and Accessories*. But this is not the reason I chose to investigate the connection between tobacco and opium.

I've had ample time to reflect on all my investigative experience and I have concluded that there is an almost direct correlation, or relationship, between these two customs of smoking, albeit what's inside each bowl is a world apart in relative pleasure and pain. My interest is in the utensils of smoke, not the act of smoking, per se, but I offer one man's strong opinion of the relative boon or bane of smoking both. According to William H. Brereton, a solicitor in Hong Kong who wrote *The Truth About Opium* in 1882 (115-16):

The difference between opium smoking and tobacco smoking appears to be this: In the one case you take into your mouth the mere smoke of a valuable aromatic drug, which when passed into the stomach as a medicine has powerful curative properties...In the case of tobacco a foul and poisonous weed is taken, with no curative powers whatever...

Martin Booth, in *Opium. A History*, charges that Brereton's treatise "...was far from truthful ..." but this subject is not my cross to bear, so I'll move on. Based on a comparative study of the utensils developed for and used with both tobacco and opium, I can easily demonstrate this As Sir Edwin Ray Lankester said in 1911 (and everyone with a slight degree of knowledge about opium smoking would agree) in *Science From an Easy Chair*: "The opium-pipe and the mode of smoking at present in use in China are very different from the pipe and smoking of tobacco used there or elsewhere." Quite true! Moreover, as Friedrich Hirth reports in *Asia Major*, 2006: "It is not difficult to

distinguish an opium smoker from a tobacco smoker, because the pipes and other utensils look so different.” Also true as to their looks, but not true as to their use.

It’s also been said that the people of the East smoked opium while the people of the west smoked tobacco. Not quite as true. Tobacco has been used far longer than opium, according to their respective histories, but what has become apparent through recent study and research is that there are some interesting parallels, better, an interesting hypothesis regarding these two very different smoking customs. Lest the reader not know the history, European traders introduced tobacco, the tobacco pipe, and opium into China; the opium pipe was, matter-of-factly, based on the tobacco pipe, and opium smoking grew out of tobacco smoking! And as I will point out, around the world, wherever the custom of smoking a pipe was accepted—any kind of pipe and whatever was inside it—accessories always accompanied, and the accessories associated with opium use were no exception. Some would say that the opium pipe is a puzzle, because its configuration is so dissimilar to a tobacco pipe. This, too, is true, but that’s not where I am going with this hypothesis. My focus is on the devices used with *both* pipes.

It’s illegal to smoke opium nowadays, but it was not illegal way back when, unimportant the timeframe. Unimportant also is who used opium and where. In its time, opium was as common a commodity in China as alcohol and tobacco are in Europe and America today. What’s important is to recognize how similar were the customs, the processes, and the devices engaged in both tobacco and opium use. The similarities abound. The opium pipe is not a mainstream collectible in the United States, except in a few small circles of those who have an appreciation for Chinese craftsmanship. Nonetheless, I know that tobacco pipe smokers appreciate works of art. Pipe smoking has always required a set of manipulations and accessories, and throughout the years, these accessories developed into important art forms, whether those utensils were tobacco- or opium-related.

## **RECORDED HISTORY OF SMOKING IN BRIEF**

When it comes to understanding the evolution and general acceptance of briar, porcelain, meerschaum, and clay pipes, their history is recorded in myriad books and in many languages. Admittedly, there are gaps and voids, myths, exaggerations, misunderstandings, and lots of unanswered questions having to recount more than 400 years of use. As to the evolution of opium pipes, their history is recorded in very few books and in fewer languages—principally Chinese, English, and French—less so, Dutch. Most all these books agree on the origin and spread of opium smoking and the evolution of the implements for its use, and most books contain rather consistently uniform facts and descriptive information, whether authored by users, onlookers, reporters, historians, or social scientists.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

Where are the similarities or commonalities? Let's be sure that the reader understands the terminology appropriate for my thesis; most of the following terms have been used to describe all the contrivances used with a pipe and, of course, most are interchangeable. In the abstract, some may describe all these things collectively as “smoking equipment” or, in a pipe man's argot, “pipe hardware.”

- **Accessory:** something extra, a thing added to help in a secondary way, a piece of optional equipment for convenience and comfort
- **Accouterment:** outfit, equipment, or kit
- **Appurtenance:** accessory
- **Artifact:** something created by humans usually for a practical purpose
- **Convenience:** handy or helpful device (passé)
- **Device:** invention or contrivance for some specific purpose
- **Implement:** article or device used or needed in a given activity
- **Nécessaire:** same as accouterment (très French!)
- **Paraphernalia:** a collection of articles
- **Pipe:** A device consisting of a bowl connected to a hollow stem, used in smoking tobacco and other substances
- **Requisite:** something necessary or indispensable for some purpose (very British!)
- **Tool:** any implement, instrument or utensil
- **Utensil:** implement or tool

## **SMOKING TOBACCO: A GLOBAL SURVEY**

Now, the promised comparison. There is a similarity of sorts regarding accessories, wherever used and for whatever purpose, for example, among our own Native Americans. Describing a grandmother, Jason Hook in *The American Plains Indians* (Osprey Publishing, 1985) reports that “She smokes a woman’s pipe, and at her feet are her smoking accessories: a cutting board, twist of tobacco, knife, tamping sticks, and a steel for fire-making (also used for sharpening knives).” That First-American tamping stick (our pipe tamper) was usually about a foot long, often ornamented with quill and beadwork. And who can forget all those wonderfully crafted, fringed pipe bags with beaded panels? Those were their accessories!

### **The Near East**

What about the pipe smoking paraphernalia in the Near East and in parts of South Asia: the nargileh, kalia, hookah, shisha, goza, or whatever you care to call water pipes? Isaac Adams, in *Persia by a Persian* (1906), reported: “Every smoking man in Persia must not only have a pipe, but also a piece of flint, a piece of steel, and a supply of punk, or tinder in his pocket [and, no doubt, charcoal] to start a fire to light his pipe.” Note that Adams does not volunteer whether the content in this regional pipe is dagga, hashish, hemp, herbs, kief, leaves, spices, sandalwood, or tobacco.

### **Japan**

Next, consider the Orient, Japan, specifically. The Japanese have their unique pipe format and devices for smoking tobacco. Notice that the smoker requires more than just his traditional tobacco pipe (*kiseru*). (Ignorant Westerners often mistook the *kiseru* for an opium pipe.) With time, artisans designed and produced (a) the *kiseru-zutsu* (pipe case in various materials and in many assorted styles and configurations); (b) the *tabako-ire* (tobacco pouch); (c) the *tabako-bon* (combination tray, ash receiver and storage compartments); (d) the *tonkotsu* (tobacco box); and (e) the *sagemono* (assorted hanging

objects suspended from the kimono's obi [sash]). Some or all became part and parcel of the ritual of smoke.

### **China**

Accessories abide those who smoked tobacco in that gooseneck-looking water pipe, that very Oriental version of the hookah used in China; water is common to both styles, but whereas the hookah and its variants has a flexible hose, in the much more refined Chinese version, the hose is non-flexible. As Charles J. H. Halcombe reports in his 1896 travelogue, *The Mystic Flowery Land*, “Their best pipe is the hubble-bubble, made of white filigreed metal resembling silver, with a little movable tube or bowl, like a cigarette holder, which is only large enough to contain a pinch of tobacco. The body of the pipe is fitted with all necessary requisites in the shape of manipulating prickers, small cleaning brush, spills, and tobacco box...” There is slight evidence that some Chinese laced tobacco with opium and smoked this mixture in this type of pipe.

### **Mongolia**

Yes, Mongolia! “From ancient times, then pipe and tobacco pouch have been the sign of peace and manhood, and smoking (as with the indigenous tribes of North America) has specific symbolic meaning...A man's smoking set consists of a pipe, a cleaning stick, flints, a pouch and a fastener with a cord for tying it to the nomad's belt. By tradition, the pipe is carried at the top of the right boot, and the pouch (with its effects), is tied to the left side of the belt” (Jane Blunden, *Mongolia: The Bradt Travel Guide*, 2004, 66).

### **Eastern Europe**

If I turn to Eastern Europe, Henry Howe, in 1854, described the Magyar shepherd in *The Travels and Adventures of Celebrated Travelers in the Principal Countries of the Globe*: “To complete his accouterments, he must have a short pipe stuck in his boot-top; and in his belt a tobacco-bag, with a collection of instruments, intended for striking fire, clearing

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the pipe, stopping the tobacco, pricking the ashes, etc.” No surprise here; after all, these were the customary impedimenta of the pipe smoker everywhere.

### **Western Europe and America**

Now a look at the western world’s tobacco pipe smoker of yesterday ... and today. In defining a tobacco pipe, the *New International Encyclopedia* (Volume XIX [1906]) had this to say: “Numerous evidences of taste are shown in the decoration of the bowls, stems, and mouthpieces and in the tobacco pouches, strike-a-light, match-boxes, and cleaners, which are smokers’ accessories.” Another source, *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, Session 1907-8*, concluded that a pipe smoker’s requisites included: “...Cases, Tobacco Pouches, Smokers’ Sets, Boxes, Match Stands, Ash Trays, Smokers’ Lamps...”

Eric Burns (*The Smoke of the Gods*) had something similar to say about a much earlier time, conjecturing about what might have occurred when Sir Walter Raleigh (1552–1618) “breezed into the Mermaid Tavern”:

He might also have distributed some of the gadgets that made the pastime of pipe smoking so intricate an endeavor, such as ‘a metal stopper to press the tobacco into the bowl, a gold or silver pick to cleanse the bowl, a knife to shred tobacco... a scoop for loose tobacco, and whatever else appealed to the playboy as necessary.’ The latter perhaps included boxes in which a person carried his tobacco and tongs to transport it from box to bowl. In fact, after a time, ‘the average gallant required so many smoking accessories... that a dedicated manservant was needed to carry them.’

Travel from England to Holland. Author Mary Mapes Dodge describes the inveterate Dutch pipe smoker in *Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates. A Story of Life in Holland* (1909, 245): “Every man of them had his pipe and tobacco pouch. Some carried what might be called the smoker's complete outfit—a pipe, tobacco, a pricker with which to clean the tube, a silver net for protecting the bowl, and a box of the strongest brimstone matches.”

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That was then, and here's a more complete, more expansive description, much better than I can offer to explain this creature known as the tobacco pipe smoker, and I doubt that the reader will find fault with it. In discussing the evolution of smoking in *Smoking Accessories. A Collector's Guide*, Sarah Yates writes in 2000:

All these developments generated a wealth of accessories: pipe cases, cigar and cigarette cases and boxes in leather, silver, gold, and other materials; tobacco pouches and jars, plus other wares such as tampers, cigar cutters, and vesta cases. From the first decade of the 20thC, the modern lighter joined the old tinder boxes, and other early lighting implements, to enhance further the vast range of collectables.

Matthew Hilton is a British professor of social history and a recognized authority on the culture of tobacco use that I have often quoted in many of my essays. In his monograph, "Leisure, Politics, and the Consumption of Tobacco in Britain Since the Nineteenth Century," in *Histories of Leisure* (2002), he writes:

Ultimately, smokers had to satisfy themselves with more earthly pleasures, but they explored their individuality through their 'paraphernalia of smokiana,' from the tools of their habit (clay pipes, briar pipes, meerschaums, churchwardens, pipe cleaners, matches, cigar holders, cigar cases, ash trays, pipe-lights, spills, spittoons, tobacco pouches, storage jars, snuff boxes, pipe racks, and so on), to the more general objects that completed the smoking experience (favorite smoking armchairs, tables, slippers, jackets, hats, and smoking companions).

And Hilton struck again, expressing a similar thought in another essay ("Smoking and Sociability," in Gilman and Xun [eds.], *Smoke. A Global History of Smoking*, 2004, 126, 128):

As props to their smoking idiosyncrasies, devotees collected 'the paraphernalia of smokiana,' including clay pipes, briar pipes, meerschaums, churchwardens, pipe cleaners, matches, cigar holders, cigar cases, ashtrays, pipe-lights, spills, spittoons, tobacco pouches, storage jars, snuff boxes and pipe racks, as well as their favourite smoking armchairs, tables, slippers, jackets and even hats.

Not to be picky, but Hilton forgot to mention silver, wood, brass and tin clay pipe cases, the pipe stand and, for those who may still be smoking the old-fashioned way, pipe tongs, the coal brazier, and the spittoon; adding these few others smoking aids may not complete the picture.

Can any of this be disputed? It's accurate, more or less, depending on the timeframe and the country in question. As I recounted in "How Do We Smoke?": Accessories and Utensils" (*SMOKE* [2004]): "Today, most of these smokers' accessories and accouterments have fallen into disuse for various reasons, among them changes in smoking preference, a better understanding of the health-related hazards and, surely, the fast pace of modern life."

## **OPIUM SMOKING**

Some have claimed that opium smoking was an offshoot of tobacco smoking. There is much evidence of this. Opium smoking is little known in the western world, although I add that in the United States, in those cities where large numbers of Chinese lived and worked, opium dens were not uncommon meeting places. Public dens were also popular in places like Paris and London where sailors and expatriates congregated. Sometime during the 16th century, European traders introduced tobacco and the tobacco pipe to China. Madak is a blend of opium *and tobacco*, and it was used as a recreational intoxicant smoking mixture in 17th–18th century China. Opium was legal for medicinal use in China at that time. When madak was prohibited by a 1729 edict, it may have been a contributing factor to the increased popularity of smoking pure opium in the 19th century. In time, both craftsmen and users had ideas about useful and efficient implements and devices for the convenience and comfort of smokers. In addition to the pipe, serious opium smokers required a host of additional materials used to prepare and smoke opium. (Could this not be said about tobacco pipe smokers and their requisites?) As one described what was required to smoke opium: "Smokers needed a special eighteen-inch pipe, bowl, sponge, chisel, and tray" (Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *A Pickpocket's Tale*, 83). But a yet better explanation comes from someone very knowledgeable, a medical doctor who intimately knew and observed opium den smokers, Dr. H.H. Kane. His article, "American Opium-Smokers" appeared in *Harper's Weekly*, September 24, 1881:



The other articles necessary to complete a smoker's outfit are: a box of buffalo horn (*hop toy*) to hold the opium; a long needle (*yen hanck*), on the end of which the opium is taken up, "cooked," and fixed upon the bowl; a small glass lamp, with a perforated bell-shaped glass cover, and in which a sweet or nut oil is burned; a pair of scissors for trimming the wick; straight and curved knives for cleaning the needle and bowl; a sponge to clean and cool the surface of the bowl; a box for the ash, or *yen tschi*; and two trays, the one smaller than the other, on which all these articles rest.

What are not mentioned in the Kane piece are some other associated opium utensils and accouterments: (a) pipe rack; (b) travel kit; and (c) furniture. So, whereas the tobacco pipe smoker might have a cabinet, chest, étagère or vitrine to store and display his wares, the opium pipe smoker might have had a bed (or a mat), a bowl stand, and a pillow (head rest), often configured with a compartment to store various tools and implements. Many of the opium-associated tools mentioned in this article can be seen at <http://www.pijpenkabinet.nl/Pijpenkabinet/P-E%20opium.html>. What was said about tobacco pipe accessories has also been said about the opium smoker's accessories.

Chinese artisans, like men of letters and women, also defined the social life of opium since the accessories they fashioned reveal... 'a body of language' and a 'surplus of meanings.' The sometimes elaborate, sometime simple but meaningful opium sets and accessories are more than everyday objects... Opium smokers communicated through smoking, and they differentiated themselves through opium utensils (Yangwen Zheng, *The Social Life of Opium in China*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, 166).

If history is useful to repeat, the spittoon, or if the reader prefers, cuspidor, was rather ubiquitous in America, and could be found even in the halls of the U.S. Congress until sometime in the early 1900s. Not surprisingly, as Peter Lee reports in *Opium Culture. The Art and Ritual of the Chinese Tradition* (2006): "In addition to the tray and the paraphernalia it holds, some other traditional accessories and furnishings are associated with the Chinese opium smoking habit. Almost all Chinese opium smokers keep a brass spittoon nearby for spitting out phlegm, coughed up while smoking." Nothing new here for a tobacco pipe smoker!

## THE COMPARISON

There is one distinction between the two pipe formats. In a typical tobacco pipe, the bowl is non-detachable, whereas for an opium pipe, the bowl is a separate component without which there is no capability to smoke. And the curing process? The briar pipe smoker builds a cake inside the bowl of a new pipe, whereas the opium pipe smoker builds a cake inside the bowl *and* in the tube of a new pipe. There is, though, one *really big* difference between the two smokers. Whereas the tobacco pipe smoker does not customarily inhale, typically emitting smoke, the opium pipe is designed for the vaporization and inhalation of the opium; that is, the user does not emit the smoke from his mouth.

Are there other similarities? One is coincident introduction. Although separated by many thousands of miles, smoking began in China, Europe and the New World at about the same time. Another is the universality of use. In 19th and early 20th century Europe *and* America, smoking opium was as popular as smoking tobacco, and opium was not limited to only the Chinese. There are also obvious, distinguishing features that separate the two communities of users beyond the pipe's configuration and what's inside the bowl; most, if not all the following are self-explanatory and none are important enough to dwell on (modus operandi of opium is described first):

- Venues (den and home versus home, office, and public places)
- Process of lighting (lamp versus a match or pocket lighter)
- Position while smoking (recumbent versus standing or sitting)
- Duration of the act (minutes for each bowl "hit" [but often, smoking as many as 6-7 pipes] versus, perhaps, one pipe bowl for an hour or more)
- Opium is distilled/vaporized; tobacco is burned
- Immediate after-effects and long-term effects
- Opium is no longer socially acceptable, and tobacco is *not yet* an illegal, banned, or controlled substance
- Availability of pipes in the marketplace (other than myriad reproductions, what's available today in opium pipes are only antiques)

It's time to focus on the pipes.

**Table 1. Comparative Features of Tobacco and Opium Pipes**

<b>Tobacco Pipe</b>		<b>Opium Pipe</b>	
<b>Materials</b>	<b>General Attributes</b>	<b>Materials</b>	<b>General Attributes</b>
Briar & other assorted woods	Stylistically, the briar pipe is a simple utensil with minimal embellishment. Earlier woods were accessorized and decorated.	Bamboo & rare woods	Gold, silver, copper, brass, precious and semi-precious jewels, nephrite, malachite accents and embellishments
Meerschaum	Silver, gold, copper, brass, amber, ivory and, on occasion, semi-precious stone accents and embellishments.  Inclusive period of production: Late 1700s to the present		Inclusive period of production: Late 1700s to c. 1920
Clay and other pottery	Price range: ~\$10 to \$15,000	Pottery & stoneware	Price range: ~\$500 to \$25,000
Porcelain	Fakes: none	Porcelain	Fakes: everywhere
Ivory & bone		Ivory & bone	
Amber	Not often found	Amber (exceptionally rare)	
Corncob			
Various metals (base and precious)		Paktong, silver, gold, niello, brass	
Glass	British fairings and today's bonges	Glass	
		Tortoiseshell, mother-of-pearl, lacquer; shagreen, cloisonné, champlévé, enamel, jade, jadeite	

And the accessories attendant to both pipes appear in the following table.

**Table 2. Comparative Similarity of Accessories**

<b>Tobacco Pipe</b>	<b>Opium Pipe</b>
Matches, lighter (butane, piezo, torch, etc.)	Oil lamp
Tamper/stopper	Needle
Pouch, roll, jar, tin, box	Box, jar
Pipe rack, cabinet	Pipe rack, tray
Pipe cleaners, reamer	Pipe cleaning rod, bowl scraper, knife
Ashtray	Dross (waste) container
Pipe holster, pouch, bag, case	Travel kit

As is readily apparent from both tables, all the stereotypical pipe smokers mentioned in this essay—the Native American, the Persian, the Magyar, the Japanese, and the Chinese water-pipe user—the Western world’s smoker of the meerschaum, porcelain, clay, or briar pipe *and* the Chinese opium smoker have much in common as regards their respective accessories.

## **COLLECTING**

Most of today’s pipe smokers are briar enthusiasts, although there are crossover collectors who acquire the occasional antique pipe. Some antikers own one or more oriental pipes (i.e., Chinese water, tobacco, or opium pipe, and the Japanese *kiseru*), and various other Asian ethnographic and tribal pipes. The devotee of the Chinese opium pipe and related accessories is customarily a purist with a singular collecting focus. As seen from the table above, there is as great a difference among the various styles and mediums employed in the design of opium pipes as there is among the various types of briar pipes available today... from the unadorned bamboo opium pipe used in the opium den to the sumptuously crafted cloisonné, tortoiseshell, jade, or porcelain opium pipe used in the home.

## **SUMMARY**

There are some irrefutable facts worthy of highlighting. The Chinese opium kit is a study of a culture, a specific era, wars fought, and lives lost. I doubt that any serious historical treatise of equivalent drama (other than medical) will be written about contemporary briar pipes. It is unlikely that the price of any high-quality briar pipe now or in the future *will ever* equal or exceed the price of a finely made opium pipe; often, however, the price of an antique meerschaum or porcelain pipe will exceed the price of some opium pipes. Still very popular and somewhat in demand in Collectorland, the opium pipe and its related utensils have unfortunately spawned a cottage industry of Far East reproductions, fakes, forgeries ... and, fortunately, a number of lushly illustrated books in several languages.

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The renewed production of the opium poppy in Afghanistan may result in a resurgence of smoking opium, but it is unlikely that anything produced today to smoke it will ever equal the Chinese standards in yesteryear pipe craftsmanship. I don't think that this kind of frenetic activity can be expected in the briar trade.

In writing this essay, it is not my intention to encourage the reader to begin collecting opium pipes, or to begin further research into this pipe genre. My singular purpose is to inform and to illustrate the similarities among those things that every smoker requires for a tobacco pipe's use, sustenance, maintenance, display, and storage. Uncanny as it may seem, perhaps hard to accept in principle, but not difficult to grasp, based on the facts presented, the tobacco pipe smoker then, as now, and the opium pipe smoker of yesterday are historically and inextricably linked by their rather similar accessories that are essential in the preparation, care, cleaning, and preservation of their respective pipes.