Lin Zexu's "Moral Advice to Queen Victoria"

1839

"The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians."

Overview

In 1839, in light of the growing level of opium addiction in China under the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Daoguang sent Commissioner Lin Zexu to Guangzhou (also called Canton), Guangdong Province, and ordered him to stop the smuggling and sale of opium in China by Western, especially British, merchants. While negotiating with Charles Elliot, the British superintendent of trade, for his cooperation, Lin wrote a letter in the traditional "memorial" form to the ruler of Britain expressing China's desire for peaceful resolution of the opium trade. He used what limited even mistaken knowledge he had newly acquired about his adversary in the hope of evoking the latter's sympathy and understanding. Drawing on Confucian precepts as well as historical events, he also reasoned forcefully on moral ground, trying to persuade the English monarch that he naturally would not wish to ask of others what he himself did not want. The letter was, in effect, an ultimatum made by Commissioner Lin on behalf of the Qing emperor to the English monarch, delivering the unmistakable message that he and the Qing government were determined to ban the selling and smoking of opium once and for all and at any cost.

After drafting and revising the letter, Commissioner Lin asked his assistant and English missionaries and merchants to translate it into English and present it to the British king who was actually Queen Victoria, whose reign had begun in 1837. Lin also circulated the letter as a public announcement to the Western merchants in Guangzhou. In the end, the letter was not delivered to the queen as he had intended, nor was his hope for a peaceful solution to the opium problem realized. Instead, the so-called First Opium War broke out in 1840, which ended in the Qing Dynasty's defeat and Lin's dismissal.

Context

From the late seventeenth century onward, international trade and commerce gained more and more importance in the West. The demand for tea and porcelain from China and for spices and indigo from India motivated many Europeans, especially the Dutch, Portuguese, and English, to establish trade depots or factories in Asia. The success of the emergent Industrial Revolution in England also fueled the English ambition to sell manufactured products in Asia in exchange for Asian goods. But most Asians, especially the Chinese, were simply uninterested in reciprocating trade with Western Europe. In 1793 Lord George Macartney, the first British ambassador to China, approached Emperor Qianlong and presented King George III's wish to establish diplomatic relations and expand trade between Britain and China. The emperor, however, firmly rejected all the requests made by the British embassy on the grounds that China had always been a self-sufficient country and that it had neither need for nor interest in foreign goods. At the time, any foreign trade with the West was administered through the Canton System, in which Western merchants were allowed to sell their goods in Guangzhou only through the Cohong (or Gonghang) merchants, who were the Chinese middlemen. Hoping to change the system and expand trade, Europeans continued to send embassies to China the Dutch in 1795, the Russians in 1806, and the British again in 1816 all to no avail.

The Europeans repeatedly sent emissaries to China because they wanted to sell more goods to the Chinese in order to balance the growing trade deficit incurred through the purchase of Chinese goods, especially tea. Through the eighteenth century, tea imports in Britain had risen sharply; from 1784 to 1785 they grew to over fifteen million pounds, from just over two pounds a century or so earlier. The British East India Company, which handled the nation's trade with China, began to grow tea in India in the 1820s but would not ship tea to Britain until 1858. Therefore, through the mid-nineteenth century almost all tea had to be imported from China. Between 1811 and 1819, British imports from China totaled over £72 million, of which tea was worth £70 million.

Aside from diplomatic efforts, the British also searched for and found an alternative to the currency of silver for the purchase of tea and other Chinese goods: opium. Just as Lord Macartney was pleading with Emperor Qianlong for the establishment of trade relations, British merchants discovered this different and illicit way to address the mount-

Time Line

1600	**December 31** The British East India Company is founded.
1760	The Canton System is established, forbidding direct access to trade in China by foreign merchants.
1820	**October 3** Emperor Daoguang ascends to the Qing dynastic throne in China.
1834	The monopoly of the British East India Company on trade with the Far East ends.
1837	**June 20** Queen Victoria ascends to the British throne.
1838	Commissioner Lin Zexu is sent by Emperor Daoguang to Guangdong to halt the sale of opium.
1839	Lin Zexu writes an open letter to Queen Victoria, urging a peaceful resolution to the opium trade. The First Opium War breaks out.

ing trade deficit with China. They began selling opium to the Chinese even though it had been banned by Emperor Yongzheng, Emperor Qianlong's father, as early as 1729. Thanks to opium sales, the silver inflow to China dropped from over 26.6 million taels between 1801 and 1810 to under 10 million taels between 1811 and 1820, or by about 63 percent. Later, as opium addiction spread rapidly in China, silver began to flow out of the country to the West, especially Britain; between 1821 and 1830 China paid out 2.3 million taels. And from 1831 to 1833, a period of merely three years, China paid an astonishing 9.9 million taels.

During the 1830s, therefore, Qing China began to suffer seriously from the trade deficit with the West. The economic toll of the growing opium sales and addiction in China was twofold. First, as opium sales grew, sales in other areas of trade dropped as a result. In his early career as governor of Jiangsu Province, Lin Zexu observed that Chinese merchants could sell only half of what they used to sell a decade or two earlier. Second, the outflow of silver caused a financial crisis in the country by altering the exchange rate between silver and copper, which was used in people's daily transactions. The shortage of silver caused its value to appreciate, which aggravated the tax burden on the people, because in paying tax they had to exchange copper cash for silver. In the eighteenth century a string of 1,000 copper cash was equal to 1 tael of silver. By the early nineteenth century 1 tael of silver was worth 1,500 copper cash, and in the mid nineteenth century it was worth 2,700 copper cash.

While opium does have medicinal use, relieving pain and allaying emotional distress, it is an addictive drug. Once the habit is formed, the withdrawal symptoms can include "extreme restlessness, chills, hot flushes, sneezing, sweating, salivation, running nose, and gastrointestinal disturbances such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea." Furthermore, "there are severe cramps in the abdomen, legs, and back; the bones ache; the muscles twitch; and the nerves are on edge. Every symptom is in combat with another. The addict is hungry, but he cannot eat; he is sleepy, but he cannot sleep" (Chang, p. 17). There can be little wonder, then, that ever since Emperor Yongzheng banned its consumption in the early eighteenth century, opium has remained contraband in China. During the early nineteenth century, when opium smoking spread across social strata and addicts numbered in the millions, many observers grew alarmed, especially scholar-officials, who presented a number of "memorials" to Emperor Daoguang, urging him to adopt harsh measures against the smuggling and selling of the drug. Lin Zexu was one, and arguably the most eloquent, among these scholar-officials. In one of his memorials, he argued vehemently that "if we continue to pamper it [opium smoking], a few decades from now we shall not only be without soldiers to resist the enemy, but also in want of silver to provide an army" (Chang, p. 96). Others suggested legalizing the drug to curb its abuse, but the proposal was rejected by the emperor, who regarded opium as an evil poison.

There is no source directly explaining why opium smoking which entails first heating opium paste over a flame and then smoking it through a long-stemmed pipe became so

popular among the Chinese beginning in the late eighteenth century. Speculation holds that it might have had something to do with tobacco smoking, imported from Latin America in the previous century. When tobacco smoking was first introduced to mainland China by soldiers who returned from a campaign in Taiwan, opium and tobacco were mixed and smoked together. As opium's therapeutic effects were revealed, it gained in popularity, especially among people who struggled with boredom or stress, such as eunuchs, wealthy women, petty clerks, and examination takers. As time went on, the habit of opium smoking spread to the leisure and working classes alike for social relaxation. To abet sales, merchants prepared detailed accounts of means of consumption in simple language, available to anyone who could read.

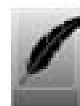
Nor has a convincing explanation been put forth for why, despite the repeated edicts from the emperor and the government, opium smoking became so unstoppable in China. Aside from the persistence of Western merchants in selling the drug, it was generally believed that the Qing government had by then become corrupt and hence ineffective in executing imperial orders. When a new imperial edict was issued in 1813 banning opium smoking altogether, it was actually quite harsh in punishing both smokers and sellers. If caught, a smoker could be sentenced to one hundred blows of the bamboo stick and forced to wear a heavy wooden collar in public for a month. Afraid of the severe consequences, the Cohong merchants who had monopolized the trade with the Europeans ceased involvement, at least in public. But small dealers quickly took their place, approaching European merchants directly in swift boats and then distributing the drug through networks of local trade. Apparently, this was a risky practice; to ensure its success, both European merchants and Chinese dealers bribed officials for their connivance. Some officials even exploited the trade by enforcing a fee per chest of opium. Whenever a new anti-opium edict was issued from the central government, local officials, rather than carry it out, would increase the fee for enriching themselves.

The British East India Company also played a dubious role in the opium trade, to say the least. Some of its officials did have qualms about smuggling the drug into China; the company stopped sales at one point, only to allow their resumption shortly after. For the company, the establishment of a long-standing opium monopoly in the Bengal region was a major success of the British conquest of India. In the 1780s the British East India Company took control of opium sales and production in the English-controlled areas of India. Shortly thereafter, the company also monopolized the trade with China. Hence, the company's opium production in India coincided with its intensified trade with China. In light of the huge deficits it had incurred in buying tea from China, the company clearly had major incentive to engage in opium production, if not directly in its selling. In fact, thanks to the company's excellent management of its opium monopoly in India, Indian opium was regarded by both dealers and smokers as representing high quality. The profits made by the company through opium sales would be directly used to purchase tea. A triangular trade network, from Britain to India, India to China, and China to Britain, thus formed. The company first bought (nominally) opium in India, selling it to private merchants, or "country traders," for smuggling into China; the merchants then used the silver gained to buy tea, porcelain, and other goods to sell back in Britain. This network helped to support the entire British position in the Far East, especially the ruling of India. Thanks to opium, the company and the British government not only corrected the earlier deficits in their China trade but also reaped a good fortune.

The success of the British East India Company in monopolizing and profiting from the trade with China caused envy

Time Line

1842	■ **August 29** The Treaty of Nanjing is signed, ending the First Opium War as well as the Canton System.
1850	■ **February 25** Emperor Daoguang dies. ■ **March 9** Emperor Xianfeng ascends to the Qing throne.
1856	■ The Second Opium War breaks out, to last for four years.
1858	■ **August 2** Under the Act for the Better Government of India, the British East India Company's functions are transferred to the Crown.
1874	■ **January 1** The British East India Company closes its business operations.



The East India Company ruled British India from East India House until 1858. (© Museum of London)

among others. By 1834 the company's monopoly of the trade came to an end, and the trade's being open to all comers resulted in the rise of opium sales. In 1832 China imported more than twenty-three thousand chests of opium (with each chest containing between 130 and 160 pounds); the figure rose to thirty thousand chests in 1835 and to forty thousand chests in 1838. These increases drove Western merchants to chafe more blatantly at the Canton System, the Qing government's means of control of foreign trade, in the hope of prying open China's door to the West, and merchants' actions were broadly sanctioned by the British government. After the end of the British East India Company's monopoly, British merchants in China were represented by the superintendent of trade. A government official, the superintendent often refused to deal with the Cohong merchants, demanding instead that he communicate directly with Qing officials. The clash over opium sales thus became not simply a matter between the Qing government and Western merchants but rather one between Qing China and Great Britain.

About the Author

Born in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, in 1785, Lin Zexu excelled in his study of the Chinese classics and in the civil service examinations; he earned the *jinshi* ("presented scholar") degree in 1811 and subsequently became a member of the Hanlin Academy, a prestigious institution of Confucian learning in Beijing, the dynasty capital. Lin then launched a successful career in government, serving in a range of posts in various provinces. His commitment to high moral standards and integrity earned him the epithet of "Lin the Blue Sky." Prior to becoming the imperial commissioner, Lin was the governor-general of Hunan and Hubei in 1837; in this post he launched a vigorous campaign against opium smoking. He also repeatedly memorialized the emperor for taking tough measures against opium sales. As commissioner, Lin assembled scholars to compile the book *Sizhouzhi* (Treatise on Four Continents), an effort to establish and disseminate knowledge about Europe and the world. After Western merchants refused to obey his orders to surrender illicit opium, he blockaded their enclave and eventually confiscated and destroyed 2.6 million pounds of opium. The British government retaliated by sending a fleet to China, and the British prevailed in battle. Angry over Lin's action for its leading to military conflict and defeat, Emperor Daoguang dismissed him and exiled him to Xinjiang. Lin was later reinstated, however, and ordered to deal with other difficult situations. He died while traveling to Guangxi to administer a campaign against the Taiping Rebellion in 1850.

Explanation and Analysis of the Document

Lin Zexu's letter to the British Crown starts by singing praises to the Qing emperor for his grace and benevolence. These praises reflect the long-entrenched Chinese notion that China was the center of the world, or the "Zhongguo" (Central Country/Middle Kingdom) in the cosmos. Out of courtesy, Lin acknowledges in the second paragraph that Britain is also a historical country with an honorable tradition. Yet this acknowledgment, too, builds on the Sinocentric conception of the world; he commends the "politeness and submissiveness" of the British in delivering tributes and offering "tributary memorials" to the ruler of the Celestial Empire   China. He also deems that the British have benefited considerably from these activities, a point he will stress again later in the letter.

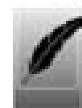
Paragraphs 3 5 directly address the problem that prompted Lin to seek communication with the ruler of Britain: the smuggling and selling of opium in China by British merchants. Lin describes how his emperor is enraged by the harm to the Chinese people caused by opium smoking and how he has been dispatched by the emperor to put an end to the practice. He explains the punishment for the Chinese who smoke and sell opium and notes that were his emperor not so graceful, the same punishment could be extended to British sellers. Lin had recently confiscated a large amount of opium through the help of Charles Elliot, the British superintendent of trade; his reporting this serves as a warning because, as he reveals, the Qing Dynasty had, in fact, promulgated new regulations, whereby if any Briton was found selling opium, he would receive the same punishment as would a Chinese. Indeed, a major reason for Lin's writing and circulating this letter was to inform and warn the British and other foreign merchants about the new regulations. In order to carry them out, he needed the help of the British ruler, who "must be able to instruct the various barbarians to observe the law with care."

In seeking to secure the aid of the British ruler, Lin resorts to moral suasion in paragraphs 6 8. This is consistent with the teaching of Confucianism and Lin's own character. His central argument draws on the Confucian precept that, as phrased in paragraph 8, "naturally you would not wish to give unto others what you yourself do not want." But in exercising this moral exhortation, Lin shows his limited as well as mistaken knowledge about his adversary, and his mistakes invariably undercut the effect of his argument. He first assumes that the sale and smoking of opium are forbidden in Britain, which was erroneous, for most British then considered opium no more harmful to humans than alcohol. Second, he believes tea and rhubarb to be indispensable to the health of the British, which was wrong, even though tea drinking had become a national habit in Britain. Third, he states that without Chinese silk, other textiles could not be woven; this was clearly inaccurate. But even with these seemingly egregious mistakes, Lin makes a strong point: The British needed Chinese goods more than the Chinese did British goods, so how could the British repay the benefits from and benevolence of the Chinese by selling them the poisonous drug? In paragraph 6 he asks passionately, "Where is your conscience?" It would have been hard for the British Crown to counter this line of argument.

After asking such acute questions, Lin softens his tone in paragraph 9. He writes that perhaps the British ruler was unaware that some wicked British subjects have been involved in opium smuggling in China, since in the British homeland, because of the king's (that is, the queen's) "honorable rule," no opium is produced. He thus asks the British ruler to extend the edict against planting opium from Britain to India and to grow the "five grains" in its stead. This plea is also made on the moral ground that for such a virtuous course of action, "heaven must support you and the spirits must bring you good fortune." Lin's notion that the "five grains" are essential to humans and his belief in both "Heaven" and "spirits" are distinctly Chinese.

Paragraphs 10 12 offer further explanation of the new regulations from the imperial court by which the same punishments will be extended to the British if they continue ignoring Lin's anti-opium orders and policy. Central to these explanations is an idea of jurisdiction that Lin takes for granted (as do many sovereign nations today): A foreigner who lives in another country must obey the laws of that country rather than the laws of his own. That is, Lin repudiates the extraterritorial rights that the British then demanded from the Qing Dynasty   and which they later obtained through the First Opium War. Lin's refusal of such privilege in this letter does not draw on international law but follows the same Confucian principle that you would not do unto others what you yourself do not want done unto you, the line of reasoning he used before. He asks the English ruler, "Suppose a man of another country comes to England to trade, he still has to obey the English laws; how much more should he obey in China the laws of the Celestial Dynasty?"

Before he actually carried out the new orders   to punish opium sellers with "decapitation or strangulation"   Lin wanted to exercise caution, which was why he decided to write the letter in the first place. In paragraph 12, he again reminds the reader of the kindness of his emperor. When informed of the new regulations, Charles Elliot requested an extension, Lin writes. After Lin forwarded the request to the emperor, the emperor, out of "consideration and compassion," actually agreed to grant the extension with additional months of leeway. Lin thus hails his ruler's "extraordinary Celestial grace." Yet with the benefit of hindsight, historians may also interpret this "grace" as a sort of reluctance on the part of the Qing ruler to confront the British militarily. In other words, although the emperor ordered Lin to halt opium sales in Guangzhou and Guangdong, he was not ready to risk war with the British. If Lin's letter amounted to a last-ditch effort to solve the opium problem peacefully, this approach was indeed favored and sanctioned by the emperor. It was said that Lin memorialized Emperor Daoguang sometime in July 1839, enclosing in the memorial the letter that he had drafted for the English ruler. On August 27, Emperor Daoguang approved it. Lin then asked others to translate it into English, publicized it around Guangzhou, and looked for messengers to deliver it to Britain.



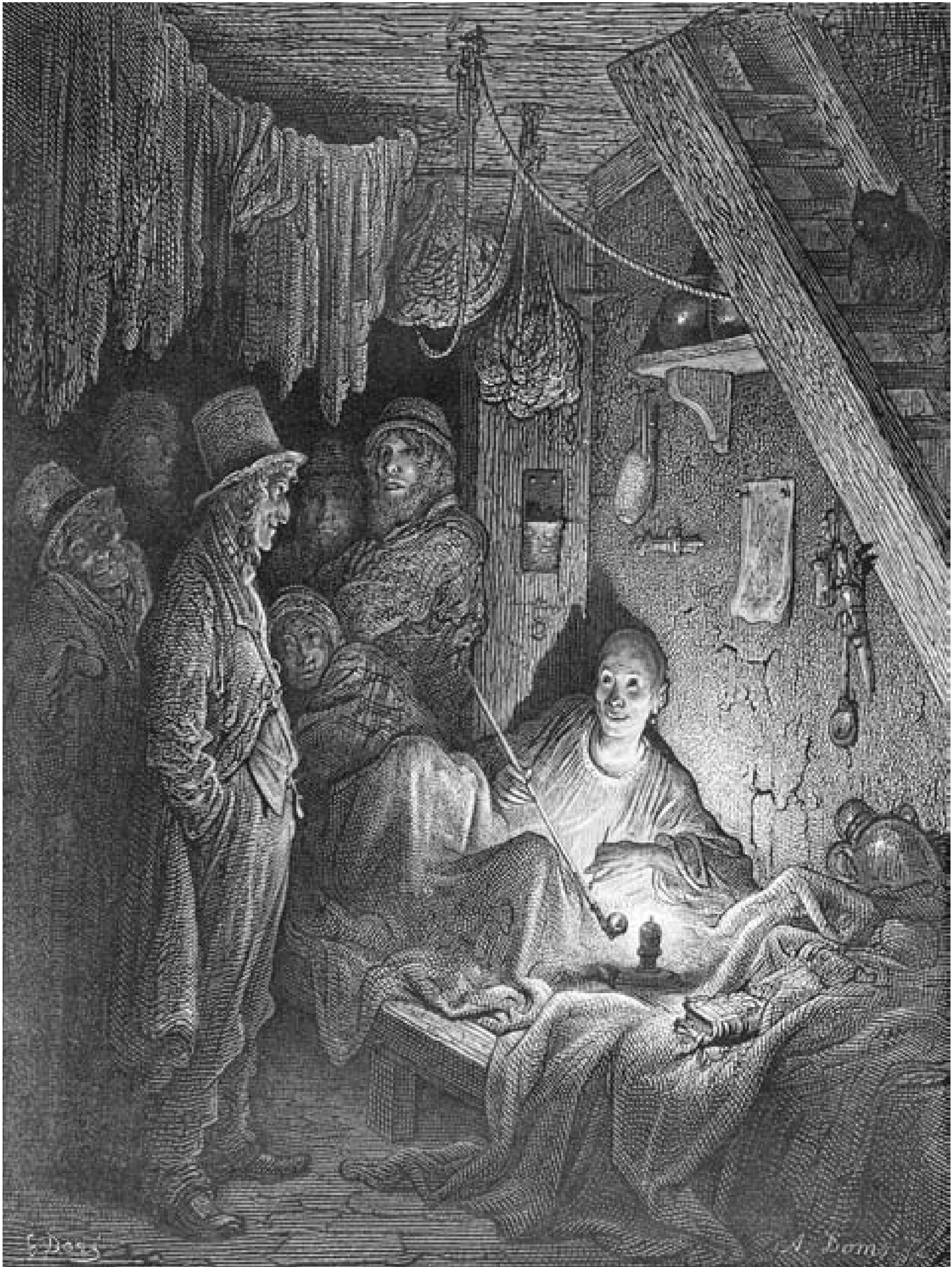


Illustration of an opium den in London (© Museum of London)

Essential Quotes

"The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? … Let us ask, where is your conscience?"

(Paragraph 6)

"To digest clearly the legal penalties as an aid to instruction has been a valid principle in all ages. Suppose a man of another country comes to England to trade, he still has to obey the English laws; how much more should he obey in China the laws of the Celestial Dynasty?"

(Paragraph 10)

"The fact is that the wicked barbarians beguile the Chinese people into a death trap.… He who takes the life of even one person still has to atone for it with his own life; yet is the harm done by opium limited to the taking of one life only? Therefore in the new regulations, in regard to those barbarians who bring opium to China, the penalty is fixed at decapitation or strangulation. This is what is called getting rid of a harmful thing on behalf of mankind."

(Paragraph 11)

In concluding his letter, Lin makes another perhaps the strongest request to the English monarch, asking the latter to take the responsibility of urging British subjects to observe Chinese laws and mores and cease the opium trade. Lin demands that the monarch, after receiving the letter, inform him and the Qing government of the means by which the trade will be stopped. Since Queen Victoria (most likely) did not even see the letter, Lin's request/demand went completely ignored.

Audience

The intended recipient of this letter was Queen Victoria, who was crowned monarch of the United Kingdom in 1837; she would also become the first Empress of India under the British Raj in 1876, and she retained both of these royal titles until her death in 1901. The last monarch of the House of Hanover, the queen was brought up speaking German, French, and English. She married off all of her nine children throughout Europe. During her reign, Great Britain saw the success of the Industrial Revolution and the establishment of the British Empire around the world. The Victorian era was marked by progress, prosperity, and power for Great Britain, which became one of the most formidable global empires in modern history.

Since the letter, before it made its way to Britain and appeared in the London *Times*, was first circulated and publicized in Guangzhou among the Westerners there, they were hence also its targeted audience. These Westerners included officials such as the British superintendent of trade, Charles Elliot, and his assistants; most, however, were merchants from Europe and America, with the British apparently constituting the majority. As "country traders," they at first obtained licenses for purchasing and selling Indian opium from the British East India Company on a select basis. After 1834, when the company's monopoly on trade in China ended, the countries where the traders came from multiplied, and the sources where they acquired the opium also diversified. Both of these

factors exacerbated the opium problem on the eve of the First Opium War.

Impact

Since Lin Zexu failed to accomplish the delivery of the letter to the British ruler and thus failed to secure the latter's cooperation in ceasing opium sales, he stepped up his anti-opium campaign. After the British merchants refused to pledge not to sell opium, he expelled them from Macao, as they had been from Guangzhou. The British retreated to Hong Kong, then a small fishing island, where they were harried by the local Chinese. Having lost their opium and fearing for their lives, the merchants lobbied the British parliament for compensation and protection. Lord Palmerston, the foreign minister, dispatched a fleet of sixteen warships carrying four thousand mariners and over five hundred guns to China. Instead of engaging the Qing forces commanded by Lin in Guangdong, the fleet sailed north, where they seized Zhoushan. This led Emperor Daoguang to dismiss Lin and replace him with Qishan, a trusted Manchu official who negotiated an agreement with Charles Elliot in January 1841. Through the agreement the Chinese were to, among other provisions, cede Hong Kong and pay six million taels of silver as indemnity to the British. The British fleet consequently returned to the south.

However, the war was not over. Dissatisfied with the agreement, Lord Palmerston fired Charles Elliot, and Henry Pottinger, the new superintendent of trade, resumed war. After losing several cities to the British, the Qing Dynasty pursued peace, which resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing on August 29, 1842. Ratified ten months later by Queen Victoria and Emperor Daoguang, the treaty stipulated that the Qing Dynasty open five port cities for trade, cede Hong Kong, and pay a total of thirty-nine million taels of silver to the British. It also officially ended the Canton System. Ironically, the opium trade is not mentioned in the treaty, except in the statement that of the total indemnity amount, six million taels were to com-

Questions for Further Study

1. For many years, the United States has been engaged in a "war on drugs," attempting both to curtail demand for illegal drugs and to interdict smuggling of illegal drugs into the United States. The limited successes of this war have prompted many Americans to call for the legalization of certain drugs, yet exporting nations show little interest in stopping drug production. In what ways does the drug situation in the contemporary United States parallel that of China in the nineteenth century?

2. Lin Zexu's letter never reached the hands of its intended audience, the British monarch, Queen Victoria. In what way, then, can the letter be regarded as a "milestone" document? Put differently, in what ways did Lin Zexu's letter represent a crucial turning point in relations between the West and Asia, specifically China?

3. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, business enterprises such as the British East India Company were often instruments of both commerce and a nation's foreign policy. In what sense did British merchants in China represent British foreign policy with regard to China as well as India? Why did England dispatch its navy to China in response to the actions and policies of the Chinese on their own soil?

4. The dissension between the Chinese and the British that led to the First Opium War was in part the result of a failure of diplomacy. In the early nineteenth century, the history, culture, religion, language, politics, and traditions of Britain and China were so different that the two nations found it difficult to find common ground for communication. In what ways does Lin Zexu's letter—and, indeed, the entire controversy surrounding it—demonstrate this failure of understanding and diplomacy? What could either side have done, if anything, to preserve its interests and yet reduce the possibility of armed conflict? Do you see any conflicts in the modern world that parallel this conflict between East and West in the nineteenth century?

5. In the nineteenth century, Asians, especially the Chinese, showed little interest in trade relations with the West, despite the efforts of several European countries to establish such relations. Why were the Chinese so resistant to trade with the West?

pensate the losses of the opium sellers. Other Western nations followed suit in seeking such agreements. As they concluded similar and sometimes more-detailed treaties with the Qing, the benefits and privileges granted were also extended to the British, including the contested "extraterritorial rights." Thus, after the First Opium War, the Qing Dynasty lost most of its control of China's commercial, social, and foreign policies. As such, the war ushered in a new era of Chinese history, to be marked by the further intrusion of Western powers and by the continuous Chinese struggle against colonialism and imperialism.

Further Reading

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Document Text

Lin Zexu's "Moral Advice to Queen Victoria"

A communication: magnificently our great Emperor soothes and pacifies China and the foreign countries, regarding all with the same kindness. If there is profit, then he shares it with the peoples of the world; if there is harm, then he removes it on behalf of the world. This is because he takes the mind of heaven and earth as his mind.

The kings of your honorable country by a tradition handed down from generation to generation have always been noted for their politeness and submissiveness. We have read your successive tributary memorials saying, "In general our countrymen who go to trade in China have always received His Majesty the Emperor's gracious treatment and equal justice," and so on. Privately we are delighted with the way in which the honorable rulers of your country deeply understand the grand principles and are grateful for the Celestial grace. For this reason the Celestial Court in soothing those from afar has redoubled its polite and kind treatment. The profit from trade has been enjoyed by them continuously for two hundred years. This is the source from which your country has become known for its wealth.

But after a long period of commercial intercourse, there appear among the crowd of barbarians both good persons and bad, unevenly. Consequently there are those who smuggle opium to seduce the Chinese people and so cause the spread of the poison to all provinces. Such persons who only care to profit themselves, and disregard their harm to others, are not tolerated by the laws of heaven and are unanimously hated by human beings. His Majesty the Emperor upon hearing of this is in a towering rage. He has especially sent me, his commissioner, to come to Kwangtung, and together with the governor-general and governor jointly to investigate and settle this matter.

All those people in China who sell opium or smoke opium should receive the death penalty. If we trace the crime of those barbarians who through the years have been selling opium, then the deep harm they have wrought and the great profit they have usurped should fundamentally justify their execution according to law. We take into consideration, however the fact that the various barbarians have still known how to repent their crimes and return to their allegiance to us by taking the 20,183 chests of opium from their store ships and petitioning us, through their consular officer [Charles] Elliot, to receive it. It has been entirely destroyed and this has been faithfully reported to the Throne in several memorials by this commissioner and his colleagues.

Fortunately we have received a specially extended favor from His Majesty the Emperor, who considers that for those who voluntarily surrender there are still some circumstances to palliate their crime and so for the time being he has magnanimously excused them from punishment. But as for those who again violate the opium prohibition, it is difficult for the law to pardon them repeatedly. Having established new regulations, we presume that the ruler of your honorable country, who takes delight in our culture and whose disposition is inclined towards us, must be able to instruct the various barbarians to observe the law with care. It is only necessary to explain to them the advantages and disadvantages and then they will know that the legal code of the Celestial Court must be absolutely obeyed with awe.

We find that your country is sixty or seventy thousand *li* from China. Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade for the purpose of making a great profit. The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit to an extreme, they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience? I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden by your country; that is because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. Since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on to the harm of other countries how much less to China! Of all that China exports to foreign countries, there is not a single thing which is not beneficial to people: they are of benefit when eaten, or of benefit when used, or of benefit when resold: all are beneficial. Is there a single article from China which has done any harm to foreign countries? Take tea and rhubarb, for example: the foreign countries cannot get along for a sin-

gle day without them. If China cuts off these benefits with no sympathy for those who are to suffer, then what can the barbarians rely upon to keep themselves alive? Moreover the woolens, camlets, and longells of foreign countries cannot be woven unless they obtain Chinese silk. If China, again, cuts off this beneficial export, what profit can the barbarians expect to make? As for other food stuffs, beginning with candy, ginger, cinnamon, and so forth, and articles for use, beginning with silk, satin, chinaware, and so on, all the things that must be had by foreign countries are innumerable. On the other hand, articles coming from the outside to China can only be used as toys. We can take them or get along without them. Since they are not needed by China, what difficulty would there be if we closed the frontier and stopped the trade? Nevertheless our Celestial Court lets tea, silk, and other goods be shipped without limit and circulated everywhere without begrudging it in the slightest. This is for no other reason but to share the benefit with the people of the whole world.

The goods from China carried away by your country not only supply your own consumption and use, but also can be divided up and sold to other countries, producing a triple profit. Even if you do not sell opium, you still have this threefold profit. How can you bear to go further, selling products injurious to others in order to fulfill your insatiable desire?

Suppose there were people from another country who carried opium for sale to England and seduced your people into buying and smoking it; certainly your honorable ruler would deeply hate it and be bitterly aroused. We have heard heretofore that your honorable ruler is kind and benevolent. Naturally you would not wish to give unto others what you yourself do not want. We have also heard that the ships corning to Canton have all had regulations promulgated and given to them in which it is stated that it is not permitted to carry contraband goods. This indicates that the administrative orders of your honorable rule have been originally strict and clear. Only because the trading ships are numerous, heretofore perhaps they have not been examined with care. Now after this communication has been dispatched and you have clearly understood the strictness of the prohibitory laws of the Celestial Court, certainly you will not let your subjects dare again to violate the law.

We have further learned that in London, the capital of your honorable rule, and in Scotland (Su-ko-lan), Ireland (Ai-lan), and other places, originally no opium has been produced. Only in several places of India under your control such as Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Patna, Benares, and Malwa has opium been planted from hill to hill and ponds have been opened for its manufacture. For months and years work is continued in order to accumulate the poison. The obnoxious odor ascends, irritating heaven and frightening the spirits. Indeed you, O King, can eradicate the opium plant in these places, hoe over the fields entirely, and sow in its stead the five grains. Anyone who dares again attempt to plant and manufacture opium should be severely punished. This will really be a great, benevolent government policy that will increase the common weal and get rid of evil. For this, Heaven must support you and the spirits must bring you good fortune, prolonging your old age and extending your descendants. All will depend on this act.

As for the barbarian merchants who come to China, their food and drink and habitation are all received by the gracious favor of our Celestial Court. Their accumulated wealth is all benefit given with pleasure by our Celestial Court. They spend rather few days in their own country but more time in Canton. To digest clearly the legal penalties as an aid to instruction has been a valid principle in all ages. Suppose a man of another country comes to England to trade, he still has to obey the English laws; how much more should he obey in China the laws of the Celestial Dynasty?

Now we have set up regulations governing the Chinese people. He who sells opium shall receive the death penalty and he who smokes it also the death penalty. Now consider this: if the barbarians do not bring opium, then how can the Chinese people resell it, and how can they smoke it? The fact is that the wicked barbarians beguile the Chinese people into a death trap. How then can we grant life only to these barbarians? He who takes the life of even one person still has to atone for it with his own life; yet is the harm done by opium limited to the taking of one life only? Therefore in the new regulations, in regard to those barbarians who bring opium to China, the penalty is fixed at decapitation or strangulation. This is what is called getting rid of a harmful thing on behalf of mankind.

Moreover we have found that in the middle of the second month of this year Consul Elliot of your nation, because the opium prohibition law was very stem and severe, petitioned for an extension of the time limit. He requested a limit of five months for India and its adjacent harbors and related territories, and ten months for England proper, after which they would act in conformity with the new regulations.

Document Text

Now we, the commissioner and others, have memorialized and have received the extraordinary Celestial grace of His Majesty the Emperor who has redoubled his consideration and compassion. All these who within the period of the coming one year (from England) or six months (from India) bring opium to China by mistake, but who voluntarily confess and completely surrender their opium, shall be exempt from their punishment. After this limit of time, if there are still those who bring opium to China then they will plainly have committed a wilful violation and shall at once be executed according to law, with absolutely no clemency or pardon. This may be called the height of kindness and the perfection of justice.

Our Celestial Dynasty rules over and supervises the myriad states, and surely possesses unfathomable spiritual dignity. Yet the Emperor cannot bear to execute people without having first tried to reform them by instruction. Therefore he especially promulgates these fixed regulations. The barbarian merchants of your country, if they wish to do business for a prolonged period, are required to obey our statutes respectfully and to cut off permanently the source of opium. They must by no means try to test the effectiveness of the law with their lives. May you, O King, check your wicked and sift your vicious people before they come to China, in order to guarantee the peace of your nation, to show further the sincerity of your politeness and submissiveness, and to let the two countries enjoy together the blessings of peace. How fortunate, how fortunate indeed! After receiving this dispatch will you immediately give us a prompt reply regarding the details and circumstances of your cutting off the opium traffic. Be sure not to put this off. The above is what has to be communicated. This is appropriately worded and quite comprehensive.

Glossary

camlets	fabrics made of silk and wool
Canton	Guangzhou
Kwangtung	Guangdong
li	a Chinese unit of measure for distance, which has varied over the course of history but is now considered to be 1,640 feet.
longells	often spelled “long ells,” twilled woolen fabrics woven in long pieces
memorials	statements made to a government, often accompanied by petitions for action