

personal concerns about the possibility that his own son might be using opium and his heartfelt efforts to share such feelings with his wife. Such sentiments reveal a man who is balancing his duties as an official and as a father and husband.

Questions

1. How might the fact that many of Lin's relatives were opium addicts color his views on the opium trade in Guangzhou?
2. How does this letter show us a different facet of Lin's personality from that of his more official persona?

The day before yesterday I sent you a letter and yesterday received two from you. . . . Here [in Guangzhou] the scenes of opium are astonishing. Over half of all households are using it and many local officials also are addicted. So detestable! I am determined to put a stop to it. I have just ordered the Guangzhou Intendant to inform the British [Trade Representative] that from today forward the trade [of opium] is forbidden. All who violate this order will lose their trading rights. I am not sure if the order will have the desired outcome or not.

Our oldest son is now in the capital [Beijing] and I have heard he often stays up late and goes out to meet with many friends. I do not know whether or not he has become addicted [to opium]. I have been meaning to write to caution him. If you are in touch with him, please also mention it, so that I will not worry. With our second and third sons at home under your oversight, they should be alright. I have heard that many relatives have become addicted. Once they become users, their health is permanently damaged and never able again to handle serious duties.

Many in the [extended] Lin family also suffer this misfortune. I am unsure how their families allowed such a thing to happen. Unconscionable! My cousin Zhongchang wrote earlier and mentioned that you were troubled by your aching [bound] feet. How come you did not mention it to me yourself? I hope you are feeling better now. I worry about you. . . . What are your finances like at home? Try to be careful if possible, but do not be overly frugal. Spend where you must—do not scrimp like the proverb of “Stingy Wang Rong” instead follow the model of “Gong Sun” who lived a simple but good life. It is more important to keep the bigger picture in mind and being overly stingy is not path I would choose for you to take.

2.10 LETTER FROM LIN ZEXU TO QUEEN VICTORIA (JULY 19, 1839)

Perhaps the most famous of all the extant Opium War documents, Lin Zexu's letter to Queen Victoria likely never reached her. Copied and given to the captain of the “Thomas Coutts” in February 1840, Lin's letter was also openly circulated and shared with many foreign merchants out of fear that if only sent via the British his policies would not be made public. On many levels, Lin is reiterating many of the same points he made in 2.7, but the letter displays a more developed internal logic and a fuller awareness of the international economic and political situation. It has been suggested many times among Western commentators that this letter was never viewed by Queen Victoria—and it may be true that she never viewed the actual letter Lin Zexu addressed to her—but only the most willfully unapprised could have missed its publication in the London Times on June 11, 1840.

Questions

1. It is often suggested by Western historians that China needed to be opened because it did not follow proper diplomatic procedures. How does the following document support or contradict such a perspective?
2. What do you think Lin hoped to achieve by writing directly to Queen Victoria?

Letter to Queen Victoria from Lin Zexu, Deng Tingzhen and Qialiang

The rule of your distinguished country has been passed down for generations. Each ruler has been known for their respectfulness, with their tributes [to China] accompanied by declarations such as, “When those people of our country conduct trade in China, they received gracious and fair treatment from your Emperor.” We are delighted that rulers from your distinguished country understood the great principles of right and are grateful for our Emperor’s kindness. Our imperial dynasty cherishes even more [this relationship] and has redoubled its kindness towards you by allowing profitable trade, extended to you over the past two hundred years. This is the reason your country has become known for its wealth.

During this long period of trade, there were good and bad foreigners, some of them brought in opium to seduce Chinese people and disseminated this poison to every province. They only focused on their own profits and cared nothing of the damage caused. The laws of heaven and the feelings of the people cannot tolerate such behavior. The Emperor, upon hearing of this, was filled with rage, and has specifically sent me, his commissioner, to Guangdong. There he has charged me together with the governor-general and governor, to investigate and settle this matter.

Any Chinese subject who is convicted of selling or smoking opium is punished to death. If we were to charge every foreigner for the years of their involvement in selling opium and the deep harm they have caused in their pursuit of colossal profits, they would have been punished with the death penalty as well. Nevertheless, we took into consideration the fact that many foreigners regret their crimes, have asked for forgiveness, and relinquished the opium from their ships in an amount of 20,283 chests to your representative Elliot; which has been confiscated and destroyed. I, [along with] the Governor-General, and the Governor, in a memorial to the Emperor have faithfully reported this information. The Emperor was exceptionally kind and pardoned the foreigners as a result of their cooperation. But, in the future, if anyone repeats the crime, it will be hard to avoid punishment. With new regulations established, we presume the ruler of your distinguished country who favored our civilized culture, will instruct all foreigners to observe these new laws with care. The benefits and punishments of our imperial laws must be explained to all [who travel to China] and they must understand that under no circumstances will opium be allowed to cross our borders.

Having investigated the matter, we have determined that your country is sixty to seventy thousand *li* away from China, and that foreign ships compete for our lucrative trade. The foreigners have all profited from the wealth of China. Put another way, the large profits made by the foreigners are achieved only by the people of China seeking to share it with them. In return how could the foreigners use the poisonous drug to harm the Chinese people? Even though the foreigners may not necessarily intend to do any harm, in order to maximize their profit, they disregard the damages they impose on people. May I ask where is your conscience? We have

heard that the smoking of opium is strictly forbidden in your country because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. If your country does not wish such harm upon your own country, you should not impose it upon others, especially not China. Every single article exported from China whether it is to be eaten, used or resold, is for the good of foreign countries. Is there anything that China has done to harm foreign countries? This is not even mentioning the daily necessities, such as tea and rhubarb, that China provides to foreign countries.

[. . .]

The goods imported to your country from China are not only consumed by your own people, but also sold to other countries, which triple your profits. You can earn these threefold profits without selling opium. Yet, you still engage in a trade that is based on selling harmful products to others simply to fulfill your greedy desire. What if people from other countries sold opium to England, enticing your people to purchase and smoke opium? Certainly, a ruler of your distinguished stature must despise and forbid it.

We have always heard that the ruler of your distinguished country is kind and benevolent. Naturally you would not wish to do unto others what you yourself do not want. We have also heard that the ships coming to Guangdong have all been given regulations and orders clearly outlining that forbidden goods are not permitted to ship to China. This indicates that the administrative orders by the ruler of your distinguished country are strict and clear. Only because the trading ships are numerous, heretofore perhaps they have not been examined with care. Now with this communication and a clear understanding of the strict laws by the imperial kingdom, certainly you will not let your subjects to violate the law again.

[. . .]

The current penalty for Chinese who sell, or smoke, opium is death. Clearly, if foreigners do not bring opium in, then Chinese could not sell and smoke opium. It is really the evil foreigners who cause the death of those Chinese. Why should opium smugglers be allowed to live? Anyone who takes a life has to pay with one's own life. Opium's harm is much beyond one life. Therefore, the new law states foreigners who bring opium to China must be punished by decapitation or hanging. This is to eliminate the evils of the world.

Upon further investigation, we discovered that Elliot in the second month of this year [April 9, 1839], petitioned for an extension of time as a result of the legal restrictions. He requested an extension of five months for Indian merchants and ten months for England proper, after which new regulations will be enacted. Now we, the commissioners and officials, have memorialized to the Great Emperor and have received the extraordinary mercy from His Majesty, who has granted Elliot's petition with extraordinary consideration and compassion. Within a year [England proper] and six months [Indian areas], anyone who mistakenly brings in opium, but voluntarily surrenders themselves and all opium will be pardoned. After the deadline, anyone who violates the law does so deliberately and will be executed with no clemency. This truly demonstrates the height of kindness and the perfection of justice.

Our imperial dynasty rules over and supervises numerous states and possesses unforeseen divine power. But we cannot bear to put people to death without giving them proper guidance. Therefore, we take great care to announce regulations openly and clearly. If the merchants of your country seek a long-term trade relationship, they must obey our statute: they must permanently stop the importation of opium. By no means should they test the law with their lives.

May you, the Ruler, restrain your evil people in order to assure the peace of your nation, to demonstrate further the sincerity of your submissiveness, and enjoy the blessings of peace. How fortunate, how fortunate indeed! Upon receiving this letter, we entreat you to provide a prompt reply regarding the details and circumstances of your opium ban. Do not delay. . . .

Included in this letter is a copy of the new law: If foreigners import opium for sale in China, the ringleader will be immediately beheaded, and all others involved hanged. All merchandise is to be confiscated. Within the one year and six months granted clemency period, those who surrender all opium will be pardoned.

Daoguang 19th year, 6th month, 9th day [July 19, 1839]. Since the edict arrived belatedly, the clemency period ends on Daoguang 20th year, 12th month, and 9th day [March 12, 1840].

POPULAR RESPONSES AND DIPLOMATIC RESOLUTIONS TO THE OPIUM WAR

The Opium War (1839–1842) was far from a popular war among either the Chinese or the British. There exist numerous instances in both countries of popular discontent over the way the war was entered into and carried out. While the British lower classes were inevitably less aware of the war than their Chinese counterparts, several of the following documents reveal that the commoners in both countries shared strong moral objections to the opium trade. Such reactions are almost entirely forgotten in many histories of the war today. Instead, many Western accounts seek to suggest that Britain's actions were entirely instigated by Chinese attacks on British goods or that the British uniformly approved of such ventures.

2.11 GUANGDONG RESIDENTS' DENUNCIATION OF THE BRITISH (1841)

The following anonymous document was likely hand-written, copied, and then posted in several locations where the author felt it would have the greatest impact. It was almost certainly written by a local scholar living in the south of China or near Guangzhou. The language is colloquial, complete with crass terminology used in daily conversations. Pay particular attention to how the denunciation employs common themes like the benevolence of the emperor, reliance on China for specific goods, etc., but turns them on their head to insult the British. The inclusion of rhubarb (here and by Lin in 2.7) reflects the short-lived misunderstanding that the British required the vegetable to prevent constipation. The defense of the emperor and attack on Qishan (Lin's replacement) are also quite typical, since it was often assumed that the emperor was at the mercy of his officials.

Questions

1. How do the popular sentiments expressed in the document diverge from that of the emperor and Lin Zexu?
2. Do you think the language employed is more reflective of the lower classes (and thus an attempt to curry favor among them) or intentionally provocative to anger the British?