Activity – Responses to the Qing Empire's Crackdown on the Opium Trade and the First Opium War

Part 1 – Understanding the Historical Context – Read the first four sections of this short article ("Resource Set Introduction" – link) about opium and its trade in Qing Dynasty China. Respond to these questions as you read about the historical context of the primary sources below.

- How and why did opium come to be sold in China? Who was involved in the sale of opium in China?
- What was the impact of the opium upon its users in China and Qing Chinese society as a whole?
- How did the Qing government respond to the opium trade in 1838? What was the impact of this response on the trade?
- What caused the First Opium War? Its impact on the Qing government and the sale of opium in China?

Part 2 – Primary Sources –Attached are excerpts from three primary sources that represent different perspectives on the opium trade in early 19th century China. Read each excerpt, responding to the analysis questions in the spaces provided.

Source A – Letter from Commissioner Lin Zexu to Queen Victoria, 1838	Source B – Letter, Robert Bennet Forbes to Rose Smith Forbes, February 1838	Source C – Letter from Houqua to John Murray Forbes, October 1841
• What is Commissioner Lin's assessment of the foreign opium trade's impact on China? • What are the Qing government's policies regarding further trade of opium in China?	• What are Forbes' views of the Qing government's anti-opium policies? • What does Forbes perceive will be the impact of the policies on his family's business?	• What news about the First Opium War does Houqua have for the Forbes' family? • What warning about business does Houqua have for Forbes?

Part 3 – Reflection Exercise – Pretend that you are a journalist who has obtained the three primary sources and has to write a short newspaper article to an American audience about the opium trade in China, the Qing government's responses, and the possible impact on American trade with China. Use evidence and quotations from all three sources in your article, and include a conclusion where you predict a possible impact of the trade ban and the war on American economic interests.

Primary Source Set

Vocabulary	*Source*
depraved and barbarous – morally evil and uncivilized **seduce and lead astray** – trick and cause to act wrongly **contagion** – infection, like a disease **afford opportunity –** allow the chance	**Source A –**Letter from Commissioner Lin Zexu to Queen Victoria, 1838 "But there is a tribe of depraved and barbarous people, who, having manufactured opium for smoking, bring it hither for sale, and seduce and lead astray the simple folk, to the destruction of their persons, and the draining of their resources. Formerly the smokers thereof were few, but of late, from each to other the practice has spread its contagion, and daily do its baneful effects more deeply pervade the central source — its rich, fruitful, and flourishing population… …Besides all this; the opium being so severely prohibited in this land, that there will be none found to smoke it, should your nation continue its manufacture, it will be discovered after all that no place will afford opportunity for selling it, that no profits will be attainable. Is it not far better to turn and seek other occupation than vainly to labor in the pursuit of a losing employment? And furthermore, whatever opium can be discovered in this land is entirely committed to the flames, and consumed. If any be again introduced in foreign vessels, it too must be subjected to a like process of destruction. **Excerpted from:** Lin, Zexu. Letter to Queen Victoria, "Letter to the Queen of England from the imperial commissioner and the provincial authorities requiring the interdiction of opium.," 1839. In *Chinese Repository, From May 1839 to April 1840*, compiled by S. Wells Williams, 9-12. Vol. 8. Canton, China. 1840. Accessed January 28, 2024. https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000541105.

Vocabulary	*Source*
smuggling transaction – an illegal trading activity **connivance –** secret involvement in wrongdoing **mandarins** – name given to Chinese government officials by English-peaking foreigners **Vice Roy** – the Chinese governor of the region where Canton was located **house** – a family-owned business **constituents –** customers **compromise –** accept lower moral standards	**Source B -** Letter, Robert Bennet Forbes to Rose Smith Forbes, February 1838 "the fact is within the last two years the Opium trade has been made a regular smuggling transaction carried on in spite of law & reason by a parcel of reckless individuals — formerly the trade was considered legalized by the connivance of the mandarins & local authorities — the Government having determined to suppress the trade have pursued various severe measure against it & among others have taken the lives of several poor people while those high in rank who have connived at it even until the Vice Roy — his sons are allowed to go free — there is little doubt but the Gov[ernment] are determined to suppress the trade & we as a house have written to our constituents to say we can receive no more of the drug — when the dreadful effects are brought before our very eyes we cannot compromise ourselves by dealing in it & thus perishes one of our most important sources of business..."
"The English business" – the First Opium War started by Britain in response to Lin Zexu's opium ban **Amoy** – the modern day city of Xiamen, captured by the British in August 1841 **Ningpo** – a major Chinese port **the Emperor –** the ruler of Qing Dynasty China	**Source C** – Letter from Houqua to J.M. Forbes, October 1841 "The English business makes me very unhappy; it has caused me the loss of a great deal of money and as every day it is becoming more Complicated and extended. I do not know when it will be settled. English have taken Amoy and hold it, and we hear that the forces have gone on with the intention of retaking [?} and capturing Ningpo and other large Cities on the coast. Perhaps the Emperor can hear the truth by and by and be willing to make an amicable settlement with the English, but I fear we are to have a great deal of trouble for a long time to come. In the midst of all this the foreign trade is suffering very much..." Full letter: MHS Collections Online: Letterbook of the Houqua, 1840-1843 (masshist.org)

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