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HIS 114: World Civ II
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19 March 2020

Primary Source - 21.1: *Letter to Queen Victoria* (Lin Zexu, 1839)

1. What screen image does Lin Zexu project of his Emperor and countrymen on the hand and of the British king and of "the barbarians" or British people on the other? How effective were these screen images as a diplomatic communication? How do you think the British received this letter?

Lin Zexu starts his letter off by first describing his Emperor to have the mind of Heaven and earth, and continues to refer to him as Heaven throughout the rest of the letter. He also says the people of the Celestial Court of China are polite and kind towards foreigners. Zexu then refers to the British as "barbarians", whether they are good or bad, probably influenced by his anger towards their practices in China. I believe that by calling them barbarians in his letter to the Queen, distaste may have begun to build up on the British part, and later fully inflamed when Zexu threatened to behead or strangle any British person who brought opium to his country. I'm fairly certain that these newly imposed rules in China were one of the reasons for the Opium Wars between Britain and China.

2. Examine carefully the Chinese attitude toward trade and the implied British attitude toward trade. This is a key instance of network-hierarchy clash, but the two cultures have different screen images of merchant activity in particular. Are the Chinese and British mutually comprehensible hierarchies? Why (not)?

In my opinion, the Chinese and British are not mutually comprehensible hierarchies because of the clash of their different frame values. The British seek to profit greatly through their trade in China, even if that means harming the people of that country by bringing in dangerous drugs. Lin Zexu describes China as being kind, and allowing trade between the countries, despite China not actually needing any of the imports from Britain, since China can sustain itself. In Zexu's opinion, the Chinese trade because of kindness, whereas the British trade because of personal gain.