

East India Interests in Britain and China Affairs, 1834-42[†]

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Abstract

This article is intended to examine the role of East India interest groups in Britain, with a focus on those in Scotland, in the debates surrounding “free and secure trade” with China between 1834 and 1842, including the opium trade and the armed expedition to China. It is evident that the lobbyist groups of merchants and manufacturers in Glasgow and other cities frequently collaborated with one another and with similar organisations outside Britain to advance their own interests in the China trade. However, they were often unsuccessful in reaching a consensus on certain matters pertaining to the Chinese affairs. Thus, they generally played merely a limited role although their claims successfully influenced the government’s decisions in a few cases.

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Introduction

Focused on Scotland, this article explores the role of East India interest groups in Britain regarding debates surrounding “free and secure trade” with China between 1834 and 1842, including the opium trade and the armed expedition to China. Several studies, such as the seminal work of P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, have commented on the active roles of private British traders in China who were closely linked with London in formulating Britain’s China policy.¹⁾ These studies have often referred to Jardine Matheson & Company. M. Greenberg’s work, which have benefitted significantly from its existing archives, arguing that the growth of

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1) Peter J. Cain and Antony G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion 1688-1914* (Longman, 1993), 422-46.

private traders in the “country trade” damaged the East India Company’s (EIC’s) monopoly and also the Canton System, which restricted Western merchants’ commercial operations in China. Moreover, he has illustrated that the expansion of British trade with China increasingly depended on opium from India, ultimately leading to the Opium War.²⁾ More recent works of A. Le Pichon and R. J. Grace have described William Jardine and James Matheson’s roles during the Opium War. The former returned to Britain and was consulted by policymakers for the Britain’s expedition to the Far East, and the latter continued the opium business and supported British military actions on the spot.³⁾ S. Chen’s work has also stressed that the Canton community played a key role “for the production of British knowledge about China,” decisively shaping relations between the two countries.⁴⁾ In the meantime, concerning the impact of British domestic politics on policy towards China, G. Melancon has examined those of the 1830s and revised the traditional view of the Whig governments’ aggressive policies towards China.⁵⁾ In addition, H. Gao’s work analysing the opinions of British politicians, officials, intellectuals, and traders both in Britain and in the Far East from the late eighteenth century to the early 1840s has revealed how Britain’s perceptions and attitudes towards China that influenced the government’s decisions changed.⁶⁾

These previous studies have often pointed out that the East India interests at home supported Britain’s aggressive policy for the China trade that culminated in the Opium War. However, their roles have been less extensively studied than that of the British government and British commercial interests in China. By examining the primary documents of provincial and metropolitan lobbyist groups, with a particular focus on the records of East India interests in Glasgow, this study attempts to shed light on their lobbying activities during the period between the opening of the China trade in 1834 and the end of the Opium War in 1842. It can be observed that the lobbyist groups of merchants and manufacturers in Britain frequently collaborated with each other and with similar organisations outside Britain to advance their own interests in the China trade during the period under examination. However, they often failed to reach a consensus on certain issues concerning Chinese affairs. Consequently, they generally played only a limited role, even though their claims successfully influenced the government’s decisions

2) Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–42* (Cambridge University Press, 1951).

3) Alain Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire: Jardine, Matheson & Co. and the Origins of British Rule in Hong Kong* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 43–49; Richard J. Grace, *Opium and Empire: The Lives and Careers of William Jardine and James Matheson* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 259–87.

4) Song-Chuan Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace: British Knowledge of China in the Making of the Opium War* (Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 8.

5) Glenn Melancon, *Britain’s China Policy and the Opium Crisis* (Ashgate, 2003), 138–39.

6) Hao Gao, *Creating the Opium War: British Imperial Attitudes towards China, 1792–1840* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

in a few cases.

After the Opening of the China Trade in 1834

The total abolition of the EIC's monopoly in 1834 significantly altered the British aspect of the China trade. Formerly, the Select Committee of the EIC had addressed Britain's mercantile affairs in China. However, when its monopoly and entire commercial activities ceased, the British government took over its roles and newly created a Superintendency of Trade in Canton.⁷⁾ As chief superintendent, Lord Napier was appointed by the Crown. Since he had no previous experience of residing in China, former EIC officers in Canton were elected to the posts of second and third superintendents.⁸⁾ Napier's mission was twofold: firstly, to extend trade to other Chinese ports; and, secondly, to establish a regular diplomatic relationship with the central government in Peking. Upon Napier's arrival in China in July, his aggressive conduct (e.g., entering the Whampoa, the anchorage of Canton, without permission and attempting to contact the viceroy of Canton directly) breached the rules enacted on foreign traders in China. His actions severely offended the Chinese authorities, resulting in the suspension of Britain's trade in Canton.⁹⁾ Diplomatic tension between Britain and China culminated in Napier's withdrawal from Canton due to illness and his immediate death in Macau.¹⁰⁾ Although the trade was reopened instantly, the failure of Napier's objectives meant that nothing was changed on China's side in the trade.

John Francis Davis and George Best Robinson succeeded Napier's post consecutively following his death. In contrast to Napier's, they adopted a "silence and quiescence" policy to mitigate unnecessary conflict with the Chinese government.¹¹⁾ However, the new policy exasperated British merchants in both Canton and Britain demanding a more aggressive policy. In 1834, for organising more effective lobbying, the British Chamber of Commerce was established by British residents in Canton on James Matheson's initiative.¹²⁾ In December, the association sent a petition for "a safe and uninterrupted commerce with China" to His Majesty in Council.¹³⁾ The petitioners pleaded for appointing plenipotentiary and proceeding him to Peking with the aid of maritime forces. Based on the petition, the plenipotentiary's objective would include the demanding of reparation for the "insulting manner" of Chinese authorities during the Napier incident, the proposal for the appointment of commissioners on the part of the Chinese government to avoid possible complaint and misunderstanding, and the promotion of trade

7) Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, 122.

8) Peter W. Fay, *The Opium War 1840-1842* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 67-68.

9) Gao, *Creating the Opium War*, 122-23.

10) Fay, *The Opium War 1840-1842*, 78-79.

11) Fay, *The Opium War 1840-1842*, 79-80.

12) Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire*, 30.

13) Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire*, 560-63, Appendix V 'Canton Petition, 9th December 1834.'

between the two countries. They also insisted on the extension of their trade to Amoy, Ningbo, and Chusan.¹⁴⁾ Moreover, the British Chamber of Commerce contacted other commercial associations of those who had interest in the China trade to solicit their support.

As soon as a letter with a copy of petition from Canton reached the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce and Manufactures (CCM) in May 1835, its extract was transmitted to the Glasgow East India and China Association (EICA), which represented the East India interests in the city and its neighbouring areas.¹⁵⁾ Kirkman Finlay, its chairman, and other members supported the opinion of British residents in Canton, who insisted on a coercive approach of showing off Britain's naval supremacy over the Chinese counterpart. However, they were reluctant to open war with China. Finlay told W. P. Paton, its secretary and treasurer, that "The Plan suggested to me to be only one likely to lead, without bloodshed to the great object of opening an extensive and properly regulated intercourse with that immense empire."¹⁶⁾ The Glasgow association decided to send its own memorial to the prime minister, Lord Viscount Melbourne.¹⁷⁾ In the memorial, as the British residents in Canton did so, the East India interests in Glasgow insisted "the object intended is much more likely to be accomplished by a direct application to the court of Peking than the negotiation through superior officers of the China trade."¹⁸⁾ They also advised him to obtain "one or more of the islands near to China as an emporium for carrying on commerce free from the exactions & control or annoyance of the Chinese Govert" if such an attempt failed.¹⁹⁾ At the same time, they asked the secretary to communicate with the Liverpool EICA to inquire about its intention on this subject.²⁰⁾ In Liverpool's case, instead of sending a memorial, they asked a parliamentary member to express similar ideas to the government directly.²¹⁾ In the two previous campaigns of 1812–13 and 1829–33 for the opening of the East India and China trade, the network of provincial mercantile and manufacturing interests had been crucial for their powerful lobbying, and

14) Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire*, 560–63, Appendix V 'Canton Petition, 9th December 1834.'

15) Special Meeting, 13th May 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, p. 117.

16) Kirkman Finlay, letter no. 25, 6th May 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence 1835–1836.

17) Adjourned Meeting, 14th May 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2 Committee Minutes 1829–1847, p. 118.

18) The Memorial of the Glasgow East India Association to Lord Viscount Melbourne, letter no. 139, sent up to London, 2nd June 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

19) The Memorial of the Glasgow East India Association to Lord Viscount Melbourne, 2nd June 1835.

20) Adjourned Meeting, 14th May 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2 Committee Minutes 1829–1847, p. 118.

21) Radcliffe & Duncan, Liverpool, letter no. 25, 16th July 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence 1835–1836.

Liverpool was its hub. The cooperation of those provincial interests continued after the complete abolition of the EIC's monopoly to lobby the government and parliament in several debates over the trade, including the heavy duties imposed on British goods in Java by the Dutch, the equalisation of duties on West and East India produces, and the EIC's advances on shipment of produce in China and India to Britain.

In January 1836, when the Glasgow EICA received another letter from James Matheson, who temporarily returned to the UK, its directors accommodated his request for pushing the government to pay attention to the unprotected state of British commerce in Canton. They assigned James Oswald, one of the parliamentary members for Glasgow, and Andrew Jamieson to cooperate with him and other deputies in London. Simultaneously, the merchants and manufacturers of Glasgow, Liverpool, and Manchester showered memorials on the same subject to the secretary of state for foreign affairs.²²⁾ Although the members of the Glasgow association generally concurred to the necessity of sending maritime force that the Canton petition had claimed, they hesitated to suggest any plans of operation to the government. Unlike the British traders in Canton, the Glasgow merchants and manufacturers admitted that they did not have enough experience and knowledge for convincing the government of their suggestion. They believed they should leave it up to the wisdom of the government.²³⁾ Their memorial clearly reflected such a view.²⁴⁾

In the same month, following Finlay's suggestion, the Glasgow association invited Hugh Hamilton Lindsay, a former EIC's secretary in Canton, to its meeting to seek his opinion and advice on the policy that the government should employ for Britain's relations with China.²⁵⁾ As the British residents in Canton entreated in their previous petition, Lindsay advised sending a squadron with the agent of the government endowed with the authority to negotiate with the Peking government. He also claimed that redress should be demanded to China for its conduct towards Napier and that, if it could not be obtained, its coast should be blockaded.²⁶⁾ He believed that such specific methods would help Britain win a

22) Memorial to Lord Palmerston, letter no. 151, February 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836; Copy of memorial referred to the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Palmerston, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Minutes, TD1670_1_5, pp. 329–30; Le Pichon, *China Trade and Empire*, 566–69, Appendix VII 'Liverpool Petition, February 1836' and Appendix VIII 'Manchester Petition, February 1836.'

23) Letter no. 149, to James Matheson Esquire of Canton, 23rd January 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

24) Memorial to Lord Palmerston, letter no. 151, February 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

25) Meeting, 3rd February 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2 Committee Minutes 1829–1847, p. 125.

26) Meeting, 3rd February 1836.

commercial treaty with China. In addition, although he concurred with the Glasgow EICA's proposal on the direct negotiation in Peking, he was opposed to the acquisition of islands in the coast of China. In his pamphlet, he argued that "Such a measure would, I conceive, have quite a contrary effect from forwarding that extension of purely commercial intercourse ... and might also lead to consequences of which it would be impossible to foretell the result."²⁷⁾

Furthermore, at the end of February, for the purpose of "the protection of the general interests of the trade with the East Indies and China," the London EICA was established.²⁸⁾ Its founders comprised noticeable figures of the City of London, including J. Horsley Palmer, Joshua Bates of the Baring Brothers & Co., William Crawford, and G. G. de H. Larpent.²⁹⁾ A notification of its foundation was sent to Glasgow by J. Stikeman, the secretary of the London association, expressing their willingness to cooperate with provincial lobbyists for common interest.³⁰⁾ As the London EICA enjoyed great geographical advantages, it soon took over the roles of the Liverpool association amid a nationwide lobbying network. The Glasgow EICA admitted that "Being at headquarters, the fountain of almost all information, & also possessing the advantage of near & ready personal access to public men & public documents, you [the London EICA] enjoyed that which qualifies you to be the head & guide of all other similar Assocns."³¹⁾ The new London establishment significantly affected the lobbying network that had previously been exploited by provincial East India interests in Britain.

Collaboration between these associations regarding the China trade began promptly. At the end of May, the London EICA conveyed to Glasgow a draught of the memorial on the China affairs to the foreign secretary, Lord Palmerston, asking its opinion.³²⁾ According to it, Britain should obtain from China (1) freedom of communication with the supreme government at Peking, (2) domicile at Canton not only for the individual merchant but also for his wife and family, (3) permission to the British merchants to build and possess warehouses, (4) permission to trade not only with the Hong merchants at Canton but also with any Chinese merchants, (5) free direct and unreserved communication with the local authorities at Canton, (6) the privilege of trading with Amoy, Ningbo, and a third port nearer Peking, and (7) the obtaining by negotiation, or purchase an island on the

27) H. H. Lindsay, *Letter to the Right Honourable Viscount Palmerston, on British Relation with China* (Saunders and Otley, 1836), 8.

28) *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 29th February 1836, p. 2, "LONDON EAST INDIA ASSOCIATION."

29) *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, 29th February 1836, p. 2, "LONDON EAST INDIA ASSOCIATION."

30) Meeting, 13th April 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, p. 128.

31) Letter to J. Stikeman, 9th March 1839, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/14, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1836–1844, pp. 71–72.

32) Meeting, 30th May 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, p. 131.

Eastern coast of China.³³⁾ The lobbyists in Glasgow fully agreed to these claims in order to draw the government's attention to the inadequate state of the China trade. The London interests also intended to express an opinion on the mode in which the protection would be provided to the British traders in China. The memorial proposed that an able and determined man as an agent should be sent by a ship of war, and that he should land as near as possible to Peking and treat with the supreme government directly.

Nevertheless, the Glasgow interests asserted that they ought to refrain from expressing their opinion on the matter of how the British traders in China should be protected.³⁴⁾ In this respect, there were divergent views among the members of the Glasgow association too. Kirkman Finlay, who persistently weighed the significance of collaborating with other lobbyist groups, claimed that "we [the Glasgow EICA] ought to go hand in hand with them [the London EICA]," but his opinion was not supported by other Scottish fellows.³⁵⁾ The secretary of the Glasgow association wrote to Finlay that "I do not think it at all likely that they [the government] will concern in this proposal—which I think besides would only invite disappointment and defeat..."³⁶⁾ When the Glasgow association received a second draught from London, its members disapproved of it as its substantial contents appeared same to those of the previous draught. Therefore, they decided to submit their own memorial to Lord Palmerston. The memorial referred to the London association's draught; not only did they uphold an attitude of avoiding suggestions of the *modus operandi*, but they also added two further claims, namely to extend admiralty jurisdiction to the board of British ships and to obtain the protection of Chinese laws such as they were.³⁷⁾ Notably, the Glasgow interests were seriously concerned regarding the first point. Previously, when a mutiny had broken out in the ship that belonged to one of the Glasgow traders, the superintendents with no authority, had rejected the captain's request for their interference into the incident. In the memorial, they added this point to the forefront of their claims. Furthermore, in the actual submitted memorial, the London EICA dropped the freedom of communication with the supreme government at Peking, and added two new claims (i.e., the expediency of sending a commercial agent or consul with municipal and judicial functions and the withdrawal of all the former

33) Memorial to Lord Palmerston by the London East India Association, letter no. 45, 6th May 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence 1835–1836.

34) Letter no. 173, to J. Stikeman, 1st June 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

35) Letter no. 179, to Walter Buchanan, 29th June 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

36) Letter no. 181, to Kirkman Finlay, 29th June 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

37) Letter no. 177, to the Right Honorable Lord Viscount Palmerston, 1st June 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

servants of the EIC).³⁸⁾ In July, both the London and Glasgow associations were contacted by the Foreign Office to acknowledge the receipt of their memorials.³⁹⁾ In the replies, the Ministry promised the lobbyists that they would give due attention to the problem on the existing relations with China.⁴⁰⁾ Nevertheless, the reply also added that while the Ministry acknowledged the virtues of the arrangements suggested by the memorialists, they had no intention of negotiating with China's central government to acquire such provisions.⁴¹⁾

In the meantime, a controversial incident, in which Henry Monteith & Co., one of Glasgow firms, was involved, took place in 1835. This fuelled the debates over the security and protection of British subjects and their properties in China. James Innes, who was a very notorious opium-smuggler, was the consignee of Henry Monteith & Co.'s goods.⁴²⁾ According to his explanation, the *Orwel* sailed with the goods that were deliverable at the Lintin island near Canton, but the ship passed it without delivering the goods. Thereafter the goods were removed from the ship to a pilot boat that Innes employed with "an intention of lodging them in the ship "Hercules," until a better bargain for duties could be made."⁴³⁾ However, the Chinese Custom House officers seized the boat and confiscated the goods on the grounds of smuggling. Since Innes' objection to the governor of Canton elicited no effective outcome, he communicated his intent to retaliate against Chinese trade and retrieve the redress.⁴⁴⁾ George Robinson, the chief superintendent, dissuaded Innes from putting it into action with his promise to communicate the instance to the British government.⁴⁵⁾ His main concern was to mitigate unnecessary conflict with Chinese authorities. Robinson displayed favour in introducing John Robert Morrison and Karl Gutzlaff, who worked as interpreters due to their Chinese language competency, to Innes to prepare communication with the viceroy of Canton. However, he emphasised that it must encom-

38) *The First Reports of the Committee of the London East India Association, Presented to the General Meeting, Held at the Jerusalem Coffee-House, January 3, 1837*, 1837, pp. 9–10.

39) J. Backhouse, letter no. 67, 16th July 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence 1835–1836; *The First Reports of the Committee of the London East India Association, Presented to the General Meeting, Held at the Jerusalem Coffee-House, January 3, 1837*, 1837, p. 10.

40) J. Backhouse, letter no. 68, 16th July 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence.

41) Backhouse, 16th July 1836.

42) John M. Carroll, *China Hands and Old Cantons: Britons and the Middle Kingdom* (Rowan and Littlefield, 2021), 201–05.

43) Letter no. 64, Extract of Letters from James Innes to Henry Monteith & Co., 1st November 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence.

44) Extract of Letters from James Innes to Henry Monteith & Co., 1st November 1835; Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence Relating to China*, 1840, p. 125, no. 69, Viscount Palmerston to Captain Elliot, 8th November 1836.

45) Extract of Letters from James Innes to Henry Monteith & Co., 1st November 1835, *Correspondence Relating to China*, Viscount Palmerston to Captain Elliot, 8th November 1836.

pass “neither threats or menaces which most assuredly you could never put in execution; nor expression and language calculated to excite feelings and impressions hostile or prejudice to the general welfare and interests of the King’s subjects.”⁴⁶⁾ In fact, the jurisdiction of the superintendents in Canton was so unequivocal that the question always remained over the legality of their enforcing decisions upon British subjects in China.

Furthermore, Innes contacted the Glasgow EICA through Henry Monteith & Co. for support.⁴⁷⁾ In June 1836, his letter from Canton was laid before the association’s meeting, and the directors agreed to adopt the draught letter regarding the subject that the secretary prepared to submit to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston.⁴⁸⁾ In response, J. Backhouse of the Foreign Office asked the association to provide more detailed information as some discrepancies between its statement and the accounts from the superintendents of Canton were noticed.⁴⁹⁾ However, the association failed to do so since it had received merely imperfect information from Canton, and the law officers of the Crown conducted the investigation based solely on the information obtained from the superintendents in Canton.⁵⁰⁾ In a letter to Glasgow, W. Fox Strangways, under secretary of state for foreign affairs, explained the Foreign Office’s viewpoint that “this case bears every appearance of having been a case of detected smuggling” and the sequestration of the goods was justifiable.⁵¹⁾ The letter also referred to Innes’ initial intention to recover the redress by force. Strangways cautioned Innes that he would be penalised for piracy if he executed it. Furthermore, Lord Palmerston transmitted to Canton a letter of similar content, which strongly warned Innes that if he resorted to force, the British government would not only abandon him but also exercise its naval power to repress his illegal conduct.⁵²⁾ Meanwhile, following the receipt of the Foreign Office’s reply, the Glasgow interests eventually displayed their regret that they have been led to get involved in the incident.⁵³⁾ The Innes incident

46) Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence Relating to China*, 1840, p. 125, Inclosure 2 in no. 68, Sir. G. B. Robinson to Mr. Innes, 24th February 1836, and Inclosure 3, in no. 68, Sir. G. B. Robinson to Mr. Morrison and Mr. Guzlaff.

47) Letter no. 64, Extract of Letters from James Innes to Henry Monteith & Co. Glasgow, 1st November 1835, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence.

48) Meeting, 28th June 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, pp. 132–33.

49) J. Backhouse of Foreign Office, letter no. 67, 16th July 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence.

50) W. Fox Strangways, letter no. 69, 4th August 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/7, Incoming Correspondence.

51) Strangways, 4th August 1836.

52) Parliamentary Papers, *Correspondence Relating to China*, 1840, p. 125, no. 69, Viscount Palmerston to Captain Elliot, 8th November 1836.

53) Letter no. 192, to W. Fox Strangways, 12th August 1836, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/13, Committee Correspondence (Outgoing) 1829–1836.

exemplifies the superintendents' lack of authority in negotiating with the Chinese government and controlling the British traders in Canton.

The annual report of the Glasgow association, which was read to its General Meeting held at the end of March 1837, summarised the unsuccessful efforts of their lobbying in the debates over the unprotected state of the China trade as follows:

Many pamphlets were published, and various plans proposed of those engaged in it. Opinions were too varied, and too much opposed to each other, to admit of concentration of force upon any given course of proceedings; the consequence is, that nothing has been done.⁵⁴⁾

Thereafter, although they never forgot its significance, the Glasgow lobbyists and their allies had few opportunities to agitate the question over the next couple of years. Only in 1839, when the opium problem seriously threatened Britain's trade with China, did they resume to enter the debates regarding the relationship between the two empires.

The East India Interests at Home and the First Opium War

In March 1839, Lin Zexu, who was appointed as an imperial commissioner by the Chinese imperial court, demanded foreign merchants in Canton hand over all the opium that they possessed. To enforce the order, he detained those merchants as well as Charles Elliot, the chief superintendent, in their factories.⁵⁵⁾ On the 26th of the same month, Elliot called on British traders to surrender the drug to him, and as he promised that the British government would compensate for the loss of confiscated drug, they eventually accepted it.⁵⁶⁾ The opium was handed over to the Chinese side and destroyed. The initial news on the seizure of opium and the forced detention of British residents in Canton reached Britain through India on the morning of 31 July and began to spread throughout the country.⁵⁷⁾ On 13 August, the Glasgow EICA received a letter from the Bombay Chamber of Commerce with a copy of public notice written by Elliot.⁵⁸⁾ The association immediately contacted the East India interests in London and Liverpool to inquire about their views on the matter. The former replied that they had assisted Crawford, a parliamentary member for the City of London, and held an interview with Lord Palmerston, but they had been told that he had not received the official communication from Elliot yet.⁵⁹⁾ Furthermore, even after receiving it, he did not

54) Annual Report of the Committee read to the General Meeting, 30th March 1837, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, p. 147.

55) Grace, *Opium and Empire*, 230–35.

56) Grace, *Opium and Empire*, 236–37.

57) *The Evening Chronicle*, Wednesday 31 July 1839, p. 4.

58) H. G. Gordon, letter no. 12, Bombay, 3rd August 1839, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/9, Incoming Correspondence 1839–1840.

59) John Stikeman, letter no. 20, 5th September 1839, Records of the Glasgow East India

disclose its contents to the public.⁶⁰⁾ The Liverpool EICA also responded that it decided to send its deputation to London to speak with the government and invited the deputation from Glasgow and Manchester to join them.⁶¹⁾ On 27 September, they conducted an interview with Palmerston, for which Andrew Jamieson, staying in London and representing the Glasgow interests, was unable to attend.⁶²⁾ The outcome of the interview was unsatisfactory for the East India interests, as they were only told that the matter would be discussed in the Cabinet Council the next week.⁶³⁾

The lobbyist groups in these cities found it difficult to urge the government to take immediate action to protect British subjects and their properties in China. They also failed to ascertain the government's intent to implement the indemnity for the abandoned opium, which Elliott had pledged to the British opium traders. In October and November, the members of the Glasgow association held lengthy discussions over the China affairs in their regular meetings but without knowing the government's intention, it was impossible for them to reach any conclusion.⁶⁴⁾ In the meantime, the London and Liverpool EICAs separately provided the government with possible tactics for military expeditions to China. In the East India trade, these two cities were well ahead of others in Britain, including Glasgow, Bristol, and Hull.⁶⁵⁾ Their merchants were in the best position to obtain and accumulate knowledge of the local climate, geography, trade, and other aspects of China through their trading networks across Asia, which enabled them to draw up tactical advice in detail. They suggested not only the naval forces necessary for the expedition, such as the types and numbers of ships and personnel, but also how to blockade the coast of China to put pressure on the imperial court in Peking.⁶⁶⁾ Combined with William Jardine's advice, their intelligence influenced Britain's naval actions along the coast of China.⁶⁷⁾

When the news from China reached Britain, the East India interests in

Association, MS891001/9, Incoming Correspondence 1839–1840.

60) Stikeman, 5th September 1839.

61) J. G. Duncan, Liverpool, letter no. 21, 14th September 1839, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/9, Incoming Correspondence 1839–1840.

62) Andrew Jamieson, letter no. 25, 28th September 1839, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/9, Incoming Correspondence 1839–1840.

63) Jamieson, 28th September 1839.

64) Meetings 14th October 1839 and 6th November 1839, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, pp. 199–200.

65) Anon, "Comparative Statement of the Number of BRITISH SHIPS, with their Tonnage, &c. cleared OUTWARDS for Places within the Limits of the East-India Company's Charter, in the Years 1838 and 1840," *The Fifth Report of the Committee of the London East India Association*, London, 1841, 26.

66) The Committee of the London East India and China Association to Viscount Palmerston, 2nd November 1839 and Mr. Andrew Henderson to Mr. G. G. de Larpent, 21st October 1839, Parliamentary Papers, *Memorials addressed to Her Majesty's Government, by British merchants interested in the trade with China*, 1840, 11–32.

67) Grace, *Opium and Empire*, 250–51.

Glasgow and other cities asked the government not only to protect British subjects, honour, and properties but also to place their trade with China on a more stable footing. Meanwhile, as the opium trade was too controversial for the East India interests in Britain to build a consensus among themselves, they were very reluctant to entertain this issue, particularly the indemnity for the surrendered opium. For instance, between September and November 1839, the merchants and manufacturers of Manchester, London, Leeds, Liverpool, Blackburn, and Bristol sent memorials to the Ministry.⁶⁸⁾ Most of them either expressed that they would not address the indemnity issue or excluded reference to the opium question altogether. In Glasgow, the internal division of local East India interests over the opium question was more clearly reported. The Glasgow EICA's annual report stated that they regarded the opium trade as "highly dishonoring to Great Britain, and injurious to her best interests" since it hindered regular trade and dishonoured the sovereign. However, they also expressed their intention not to interfere in the opium question.⁶⁹⁾ Furthermore, in a meeting of the Glasgow CCM, its secretary, J. A. Anderson, proposed that the cultivation of opium in British possessions in India and the illegal export to China, which were morally unjustified, be suppressed.⁷⁰⁾ A. Wardrop and R. Rodger supported this claim. However, the participants in the meeting were unable to reach a conclusion and decided to adjourn.⁷¹⁾ Conversely, in March 1840, when the Glasgow CCM received a letter opposed to discouraging the opium trade from W. Gemmell, who was staying in London and claiming compensation for the confiscated opium, the directors also refused to act on his claim.⁷²⁾ In fact, Anderson, Wardrop, and Gemmell were the directors of the Glasgow EICA.⁷³⁾

Simultaneously, based on the assumption that China itself was a major producer of opium, the Glasgow EICA conveyed its belief that the Chinese government's claim that opium was harmful to people's morals was in fact a cover for its other purposes. A leading cause was to prevent silver draining from the country.⁷⁴⁾ However, the association put more weight on Chinese hostility and its

68) Parliamentary Papers, *Memorials addressed to Her Majesty's Government, by British merchants interested in the trade with China*, 1840.

69) Annual Report of the Committee read in the General Meeting, 26th March 1840, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, pp. 207–09.

70) A General Meeting, 4th January 1840, Glasgow Chamber of Commerce Minutes, TD1670_1_5, p. 181; A meeting of the Directors of the Chamber, 7th February 1840, p. 189.

71) A meeting of the Directors of the Chamber, 7th February 1840.

72) A meeting of the Directors of the Chamber, 13th March 1840, pp. 194–95.

73) Yukihisa Kumagai, *Breaking into the monopoly: Provincial Merchants and Manufacturers' Campaigns for Access to the Asian Market, 1790–1833* (Brill, 2013) 199–213.

74) Annual Report of the Committee read in the General Meeting, 26th March 1840, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, pp. 207–209.

response to the geographical expansion of British influence on its peripheries.⁷⁵⁾ It argued,

If it be remembered that in Assam the British power touches upon China; that at Moulmein [in Burma] we possess the mouths of a river which penetrates to the centre of that Country; and that on the heights of Nepaul, also, our army overlooks its territory, we shall especially if we take into calculation the more serious operations on her frontier in regard to Central Asia, find much to justify the fears of the Chinese Government.⁷⁶⁾

Furthermore, it warned that the conflict between Britain and China would provide Russia an advantage in a part of the “Great Game,” a geopolitical competition between the two European powers. During this period, Russia unsuccessfully tried to dispatch expeditionary forces to the Khanate of Chiva (Khiva) to extend its influence over the east bank of the Caspian Sea. Britain invaded Afghanistan to check the Russian threat to India from the north, culminating in catastrophic results.⁷⁷⁾ This growing political tension between the two countries was the background of following argument made by the Glasgow EICA:

Russia has for upwards of a Century, possessed a College at Pekin, while all our political, commercial & military power could not ever obtain an audience. Its interests are, beyond dispute, opposed to those of Great Britain, and it is impossible to avoid observing how much the objects are ... promoted by that move on the Southern coast of China. It creates a serious diversion of our strength from Central Asia, withdraw a large portion of the British Navy to these distant shores.⁷⁸⁾

Their argument seems to have been based on the news from Canton, which appeared in some British newspapers in late August 1839. These newspapers reported that in Canton, the “Russian intrigue” was alleged over the seizure of opium. One such newspaper reported, “The whole of the influence which Russia has in China has been at work in Pekin (where there is a ‘Russian College’) to bring this late confiscation about.”⁷⁹⁾ However, it was a mere rumour; there was no evidence to support the claim of the Russian conspiracy. A similar argument was also made by the anonymous author of “The opium and the China question,” which appeared in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*.⁸⁰⁾ The Glasgow lobbyists’ arguments that sought to link the China crisis with the broader strategic and geopolitical issues reflected their prioritisation of India and Southeast Asia. Compared with those of London and Liverpool, Glasgow’s East India interests

75) Annual Report of the Committee read in the General Meeting, 26th March 1840, pp. 207–209.

76) Annual Report of the Committee read in the General Meeting, 26th March 1840.

77) Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: On Secret Service in High Asia*. (John Murray, 1990), Chapter 19.

78) Annual Report of the Committee read in the General Meeting, 26th March 1840, pp. 207–09.

79) *Leamington Spa Courier*, Saturday 24 August 1839, p. 4.

80) Anon, “The Opium and the China Question,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 47 (June 1840): 717–38.

were not so centred on the China trade.⁸¹⁾ The members of the Glasgow association never overlooked China's significance. However, they devoted more time and effort to several other issues even during the Opium War, including the production of better quality cotton in India, the equalisation of duties on East India and West India produce, the establishment of overland mail services to India, and the discriminatory duties on British products in Java.⁸²⁾ Therefore, as far as the war with China was concerned, their lobbying activities were more passive and aligned with the lobbying strategies the EICAs in London and Liverpool adopted.

Nevertheless, during this period, the Glasgow EICA identified a particular issue that merited attention: the high rate of internal customs duties in China. Although it is unclear how this came onto the agenda in Glasgow, the chairman of the association prepared a memorial to Lord Palmerston, and a copy was submitted to the Board of Trade.⁸³⁾ It stated that the excessive rate of duties on transit from one province in China to another confined the consumption of British and other goods imported to the population of the coastal regions.⁸⁴⁾ The Foreign Office replied that a copy of the memorial would be forwarded to the British Commissioners, with instructions to bear its object in mind in their communications with the Chinese government although it was not normally a matter for other governments to intervene in.⁸⁵⁾ The Glasgow association's claim influenced the negotiations for a treaty between Britain and China and was eventually inserted into the tenth clause of the Treaty of Nanking.⁸⁶⁾

On 20 January 1841, Charles Elliot, who had been appointed as plenipotentiary by Lord Palmerston the previous year, declared his preliminary agreement (the Convention of Chuanbi) with Qishan, who had replaced Lin Zexu.⁸⁷⁾ Based on Elliot's statement, the agreement included (1) the cession of Hong Kong to Britain, (2) the indemnity of six million dollars for the cost of destroyed opium, (3) the establishment of equal diplomatic intercourse between the two countries, and (4)

81) Ian Nish, "British Mercantile Cooperation in the India-China Trade from the End of the East India Company's Trading Monopoly," in *Collected Writings of Ian Nish, Part 2 Japan, Russia, and East Asia*, ed. Ian Nish (Japan Library, 2001), 85.

82) J. M. Myers, secretary of the Liverpool East India and China Association, letter no. 36, 19th April 1841, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/9, Incoming Correspondence 1839–1840.

83) Meeting, 19th March 1840, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/2, Committee Minutes 1829–1847, pp. 202–205.

84) The Memorial of the East India Association of Glasgow to Lord Viscount Palmerston, 20th March 1840, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/14, Outgoing Correspondence 1836–1844, pp. 122–23.

85) J. Backhouse, Foreign Office, letter no. 46, 23rd April 1840, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/9, Incoming Correspondence 1839–1840.

86) Haijian Mao, *The Qing Empire and the Opium War: The Collapse of the Heavenly Dynasty*. (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 434–35.

87) For instance, *The Sun*, 10 April 1841, p. 8; *The Globe*, 10 April 1841, p. 2.

the resumption of trade in Canton within ten days after the Chinese New Year.⁸⁸⁾ Nevertheless, he disobeyed Lord Palmerston's original instructions, which required him to secure further concessions from the Qing government, including the opening of additional Chinese ports to trade.⁸⁹⁾ Moreover, before negotiating with Qishan, Elliot turned back the British fleet from the Peiho River off Tianjin to Canton.⁹⁰⁾ Subsequently, in the course of negotiation with Qishan, he decided to surrender to China the strategically valuable island of Chusan off Ningbo, which British troops had previously occupied.⁹¹⁾ When news of Elliot's declaration reached Britain in April, it stirred widespread criticism against him. The Liverpool EICA sent a memorial to Lord Palmerston against ratifying the treaty while simultaneously asking the Glasgow association what steps it would take.⁹²⁾ The London EICA also asked him for an interview for the same purpose and contacted the Glasgow CCM to join them. Then Andrew Jamieson, who was in London, was again instructed to join in the deputation, comprising William Crawford, W. Palmer, J. Milligan from London, and William Jardine, who had left Canton in 1839.⁹³⁾ In the interview held on 21 April, the deputation communicated to Palmerston that Elliot had completely lost the confidence of British merchants of Canton, Calcutta, Bombay, and London and insisted that none of the objects of Britain's armed expedition to China would be accomplished by the terms that produced the basis of the preliminary negotiations.⁹⁴⁾ In addition, when Palmerston questioned Jardine about the details of the Canton trade, he mentioned the obstacles that Elliot would face in pursuing his objective of relocating the British trade with China from Canton to Hong Kong.⁹⁵⁾ Jardine believed that possession of the island was not necessary. Hong Kong's significance both to Britain and to Jardine Matheson & Co. was only justified in retrospect. The interview inspired Palmerston to determine Elliot's future, as evidenced by a private letter he penned to Elliot on the same day, where he reproved and dismissed him, although the decision was formally rendered at the Cabinet meeting later that month.⁹⁶⁾

88) Grace, *Opium and Empire*, 275; *Liverpool Standard and General Commercial Advertiser*, 13 April 1841, p. 2.

89) Mao, *The Qing Empire*, 185–86, 190, 195–96.

90) Grace, *Opium and Empire*, 271.

91) Mao, *The Qing Empire*, 194.

92) J. M. Myers, letter no. 36, 19th April 1841, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/10, Incoming Correspondence 1840–1843.

93) John Stikeman, letter no. 34, 23rd April 1841, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/10, Incoming Correspondence 1840–1843.

94) Andrew Jamieson, 21st April 1841, letter no. 33, Records of the Glasgow East India Association, MS891001/9, Incoming Correspondence 1839–1840; John Stikeman, 23rd April 1841, letter no. 34.

95) John Stikeman, 23rd April 1841.

96) Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, vol. 1 (Paragon Book Gallery, 1910), 641–43, Appendix G, Lord Palmerston to Captain Elliot, 21st April 1841; Le

The British aggression on the coast of China continued after the recall of Elliot and Henry Pottinger's appointment to take over his posts.⁹⁷⁾ However, the Glasgow EICA's records indicate that the East India interests in Glasgow and other British cities had few opportunities to become seriously involved in the China affairs until the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking on 29 August 1842: The members of the Glasgow association did not send or receive any communications regarding the events in China, nor did their annual reports of 1841 and 1842 refer to the war at all. This also demonstrates the limited capacities of East India interests at home to gather information about the ongoing distant war in the Far East.

Conclusion

This paper is intended to reconstruct the lobbying activities of the East India interests in Glasgow and other British cities following the opening of the China trade in 1834. Despite the complete abolition of the EIC's monopoly, many British merchants and manufacturers were dissatisfied with the unprotected state of trade with China. The historical records indicate that to establish the "free and secure trade" with China, the Glasgow EICA and other similar associations collaborated with each other in their lobbying and agitation of public opinion. However, they failed in persuading the government to adopt a coercive policy, such as showing off Britain's naval supremacy and negotiating directly with the Chinese government, prior to 1839. This was partly due to the fact that the divergent opinions of the various parties and individuals involved in the debates prevented the formation of a coherent consensus, rendering the concentration of force upon a single course of action impossible. Then, in the summer of 1839, when news of the seizure of opium and the detention of British residents in Canton reached home, the merchants and manufacturers at home again failed to urge the government to take immediate action and to ascertain its intention of compensating for the opium destroyed. Furthermore, they tended to avoid interfering in the controversial issues surrounding opium because they could not reach a consensus among themselves. Meanwhile, in addition to the tactical information that the London and Liverpool EICAs provided for the naval expeditions, their lobbies exerted substantial influence on the government's decisions in a few instances, such as Lord Palmerston's decision regarding the dismissal of Charles Elliot and the negotiation of two countries over the high rate of internal custom duties in China. Nevertheless, it can be observed that in general, during the war, the East India interests at home were again able to play only a limited role.
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Pichon, *China Trade and Empire*, 38; Mao, *The Qing Empire*, 272.

97) Mao, *The Qing Empire*, 272.