

Lost in the Past: Early 1900s – Early days of advocacy efforts

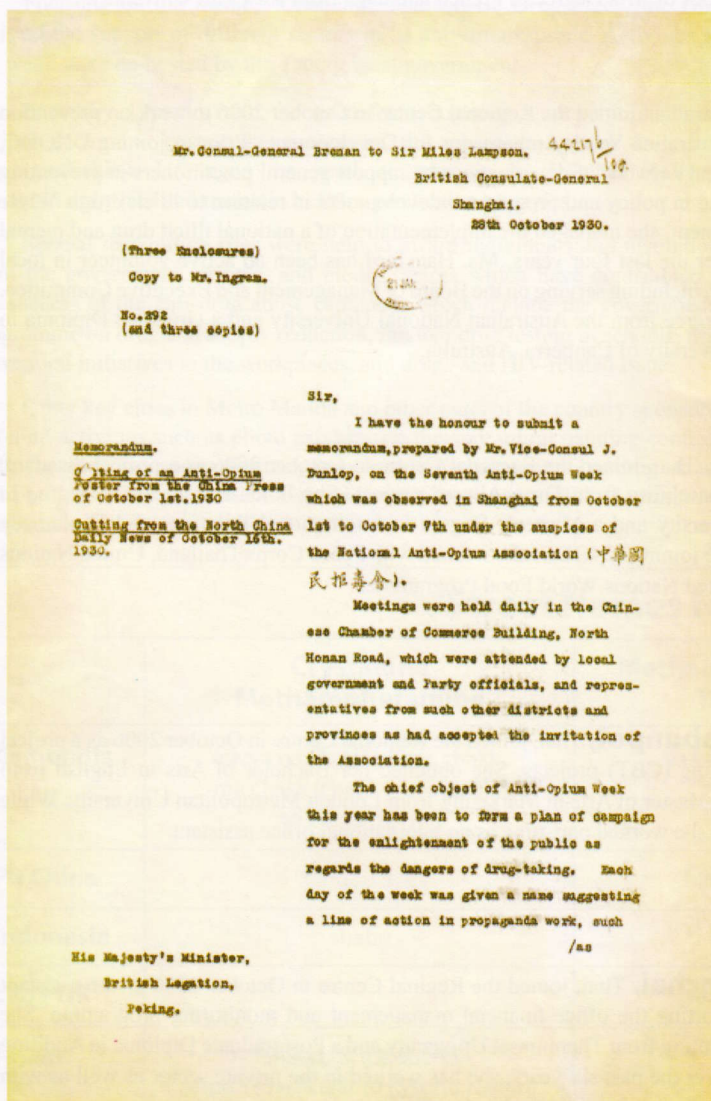
By **Akira Fujino**
UNODC Regional Centre

Shanghai, October 8th, 1930, Anti-opium Commission – “Shanghai began the work of opium suppression, and it has been taken up throughout the country. Although very little has been achieved so far, we must not be discouraged, but strive for ultimate success. Our efforts are not limited to this one week; the work of saving the country must be carried on unremittingly on the lines laid down during the Anti-Opium Week...”¹

Shanghai was a major point of drug trafficking route. In 1924, Shanghai² started a “National Anti-Opium Week”. It was the year before the first international drug control treaty with “binding measures”, the International Opium Convention of 1925, was adopted as well as a number of initiatives implemented.

Various activities for the National Anti-Opium Week continued to take place. In 1930, the seventh event was held from 1 to 7 October with a specific theme for each day. The inaugural meeting of the event in Shanghai was presided over by the President of the National Anti-Opium Association, reflecting the importance of the event. It was held at the Chamber of Commerce, and attended by a wide variety of multi-disciplinary agencies, including the Shanghai Municipal Government; the Bureaus of Health, Public Safety, Public Works, and Social Affairs; the Shanghai Special District Court; and over 40 other bodies.

At the end of the week, the Anti-Opium Commission issued the above comment on 8 October 1930. The “lines laid down” during the Week referred to the theme of each day and the corresponding proposals made. It is worthy to examine the proposals made, particularly, for advocacy, as these were pioneers in the field, and today we continue to do so.



¹ "Shanghai dispatch No.292 to Peking, 28th October 1930" in Ho 45/24787 63396, Home Office file, Public Record Office, United Kingdom.

² See "Stories from the Past: Series IV, Lost in the Past: Early 1900s – Early Days of the International Drug Control Treaty System, in "Eastern Horizons" Spring/Summer 2006 issue, published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific, <www.unodc.org.th>

The first day was styled "*Delivery from disgrace*" day. Among others, it was decided to petition to the Central Government "to publish Anti-Opium books for use in schools."

The second day was "*Obey the Law*" day. "*In a manifesto in the local press the Commission drew attention to past corruptness in the judiciary, whereby people of wealth and influence disobeyed the law with immunity.*" The proposals made on that day included "*Posters to be affixed to hoardings and distributed to shops, railway stations and Post Offices for display*".

The third day was "*Opium Suppression and Health*" day. "*A contributed article in the local press explained the evil effects of opium on the nation's health. The people must help one another in fighting addition to opium; the work to be directed on the following lines*", which included "*the production of plays, films, etc; demonstrating the evils of opium.*" A proposal included "*School children must be warned of the opium peril in their lessons on hygiene.*"

The fourth day was called "*Opium Suppression and the Home*" day. The proposals of the day were all for advocacy efforts: "*(1) To arrange singing meetings to which men, women and children are invited to attend. (2) To send girl students to investigate the home conditions of opium addicts. (3) To organize a Womens' Anti-Opium Propaganda Association. (4) To publish an anti-opium magazine for women. (5) To appeal to women to take an oath to combat opium.*"

The fifth day had a theme "*Opium Suppression and Relief of Distress*" day. A proposal was to "*request the foreign missions to arrange lectures and the taking of oaths in their halls.*"

The sixth day was "*Build up the Race*" day. Proposals of the day included "*Advertise the harm done in China by foreign narcotics*" and "*Form an Anti-Opium Propaganda Association.*"

The final day had the theme of "*National Prosperity*" day. And the proposals of the day encompassed a wide range of advocacy activities. A proposal of the day says, "*Explain the evils of opium to school children at their morning assembly.*" Another says, "*Divide the students into groups, and send them to every district to conduct anti-opium propaganda.*" They continue: "*Arrange debates on opium suppression for the students.*" and "*Arrange essay-writing competitions for the students.*" Others proposed, "*Students to form recreation societies in interests of opium suppression*" and "*Students to compete in the sale of copies of "Opium" (a monthly magazine).*"

Those forerunners before our time, at the turn of the last century, struggled to promote advocacy in the face of the already large drug dependent population in the country. They knew that prevention and education was the key. They had to be innovative, as there had been no one before them to provide guidance. They needed to be realistic, as supply reduction and treatment alone were not sufficient, and those were not yet successful. Today, we have lessons to learn from the efforts of the past, at time, early 1900s - as it is those that we need to do now, learning from the pioneers, before the situation becomes too late. ■

Author's note: *Texts in italics are reproduced verbatim. Names of individuals are withheld.*