

Commissioner Lin on The Opium Question: Understanding the Man and His Potential in A National Crisis

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Abstract

As the topic of this paper suggests, this is one of the promising chapters in the history of modern China. So long, students/researchers are aware mostly of the specifics of Western Imperialism – resulting in events like the Opium Wars; or else, more research in recent times on aspects related to production, cultivation, distribution, marketing, and the economy of this whole business in preceding two-three centuries. On a deeper probing of the entire subject, however, one is faced with many questions, *the most important being among others* - What led China to get involved in this whole story of trade, treachery, greed, diplomacy, and war? How did the State, and its bureaucracy handle the situation – crystallized in China by the 18th century? What were the other options, if at all any? What was so special in the personality of Lin Zexu that made matters so difficult for the foreigners stationed in China – and especially the young, ambitious Captain Elliot? Does this phase of history also call for a cultural scrutiny of the two societies (the point may appear to be remote though to some)? The findings of the present study establish beyond doubt that even today, there is a lot to learn from the history – preceding our times.

Key Words: trade practices, habit formations, opium smuggling, controlling action, conscientious Westerners

Introduction

The Opium trade and wars occupy an important place in the history of the emergence of Modern China – for their multi-dimensional and picturesque details related to the events as they emerged during China's intercourse with the European Powers in the past two centuries. It is a major theme in the history books of the modern world, and a few novels as well (Ghosh,2008). Yet a question often underestimated is 'Did China have no such strong leadership that could confront the Western onslaught on it - via the opium 'trade' (so-called)? It is also a commonly shared knowledge that contemporary Chinese society has become fully opium-addicted (Roche,2000 ; Kane,1882), and its bureaucracy fully corrupt on that account; that for the most part, it acted as a comprador class of the foreign agencies and welcomed the smuggling of opium by European powers in their country (Hao,1986; Headland,1909) . However, least addressed is the question – how does the demand for opium on such a wide scale come to be generated in that country? Until about the 12th -13th centuries, opium in China was recognized as an object – representing – miraculous powers of curing common ailments and therefore something that primarily concerned the medical practitioners there. How then, did it gain its new identity as a symbol of "recreational smoking" - achieving menacing proportions to such an extent that the government and bureaucracy there supposedly gave up (Brennan,1988; Fry, 1840 ; Greenberg, 1951; Hosie,1897; Phillips & Ray,1981), (much to the delight of the invading foreigners involved actively in this trade)? Further, why the need for an opium war - if things were being managed that smoothly?

To be able to see through this cobweb, especially deserving a unique place in this whole story of trade, treachery, greed, diplomacy, war, and inter-continental relations – is one personality known by the name Lin Zexu, who came to be known as High Commissioner Lin in due course of time. What however needs to be emphasized is that the details about the opium trade that have filtered down the routine history books on China scarcely mention details and contribution of this very important figure; and much to the surprise of this scholar during the discussions, an average student/scholar of Chinese history has a very vague image about Lin Zexu – the man, his place in this whole context. After all, *it is not for no reason* that even a Sinologist of British origin, Herbert A. Giles – praised and admired Lin, saying that *he was a fine scholar, a just and merciful official, and a true patriot* (emphasis added); and by the way, it also makes sense to mention here that he was not writing in a mood of fanciful imagination or taken away by some kind of nostalgic attachment for the personality, we are talking about. Mr. Herbert was a British diplomat (apart from being an English Sinologist) – who was also a professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge for 35 years(Giles,1876 ; Giles, 1901; Giles,1911; Giles, 1912). Of course there may be more to it than just the political details, offered by the official histories on the subject, and, studying such materials would perhaps complement the existing literature in meaningful ways; but that may be left for an entire book in future on the subject rather than this brief paper within the given word-limit.

It needs to be said that an additional reason for taking up a subject like this is because June 26 is the international day against 'drug abuse & drug trafficking'. Believe it or not, the same is *chosen as the day against drug abuse* – is for the simple reason that *it marks the anniversary of an event that is known as the Humen Opium Party**– during which some 20,000 tons of contraband opium was dumped into the harbor at Humen in China, under supervision of High Commissioner Lin. Anyone interested in whether policies can curb or even eradicate drug use *might turn to episodes of history for suggestions*. Even policy-making bodies, reviewing the literature have found some encouraging examples of these incidents (in many of the post-war countries which are serious about such issues). If detailed attention is given to China's most effective campaign against opium smoking, launched under Lin – it may be possible to derive some worthwhile policy conclusions in the above context.

Even though it is true that the voluminous work done so far on the subject of Opium History – is far too vast as compared to that done on Lin Tse-Hsu; that does not prove the insignificance of the subject of this paper any less as compared to the historiography on modern China. The point of consideration is that *a detailed overview of the literature on the subject*, within the given limits of time and space, is perhaps next to impossible. However, a brief listing of some published literature could be attempted here, but certainly not the whole list of official histories, the archival sources, or the private archives – diaries, letters, and so on – the list of which is large and endless. One of the most influential works is that of Hsinpao Chang's *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1964), followed up by others like Joyce A Mandancy's *The Troublesome Legacy of Commissioner Lin: The Opium Trade and the Opium Suppression in Fujian Province 1820s to 1920s* (Harvard University Asia Centre, 2003); Hummel, Arthur W. Sr. (ed.) *Lin-Tse-hsu: Eminent Chinese of the Ching Period* (US Government Printing Office, 1943); Hanes, William Travis, Sanello, Frank's *The Opium Wars: The Addition of one Empire and the Corruption of Another*, Sourcebooks, Inc. Pub., Naperville, Illinois, 2002; Lee, Khoo Choy's *Pioneers of Modern China: Understanding the Inscrutable Chinese*, World Scientific Pub., Singapore, 2006; Kuo, Pin Chia's *A Critical Study of the First Anglo-Chinese War with Documents*, Shanghai Commercial Press, 1935; Lovell, Julia's *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the making of Modern China*, Picador Pub., London, 2012; Peyrefitte, Alain's *The Immobile Empire*, Vintage Pub. Reprint Edition, 2013, and so on. There may be an ocean of unofficial histories and unconventional sources, i.e., notes, jottings, or miscellaneous other forms of literature, and each historian has to scrutinize minute details to judge the limits of his /her paradigm to be able to do justice to the subject. My acknowledgments are due to most of the above, but most importantly to Hsin-Pao Chang, from whom I learned a great deal besides quoting him profusely.

It will be to quote very briefly what John King Fairbank (Professor of History at Harvard University) says in the whole context, that the Opium war has embittered Chinese patriots and embarrassed conscientious Westerners for more than a century; that the Chinese

grievance is reinforced by the plain facts that opium-smoking was pernicious and Lin's efforts to suppress it "was the immediate occasion for hostilities"; but at the same time "Indeed, the question is unavoidable: why was the Chinese reaction to the opium evil not more vigorous?"(Chang, 1964). Similarly, speculations such as that "Anglo-Chinese hostilities would have occurred even if there had been no opium trade, that other Western powers would have aggressed against China even if Britain had not, and that Chinese patriots today would have a sense of grievance even if Sino-Western relations had avoided warfare..."(Chang,1964) Given the historical scenario of the pre-modern world, there could be a host of questions – related with this entire theme. It is also true that the need for historians' rational analysis and dispassionate understanding of events and an effort not to just sit as a judge but also to be a witness for all sides of the argument, and to recapture the circumstances, the moods, and the beliefs of the protagonists - always stands. "To do this for the Opium War is an exacting task", he continued. This is illustrative of the challenges lying ahead of a historian, who decides to write about the opium question and modern China.

Life-sketch: Born in August of the year 1785 in the Fukien province (Fujian), Lin Zexu (Lin Tse-hsu) was the second son of Lin Binri - who served as an ordinary official under the Qing government. A teacher by profession and although poor, the father gave his sons a good education in the Confucian Classics**, so that they could succeed in the exams held by the State for administrative ranks, and obtain positions in the government bureaucracy. An interesting event about his name is as follows: "When (the child) Lin Tse-hsu was born on August 30, 1785, the popular governor of Fukien, Hsu Shih-lin, and his retinue were passing by the door of the Lin household. Therefore, his father named him Tse-hsu, literally "follow the example of Hsu"(Chang,1964: 121). Lin passed the initial exams in 1804 (achieving the degree *chu-jen*) and was made an aide to the governor (Chang Shiheh'eng) of his native province – a position which gave him practical experience in the government usages, administrative procedures and politics, thus firmly laying the groundwork of his future career as a Statesman too. In 1811, he received his degree called 'jinshi'*** – supposed to be the highest title in the Imperial examinations; and three years later he was also appointed a compiler at the prestigious Hanlin Academy**** – which was known for advising the emperor and also helped him in the drafting of the official/other needed documents. He made his first trip to Yunnan province as Chief Supervisor of the provincial exams in 1819. Besides, he was a member of a small, influential group of 'reformists' (the Statecraft School - which sought to revitalize traditional Chinese thought/institutions to revive the tottering Qing dynasty; advocated compilation of practical knowledge about the West and its technology, etc. are some of the other important aspects of Lin's personality. His craving for a better knowledge of foreigners drove him to collect material for the geography of the world, and this material was later passed on to Wei Yuan (who published the Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdom in 1843). This is regarded as the first significant Chinese work on the West.***** The core of the argument is that Lin soon achieved the status of not only a renowned scholar, and writer, but also successfully established his reputation for intelligence,

virtue, dutifulness, and "a resolute and competent administrator, a just and fair applicator of the law and most amazingly, bearing in mind his peers – incorruptible"(Booth,2013: 129).

Lin Tse-hsu received his first regular administrative appointment in 1820 in the salt monopoly; followed by his supervision of the water control systems in several localities; then serving as a tax collector; followed by a term as local judge. This speaks of his talent and administrative skills which made him rise to different positions and get transfers from one to another – wherever the emperor thought he was needed for a proper discharge of administrative functions. The use of the word 'incorruptible' speaks volumes about the personality and commitments in contemporary China – which he earned himself a respectful nickname by the public – "Lin the Clear Sky"(Chang,1964:121-22). It is often assumed that the more important part of his career began when he returned after a period of literary activity (during the traditional mourning of his father's death) – to serve in the highest echelons of government. That is when he was given the appointment of the governorship of Kiangsu, and was promoted to become governor-general of Hunan and Hubei in the year 1837 (where he remained until he was appointed Imperial High Commissioner in late 1838).

Historically, the situation was that the opening of the tea trade to the Dutch and British merchants (in China) – created the problem of large quantities of illegal opium sneaking into China, *which made opium addiction a serious social problem* by the early 19th century. As compared to the other European nations, it was the British merchants in particular, who *to balance out their trade deficit with China* – started exporting opium to Chinese ports in large quantities – with *unexpected results amongst the Chinese population*. The description of this situation is available in the contemporary literature about the *typical opium dens* in China, "The room is four or five yards long and perhaps three wide low ceilings blackened with smoke and covered with black cobwebs. The floor is the bare earth the walls are black as soot save here and there where they are adorned with a few strips of red paper most of which bear inscriptions sounding like horrid mockery. Take one: 'May all who enter here gain health and happiness'. On all sides of this den are wooden benches-like tables covered with a piece of matting and each furniture with lamp and pipe. Most of these were occupied with gaunt hollow-eyed figures lying curled up some taking their first puffs others in different stages of prostration and stupefaction"(The Friend of China, 1878 : 106).

When the son of the emperor Taokuang (Dao Guang Emperor) died of an opium overdose, the emperor decided to put an end to this trade *not only on moral grounds but also because the opium, by this time, had to be paid with precious Chinese silver* (Hao,1986). The emperor became alarmed over the issue of trade, which was being carried on with impunity by the British as well as the Chinese smugglers; and that *even illegal imports had to be paid for with the export of Chinese silver*. Lin then submitted a memorial to the emperor – condemning a suggestion by a few interested officials within China that the opium trade be legalized. He also cited the measures by which he had suppressed the drug traffic in the

provinces where he was appointed the Governor-General. Lin's presentation "was outstanding for its realistic and moderate approach. It betokened careful investigation and a profound grasp of the problem", comments a scholar (Chang,1964). He continues, "Among all the memorials submitted by the nation's leading officials during the debate, Lin's stood out as the most cogent". "Lin's talent, probity, and loyalty to the government had been recognized by the emperor ever since the early 1820s..."(Chang,1964:120) It was reported that while discussing the effects of opium on his people, the emperor wept and said to Lin, "How, alas, can I die and go to the shades of my imperial fathers and ancestors, until these dire evils are removed!"(Chang,1964 : 120) The emperor (who for almost two decades *had vainly attempted to enforce the 'Ban on the importation of Opium'*) then responded *in a very terse edict* by appointing Lin as Imperial High Commissioner in 1838 (to cope with the Opium problem in Canton) and *vested him with extraordinary powers*. A formidable bureaucrat, known for his thoroughness and integrity, Lin was sent to Guangdong (Canton) to halt the importation of opium by the British and obviously to put an end to the whole uneasy situation, that was eating up the Chinese economy and society from within.

After an unusual 19 audiences in Peking with the Emperor, Lin proceeded to Canton (the hub of the trade). His diary for this period survives and conveys a vivid picture of a Chinese Official of the time at work: making the arduous journey from Peking; perspiring in the heat of Guangzhou's sub-tropical climate as a gesture of compliance before the written instructions of the emperor. What is of significance to note here is the fact that "the powers delegated to the office of the Commissioner were made less meaningful by the Ching government's practice of rewarding or punishing an official according to the result of his work, not based on his adherence to or violation of instructions"(Chang,1964:121) Therefore, as it appears, Lin's power/position *was not unlimited*, in a way.

Turn of Events: Two weeks before he arrived at Canton, the Commissioner had sent a dispatch to the Provincial Judge and Financial Commissioner of Kwantung stating that the most important aspect of his mission was to nab the 'traitorous Chinese' and crack upon the operator/s of fast-crab-network (for which he supplied them a compiled list (prepared based on investigations and accusations contained in memorials sent to the emperor). They were also instructed to send reliable men in plain clothes to arrest the opium dealers, along with the evidence of their crime. A warning posted for the local people concluded as follows, "Now then ye who smoke opium! When ye take up the opium pipe to smoke, do one and all of you put the hand upon the heart and ask yourselves: Do I deserve death or not? Ought I to leave off this hateful vice or not? People who have rebelled against heaven, who have injured their fellow men, who have opposed reason, who have trampled on five relations of mankind, who have set at defiance every rule of decency and propriety: one thinks that though our sovereign's laws may not slay them, yet with heaven and earth, gods and spirits, must exterminate them with their avenging lightning! Though you may escape our human punishments, think you that you can escape the punishment of heaven?"(Martin,1847:68)

This speaks volumes about the man and the way he thought. He mobilized the gentry and literati as auxiliaries to his office. The effect of the whole arrangement was remarkable, and within 16 weeks Lin put five times as many people in prison and confiscated 7 times as many opium pipes as Teng (the Gov-Gen.) had done during the preceding 3 years. However, comments a scholar, "Commissioner's treatment of any Chinese known to be connected with the opium traffic was drastic, but it was also successful. The difficulties lay in his dealings with foreigners"(Chang,1964:131).

Within a few months of his arrival in Canton, Lin issued an edict demonstrating his resolve: "Let the Barbarians deliver to me every particle of opium on board their store-ships. There must not be the smallest atom concealed or withheld. And at the same time let the said Barbarians enter into a bond never hereafter to bring opium in their ships and to submit, should any be brought, to the extreme penalty of the law against the parties involved"(Hoe & Roebuck,2013) Further that "Having come into the territory of the Celestial Court, you should pay obedience to its laws and statutes, equally with the natives of the land"(Chang,1964:139) in the same way as they do in England concerning the English laws. *It is interesting to note that Elliot (the British officer) candidly admitted that those who go to Canton for trade must act in obedience to the laws and all he could do was to have British vessels and men depart from Canton, but he did not mean it* (as is clear from all his letters/actions). Keeping in view the entire tone and tenor of his correspondence, it will be fallacious to assume that Lin intended to plunge China into war with Britain (even though he had with him Emperor's instructions to weed out the 'Opium Evil' "root and branch").

There were several issues and incidents of a similar nature and a whole lot of details attached (which it is not possible to mention here) but one point was too clear, viz. that while to Lin the detention of the defaulter foreign merchants was the 'rightful punishment' – sanctioned by Chinese law, to Elliot it was a serious piratical act against British life, property, liberty and dignity of British Crown. Henceforth his aim was not just to avenge these wrongs, but to make China change its foreign trade system and begin an era of honorable relations between both countries.

The Commissioner in his second Edict demanded that the foreigners submit to the Chinese government within three days, all the opium on board their ships, *so that the same be destroyed in order "to stop its harm"*. The Commissioner however kept appealing to these merchants that they could make immense profit from Chinese trade, but by trading solely in other articles. Such profit – he argued – would be made legally and would not earn them heavenly retribution. On the other hand, if they persist with the Opium trade, all trade would be stopped. Since opium was not being consumed in foreign countries and was at the time prohibited in China, Lin Tse-hue could not see why foreign merchants should have any difficulty in deciding to deliver it (Chang, 1964) S. Williams opined that "For once in the history of foreign intercourse with China, these commands were

obeyed”(Williams,1883:501) By May Lin could congratulate himself for the Opium of China being entirely in his hands now, observes Chang. As soon as the delivery was completed, he wrote to the emperor, “Millions (of dollars) of the barbarian’s capitals is now laid waste, and probably they would not dare to repeat the same (crime)”(Chang,1964:172).

The question now was about the disposal of the surrendered opium. There were quite a few speculations on the side of the foreigners that would Lin destroy opium, as he previously announced. Captain Elliot from the side of the British guessed that the care with which the Commissioner was superintending the 'repackaging of drug' – perhaps the Chinese would legalize the trade as a government monopoly and the profits from the sale of such a vast amount would make it easy for their authorities to set up a 'Fund' to compensate the original owners, but he was proved wrong. When Lin offered some concessions "for each chest of opium he received" – this was to be a reward for the foreigners' compliance with his orders rather than "an indemnity for the opium surrendered". It was quite common amongst the opponents to condemn the Chinese government for being inept, corrupt, backward, and erratic but about the opium prohibition in the late 1830s, "it was unwavering". It did not expect to pay merely to have its laws obeyed. The emperor instructed Lin to destroy opium on the spot. The method devised for the destruction of the commodity (after an extensive inquiry) was even more original. It was decided to disintegrate the opium balls; mixing them with lime and salt; then thrown into the well dug trenches, filled with water. The drug was completely decomposed and then the liquid was pushed into the nearby creeks – which carried it to the ocean.

It was about a week before all this happened that Commissioner Lin composed a prayer for the God of the Sea (Chi Hai-Shen wen) that all aquatic animals might take refuge when the decomposed opium was thrown into the ocean. The idea of this literary composition *seems amusing from today's viewpoint*; it however gives us a clue to the gentleness of the Commissioner. E.C. Bridgman, *witnessing the destruction* said, "The degree of care and fidelity, with which the whole work was conducted, far exceeded our expectations; I cannot conceive how any business could be more faithfully executed"(Chang,1964:174) Let aside the other useful details, Lin's accomplishments won him great applause and somebody commented "that while Christian Governments were growing and farming this deleterious drug, *this Pagan Monarch* (emphasis added) *should nobly disdain to enrich his treasury with a sale which could not fall short of \$20,000,000*"(Edmonds,1841:14). Another circular issued from the American Board of Commissioners, saying "For years past, those who ought to have introduced the gospel ... have instead been bringing in a flood of desolation. This tide is now checked, but not yet entirely stopped. The destruction by the Chinese government, of twenty thousand chests of opium, which if so, would have brought into treasury ten or fifteen million dollars, will long be referred to as an act, illustrative of the combined power of conscience and correct principle, operating even in pagan hearts ... it seemed incredible that it should be

destroyed. Yet so it was – destroyed”(American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1839).

Most important of all details to be noted here is what emerges as the difference of attitudes between the two nations – one represented by Lin and the other by Captain Elliot – who did not morally approve of the opium traffic and considered it “a trade, which every friend to humanity must deplore”(Chang,1964:177) – nevertheless pledged his full protection to the English and other opium traders.

Then comes the end: The destruction of the immense amount of contraband opium was “the climax of Lin Tsu-hsu’s mission in Canton”; and he now directed his attention to seeking ways of bringing the situation back to normal. However, Elliot looked at the situation differently and was *bent on launching a campaign for the punishment of China to open a new era in the China trade*. (Plea given repeatedly was that the Chinese government was corrupt, inept and a number of their officials connived in the illicit traffic. A funny logic indeed used for rationalizing the plans designed for the future); and Palmerston responded by sending a secret dispatch to Elliot (October 18, 1839) informing that *his government had decided to place Britain’s relations with China on a proper footing* and so an expedition force to blockade Canton and ... was to arrive in Chinese water by the following March (Chang,1964:194). The period intervening in between these events was punctuated by futile negotiations, crises, rumors in England, and the usual fighting. So when the British retaliated *by ravaging large parts of South China, with the onslaught of their ship Nemesis* – the change in the emperor's attitude was surprising. His attitude toward the Britishers was reversed now and on August 21, 1840, he accused Lin Tse-hsu of not being able to stop the opium trade and internally the outlaws (opium smugglers and smokers) were neither cleared away. He said, “You are just making excuses with empty words. Nothing has been accomplished but many troubles have been created”(Chang,1964:212).

Commissioner Lin was dismissed within no time, and immediately replaced by Ch'i-shan and exiled to Ili (the north-west frontier of China). (It was a different matter though that here too, Lin engaged in irrigation work, and by 1844 "he had reclaimed over 3,700,000 moue of land”(Chang,1964:212) and was recalled by the Court for other administrative assignments. He was also rewarded with the title of *grand guardian of the heir apparent* for pacifying the Muslim rebels in the province of Yunnan. Lin had hardly begun to enjoy the life of retirement when the Court assigned him another important responsibility – for which no other official was found suitable. In October 1850 he was appointed imperial commissioner to suppress the Taiping’s in Kwangsi. Even in sickness, he set out to carry out the edict of the emperor, but never reached the destination because he died en route in the year 1850 at the age of 67.

Conclusion

Of central significance is the fact that amidst the stark and simple, black-and-white story of Chinese victimization (concerning the question of Opium trade) and the ensuing Anglo-Chinese hostilities – the emergence of a character like Lin Zexu was indisputably a glorious chapter in the context of Chinese history – an aspect on which the research workers and popular writers in China (especially since 1949) *have laid great emphasis than ever before* – using materials that were made available to them through the newly established Museums/Archives - which played a great role in rescuing research materials – lying in obscurity so far; and neither was there any scope of the same being available for public scrutiny if this was not done. Once the possibilities of public access were thrown open for scrutiny of the same, it led to interesting developments – like a few scholars diverting from their purely literary pursuits into writing books on the opium issue; and others making films on such events/characters like Lin Tse-hsu – based on actual events that took place during the Opium War.*****

Because Opium had a tenacious hold on Chinese society and brought its economy as well, almost near to extinction by the onset of the 19th century, what were the expectations of its ruling dynasty or the bureaucracy? At the other end was the entire British team of traders/officers who were stationed in China to squeeze profits out of that smuggling, which they advertised as 'trade'. What was their perception?

This paper *gives a glimpse* of the activities of Opium traders throughout, and the counteraction of the Chinese officials (but all to no avail) – *until the emergence of a man* called Lin Zexu, whose personality and performance (apart from other factors) also allows us to understand/appreciate the basic difference between the two cultures confronting each other in this part of the world: on the one side England's trade and its role in China *in obstinate violation of the laws of that country*, and, on the other side Commissioner Lin being determined and clear-headed - not to compromise on the issue of such violations. For those who hold Commissioner Lin responsible for the outbreak of Opium wars and the consequent calamity in China – it is necessary to introspect (consequent upon Lin's appearance on the scene) why the destruction of confiscated opium and the detention of the foreign community – blocked all avenues for diplomatic conclusion of the existing dispute? Why is it that almost all Englishmen (interested in China trade) ranging from traders, financiers, or the superintendents in Canton to the manufacturing class of London – were hell-bent on entreating their government to intervene in Chinese affairs?(Farooqui,1998) How could Palmerstone decide to finally intervene *by imposing a war against China* (and that too not through the proper channel)? It is also important to see the behavior of Captain Elliot who was forthright in calling this kind of a British response *as a new system of trade with China*. Commissioner Lin's rightful acts of national defense were looked upon by Elliot as unjustified, and, hence the consequent British aggression as “just vindication of all wrongs

and the effectual prevention of crime and wretchedness”(Trocki,2002;York & Eames,1909) to use his own words. He expected that kind of trade to be legalized by flying Her Majesty's flags on the coasts of China (!).

It is not an exaggeration to say that Lin's significance goes beyond his career and administrative achievements (even though the humiliating and ruinous penetration by the foreigners through their intransigent attitude hastened the downfall of his country).

As a true nationalist, Lin simply drew on the precedents of earlier generations – to whom commercial considerations were not always the last ones to matter. *They were petty – in the larger Confucian context.* So quite reasonably, it was difficult for Lin Tse-hue, whose training in the Confucian Classics (as his father desired) came in the way of his comprehending the British demands for 'free trade', or 'international equality in the sense of their concept of a commercial empire' in the contemporary context. He relied on *a moral tone* – in tune with the Chinese world order – and this is well represented through a letter that he drafted for the ruler of England – in which he posed the question in simplest terms. Whether the Queen would allow the importation of a substance **as poisonous as Opium into her own country?** Audacious as it may appear to some, it nevertheless hit the nail on the head, when the letter said, "We think that this poisonous article is clandestinely manufactured by artful and depraved people of various tribes under the dominion of your honorable nation..... And we have heard that in your honorable nation, too, the people are not permitted to smoke the drug, and that offenders in this particular expose themselves to sure punishment. ... But to remove the source of the evil thoroughly would it not be better to prohibit its sale and manufacture rather than merely prohibit its consumption? ... We now wish to find, in cooperation with your honorable sovereignty, some means of bringing to a perpetual end this opium, so hurtful to mankind....”(Chang,1964:135)

Can we also take a position that traffic in Opium “provided nothing more than a spark that set off an explosion whose origin lay entirely in cultural differences” – *which may not be an invalid postulation from a deeper perspective?* Given the fact that (as few opine) it is always necessary to see the immediate precipitating causes of opium wars – the question that will always bother researchers *endlessly* is – Could the war be avoided anyway? *However, if for once, the perspective is shifted from 'could' to 'should' the opium war be avoided (?)* – anybody will appreciate the significance of the fact that the letter for which Commissioner Lin worked hard – *was never allowed to reach the ruler of England.* Lin Tse-Hsu had set off a process against the smugglers *that could not have been stopped but through a War alone* (as the available evidence and events testified). Yet it is also true that the British came to regret their part in the opium wars. John Passmore Edwards called it as one of the most unjust and iniquitous crimes perpetrated by one nation on another (Edwards,1858). The future prime minister Gladstone also used somewhat similar language when he said that it was a War more unjust in its origin, a war more calculated to cover this country with permanent disgrace, I do

not know and have not read of *****. In the same continuation, we have a fair assessment by one Mr. Omrad, who spoke of Lin's efforts in these words, "I hold that Commissioner Lin served us just right when the opium that was to have destroyed his countrymen were instead destroyed by him, and I honor the patriotism and admire the pluck of the brave Commissioner who dared to step forth in defense of his country, a simple justice, and common humanity against a nation so great and powerful as our own"*****

So, it is better for those in our day who participate in the recreational drug trade; to attempt to legalize it and simply acquiesce in the face of political forces (which seem to make these toxins more easily available in the name of liberty/justice/human rights) - to read history and take a desirable lesson.

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The silver drain had already begun in Jialing's reign. It increased in the 1820s with the growing consumption of yang Huo and opium. Between 1801-1826, according to a conservative estimate at \$ 74,700,000; and \$ 133,700,000 between 1827 and 1849. Hao Yen-Ping (1986). *The Commercial Revolution in 19th Century China*. Berkeley, pp. 121-2

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FOOTNOTE

*An event of great significance in which Commissioner Lin had the upper hand by seizing the opium stocks of smugglers in China and destroying them publicly.

**The four books and five classics are the authoritative books of Confucianism, written in China before approximately 300 BCE. They are the most important classics of Chinese Confucianism. They formed the curriculum for schools in China down through the 19th century. In Imperial China, the most prestigious career, that of government service, was open only to those who passed the rigorous exams in the classics. The Five Classics are described

in terms of five visions: metaphysical, political, poetic, social, and historical. Authorship of the Confucian Classics is traditionally given to Confucius himself.

*** Lin became the Chin-shih; (also jinshi) supposed to be the highest degree in Imperial China.

**** Hanlin Academy was an academic and administrative institution of higher learning founded in 8th century A.D. Tang China by the emperor Xuanzong-in Chang 'an. Its membership was confined to an elite group of scholars who performed secretarial and literary tasks for the Court.

***** HaigouTuzhi is a 19th-century Chinese Gazetteer compiled by scholar-official Wei Yuan and others, based on the initial transactions, ordered by Commissioner Lin. Hao, Wang & others (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China: Late Ching 1800-1911*, Cambridge, p. 148

***** One such film, *The Opium War* is a 1997 Chinese historical epic film that was directed by Xie Jin (it tells the story of the First Opium War fought between the Qing Empire of China and the British – from the perspectives of key figures such as the Chinese official Lin Zexu and the British naval diplomat Charles Elliot). Furthermore, despite its clear political message, many Western commentators found the film's treatment of the historical events 'balanced and even-handed'. It was supposed to be the most expensive film produced in China and had won several awards.

***** Gladstone made a famous speech in Parliament in 1840 against the First Opium War, and publicly lambasted these wars as "Palmerstone's Opium War". Further, he felt "in dread of the judgments of God upon England for our national iniquity towards China".

***** Mr. Omrad (blogger) in his write-up entitled *A Disgraceful Little War ~ The Opium War and Commissioner Lin*, Monday, June 26, 2017