

National Hero Lin Zexu



开眼看世界 -- 林则徐像

Chinese scholar and official during the Ch'ing Dynasty known for his role leading up to the First Opium War

Lin Zexu (Lin Tse-hsu) was born August 30, 1785 in Fuzhou, Fujian province. His father, being a teacher, ensured he had a strong education to include the Confucian Classics which would help him advance in government bureaucracy. And that he did, excelling in civil-service exams, Lin Zexu eventually ended up in the Hanlin Academy, an elite scholarly institution, the highest academic institution in China. During the mid-1830s, the Daoguang emperor was concerned over the growing illegal opium trade being conducted by British and Chinese smugglers. The emperor appointed Lin Zexu as imperial commissioner and sent him to Guangzhou (Canton) to stop the importation of opium. In March 1839, Lin started to take measures by arresting over 1700 Chinese opium dealers and confiscating over 70,000 opium pipes. He forced the British traders to surrender their opium for destruction. He famously wrote a letter to Queen Victoria stating that China was providing Britain valuable commodities such as tea, porcelain, spices and silk, with Britain sending only “poison” in return. Lin Zexu was a formidable bureaucrat known for his competence and high morals, reminiscent of our Great Ancestor Pi Kan. Britain retaliated with war and was victorious. In the

1842 Treaty of Nanking, Hong Kong became a British colony. The Daoguang emperor withdrew his support for Lin Zexu and exiled him to East Turkestan only to recall him years later to help quell the Taiping Rebellion. Unfortunately Lin died en route in 1850.

Even though the Opium Wars was disastrous for China, Lin Zexu is still admired for his fight against opium:

China – he is viewed as a national hero

Taiwan – June 3rd celebrated as “Opium Suppression Movement Day”, was the day Lin Zexu confiscated the chests of opium

Around the World – June 26 was set by the United Nations as “International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking” in honor of Lin Zexu