



Paul Chrastina

Lin Tse-hsü, the governor of the Chinese province of Hu-

bureaucrat who wrote stylized Confucian poetry in his spare time. During his long career, 53-year-old Lin had acquired a reputation as a man who could be counted on to do the right thing in a difficult situation. His high degree of morality and integrity had earned him the nickname "Lin the Clear Sky," and his opinions were highly regarded at the court of Chinese Emperor Taokuang. In October, 1838, Lin Tse-hsü was summoned to the Imperial Palace in Peking, where the Emperor personally assigned him to stamp out opium addiction in China.

million Chinese opium addicts. Addiction was especially common around the port city of Canton, where foreign merchants smuggled large quantities of the narcotic drug into China. Commissioner Lin launched his anti-drug campaign in Canton, where he set up headquarters and took command of the local naval forces. On March 10, 1839, Lin proclaimed that the opium trade would no longer be tolerated in Canton, and he began arresting known opium dealers in the local schools and naval barracks. Those

were sentenced to public execution by strangulation. "Let no one think," Lin proclaimed, "that this is only a temporary effort on behalf of the Emperor. We will persist until the job is finished." Lin consulted with local physicians and established a treatment center near Canton. He encouraged opium addicts to enroll there—under amnesty—to shed their habit. To combat the popular belief that opium addiction was an impossible habit to break, Lin frequently told the story of a man he had met who "had been an addict for thirty years, smoking an ounce of opium a day, but who

limbs." Lin's next move was to crack down on foreign smugglers of opium. He knew that very little opium was grown in China. Most opium was grown in British India, where the drug was a legal commodity. If Lin could stop foreign merchants from smuggling opium into his country, then China's addiction problem would be solved. Lin knew that the opium was brought to China in large British clipper ships, which also carried legal trade items. The cargo masters of these ships sold their opium to

Canton, where they held permits to buy tea and silk, and Commissioner Lin sent messages demanding that they turn over all of the opium they had aboard, as well as any supplies of the drug that might be stored at Lintin promising never to bring opium to China again, on pain of

The foreign traders were given three days to comply with

the situation very lightly and made no move to turn over

any opium. Lin guessed that the foreigners were counting

Commissioner Lin's demands, but they seemed to take

on corrupt Chinese officials to protect them. Many

Cantonese officials, including the viceroy and high

ranking naval commanders, were secretly accepting bribes, called "squeeze money" from the western merchants; some were even using Imperial navy vessels to move the contraband drug ashore. On the morning of March 25, 1839, Commissioner Lin gave the opium smugglers a demonstration of the the seriousness of his intent. He ordered the suspension of all trade with the western merchants, who lived together in a small neighborhood of waterfront homes, offices, and

Commissioner Lin laid down the terms under which the foreign merchants could regain their freedom and their right to trade in Canton. First, they must turn over all of the opium concealed aboard their ships, then they must sign a binding pledge not to bring any more opium to China in the future. Until these requirements were met, the foreigners would not be permitted to purchase any tea, rice, or silk for export. On March 27, the merchants agreed to surrender their opium to Commisioner Lin. When Lin informed Emperor Tao-kuang of his success, he was rewarded with an exquisitely prepared dinner of roebuck venison, a message signifying "Promotion Assured," and a hand painted silk scroll from the Emperor

During the next two months, over two and a half million

Commisioner Lin was faced with the problem of disposing

and chemists, Lin had three large trenches dug along the

seacoast. Each trench measured seventy five wide by one

confiscated. After consulting with Cantonese engineers

pounds of processed opium were delivered under tight

bearing the characters "Good Luck, Long Life."

security from the merchant ships to the Chinese

of the enormous stockpile of opium which he had

On the first day of June, 1839, Commissioner Lin composed a ritual address to the Spirit of the South China Sea. He advised the spirit that he "should shortly

large quantities of salt and lime were dumped into the mixture. The ensuing chemical reaction heated and liquefied the opium, releasing clouds of nauseating gas. A team of five hundred closely guarded laborers with shovels and hoes stirred the slowly decomposing material and ran it off into a stream that led to the sea. The first

For the next two weeks, Commissioner Lin supervised the

methodical destruction of the opium, or "foreign mud,"

from a pavilion set up near the trenches. When he

advised the Emperor that the work was finished, Lin

received the warm reply, "This is something that is

greatly delightful to the hearts of mankind."

On July 12, a Chinese villager was killed by a rampaging gang of drunken British seamen who had come ashore at Kowloon, a mainland village near Hong Kong. Lin demanded that the men responsible for the murder be turned over to him for punishment. Captain Elliot

British at various points along the coast were poisoned. Large banners were posted to warn Chinese villagers not to drink from the streams. Lin then pressured the Portuguese authorities at Macao to evict the British from their harbor, under penalty of severe trade restrictions. These drastic measures forced all of the British ships to retreat from Macao to Hong Kong by the middle of August. On August 31, Commissioner Lin learned that the merchant ships anchored off Hong Kong had been joined by a twenty-eight gun British frigate. Although this news

was not good, Lin, who had the use of a fleet of Chinese

Lin assumed that his Chinese warships were superior to

the ships of the British navy. He thought that Europeans

were primitive barbarians. British fabrics were inferior to

Chinese silk, British earthenware was inferior to Chinese

seemed uncivilized, so Lin assumed that the British navy

that even British civilian merchant ships were armed with

On September 4, two British merchant ships and a launch

junks that tried to prevent them from landing at Kowloon

Although the Chinese warships returned the British fire,

from the newly arrived warship attacked three Chinese

ceramics, and the general behavior of British seamen

must be inferior to the Chinese navy. Lin did not know

cannon that were far deadlier and more accurate than

war junks at his disposal, was not frightened by the

arrival of a single British warship.

any of the guns of the Chinese fleet.

to obtain water and supplies.

their failure would be viewed by higher authorities as a disgraceful act of cowardice. The captains therefore reported to Commissioner Lin that they had won a victory and had sunk a British ship. Commissioner Lin forwarded this version of the encounter to the Emperor and composed an angry proclamation the British, warning them that because "you have presumptuously fired upon and attacked our naval cruisers, our army and navy will now be required to launch a devastating attack upon you, and you will suffer just punishment at our hands." Lin informed the Emperor that he was preparing to permanently drive the merchants away from Hong Kong.

of the largest Chinese war junks and severely damaged many others in an attack that lasted just under 45 minutes. Commissioner Lin now faced serious difficulties. If he truthfully reported his defeat to the Emperor, he was likely to be disgraced and punished. He therefore kept his report of the battle brief and vague, describing six imaginary "smashing blows" that had been inflicted on

concluded "People say that our junks and guns are no match for the British.... But they do not know!" Commissioner Lin's forces, however, proved to be no match for the invaders, who immediately imposed a blockade on the Canton estuary, then attacked and took control of strategically important sites along the China coast.

The British commander sent a sobering message to

Emperor Tao-kuang in Peking, demanding "satisfaction

and redress" for Commissioner Lin's actions at Canton.

On August 21, 1840, the Emperor dismissed Lin Tse-hsü

Stripped of his title, Lin Tse-hsü was exiled to the isolated northern frontier province of Ili, where he was given the task of supervising large scale irrigation and flood control projects. Lin Tse-hsü gradually recovered from the disgrace of his failure to put an end to the opium trade. Ten years after

his dismissal, the Emperor again summoned him into

service. Lin was reinstated as Imperial Commissioner,

Tse-hsü in Canton were unable to stop the opium traffic. In conflicts known as the First and Second Opium Wars, British naval and marine forces seized control of Hong Kong, ravaged the Chinese coastline and briefly occupied the capital city of Peking. In 1858 the Chinese government, bowing to British demands, reluctantly legalized the importation of opium. **SOURCES:**

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Opium History

Huang, was an accomplished administrator and

Lin accepted the assignment, knowing that it represented one of the most difficult problems faced by the Chinese empire. The sale of opium had been made illegal in China in 1800, but the black-market narcotics trade flourished in defiance of the law, and there were an estimated two

found guilty of purchasing, possessing or selling opium managed to give it up." Soon, Lin claimed, "his cheeks began to fill out and the strength came back into his

clandestine Chinese buyers at Lintin Island in Canton Bay. After the foreign merchants unloaded their contraband cargo, they proceeded peacefully up the Pearl River to to sell a variety of legal trade goods. To the foreign clipper ships anchored at Canton, Island. He also commanded them to sign guarantees

trial and execution if found guilty.

trading docks in Canton. Lin's troops surrounded the foreign neighborhood, building barricades across the streets to prevent Chinese people from visiting the docks. Three rows of armed Chinese patrol ships lined up in the river opposite the trading houses. The foreign community was informed that it was being held in detention until the opium trade was suppressed. Lin's action was protested by the ranking British naval officer in the Chinese port, Captain Charles Elliot. The merchants, Elliot asserted, had the full support of the British government, and were not bound to obey the laws

of China.

mainland.

hundred fifty feet long, was seven feet deep, and was lined with flagstones and rough-hewn timbers. The three trenches were surrounded by a tall bamboo fence. be dissolving opium and draining it off to the great ocean," and suggested that all sea creatures should

Despite his success, Commissioner Lin could see that the British merchants were not yet willing to abide by the laws of China. Trying to escape from Lin's authority, some merchants had moved away from Canton and sailed down the Canton estuary to the Portuguese-controlled port of Macao, where it seemed they were intending to resume smuggling opium. Other British ships anchored near the sparsely inhabited island of Hong Kong, at the mouth of the estuary.

delivery of all rice, tea, meat and fresh vegetables to the Freshwater springs that were known to be used by the

By September 22, Lin had assembled a fleet of eighty junks and fireships at the mouth of the Pearl River.

preparations for naval warfare, Lin wrote a poem noting

that "a vast display of Imperial might has shaken all the

foreign tribes, and, if they now confess their quilt, we will

impudently demanded that British merchants be allowed

Commissioner Lin insisted that the British could not enjoy

British could not honor these terms, they were ordered to

any of the benefits of legal trade unless they agreed to

obey Chinese laws and stopped importing opium. If the

In early November, Lin learned that a second British

British warships approached the Chinese fleet with a

sealed letter, demanding supplies and the immediate

warship, an eighteen-gun frigate, had joined the British

merchant fleet at Hong Kong. On November 3, the two

The admiral of the Chinese fleet returned the merchants'

letter unopened, at which point the frigates attacked the

anchored Chinese fleet. The British immediately sank five

Confident that the British were alarmed by his

Lin ignored messages from Captain Elliot, who

leave Chinese waters and never return.

Captain Elliot refused to concede.

to buy the last crop of Chinese tea that had been

not be too hard on them."

harvested that year.

resumption of trade.

the impetuous British barbarians. Pleased with Lin's report, Emperor Tao-kuang gave his thanks. The Emperor also inquired whether or not Commisioner Lin had, in fact, completely stopped the smuggling of opium. Independent reports had arrived in Peking, claiming that small British boats were delivering chests of opium to remote villages along the seacoast north of Canton. The Emperor reminded Lin that his job was to "clear away the opium-evil throughout all of China," not just in Canton.

from his post as Imperial Commissioner. "You have caused this war by your excessive zeal." the Emperor wrote. "You have lied to us, disguising in your dispatches the true color of affairs. Instead of helping us, you have only caused confusion to arise. Now, one thousand unending arms are tied. You are no better than a wooden dummy.

and assigned to travel to the rebellious province of Kwangsi to negotiate with rebel factions. Lin Tse-hsü collapsed and died while en route to Kwangsi on November 22, 1850, at the age of 67. The successive Imperial Commissioners who replaced Lin

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> **Timeline Glossary Receptors References**

retreat to deeper water "to avoid being contaminated," until the opium was completely run off. On June 3, the destruction of the foreign opium began. The trenches were filled with water, and the first chests of opium were broken open and thrown in to soak. Next, worker who was caught trying to steal some opium was immediately beheaded as a warning to the rest.

British jurisdiction. Captain Elliot then tried the sailors himself, with results that were not satisfactory to Commissioner Lin. One seaman was acquitted of a murder charge for lack of evidence, and five others were found guilty of participation in a general riot. When Lin again demanded that the guilty men be delivered to Canton for justice, Elliot sent word that the men would all be appropriately punished when they returned to England. To force Elliot to submit to his demands, Lin ordered that anchored ships at Macao to be intercepted and cut off.

responded that the seamen could only be tried under

they did no damage to the British ships, and were forced to retreat after being badly shot up by cannonballs. The captains of the defeated Chinese junks feared that

Lin assured the Emperor that the despicable foreign drug trade was rapidly drawing to a close. He spent the next

several months fortifying Canton harbor by sinking

barges loaded with stones at its entrances. He also

In the beginning of June, 1840, Lin suddenly found

himself confronting a large British expeditionary force

that had come from Singapore, which included steam-

report to the Emperor, Lin wrote, "English warships are

now arriving at Canton. Although it is certain that they

certain that they will, like great rats, attempt to shelter

coast-guard could prevail in the event of trouble, Lin

the vile sellers of opium." Still confident that the Chinese

will not venture to create a disturbance here, I am

powered gunboats and thousands of British marines. In a

cannon supplied by some enterprising Portugese

merchants.

purchased an American sailing ship and outfitted it with

problems are sprouting. You have behaved as if your As we think about your grievous failings, we become furious, and then melancholy."

The Opium War Through Chinese Eyes. by Arthur Waley. George Allen

Opium in Iran The Opium Trade Just For Chemists The Golden Route Opium Advertisement FUTURE OPIOIDS