ABSTRACT

The Sino-British Opium War of 1839-1842 was the first war between China and Britain. It served as an important turning point in the modern history of China and compelled China to change from an isolated Celestial Empire to the status of a semi-colony. More important, the war exposed the futility and impotence of the Manchu (满洲) government.

The major cause of the war was definitely the opium question. The importation of opium by British merchants to China became a serious problem during the 1830's. Not only did this create a moral issue, it actually became an urgent fiscal problem to the Chinese government since large sum of silver was outflowed from China through the import of opium. In tackling this situation, some Ch'ing officials proposed legalizing the opium trade on a barter basis in order to prevent the outflow of silver from China. This suggestion was denounced by Lin Tse-hsü (林则徐). He felt that resolute measures should be taken to stop the opium trade, and this was the only way to solve the problem.

On December 31, 1838, Lin was made imperial commissioner to settle the opium problem in Canton. From then on, he took strong and resolute actions against the opium traffic. Unfortunately, owing to the weaknesses of the Chinese military forces and the lack of support from Emperor Tao-Kuang (道光帝) in Peking, China was defeated by the well-trained and well-equipped British forces. This finally led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Nanking (南京条约) in August 1842.
The purpose of this Academic Exercise is to present an extensive study of Lin Tse-hsü's resolute measures in the anti-opium movement. It attempts to evaluate Lin's policies in preventing opium smuggling in the Canton area, and to probe into the relationship between Lin's anti-opium measures and the occurrence of the Opium War.

Structurally, this Exercise consists of seven chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the topic. Chapter two deals with the family and educational background of Lin Tse-hsü. The third chapter is a discussion of how the opium trade affected the relationship between China and Britain. The next two chapters analyse the various anti-opium policies adopted by Lin in Canton. Chapter six provides an evaluation of Lin's anti-opium movement. The concluding chapter presents the author's personal views of the relationship between Lin's thoughts and actions and the Opium War in 1839-1842.