ABSTRACT

Opium War is a landmark in China’s history. It not only forced open China’s closed-door economy, but also brought her people onto the arduous road of modernization.

The cause of the War is opium poppy. Human’s abusive use of this medicine brought about disastrous consequences. Opium not only exerted a pernicious influence on China, its trade also greatly affected Anglo-Chinese ties. The breakdown of Anglo-Chinese ties leading to the Opium War, with the encroachment of western power on China’s territorial rights, China was reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society.

The Opium War had a massive impact on China. When we look at the deadly consequences of the War, we might ask the question whether the War was avoidable, so that the Chinese could escape from the terrible sufferings in the ensuing years. My dissertation attempts to answer this question. The focus of this dissertation is on the period of Lin Ze Xu’s (林则徐) ban on opium-trafficking which pushed the Anglo-Chinese conflict to its heights, and caused the outbreak of the War. To further enhance our understanding of the Anglo-Chinese relation at that time, the diplomatic relations between the two countries before the War was also touched on.

This dissertation starts with a synopsis of the influence of opium on the Chinese life in order to show Lin Ze Xu’s urgency to impose the ban. My account on Lin Ze Xu’s ban of opium trade in Canton will serve to give a fuller picture of the underlying causes of the War. The Opium War, indirectly exposed the cultural conflicts of the English and Chinese people. An analysis will be done in this aspect too, in this dissertation. The concluding chapter is an analysis on the inevitability of the War and causes for its outbreak.