

Lin zexu



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The letter prepared by Lin Zexu is written in a kind, compassionate tone. The high-profile government administrator writes to the British queen in an attempt to persuade her to help the Chinese prevent opium traffic in their land. Although his pleadings were eloquent and far-reaching, he was not successful in his attempt since the British undertook no action. Although the letter never made it to the Queen, it was published in a British newspaper (Travis, Hanes, 2002, p. 41).

The responsibility Lin Zexu places on the British was serious in many ways. He blames upon the British their disrespectful treatment of the nation that has for centuries maintained good relations with them and enabled them to realize large profits from their trade. The official points out that this trade was so beneficial for the British that they did not hesitate to sail to China from another end of the world. He also stresses that British merchants can be both scrupulous and unscrupulous: " among the unscrupulous are those who bring opium to China to harm the Chinese; they succeed so well that this poison has spread far and wide in all the provinces" (Zexu, 1839).

Lin Zexu especially stresses that the Chinese government was nothing but nice toward foreign traders. They (at least in the opinion of the official) were granted every right so that they could feel comfortable in the area. However, many of the merchants chose to act in a dishonest way, causing a situation that necessitated the writing of the letter.

Lin also emphasizes the favorable treatment of people from England, noting that " the Celestial Empire, following its traditional policy of treating foreigners with kindness, has been doubly considerate towards the people

from England” (Zexu, 1839). He is quick to connect this trade with the current prosperity of the English, omitting perhaps by mistake the fact that Britain traded with a number of countries, and a broad base of partners also contributed to its current prosperity.

The official also points out that the stuff brought from China was composed mainly of “useful items” whereas opium is hardly so (Zexu, 1839). Lin describes a variety of problems that China experiences because of the opium imported on British ships. He talks about the poison that is killing people. He also talks not only about the ugly nature of the opium, but also about the inability of the government to control the country. He blames the British for disobedience of the Chinese laws, stating that they are responsible for the damage inflicted upon people who fall victim to the penalties envisaged in the local criminal law.

Thus, he says, “since a Chinese could not peddle or smoke opium if foreigners had not brought it to China, it is clear that the true culprits of a Chinese’s death as a result of an opium conviction are the opium traders from foreign countries” (Zexu, 1839). This statement seems a little disputable, but it was not without reason: indeed, the nation has already set its laws, and whoever pushes a Chinese person to disregard those was clearly making a disservice to this person, putting him and his family in danger of capital punishment.

The way Lin Zexu blames the British reveals a weakness in the position of the Chinese authorities. Clearly, the government was not able to control the

spread of drugs through its own efforts, otherwise it would not need to do things like ask foreign governments for assistance in solving their internal problems. In the modern world, governments tend to cooperate to combat crime rings and smuggling; however, in the Victorian world, such hope was rather elusive. In addition, almost no government could dictate to another whether it needs to eliminate opium plantations or undertake any other measures for managing internal affairs.

The way Lin Zexu puts it, which seems rather rude and lacking in diplomacy, is a true revelation of the extent to which China needs to get this problem solved. Talking to the British queen in his letter, he says that “ it is hereby suggested that you destroy and plow under all of these opium plants and grow food crops instead, while issuing an order to punish severely anyone who dares to plant opium poppies again” (Zexu, 1839). He ends this paragraph with the pending question “ why do you not do it?” (Zexu, 1839). This once again demonstrates reliance on the British to get the problem solved.

The main reason why Queen Victoria ignored the request could have something to do with the internal situation in Britain. The nation lived for the most part off overseas trade and wanted to preserve its source of income. If British ships were implicated in opium trade in China, this probably did not bother the queen that much. In those times, monarchs were far less interested in preserving the good name of their countries. After all, the British Crown could be accused of taking part in the trade or sponsoring it. In this light, it made sense to sort issues out by not responding to the message.

This is why Lin Zexu was not successful even though his message is quite appealing in style.

Closing the discussion, it is worthwhile noting that the problems with opium trade in China closely resemble many of the issues that exist in the modern world. Many people suffer from adverse actions on the part of foreign and their own governments that either overlook or fail to suppress harmful practices such as drug trade. Actually, drug trafficking persists on even a larger scale today.

To this date, many governments fail to find an adequate framework for cooperation, losing their chance to overcome the problem. As in the times of Lin Zexu and Queen Victoria, there are many hidden motives involved so that officials are often interested in preserving the business that helps them makemoney. Therefore, this letter can serve as a useful source to consult for those willing to learn from the past mistakes.

References

Hanes III, W. T. and Sanello, F. (2002). The Opium Wars. Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks.

Zexu, L. (1839). Letter to Queen Victoria.