



## 林則徐

Lin Tse-hsu / Lin Zexu (PRC 1959)

107 minutes

Directors: Zheng Junli 鄭君里 Cen Fan 岑范

Starring: Zhao Dan 趙丹

This film was produced in the People's Republic of China in 1959, at the end of the Great Leap Forward. It stars the famous liberal Communist actor Zhao Dan in the leading role as Lin Zexu.

The film is set in 1839-1842 and depicts Lin Zexu's attempts to organize an effective resistance to the British, who are smuggling opium into China.

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Lin has been sent to Canton as High Commissioner 欽差大臣 by the Daoguang 道光 Emperor to enforce a ban on the opium trade. The British merchants, under the unofficial leadership of Dent, plan to sail their opium-laden ships just outside of Chinese territorial waters. Apprised of their plan, Lin orders Dent taken into custody. Elliott, British consul at Macao, who comes to Canton frequently, advises Dent to escape. With a little arm-twisting, they convince a Chinese official who is involved in the opium trade to spirit Dent away by night. But the Dent, who is disguised as a Chinese, is spotted by an ordinary Chinese fisherman when his cap (that worn by a Manchu official) falls into the water as he boards a small boat. The fisherman attempts to apprehend him, but is knocked unconscious by the club of a yamen runner. A crowd forms and volunteers (including one brave woman) pursue the boat carrying Dent. Dent is apprehended and slapped by the woman when he equivocates about whether he is Chinese or a foreigner.

Lin Zexu forces the British merchants to turn over their opium stocks. In a festive scene with lion dancing resembling a New Year's celebration, Lin orders the public burning of 20,000 chests of confiscated opium.

Seeking revenge, the British merchants convince Parliament to launch a military campaign against China. Lin Zexu casts new cannon and strengthens the shore fortifications in anticipation. When the British navy arrives, his troops and the people resist, repulsing the British at Humen (The "Tiger Gate") outside Canton. The British warships then go north to attack Tianjin, thereby threatening Peking.

The Daoguang Emperor, who is watching Peking opera at the time, is interrupted by Manchu officials from the south who bring him the tidings of war and also slander Lin Zexu as an opportunist and military adventurer who endangers the empire by provoking the foreign powers and threatens central authority by building his own military base. The fickle emperor then sides with the faction which wants to appease the British. Lin is dismissed and banished to distant Xinjiang / Sinkiang, but the common people are depicted as carrying on the struggle.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the intended themes of the film?
2. How are the British and the Chinese depicted differently from Western films dealing with the same era, such as Taipan?
3. Why would a movie such as this be made just at the end of the Great Leap Forward?
4. Who is the greater problem from the standpoint of the Chinese people – the British imperialists or the Qing court?