

Museums and their Collections IV – Lin Zexu Memorial Museum of Macao

Lin Zexu was a great patriot and remarkable national hero in the modern times of China. During the Daoguang period of Qing dynasty, the foreign merchants, mainly British traders, imported huge amount of opium into China and poisoned countless Chinese people, consequently China gradually weakened. In order to eradicate drug abuse and save the country, Lin strongly advocated opium ban in the imperial court. In 1839, Lin was appointed by the imperial commissioner to head south to Guangdong for enforcing the prohibition of opium. He eliminated many internal and external obstacles; adopted a series of effective measures to vigorously and swiftly ban the opium trade. He seized and confiscated about 20,000 chests of opium and destroyed them at Humen in public, namely “The Destruction of Opium at Humen” in history. It was a victory in the opium prohibition campaign, and he was well known both at home and abroad.

After the destruction of opium at Humen, on 3rd September of 1839 (26th July, the 19th year of Daoguang), Lin Zexu, as an imperial commissioner, made his inspection trip to Macao with Deng Tingzhen, the Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces. They stayed at Lin Fong Temple and interviewed the Portuguese officials of Macao, announcing both kindness and severity of China’s government and affirming the order of opium prohibition in Macao. They received cooperation from the Portuguese authority of Macao in opium ban; the authority also remained strictly neutral towards the Sino-British relations. As a result, the British invaders’ conspiracy of invading China via Macao was foiled in time, and the nation’s sovereignty was safeguarded. At the same time, Lin regarded Macao as an intermediary to know the state of affairs of Western countries and to learn about western culture, he then became the first person to “look at the world with opened eyes” in modern China.

Lin’s achievement in banning opium trade to save the country is truly epic. In memorial of this national hero, the first statue of Lin Zexu in Hong Kong and Macao region was built in 1989, as organized by the Charitable Table of Directors of the Lin Fong Temple. Together with the base, this granite statue is about five meters in height, standing upright on the left in front of Lin Fong Temple for people to pay tribute. The styling of the statue is majestic; Lin is wearing an official gown with his head up and chest out, which fully shows his heroic manner with a strong sense of righteousness.

With the support of various sectors across the community to the Table of Directors, a Lin Zexu Memorial Museum was built next to the statue in 1997, which was the first museum of Lin located outside Mainland China. The exhibits in the museum include a written record regarding Lin’s inspection in Macao, a well maintained rectangular desk that was used for interviewing the Portuguese officials of Macao, some handwritten copies of Macao newspapers’ translation, photos of the destruction of opium at Humen and Macao in the old days, the correspondences between Lin Zexu and the imperial court, models of different ships such as Chinese naval vessels in Qing Dynasty, Portuguese ships and other ships for opium storage, as well as some implements used for opium consumption, with nearly 200 displayed items in the museum.

The museum has undergone many innovations and constant improvements in facilities since its completion. Besides, the Table of Directors has visited the Lin Zexu Memorial Museum of Fuzhou in Fujian for observation and reference, and conducted exchange and study visits to both Lin Zexu Memorial Museum of Humen and Guangzhou Museum. At present, there are five exhibition halls in the Lin Zexu Memorial Museum of Macao, which are “The Biography of Lin Zexu”, “Eyes Opened to the World”, “The Destruction of Opium at Humen”, “The Inspection Trip in Macao” and “The Everlasting Commemoration” respectively. The exhibits and information are plentiful and comprehensive, with both Chinese and English introduction as well. In addition, electronic and multi-media equipment is being used. Together with the existing display board and original objects as a foundation, the magnificent life of Lin Zexu, is vividly illustrated; the scourge of drugs is also revealed. The function of the museum is not for patriotic education purpose only, but also for promoting the message of drugs prohibition.

Charitable Table of Directors of the Lin Fong Temple
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