

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION.

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

THE system of excluding foreigners from all intercourse with China, has often been extolled as the greatest proof of wisdom in her rulers ; but, upon a nearer investigation, it will be found that nothing is more at variance with sound policy than this unnatural law of restriction.

All mankind are created and upheld by the same God, descended from the same parents, subject to the same changes, are living under the same canopy of heaven, upon the same planet, and therefore have a natural right to claim fellowship.* The refusal of it is a transgression of

• An emperor of China, in 1300, before the Tartar Conquest, sent an embassy to Japan for the sake of cultivating an amicable intercourse. In his letter he said, “ The sages considered the whole world as *one family* ; but if all the members have not a friendly intercourse, how can it be said, that the principle of one family is maintained ? ”

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

the divine law of benevolence, which is equally binding upon all the nations of the earth. Savages might better be excused for secluding themselves from other nations, since the loss must be chiefly their own; but a people, like the Chinese, acquainted with letters, endowed with intelligence, and boasting of a civilization superior to that of any other nation, cannot do the same without injury to others, as well as themselves.

The most deplorable consequence of this un-social system is, that the worship of the only living and true God has been thereby excluded from this vast empire. Whilst all nature proclaims an Almighty Creator and Preserver, the sons of China worship the work of their own hands. Peace is proclaimed between God and men, through the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Saviour, not of any favoured nation, but ‘of the world;’ but China has not welcomed these ‘glad tidings.’ Although she once despatched ambassadors to India to inquire into the doctrines of Buddhism, she has never been equally anxious to possess the divine revelation, or to examine it when brought to her doors. It may perhaps be said in excuse for the Chinese, that the true Gospel was formerly purposely withheld from them, whilst they were offered, in its stead, only

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

3

the frivolous legends of a spurious Christianity. Protestant Christians are indeed chargeable with guilt in having so long neglected to send the Gospel to them; but we confidently hope, that, when an opportunity is offered to introduce it, and they are found willing to receive it, Christians will no longer be slow to give them the word of life.

Perhaps it will be said, that all attempts to remove the barriers to intercourse with China have hitherto proved abortive, and will be so in future. The former is partly true, the latter remains to be proved. It may be interesting to inquire, what causes have operated so powerfully as to defeat all past attempts to establish mutual intercourse?

It is remarkable that all the nations which use the Chinese written character, harbour the same prejudices against foreigners. By means of this written language they have been united for ages under similar laws, institutions, and religion. Hence they have formed one great family, quite distinct from other nations, in all points of national peculiarity. As they enjoyed the privileges of civilization at an early period, while the adjoining nations were living in barbarism, they learned to look down upon them with contempt,

B 2

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

and in all collisions with them, to treat them, if inferior, as vanquished enemies, or if superior, as savage intruders. By sedulously shunning any intercourse with the 'barbarians,' the opinion of their ferocity and depravity, which the Chinese had first imbibed, continued to be cherished through ignorance of its objects and settled prejudice. This general contempt was increased also by the consciousness that they were the most numerous of the nations of the world. The fact is certainly true, but not so the conclusion which they derive from it, that their country was the most extensive of all. Fancying the earth to be a square, they assumed to themselves the main land in the centre, and allowed to the other nations the small and remote clusters of islands, in various directions around themselves. How could they look upon the poor inhabitants of those scattered lands otherwise than with the utmost contempt! The sovereign of so great a nation, also, regarding himself as the sole potentate of earth and the vicegerent of heaven, claimed the universal dominion over all the lands and the four seas. Their princes, he considered his vassals and tributaries. He slighted them when he pleased, viewing them merely as the petty chiefs of barbarous tribes; yet, with much com-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

5

passion, he occasionally condescended to receive their embassies. Though the modern improvements in navigation, the progress in the science of geography and in general information, have partially rectified their opinions on this subject, yet they are too proud to confess the fact of their national ignorance; to this moment they claim the title of “the flowery middle kingdom,” and would have all the princes of the earth humbly do them homage. We still hear the same old stories about the “four seas” repeated, and maps of the world may be met with, which so represent it still. So long as the public opinion is swayed by such notions, we cannot expect foreigners to be held in any just estimation among them. Those petty nations which use the Chinese written character, and acknowledge their vassalage to the Celestial Empire, imitate them also in all the arrogance of national vanity.

Another cause operating to favour the same system of restriction, exists in their literature. The Chinese are much attached to their own literature, and are therefore prepared highly to value any degree of eminence in this department. But foreigners are not often acquainted with their literary productions, and having scarcely any thing else which, in the estimation

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

of a Chinese, entitles them to rank among the “literati,” they are together regarded as ignorant barbarians. Proud of their own observance of the rules of propriety and justice, the Chinese are also taught by their classical authors to look down upon these barbarians as rude and fraudulent, and to esteem any friendly intercourse contaminating. “These barbarians,” they are told, “have never felt the transforming influence of the Celestial Empire, and though they may therefore be pitied, yet much more do they call for our contempt. Drive them away, banish them from the empire.” This is true Chinese policy.

To increase and perpetuate this contempt of foreigners, various methods have been adopted by the government, and with various degrees of success. They know, though reluctant to admit it, that some barbarians are more warlike than themselves, that they have made extensive conquests in their vicinity, and that in the event of a war with them, they themselves would be an unequal match for them. This has led them to regard these nations with constant suspicion. But to conceal from the people their fear of the superiority of Europeans, they are accustomed to stigmatize their characters as infamous, and in

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

7

their intercourse with them, to substitute violence and cunning for principle and candour. I am firmly persuaded that government would, were it possible, reduce all European residents and visitants to the same state of humiliation which the Dutch endure at Japan.

It must, however, be acknowledged, that Europeans have frequently, by petty aggressions, provoked the Chinese to carry their laws of exclusion into the most rigorous execution. We have cause to regret that they have never been so successful in re-establishing friendly intercourse, as unfortunate in giving occasion for stopping it.

As in the instances where actual force was used to decide disputed claims, the Chinese have generally proved inferior, they have become desirous to avoid any recourse to physical strength. Instead of spilling blood, they prefer to spill ink, and have proved to the world that China is invincible in a paper war. Like the anathemas of the Papal See, fulminating edicts have been invariably issued on such occasions against intruding foreigners. These edicts are in general very specious, and would persuade a European unacquainted with the case, to believe that the Chinese have justice on their side.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Their threats are intimidating, and their commands almost irresistible, but here they stop: for the intruder either yields and re-traces his steps, or if not, the Chinese is too wise to let matters come to the extremity of force, where he is as sure of defeat, as he is certain of victory in a pitched battle of words.

The continual collision of the foreign mercantile establishments at Canton, with the Chinese authorities, has occasioned great surprise to persons but slightly acquainted with the native character. The most severe animadversions also have been called forth from capitalists who have suffered loss, and who have not been on the ground to judge of the case. But so long as the prejudice against foreigners is cherished, there must be contests; on the one part, to maintain old privileges, ameliorate their present condition, and extend the trade, and on the other, to retrench the liberties and enforce the exclusion of strangers. The experience of centuries has taught Europeans that the Chinese authorities will heap insult on insult upon them, when it can be done with impunity to themselves and their interests. But when an opponent supports his argument with physical force, or

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

9

their interest demands it, they can be crouching, gentle, and even kind. This peculiarity of national character, so very unlike our own, has been prolific in mutual evils.

It has exhibited the measures taken by the European residents to redress their grievances, in a light the most unfavourable by contrast with their own plausible and forbearing deportment. While we do not forget the long catalogue of petty annoyances from the Chinese authorities, which the Europeans have suffered from the first arrival of the Portuguese to this day; we regret that the possession of the gospel has not taught Europeans more forbearance and long-suffering. Had these been oftener practised on suitable occasions, we should have had fewer causes of complaint against the Chinese. But it is not strange, that Europeans, destitute of the spirit of Christian meekness, on coming to this country, and finding themselves treated as barbarians by a nation so evidently below them in civilization, should feel their indignation roused, and should retaliate insolence for insolence and dislike for hatred. Thus the line of separation became broader and broader. Governmental proclamations, detailing the infamous conduct of barbarians, have

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-07941-9 - Journal of Three Voyages along the Coast of China, in 1831, 1832 and 1833: With Notices of Siam, Corea, and the Loo-Choo Islands

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10

INTERCOURSE WITH CHINA.

been repeatedly posted up at Canton. Foreigners have wisely taken no notice of them, but the minds of the people have been thus imbued with strong antipathy against such worthless barbarians. Thus the authorities gained their point, for the aversion to foreigners thus excited and cherished, was the best precaution against forming too close a friendship with them. The writer has often heard the natives rehearse these accusations with self-gratulation at their own superiority.

Thus every event has contributed to widen the breach between foreign nations and the Chinese. In vain have embassies been tried to conciliate their favour; no presents have been withheld, no trouble spared, in order to bring about a friendly intercourse. An explanation of these failures will be found in the above remarks on the general spirit of the nation and the policy of its rulers. The Portuguese, who were the first of the European nations to lead the way to China, had frequent opportunities and causes to solicit the imperial favour. In 1520, a Portuguese ambassador to the Court of Peking, was sent back without having gained any advantage, and eventually, on account of the jealousy caused by their conquests in India,