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PLACARDS POSTED IN GUANGZHOU

The Opium War between China and Great Britain (1839–1842) was fought over issues of trade and diplomatic access. The Chinese were trying to suppress the importation of opium and the British were trying to expand the rights of British merchants to trade freely in China. When the British Navy showed it could take China's coastal cities easily, the Chinese had little choice but to accept British terms. In the treaties signed in 1842 and 1843 the Chinese ceded Hong Kong, opened five treaty ports, and gave British subjects in China special legal privileges.

In the Guangzhou (Canton) area, passions had been roused by the efforts of officials to suppress opium and resist the British, and it was not easy to get the population to accept the terms of the treaties. As seen in the following placards which local gentry posted, many local residents were determined not to let the foreigners enter.

1

We, the literati and righteous people of Guangzhou, including those who live on the land and on the water, those who live inside and outside the city, publish these instructions to let the barbarian merchants of all nations understand our intentions.

The injuries, deceits, cruel deeds, and evil acts of the English resident barbarians are as innumerable as the hairs of the head. Now they plot to coerce our high authorities. They have long wished to enter the city; and our superiors, from the depths of their virtue and the greatness of their benevolence, have given in and issued a procla-

mation granting permission to enter the city. They have not considered that the English barbarians, born and raised in noxious regions beyond the bounds of civilization, having the hearts of wolves, the visage of tigers, and the cunning of foxes, plan to take possession of our province and only desire to enter the walls so that they may spy out the land. Now having received a proclamation allowing their entrance, they will not only exercise violence and usurpation, but will insult and injure the people to an unspeakable degree.

Therefore, we, the literati and the people of Guangzhou, however small our strength, have prepared ourselves for the contest. We declare that sooner than obey the proclamation and suf-

fer these wild barbarians, we will act in opposition and adhere to the old regulations of our government. In public assembly, we decided to await the day they enter the city, then exterminate their odious race and burn their houses. With united hearts, we will destroy them in order to display celestial vengeance and manifest public indignation.

But we are aware that at the thirteen factories barbarian merchants of all nations are assembled together for commerce, the good and the bad mixed together. When the standard of righteousness is raised, the precious and the vile might be consumed together if they were not warned in advance. Therefore we give this special early announcement.

All the good barbarians who intend to remain in their places quietly and do not contemplate entering the city shall come to no harm if they promptly leave. As regards all the people who live in the vicinity of the factories, if they wish to guard themselves and their establishments, they should not go out of doors to protect or save the barbarians. Otherwise calamity will overtake them, and they will have no time for regrets. Be warned. Tremble. Be on your guard. These are special commands.

Posted in front of the thirteen factories on the 18th day of the twelfth month of 1845.

2

When the English barbarians started the quarrel about opium, our august sovereign, out of consideration for the people of the seas, and unwilling to make them suffer the horrors of war, consented to free trade [at the five ports]. He thereby manifested the highest degree of tender regard. All of our high provincial authorities have also in every way possible manifested their generosity. But the desires of the barbarians cannot be fathomed, and their repeated wanton deeds are already sufficient to make men's hair stand on end. Often of late they have, under the pretext of

entering the city to take exercise and relaxation, hoped to get secret opportunities for spying out and usurping the land. Nothing can exceed their violent insults.

Consider how different our case is from the others. In our metropolis, Guangzhou, commercial transactions are all conducted outside the walls of the city, while the opposite is the case at Fuzhou and Ningbo. Therefore they have no real reason to enter the city. In asking to enter the city to take exercise and relaxation, they reveal their opposition to the old regulations. Moreover the city is an important site. Here are not only the offices of government, the granaries and prisons, but also the family residences of all the people. If a perverse line of action is allowed to begin, violent opposition to authority will shortly follow, which will lead on to shameless usurpation and eventually to mutual slaughter. War will recommence.

For the protection of our families and the preservation of their lives, we will firmly maintain the oaths we have taken and never swerve from our determination. If they truly keep to their intention to enter the city, every house and every family will prepare heaps of stones and bricks at their doors, and when the gong is sounded, every street and lane shall be closed to prevent their escape. If the barbarians use force and attack the gates, the people of every street will shower down their bricks and stones, and, shouting to each other from every quarter, will advance, slaughter the whole multitude, and then demolish their factories and burn up their ships, not allowing one to escape.

Notice has already been given to the people and scholars in every direction to assemble and train the righteous and valiant among them and to place guards at the important and dangerous passes, ready for all emergencies.

We, the inhabitants of the whole city, ought and must, with one heart and united strength, defend our ancestral city. Anyone who dares to oppose us, may both the gods and men dash to pieces.

This manifesto is issued by the united gentry and people of all Guangzhou.