

**Document 4.3: Excerpts from the letter King George III wrote to the Chinese emperor and sent with Lord Macartney, 1792**

The natural disposition of a great and benevolent sovereign, such as is your Imperial Majesty, whom providence has seated upon a throne for the good of mankind, is, to watch over the peace and security of his dominions, and to take pain for disseminating happiness, virtue and knowledge among his subjects, extending also the same beneficence with all the peaceful arts, as far as he is able, to the whole human race. Impressed with such sentiments from the beginning of our reign when we found our people engaged in war, we granted to our enemies, after obtaining victories over them in the four Quarters of the world, the blessings of peace upon the most equitable conditions. Since that period, not satisfied with promoting the prosperity of our own subjects in every respect, and beyond the example of any former times, we have taken various opportunities of fitting out ships, and sending in them some of the most wise and learned of our own people, for the discovery of distant and unknown regions, not for the purpose of conquest, or of enlarging our dominions which are already sufficiently extensive for all our wishes, not for the purpose of acquiring wealth, or even of favoring the commerce of our subjects, but for the sake of increasing our knowledge of the habitable globe, of finding out the various productions of the earth, and for communicating the arts and comforts of life to those parts where they were hitherto little known; and we have since sent vessels with the animals and vegetables most useful to man, to Islands and places where it appeared they had been wanting. We have been still more anxious to enquire into the arts and manners of countries where civilization has been perfected by the wise ordinances and virtuous examples of their sovereigns thro<sup>1</sup> a long series of ages; and above all our ardent wish has been to become acquainted with those celebrated institutions of your Majesty's populous and extensive empire, which have carried its prosperity to such a height as to be the admiration of all surrounding nations....

[W]e have the happiness of being at peace with all the world, no time can be so propitious for extending the bounds of friendship and benevolence, and for proposing to

---

<sup>1</sup> Through

communicate and receive those benefits which must result from an unreserved and amicable intercourse between such great and civilized nations as China and Great Britain. Many of our subjects have also frequented for a long time past a remote part of your Majesty's dominions for the purpose of trade....

[T]he interchange of commodities... requires to be properly conducted, so as that the newcomers may not infringe the laws and customs of the country they visit, and that on the other hand they may be received on terms of hospitality and meet the justice and protection due to strangers. We are indeed equally desirous to restrain our subjects from doing evil or even of showing ill example in any foreign country, as we are that they should receive no injury in it. There is no method of effectuating so good a purpose, but by the residence of a proper person authorized by us, to regulate their conduct, and to receive complaints against them, whenever they should give occasion for any to be made against them, as well as any they might consider as having just cause to make of ill treatment towards them. By such means every misunderstanding may be prevented, every inconvenience removed, a firm and lasting friendship cemented, and a return of mutual good offices secured between our respective empires. All these considerations have determined us to depute an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to your Sublime Court... the Right Honorable George Lord Viscount Macartney... a nobleman of high rank and quality of great virtue wisdom and ability, who has filled many important offices in the state of trust and honor... to whom we entreat your Majesty to grant a gracious reception, as well as a favorable attention to his representations....

We rely on your Imperial Majesty's wisdom and justice and general benevolence to mankind so conspicuous in your long and happy reign, that you will please to allow our Ambassador and Representative at your court to have the opportunity of contemplating the examples of your virtues and to obtain such information of your celebrated institutions, as will enable him to enlighten our people on his return; he, on our part, being directed to give as far as your Majesty shall please to desire it, a full and free communication of any art science or observation either of use or curiosity which the industry, ingenuity and experience of Europeans may have enabled them to acquire; and

also that you will be pleased to allow to any of our subjects frequenting the coasts of your dominions, and conducting themselves with propriety, a secure residence there, and a fair access to your markets, under such laws and regulations as your Majesty shall think right, and that their lives and properties shall be safe under your imperial protection; that one man shall not suffer for the crime of another, in which he did not participate, and whose evasion from justice he did not assist, but that every measure shall be taken on the part of your government as our Ambassador is instructed strictly to direct to be taken on the part of our people, to seize and bring to condign punishment, any of our subjects transgressing the laws or good order of your empire, or disturbing the peace and friendship subsisting between us. We have particularly instructed an Ambassador to take every method in his power to mark our regard and friendly disposition to your Imperial Majesty, and it will give us the utmost satisfaction to learn that our wishes in that respect have been amply complied with and that as we are Bretheran<sup>2</sup> in Sovereignty, so may a brotherly affection ever subsist between us. May the Almighty have you in his holy protection!

George R

Source: *British Illustrations*

---

<sup>2</sup> Brothers