

Document 4.8: Excerpts from a letter Edward King wrote from Guangzhou to his brother, October 31, 1835

Canton¹, Oct. 31st 1835

Dear Brother,

I arrived in this city on Thursday evening the 29th ... [I] intend taking on board a Cargo of Teas for home and sail among the first Ships, shall probably get away by the 1st or middle of Dec....

People live here in great style and have everything very comfortable. Servants in abundance one for every person. I have been much pleased with the appearance of the Chinese. They are extremely neat, that is the better class. Our passage up from Linten was quite interesting though. We were confined in a small fishing boat covered up to prevent our being seen. We saw I should think a million or more of people in Boats. All the way up the river from Whampoa there are villages of 50,000 and more. There are hundreds of kinds of boats. That is of different forms and sizes, from the sampan to the junk of 1,000 tons. Opposite the city, the river is completely covered with Boats, which are anchored in which are thousands of inhabitants....

The prospect for a successful voyage is not bright. The market here is very bad for an outward cargo and the prices of Tea are likely to be high. Still I believe this market holds out the best inducements and I have concluded to load here....

I have not been about much. What I have seen of the shops has pleased me. The Chinese are a shrewd set. Silks are high, 20% more than last year. I hardly know whether to invest my adventure or not, but I think I shall. I send by this opportunity (the Bark *Mary Ballard*) for New York a package of letters, which I wrote on the way up the China Sea. There will be an opportunity to write home in 10 days by another vessel, and I shall then

¹ The name by which Guangzhou was formerly known.

write you more at length. I have been purchasing a few things for myself such as some thin clothes which come quite cheap, only 1 [dollar?]² for a pair of pantaloons, 1 ¼ for a short jacket of fine grass cloth, and 75 cents for thin vests made also of grass cloth. Shoes come at 50 to 75 cents the pair and other articles in the same proportion.

The Chinese are a very industrious people. They are always busy about something. I today went with Mr. Coolidge to see some of the Hong Merchants. We called on Hougus, the senior Hong Merchant. He is quite old, about 80 years of age. He is the richest man in Canton, and one of the most intelligent. We also saw Tousing and Kingqua who are also Hong merchants. The Hong merchants are the only persons allowed by the Government to sell Teas to foreigners.

The vessel by which this goes sails in the morning, and as it is quite late now, and I am extremely tired I must conclude by wishing you to remember me to all friends and give my best love to Papa and all the family. I think I may say that I will return home in the Ship.

Yours affectionately,

Edward King.

Source: Edward King to George King. 31 October 1835. Edward King papers. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. Transcribed by Liz Nelson and Shirley Huettig Moore.

² Where the words or intended meaning in the original handwritten document were unclear, the transcribers have added a “[?]”.