Boundaries and Beyond

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CHAPTER 4

Treaties, Politics and the Limits of Local Diplomacy in Fuzhou in the Early 1850s

Introduction

The interaction between China and foreign powers in the post-Opium War era is often seen in the stark context of either Western imperialism or Chinese xenophobia. While Chinese nationalistic historiography stresses the inevitability of clashes in the wake of the intrusion of Western imperialism, Western-language accounts often depict the Sino-Western conflict as a consequence of differing conceptions of international relations. The latter interpretation assumes that the Chinese did not understand modern concepts of diplomacy.

The Chinese officials in charge of foreign affairs (yiwu) are generally portrayed as divided into two factions advocating different policy approaches: a group of hardliners that advocated the extermination of the barbarians (jiao yi) and an appeasement party that favored peaceful control (fu yi). Western scholars often show the appeasement party in a better light, expressing admiration of their compliance, while treating the hardliners as being ignorant of international affairs. Nationalistic

1. Using the FO dispatches deposited in PRO, London, and the Qing documents in the First Historical Archives in Beijing and the Palace Museum Library in Taipei, a preliminary paper in Chinese was given at the Second International Conference on Ming-Qing History held in Tianjin. The paper further incorporated materials from the Church Missionary Archives at the University of Birmingham. A rewritten version, from which this chapter originated, was presented at a conference in Perth.

2. See, for example, Fred W. Drake, China Charts the World: Hsu Chi-yu and His Geography of 1848 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University East Asian Research Center, 1975), and Ellsworth C. Carlson, The Foochow Missionaries, 1847-1880 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University East Asian Research Center, 1974). The former sees Governor Xu Jiyu as a victim of conservatism and xenophobic local literati and the latter finds the event under discussion as a frightening...
Chinese writers reverse these judgments, criticizing the former group for capitulating to foreigners and praising the latter for defending national interests.

Christian missionaries played a significant role in the process of contact and confrontation between East and West. This situation has led to a tendency to believe that the anti-Christian tradition upheld by the Chinese officials and literati was responsible for the difficulties experienced by Western missionaries in China, but this interpretation fails to take into account the complexity of the situation. An incident in 1850 that pitted the English Church Mission in Fuzhou (Foochowfu), the provincial capital of Fujian, against local officials is one episode that reveals the complexity of the conflict. In that year, the Fuzhou authorities attempted to evict two English missionaries, William Welton and Robert David Jackson, who had rented quarters within the city walls. Welton and Jackson registered themselves at the British Consulate in Fuzhou on June 1, 1850. In several respects, the tension caused by their arrival resembles the “city question” of Guangzhou, in which the Chinese authorities refused to allow Western personnel into the city, confining them to a strictly designated area outside the city walls. On the other hand, the two cases differed in that the British Consulate and its personnel had already been allowed entry into Fuzhou. Throughout the confrontation, the question of keeping the consular officials outside the city did not arise.

Before Welton and Jackson departed from Hong Kong, an American missionary by the name of Rev. Samuel McClay arrived there from Fuzhou. He told the two missionaries of the efforts made by the Chinese officials to keep missionaries confined to a section of Nantai Island situated about three miles outside the south gate of the city walls. McClay impressed upon them that the missionaries were all living together and suggested Welton and Jackson “must do the same”.

However, instructions given to the two men by the Anglican Bishop of Victoria, the Right Reverend George Smith, emphasized the importance of securing a residence within the city, “even though a very inferior lodging”. If this proved impractical, they should locate themselves in some suburb “at a distance from the present missionary residence”.

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3. William Welton’s “Journal”, in Church Missionary Society Archives (hereafter CMS), C CH/O 91, May 31, 1850; also CMS, C CH Ml, the Bishop of Victoria (Hong Kong), George Smith, to the Secretary of the Society Rev. H. Venn, July 19, 1850.

4. CMS, C CH Ml, Smith to Venn, July 19, 1850.
prepared a letter to consular interpreter, W.R. Gingell, then Acting Vice Consul-in-Charge, requesting his assistance in the matter.

Gingell asked a local official, Prefectural Assistant Guo Xuedian, to procure a suitable residence for the two clergymen either within or just outside the city. Guo was a Commissioner (wei yuan) appointed by the provincial authorities to assist in foreign trade affairs. After 15 days, Guo sent a message to say that three houses were available along the Min River. Two of these proved to be in a dilapidated condition. The third was commodious, but it was subject to inundation.

A few days earlier, Gingell had located some rooms in a Buddhist Shenguang Temple on Wushi (Black Rock) Hill, where the consulate was also situated. With some alterations and repairs these would be a reasonable place to stay, and the abbot of the temple was willing to rent out the space. Gingell procured the rooms in his own name, and the Bishop of Victoria, in a later comment on Gingell’s act, said he believed that his previous appeal to the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, to permit consular agents to act for missionaries in their dealings with the Chinese had had a great effect on this occasion. On June 20, 1850, a contract was drawn up and forwarded to Magistrate Xinglian of Houguan district for approval. After some minor alterations in the wording, the Magistrate affixed his official seal on the document, apparently believing that Gingell was the lessee. The rent for the first three months at the rate of 23 Spanish dollars per month was paid in advance.

Two days later, Xinglian sent a message to Gingell saying that the literati were opposed to the leasing of the lodgings and were about to petition the high-ranking provincial authorities on the subject. Worried about the repercussions should this take place, the Magistrate asked Gingell to give up the rooms. Gingell requested a written communication from the Magistrate before he would make a reply. The next day he received a message to this effect, and the abbot also came to ask for cancellation of the lease. Various communications passed between Gingell and the Chinese authorities, who argued that the lease was in

5. FO 228/114, enclosure in no. 22, Gingell to Magistrate Xinglian, June 24, 1850.
6. FO 228/114, no. 22, Gingell to Bonham, June 26, 1850.
7. FO 228/114, enclosure in no. 23, n.d., Xinglian to Gingell.
contradiction to the treaty.8 This matter triggered a diplomatic row that lasted for more than six months.9

The Shenguang Temple Affair has been discussed in a number of writings.10 This chapter seeks to fill the gaps in the existing literature and, more importantly, to provide a critical re-examination of the stereotypes that highlighted the xenophobia of the Chinese and their alleged ignorance of modern concepts of diplomacy. It commences by scrutinizing the Sino-British confrontation over the rental issue that involved the observance of the treaties. This is followed by an exploration of the milieu of Fuzhou in which the missionaries lived and worked through their experiences. Lastly, the chapter will provide some new perspectives on the problem of Sino-Western contacts as seen in the case of the Shenguang Temple episode.

The Fuzhou Authorities, Their Critics and the Xianfeng Emperor

The presence of foreigners in the Shenguang Temple caused a great stir among the Fuzhou literati, and in its turn the disturbance attracted the attention of the 20-year-old Xianfeng Emperor, who had ascended the throne on March 9, 1850. Moreover, at the time of this incident, Lin Zexu, the former Imperial Commissioner in Guangzhou at the outbreak of the First Opium War, was living in Fuzhou. Lin, who was a native of Fuzhou, had recently retired from active service because of failing health.11 A patriot who had long shown his concern about Western intrusions, he

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8. For details, see Ng Chin-keong 吳振強, “Shenguang si shijian yu Fuzhou yiwu de zai jiantao” 神光寺事件與福州夷務的再檢討 [A re-examination of the Shenguang Temple affair and yiwu (foreign affairs)] in Dierjie Ming Qing shi guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwen ji 第二届明清史国际学术讨论会论文集 [A collection of essays presented at the second international conference on the Ming-Qing history] (Tianjin: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 386–402.
9. FO 228/114, no. 22, Gingell to Bonham, June 26, 1850.
10. See, for example, the works of Carlson and Drake cited earlier. Some of their contentions have been scrutinized and refuted by the present author in a detailed account of the affair. See Ng, “Shenguang si”.
11. Lin Zexu was granted permission to vacate his post and return to his native place to recuperate on September 10, 1849. See Grand Council Records [hereafter GCR] (Beijing) (junji dang 軍機檔, GCR deposited in the First Historical Archives, Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts (Shangyu Dang 上諭檔), DG29/7 (Daoguang Reign 29th year/7th month), microfilm 233:299 (no. 233, p. 299).
provided leadership in the initial stages of opposition to foreign residence within the city. The morale and enthusiasm of his supporters received a boost in June, in the wake of an imperial edict addressed to Governor-General Liu Yunke inquiring whether Lin Zexu had recovered his health sufficiently to return to the capital immediately to resume service.12

The Court at this point in time was preoccupied with British attempts to send dispatches to Beijing via Shanghai and Tianjin, bypassing the proper channel via the Imperial Commissioner, Xu Guangjin, in Guangzhou. The British had grown increasingly frustrated with the mounting Anglo-Chinese friction in Guangzhou, and in April 1849 the British Plenipotentiary and Governor of Hong Kong, Sir Samuel George Bonham, advocated the use of force to reinvigorate the British position in China. In August, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, began to press for communications with the Chinese capital, initially through Shanghai and, later, Tianjin, going over the head of the Imperial Commissioner. Moreover, in September the paltry trade in Fuzhou and Ningbo prompted Palmerston to ask Bonham to suggest other ports as substitutions. In January 1850 he told Bonham that, if necessary, he should personally proceed to the north to deal with the matter. Bonham did exactly that in May. He returned to Hong Kong in the middle of July.13

In response to an imperial edict dated July 11 about Bonham’s attempts to send dispatches to Beijing via Shanghai and Tianjin and the Court’s instructions to take precautionary measures, Governor Xu Jiyu of Fujian sent a memorial, received at the Court on August 13, reporting that there were no signs of the Englishmen making trouble. He did not mention the Shenguang Temple dispute. Instead, in his memorial he dwelt on some basic principles of managing foreign affairs, arguing that matters concerning foreigners should be taken care of discreetly to avoid exciting the local population or arousing the suspicions of foreigners. Were this not done, disputes might arise.14

The new moves by the British greatly alarmed some Chinese officials, who advocated a hardline approach toward foreign affairs. The former Director-General of Grain Transport, Zhou Tianjue, submitted a memorial to the Court requesting an investigation into the situation. When it was

12. Qingdai chouban yiwu shimo: Xianfeng chao 清代籌辦夷務始末：咸豐朝 (YWSM: XF) [Management of barbarian affairs of the Qing Dynasty from beginning to end during the Xianfeng Reign], I: DG30/5/3: 21a (juan 1: Daoguang Reign/30th year/5th month/3rd day: p. 21a).
14. YWSM: XF II: DG30/7/6: 10a–11a.
received on August 25, an imperial edict was issued to the Governors-General and Governors of the maritime provinces reminding them that the peace treaty could now no longer be relied on to guarantee law and order and calling for measures to strengthen maritime defense.  

It is not surprising that the minor dispute over foreign residence in the Shenguang Temple became linked to the broader context of foreign relations. The first detailed report to the Court on the Shenguang Temple Incident was in a memorial submitted by Sun Ming’en, Reader-in-Waiting of the Hanlin Academy. It reached the Emperor on August 25. Sun prefaced his memorial with the statement that, “foreign affairs are in an unpredictable state”. In his analysis of the dispute in Fuzhou, he accused the local officials of siding with the foreigners. He had heard that the officials had even escorted the two clergymen to take up their residence in the temple. He advocated the emulation of Governor-General Xu Guangjin who, with the assistance of the local people, took concerted action against the foreigners’ demands in Guangzhou. Attached to Sun’s memorial was a copy of the address forwarded to the British consular official by the scholars and the general public of Fuzhou. On the same day, in his edict to Governor-General Liu Yunke and Governor Xu Jiyu, the Emperor commented that, in order to manage the foreigners properly, the officials should unite with the people. If peace and tranquility were to prevail, officials should neither spark off conflicts with the foreigners nor go against the wishes of the people.

Governor-General Liu and Governor Xu dispatched their first report on the Shenguang Temple dispute to the Court on August 19. They began by discussing the background to the question of foreign residence in Fuzhou. When G.T. Lay arrived to open the first Consulate in 1844, his immediate wish was to take up residence within the city walls. Although Liu Yunke, the Governor-General, and Xu Jiyu, then the Provincial Administration Commissioner, were fully aware that under the terms of the treaty Lay was entitled to lodge in the city, they still hoped to keep him outside. They instigated a joint submission consisting of more than
two hundred signatures from members of the literati and the general public to oppose Lay’s entry into the city. However, when the signatories were asked to be present at the city gate to express their objection to Lay’s arrival, not one of them showed up. Lay successfully moved into his residence in the Jicui Temple on Wushishan. In their next step, Liu and Xu attempted to boycott trade with the foreigners, but succeeded only for a short period. Local people simply could not resist the temptation of the profit to be had by doing business with foreigners. These events led Liu and Xu to understand that the Fuzhou people were not keen on confronting the Europeans. Nevertheless, Liu and Xu pressed ahead and made it clear to the foreigners that, in accordance with the terms of the treaty, only foreign officials were allowed to lodge within the city, and that merchants would have to reside at the harbor area. Furthermore, all rental contracts were required to have the approval of local officials.

One chief point of friction in Sino-British relations after the First Opium War was their differing interpretations of treaties, arising from discrepancies between the English and Chinese versions. The Chinese text contained some key points that did not appear in the English text. In the case of the Treaty of Nanjing, Article II of the English version stipulated that “British Subjects … shall be allowed to reside at the Cities and Towns of Canton (Guangzhou), Amoy (Xiamen), Foochow-fu (Fuzhou), Ningpo (Ningbo), and Shanghai, and Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, etc., will appoint Superintendents or Consular Officers, to reside at each of the above-named Cities or Towns...” But the corresponding part of the Chinese version provided that temporary residence of non-official British subjects was allowed only in the “harbour areas” (gangkou) of the five cities, and that of consular officers in the corresponding “walled cities” (chengyi). In fact, the “city question” in Guangzhou, an issue of foreign entry into the city walls, had been causing a controversy in Sino-British diplomacy for several years and contributed to the tension and violent clashes between the two countries.

In the case of Fuzhou, the distinction between the rights of residence of foreign officials and merchants had not been challenged by the foreigners until Gingell rented rooms in the Shenguang Temple for the two missionaries. When affixing his seal, Magistrate Xinglian thought he

18. One incisive observation is provided in Fairbank, Trade and Diplomacy, pp. 102–3, 121–6, 200–1, 275, 378.
was following a precedent set the previous year in which approval was granted to the consular official to rent temple space for luggage storage. Governor Xu discovered the true purpose of the rental soon afterwards and immediately instructed Xinglian to withdraw his approval. Gingell refused to take any action before the arrival of Governor Bonham’s instructions, and Xu decided to wait until these instructions arrived, even though he believed that the British official had breached the terms of the treaty.

When the matter became known a few days later, some members of the literati decided to emulate their counterparts in Guangzhou by lodging a protest in the form of a public address to the British consular official sent through Magistrate Xinglian, noting public displeasure at the British disregard of the treaty by taking up residence in the temple without the consent of the local people. They warned that the people of Fuzhou might be compelled to follow the example of their Guangzhou compatriots in protesting against foreign encroachment.21 Another public statement made by scholars of the local colleges followed. The general public also posted copies of a statement similar in content to the one prepared by the scholars. Meanwhile, anonymous placards appeared in the city threatening to kill the foreigners. Gingell refused to receive the public address and returned it to the Magistrate. However, when other statements began to arrive, Gingell approached Governor Xu for protection.

Both Liu and Xu feared that the situation might get out of control and lead to an open confrontation with the British. Sino-British relations were already tense in the wake of Bonham’s journey to the north in May. Xu appealed to the scholars for patience while he was negotiating with the British. He also decided to retain Xinglian in his official function because his dismissal at this juncture, in Xu’s opinion, would only bring the authorities into contempt.

A few days later, responding to an edict dated July 11,22 Liu together with Xu again memorialized the throne, stating that peace prevailed in Fuzhou and Xiamen despite the excitement caused by the British actions. By this time, the Fuzhou literati had accepted a gradual approach to the Shenguang Temple dispute and had dispelled the foreigners’ doubts and suspicions. For their part, the two clergymen could not agree between

21. GCR (Taipei): Monthly Record Books of Palace Memorials, DG30/ Autumn; also in GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, file 93, no. 3.
22. The edict was about the return to Shanghai of the British mission from Tianjin, and Xu had earlier already sent a reply while Liu was absent on a military inspection tour.
themselves whether or not to move out, but it seemed their stay in the
temple would not be long.\textsuperscript{23}

The Xianfeng Emperor’s comments on the joint memorial of August 19
sent by Liu and Xu were sent on September 1. In the edict, the Emperor
repeated the principle that commercial treaties were concluded with
foreigners for the purpose of maintaining law and order between the
two parties. Strict observance of the treaties was the best guarantee of
peace. To avoid violent clashes with the foreigners and incurring the
displeasure of their own people, officials should not panic in their handling
of the matter, but neither should they be timid in their approach.\textsuperscript{24} As to
Liu’s memorial, an imperial edict dated September 8 similarly advised
that it was equally important to maintain peace with the foreigners and
win the support of the public, and warned that the two officials would be
held responsible for any disharmony between the local people and the
foreigners.\textsuperscript{25}

Meanwhile, former Imperial Commissioner Lin Zexu took the lead
in submitting a presentation to Governor Xu. Lin had already written
to Xu in early July, and had been assured that, allowing more time, the
Shenguang Temple affair would be settled. Lin waited a fortnight before
he sent another letter, saying that he was troubled by information that
the two missionaries had not moved out of the temple, and that more
foreigners were moving into the city. Every day, baggage and large trunks
containing weapons and cannon were being brought in, and local officials
chose to ignore this traffic. As a citizen of Fuzhou he considered it his
duty to remind the authorities of the worsening situation. He hoped the
authorities could enlighten him as to what military preparations had
been made to meet the emergency. He felt particularly angry with the
placards displayed by foreigners, threatening to put to death any local
troublemakers who dared to oppose them.\textsuperscript{26}

In his reply, Xu said that the literati had been misinformed. In fact,
the two clergymen had brought along only eight trunks of personal
belongings. Those who had arrived in the city after them were Consular
Interpreter C.A. Sinclair and Vice-Consul W. Connor, the latter accompanied
by his wife and a maid. The largest trunk, containing household utensils,
had been checked by the local officers in Nantai. Sinclair brought along

\textsuperscript{23} GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, file 95, no. 4.
\textsuperscript{24} GCR (Taipei): Square Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG30/Autumn/7th
Month; also in GCR (Beijing), Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG30/7,
\textsuperscript{25} GCR (Taipei): Monthly Record Books of Palace Memorials, DG 30/Autumn, pp.
31–4. For the contents of the posters by foreigners, see DG30/Autumn, p.37.
a Cantonese clerk, who came with his wife. Xu contended that the treaty did not contain any stipulations that would disallow the employment of Chinese by foreign officials. Although he admitted the Magistrate of Houguan district had made a mistake, he warned that the Chinese authorities would be in the wrong were they to expel the two clergymen by force, since the local official had affixed his seal to the lease. Any drastic action would only invite foreign military intervention. As to the consular officials’ residence within the city, it was in accordance with the treaty. To stress the point, Xu said he did not intend to invite trouble unnecessarily, but would not hesitate to take a small boat and approach any invading foreign vessels head-on, and that he would be prepared to sacrifice his life should he fail to dissuade them from invading. Then, and only then, would it be time to use force to confront the foreigners.27

More people were drawn into the debate. Among them was Lin Yangzu, a Supervising Censor in the Office of Scrutiny of Works. Citing the local reaction to the Shenguang Temple Affair and the Governor’s argument, he sought to impeach Governor Xu for handling the matter improperly and causing disharmony between the officials and the general public in the face of foreign penetration. He said that, as a Fujianese himself, he felt obliged to report the affair to the Court.28

Responding to Lin Yangzu’s memorial, in an imperial edict dated September 4, the Xianfeng Emperor instructed Liu and Xu that, although he could see the need to deal calmly with the foreigners, he found it more important to seek support from within. The officials concerned should outrightly reject any demands that contravened the treaty stipulations.29

The imperial edict of August 25 replying to Sun Ming’en’s memorial reached Liu and Xu on September 15. In their answer, dated September 27, these two officials refuted the claim that soldiers had been sent to escort the two clergymen to their residence. In fact the soldiers had been posted in the neighborhood of the Shenguang Temple as a precautionary measure against possible disturbances made by local troublemakers, and remained in the vicinity for more than a week after the two clergymen had moved into the temple. Soon after Governor-General Liu’s return from his military inspection, the memorial went on, he met with the literati and explained to them that, although the leasing of the rooms contravened the treaty, patience was needed to settle the dispute. Any hasty decisions

27. GCR (Taipei): DG30/Autumn; also in GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, file 93, no. 3.
28. GCR (Taipei): Monthly Record Books of Palace Memorials, DG30/Autumn; also in GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, file 93, no. 3.
would only worsen an already delicate situation. Bonham was becoming restless and should not be given another pretext to intervene. The literati, according to the two officials, accepted Liu’s advice.

At this juncture, Liu learned of Bonham’s instructions to Connor and concluded that, after the British attempt to enter Guangzhou had failed, Bonham was now deliberately twisting the meaning of the treaty in order to bypass Guangzhou. Any efforts to argue with Bonham through the proper channels, using the good offices of Xu Guangjin, the Governor-General of Liang-Guang and concurrently Imperial Commissioner, would be time-consuming and fruitless. To expedite a settlement of the affair, Liu decided to communicate directly with Bonham. His dispatch maintained that the treaty stipulations were very clear about the matter of residence, and that contravention of the treaty by the two clergymen had greatly antagonized the general public of Fuzhou. He was prepared to let them remain, but only until the expiry of the six-month lease. In his memorial to the Emperor, the Governor-General defended this offer by arguing that such flexibility had not compromised his determination to remove the clergymen from the temple. He had instructed Circuit Intendant Lu Zezhang, the two Magistrates, and Prefectural Assistant Guo Xuedian, to prevent workers from repairing the place, and did not expect the clergymen to remain in the temple long. When the scholars came to deliver their petition, he also won their support for his measures. He understood that there were all sorts of rumors in circulation, but he assured the Emperor that they were all unfounded.

In conclusion, Governor-General Liu opined that words alone could never defeat the foreigners. Only a few members of the literati actively took part in the rental issue. Their concern was admirable and respectable. However, to insist on trifles at the present time but ignore the dangers lurking in the future was irresponsible.30

In early September, while this debate was going on, another request for the impeachment of Liu and Xu reached the throne. It was presented by He Guangying, Investigating Censor of Huguang, who charged the two high officials with dereliction of duty. He claimed that among the five ports opened to foreign trade, only Fuzhou allowed foreigners to reside in the city. He was highly critical of the points raised by Governor Xu in the reply to the literati’s petition, seeing them as excuses for their cowardice in managing the foreigners. Such behavior only served to encourage the foreigners’ arrogance and undermine the spirit of the local people.31

31. GCR (Taipei): DG30/Autumn; also in GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, file 99, no. 1.
In his imperial edict dated September 6, the Xianfeng Emperor instructed Governor-General Liu to conduct a secret investigation into the case and to report whether or not Governor Xu had mismanaged the affair and had as a consequence disrupted the tranquility between the local people and the foreigners. In a subsequent edict dated September 8, in response to a joint memorial by the two provincial officials reporting on Bonham’s return to Hong Kong from Shanghai, the Emperor cautioned that they should continue to be on full alert.

The imperial edict of September 6 reached Governor-General Liu on September 25. In the confidential report he sent to the throne he said he fully supported Governor Xu’s handling of the lease affair. He refuted the claim that the treaty stipulations did not permit foreign residence within the city walls. On the contrary, the treaty clearly stipulated that foreign consular officials were entitled to reside in the city, and Governor Xu had managed the matter in accordance with the treaty. Moreover, it was inaccurate to say that, among the five ports, only Fuzhou allowed foreigners to reside inside the city. In fact, foreign residents could be found within the city walls of Ningbo and Shanghai, also in accordance with the treaty. He suggested that the most appropriate way to conduct foreign affairs under the present conditions was to adopt a calm approach to avoid excitation on either side. He knew he and Xu had made some of the literati unhappy because they refused to adopt their proposal to mobilize troops and hold a firing practice. To show personal concern about the security of their native province was understandable, but it was wrong for the literati not to consider the consequences, or to base their understanding of the affair on mere hearsay. He and Xu would not let hostilities be triggered by a petty affair and were determined to supervise Lu Zezhang and Xinglian in an effort to see the question settled quietly. Nor would they allow those who were interested only in fishing for fame to influence their approach.

The great debate over the ways to forestall a possible invasion by the British continued in September and October. Memorials written by Fujian Education Commissioner Huang Zantang and former Director-General of Grain Transport, Zhou Tianjue, reached the Court in early September suggesting how coastal defense should be strengthened.

At this point, when the hard-liners’ proposal was gaining influence, Grand Secretary Qiying joined in the debate. While agreeing to the principle of active defense and military initiative, Qiying warned the Emperor that no hasty action should be taken unless the precise situation

32. GCR (Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG30/7, microfilm 236: 2.
34. YWSM: XF, II: DG30/8/4: 29a–33a.
had first been properly calculated. Another moderate, Governor-General Naerjinge of Zhili, criticized Zhou's proposal which called for Chinese forces to lure the enemy into inland rivers and then launch an all-out attack, saying it was impractical and showed ignorance of the actual geographical situation. Governor-General Lu Jianying of Liangjiang also considered Zhou's suggestion to be alright on paper but with little connection to reality, showing the writer's unfamiliarity with matters of coastal defense.

Finally, four submissions by Governor-General Liu Yunke and Governor Xu Jiyu reached the Court on October 30. They commented on the recent events in Sino-British relations and offered their analysis of the country's maritime defense. Liu and Xu listed the major problems confronting coastal defense, including the superior naval power of the British, the great length of China's coastline and the fact that, despite the placement of fortresses and batteries at the mouth of the river, the great expanse of the estuary of the Yangzi meant that the interior was vulnerable to penetration. They cited Xiamen as a case in point. Although there were more than two hundred large guns in place when the British attacked in the last war, the battle had been lost in less than half a day. Also, during the war, several million taels were spent recruiting more than 100,000 "braves" (yong, or irregular troops), and yet local defense had not benefited from their deployment. On the contrary, many of these braves had turned to banditry and caused turmoil in the coastal districts after the war.

As for the Shenguang Temple Affair, the two officials summed up once again the main points raised in their previous memorials. They said they shared the concerns shown by the literati and were equally determined to remove the two clergymen. The two parties differed only in their means, not their ends. Knowing that the British were now keen to exchange the economically inactive ports of Fuzhou and Ningbo for other locations offering greater commercial potential, they should not arouse British suspicions and give them a pretext to push their demands. Lastly, they stressed that they were very willing to consult the literati if the latter could provide a foolproof scheme; but they would not accept an approach that compromised the region's security.

35. YWSM: XF II: DG30/8:5: 36b.
39. Guangzhong dang zhupi 宮中檔硃批 (The palace memorials with imperial vermilion endorsements, deposited at the First Historical Archives, Beijing): Imperialist Invasions, file 150, no. 9, microfilm 4.
The Emperor was unconvinced by the submissions made by the two officials, and reproached them for having allowed the clergymen to move into the temple in the first place. He demanded a definite answer as to when the two foreigners would move away. In the meantime, he ordered the immediate sacking of Xinglian. Commenting on British designs on other places, officials should take a firm stance and observe existing treaties on the strictest of terms. At the same time, they should work together with the literati and seek to consolidate the support of the people. Calmness and equity were the principles by which relations between their own people and foreigners should be managed.40

Impeachments of the Fujian officials continued to arrive at the capital. The Supervising Censor of Huguang, He Guangying, launched a new attack on Liu and Xu in two memorials that reached the Court on November 21. He reported that, on account of the appeasement policy of the officials, the foreigners were now becoming even more arrogant and restless. They not only refused to move from the Shenguang Temple, they had now also occupied several other temples. The memorialist was apparently most shocked by the news that some cannon used for coastal defense had been sabotaged by foreigners. This had happened, according to He, just at a time that piracy had become rampant and the provincial naval force was powerless to deal with the situation. Under such circumstances, foreign vessels extorted protection fees from merchant junks to provide them escort services. Certain foreigners in Nantai had fired their muskets and hurt two small children. Despite all this, the Governor-General continued to side with the foreigners and failed to perform his duty properly.41

On November 21, an imperial edict was sent to the Governor-General of Liang-Guang, Xu Guangjin, who was concurrently Imperial Commissioner in Charge of Foreign Trade Affairs for the five ports, instructing him to investigate the accusations and submit a report. Another edict was also issued to Liu Yunke and Xu Jiyu requiring them to provide full explanations for their misdeeds.42

Xu Jiyu received the edict on December 10. He prepared a detailed reply the following day, emphatically denying the charges against him, saying that most of the claims were unfounded. Referring to the escort provided by the foreign vessels, he said the treaty had no stipulations

42. For the edict to Xu, see *YWSM: XF*, III: DG30/10/18: 22b–24a; also *GCR (Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts*, DG30/10, microfilm 237: 227–8. The edict to Liu sent three days later is in *GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations*, file 95, no. 7.
that prohibited such practices. Consequently, it would be difficult to stop
them. He reassured the Emperor that, in handling foreign affairs, he never
adopted a permissive attitude towards the foreigners lest he tarnish
the image of the state. Nor did he take hasty action that could create conflict.
This was the reason that peace and harmony had generally prevailed in
the past seven or eight years. He had never tried to conceal facts, nor did
he want to trouble the Emperor with trifles that he himself could handle
properly to maintain tranquility.43

Governor-General Liu, who was at the moment on a tour to inspect
the troops in Zhejiang, had already memorialized the throne to request
an audience with the Emperor. The imperial edict reached him on
December 15, commanding that he should follow the instructions in an
earlier edict and wait until the next autumn for the imperial audience. The
edict then mentioned the charges made in He’s memorials. In his reply on
December 26, Liu refuted the distorted claims in the same manner as Xu
had done. He assured the throne that peace and harmony prevailed in
Fuzhou; had they not, he would not have departed on the present tour.
Moreover, only a dozen or so foreigners resided in the provincial city, and
their small numbers would not allow them to make trouble.44

Meanwhile, Governor-General Xu Guangjin’s report reached the Court
on January 12, 1851. He reported that he had asked Fujian ofϐicials
serving in Guangdong about the foreign affairs in their native province.
All were critical of the Governor-General and of the Governor of Fujian
for being too submissive to the foreigners, and acting repressively against
their own people. Consequently, it was said, the foreigners had grown
increasingly arrogant and the local people were alienated. However, Xu
Guangjin cautioned that all these charges would need to be substantiated.
He would send deputies to investigate and report back to the Court, but
in consideration of the distance involved it would take two months to
gather information. He recommended that only light punishments be
given to the two high ofϐicials as a warning and reminder.45 Imperial
edicts addressed to Xu Jiyu and Xu Guangjin were subsequently i ssued
on January 12, 1851. The former was reprimanded for taking the lease
issue lightly and failing to report on it regularly to the Court; the latter
was commanded to conduct an investigation.46 Earlier, on December 1,
the two patrons of the yiwu ofϐicials, Grand Councillors Muzhang’a

43. GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, ϐi le 95, no. 8.
44. GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, ϐi le 95, no. 7; also in GCR
45. GCR (Beijing): Foreign Affairs, Sino-British Relations, ϐi le 99, no. 2.
46. YWSM: XF, III: DG30/12/11: 38a–b.
The End of the Affair

The Shenguang Temple Affair dragged on through the month of December. It took a sudden twist with a new instruction from Bonham, written on December 5, that reached the Fuzhou Consulate only on December 28. Bonham commanded Sinclair to restore to the two missionaries the whole amount of money lodged in the consular chest for the payment of their rent. Sinclair executed the order immediately and also notified the newly-appointed Daotai (Circuit Intendant) Lu of Bonham’s decision in this matter. Lu reaffirmed the decision that the Chinese authorities could not, any more than before, permit the abbot to accept the money. In such an awkward and embarrassing position, Sinclair pointed out in his dispatch to Bonham on January 2, 1851 that the missionaries would "have inhabited these quarters during [the] three months for nothing; a circumstance which formed a chief point in the Taoutai (Daotai)’s

47. GCR (Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG30/10, microfilm 237: 337–40.
48. GCR (Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG30/11, microfilm 237: 217 and 223. Liu Yunke had not been in good health since 1847. See GCR (Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG27/6, microfilm 226: 217.
49. YWSM: XF, III: DG30/12/16: 42a–b; see also GCR (Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG30/12, microfilm 238: 231–2.
arguments for their ejection. He added that, as the clergymen had rented other houses of their own choice in the city, into which one of them had already moved, with the other to follow in a week’s time, the Shenguang Temple Affair could be considered to have drawn to a close.

In a subsequent dispatch to Bonham dated January 14, 1851, Sinclair reported that Welton and Jackson had left the temple. Wishing to obtain permanent and separate residences inside the city, they had rented two sets of rooms in a Taoist temple, a short distance from the Consulate, and on the same hill within the city. A rental agreement in triplicate was signed by the contracting parties and stamped with the official seals of the Magistracy and Consulate conjointly. The agreement also allowed building extensions on their premises, a liberty that the contract with the Shenguang Temple forbade.

Xu Jiyu’s report on the removal of the two missionaries from their premises at the Shenguang Temple to a “temporary lodging” in the Daoshan Taoist Temple reached the Court on January 27. He informed the Court that the rooms in the Shenguang Temple had been duly returned. According to Xu, the Daoshan Taoist Temple was in the neighborhood of the Jicui Temple, in which the British Consulate was located. The consular interpreter had rented the place for some years without raising objections from either the literati or the public.

Another memorial from Xu Jiyu arrived on February 24, confirming that the two clergymen had moved out from the Shenguang Temple on January 1 and January 21 respectively, and noting that the dismissed Magistrate of Houguan, Xinglian, had handled the matter throughout.

Following the arrival of Xu Guangjin’s and Xu Jiyu’s memorials, the Xianfeng Emperor issued five successive edicts, on January 17, January 19, January 27, January 28 and February 24, commanding the Governor-General Designate, Yutai to verify the contents of the memorials and investigate the matter upon his arrival in Fuzhou. The Emperor was dissatisfied with the vague nature of Xu Jiyu’s memorial. He wanted to know exactly how far apart the Shenguang and the Daoshan Temples were. Since the latter was located within the city, he feared that the change would not satisfy the gentry and the public. The Emperor also

51. FO 228/128, no. 3, Sinclair to Bonham, January 2, 1851.
52. Ibid.
53. FO 228/128, no. 6, Sinclair to Bonham, January 14, 1851.
54. Ibid.
55. YMSM: XF, III: DG30/12/26: 44a–45a.
wanted to know why Xinglian remained in charge of the matter, despite his dismissal.\textsuperscript{57}

Xu Jiyu received the imperial edict of January 12 on February 2. It seems he did not respond to it immediately, probably because he had already made a report to the throne on January 23. His reply, which reached the Court on March 13, explained that his reports of December 23 and January 23 concerning his handling of the lease case might have been delayed on their way to the capital. He apologized for all the undue anxieties that he had caused the Emperor and asked to be referred to the board of civil appointments for deliberation on his penalty. The literati and the public opposed the leasing of the rooms at the temple because the temple was a place of study for the scholars of the local colleges. After the rooms had been vacated, tranquility had been restored between the people and the foreigners.\textsuperscript{58}

An imperial edict commanding the Tartar-General of Fuzhou, Yuruí, and the Fujian Education Commissioner, Huang Zantang, to investigate the temple affair reached these two officials on January 17. They spent more than a month gathering information before submitting their report, which reached the Court on March 26. Their verdict was inconclusive, and they found no concrete evidence to substantiate the accusations of misgovernment on the part of the former Governor-General.\textsuperscript{59} Three days later, Xu Guangjin’s reply to the imperial edict of January 12 also reached the Emperor. Xu Guangjin remained critical of the Fuzhou authorities, but his report confused even the dates and events and seemed to have been based more on hearsay than on-the-spot investigations. In connection with his earlier report on the boycott staged by the carpenters and the subsequent public announcement made by the Min and Houguan Magistrates to prohibit such acts, Governor-General Xu Guangjin now had to concede that the Magistrates had acted in accordance with the stipulations of the treaty.\textsuperscript{60}

In response to a succession of imperial edicts, the new Governor-General, Yutai, memorialized the Court on February 24 and again on March 10 informed it that the literati and the public had not made any further complaints after the removal of the missionaries from the Shenguang Temple. However, the two foreigners used the fact that the

\textsuperscript{57} GCR (Beijing): Record Books of Imperial Edicts, DG30/12, microfilm 238: 231–2, 279, 405; GCR (Beijing): XF1/1, microfilm 238: 159; GCR (Taipei): Record Books of Dispatches from the Grand Council (\textit{junji dang} 軍機檔), DG30/Winter; GCR (Taipei): XF1/Spring & Summer; and YWSM: XF, IV: XF1/l/24: la–b.

\textsuperscript{58} GCR (Taipei): Monthly Record Books of Palace Memorials, XF1/2, pp. 11–3.


\textsuperscript{60} GCR (Taipei): Monthly Record Books of Palace Memorials, XF1/2, pp. 36–40.
Daoshan Temple was formerly a consular residence as a pretext to remain inside the city; other foreigners might follow their example. In Yutai’s view, such an arrangement was indeed improper. Despite his annoyance about the matter and his impatient temperament, the Emperor managed to maintain a cautious and balanced approach. On March 24 he instructed Yutai that he should be neither too rash nor too lenient in handling the matter.

A memorial from Yutai that reached the Court on April 8 referred to the treaty provisions, which allowed consular officials to reside within the city but required others/other foreigners to remain outside the gates. Therefore, the missionaries were contravening the treaty by remaining in the city. However, considering the fact that since 1845 foreigners had resided in the Daoshan Taoist Temple and law and order had prevailed, the literati and the public hesitated to challenge the foreigners’ right to remain lest they should come into conflict with them. The Emperor accepted the recommendation that the authorities should temporarily put aside the matter of residence in the Taoist temple until further discussions could be conducted with the successor to Vice-Consul Connor, who had recently died.

Other queries raised in the imperial edicts were answered point by point in Yutai’s memorial that reached the throne on April 23. Yutai informed the Emperor that most of the charges against Liu Yunke, Xu Jiyu and other local officials were unfounded. He also confirmed that the local merchant junks sailed under the convoy of foreign (Portuguese) lorchas on a voluntary basis based on mutually agreeable arrangements. The reason Liu and Xu continued to assign official duties to Xinglian after his dismissal was to ensure that the missionaries would not renege on their promise to move out.

Yutai’s well-considered reports had not saved Xu Jiyu from being removed. Xu was summoned to the capital for an imperial audience on

62. GCR (Beijing); Record Books of Imperial Edicts, XF1/2, microfilm 238: 250; GCR (Taipei); Square Record Books of Imperial Edicts, XF1/2; and GCR (Taipei); Record Books of the Grand Council, XFl/Spring & Summer.
63. GCR (Taipei); Monthly Record Books of Palace Memorials, XF1/3, pp. 1–4; GCR (Beijing); Record Books of Imperial Edicts, XF1/2, microfilm 238: 250; and GCR (Beijing); Square Record Books of Imperial Edicts, XF1/3.
64. GCR (Taipei); Monthly Record Books of Palace Memorials, XF1/3, pp. 30–4; refer also to YWSM: XF, IV: XFl/3/22: 34b–37a.
the very day Yutai’s memorial arrived,65 and he was officially relieved of his Governorship on June 22. Nevertheless, during his imperial audience, Xu apparently impressed the Emperor and was deemed trustworthy rather than deceitful.66

Welton’s Perception of the Affair

Misperception made a large contribution to the conflict in Fuzhou. The Right Rev. George Smith believed that firmness on the part of late Consul Lay had succeeded in effecting the removal of his official residence from an insalubrious site near the river to a scenic location within the city, with the result that the Union Jack was flying at the top of Black Rock Hill.67 He thought he could repeat Lay’s success.

In their first letters to Smith, Welton and Jackson wrote very discouragingly about their experiences in Fuzhou and initially seemed to deprecate his instructions. However, they soon had good reason to be proud of being inside the city, despite the unfavorable predictions and dissuasions of the other missionaries. Welton dwelt long on the importance of the site and the principle involved, and he commended Gingell for devoting his energies to the promotion of their “designs”.68 A letter from Jackson congratulated Smith on the success of his plans.69

Welton’s perception of the affair had undergone changes. His first reaction was that the mandarins and the abbot of the Shenguang Temple were acting together to evict them from the rooms. The literati were perceived to be acting in unison as a privileged and powerful class opposed to their presence within the city. At the same time, he also conceded that the objections were mostly attributable to the fact that they were refurbishing a college at the back of the temple. The construction had begun some months before Welton’s arrival. As it was a place of study for candidates attempting literary degrees, it had the support of the Chinese authorities as well as the literati. The building was opened on September 28, 1850, with great pomp, the ceremony attended by many mandarins.70

65. Gongzhong dang zouzhe 宮中檔案 (Palace memorials deposited at the National Palace Museum Archives, Taipei), XF1/4/23.
68. CMS, C CH MI, Welton to Venn, July 8, 1850.
69. CMS, C CH MI, Smith to Venn, July 19, 1850.
70. Welton’s “Journal”, September 28, 1850.
Bishop Smith also observed that the opposition arose entirely from the prejudice against foreigners residing within the city and did not seem to be directed against them as missionaries. In fact, initially, the Chinese did not appear to know the two foreigners were missionaries. In his earlier account on Fuzhou before the Shenguang Temple Affair, Smith commented on the Chinese attitude towards foreigners as follows:

The individual natives, with whom I formed acquaintance during my stay, as well as the people generally, whose feelings I had an opportunity of testing, showed the same friendly disposition, which is prevalent among the Chinese in other parts accessible to foreigners.

As to the Chinese officials’ attitude toward their English counterparts’ religious practices, Smith had the following to say:

The liberality of the Mandarins was perceptible in one of the conditions that they, of their own accord, introduced into their agreement with the building contractor; viz. that the masons and carpenters should never perform any work on the Sabbath-day, nor in any way interfere with the religious observances of the English. In the same spirit, the Mandarins, before paying the Consul a visit, frequently sent to inquire whether it was the Sabbath-day or not.

Welton also admitted that the Chinese authorities had acted responsibly. It was the Governor-General, Liu Yunké, who had stationed a guard of 80 soldiers around the temple, ready to quell any disturbance. He mentioned that the Governor-General and a party of mandarins had called on Gingell and informed the latter of their determination to leave the two missionaries undisturbed and to offer them protection. As for Governor Xu Jiuyu, Welton considered him “one of the most eminent and enlightened Chinese Governors” and regretted Xu’s departure from Fuzhou in mid-1851. Welton shared the views of Bishop Smith, who in his 1847 work praised Liu Yunké and Xu Jiuyu, the two highest civil officers of the province, for their liberal views and for being increasingly favorably disposed to foreigners. The two officials also cultivated a friendly intercourse with the British Consul. It was in fact the liberal disposition of the authorities and the religious indifference of the people

71. CMS, CH MI, Smith to Venn, July 19, 1850.
73. Ibid., p. 332.
74. Welton’s “Journal”, June 21, 1850.
75. CMS CH/O 91/2B; and 91/5.
that encouraged Smith’s hope that no jealousy of proselytism would place obstacles in the way of Protestant missionaries.\textsuperscript{76}

On December 12, the District Magistrate met Welton at the Consulate, and proposed that Welton and Jackson take rooms in an adjoining temple and relinquish those in the Shenguang Temple. The Magistrate explained that such a move would relieve him of enormous difficulty. In reply, Welton set down conditions, saying that the proposed rooms must be as secure as those of Shenguang Temple, and that rooms for a hospital and school in the city should be provided at a proper rent. He mentioned some locations that had been offered to him, but said he could not give up possession of the present rooms until an agreement for the rooms in the Daoshan Taoist Temple had been signed and sanctioned by the District Magistrate. Four days later, Welton had the agreement for the hire of the room for the hospital and school made out and signed by the landlord. However, Governor Xu Jiyu sent a verbal protest to Sinclair announcing his displeasure at Welton’s hiring the school and hospital rooms, although this move was clearly intended as a reiteration of principles rather than as a real effort to prolong the issue.

As a medical missionary, Welton certainly felt welcomed by the local community, and Smith hoped that Welton’s medical activities would soon “disarm prejudice.”\textsuperscript{77} In fact, Welton had established a surgical reputation before long on account of his successful cases. A typical entry in his journal on September 26, 1850, for example, records that he operated on a patient with a considerable tumor situated in front of the left ear. Another patient, a respectable literary man, had a tumor on his left temple the size of an egg. This too was removed, and the patient recovered within a week. In a third case Welton removed a bleeding fungus from the nose of a Buddhist monk, who quickly recovered.\textsuperscript{78}

Not surprisingly, his residence was always crowded with large numbers of sick people seeking treatment. Within ten days of his taking up residence at the temple, he was receiving an average of 150 to 200 visitors daily. His patients included “a higher and better class of Chinese, many elderly.” Among these respectable Chinese were groups of literati and Tartars, including a son of the Prefect. In general they conducted themselves decorously, but manifested great curiosity. The majority, however, were “a rude rough” lot. As soon as the door was opened to admit or send away a patient, numbers crowded in. After some weeks, he noted in his journal, patients were of “a better class

\textsuperscript{76} Smith, \textit{A Narrative}, pp. 369–70, 374.
\textsuperscript{77} CMS, CH MI, Smith to Venn, July 19, 1850.
\textsuperscript{78} Welton’s “Journal”, September 26, 1850.
and better conducted, less idle curiosity [was] exhibited”. Clearly, even officials felt no qualms about seeking cures from a missionary, and one mandarin called at Welton’s residence for treatment. As Welton was away, he left his address, requesting him to call at his house in the city the following day, which Welton did. This official subsequently came back for further treatment.

Welton himself saw his efforts as a desirable way of making a favorable impression on the people. In fact, he later decided not to encourage the sick to come and consult him, as he had done in the first instance. Having fully gained his object of obtaining a residence within the city, he deemed it better to devote his energies to acquiring the local language.

In the meantime, all sorts of rumors were causing excitement among the local population. On one occasion, a Chinese official called on Welton and used the opportunity to have a private conversation with his servant to enquire as to whether Welton had ever operated on a tumor situated on a child’s head. A complaint had been made that the child had since died, and the child’s father was seeking monetary compensation. Welton realized that it was not uncommon for local practitioners to pay compensation in such cases, and that lower-class Chinese used this method to extort money. But Welton denied there had been any such incident.

Welton was sanguine about prospects for spreading the Gospel in Fuzhou. He was able to distribute religious books freely and said people eagerly sought them. He mentioned a Lieutenant-General who sent his servant for a copy of the scriptures in Chinese. There were enquiries by literary men about the meaning of scripture passages, such as “born again”. He recorded such encounters with joy in his journal. In early 1852, Welton was able to report that he had lately adopted the practice of making excursions into the countryside around Fuzhou in the company of another American missionary. He found that the people had become accustomed to their presence and reconciled to them. While the American missionary preached openly, Welton administered medicine.

The Shenguang Temple Affair had not actually made the environment hostile to foreigners. Welton moved about the city freely and undisturbed. On one occasion, he took a long walk into the Tartar quarter of the city with Sinclair. In Welton’s words, “the people were curious but exceedingly well behaved”. Living as they did in “a heathen temple”, they had frequent

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80. Welton’s “Journal”, September 29, 1850.
81. CMS, C CH M2, Welton to Venn, March 31, 1851.
82. CMS, C CH M2, Welton to Venn, January 9, 1852.
83. Welton’s “Journal”, December 26, 1850.
opportunities for observing the abbots’ devotions. From time to time, Jackson argued with them about what he considered “the folly of idolatry as the object of their worship”. The reply was generally a laugh, and they made no attempt to defend their beliefs.84

Given Welton’s aggressive style of Evangelism, it was a blessing for him that local religious leaders, Buddhist and Taoist, were tolerant and restrained. As Bishop George Smith had observed, Chinese priests watched “with complacency” and “with a remarkable absence of bigotry” as their beneﬁce and grounds were transformed into a foreign residence.85 During Smith’s earlier visit to Fuzhou, he had had several encounters with local Taoist and Buddhist monks who showed him hospitality and procured religious literature from him. One venerable abbot remarked that all religions were in principle the same. Smith was surprised that there was “the total absence of any alarm [among the Chinese priests] at the possible diminution of their inﬂuence by the dissemination of Christian tenets in these publications”.86

There were moments of frustration when Welton did not hesitate to advocate the use of force in dealing with the Chinese authorities. For instance, when two married missionaries of the Methodist Church in America arrived in Fuzhou in July 1851, they were treated with civility but strictly forbidden to erect a church building. Welton commented that, unless the American charge d’affaires in Guangzhou, Dr Parker, sent a man-of-war, it was unlikely that the Chinese ofﬁcials would give way.87 Welton was highly critical of Vice-Consul Walker and even Governor Bonham for failing to protect missionary interests. Chinese ofﬁcials prevented Welton from converting his house into a place suitable to be used as a hospital, from which he might also distribute books and the scriptures, and also prevented him from carrying out repairs. He referred these problems to the Vice-Consul, who positively refused to intervene. The Vice-Consul even demanded that Welton abandon the building altogether. Welton pointed out that he had hired the place legally and part of the agreement was that he should be allowed to move to another temple. He criticized the apathy and neglect of British interests by the consular authorities and expressed incredulity that they could evade responsibility in such matters. He also discovered that Governor Bonham of Hong Kong would at one time have sacriﬁced missionary rights and interests in Fuzhou to evade active intervention, had it not been for the

84. CMS, C CH M2, Jackson to Venn, received June 20, 1851.
85. Smith, A Narrative, p. 332.
86. Ibid., pp. 350–1.
87. CMS, C CH M2, Welton to Venn, January 9, 1852.
firmness of himself and Bishop Smith in insisting on their rights. He appealed for joint action by England, America and France to secure better terms in a forthcoming revision of the treaty. He particularly regretted that the English Treaty made no reference to missionary work, for what he saw as a selfish objective—the extension of commerce between China and England. On the revision of the treaty, he wanted to see something more definite secured “for the honour of the English nation”.  

Towards the end of 1852, however, Welton mitigated his confrontational approach. He felt encouraged by the improved bearing of the people, noting that he had met with scarcely any unpleasantness from the people of late, and none from the authorities. There were, he noted, “many advantages and comforts at this port for a missionary, and now our troubles with the literati are passing away”. In his observation, there was also an increasing confidence on the part of the local people in receiving him and in the eagerness with which they sought his medical aid. He was very much in want of a suitable building for seeing the sick, distributing books and addressing the people. He proposed giving up the house in the city that he had intended to use as a dispensary, in return for one outside the city, feeling that he was losing time dealing with the issue. He hoped such a conciliatory gesture on his part might disarm much of the prejudice.

Concluding Reflections

The Fuzhou affair provides revealing glimpses into the operation of Chinese diplomacy and the milieu in which the missionaries lived and worked. It shows that viewing the episode as a choice between anti-foreignism and capitulation oversimplifies a complex situation in which different contending forces, both domestic and foreign, were at work. Liu and Xu were among a small but growing group of pragmatic provincial officials who emerged after the war. They were at the forefront of contact with foreign powers. They soon grasped the reality of diplomatic constraints under the new treaty system and adjusted themselves to its modes of operation.

The insensitivity and uncompromising attitude of the British consular officials and the two missionaries undoubtedly aggravated anti-foreign and anti-missionary feelings among the leading literati in Fuzhou. The latter’s genuine concerns and unhappiness about the new international

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88. CMS, C CH M2, Welton to Venn, October 4, 1852.
89. Ibid.
environment after the war are not hard to understand. Their position was shared by some extra-provincial officials, including those originally from Fujian.

An evaluation of the Chinese response to the lease issue needs to consider the broader context of the incident. The crux of the conflict was differing understandings of the existing treaties, not ignorance of their provisions. First and foremost, there were imperfections in the wording of the treaties. On the basis of the Chinese text, Chinese officials believed that the treaties did not grant foreign subjects, apart from consular officials, the right to reside within the city walls. The trend in British policy at this time is also relevant to an understanding of the whole episode. As John K. Fairbank points out, historians have not paid sufficient attention to the role of the British diplomatic initiatives in 1850 in touching off the anti-foreign measures of the young Xianfeng Emperor.

The Chinese reaction to the affair was to insist on strict compliance with the treaty provisions. This attitude remained one major guiding principle of both the Fuzhou authorities and the Court, as can be seen from the imperial edicts. Even the literati cited the treaty as evidence to support their contentions. The Chinese and the British in fact shared one common approach, in that both cited the clauses most favorable to their case. To the Chinese, this was exactly what was written in the Chinese text, which local Chinese officials possessed and could understand. Throughout the dispute, the contending Chinese parties saw strict observance of the treaty as the best protection of the status quo, and the way to prevent further British infringements of Chinese interests. None of them ever hinted at defying the treaty. In their eyes, it was the British who were failing to observe its provisions.

As to the interpretation of treaties by different parties, some rules enumerated by L. Oppenheim, the late Whewell Professor of International Law of the University of Cambridge, are worth quoting here. He states, among other things, that "(i)f two meanings of a provision are admissible, that which is least to the advantage of the party for whose benefit the provision was inserted in the treaty should be preferred" and that "(u)nless the contrary is expressly provided, if a treaty is concluded in two languages and there is a discrepancy between the meaning of the two different texts, each party is only bound by the text in its own language." In defining rules of interpretation, George B. Davis, Judge-

91. Ibid., p. 378.
Advocate General and United States Army Delegate Plenipotentiary to the Geneva Conference of 1906 and to the Second Peace Conference at The Hague, 1907, shared a similar view. "Where a treaty is executed in more than one language", Davis affirms, "each language being the language of a contracting party, each document is to be regarded as an original, and the sense of the treaty is to be drawn from them collectively." He goes on, "clauses inserted at the instance, or for the benefit, of one party, are strictly construed; that is, they are given the meaning least favorable to the party at whose instance they were inserted; it is his fault if he has not expressed himself clearly."93 This opinion is also supported by William Edward Hall: "When terms used in a treaty have a different sense within the two contracting states, they are to be understood in the sense which is proper to them within the state to which the provision containing them applied."94

The Chinese were not able to benefit from the above principles of international law, of which they might have been unaware. It is worth noting that during the dispute the British disregarded this issue. Although they admitted privately, and with some astonishment, that there were differences between the English and Chinese versions of the treaties, they cited only the English version. Had they argued in reference to the international law that governed such cases, they would have damaged their own case.

Therefore, by overstressing the anti-foreign feelings of the literati and indecisiveness of the yiwu officials in the affair, scholars have understated the responsibility of the British personnel and the positive contribution made by the cool-headed Chinese officials in reaching a peaceful settlement. On the other hand, criticism of the officials for adopting an attitude of capitulation when faced with foreign pressure ignores their rationality and flexibility in meeting the challenge of new international relations. Finally, the assumption that the Chinese were ignorant of, and therefore on the wrong side of, international law, does not seem tenable in the Shenguang Temple Affair.

Chinese misconceptions of the West have often been discussed. However, the Fuzhou affair shows similar tendencies on the British part. Men on the spot frequently relied on their Chinese language teachers or even on servants for information, and these figures did not have direct

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access to reliable sources and based their comments on hearsay or gossip. Certainly, foreigners did not have a firm grasp of the workings of Chinese society and the political system. A case in point is that, whereas the Chinese provincial authorities were more than passive recipients of orders from the Court, their authority was often constrained by local pressure groups. On one occasion, Sinclair informed Welton and Jackson that he had received a communication from a Chinese official, requesting him to have them removed from their rooms in the Shenguang Temple. The communication included a statement to the effect that "the basis of good government consisted in complying with the wishes of the people". Sinclair took the statement lightly, and in reply stated that in England and Europe good government consisted in making the people obey the Laws.95

Consequently, firmness and a confrontational approach were deemed effective means. As a matter of fact, even some editorials in the Hong Kong newspapers at the time commented that it was impolitic for the two missionaries to retain possession of rooms within the city contrary to the will of the authorities. When Sinclair wrote Welton a note expressing his surprise that he had not moved, Welton in turn felt surprised by the letter, and referred him to the terms upon which he agreed to give up possession of the Shenguang Temple. He said in his letter that he intended to abide fully by the terms, and asked Sinclair to communicate his determination to the Chinese authorities. When Welton consulted two of the longest-serving missionaries in Fuzhou on the matter, they urged him to be cautious and wary.96

This chapter is not suggesting that the labor of spreading the Gospel in Fuzhou might have been more successful had Welton been more tactful and compromising. What it shows is that the missionary’s misconception about conditions in the field and his confrontational approach made life difficult for him. The hardship that the two missionaries experienced in the present case has been seen in the literature as a showcase of Chinese xenophobia and anti-Christianity. In fact, it had little to do with either of these issues.

95. Welton’s "Journal", September 18, 1850.
96. Welton’s "Journal", January 3, 1851.