Re-imagining Chineseness: Chinese People, Chinatown, and British Masculine Chinoiserie ca. 1850- ca. 1920

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<td>Manchu Qing Dynasty</td>
<td>1644 AD – 1911 AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of China</td>
<td>1911 AD – 1945 AD (Move to Taiwan 1945 AD –)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Republic of China</td>
<td>1949 AD –</td>
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</tbody>
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List of Abbreviations

CKT Chee Kong Tong
LSE London School of Economics and Political Science
SOAS School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London
SSOT Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade
THLHA Tower Hamlet Local History Library and Archives
V&A Victoria and Albert Museum
VOC Dutch East India Company
WSPC Women’s Suffrage Procession Committee
Notes to the Reader

All translations are mine unless indicated otherwise.

Chinese terms and names are Romanised using the pinyin system.
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you, but I hope that it benefits you nonetheless, and I hope that you can forgive me sometime that I was impatient and distracted when I was busy at gongzuo 工作 (work). And of course, thank you all for being my reason to get up in the morning.
Declaration

I, Shengfang Chou, confirm that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Cover Illustration: Royal Aquarium: Chang, the great Chinese giant: admission one shilling, 1880, Wellcome Collection, London.
Abstract

This thesis examines the construction of Chineseness in Britain between 1850 and 1920. It focuses on Chinese people in Britain, the image of China held by the British, and the British space most associated with Chinese presence, Chinatown in Limehouse. While much of the scholarship on Chinese in Britain often takes up eighteenth-century cultural contact and exchange, this dissertation focuses on the proliferation of exchange in the nineteenth century. Although the image of eighteenth-century China was largely associated with a feminine aesthetic perspective, it was in the nineteenth century that Britain increased its intensity of interaction with China, including trade, immigration and cultural exchange transforming British conceptions of Chinese and Chinoiserie. In particular, this thesis considers Limehouse Chinatown and the London Chinese opium dens as sites that shaped hybrid cultures, heterotopian spaces and sites for flâneurs. Drawing on visual and material culture, the thesis offers a new understanding of Chinoiserie and its impact on British views of Chineseness in the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century. It suggests that in addition to assessing the construction of Chineseness in Britain, an analysis of the image of Chinese people and Chinoiserie furthers our understanding of how and why fantasy and fear developed toward China and the Chinese in the nineteenth century. It calls for a re-evaluation of our understanding of nineteenth-century Sino-British relations, arguing that the impact of Chineseness and Chinoiserie on British perspectives should not be overlooked.
Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Overall Introduction

This thesis examines the British construction of Chineseness from the 1850s to the 1920s. It explores the ways in which early Chinese male visitors and migrants to Britain were represented in various media, including imagined representations of Chinese bodies, experiences and spaces such as Chinatown in Limehouse, London. These imaginations are a form of Chinoiserie: aesthetic imaginations of Chineseness, constructed entirely within the British context. This thesis seeks to show that there was a transformation of Chinoiserie in the nineteenth century, and situates this transformation within its cultural and socio-historical context. In the nineteenth century, Limehouse Chinatown became a clearly demarcated space of otherness within metropolitan London, and in and around this space, new Sino-British encounters took place. These encounters shaped both the experiences of Chinese migrants in Britain and the British experience of Chineseness. The hybrid cultural experience that emerged out of this Sino-British encounter is more complex than previously thought. Rather than seeing a binary (Orientalist) relationship between West and East, and between self and other, a more complex British Chineseness emerges, which takes into account a range of subjectivities and agencies.

In the mid nineteenth century, Sino-British relations saw a dramatic transformation. The Opium Wars caused the Qing Empire (1644-1911) to lose its military power.¹ China was waverin its relationship with the West. The narrative

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of the Chinese nation is associated of a ‘century of national humiliation’, from the First Opium War of 1839–42, when China was first forced to accept the terms of an unequal treaty. Politically speaking, it was a dark period in the relationship between China and Britain. China was placed firmly under the control of Britain’s informal empire, where, although not formally colonised, it was subject to Britain’s economic and political demands. In addition, China and its people were perceived as ‘uncivilised’ in the British imagination. The British construction of Chineseness in China was based on these problematic political and diplomatic relations, however, this was not the case, this thesis will argue, for the British construction of Chineseness in Britain.

Despite the decline and eventual collapse of the Qing Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chinese visitors, such as performers and Chinese migrants, arrived in Britain. These visitors, who numbered only in the hundreds, came to play a visible role in local British culture through their shops, attire and social activities. These visitors did not form a homogenous community; they hailed from various parts of mainland China and brought with them very different political and social outlooks. The Chinese presence in Limehouse featured in various narratives and played a role in cultural interactions, which in turn forced

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the British public to change both their attitudes towards, and their imagination of, China and the Chinese. This thesis demonstrates how British ideas of Chinese-ness emerged from these transcultural and diasporic interactions, and argues for the importance of seeing this nineteenth-century British imagination of Chinese-ness as a new kind of Chinoiserie, based on British responses to and interactions with Chinese people, images, design and socio-cultural practices in Britain.

Previous studies of the British-Chinese relationship framed around political tensions all emphasise the stark differences between the two cultures. They characterise the diplomatic, commercial and military conflicts between Britain and China as the inevitable outcome of a clash of opposing cultures. For example, John King Fairbank and Paul A. Cohen focus on political and diplomatic relations.⁴ They consider the Anglo-Chinese relationship an important feature of nineteenth-century Qing Chinese history. There is academic debate about how to place the role of China in a wider historical framework, such as China’s response to the West or a China-centred historical approach. However, these studies take the importance of political, diplomatic and economic relations for granted.⁵ In such cases, i.e. both China’s response to the West and the China-centred approach are based on the boundary between East and West.

More recently, nineteenth-century Sino-British relations have been studied increasingly from a global perspective. They reflect China’s integration into the world regions through globalisation; China is considered not in isolation but as

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connected to the world’s political, economic and cultural networks. James Hevia, for example, examines both China and Britain in their wider contexts, stressing in particular the importance of both Western and Chinese imperialism. Frances Wood examines the lives of British diplomatic merchants and missionaries in the nineteenth century’s first treaty port in China, seeing the British and the Chinese within a shared cultural framework. For example, Robert Bickers draws on Chinese Maritime Customs which were a British imperial asset in China. Zheng Yangwen investigates the importance of opium’s material context in Chinese people’s lives and situates opium within a wider culture of consumption. Such lines of research offer new insights into the Sino-British relationship, by unpacking the narratives, cultural activities and events that connected China and Britain, which are situated within a global perspective. However, these approaches do not yet provide a way of studying how Chineseness was staged both within China and outside of China.

In recent years, there has been a growing trend for cultural and literary historians to examine British perceptions of China and the way its people are represented in Britain. For example, Peter Kitson focuses on discourses of hospitality, cosmopolitanism, gift-exchange and linguistic exchanges between Britons and Chinese. Elizabeth Hope Chang’s study of material culture in British

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imperialist China through the four representational media — gardens, plates, opium dens and photographs — uncovers histories of British imperialism and Chinese artistry that show how art influences political structures.\textsuperscript{11} David Porter argues that the significance of things Chinese and Chinoiserie in Britain is that the ‘domestication of the alien Chinese aesthetic involved not merely a superficial shift in British taste or passing fad, but rather a profound transformation of underlying constructs of gender, nation, and desire’.\textsuperscript{12} Ross Forman pushes against the Victorian scholars’ approach that put India at the centre of British imperial studies, and argues that the ‘celestial empire’ provides a different way to imagine imperialism between China and Britain.\textsuperscript{13} These studies highlight that the cultural form of Chinoiserie played an important role in shaping British ideas of China. However, most of these studies are dedicated to assessing Western power through ‘literary expressions’, using a framework derived from Edward Said’s Orientalism. They explore Western perceptions of the East based on literary works.

This leads me to ask the following overall research question: how did Chinese people, the Chinese diaspora, and their representation in images in Britain shape the idea of Chineseness and create a new form of Chinoiserie in Britain in the nineteenth century? This study is designed to explore and analyse three visual pathways by which Chineseness and Chinoiserie were constructed and presented in Britain: the image of the early Chinese male in Britain; the image of Chinese people in China photographed by British photographer John Thomson; and the space of Limehouse.

Chinatown. These three designations - Chinese people, Chinese images and Chinese diasporic space - are related to each other, and were seen as related in British eyes, because they all had their origins in China. Each designation has a main question. 1. Chinese people: To what extent were images of the Chinese, Chinese migrants and their traditional Chinese attire, which took different forms between the 1850s and the early 1920s, vital factors in the development of a British idea of Chineseness? 2. Chinese images: How did the images in the photo Albums, *Illustrations of China and Its People* (1873-1874), photographed by John Thomson (1837-1921), affect British ideas of China and the Chinese? Furthermore: How do Thomson’s photographic representations of Chinese labour and opium smokers reveal underlying attitudes to the themes of race, art and class ideology through staging, designing and reproducing British Chineseness? 3. Chinese diasporic space: How did Limehouse Chinatown and the Chinese in Limehouse influence the production and consumption of Chinoiserie in British culture?

The significance of this study is threefold. First, historiographically, this study bridges the gaps in research on both studies of Chineseness and Chinoiserie. The thesis develops David Porter’s argument that Chinoiserie can be situated within nineteenth-century British discussions of Chineseness, which evolved on transnational, economic, transcultural, gender aesthetic, socio-cultural levels and involved interactions between different global groupings, including Chinese and Britons. Rey Chow tells us that Chineseness means a certain Chinese experience that cannot be placed within the domain of a single field governed by strict boundaries.14

Ien Ang has called for a new diasporic paradigm, which places the study of
Chineseness in a wider cultural context. This thesis develops Ang’s concept of
Chineseness and applies it to the study of Chinatown in the nineteenth century. On
that basis, this study examines the nineteenth-century British relationship with
cultural and ethnic identities, including Chinese males. I argue that Chinese diasporic
interactions are of importance to the study of the British construction of Chineseness
in Britain. This thesis seeks to offer historians a fresh and detailed perspective on the
study of nineteenth-century Chinoiserie and Chineseness.

Secondly, this thesis contributes to the methodology of the British
construction of Chineseness in Britain through an analysis of the visual and material
sources of the now disappeared Limehouse Chinatown. Limehouse Chinatown was
destroyed in 1940 by German bombing. New buildings were erected immediately
after the War, so we have no opportunity to explore the now buried archaeological
evidence. The community of Limehouse was recorded photographically, and this
evidence remains. Photographs of the Limehouse community between 1900 and
1930 are held in the Tower Hamlet Local History Library and Archives (THLHA)
collection. The photographs tell us about the nature of the community. This study
uses photographic data analysis of various types to examine the significance of, for
example, the Chinese shopfronts. It analyses the implications of these Chinese texts,
and applies contemporary discourses of heterotopia to this discussion. It challenges
the view of China through a discussion of Chinoiserie and Chinese ideas in visual
design in a material context.

15 Ien Ang, ‘Can One Say No to Chineseness? Pushing the Limits of the Diasporic Paradigm’
Thirdly, this thesis brings the ‘masculine’ into the British Chinoiserie discussion. Current Chinoiserie scholarship often takes for granted the idea that Chinoiserie is feminine. Some of its design, art and activity is covered by women’s history, but most ignore that Chinoiserie, as a cultural activity, is partly feminine and partly masculine. I chose to study the evidence for the masculine Chinoiserie forms, rather than the feminine aesthetic. There was a significant change in Chinoiserie across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from a largely feminine aesthetic form based on fantasy in the eighteenth century to a more masculine form shaped by sensory interaction and fear. The ways in which Limehouse Chinatown, and particularly the London Chinese opium dens, were represented share elements with Victorian fictional works, and these can be designated as Chinoiserie. My study of all opium-related activities – images, objects such as opium pipes, events and fictions of Limehouse Chinatown – shows that by the nineteenth century, the British public’s attention had shifted away from the old Chinoiserie objects of the eighteenth century, to focus instead on the ways of life of Chinese immigrants. This study calls, therefore, for cultural and design historians to reconsider and explore the importance of male immigrants on the development of modern British ideas of Chineseness in the nineteenth-century.

The sources used in this thesis include visual and material cultural resources, photographs, maps, paintings, novels and films. This includes documents such as censuses, criminal records, announcements of circus events, press cuttings, letters, material objects as well as secondary literature. Particularly, visual sources from British travel photographer John Thomson’s portraits’ of people in the Late Qing period and the photographs of the Limehouse community in the THLHA collection are considered. This thesis deploys mixed methods in the analysis of these visual
sources, including the theoretical framework of post-colonial study from Homi Bhabah and the concept of heterotopia from Michel Foucault. The British construction of Chineseness in Britain affected Sino-British relations in the nineteenth century. This thesis argues that the concept of Chinoiserie needs to be rearticulated to take account of its nineteenth-century form and its transnational and global perspectives.

This introduction begins by discussing the overall research insights of the study and explaining the significance of the research goal of demonstrating the British construction of Chineseness in Britain. The next sections provide a brief history of ‘what is Chinoiserie?’ with two examples of art and craft Chinoiserie in the eighteenth century and the Chinese in Britain, 1850–1920, with a specific focus on three patterns in the early Chinese migration to Britain. It then considers the historiography of the two key areas of research: the cultural history of Chinoiserie, and the study of Chineseness as it emerged from the context of diasporic experiences. The following introduces the main sources, methodologies and theoretical frameworks of this thesis. The last section of the introduction sets out the structure of the dissertation.

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1.2 What is Chinoiserie? Two Examples of Art and Craft Chinoiserie in the Eighteenth century

China and Chinese culture have long exerted a fascination for Europe and Britain. At the same time, China and Chinese culture were shaped by the European context in which they were represented.\(^\text{17}\) In 1988, the French historian René Étiemble demonstrated how China and Chinese culture shaped European life and fashion from the time of the Roman Empire to the end of the Enlightenment. Étiemble calls this ‘l’enchinoisement de l’Europe’ (the ‘chinese-ification’ of Europe).\(^\text{18}\) From Marco Polo’s tall tales of the Kingdom of the Great Khan to the notorious dispute of the Chinese Rites controversy between the Jesuits and Roman Catholic missionary party, China aroused both intense admiration and suspicion among European consumers of those representations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Chinese civilization evoked, on the one hand, metaphysical representations, through the missionaries associated with the legendary sage Confucius, and, on the other, material representations through the riches brought back to England by the East India Company’s merchant ships.

In art, craft and material culture, the artistic exchange between China and the West, including Chinese-inspired objects such as willow pattern plates, Chinese porcelain, Chinese export painting, lacquer tea trays, home furniture, architecture and gardens came to be referred to as Chinoiserie, from the French term ‘chinois’ for ‘Chinese-esque’, meaning in the style or manner of China. Chinoiserie is defined in the *Grove Dictionary of Art* as ‘a type of European art dominated by Chinese or

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pseudo-Chinese ornamental motifs’. This section illustrates two examples of art and craft Chinoiserie in the eighteenth century, hoping to show what eighteenth-century Chinoiserie is in order to assess how nineteenth-century Chinoiserie was in transit. The first example is pictorial scenes from the play The Story of the Western Wing which were often used to decorate porcelain, plates, wallpaper and furniture. The second is the cultural projects designed for the British royal family, for example, the Chinoiserie pagoda in Kew Gardens. The former can be found in the vast collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) and within National Trust Collections, on both ordinary objects and decorative art (Figure 1-1). As another example, Saltram House, one of Britain’s best preserved examples of an early Georgian house and cited as one of the neoclassical architect and designer Robert Adam’s (1728-1792) finest works, provides a stunning case of preserved Chinoiserie decorations of the era. Inside, there is a room called the study, decorated with wallpaper depicting the most famous scenes from The Story of the Western Wing (西廂記) (Figure 1-2 and 1-3).

The play was written by the Yuan Dynasty Wang Shifu (王實甫) (1260-1336), but the story takes many different forms. The Story of the Western Wing is ‘China’s most popular love comedy’ about a young couple consummating their secret love without parental approval. The main female character; Cui Yingying, acts out a tragic role, waiting for her unresponsive lover Zhang Sheng, a young

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scholar. Yingying’s maid, Hong Niang, takes pity on them, and ingeniously arranges to bring them together in a secret union. The design of the wallpaper features the two women, Cui Yingying sitting inside the house looking through the window and her maid Hong Niang standing outside by the wall.

We know little of whether British consumers understood the story or from where these images originated, but the idea that this tale became associated with feminine taste by means of the objects and patterns of the time is well established.\textsuperscript{22} With an increase in female participation in decorating the home, Chinese wallpaper and other Chinoiserie decorations were increasingly associated with private, feminine spaces. As a result, at the time Chinoiserie came into vogue among the British public, a popularity that reached its climax between 1750 and 1765, there was a general decline in the estimation of China among British intellectuals. Moreover, we now see that during the eighteenth century, Chinoiserie was not only inspired by the Chinese, but was a multi-cultural production between Britain and other Asian countries. The British idea of Chineseness influenced distinctive designs that incorporated several other Asian and Oriental design elements.\textsuperscript{23} The fashion for Chinoiserie-inspired designs in Britain overlapped with the periods when Baroque and Rococo patterns were fashionable. Chinoiserie should then be understood as a hybrid style which included some Asian tones, mostly coded as ‘distinctly feminine’.\textsuperscript{24}

The second example of art and craft Chinoiserie can be found among the several cultural projects of the British monarchy, such as architectural projects. In the design of the Chinese pagoda, the British government mimicked Chinese architectural idioms within the British national landscape. This particular architecture first appeared in the 1740s and can be seen in the Chinoiserie style of the curvaceous shapes of the central kiosk of Vauxhall Gardens, built in 1758, as remodelled by Frederick, Prince of Wales, to rival the court of his father, George II. Kew Garden’s Chinoiserie pagoda, designed in 1762 by Sir William Chambers, a former servant of the Swedish East India Company, was another British national project employing Chinese architecture in the promotion of a multifaceted British kingship. The symbolism of the British-made Chinoiserie pagoda had a specific significance (Figure 1-4).

In celebration of the conclusion of the First Opium War, the British government designed a gold medal commemorating ‘The Triumph of the British Arms, 1842’, now part of the collection of the National Maritime Museum. The front of the medal depicts Queen Victoria, with the reverse displaying a detailed relief of four British officers, one holding the Royal Standard, facing four Mandarin officials. Two representatives in the centre of the scene hold a scroll of the treaty between them, with the figure of Peace looking down and the Angel of Victory flying above blowing a trumpet. Notably, behind the Chinese officials stands a Chinoiserie pagoda, symbolic of the nation of China.25 Although the Chinoiserie pagoda had been built in Britain from the mid-eighteenth century to celebrate the British national

landscape, over a century later it became symbolic of China and representative of its assumed national identity (Figure 1-5).^{26}

While eighteen-century Chinoiserie has been well-studied, we know less about nineteen-century Chinoiserie. Chinoiserie, at first, was based on European invention and imagination and reflected British interior design, decorative arts, architecture and gardens. Such design patterns evolved during the eighteenth century, and remained popular until the nineteenth century.^{27} However, in the nineteenth century, Britain increased its intensity of interaction with China, including trade, immigration and material cultural exchange; this was a particular period of frequent people-to-people contact. With these connections, in the nineteenth century, Limehouse Chinatown became a metaphor for Chinese people and their hometown community. Diasporic Chineseness and Chinoiserie were generally represented in the British cultural mainstream as new and exotic.

I adopt an approach that examines Chinese people, their attire and Chinatown itself to understand of how the British construction of Chineseness created alterative Chinoiserie models in the nineteenth century. As Foucault’s ‘heterotopia’, a site shaped by illusion that exposes the real space and where ‘all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned’,^{28} Limehouse Chinatown reflected the conditions of nineteenth-century Chineseness and Chinoiserie in social, design and lived reality, unlike earlier craft and artistic productions.

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^{27} Section 1.4.1 ‘Chinoiserie in Art and Cultural Historical Approaches’, see also ‘Style Guide: Chinoiserie’, [http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/style-guide-chinoiserie/](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/s/style-guide-chinoiserie/) [accessed 12 May 2015].

Figure 1-1: Chinoiserie tea bowl and saucer, ca. 1779-99, Ref: C.23&A-1911, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
Figure 1-2: Dressing room at Saltram, Devon, 1740-1760, @National Trust.

Figure 1-3: Wall paper of *the Story of the Western Wing* (Partly), Mulberry paper and paint, 1740-1760, Dressing room at Saltram, Devon, NT 871951@National Trust.
Figure 1-4: The Great Pagoda, Design by Sir William Chambers, 1762, Kew Gardens, London. Image taken from https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryMagazine/DestinationsUK/The-Great-Pagoda-at-Kew/

Figure 1-5: ‘The Triumph of the British Arms, 1842’, National Maritime Museum, Ref. MEC1104.
1.3 Historical Background: The Chinese in Britain, ca. 1850 – 1920

There have been many changes in the view of China and the Chinese people that the British lens afforded over the last 300 years. Some views of China were grossly distorted by political tension, unbalanced trade as well as by the racist imagination current at the time, while other views largely reflect the transformations of China and the Chinese diaspora over time. In Britain, there have been two salient and contradictory modes of representation of China and the Chinese. Early descriptions of China and the Chinese from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century represented China as a rich and ideal country, partly because of the successful trade in Chinese goods that were popular in Britain, including porcelain and silks. At the time, very few Chinese came to Britain. The Chinese were presented as a clever and ambitious people, an impression that was based on Confucian doctrines, descriptions of the examinations system, and the Chinese political structures, with a benign despot at the head of the government. The Jesuit missionaries reported to their European readers that ‘the entire kingdom is administered by the Order of the Learned, commonly known as the Philosophers.’ 29

But in the nineteenth-century, accounts of the Chinese switched, from the Chinese Jesuit admiration to portray China as uncivilised, and the Chinese as passive and unapproachable ‘barbarians’ with ‘the grossest simplicity and ignorance’. 30 This negative view of China began after the 1793 Macartney mission to China. John


Barrow, who served as the comptroller to the Macartney embassy and personal tutor to the son of George Staunton, published his *Travels in China* in 1805. As an official member of the embassy, Barrow had a unique opportunity to observe and report on the mission’s progress through China and the interactions with the Qing court and Chinese people. Throughout his account, however, Barrow’s narrative shows a negative bias towards China and the Chinese. In describing the public amusements of the Chinese, Barrow calls them ‘very puerile, or so gross and vulgar, that the tricks and the puppet-shows which are occasionally exhibited in a common fair of one of the country towns of England, may be considered as comparatively polished, interesting, and rational’.  

From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth-century, these two views of China ran in parallel as imperial Britain tried to open the Chinese market. China as a society was understood to be closed, orderly and moral, while a Sinophobic view also started to spread. In particular, comic books that featured uncivilised Chinese started to appear in the British press, especially around the 1851 Great Exhibition period. Later, in 1913, Sax Rohmer’s Chinese super-villain *Dr Fu Manchu* emerged, set in Limehouse Chinatown. By this time, the idea of the ‘Yellow Peril’, the image of a threatening Chinese persona, embodied in his Chinese features and dress, had been around for several decades. It is to be noted that *Dr Fu Manchu* was launched just after the fall of the Qing Empire, the last imperial system in Chinese history, in the Revolution of 1911. From then onwards, most of the Chinese people who stayed in Britain no longer continued to wear their traditional dress. At this time, the

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Chinese in Britain wore Western suits and some married white British women. Nevertheless, they were represented in print and in the media as canny and unscrupulous competitors to white labourers. The community they lived in, Limehouse Chinatown, was seen as a ‘mysterious, vice-ridden and dangerous’ place.33

The early Chinese migrants in Britain played a formative role in constructing the British perception of China and the Chinese. The Chinese visitors and migrants who appeared in Britain presented vivid first-hand accounts of China and the Chinese to the British public, unlike the travel accounts, translations and other literature generated by a host of China experts. There had been three types of Chinese migrants to Britain by the twentieth-century: firstly, Chinese visitors such as artists and theatre performers, secondly, huagong 華工 known as coolies (contract emigrant labourers), and thirdly, huaqiao 華僑, well-educated Chinese migrants.

The first group appeared in the early nineteenth century, and featured a tiny number of Chinese visitors, who were not yet migrants. They included, for example, a group of Chinese performers, known as ‘the Chinese family’, who played as a side-show at the 1851 Great Exhibition, and a well-known character known as ‘the Chinese giant’, a man named Chang Woo Gow, who featured in P.T. Barnum’s Circus group. These were known as huaju 華劇, which literally means ‘theatre about Chinese people’ or ‘Chinese shows’ in the West.34 These performances, presented by Chinese actors, were either performances of Chinese plays translated into Western

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languages or performances relating to China. One important element of the Chinese plays were the traditional garments and other Chinese objects. From the middle of the nineteenth century, Chinese traditional dress and dragon robes became favoured Chinoiserie objects, and these were collected by Western individuals and museums. Precisely at the point that in China, traditional dress and traditional values were being challenged during the late Qing period, but, in Britain, audiences insisted on seeing Chinese performers wearing traditional Chinese dress.

After the First and Second Opium Wars (1839 – 1842 and 1856 – 1860) the Qing government was forced to sign the so-called Unequal Treaties, and yield significant concessions to the British, French, Japanese and American governments. China became a trading zone for British merchants and the demand for Chinese seafarers increased. From ca.1860 to 1880, the overwhelming majority of Chinese men came to Britain as coolies, or in Chinese huagong. They were generally poor and illiterate and their journeys abroad were often not planned.35 The second wave of huagong from the late nineteenth-century to World War I, saw thousands of Chinese contract labourers recruited by the British, French and Russians to work as battlefield ancillaries. After the war, the great majority of these huagong returned home, but a small group stayed and clustered together, forming Chinese communities in the port cities of London, Liverpool and Cardiff.36 These coolies were exclusively male Chinese nationals, for the most part hailing from Siyi 四邑 village in Guangdong in Southeast China.37 It has been argued that Siyi was the biggest single source of early

37 Siyi literally means ‘four counties’, refers to the name of the four counties of Taishan, Xinhui, Kaiping and Enping in Guangdong’s Pearl River Delta region, on the south east coast of China.
Chinese emigration to Britain, but it has been shown that some Chinese workers in Limehouse Chinatown came from Shanghai. An article in the *Evening News* in 1920, entitled ‘Chinatown as I know it: Glimpses into the Life of Yellow Men’s Wives’, included an interview with a Chinese man’s English wife, Laura, who explained, ‘if you take up with a Hong Kong man, you mustn’t make friends with a chap from Shanghai, or you’re in for it’. The people from Guangdong and Shanghai spoke different dialects and had conflict sometimes, although this was often overlooked by the British public and in the British press, which tended to see all Chinese people as ‘very much alike’. All are Chinese, but there are still some similarities and differences between them.

The third group of Chinese migrating to Britain, known as *huaqiao*, were well-educated Chinese migrants including officials, journalists and students. Since China had been threatened by the two Opium Wars, the Qing courts (1644–1911) decided to send some well-educated young Chinese to study in America, Japan and Europe, in order to ‘learn foreign technology to fight against foreign invasion’ (*shiyi zhang ji yi zhi yi* 師夷長技以制夷). Most of these overseas-educated individuals became reformists, strongly tied to nation building, and some aspects of this migration pattern survive today. Evidence of their participation in Britain can be found of the ‘Chee Kong Tong’ 致公堂, or Chinese Freemasons Society in Limehouse Chinatown. The ‘Chee Kong Tong’ was a group involved in opposition

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39 Dorota Flatau, (author of *Yellow English*), ‘Chinatown As I Know It: Glimpses into the Life Yellow Men’s Wives.’ In *Evening News*, 01 October 1920.
41 For example, the visit of Li Hongzhang (1823-1901) to Britain in 1896 where he was presented to Queen Victoria and made a Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Victorian Order.
to the Manchu Qing Dynasty. Sun Yat-sen called the overseas Chinese the mother of revolution. Those educated abroad experienced not only an opportunity for self-development, but, more importantly, developed China economically and politically, and promoted Chinese culture abroad.43

Limehouse Chinatown in London began to develop from the 1880s. The community was very small, and consisted of just two streets: Pennyfields and Causeway Street. The early huagong and huaqiao were both engaged in small businesses, such as restaurants, groceries and laundries in the Limehouse community. They were tiny in number. The 1901 census records show a total of 387 ‘Chinese-born aliens’ in England, 120 in greater London and only 55 in Limehouse. By 1911 the Chinese population of Limehouse had grown to 101. In 1921 the census indicated 337 Chinese residents, but by 1931 the population dropped to only 167.44

Images of the Chinese in Britain in the nineteenth-century appeared in British publications, which are particularly helpful in reconstructing the various attitudes of the British population towards China and the Chinese. This construction of the Chinese in print is related both to the rise of reading among the British population and the appearance of cheap printing technology. Concurrent with the expansion of the British Empire in the late eighteenth century, the industrial revolution took hold at home, and Britain became the ‘workshop of the world’.45 The population of the British mainland almost doubled between the middle of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. It rose from 10.5 million in 1801, to 20.8

million in 1851 and 40.8 million in 1911.\textsuperscript{46} This increase, combined with advances in printing technology, led to a rapid expansion of reading among the public during the nineteenth century. Printing technology made it possible to reproduce photographs of China and the Chinese and in turn sparked curiosity and interest in Chinese people’s lives and the spaces of Limehouse Chinatown.

There was a sudden rise in the number of printed books produced in the early 1850s. The subject profile of the books available changed between the period 1814 to 1846 and about 1900. Subject listings in the Bibliotheca Londinensis for the early period of the nineteenth century show a predominance of traditional subjects. ‘Geography, travel, history and biography’ were of great importance with 17.3% of titles; ‘fiction and juvenile’ works were 16.2% of titles; and ‘poetry and drama’ represented 7.6% of titles.\textsuperscript{47} By the 1890s the mix was very different. Religion had more than halved, ‘Geography, travel, history and biography’ had shrunk to 11.7%; ‘fiction and juvenile’ now towered over all other categories with 31.5%; and ‘poetry and drama’ had shrunk to 4.3%.\textsuperscript{48} This illustrates the considerable growth of fiction novels in British society.

The narrative of Limehouse Chinatown was a popular fiction subject, producing a great number of titles at this time. The subject profile of the local British publications indicates a substantial interest in the subject of China and the Chinese throughout the years 1850 to 1920. Despite widespread literacy, the high cost of books and other printed materials ensured that much of the expansion in readership

\textsuperscript{47} Thomas Hodgson, \textit{Bibliotheca Londinensis: A Classified Index to the Literature of Great Britain During Thirty Years} (London, T. Hodgson: 1848), pp. 77-95.
\textsuperscript{48} Aspect of the Victorian Book, British Publishing 1800-1900, the British Library, available online at \url{http://www.bl.uk/collections/early/victorian/pu_intro.html} [accessed 12 April 2019].
took place among the ranks of the new commercial and industrial middle class.\textsuperscript{49} It was these up and coming classes that displayed most interest in the Chinese opium den in Limehouse Chinatown. This thesis will argue, then, that Limehouse became an alternative site for the construction of a type of Chinoiserie, or British Chineseness, which flourished in combination with the growing market for publications and the culture of writers and aspiring writers, who fuelled a flâneur-like narrative movement, often set in the London opium dens.

1.4 Historiographical Review

This study tackles two distinct areas of historical research that rarely interact: Chinoiserie and Chineseness. The dissertation bridges a gap between these two research areas, shedding light on how British Chinoiserie shifted over time and how it affected domestic British ideas about Chineseness the Sino-British contact. The study firstly sheds light on the scholarship of cultural historians, and examines the impact of British nationalism, gender, and modernism on nineteenth-century Chinoiserie.\textsuperscript{50} Through an investigation of relations with the early Chinese in Britain, and studies of Chinese images, identities and diasporic spaces such as Limehouse Chinatown, this thesis shows how historians can gain a fresh and more detailed

\textsuperscript{49} Patricia Anderson, \textit{The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture: 1790-1860} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 46. Also, it is important to note that in terms of book prices from 1811 to 1895, until 1825 most books were expensive; medium prices dominated in 1835 and 1845, and it was only in 1855 that books at 3s. 6d. or under formed the largest category. The figures from \textit{The Bookseller} show that the period 1858-1895, on the other hand, was dominated by books at 3s. 6d. or under. All these were cover prices. Before 1828, and between 1852 and the 1890s, books were not subject to retail price maintenance, and buyers could expect up to 3d in the shilling discount. However, even a discounted 3s. 6d. represented a significant proportion of a working class family’s weekly disposable income. See also \url{http://www.bl.uk/collections/early/victorian/pu_intro.html} [accessed 12 April 2019].

perspective on how and why nineteenth-century Chinoiserie developed. It challenges the existing framework adopted by post-colonial scholars in their assessment of Anglo-Chinese relations, in particular the American Chinese. These scholars remain focused on uncovering how nineteenth-century Western expansion affected the political, literary, linguistic and cultural development of the Chinese. This thesis reverses this approach — arguing that the Sino-British relationship not only affected cultural encounters within China but also led to the emergence of a hybrid British identity that encompassed a British Chineseness. The British encounter with Chineseness in Britain led to new forms of aesthetic imaginations and constructions of diasporic spaces, which consolidated British cultural hybridity and consolidated modern British ideas.

In terms of terminology, I chose to refer to ‘Sino-British’ rather than ‘Anglo-Chinese’, and ‘British’ rather than ‘English’ cultural ideas. This is because Chineseness was also reconstructed in Scotland and Wales. For example, the photographer and travel writer John Thomson, who was part of the construction of Chineseness in visual form through his cultural productions, came from Scotland.

Similarly, the study uses the terms ‘body’ and ‘embodiment’ to refer to the discussion of the Chinese people’s images and attire, which reveals their ethnic and cultural identity and material cultural values. In cultural, anthropological and sociological studies of the body and embodiment, the image of the body is generally seen as socially produced by the body itself (its shape, size, colour and gesture) and

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by embodied experiences (dress, clothing and hairstyle). In this sense, linking Foucault’s idea of body to writings about Chinamen, such as Dr Fu Manchu by Sax Rohmer, creates a sense that the body serves as an agent of identity and construction for an individual, while at the same time embodying sentiments like fantasy, fear and empowerment that are present in the British host country. In that sense, the body is constituted as a complex relationship between discourse and regimes of power: ‘The deployment of power is directly connected to the body — to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures’. This thesis, then, connects the body to the dress, clothing and hairstyles that created embodied identities for the Chinese during this period. The idea of Chineseness, then, is the outcome of a combination of white British male writers and flâneurs who indulged in visits to Limehouse Chinatown, their experiences and co-existence within the historical moment and cultural activities in which they participated, as well as the public consumption of Chinoiserie.

Finally, the thesis uses the term ‘masculine Chinoiserie’. The term ‘masculine Chinoiserie’, is in the first place fixed by biology. I seek to demonstrate that Chinoiserie can be read as a masculine aesthetic form within the nineteenth-century Chinese diasporic paradigm. However, I recognise that there are multiple ways of interpreting Chinoiserie, with different scopes — for example, period, aesthetic and design form. Furthermore, masculinity can also be part of the construction of femininity. Masculine Chinoiserie is not always or necessarily about men. It can be

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53 The flâneur is understood to be a well-dressed, well-educated, and wealthy man who walks the city for his own leisure. The flâneur in academic discourse, is upheld as an important tool that can be developed for understanding the effects of modernity.
argued that women, even to the same degree as men, are consumers of masculinities, and also producers and performers of masculinities. It is therefore useful to view masculinities as, what John Beynon calls, ‘cultural spaces’.\(^4\) Adopting the term ‘masculine Chinoiserie’ in this way helps us to reflect on and develop further the existing Chinoiserie scholarship.

1.4.1 Chinoiserie in Art and Cultural Historical Approaches

In recent decades, the subject of Chinoiserie as it is studied in English speaking countries, has led to a spate of books, essays and exhibition catalogues, developed in two phases, which can be characterised as the two disciplines of art history and cultural history. Previous scholarship on Chinoiserie often considers it a style associated with playfulness, a hybrid product of Oriental and Rococo. Among the most noted scholars is Madeleine Jarry, who investigates the Chinese influence on European decorative art in her 1981 book *Chinese Influence on European Decorative Art 17th and 18th Centuries*. In his study *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay*, published in 1960,\(^5\) Hugh Honour examines Chinoiserie from its beginnings in the thirteenth century to its decline in the nineteenth century. In *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration*, which was published in 1977, Oliver Impey focuses on Rococo Chinoiserie.\(^\text{56}\) He discusses the meeting of East and West and concentrates on Western decorative art influenced by Chinese culture.

Chinoiserie was, at first, imported material, a survivor of long distance travel, which


\(^{56}\) Oliver Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). However, David Porter argues that the influence of Chinoiserie is mutual. It is impossible to draw distinctions between European and Chinese art, since according to some, Chinoiserie-imported commodities were made by European exotic-inspired painters.
acted as a narrative object that aesthetically told a story. It was symbolic of what the British perceived to be the commercial successes of the Sino-British trade.

However, local British craftsmen and artists mimicked the Chinese style and created designs with images based on illustrations from travel books, or copied Chinese export art and design. Imaginary Chinese landscapes and everyday scenes provided the basis for British Chinoiserie design, created by British craftsmen or factories. Craig Clunas suggests that Chinoiserie is used by art historians for object identification, but has gradually been recognised by cultural historians who explore aesthetic imaginations and the sensory interaction between collectables and intellectual collectors. Thus, recent studies of Chinoiserie are concerned with the expression of its cultural encounters, and analyse Chinoiserie as a critical mode of the cultural politics of various European nations, particularly in a Sino-British context.

In *The Chinese Taste in the Eighteenth Century*, David Porter proposes a set of questions, asking ‘how a foreign aesthetic that was so often depicted in negative terms - strange, monstrous, grotesque, repugnant, trifling - came to be so thoroughly and successfully assimilated within its host culture’. Porter states that the function of things Chinese and Chinoiserie is complex, and that ‘domestication of the alien Chinese aesthetic involved not merely a superficial shift in British taste or passing fad, but rather a profound transformation of underlying constructs of gender, nation,

and desire’. Porter develops an interpretation of Chinese aesthetics in eighteenth-century England within a wider model of modernity, thus Chinoiserie is able to shed ‘light on the contemporary consolidation of hierarchies of gender, aesthetic value, and national identity’. Porter argues that Chinoiserie had an active role in English society, being more than an object materiality such as a tea pot, a craft creation of Chinese things and exoticism, but rather as already a part of the repertoire of Englishness. Porter’s arguments are well known and have been recounted many times, so let a simple summary suffice in his words: ‘only an awareness of this ambivalence, of the potential status of Chinese objects as a site of both imperial envy and imperial pride, can enable us to recognize the semiotic fluidity and transformative potency of these seemingly ephemeral objects in the European imagination’.

The concept of Chinoiserie developed by Porter has been applied widely by scholars such as Chi-Ming Yang and Stacey Sloboda. In her book, *Performing China: Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1660-1740*, published in 2011, Chi-Ming Yang discusses China’s distance and strangeness which makes the function of exemplarity possible for the British speculative imagination. After sustained contact with China began in the seventeenth century, English models of exemplarity began to shift from ancient Greco-Roman models of virtue to Chinese-inflected virtues related to consumerism, imported goods and even foreign ideas. Moreover, Yang argues that China provided a ‘hypothetical model of

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virtuous paganism for England’s new mercantile empire’. Yang and Porter provide a wider sense of Chinoiserie. Although both undertake a discussion of a Chinoiserie object such as lacquer furniture and wallpaper, their idea of Chinoiserie seems not to be limited to objects themselves, but treated as a critical approach to social representation.

However, neither Porter nor Yang are clear about how they address Chinoiserie in cases where gender and aesthetic identity appear not to match. In Porter’s narrative, Chinoiserie is understood as ‘feminine’, associated with a feminine style of fashion or decoration, and receiving favourable opinion from female collectors and consumers. Porter relates Chinoiserie to the concept of the female gender role, thus attributing it to women’s history, rather exclusively, male figures’ commentary on the matter of Chinoiserie. Porter does not distinguish these two histories conceptually. This is problematic, as it could be argued that Porter makes efforts to show Chinoiserie as feminine aesthetic imagination because Chinese taste constantly received favourable opinions from female collectors and consumers, while their male counterparts showed ambivalence at best.

Yang focuses on the performances of influential figures common to the representation of China, who came to embody new forms of heroism in contrast to the classical masculine republican hero. For example, when Yang analyses heroism in Elkanah Settle’s play The Conquest of China by the Tartars (1676), she argues that this literally effeminate warrior epitomizes a new approach to heroic virtue with

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the perception of Confucius’ philosophy. Nevertheless, it is problematic that she applies the perception of Confucius, a gentle male philosopher, to a strong woman warrior. Yang notes, ‘in theory, both man and woman could be considered the effeminate party by virtue of their Chinese identity—“soft” and “civilizing,” a force of “Nature”’. Nevertheless, Mark C. Elliott states that, according to ‘the values of “masculine virtue” and associated warrior ways’, masculinity was in fact an important part of Manchu culture and identity. But Yang makes no distinction between gender and the sexuality issues of men and women when she talks about ethnic groups such as the Chinese or Manchu in the European or Western world. Furthermore, she does not explain why Chinoiserie was treated by both men (Confucius) and women (Manchu woman warrior) as an admirable feminised alternative in English eyes.

In her recent book *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Stacey Sloboda investigates the visual grammar of Chinoiserie in the economic and aesthetic context of eighteenth-century Britain through the central notion of commerce. Sloboda utilises a material and visual approach to extend Porter’s argument by demonstrating the diverse ways in which Chinoiserie empowered individuals. Particularly compelling is the case that she makes for craftsmen. Once released from the rules of classicism, Chinoiserie offered cabinet makers the chance to be creative in constructing new forms and

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shapes. Similarly, while Chinoiserie and things Chinese were regularly conflated with femininity, sexuality and desire, women could play on these connotations.

Another case of this is given in Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace’s book published in 1997, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century*. She depicts how British social reformer and patron of the arts Elizabeth Montagu used the overtly ‘feminine’ space of her Chinese room, her dressing room designed by Chinoiserie furniture-makers William and John Linnell, to host meetings of her bluestocking circle.68

Many cultural and design historians have shown that English aristocrats and middle-class families alike took Chinoiserie as a lifelong taste, not only following the fashion of the time, but also representing their social status and intellectual engagement with China. Chinoiserie, argues Porter, ‘marks the consolidation of an oppositional aesthetic widely embraced by contemporary women and coded along specifically gendered lines in its resistance to cultural assumptions embedded within the classicist norm’.69 In such a comment we see how, in order to make arguments about what the Chinoiserie aesthetic encompasses (design and knowledge, women and men), scholars express their evidence as what it might be assumed to mean within their works.

Such aesthetic encounters, as Danielle Elisseeff-Poiste points out, are the most difficult form of intercultural contact. She believes they always fail for two reasons, the travellers do not know how to observe the civilizations they discover,

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while readers are imprisoned in their own aesthetic systems and cannot understand what the travellers are trying to explain.\(^70\) Porter, indeed, brings a fresh outlook, pushing the field of study to seriously re-consider that ‘things matter’, to consider the ambiguities that the Chinoiserie phenomenon raises between material culture studies and English literary history. Maybe in Porter’s study of Chinoiserie, the male identity appears as ‘the traveller’, criticizing Chinoiserie as ‘monstrous beauty’ and the female collectors are the readers are imprisoned in their own aesthetic systems.

Chinoiserie is not a fixed category, it can be either a design or a cultural phenomenon, with male or female aesthetic imaginations. Most of the scholars mentioned above regard its feminine aesthetic form to reflect the East-West cultural process of the eighteenth century, a reflection of Western cultural-political ideology, or an academic repertoire of discursive resistance. For example, in James Hevia’s analysis of the function of the representation of China in British discourse, he emphasises the importance of Western notions of China by showing a ‘feminized China’.\(^71\) This feminized China was ‘caught up in appearances, irrational, arbitrary and whimsical’, and Western identity was ‘the true, the real, the rational and the upright’.\(^72\) This idea of a feminized China, associated with Chinoiserie which is feminine, shows a post-colonial approach to theory.

The theme of Chinoiserie not being a fixed category might have been brought out more explicitly by literary critic Anne Witchard’s study, *Thomas Burke’s Dark*...
Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown. She describes Burke’s Limehouse fiction as being about the ‘glamorous shame’ of Chinatown as part of ‘the tradition of literary Chinoiseries’ in England from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth. As a whole however, the ideas of Chinoiserie allow a richly comparative approach to understanding the diverse experiences and multiple roles of Chinoiserie’s cultural adaptations in Britain, drawing on an interdisciplinary range of contributions.

In Peter Kitson’s recent study, ‘The Kindness of my Friends in England: Chinese Visitors to Britain in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries and Discourses of Friendship and Estrangement’, published in 2016, he explores the presence of Chinese visitors to London during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although he mentions the conflict surrounding the Chinese who wore Chinese dress being seen as a Chinoiserie object in British society, he does not go further:

We know that sometime after 1776, Whang, like Chitqua, also returned to Canton. He is known to have dined in company with Reynolds and Jones while in London. The Duke commissioned Reynolds to paint Whang in 1776 and the portrait now hangs at Knole. It is the portrait of a young man, aged about 22 years old, seated on a Chinese bench and wearing Chinese clothes, holding a fan. It emphasizes Whang’s Chinese identity, while at the same time, representing him as an individual and not a Chinoiserie object. A later drawing said to be him as a man by the artist George Dance the

73 ibid, Witchard (2009), p. 4.
youn
ger

survives in the British Museum. Here, Whang is in British
dress, which may have been what he wore in London.74

These words imply that the presence of the Chinese man, Whang, including
his body and clothes, were associated with his Chinese identity, however, he needs to
be treated as an ‘individual and not a Chinoiserie object’. Kitson’s words correct the
tendency to see a Chinese man as a Chinoiserie object, but it is paradoxical to say
that Whang’s Chinese identity with his traditional dress, embodied Chinoiserie.
Scholars push the field of study to seriously re-consider that ‘things matter’; to
consider the ambiguities that the Chinoiserie phenomenon raises between Sino-
British material culture studies and British modern history.

In addition, in his recent book, published in 2017, Out of China: How the
Chinese Ended the Era of Western Domination, Robert Bickers uses a wide lens to
capture the diversity of Anglo-Chinese interactions.75 Although China’s quest to
overcome Western domination may seem to be the realm of high politics, Bickers
pays great attention to the cultural interactions that have also been an important
arena. For example, Bickers shows how, at the 1935 International Exhibition of
Chinese Art in London, the Nationalist government sought to earn foreign sympathy
through culture, seeing it as a global front in the war against Japan. Bickers is
concerned with struggles over power and ideas, and how China’s connections with
foreigners produced moments of humiliation. Foreign experts, humanitarians and
evangelists travelled to China, for refugee relief and Comintern guidance, while self-

74 Peter Kitson, ‘The Kindness of my Friends in England: Chinese Visitors to Britain in the Late
Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries and Discourses of Friendship and Estrangement’,
75 Robert Bickers, Out of China: How the Chinese Ended the Era of Western Domination (London:
confident Chinese sojourned abroad and engaged with the world. The view taken is that humiliation is a particularly powerful concept in scholarship in critical area studies. But, in studying Chinese history in Eastern and Western modes, humiliation is one of the most important emotions that we need to understand and manage, both in ourselves and in others. Ideas such as ‘Western domination in China’ may lead to intergroup conflicts, but by the same token, ‘Chinese domination in the West’, may lead to a discourse of revenge and, under the pressure of anxiety, create more boundaries. Thus, it is important to understand the difference between China and the imagined China, both constructed and deconstructed by the West.

1.4.2 ‘Chineseness’ as a Diasporic Paradigm

In the academic realm of West-East studies, the method of comparison has often been shaped by what we call ‘Orientalism’, a perspective where the self, the West, dominates the other, the East. Otherness is often equated with a feminised or Westernised object. The object of study receives a ‘double oppression’ in the narrative shaped by the male gaze and Western colonialism. Said’s definition of Orientalism is a signifying system of representation framed by the West’s economic and social conditions and political forces. Said draws on a number of literary studies from Western scholars, mostly Arabic and Islamic examples, to support his argument. Said argues that Orientalism is constructed within Western knowledge as a means of exerting power and imaginary scope over the East.

This classical idea of Orientalism was a standard Western constructed interpretation of the East. Said points out how the cultures and civilizations of the

West and East are different. Using the term ‘the others’ to refer to a Western perception of the East, he challenges the notion that difference implies hostility, arguing that Oriental study should not be carried out through Western ‘vision’, but rather through the use of ‘narrative’, in order to think about the difference between the West and the Orient in a more critical and objective way. Said’s assertion that the colonial power statements inherent in Orientalism only function in the West-East relationship is problematic. Said writes, ‘my real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world’. This is ‘our’ world, as Said emphasises, with political power and colonial or imperial establishment, and it is far removed from the reality of the history of ‘otherness’, particularly in the case of the study of Chineseness and Chinoiserie.

A number of scholars take up the study of Chineseness using post-colonial perspectives. Such an analytical stance not only follows Edward Said’s Orientalism, reflecting a long-standing Western strategy of essentialising the Chinese ‘other’, but also emerges as a response to recent positions on Chinese culture and China’s economy as a rising global power, a positions associated with Chinese nationalist assumptions and fuelled by the role of the People’s Republic of China. Scholars such as Rey Chow, Ien Ang, Lydia Liu and Allen Chun approach Chineseness from the perspective of critical area studies, claiming that cultural identity is constructed within the role of particular actors. For example, Lydia Liu proposes that the massive influx of neologisms from other languages into what has become the modern Chinese

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language since the late nineteenth-century makes Chinese and Chineseness hybridisations. Allen Chun critically deconstructs the presumed links between Chinese ethnicity and the cultural identity of Chineseness. Particularly, Rey Chow and Ien Ang produce brilliant articles that surpass the Chineseness construct, criticising its context and propagating its boundaries. Much work is focused on the narrative of the Chinese self as constructed, distancing it from the West’s other.

Rey Chow states in her study, *Introduction: On Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem* published in 1998, ‘in the habitual obsession with Chineseness, what we often encounter is a kind of cultural essentialism — in this case, Sinocentrism — that draws an imaginary boundary between China and the rest of the world’. Rey Chow asks ‘what is Chineseness but an object organizing a field structured by the protocols of the disciplines that take the field as their own?’ One sense in which Rey Chow hopes to sweep aside all essentialisms, both open and covert, is by making Chineseness an object of discussion, trying to demystify rather than thinking politically or through professionally familiar encounters. Thus, for Rey Chow, Chineseness is too often treated with a kind of cultural essentialism rather than as a cultural identity, cultural event or cultural movement. In furthering the study, Ien Ang says, ‘how to determine what is and what is not Chinese has become the

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necessary preliminary question to ask, and an increasingly urgent one at that. This, at least, is one of the key outcomes of the emergent view from the diaspora’. When Rey Chow tells us that Chineseness means that certain Chinese experience cannot be reset within the domain of a field or with any boundaries, Ang calls for a new diasporic paradigm in the study of Chineseness:

Chineseness is not a category with a fixed content – be it racial, cultural, or geographical – but operates as an open and indeterminate signifier whose meanings are constantly renegotiated and rearticulated in different sections of the Chinese diaspora.\(^86\)

The definition of Chineseness, however, needs to be reviewed. Ang speaks of Chineseness as essential, reflecting her strong sense that it disciplinarily affronts knowledge of Chineseness in its emergence. She transforms the diasporic discovery of emergence back to outcomes and determinations. Somehow, she helps free scholarly discourse from prejudice of racist common sense to see Chineseness as a new paradigm in its emergence, unexpected as ‘it varies from place to place, moulded by the local circumstances in different parts of the world where people of Chinese ancestry have settled and constructed new ways of living’; which can be applied to nineteenth-century Limehouse Chinatown.\(^87\)

There is much scholarship surrounding the subject of ‘Chinatowns’ in America, Canada and New Zealand, but there are fewer studies in the context of London. The designation Chinatown suggests a significant settlement of Chinese


residents. Sociological scholarship is especially interested in the history of immigration, and a place being referred to as Chinatown conjures a mental image of a diasporic community. In his 1968 study, *The Chinese in London*, sociologist Ng Kwee Choo states:

> The term ‘Chinatown’ was a misnomer since it did not by any means cover an extensive area in which all the Chinese were clustered together, like the Chinatowns of San Francisco and New York; it consisted only of two small streets, Pennyfields and the Limehouse Causeway.\(^8\)

Ng Kwee Choo argues that Limehouse Chinatown was a misnomer, unlike the larger Chinatowns of San Francisco or New York. Meanwhile, one of the important themes in Limehouse Chinatown studies is the issue of race. Joanna Herbert, in her study entitled *The Construction of London’s Chinatown 1900-1990*, continues this line of analysis by positing the categorisation of institutions and the connections between power and urban space. She argues that London’s Chinatown is a vital space for the reproduction of hegemony by the host government.\(^9\) Sociologist and historian Gregor Benton, in his 2001 study *Chinatown and Transnationalism: Ethnic Chinese in Europe and Southeast Asia*, systematically approaches Chinese migration issues as a means to address further research into the diaspora. He questions concepts of the transnational by dividing the ethnic groups found in

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Chinatown, which complicates their co-existence and the perceived social cohesion within multi-ethnic societies.90

In the cultural and media study of Limehouse Chinatown, a main question which arises is whether Chinatown in Limehouse is ‘a false tale’. Historians such as Jon Burrows and John Seed ask whether the Limehouse Chinatown was merely a product of the British imagination.91 Jon Burrows, in A Vague Chinese Quarter Elsewhere: Limehouse in the Cinema 1914-36, takes the example of D.W. Griffith’s film 'Broken Blossoms’ (1919), which took place in Limehouse but was shot in a studio environment in Hollywood. Burrows asserts that this locality has little to do with real Chinese people. He argues that ‘the image of Limehouse could be seen as another transatlantic import, no more indexically linked to native reality than a Western film’.92 To these critiques, we may add comments by John Seed from his article Limehouse Blues: Looking for Chinatown in the London Docks, 1900-40, in which he powerfully argues that ‘it is that imaginary relationship, its very fictive dimensions, which made Chinatown so potent and flexible a signifier, adjustable to a variety of social and political cries in London at the end of the First World War’.93 Seed proposes that Chinatown in Limehouse is ‘a space which cannot be reached by any normal means’.94 He refers to the space that newspapers and modern authors manipulated into being a Chinatown, a town that represents the imaginary

93 Ibid, Seed (2006), p. 82.
relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. John Seed is not the first scholar to interpret the idea of Chinatown in Limehouse in this way, but he sheds light on how the existing writing must be reconsidered.

Focusing on the socio-historical and media dimensions of Limehouse Chinatown research, scholars do not bring the subject of Chinoiserie into the discussion. This study includes the development of Chinoiserie as a part of the British consumption of Chineseness. However, there are two problems with the existing study of Chinoiserie, one being the chronological period. Most Chinoiserie scholarship focuses on the eighteenth century, largely avoiding extending the temporal research scope. Eighteenth-century Chinoiserie scholarship often takes the fact that Chinoiserie is feminine for granted, overlooking the masculine aesthetic form. This thesis examines Chinoiserie’s cultural adaptation and focuses on a transcultural emergence that denies such a division of East or West.

Therefore, this study adapts the concept of Chineseness referred to in Ang’s reflection on the Chinatown diasporic paradigm and the description of this diasporic model as ‘many different Chinese identities, not one… a departure from the mode of demarcating Chineseness through an absolutist positioning of authentic and inauthentic, pure and impure, real and fake’. In other words, Chineseness is a communication that relates partly to Chinese culture and partly to non-Chinese culture, particularly in a diasporic paradigm. The nineteenth century represented a period of development for Chinese values and this thesis shows how the Chinoiserie experiences shaped the diverse perceptions of Chineseness in Limehouse Chinatown.

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— one of the fantasies and fears of the special community — which was designated for and by men across media forms, notions of modern nineteenth-century experiences, and a hybrid social-cultural design model.

1.5 Methodology, Theoretical Frameworks and Sources

The aim of this thesis is to locate Chinoiserie in the social and cultural construction of nineteenth-century Chineseness in Britain within a transcultural context. There are key debates over the form of the transnational social structure, the nature of masculinity and its meanings performed in nineteenth-century Chinoiserie in Britain. Chinese male visitors and migrants, the image of Chinese people reproduced in Britain, and Limehouse Chinatown are the three key case studies used in identifying new forms of Chinoiserie associated with a masculine aesthetic imagination which came to embody both fantasy and fear, especially in the mid-nineteenth century opium trade with China, when the British political elite still grappled over which institutions and organisations were needed to conquer and rule. In developing this argument, particular attention is given to British Chinese people, the image of Chinamen, and the space of Limehouse Chinatown, the actors who constituted the Chineseness that was being constructed by the British.

In order to achieve this aim, I deploy a mixed methodology in the study, including visual analyses, case studies, comparisons and theoretical approaches. I analyse the visual and material culture sources, particularly photographs that describe the early Chinese visitors, migratory history and diasporic Limehouse Chinatown heritage in Britain. By focussing on this dimension, I visually analyse the specific subject in its historical context to construct reflective interpretations. The
examination of the image of the Chinese people, their attire and cultural identity enables me to critically reflect on the perceptions of the Chinese through a British lens, and re-consider the Chinese sense of selfhood abroad. There appear to be cultural negotiations between their traditional Chinese origins and overseas modern lifestyles. Visual analysis allows us to see how they changed their attire and how they adapted to the host culture.

Looking carefully at the images of the *China and its Chinese People* photographed by John Thomson, the range of the research moves from ‘image worlds’ to a ‘visual economy’. Deborah Poole uses the term ‘visual economy’ to discuss how images acquire their meanings. Visual culture is understood as symbolic coding and shared meaning, while the concept of visual economy refers to images not just sharing meanings but being ‘part of a comprehensive organisation of people, ideas and objects’.96 Poole mentions that speaking of images as part of a shared culture is difficult.97 Therefore, here, I take the term visual economy more generally to frame my study of Thomson and his Chinese image world with a sense of how the fear of images of the poor might move across transnational, transcultural, and between Chineseness and Britishness boundaries.

This study confirms the findings, and the research methodology is expanded to include a theoretical approach to the visual and socio-historical factors contributing to Sino-British relations. This thesis deploys the theoretical approaches of post-colonial study from Homi Bhabha and the concept of space from Michel

Foucault, discussing the changes in the image of British Chinese in a ‘mimicry’ way, and the Limehouse Chinatown as a ‘heterotopia’.

In the nineteenth century, although Chinese people came to London, the relationship between the British and the Chinese was far more complex, as the influence of Chinoiserie meant people saw Chinese things as a style, a design, based largely on imagination, now Chinese people and Chinese shops appeared in Limehouse Chinatown presenting what is a real rather than imagined. How did Chinese men represent themselves in Britain? In the early twentieth century, Dr Fu Manchu was associated with the traditional Chinese dress code changpao 長袍 (long robe). This likely relates to an earlier image of the Chinese in Britain, embodying the Chinese features and dress. However, in the photographs, Chinese men at this time were pictured wearing Western dress. The traditional Chinese dress is not seen between 1900 and 1920 in Limehouse Chinatown. These conflicting messages find relevance in an investigation of the imagery of the fictional Chinese character of Dr Fu Manchu, which manipulates images of the British Chinese.

Postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha show that colonialism revealed a third group, between the coloniser and the colonised. This is a class of people who are natives by birth and physical features, but in taste, opinion and dress are the coloniser. Bhabha states in his 1990 essay ‘Of Mimicry and Man’, ‘in mimicry, the representation of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonymy… mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonisation of repression of difference, but a

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98 The changpao 長袍 refers to ‘a long loose-fitting robe, which covered their feet and had an overlapping front flap that fastened with loops and toggles at the right shoulder’ and also refers to male version of the cheungsam in Chinese. See also Hazel Clark, ‘The Cheung Sam: Issues of Fashion and Cultural Identity’, in China Chic: East Meets West (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 155.
form of resemblance, that differs from or defends presence by displaying it in part, metonymically’. Similarly, Frantz Fanon uses the phrase ‘black skin and white masks’ to describe this class of people, and Homi Bhabha calls them ‘mimic men’. The idea of ‘mimic men’ can be applied to the Chinese in Britain in the nineteenth century, and the way they adapted to the modern lifestyle. The British however, perceived this as a threat. This is another key illustration of the difference between the Chinese in London and those in the North American Chinatowns, who preserved their traditional dress in order to resist the host society.

‘Space’ is an object that we can read and study in order to understand the process of cultural construction ‘of those different spaces, those other places, in a kind of both mythical and real contestation of the space in which we live’, as a way of demonstrating how power is constituted at a moment in history within material practice. In the case of Limehouse Chinatown, the mystery of the migrant area of East London became a popular subject through rumours and social events. Limehouse Chinatown, however, was also a place where the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom. In his essay ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’ published in 1967, Foucault states that heterotopias:

[Sixth principle] … have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more

\[\text{100 V.S. Naipaul, The Mimic Men (London: Andre Deutsch, 1967).}\]
\[\text{101 Michel Foucault, ‘Space, knowledge, and power’ in Rabinow, P. ed., The Foucault Reader (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 246.}\]
illusory (perhaps that is the role that was played by those famous brothels of which we are now deprived). Or else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation.¹⁰²

Foucault’s concept of heterotopia serves two purposes in the case of Limehouse Chinatown. On the one hand, it ‘unfolds between two extreme poles’, the Chinese male strangers and British male writers, both their roles being ‘to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory’.¹⁰³ Foucault’s understanding of space and body, provides a wider analysis of interrelated discursive and material practices, and helps us to enact and reflect upon how spatial material and imagined communities come together to produce the heterotopia of Limehouse Chinatown. As he explains, it is ‘arbitrary to try to dissociate… the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand’.¹⁰⁴ In addition, a significant hybrid effect was found between the Chinese owner’s shopfront designs and the local British terrace housing. Most shopfront designs in Limehouse Chinatown were exotic, and the various


shopfront signs told a different story. However, they also show a connection with the image of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, or both, an in-between space. As a result, Limehouse Chinatown was a heterotopia, ‘not of illusion, but of compensation’ in relation to British consumption of China, combining ideas of self and other, such as traditional and modern, Chinese and British, West and East. These aspects include barriers such as resistance, and opportunities such as change and interactivity.

This thesis examines a range of sources that dissect the various nineteenth-century British constructions of Chineseness in Britain. Examples of visual and material culture include paintings, illustrations, photographs, maps, dress, events posters, opium pipes, and in particular, photographs taken between 1900 and 1930, now in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, and social scientist Charles Booth’s notebooks composed during his London map project, now in the London School of Economics Archives. These materials reveal that ‘Chinatown’ is a misnomer, as applied to the Chinese Limehouse area in the early twentieth century. The Tower Hamlets Local History Library was established in 1965, at the same time as the London Borough of Tower Hamlets was established. According to the archivist, Malcolm Barr-Hamilton, the collection mandate is to, ‘collect any images which record the face of Tower Hamlets and its people’.105 This archive combines the local history collections of three former boroughs, Bethnal Green, Poplar and Stepney, which collected local history material beginning in the early twentieth century. Hailing from a variety of sources, some material was commissioned for articles in magazines such as The Graphic.106 Other materials, officially collected by

105 Malcolm Barr-Hamilton, Borough Archivist, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, personal conversation.
106 The Graphic, a British weekly illustrated newspaper, first published in 1869.
Photographers hired by the borough, include a large collection of photographs of Poplar taken by William Whiffin, a professional photographer interested in local history.

Some of the most interesting primary visual sources are event advertisements, including the posters for Chang the Chinese Giant’s performance, known from the global circuses of P.T. Barnum’s London trip ca. 1870 and the brochure of the lived event ‘Opium Smoking Parlour’ at the Western Gardens of the Earl’s Court Exhibition of 1899, now at the Kiralfy Archive of the Museum of London. Meanwhile, an object study of an opium pipe, from the Bragge Pipe Collection, along with an analysis of the history of opium related activities and Chinese opium dens in Britain, show that the image of Chineseness was shaped in another way, linked to the argument of the thesis.

In addition, this study reviews official records such as historical censuses and building surveys from the Office for National Statistics and the Register of Property from the London Property Services Department, to investigate the early Chinese migrants’ history and reveal the urban nature and architectural style of the Chinese community in Limehouse. The records of the proceedings of the Old Bailey show the very low rate of crime involving the Chinese in Limehouse and crimes related to opium and opium dens. The British communication industry, such as press, magazines, fiction and photographs also provides interesting clues to the British public’s ideas and opinions about British-Chineseness representations. In writing networks, fictional Chinese and Limehouse opium dens appeared in journals,
magazines, fiction and film geared towards entertainment and information, rather than critical examination, although the journals, especially early in the period considered, saw themselves as ‘performing a higher role than mere entertainment’. In image making, the early photographs of China and the Chinese people brought back home by British photographers such as John Thomson played an important role in shaping perceptions of China and the Chinese. Some of the interesting primary Chinese and English texts examined are personal diaries, letters and correspondence about the 1851 Great Exhibition written by British officials, Chinese diplomats and overseas students based in Britain.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides a brief historical background to the early Chinese in Britain, shows a strong critical engagement with the two fields of the historiography, Sino-British interaction with Chinoiserie and Chineseness, and discusses the sources used and the theoretical framework of the thesis. Chapter 2 ‘Chinese People, Dress, Object and Cultural Identity in the Early Expos Period’ focuses on Chinese male visitors to Britain. In particular, it explores the ways in which their traditional clothing cake and hairstyle queue (a long braid) came to signify their cultural identity during this period. Various images of China and the Chinese were constructed both in China and Britain. There are ways in which the Chinese shaped their own image, and ways in which the British perceived the Chinese. Both are to do with bodies, clothing and spaces. This chapter takes the

Chinese body as object of study, and draws on visual and textual evidence to situate that Chinese body in the specific context of the Sino-British encounter of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 3 ‘Fantasy and Fear: The Chinese Man as a Prototype of China’s National Image’ investigates the impact of images of the Chinese Emperor, Chinese giant, and the Chinese in Limehouse Chinatown on the British historical past and the politics of physical textual manipulation. The character of Chinese men is explored through the relationships between the images of the Chinese Emperor, Chinese giant and mimic men. The image of the Chinese Emperor was transformed into a global entertainment industry, including circus shows, with a particular focus on the theme of the Chinese giant as spectacle. Chang the Chinese Giant created certain emotional and physiological states. The Chapter addresses the notion of loss (of the queue and of identity) as spectacle, and the way social relations are mediated by image, for example the Chinese in Limehouse did not wear traditional Chinese attire but adopted Western clothes and a modern lifestyle. This case study opens the discussion about the ways Chinese migrants transformed themselves, while national and cultural boundaries centred on their dress and embodied experiences circulated throughout the media and entertainment culture across transnational borders.

Chapter 4 ‘Making a Visual Economy of Chineseness: British Photographer John Thomson and His Chinese Images Produced in Britain ca. 1870’ engages with race theory and places Thomson’s work in China in the context of Victorian interest in, and depiction of, the London poor. It discusses how the media formulated and circulated an image of the Chinese people. This chapter begins with a general overview of John Thomson’s life in China and his Illustrations of China and of Its
People ca. 1870. Some of his photography, with its selective exposure of Chinese types — such as labourers, beggars and opium addicts — depicts the decline of China’s late Qing Empire. It highlights the characteristics that came to be associated with China, so much so that it can be seen as a mirror of London society at the time. In addition, in the case of the Chinese opium smoker, I consider the way in which the body politic has a different ideology in Britain and China, and compare the opium smokers’ bodily interactions to the harmonious system of the yin and yang states of Chinese philosophy. The prostrate Chinese smoking body was perceived negatively in Britain. The representations of Chinese opium smokers can be used, in various ways, to reassess the social value of representations of the body in Chinese society.

Having provided an overview of the early image of the Chinese associated with the negative ‘sick men’ or ‘opium smokers’, Chapter 5 ‘London Limehouse Chinatown as a Heterotopia ca. 1890 – ca. 1920’ deals, in detail, with the complex nature of London Limehouse Chinatown’s social history and its urban design space. The chapter brings to light the cultural-historical dimensions of the theoretical space as heterotopia concept of Foucault. The concept of heterotopia is built upon the reading of Chinese shopfront design and its language code within the London cityscape. It addresses issues of place and narrative, discussing Limehouse in relation to the aesthetics of Chinoiserie design, and uses a comparison of San Francisco’s Chinatown and Limehouse’s Chinese community between 1900 and 1920 to highlight the marked absence of obvious Chinese architecture or design features in Limehouse. It shows two main factors that cut across class and culture, the framing of the area as Chinatown despite its lack of Chinese design features, and the Chinese sailors who founded various small businesses and restaurants in the area. London’s Limehouse Chinatown was nowhere and everywhere as a heterotopia.
Chapter 6 ‘Beyond Eighteenth-century Chinoiserie: The London Chinese Opium Den, ca. 1850- ca. 1920’, discusses how the local flâneur activities of Victorian writers fertilised a sense of eighteenth-century Chinoiserie aesthetic imagination and interest in London’s Chinese opium dens. Searching for and building the literary network of London’s Chinese opium dens became a social movement. Issues raised include the visitors’ expectations of the ‘Chineseness’ of the area. In this respect, the flâneur can be seen as having a dual influence. On the one hand, the aesthetic of the flâneur had an impact via the texts and street photographs produced. On the other hand, it informed perceptions of the masculine Chinoiserie of a place and its people. It explores for a British masculine Chinoiserie through Victorian writers, British white male flâneurs and the idea of the imagined Chinese opium den, seen in opposition to the earlier, more feminine, Chinoiserie of the eighteenth century.

Finally, by attending to the transnational, and thinking about how Chineseness was practiced across multiple settings and media, Britain’s local political and cultural dilemma concerning opium was that once the anti-opium movement and it then shifted the attention to the Chinese immigrants in Britain. It had given Britain the chance to reflect on the humanitarian implications of the unlawful opium trade to China, but it also showed how the British society experienced anxiety about losing colonial power while facing a moral crisis, and created a complex aesthetic imagination of China and the Chinese. As a result, London Limehouse Chinatown and the Chinese in Limehouse demonstrated a hybrid model of imagined Chineseness, largely based on the previous Chinoiserie aesthetic imagination, problematised by the relationship of social reality and literary production. These findings challenge the overlooked Chinoiserie in the British
Chineseness discourse that has grown in the modern imagination, along with the global Chinese diaspora and cultural hybridity.
Chapter 2 Chinese People, Dress, Object and Cultural Identity in the Early Expos

Figure 2-1-A: ‘Chinese family at the zoo’, ref. 4811200, London Metropolitan Archives.

Figure 2-1-B: On the back of the photograph ‘Chinese family at the zoo’, ‘1912’(‘188?’), ref. 4811200, London Metropolitan Archives.
2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the representation of Chinese dress and hairstyle in the early Expos ca.1851 in Britain.¹ Taking traditional Chinese dress in the mid-nineteenth century as a starting point, this chapter investigates the style that characterised cultural interactions between China and Britain. Within China, in the nineteenth century, traditional dress and values were challenged. By then traditional forms of dress had become highly politicized and had become part of the tension between modernization and nationalism in China.² Chinese people struggled with what to wear and looked to establish a new dress code that featured a combination of Western and Chinese tastes.³ Meanwhile, in Britain, Chinese visitors with their traditional Chinese dress had become very popular. This chapter considers how wearers of traditional Chinese dress struggled during this period, when the representation of Chineseness became ‘written’ on their bodies by British expectations and British-made Chinoiserie. The culture of Chinese clothing, which includes ‘ordinary’ Chinese dress, Chinese dragon robes, as well as Western fashions that had been influenced by Chinese clothing, has been widely studied.⁴ However, many questions remain unanswered, including how the British viewed Chinese people and their bodies dressed in traditional attire, particularly in the period of frequent people-to-people contact during the early Expos. In other words, this

³ Antonia Finnane, Changing Clothes in China (London, Hurst, 2007), pp. 1-16.
⁴ Researchers such as Dieter Kuhn, Alan Priest, John Vollmer, Gary Dickinson and Linda Wrigglesworth, based their research on the history of Chinese clothing.
chapter asks to what degree Chinese traditional dress formed part of the construction of the cultural identity of being Chinese in British eyes?

I examine the image of Chinese traditional appearance in Britain, using visual materials such as the photographs at the London Metropolitan Archives and the Illustrated London News. Through the image of Chinese traditional dress, both in terms of how it emerged and its meaning, I discuss the act of dressing, and explore how dress came to have agency in the shaping of Chinoiserie, and in the constructions of both ‘self’ and ‘other’.

Section 2 of chapter 2, entitled ‘How Can I Tell You Who I Am?’ investigates the photograph ‘A Chinese family at the zoo’ in the context of the images and historical documents produced by the London press, such as the Illustrated London News. This photograph of a Chinese family may well represent a Chinese family who were a sideshow in the 1851 World Exhibition in London. In the photograph, the Chinese family is constructed so as to convey a specific meaning and message, particularly through their traditional Chinese dress. Their ethnic dress, which is intended to represent the cultural and national identity of the wearer, ‘helps to position individuals in time and space, to preserve traditional heritage, and at the same incorporates changes and new elements’. But what is the agency of the wearer of this dress? We should consider their own voice, and therefore pose a new question: ‘how can I tell you who I am?’. I use this photograph, ‘a Chinese family at the zoo’, taken in the mid nineteenth century in London, to rephrase my research questions rather than answer them.

The question ‘how’, implies a method of solving a problem. The West would refer to the people depicted as ‘Chinese’ because of the way they are dressed, their robes and queues, which were key socializing features related to Chinese identity. But was that Chinese identity what they themselves wanted? Moreover, is there a way to describe one’s identity through refuting the identity one has been labelled with simply because of what one wears? Furthermore, the image of the Chinese family was being reinterpreted by the British gaze. In the 1851 Great Exhibition, two types of dress were shown: the dragon dress (at a Great Exhibition sideshow) and the ‘ordinary’ dress (at the reception of the Chinese family by her Majesty, at Osborne). This suggests that clothing and dress signified many things at the same time, depending on the political and cultural context, on practices of tourism, as well as on the specific environment and on social interactions within that environment.

Section 3 of this chapter, entitled ‘Chinese Body as an Object at the 1851 World Exhibition’, discusses the relationship between the Chinese body and the Chinese object as it was constructed by the British. It focuses on a single, displayed object, a giant teapot, and explores how this object of Chinoiserie implied the structure of power of the host; the myth being that Queen Victoria used this pot to serve the public tea. The display case leads us to ask how the Chinese people came to be objectified in British mass culture. Most importantly, as I show, this study brings out the idea of ‘body as an object’ within the embodiment of the ethnic dress, object context and visual and material culture methodology. Through discussion of the act of dressing and displayed objects as agents in creating a Chinese cultural identity, I show how the Chinese body associated with its traditional dress was viewed in Britain, as an object, connected to the embodiment of Chinoiserie of the early Expos period.
In section 4, entitled ‘Elite Overseas Chinese and the Change of Dress’, the story begins with the Chinese travel writer Wang Tao’s life experiences in Britain. Wang Tao 王韬 (1866-1937), who was the first Chinese person to visit the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London, wrote a famous travel journal, *Jottings of Carefree Travels* (*Manyou suilu* 漫遊隨錄) which influenced Chinese and Japanese thought about Western experiences and lifestyles. During Wang’s stay in England, his traditional outfit, with the robe and queue, brought him derision. His experiences, expressed through his words and publications, attracted widespread attention in the Chinese world. However, the British gaze misread his appearance and dress, and misconstrued his social role and class association. On one hand, in the Western imagination, his Chinese appearance construed him as ‘the other’;

6 on the other hand, the elite Chinese in Europe also wished to distance themselves from him, because of the negative class associations the ethnic dress conjured up. To Western beholders, the Chinese were all seen as the same ‘type’ of people, regardless of their class or social standing. This study of traditional Chinese dress and values seek to reveal the new forms of Chinese identity and selfhood that came into being during this period of the Expos in Britain.

2.2 How Can I Tell You Who I Am?

This section begins with a perhaps little noticed photograph called ‘a Chinese family at the zoo’, dated ‘1912’ (‘188?’), found at the London Metropolitan Archives. At the centre of the photograph, Figure 2-1-A, appears a ‘Chinese family’, dressed in

6 The ‘other’ as I use it at here refers to the terms in which the West sees the East as ‘the other’ in Edward Said’s book *Orientalism*. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York, 1978).
Chinese traditional clothes. Behind them appears a group of British men and women wearing Victorian style dress. There is not much information available about this photograph. We do not know who took it or who the people in the photograph are. In fact, the people were likely to have run into the photographer accidently, as there seems to be motion blur in the photograph, a focus on the background people, and the Chinese family’s details are not entirely clear. It shows a Chinese man with a long robe and skullcap in front of a Chinese lady. The photograph shows ‘nothing but a trace of the social protocol of integration’, as it recalls all that Roland Barthes hopes to extract from a photograph, which is ‘a true being, not a resemblance’. Mysteriously, the picture attracts the viewer’s gaze. It reveals a ‘strange’ scene, of the East and West ‘encountering’ one another — of two kinds of people — one dressed in Chinese traditional clothes and the other in British Victorian styles. This mixed scene, exposed by this moment frozen in time, remains intriguing nearly a hundred years later.

Before investigating the photograph further, it might be appropriate to go back to the analysis of photographic theory, in order to explore this specific photograph, both in terms of image and object perspective. First, in this photograph, the central feature, an older Chinese man, looks toward the photographer, but without being in focus, as the whole picture is blurred. The cause of the blurriness is likely to be movement, as all the characters in the photograph are walking, rather than it being out of focus. The question is: can a blurred photograph be a historical source? As the art historian Wolfgang Ullrich in the History of Blurriness explains, blurriness may bring a distortion to the representation of the characters, but it can

also increase the credibility of the image, and even emphasise its truth.\(^8\) This suggests that the blurriness of the photograph does not reduce its credibility as a truth-value image. In turn, because such blurriness does not come from an artificial effect, ‘it stimulates associations and moods rather than a rational reaction as in the case of focused photographs’.\(^9\) The blurriness might enhance our belief in the photograph as a representation of reality, and possibly evoke another presentation.

Nevertheless, in certain cases, a blurred photograph could be considered to represent unprofessional work, or it may cause difficulties for the archivist, because of the lack of a detailed image (Figure 2-1).

In *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images*, Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart state: ‘materiality translates the abstract and representational “photography” into “photographs” as objects that exist in time and space. The possibility of thinking about photographs in this way in part rests on the elemental fact that they are things’.\(^10\) In using the photograph as a material source, we investigate not only linked meaning as images but also meanings as objects.

The significance of studying a photograph is not only an image, but also an ‘object’ for analysis. Figure 2-1-A shows the front of ‘Chinese family at the Zoo’ photograph, Figure 2-1-B shows the back of the same photograph. It is recorded as ‘1912’ on the back of the picture, but if we look closer there is other handwriting, from the archivist, with a modified date of ‘188?’. This modification leads us to ask,


who is this ‘Chinese family’? Or when and which event brought a ‘Chinese family’ to Britain. Can we identify the year through any motifs in the photograph? Is the year recorded, 1912, correct? Coincidentally, 1912 was a significant year for the Chinese Qing dynasty. The 1911 revolution in China consisted of many revolts and uprisings. The revolution ended with the abdication of the six-year-old ‘Last Emperor’, Puyi 溥儀 (1906-1967), on February 12, 1912, which marked the end of two thousand years of imperial rule and the beginning of China’s Republican Era. However, we do not know what the exact date on this photograph is, but pose these questions as a starting point of my inquiry.

![Figure 2-2: ‘The Opening of the Great Exhibition’, by Henry Selous, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1851, Ref. 329-1889.](image)

From the 1850s to the 1920s, Britain increased the intensity of interaction with China, including trade and exchange in goods and people. In particular, in 1851
the Great Exhibition in London brought a great number of visitors to Britain, including Chinese visitors and performers. During the exhibition, the image of the Orient was almost entirely constructed and projected by Britain. The design of the small section that displayed random Chinese goods, despite being a British-made China, was a great success, attracting many visitors. The British public began to pay attention to the Chinese people, for example, in a painting entitled ‘The Opening of the Great Exhibition’, created by Henry Selous in 1851. (Figure 2-2) It shows a Chinese man wearing traditional dress, who had been invited to participate in the opening procession of the Great Exhibition, because the exhibition organiser thought he was the Chinese emperor himself. However, he turned out to be a man named He-Sing, the guard of a Chinese junk moored in the Thames. This mistaken identity is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the man wore the kind of ethnic dress that came to represent and signify Chinese people’s identity in British eyes. Secondly, the mistaken identity confirms that, at the time, the dress became a symbol of the country and cultural identity of Chinese visitors to Britain, and some became very

11 More detail is given in Chapter 3 ‘Fantasy and Fear: The Chinese Man as A Prototype of China’s National Image in Britain’.
12 Ironically, until 2010, China paid little attention to the world expo. Very few articles discussed it and the history of the world expo was not mentioned in art or design education courses throughout the 150-year period since the Great Exhibition held in London in 1851. Nevertheless, this paradoxical phenomenon of China and the Chinese people having been absent in the past from both world exhibitions and research materials on the topic of the early world expos, has, ironically, not stopped the ‘Chinese in the 1851 Great Exhibition’ being put on the table as an important subject in the Chinese government’s promotion of the 2010 World Fair in Shanghai. However, there is very little Chinese text to record who went to the 1851 Great Exhibition in Chinese documents. In 2002, following the announcement that Shanghai would host the 2010 World Fair, a Chinese man, 徐希曾 (Xu, Xi-Ceng) produced evidence that his great-grandfather 徐荣村 (Xu, Rong-Cun) joined the first world fair in London in 1851. Later research confirmed this lost history. Xu was the first Chinese merchant to have a presence at a world expo. He owned his own silk business called Rong Kee Silks Rong-Kee Hu Si 荣记湖丝 Rong-Kee Hu Si, and was the supplier to a British company called Dent. He first heard about the world expo from Dent and sensed a huge business opportunity that could not be missed, entrusting Astell and Co. with 12 boxes of silk to England. This recent announcement regarding a contemporary Chinese person’s great-grandfather, implies not only that a Chinese merchant could be traced back to the Great Exhibition of 1851, in which he participated through his business, but also that China is becoming interested in earlier world exhibitions.
popular because of their attire (Figure 2-2). As Linda Arthur, in *Religion, Dress and the Body*, suggests, ‘the term “dress” is used in the most global sense to refer to all of the ways the body is used in the expression of identity’.13 Thus, the Chinese man with his Chinese dress became a relevant tool for detecting cultural connections and embodied behaviour, particularly in the case of the Chinese visitors to the 1851 Great Exhibition in London.14

Except for the display itself, which consisted of Chinese objects and several Chinese people in traditional dress, the Chinese were present at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. According to the *Exhibition Supplement to the Illustrated London News*, 10 May 1851, there was not only a ‘China’ exhibition, but also a sideshow provided by a ‘Chinese family’. It reports this as follows:

The Chinese Family. A pleasing addition has been made to the Chinese Collection, consisting of a Chinese lady, named Pwan-ye-Koo, with small lotus-feet only 2 1/2 inches in length, a Chinese professor of music, his two children (a boy and a girl), the femme de chambre of the lady, and an interpreter. The children are gay, lively, and intelligent, the lady herself agreeable and interesting, and the gentlemen civil and obliging. A Chinese concert forms part of the entertainment; the lady Pwan-ye-Koo singing a Chinese air or two, accompanied by the professor, who likewise treats the public with an exhibition of his vocal powers. The group is one that has much to

commend it: it is picturesque and peculiar, and presents an image in high relief of the native manners of a Chinese family. The conduct of the domestic blended the humble and the familiar in a significant manner: and there was an air of freedom, and a sense of mutual obligation manifested in the whole party, calculated to make a favourable impression on the spectator.\textsuperscript{15} (see Figures 2-3 and 2-4).

Accompanying these descriptions were two illustrations of the performers. Their arrival not only gained the attention and interest of the British public, they were even invited by Queen Victoria to perform at the Swiss Cottage. The Swiss Cottage was designed as a private home for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, and played an important role in the upbringing of their nine children. It was a miniature world set apart for the entertainment and informal education of the royal children.\textsuperscript{16} As Queen Victoria wrote in her diary on 18 August 1851:

\textit{At 12 we went down into the Drawing Room with all the children, ladies and gentlemen to see a Chinese family who have just arrived, coming on purpose to see the Exhibition… I annex a little sketch to give a faint idea of them… the man on seeing me performed the usual overt singular salutations.}\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15} The Exhibition Supplement to the Illustrated London News (10 May 1851), no. 484, vol. XVIII.
This suggests that the ‘Chinese family’ at the Great Exhibition were a real
group, highly popular with the British, from the royal family to the public. Their
performances were highly appreciated, and the way they presented themselves, with
their traditional dress, was a matter of great interest. Returning to the photograph, the
‘Chinese family’ may well be perceived to be the same group as the ‘Chinese family’
in the 1851 Great Exhibition (see Figures 2-3 and 2-4).

Figure 2-3: The Chinese family, in the exhibition at Albert Gate, 1851, The
XVIII.
A dress is considered an important aspect of non-verbal communication.¹⁸ Looking closely at Figures 2-3 and 2-4, we see the Chinese family group with a different type of dress code. In Figure 2-3, they wear the costume of the dragon robes, and in Figure 2-4 they wear the informal ‘ordinary’ dress. Chinese dress represented political and cultural identity. An important encyclopaedic work called the Huangchao liqi tushi 皇朝禮器圖式 (Illustrated Regulations for the Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court) was printed in 1766 by the imperial printer. It recorded dress in a section called ‘Hats and Dress’ (Guanfu 冠服), with the first clothing being that of the Emperor, then the Empress, the Princes and the Imperial family, followed by the clothes of scholar-officials and their wives and families. The

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clothes are divided in winter and summer styles, but the most important division is represented by the social function of dress. The formal dress worn at court and major political events is called the ‘audience’ (chaofu 朝服), followed by semi-formal dress called the ‘festive’ (jifu 吉服), including dragon robes, then the informal or ‘ordinary’ attire (changfu 常服).\(^{19}\)

Figure 2-5: Imperial dragon robe, silk tapestry weave (kesi), China, Qing dynasty, Silk tapestry (kesi), 1780-1850. Museum number, T.199-1948. From the collection of Bernard Vuilleumier, V&A.

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\(^{19}\) *Huangchao liqi tushi 皇朝禮器圖式* (Illustrated Regulations for the Ceremonial Paraphernalia of the Imperial Court), online in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, [https://gallica.bnf.fr](https://gallica.bnf.fr), (Pekin: Imprimerie imperial, 1766). For the printed copy, see *Huangchao liqi tushi 皇朝禮器圖式* in *Siku quanshu zhenben chuju* 四庫全書珍本初集 vol. 122, Issue 29, (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuquan 商務印書館, 1978), see also Helena Heroldova, ‘The Dragon Robe as the Professional Dress of the Qing Dynasty Scholar-Official’ in *Annal of the Naprstek Museum*, vol. 37, no. 2, (2016), pp. 51-52.
Figure 2-6: Auguste Racinet (1825-1893), The Costume History, part II, the 19th Century, ‘Beyond the Borders of Europe: Chinese Dragon Dress,’ August Racinet imitated Chinese export painting and images to illustrate Chinese costume. Le Costume Historique originally published in France between 1876-1888.
Figure 2-7: Auguste Racinet (1825-1893), *The Costume History*, part II, the 19th Century, ‘Beyond the Borders of Europe: Chinese Dress’, the bottom the left (man) and right (woman) in everyday gown.

Dragon robes were a common recognisable symbol of Chinese dress. In China, dragon robes were worn by scholar-officials at work or at specific official engagements and festivals. It was considered professional dress, and showed the different position of the scholar-officials in the ruling Manchu Qing social hierarchy. Although the dragon robes represented a social group and evoked strong associations within China, they came into the collections of many Western individuals and museums. They were either given as gifts to notable foreigners by the Qing dynasty.
authorities or sold to foreigners in China and later brought home as souvenirs (Figures 2-5, 2-6 and 2-7).

According to the Huangchao liqi tushi, the dress presented by the Chinese family in Figure 2-3 was most likely a costume design in the jifu style for performance or show. Particularly, the central child’s dress with the flats attached on the back is called a ‘by flag’ (kaoqi 靠旗), which was a popular design for actors playing martial roles in Chinese operas (Wusheng 武生), created to give a visual impression on stage. The individuals performed activities and had expectations communicated by others, while for the British, the dragon robes represented their identity and embodied associations with the Qing Empire.

In Qing society, people were required to wear the appropriate dress, according to the dress code, that represented their social role. In the case of the Chinese family, they might be actors and actresses, with their dragon robes a concrete and visible professional dress for performing to the British public at the exhibition. One function of the dragon robes worn by the Chinese family might be to strategically attract British visitors to the Great Exhibition. What this shows is that being Chinese was enacted through body and dress; their attire was intimately connected with Chinese material culture, and the Chinese family performed the notion of Chineseness as it had become established within British society. As Eicher Lina states, ‘articles of dress become selected, characterized, incorporated and transformed by a group that has had contact with others’, 20 hence the traditional dragon robes manipulate for touristic purposes and are used to construct ethnicity. 21

However, the act of dressing also had multiple meanings and told a different story in relation to its environment. As shown in Figure 2-4, for their audience with Queen Victoria they seem to be wearing Chinese ‘ordinary’ attire. The description in Queen Victoria’s diary shows that the invitation to Osborne was most likely a family event, friendly and private. Thus, the dress code of the family meeting Queen Victoria changed its meaning. The dress no longer merely represented their country of origin; instead the ‘ordinary dress’ style was adopted to adjust to the environment, with the aim, at this informal family event, of signifying membership of a family group. The Chinese family’s ‘ordinary dress’ matches the domestic atmosphere of the environment; at the same time, the Chinese family’s ordinary dress has been chosen to differentiate the family from the others represented in the image, and to make the family’s appearance match British expectations of their Chineseness.

2.3 Chinese Body as Object at the 1851 World Exhibition

Britain inaugurated the 1851 Great Exhibition as a means to promote industrial manufacturing. One of the successful outcomes of the Great Exhibition of 1851 was that it attracted about six million visitors (equivalent to a third of the entire population of Britain). China was one of the national sections that occupied the south galleries of the Crystal Palace, where the British colonies were confined. Among the important commentators, Charles Dickens wrote in 1851 in his own weekly publication, Household World, a text entitled ‘The Great Exhibition and the little

22 There is different attire discussed in the section ‘Chinese Writer Wang Tao’s British Experiences ca. 1860’, in particular, the standard garment for non-labouring men.
one’, comparing the England and China exhibitions, based on his own visit to the Great Exhibition (see Figures 2-8 and 2-9):

As it is impossible in any allowable space to “go through” the whole Exhibition, or touch upon a tithe of its Catalogue, let us suggest as curious subjects of comparison, those two countries which display (on the whole) the greatest degree of progress, and the least—say England and China. England, maintaining commercial intercourse with the whole world; China, shutting itself up, as far as possible, within itself. The true Tory spirit would have made a China of England, if it could. Behold its results in the curious little Exhibition now established close beside the great one. It is very curious to have the Exhibition of a people who came to a dead stop, heaven knows how many hundred years ago, side by side with the Exhibition of the moving world.25 (see Figure 2-10)

Dickens’s commentary indicates that Britain was demonstrating its progressive industrial power over China, while also incorporating China itself as an exhibit, or rather a commercial practice. China, in this vision, became part of England in the form of the exhibit. The process of understanding China took place only in relation to the British imaginary commercial perception.

‘China’ was an exotic fantasy, while Britain’s superior spheres of power were seen in its commercial practices and practical functions. Through Dickens’ eyes, England represented the great achievements of innovative industrial machines, while

the setting apart of a little section devoted to Chinese commodities not only implied that China was only of commercial interest to Britain, but also provided a vision of China’s cultural stoppage, or its backward movement in comparison to the progress of the ‘moving world’. Nevertheless, the intention to show ‘good will and peace’, and the ‘international’ ambition of the exhibition’s official planners becomes a surprising ‘moral manner’, penetrated by British critics’ eyes.

Figure 2-8: ‘View of the Tunis and China Court at the Great Exhibition’ depicting the ‘Putuo Five’ from Dickinson’s Comprehensive Picture of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Chromolithograph. Department of Print and Drawings, Tunis no. 3. PLXXXI, U. 10. B. Copyright: V&A images, Victorian and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 2-9: ‘The China Court at the Great Exhibition’ by John Absolon (1815-95), Copyright: V&A images, Victorian and Albert Museum, London.

Apart from the Chinese visitor and Chinese family appearing at the exhibition, there were imaginary Chinese features created by the British press. The portrayal of the Chinese people at the 1851 Great Exhibition in much of the British press was nationalist, xenophobic, and not at all international. An example can be found in Henry Southerland Edwards’ *An Authentic Account of The Chinese Commission, which was Sent to Report on the Great Exhibition; Where the Opinion*
of China is Shown as Not Corresponding at all with Our Own. Figure 2-11 shows a Chinese man buying a hot pie but looking at a dog, the author commenting in the caption, ‘and I found they ate dogs, when I ventured to try a thing which they sold as a mere mutton pie’. Another one famous fictional Chinese image from this period is ‘the first Chinese Ambassador to Britain’. In fact, the first Chinese Ambassador to Britain, Guo Sontau, arrived in Britain only in 1876, when China and Britain signed the Chefoo Convention at Yantai (yantai tiaoyue 煙台條約, 1876), which stipulated that the Qing government had to send a diplomat to London, and Guo was appointed to the Court of St. James. However, as early as December 1842, the Illustrated London News depicted someone they referred to as ‘the Chinese ambassador’ to London, in a comic image with Chinese features, including a queue and long robe. This poem accompanies the image:

Oh, how they’ll invite him and fête him about!

He’ll be of the next season the lion no doubt.

He’ll shine at their routes; of each fancy bazaar,

The envoy celestial must be the star.

‘T is said that already the publishers look

To the chance of the Chinaman writing a book;

And a bibliopole, who in spirit ne’er fails,

Has opened a treaty for some of his tails.

27 Henry Sutherland Edwards, An Authentic Account of The Chinese Commission, which was Sent to Report on the Great Exhibition; Where the Opinion of China is Shown as Not Corresponding at all with Our Own, (London, 1851).
His portrait they’ll draw with astonishing zeal

On brass and on copper, as well as on steel;

His features they’ll put upon wood and on stone,

Till he fancies (poor fellow) his head’s not his own.

They’ll take him to arsenals, show him reviews,

And cause him to shake, if there’s room, in his shoes.

To Woolwich by railroad they’ll probably run him,

And, when he gets there, with artillery stun him.

Thro’ the Tunnel they will drag him, and fill him with wonder

When he can’t understand how the Thames he stands under.

And when he returns to his country again,

How much to his Emperor will him explain.

He’ll say the tea in Great Britain to grow,

At least on the hedges, is wond’rously slow.

That the English are such a barbarian race,

Their method of eating is quite a disgrace;

For instead of the chopsticks, they take not a meal,

Without having recourse to sharp weapons of steel.

The envoy, of course, will correctly note down

What he sees, or is told, in the country or town;
And when he has filled his recorder diurnal,

Get Murray or Longman to publish his journal.28

The poem was attributed to several known comic writers at the time, and published in 1842. Since the first Chinese ambassador to Britain was not appointed until 1876, this ‘Chinese ambassador’ was just created by the comic painters and writers. Such fantasy and imaginary comics became popular entertainment for the British public. For example, in Figure 2-12, looking closely at the press page edition, it is surprising to find that the Chinese ambassador’s comic image is placed next to a prominent British politician (The Marquis of Westminster), and the image shows realistic touches of the character, dressed as a proper ‘English gentleman’. Putting these two images together creates a strong contrast, not only of East and West or Chinese and British, but also a strongly implied ‘civilised’ and ‘brutal’.

The significance here is that the ideas of civilisation and barbarism are called upon to explain and justify the extension of power to the British Empire in China. Edward Said criticised Britain’s ‘cultural imperialism’ in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, and these portrayals were undoubtedly early examples of ideas based on nationalism and racist scorn for other people. The Chinese people were depicted as having an uncivilised manner and thus they were treated with contempt. A notorious case is the use of the word ‘pigtail’ in the English-speaking world to describe the Chinese man’s queue. It created a sense of ‘humiliation’ that threatened to

undermine Chinese traditions and social practices.\textsuperscript{29} The images of the Chinese illustrated in the Victorian era mediated the British perception of China and the Chinese.\textsuperscript{30} The Chinese were represented as savages, complete with animal-like features and pigtails (see Figure 2-11 and 2-12).

Figure 2-12: The ‘Chinese ambassador in London’ December 1842, the Illustrated London News, National Art Library.

\textsuperscript{29} ‘Small-box among Chinese Immigrants at San Francisco Know-Nothingism’, New Yourk Times, 28 May 1873.
Britain, it would seem, had ambiguous feelings towards Chinese people and objects. Although the Chinese were viewed with mistrust, Chinese objects were treated as treasures at the exhibition. For example, Chinese porcelain was already appreciated as a luxury commodity by the British. Paradoxically, the xenophobic images and attitudes of admiration for Chinese goods co-existed at the Great Exhibition. Catherine Pagani, in her article ‘Chinese Material Culture and British Perceptions of China in the Mid-nineteenth Century’, described the exhibition of the Dunn Chinese Collection in 1842, held in London. ‘China itself became a commodity through its goods’. Since the sixteenth century, China’s trade with Britain had made it possible for Chinese luxury objects to become goods for everyday use by the British upper classes. The British perception of China in the 1851 Great Exhibition reflected the limited understanding and knowledge that Britain had of China.

Chinese objects and their material culture context had become a medium for the British through which they could imagine the whole Chinese world. The stereotype ‘Chinese style’ had been reproduced in a long process of export trade, from the original Chinese objects to the imitation ‘Chinese style’ products of the West. In the nineteenth century, Chinese export products had become copies of the West’s interpretation of the original Chinese designs. The Chinese manufacturers were producing their own version of the British vision of ‘China’ so as to ensure the saleability of their goods in Western markets. Thus, Chinese export objects not only played an important role in reinforcing British perceptions of China, they also

facilitated a process of reconciliation between diverse beliefs and practices as Britain and China traded with each other.\textsuperscript{32}

In one of Shakespeare’s plays, \textit{Measure for Measure}, the playwright uses the term ‘China’ to refer to Chinese porcelain, rather than to the nation.\textsuperscript{33} And in John Gay’s (1685-1732) poem, ‘To a Lady on Her Passion for Old China’, he describes a lady’s desire for Chinese porcelain:

‘What ecstasies her bosom fire!
How her eyes languish with desire!
How blest, how happy should I be,
Were that fond glance bestow’d on me!
New doubts and fears within me war:
What rival’s near? a \textit{China} jar.

\textit{China}’s the passion of her soul;
A cup, a plate, a dish, a bowl,
Can kindle wishes in her breast,
Inflame with joy, or break her rest...’\textsuperscript{34}

Since ‘China’ in English refers to Chinese porcelain, the material obsession in John Gay’s depiction of Chinese export commodities is not surprising. Chinese

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\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, pp. 32-33.

\textsuperscript{33} William Shakespeare, \textit{Measure for Measure}, Act II, Scene I, A hall in Angelo’s house, Pompey: ‘...in a fruit-dish, a dish of some three-pence; your honours have seen such dishes; they are not China dishes, but very good dishes,’ (1623), available online at http://shakespeare.mit.edu/measure/full.html [accessed 5 October 2016].

porcelain had been traded with England. It had become an exotic, fashionable element of interior design and the decorative arts, popular among the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie throughout the period. By the mid-seventeenth century, Chinese exported artefacts offered a vision of the far-off dreamland of the East. Through export objects, the British envisioned a stereotyped version of China, which led to the production of a style known as ‘Chinoiserie’: a Western reproduction of China for Western consumption in the eighteenth century. Chinoiserie’s particular syntactical relationships bound the eighteenth-century British woman to Chinese objects in cultural social life, such as the tea set. Chinoiserie production integrated material objects into the life of female subjects, and is associated with the most female personal ornaments and interior decoration.  

Figure 2-13: A giant teapot that holds 60.75 litres (13½ gallons) of liquid, shown in the 1851 Great Exhibition, Norwich Castle Museum.
Figure 2-14: Details of these images are adapted from drawings by British artist Thomas Allom from his book China Illustrated, published in 1847, Norwich Castle Museum.

Figure 2-15: ‘The culture and preparation of tea’, original by Thomas Allom, engraving by Arthur Willmore, image 12.6x 19.3 cm, (London; Paris: fisher, Son & Co., ca. 1840), Wellcome Collection, London.
Figure 2-13 shows an object that claims to be the ‘largest teapot in the world’, which was made for the Great Exhibition at Hyde Park in 1851 in the Crystal Palace, and now displayed at Norwich Castle Museum. According to the museum, this giant teapot holds 60.75 litres (13½ gallons) of liquid and is the largest working teapot in the world. The hand-painted scenes with which the teapot is decorated depict the growing, picking, fermenting and shipping of tea from China. The story that circulates about this giant teapot is that during the Great Exhibition tea was poured from it for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. The Cincinnati Enquirer reported, in an article entitled ‘This is no little teapot, short and stout’ in 2000, that the giant teapot from the Norwich Castle Museum was the largest in 1851, but in 1893 it was outdone by Alfred Meakin Co., who made one for Dean and Kite Wholesale China Company, for display in their store in Walnut and Pearl street in Cincinnati. According to the curator David Conzett there was probably more than one giant teapot made at the time, but the others may not have survived. It was once featured in Ripley’s Believe it or Not newspaper column, which said it could serve 2,000 cups, but in 1960 the president of the Dean and Kite Wholesale China Company wrote, ‘we suspected this to be an exaggeration and determined it to be in the neighbourhood of 728 cups’. At any rate, this teapot can be seen as a representation of the British-made Chinoiserie objects and is a reproduction of ‘Chineseness’ for British consumption.

The teapot was adapted from drawings by British artist Thomas Allom (1804-1871), who had never been to China. He painted it entirely on the basis of his own

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36 Owen Findsen, ‘This is no little teapot, short and stout’, Cincinnati Enquirer (6 February 2000).
38 The images were adapted from engravings by British artist Thomas Allom from his book China Illustrated, printed in four volumes in London, published between 1843 and 1847.
imagination, aided by Chinoiserie visual resources (see Figure 2-14 and Figure 2-15). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ‘Chinese style’ porcelain became a popular fashion in the home decoration of the British middle-class. It is characterised by the imitation of Chinese designs that recreate a Western image of ‘Chineseness’. The teapot represents a visual Chinoiserie metaphor, a generalised Chinese tea-making scene.

Figure 2-16: Anon, The Great Exhibition ‘Who is it To Be’ (London, 1850), National Art Library.

Similarly, the poem-comic book *The Great Exhibition ‘Who is it To Be’* published in 1850, shows different nations’ peoples attending the exhibition. The page entitled the ‘Art and Manufactures of China’ illustrates Chinese people with their queue and long robe, and Chinese objects, such as giant tea cups, that branch out from part of their body. Figure 2-16 shows a huge teapot as a part of a Chinese man’s head. This drawing shows the British public’s complex feelings about ‘Chineseness’. They appreciated Chinese art and commodities but, at the same time, the Chinese people’s appearance was treated with ridicule for their queue, long robe
and foot binding. The Chinese body as an ‘object’ described in the Victorian press and publications was treated as a monstrous creature rather than a human being, to be mocked.

Figure 2-17: Anon, The Great Exhibition ‘Who is To Be’ (London, 1850), National Art Library.

At any rate, the Chinese people were not the only people to be mocked in these poem-comics. Figure 2-17 shows the ‘Arts and Manufactures of Ireland’, in which the Irish people are depicted as savage, brutal and with the untaught behaviour of rural folk, in contrast to English urban sophistication. This suggests that the English at that time perceived their own type and class as privileged over other people.

Nevertheless, Chinese features were treated as objects for British entertainment and consumption; Chinese masculinity was considered ‘different’ and therefore became one of the foci for ridicule for the British public. The Chinese man’s queue and long robe called into question their gender, and Chinese men were
often confused with women. Thus, in British perception, Chinese dress culture constituted not only part of the Chinese national image but embodied a contradictory identity: on the one hand, the attire points to their Chinese identity – where they are from and where they belong - but on the other hand, this neutral or androgynous dress confused the British who did not know how to classify the Chinese man’s gender identity.

2.4 Chinese Writer Wang Tao’s British Experiences ca. 1860

Figure 2-18: Three Presbyterian Pastors from Amoy (Xiamen), ca. 1895, Ref: PCE/FMC South Fujian Photographs, box 3, file 8, SOAS Library, SOAS University of London (School of Oriental and African Studies), London.
The early British view, prejudiced against the Chinese traditional dress, had a strong impact on Chinese self-image. The gaze of the West on the Chinese appearance created a strong cultural conflict in the Chinese world. The Qing dynasty was ruled by Manchus, a semi-nomadic peoples from the North. Much of what we know today as Chinese material culture developed during this period, including material culture related to Manchu dress, such as the changpao and hair styled in a queue (bianzi 辫子). Figure 2-18 shows three Presbyterian pastors from Amoy (Xiamen), ca. 1895,

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39 The Manchu’s queue order sparked widespread resistance across China when the ethnically-Manchu, after conquering China in 1644, demanded that Han Chinese men adopted the queue. Only gradually did this practice become part of their own identity.
wearing long gowns, *changpao* with sleeveless vests (*majia* 马甲), the standard dress for non-labouring men. Their gowns are large and loose with tied trousers (*ku* 裤) which is clothing intended for walking: comfortable and loose-fitting, allowing the wearer to move. The design of the hat is not an original Manchu style but was very popular at the time; as a skullcap just covers the head and the queue, a long braid of hair normally falls on the back. All these dress characteristics were designed for the wearer to easily move around in everyday life.\(^{40}\) This image Figure 2-18 illustrates the ordinary style that Han (Chinese) people wore in everyday life at the time.

Looking closely at the details, the Chinese ‘queue’ hairstyle has two parts: the front of the head, which was shaved, and the back of the head, which featured a long braid (Figure 2-19).\(^{41}\) From a cultural and historical perspective, this hairstyle maintains both the Manchu and Han Chinese traditions. Shaving the front of the head was first required by Manchu rules, and braiding a queue, although a style of the Manchus, was the Han Chinese tradition as well. The Han Chinese Ming style was for men’s hair to be left long and tied in a knot on top of the head. In the *Classic of Filial Piety* (*xiaojing* 孝經) Confucius notes, ‘we are given our body, skin and hair

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\(^{41}\) When the Manchus conquered China, establishing the Qing dynasty in 1644, they did not impose all their cultural practices on the Han Chinese. But one important cultural icon, the male hairstyle ‘queue’ was imposed upon the majority Han population, as a sign of their submission to the new Manchu rulers. This new style included a male hairstyle featuring a high shaved forehead (*tifa* 薙发) and a long braided queue (*bianzi* 辫子). For the Manchu, this hairstyle was part of their nomadic culture; shaving the forehead and sides was useful in the wind when horse riding. At the beginning of the Qing dynasty, the command to shave the hair only applied to former Ming officials and soldiers, not to the civilian population. In 1645, Dorgon 多爾袞 (1612-1650), regent to the Shunzhi 順治 emperor (1638-1661), ordered that all Chinese, military and civilians alike, shave their foreheads and plait their hair in a queue like the Manchus. From the Manchu perspective, the command not only brought about the physical resemblance of rulers and subjects, it also provided a perfect test of loyalty. By the end of the Qing dynasty, the queue had become part of ‘Chinese look’, but it was still seen as a symbol of Manchu identity. ‘Cutting the queue’ therefore had become a new political trend, which went against Qing authority.
from our parents; which we ought not to damage. This idea is the quintessential of filial duty’. 42

However, the Westerners’ impression of Chinese clothing was simple and monotone. British traveller and writer Alicia Little characterised China as ‘the land of the blue gown’, using men’s clothing to represent the image of China. 43 These images of the Chinese were stereotyped by the West, with the Chinese body as object, and their clothes and hairstyles expressing great homogeneity and visibility. But when Chinese individuals came to Britain, their traditional dress caused the Chinese psychological self-humiliation, because their social class was misread in Western countries and brought hardships to Chinese immigrants. 44 This led the elite Chinese in Europe to cut their hair and change their traditional clothes because of the negative class associations.

In 1867, the Chinese travel writer Wang Tao 王韬, the first Chinese person to visit the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London, wrote the famous Jottings of Carefree Travels 漫遊隨録 (Manyou suilu), which informed Chinese and Japanese intellectuals about Western experiences and lifestyles. Between 1867 and 1869, Wang Tao lived in England and did translation work. During these two years

42 For instance, The Classic of Filial Piety (Xiaojing 孝經) in its opening chapter contains the lines, ‘our torso, limbs, hair, and skin we receive from our fathers and mothers; we must not destroy or damage them. That is the beginning of filial piety.’ 身體髮膚,受之父母,不敢毀傷,孝之始也。
44 Shih-ying Chang 張世瑛,’清末民初的剪辮風潮及其所反映的社會心態’ ‘Qingmo min chu de jian bianfengchao ji qi suo fanying de shehui xintai’ (The Pigtail-Cutting Turmoil and the Related Social Attitudes in Early Twentieth-century China, 國史館館刊, vol. 22 (Taipei, 2009), pp. 14-15. In Shih-ying Chang’s study ‘The Pigtail-Cutting Turmoil and the Related Social Attitudes in Early Twentieth-century China’, 2009, Chang addressed this situation: ‘During the second half of the nineteenth century, Chinese diplomats and overseas students confronted the conflict of [ideas about] dress between China and the West. Early Chinese diplomats and overseas students, labourers and merchants were often laughed at for their appearance in foreign countries. Many students cut their braids before going abroad…’ 在十九世紀下半葉期間，涉外人員與留學生是少數會面臨到中西服制衝突的當事者。早期的中國使臣、留學生、出國華工及商民常在外國受到嘲笑，許多學生在出國前即剪去辮子。’
he wrote about his encounters in everyday life. One of his personal experiences was that his ‘Chinese look’, hairstyle, queue and dressing robe brought him derision. He was often thought to be a Chinese woman, and people laughed at his appearance. He wrote:

Western intellectuals wear short blouses with tied sleeves. It is only me here, who is walking in town with a long loose skirt and large belt. The children here have never seen a Chinese, they often point me out saying, ‘are you a Chinese lady?’ or assuming me to be the wife of that Chinese giant Chang Woo Gow. I am a strong male who is rather masculine, encountering strangers who mistake me for a female. But this misleading way to turn my gender on me is a deliberate insult.

How can they tell who am I when I dress like this? It is confusing to be unable to distinguish between male and female. As I throw myself into this foreign land, it may be well implied that my real identity is invisible, as the way I dress is in-between genders. These children’s inappropriate words may be well turn out to be a prophecy.45

This description shows not only that Chinese traditional clothes confounded British ideas of gender and appropriate dress, but it also suggests that Wang Tao’s Chinese image was interpreted by a frivolous reading, through Western eyes. The fact is that in this transcultural context, the host people seem to have inevitable power to speak about out ‘who he is’ by what ‘they think’. This judgement of his

45 Wang Tao 王韜, Selections from Jottings of Carefree Travels 漫遊隨錄 (Manyousuilu), 1890, (Yue lu Shu She 岳麓书社: 1985), p. 131. ‘西國儒者率短襦窄袖，余獨以博帶寬袍行於市。北境童稚未睹華人者，輒指目之曰：戴尼禮地也? 或曰：否，詹五威孚耳。余本一雄奇男子，今遇不識者，竟欲雌之矣。奈此鬚眉，蒙以巾幗，誰實辨之? 迷離撲朔，擲身凔波，托足異國，不為雄飛，甘為雌伏，聽此童言，詎非終身之讖語哉。’
outward look refers not merely to his cultural identity but also to his personal bodily image, based on his hairstyle and what he wore. Personal body image has important psychological effects on both the individual and the group. His response explains that he had to deflect criticism that came his way with a self-deprecating sensibility.

Similarly, travel writer Hinton Helper wrote in his novel *The Land of Gold: Reality Versus Fiction* in 1855, that Chinese men allow their queues to ‘trail about [their] back and legs, as young girls sometimes do ribbons’.⁴６ Such descriptions echo the situation Wang Tao met, and suggest that Chinese men were often feminised by their queue and robe. Their masculine aesthetic was not visible to Western eyes. These Western ‘intrusions’ were imposed on Chinese body culture. However, they had an impact on the Chinese self-gaze, and their awareness of their body and embodiment, because, ‘only there do we exist for one another’.⁴⁷ The other’s gaze not only reveals others’ truth but may also bring a new self-gaze to light.

Wang Tao 王韬 was the first Chinese person to write about the World Expo after visiting Paris in 1867. He went to the Paris World Expo on his own initiative and curiosity, after seeing the 1851 Great Exhibition in the Crystal palace. In *Jottings of Carefree Travels*, he depicted the things he saw, and this stands as the first Chinese record of the World Expo. In this book he interpreted the World Expo as ‘a dazzling strange show’ (*xuan ji hui 炫奇會*) and a competition of treasures and products. He was impressed by the show, and by the World Expo as a commercial activity. He commended the Chinese merchants who had learned from their previous trade experience what it was that the West wanted. Wang was a literatus: he was an

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early publisher of newspapers in China and engaged himself in translations with the purpose of two-way cultural exchange, endeavouring to promote a Western style of education.

In feudal China, there were four social classes: the literati (shi 士), or government officials, farmers (nong 農), artisans (gong 工), and merchants (shang 商). The merchants were considered to have the lowest occupation in society. There are two reasons why these occupations came to be graded in this way: the system of Imperial Examination and the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius, which were rooted in imperial China. For the Chinese, the highest aim was the pursuit of knowledge and success in the Imperial Examinations in order to become a government official. This thinking had deepened in China since the Song dynasty: ‘the pursuit of knowledge is superior to all other walks of life.’ (wanban jie xiapin, wei you dushu gao 萬般皆下品，唯有讀書高).48 That is to say, once one succeeds in the examination, one can be seen as a member of the intellectual class, that is, not only seen as a government official, but also as intelligent, a member of the cultural elite, a writer and a painter. One reason Chinese merchants would have business with the West was to make money, of course. But the idea of personal enrichment was treated with suspicion in the doctrines of Confucius and Mencius. The main instruction of this philosophy is to believe in ‘justice and humanity’ (renyi 仁義), which is the basis for structuring a moral society, and a reflection of the inner attitude of human beings. For instance, human desire is considered the darkness of the human inner attitude. One can fulfil one’s basic life needs without having desire.

48 The Northern Song Dynasty poet Wang Zhu 汪洙 wrote, wanban jie xiapin, wei you dushu gao 萬般皆下品，唯有讀書高.
Farmers (not including Chinese coolies) for example, work for life, which is perceived as a human need, and so is encouraged. By contrast, making money is seen as a desire, and even worse, a desire that involves the thought of how to make money, which is unacceptable in the strict criteria of this philosophy. Nevertheless, it is important to take note of the Chinese merchants’ social status, because it raises the crucial question of who was representing China in the West. It shows that commercial activities and artisans’ works were not considered cultural or official tasks at the level of the state. This understanding of the Chinese people’s self-perspective in material culture might suggest why commercial exchange, or the work of the artisans, were not promoted or taken to be important things by the Qing government of China. It also sheds light on the different viewpoints of commercial value and merchants’ differing positions in society in Britain and China.

Chinese coolies were the keystone image of the ‘Chinese’ and played a crucial role in mid-nineteenth century Western society. Chinese coolies worked for lower wages than white men. Colleen Lye in his book *America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945*, states that the coolie represented the ‘increasing transnationalisation of the labour market’ and was ‘a biological impossibility and a numerical abstraction, whose social domination’ threatened the

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49 This point is probably another reason that Macartney and the British at the time never fully understood why China resisted their ‘enlightened’ approach, searching for free trade and formal diplomatic connections with China. See also Antonio Cua, *Encyclopaedia of Chinese Philosophy*, (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 93-94.

‘robust American body’.\textsuperscript{51} The role of the Chinese coolie threatened the global labour market. These were ordinary Chinese people sent to America and Britain as cheap workers. Their numbers were huge, and they were the ones who were discriminated against because of their appearance with their robe and queue. Their skinny bodies were often associated with opium smokers.

However, they insisted on maintaining their traditional dress, which represented their Chinese cultural identity, especially for ordinary people such as coolies. They found it difficult to separate their dress from their identity. An article in the \textit{American Missionary} published in 1878 depicted the situation of a young Chinese man who, as a coolie, insisted on keeping his dress and queue as part of his ethnic and cultural identity, even after his conversion to Christianity:

Not long ago a young man became a Christian, and his friends… wrote a false report to his parents in China, telling them that their son in California not only had forsaken his old religion and the worshipping of his ancestors, but also had cut off his long queue and dressed in foreigners’ clothes. When they received this news, they wept and made many inquiries… When the young man heard of this, he wrote home to them, telling them it was true that he had become a Christian, but it was not true that he had cut his queue and wore the foreigners’ clothing, and said that he was a Chinaman still.\textsuperscript{52}

This suggests that the ordinary Chinese people had a strong identity linked to their traditional Chinese dress. In Han Chinese culture, people did not tend to cut

\textsuperscript{51} Colleen Lye, \textit{America’s Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945} (Princeton, N.J., 2005), p. 57.

\textsuperscript{52} Fung Affoo, \textit{American Missionary}, vol. 32, no.3 (March 1878), pp. 81-83.
their hair, and this was why many Han Chinese refused to follow the Manchus in shaving their foreheads. But the oversea elite Chinese found it difficult to identify themselves to be in the same position as a coolie.

In 1904 at the St. Louise Exhibition, there was a display titled, the pavilion of Chinese humans. The display showed a set of Chinese clay dolls with different characters and occupations, illustrating some Chinese appearances and customs, such as foot biding on women, clothes, opium smokers, and all occupations. However, the lower classes, such as street workers, labourers, beggars, prisoners and solders were the most interesting features to Westerners. Zhang Ji Yia 張繼業, one of the overseas elite Chinese, in a report called Observation of the Chinese at the St. Louise Exhibition, published in 1905, showed his anger at these Chinese sculptures’ small features. He saw the traditional Chinese dress and features as a national humiliation. This suggests that those of higher class, had angry feelings about the way the Chinese were represented and stereotyped as old, changeless, traditional or even lower class – and so often, it is anger that precedes change. If we connect to the treatment Wang Tao received, these early overseas elite Chinese visitors were often laughed at because of their dress in foreign countries. As the ‘dress’ is indeed the general medium for demonstrating to the world who one is and the group and social state one belongs to. Dress denotes position in the social hierarchy in China, and the overseas elite Chinese were likely to distinguish themselves from the ‘coolie’ or lower class.

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53 Zhang Ji Yia 張繼業, ‘Observation of the Chinese at the St. Louise Exhibition’ 記聖路易斯博覽會中國入賽情形，美洲學報：實業界，第一期，the Journal of America, vol. 1, 23th of February, 1905, ’凡有血氣之人聞之，當如何奮發，及時改良，以湔洗無窮之奇恥。’
In July 1907, Zaifeng, Prince Chun during the time he served as the Prince Regent of the Qing Dynasty, was concerned with the subject of ‘changing dress and cutting the queue’ (yi fu jian bian 易服剪辮), but did not make any changes. The Chinese ambassador in the Netherlands, Lu Zhengxiang 陸徵祥 sent an emergency request to ask the court’s permission to allow overseas Chinese literati and merchants to yi fu jian bian in 1909. Prince Chun wrote the word ‘viewed’ on it without any further steps taken.\textsuperscript{54} The view of Westerners of Chinese bodies and dress had a significant impact on Chinese self-hood in the early Expos era. Furthermore, the Chinese dress visible in Britain, understood through the lens of Chinoiserie, was considered rather a fantasy, and of the imagination. The construct of Chinese identity during this period cannot be studied within a single national context but must be approached as a transnational subject.

2.5 Conclusion

Through these case studies of the Chinese family, Chinese dress, objects at the Great Exhibition and Chinese travellers in Britain and the West, this chapter has considered how British views of Chinese bodies and dress related to the Chinese cultural identity and constructed Chinoiserie during this period. Through an investigation of the relationships among people, social interactions, dress and the representation of China and the Chinese in the events of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, all of which served as sites for the performance of Chineseness, this chapter has shown

\textsuperscript{54}《軍機處全宗·隨手登記》，膠片第 169 號。Ref. no. 169 (Beijing, First Historic Archives of China 中国政府第一历史档案馆藏), July, 1909. See also, Fan Xueqing 樊曉慶, ‘Queue-Cutting and Dress Reform’ and the Frustration of the Late Qing Constitutionalist Movement, 1909-1910 ‘剪髮易服’與晚清立憲困局(1909-1910), 近代史研究所集刊, vol. 69 (Taipei, 2010/09), p. 70. ‘出使荷蘭大臣陸徵祥為荷蘭僑事曾上〈僑事危迫敬陳管見摺〉，附片奏請准許僑民一律剪棄發辮。載灃將其批交外務部知道，而對該片，僅批了一個「覽」字。’
how nineteenth-century traditional Chinese dress served as a form of non-verbal communication about what it was thought to mean to be Chinese. Chinese dress served construct ethnic identity, but that identity was not only constructed within China, but also within this hybrid, transnational context.

This chapter has sought to challenge the ways in which Chinese individuals documented their presence in Britain, and assigned meanings to the objects that displayed them and their identities within the Expos. The unnoticed Chinese family photograph represented one way in which the question of ‘how can I tell you who I am?’ could be posed. The image of the Chinese family represents the despair of losing or having lost words; their identity is obscured. Chinese traditional dress was often misunderstood by Westerners, and their social status underestimated. To Western beholders, there was no visible distinction between the outfits of the elite Chinese or coolies. The overseas elite Chinese seem to have been motivated to change their dress because of such negative social role associations. This chapter has explained that talk of ‘yi fu jian bian’ first came from the overseas Chinese community in the West. However, the issue of ‘yi fu jian bian’ is much more complex than merely a response to, or avoidance of, Western misreading of class associations through dress. It was affected by the cultural and political conflict between the West and China, as well as the conflict between modernity and tradition. But as this chapter has shown, these conflicts were not negotiated simply within a single national context; they need to be understood transnationally.

This British-made ‘China’ and the associated concept of Chineseness, as well as the knowledge about its production, were embodied in the British Chinoiserie, which remained in place thereafter as an image of an unchanging China. This
particular form of Chinese dress came to be seen as the stereotyped view of China by the British. As Craig Clunas mentions that, for example, the early twentieth-century British museum curator Laurence Binyon (1899-1943) viewed China as incapable of representing itself. Binyon thought that China could only be revealed to itself by Western experts; only Westerners could penetrate its essential and unchanging characteristics.\textsuperscript{55} This foreshadows Edward Said’s argument. His classic Orientalist study was carried out on the basis of a Western vision and interpreted the geographical landscape known as the Orient, rather than producing a narrative that explored the differences and connections between the West and the Orient in a critical way. Because of this Western vision of China, the narratives that shaped the Chinese practice of wearing the traditional dress were largely overlooked at the time. By the same token, although traditional Chinese dress codes were in the process of collapsing in China, Chinese bodies and traditional dress, once a symbol of the Manchu Qing China, continued to be visible in Britain. For a Chinese man, his appearance was most likely a neutral style, but one which had a great effect in the Chinese performance theatre in the West, and came to be connected to the British fantasy of China known as Chinoiserie theatre (\textit{huaju}).

Chapter 3 Fantasy and Fear: The Chinese Man as a Prototype of China’s National Image

3.1 Introduction

Chinese people first visited Britain in the seventeenth century. Few in number, they were either Christian missionaries or travellers such as merchants or performers. Later, in the nineteenth century, after the Napoleonic wars, a small group of Chinese sailors arrived in Britain to replace the British sailors who had been called into naval service. The British discovered that Chinese seamen were cheaper, better disciplined and easier to command than British sailors. British shipping companies, therefore, recruited Chinese seamen from Hong Kong, China and Southeast Asia. These seamen arrived in Britain as mobile labourers and waited in the dock areas of Liverpool and London for engagements. Over the 200 year span of the Chinese in Britain, there have been many kinds of Chinese migrants.

This chapter traces the visual and historical footprints of the image of the Chinese in Britain from ca.1850 to ca.1920, focusing on the change in the image of the Chinese male in Britain. It analyses the image of the Chinese and representations of China and explores how these representations were shaped by both the fantasy and fear of China present within British society. It first examines the various images of the early Chinese visitors to Britain before moving on to the role of the Chinese Emperor on the Western stage, exploring how Chinese identity was built of Chinese elements and dress codes as conceived by the West. The final section explores how performances of Chinese masculinity and the cultural identities of British Chinese in London Limehouse Chinatown acted as mediating agents in the discourse of Chinese modernity. This chapter uses visual sources, including paintings, newspapers, film
and photographs, to delineate changes in the imagery employed to depict Chinese visitors and male immigrants in Britain. These sources, especially photographs, situate and contextualise the historic residents of the Limehouse Chinese community.

During 1900, the Chinese in England were keen to adopt Western knowledge, values and dress. Some married English wives. On one hand, the Chinese tried to be a part of British society, but on the other, the British hosts seemed to not quite ready to accept them. The issues that arose involved labour conflicts between Chinese men and British workers as well as negative sentiments towards the Chinese men due to opium, drug abuse, and gambling. The main issue was sexual relationships formed between British women and Chinese men. Many immigrant men arrived in Britain unattached, and some settled with British women.¹ This was a source of great anxiety for Britons during a time of economic strain. Inter-racial marriages were neither understood nor officially recognized in larger society at the time. The press frequently reported that Chinese men manipulated British women with drugs.² For example, British novels propelled these negative stereotypes in stories such as Sax Rohmer’s Dr. Fu Manchu books, which have since inspired films and television series. Sax Rohmer was a former journalist who used his knowledge of Limehouse to write highly successful popular fiction about a depraved Chinese man whose evil empire’s headquarters were, improbably, based in Limehouse:

¹ It is important to note that the key theme in the film ‘Broken Blossoms’, written by the author Thomas Burke was the issue of inter-racial marriage in Britain.
Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present… Imagine that awful being and you have a mental picture of Dr Fu Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.³ (Figure 3-1 and 3-2)

Alleged scandals played a part in maintaining an image of the Chinese man as the ‘yellow devil’.⁴ Apart from fictional figures such as Dr. Fu Manchu, there are an alternative range of Chinese figures and cultural anxieties, both Chinese and British, that expand the possibilities of existing narratives way beyond Rohmer’s villains.

⁴ Ibid, p. 70.
Many studies explore the Fu Manchu phenomenon and the negative stereotype it propagates between China and the Western imagination, and many socio-cultural historical analyses have been produced in recent years to explain why London Limehouse Chinatown was so feared and obsessively recreated by novelists, journalists and film-makers. Lucy Bland points to ‘the legacy of the wartime liberalisation of gender roles and relationships, and the relatively large increase in numbers of resident men of colour’. Marek Kohn explains the moral panic over female drug use in the 1910s and 1920s:

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It did not especially perturb the British that the Chinese among them liked to gamble, or that they smoked opium. What they feared was the ability of the Chinese to attract white women; the dangers of the other vices were seen to lie mainly in their capacity to aid seduction across the racial divide. The principal theme of the British discourse upon Chinese communities in the first quarter of the twentieth century was the intrinsic evil of sexual contact between the races, and its issue.7

Modern scholarly analysis of the discourse problematising the concept of the ‘Yellow Peril’ suggests that it should be read in a specific historical context, as it stemmed from particular social problems such as drug use, particularly opium. Similarly, Christopher Frayling’s book, The Yellow Peril: Dr Fu Manchu & The Rise of Chinaphobia, published in 2014, describes Fu Manchu as the ‘Yellow Peril incarnate’, which embodied and helped to extend the reach of disturbing Western stereotypes of Chinese people, while reinforcing deeply rooted fears of China.8

What exactly was this fear about? One could produce a reading that links fear of societal issues to an urban space such as Limehouse. Rohmer readily admits that he drew on two kinds of pre-existing anti-Chinese sentiment in Britain: the anti-Christian Boxer uprising of 1900, triggered by sensational news coverage,9 and tabloid tales that featured London Limehouse Chinatown, which they depicted as a seedy place full of opium dens and criminal gangs. In my view, the fear of the Yellow Peril first came from the image of a threatening Chinese persona, embodied

8 Christopher Frayling, The Yellow Peril: Dr Fu Manchu & The Rise of Chinaphobia, pp. 9-10.
in his Chinese features and dress, which are very distinct factors. Tracing the Chinese play *huaju* on the British stage from ca. 1840 shows that Chinese roles including their traditional dress were very popular. Fu Manchu is associated with the Chinese dress code *changpao*, ‘a long loose-fitting robe, which covered the feet and had an overlapping front flap that fastened with loops and toggles at the right shoulder’. 10 This likely relates to an earlier image of the Chinese in Britain.

Rohmer used London Limehouse Chinatown and the Chinese in Britain as the backdrop for his story. But the traditional Chinese dress is not seen between 1900 and 1920 in the Limehouse Chinatown photograph collection in Tower Hamlets Local History Archives. Chinese men at this time were generally photographed wearing Western dress (Figure 3-2). These conflicting messages find relevance in an investigation of the imagery of the fictional character Fu Manchu, the film ‘Broken Blossom’ and the photographs from 1900 held in Tower Hamlets Local History Archives, all of which manipulate images of the British Chinese. What does this anomaly tell us? Such British perceptions of the Chinese lead us to ask: on what source or practice was this stereotypical Chinese look based? How did these puzzling, contradictory images coexist in British society at this time? How did the image of the Chinese in Britain change over time from Chinese subject plays to Chinese immigrants? How did these images and representations of Chinese people co-exist? How were images of Chinese residents distinguished in a British context, as opposed to other socio-historical contexts?

Theoretically, this chapter conceptualises cultural identity and dress as a changing process constructed through discourse and social practice. The analysis of British Chinese cultural identities starts from an examination of the situated identifications adopted by individuals within a specific time and place. This mixed-method study focuses on two themes related to the performance of Chinese masculinity in British society: the Chinese body as spectacle in the Early Victorian era, and the representations of men in London Limehouse Chinatown, which I will refer to as Chinese mimic men.

Firstly, I use the term ‘spectacle’ in the sense that the French theorist, Guy Debord defines it in his book, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Debord refers to
the ‘spectacular features’ found in an advanced capitalist society as the ‘fake reality’, created by mass media and advertising, to mask the ‘real’ capitalist degradation of human life. Secondly, postcolonial scholars have shown that colonialism produced a class of interpreters that were positioned between the coloniser and the colonised. This is a class of people who according to their birth and physical features belong to the colonised class, but in taste, opinion and dress belong to the coloniser. In colonial mimicry the colonised pretend to have become one with those who colonise them. For example, Homi Bhabha developed this concept, and he describes a mimetic representation that ‘emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge’. The idea of mimic men is applied to the Chinese in Britain in this chapter. British hosts would want to produce Chinese men who resembled them in their dress and tastes, but at the same time, they were conflicted as they wished to maintain their British Chinoiserie aesthetic. This chapter argues that such conflicts made the Chinese a spectacle, and anxiety about Chinese mimic men created an image of the Chinese that was based both in the fantasy and fear of British society.

3.2 The Spectacle of Early Painted Chinese Images

‘It is my anxious desire to promote among nations the cultivations of all those arts which are fostered by peace, and which in their turn contribute to the peace of the world.’

Queen Victoria, 1851.

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This quotation was printed in the foreword of The Great Exhibition catalogue in 1851. Queen Victoria’s words proclaim that the British Empire unveiled the era of world exhibitions, inviting other nations to this Great Exhibition to celebrate all branches of human industry and the friendships of all nations. At the Great Exhibition, China presented products such as silk, porcelain and tea, which were arranged by the British merchants and official planners Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd and Lieutenant R.E. Tyler. The 1851 Great Exhibition’s organisers seem to have had a hidden political agenda, revealed through the setting of the space, not only in terms of the exhibition sites but also the politics of the body, thereby invoking a competition between nation-states rather than a global ‘commercial war’.

The body is a capacious topic as it tells the story of human appearance, but the body also evokes, metaphorically, a part of history and national identity. For example, the surprising atmosphere of the Great Exhibition of 1851 can be seen in the painting, ‘The Opening of the Great Exhibition’, by Henry Selous, now displayed in the room of the permanent exhibitions of the World Expo in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Figure 3-3). Clearly, it represents an international sense, infused with the hope of ‘good will and peace’ in the ceremony.

At the lower left-hand side of the painting is the figure of a Chinese man dressed in traditional Chinese robes, among the foreign ambassadors and

14 Susan R. Fernsebner, ‘Expo 2010: A Historical Perspective’ in The Journal of Asian Studies, vol. 69, no. 3, (2010, The Association for Asian Studies), p. 679. Fernsebner’s idea of ‘New Policies’ was a project of state renovation in the first decade of the twentieth century’s world expos, including global ‘commercial war’, political concerns and economic interests, but the China pavilion in the 1851 world expo used a small space to symbolise the nation of China, as a means of competing with national defence in a political sense.
commissioners in the procession. According to Verity Wilson’s *Chinese Dress*, ‘the robes worn by the Chinese visitor lack certain supposedly standard features. The longer of the two robes does not have the “standing water” design at the hem. Reality at once appears more confusing than orderly’.\(^{15}\) This explanation might convey a message that either the Chinese visitor in the painting was a figure imagined by the painter, or that he was not an official governor sent by China. Indeed, the Chinese Qing government had neither participated in the 1851 Great Exhibition nor sent an official representative to the ceremony.

Figure 3-3: ‘The Opening of the Great Exhibition’, by Henry Selous, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1851, Ref. 329-1889.

In his *Memoirs and Correspondence of Lyon Playfair*, 1851, Playfair describes this Chinese man and how he was positioned in the ceremonial procession:

A Chinaman, dressed in magnificent robes, suddenly emerged from the crowd and prostrated himself before the throne. Who he was nobody knew. He might possibly be the Emperor of China himself who had come secretly to the ceremony, but it was certain that he was not in the programme of the procession, and we who were in charge of the ceremony did not know where to place His Celestial Highness. The Lord Chamberlain was equally perplexed, and asked the Queen and the Prince Consort for instructions. We were then told that there must be no mistakes as to his rank, and that it would be best to place him between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Duke of Wellington… Next day we ascertained that this Chinaman was the keeper of a Chinese junk that had been sent over to lie in the River Thames, and which anyone could visit on payment of a shilling!16

Sir Playfair was one of the chief commissioners of the show. His words indicate not only the mistake of placing the Chinese visitor in an important rank in the procession, but also how the British government perceived China and the Chinese at that time. It is a good illustration of the ambitious and imaginary scope of the international concept of the show; but questions remain. What is the Chinese man doing in the picture? How could this unknown Chinese man be imagined and seen as the Emperor of China?

This Chinese man is to be treated as the Emperor of China, as an object in the role of the Chinese Emperor, as a symbol of the nation. Guy Debord reminds us that,

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16 T. Wemyss Reid, *Memoirs and Correspondence of Lyon Playfair, First Lord Playfair of St. Andrews* (Cassell & Co.: London, 1899), p. 120.
The historical event of the meeting with the Emperor of China created a significant record, because it brought back to Britain a visual imagination. We need to consider the idea of the Chinese Emperor, both the real Emperor of China and the constructed character of the Chinese Emperor. What is the significance of this Chinese Emperor in Britain?

The best-known Chinese event in Britain was the Macartney Embassy meeting with the Emperor of China. The British Ambassador, George Macartney, led the first envoy from Britain to China in 1793, in order to convince the Qianlong emperor to ease restrictions on trade between Britain and China. Despite not achieving its goal, this diplomatic task created a strong, omnipresent image in Britain, particularly through the circulation of numerous, detailed, imaginary drawings. It has been said that key to this failure was the fact that Ambassador Macartney refused to follow the traditional rituals of the Chinese court, that is, the act of subjugation made by an inferior to his superior by kneeling and bowing his head to the floor. Such a performance shows respect to the Chinese Emperor as the ‘son of heaven’ (tianzi) and to China as the Central Kingdom in the world. Hence, the visual representations of this event, when Ambassador George Macartney met the Chinese Emperor Qianlong at the end of the eighteenth century, created one of the most significant records of this Chinese role.

The wide circulation of the depiction of a Chinese male as the Chinese Emperor, lead the caricaturist James Gillray (1756-1815) to draw a mock encounter of Macartney meeting the ‘oversized’ Chinese Qianlong Emperor in a fantastical

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court of George III, on ‘an unspecified day in late 1793’, based on the official sketches of the painter William Alexander. Neither Gillray nor Alexander witnessed the first encounter between the two empires of China and Britain, but the event had become ‘perfectly legible within an ornamentalist visual tradition’ through the painting’s circulation. The Chinese Emperor remained a strong image in the British view of a Chinese man’s appearance.¹⁸ (Figure 3-4)

Figure 3-4: James Gillray, ‘The reception of the diplomatie and his suite, at the Court of Pekin’, published by Hannah Humphrey. Hand-coloured etching, published 14 September 1792, National Portrait Gallery, Ref. NPG D12463.

However, the first Chinese images were captured within the much older tradition of ‘Confucian-Christian synthesis’ painting; notable among them being the celebrated portrait of Shen Fuzong (1658-1691) painted by Sir Kneller Godfrey in

1687, now in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, shows the idealised British view of Chinese people in the seventeenth century. Fuzong, standing in the centre of the composition, in classic Western portrait style. Fuzong was a well-known individual: a respected Christian, he was famed for his wisdom. European missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci, who demonstrated a curiosity and admiration for ‘Chineseness’, probably contributed to the great respect awarded to Fuzong (Figure 3-5).

Figure 3-5: Sir Godfrey Kneller, Michael Alphonsius Shen Fu-Tsung [Fuzong] (c.1658–1691), ‘The Chinese Convert’, Royal Collection © 2007 Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Oxford Biography Index Number 101095020.
Figure 3-5 shows Fuzong in Chinese robes holding a crucifix, which he references with his other hand. He looks outward toward the natural light coming through the window, which illuminates his face. This conception references the act of conversion, natural religion and iconography, all themes that resonate strongly with contemporary notions of enlightenment and confession in both England and Europe. This painting acts as a foundation for the image of Chinese men in Britain, with its spiritual themes of a great man and the Catholic religion.

In *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci: 1583-1610*, Ricci asserts that Fuzong introduced Chinese philosophy, Confucian doctrines, educational content, and Chinese political structures to European readers. Regarding Chinese society, he wrote, ‘the entire kingdom is administered by the Order of the Learned, commonly known as the Philosophers’. Very few Chinese came to Britain at this time, and this philosophical outlook made Fuzong a figure of special interest. The image of Fuzong continues to occupy an important place in the British imagination of Chinese. In 2006, the University of Oxford announced that one hundred and forty-four new lives would be added to the monumental *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* including Shen Fuzong, who was among the forgotten figures of British history. He is presented as a Chinese visitor to England, who translated Thomas Bodley’s collection of Chinese books (now held in the Bodleian library at Oxford) in the 1680s.

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In Albert Chan’s *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome: A Descriptive Catalogue: Japonica-Sinica I-IV* (2002), he describes Fuzong, ‘as a Christian [whose] name was Michel Alfonso. He travelled to Europe with Father Philippe Couplet (1623-1693). He was sent by Couplet to Lisbon for noviceship and seems to have finished his studies later in Rome’.\(^{22}\) Couplet and Fuzong later visited England and met with King James II and Lord Clarendon. The King was so taken with Fuzong that, in 1687, he commissioned Sir Godfrey Kneller to paint a portrait of the Chinese convert wearing customary Chinese attire and holding a crucifix. James II remarked, ‘he had his picture to the life, hanging in his room next to the bed chamber’.\(^{23}\)

According to the records of the East India Company (VOC) in 1683, Shen Fuzong may not have been the first Chinese man to arrive in England, but he was the first influential Chinese person at the British court.\(^{24}\) Fuzong’s remarkable portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller is the first British representation of a Chinese person in Britain. In an article entitled *The Converted Chinese* in *The Visitants’ Guide to Windsor Castle and Its Vicinity* (1828), Charles Andrews explains:

> This picture is, in reality, a portrait of Father Couplet, a Jesuit missionary in China. Walpole says, ‘of all his works Sir Godfrey was


most proud of the converted Chinese’; and it is generally considered to be his best production.25

It is difficult to say why this text suggests the portrait is, in fact, Belgian Jesuit Philippe Couplet, when the picture obviously depicts a Chinese man wearing Chinese garments, or changpao.26 Despite this contradiction, there is no doubting the painting was collectively seen as a high example of British portrait painting. In this respect, there are two points that must be considered. The composition succeeds on the basis of its unaffected sense of design, which was recognised by the English collector Horace Walpole.27 Secondly, although this is a portrait of Chinese man, it can also be categorised as a religious image. As the image of the portrait of Shen Fuzong not only shows a respectful, romantic image of the Chinese, but also incorporates contemporary British religious perspectives.

The second painting of ‘The Opening of the Great Exhibition’ combines British imperial power with the image of a single Chinese figure as a spectacular prop. It is worth restating how the Chinese man in the second image is depicted at the centre. While the other subjects regard the viewer, the Chinese figure stares elsewhere, which isolates him. He is lost in the crowd and only recognisable by his traditional Chinese garments - a figure of spectacle. His traditional Chinese dress marks the person as different; without that, it would be difficult to identify this different ethnicity. Although, the painting of Shen Fuzong can be seen in terms of an aesthetic blurring between Chinese dress and religious dress. Both of them, their

Chinese garments make them conspicuous, noticeable and easily spotted as being different and foreign.

Comparing the painting of the ‘Chinese Emperor’ in ‘The Opening of the Great Exhibition’ and the portrait of Shen Fuzong; both subjects look upwards and away from the viewer. While the religious composition suggests the embodiment of intellect and confidence in the Chinese convert, the 1851 painting depicts a Chinese figure looking away in a careless detached way. He is positioned near the centre of the canvas, which supports the theory of his idealised presence as the Emperor of China at the event. The painting was exhibited at Trafalgar Square from 25th May 1852; there is an admission ticket to the exhibition in the National Art Library. It was described in the *Art Journal* in August 1852 as follows:

Mr Selous has painted the subject of the opening of the Great Exhibition, selecting that part of the ceremony when the Archbishop of Canterbury is offering the benedictory prayer. The time could not be more judiciously chosen, as it affords the opportunity of bringing forward the illustrious personages who figured prominently on that occasion, grouped together in all the magnificence of costume and dress, but in an attitude of perfect repose, and the countenances expressive of agreeable and devout expression.\(^{28}\)

In the composition, the royal family is surrounded by commissioners, ministers and dignitaries. Individual sittings with Selous were given by many of the figures depicted; the painting functions as a large group portrait. The group of four

men wearing court dress in the left foreground of the picture are, from left to right, Joseph Paxton with his hat under his arm; Charles Fox, whose firm built the Crystal Palace; the bearded Owen Jones, who designed the colour scheme of the building; and Henry Cole, the first director of the South Kensington Museum. Beside the oil painting, there is also a sketch of the procession of those important people entering the opening event, published in the May 10, 1851, *Illustrated London News*. The Chinese man is placed in the centre of the drawing. The Chinese man’s Chinese attires making him visible. His appearance seems to affirm him as an important and exotic role. The representation of this figure, imagined or not, enhances the idea of spectacle (Figure 3-6).

This visual representation perpetuates the idea of spectacle with ethnic dress which was developed in later World Expositions, for example, a few Mbuti people were brought back from Africa to be a part of an anthropology exhibit at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904, the St. Louis World Fair’s side show, and a controversial human zoo exhibit in 1906 at the Bronx Zoo in New York. They were displayed as ‘living heritage’ in later colonial contexts. The identification of the male body with the ethnic dress and nation take us some way into the callous darkness of the human zoos of the early World Expos’ history in the nineteenth century. However, in the case of the image of Chinese men, the Chinese Emperor in particular broadened the meaning of objectification, creating a body that no longer belonged to a man but to an idea, a metaphor for their nation. Therefore, this

29 Ibid, ‘The Opening of the Great Exhibition by Queen Victoria on 1 May 1851’.
individual came to represent a national identity. Chinese masculinity and Chinese men with their traditional attire, in this way, became intimately connected with the perceived national image of China in the period.

Figure 3-6: The Great Exhibition, *the Illustrated London News*, 10 May 1851.

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3.3 Mimicking the Emperor of China: Chinese Giant Chang Woo Gow

During the mid to late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the opportunities for person-to-person contacts between British and Chinese increased significantly. For example, a mysterious Chinese figure in traditional clothing started to appear not only in paintings but as living beings in the showcases of the great exhibitions and global circuses such as P.T. Barnum’s global Circus and freak shows. From 1840, several global performances and international events were created, from industrial exhibitions to popular entertainment. P.T. Barnum was an author, publisher, and for some time a politician. Multiple successful careers gained him the title the ‘father of
American advertising’. As a founder of the Barnum & Bailey Circus, Barnum established a global travelling exhibition, advertising the ‘most extraordinary curiosity yet,’ and displaying Chineseness as an ‘exotic curio’. According to the Boston Daily Globe in 1881, ‘Barnum’s first great hit was the Chinese mermaid, and his last the Chinese giant’. By that time, in America, the UK and Australia, thousands of people had flocked to see Barnum’s Chinese giant.

According to Zhang Deyi, he recorded that he saw many huaju (theatre shows about the Chinese people) in Europe between 1866 and 1903. Among the performances he saw, a show about the Chinese giant was rather popular. He wrote of three ‘Chang the Chinese Giant’ shows: on 11 June 1866 at the Bailiyou Theatre in London, 18 February 1879 at the Chinni Saili Circus in Petersburg, and 8 June 1880 at The Royal Aquarium in London. He wrote: ‘The Chinese giant Chang Woo Gow comes to London again. The Aquarium prepares a wooden stage on which Chang stands. Those who want to see the giant need to pay the entrance fee’. The poster for this show is now stored at the Wellcome Library in London. Printed in dark blue, red and black on a white background, it shows Chang the Chinese Giant in a full-length Chinese dragon gown, his left arm raised above the head of a British guardsman. This show was presented at the Royal Aquarium, a large exhibition hall

33 ‘Chang, the Chinese Giant’, Boston Daily Globe, on March 9, 1881.
34 Zhang Deyi, Shuqi, vol. I, ch.3 (China: Guangxu shu shen, 1908), ‘In the end of the play, two Chinese characters…who are both very tall, appear on the stage. The ever-changing decorations provide fabulous visual effects.’
35 Ibid, Deyi (1908), vol. IV, ch.12, ‘The title is “Chinese People Celebrating the New Year’s Day”. More than one hundred performers, men and women included, are dressed as Chinese people… they even imitated the famous Chinese giant Chang Woo Gow.’
and theatre built in 1876. Admission fees to this spectacle were one shilling, for which the audience would witness Chang, at 7 feet 8 inches, arise to greet and shake hands with those nearest the stage before returning to his throne. The role of the Chinese Emperor, played by Chang, as implied by British popular culture, enables us to rethink the symbolic meaning of China and the Chinese in British society. Chang was a public attraction not only due to his exceptional height and body, but also because he was dressed in elaborately decorated Chinese satin robes (Figure 3-7).

Although the Chinese were perceived as figures of spectacle, who all looked ‘very much alike’ in the eyes of the British due to their exotic dress, Chang fulfilled the Victorians’ fascination with people of perceived exoticism and satisfied the popular imagination for such ‘celestials’ from the mysterious Orient, to such a degree that Chang was even invited to visit the Prince and Princess of Wales. In this way, ‘Chang the Chinese giant’ exemplified not simply an individual body but his body played an important role as an imagined objectification, mediating the British perception of China.

The Star in 1893 published an article entitled ‘Chang To-Day: The Tallest Man in the World Talks Seven Languages’ (including English, French, German, Spanish and Japanese), which seems to have been greatly exaggerated but he continued to work as ‘the Chinese Giant’ in the USA, Australia and England, drawing crowds and meeting royalty for almost twenty years. According to the Star in 1893, Chang had ‘never been in love with show-business. He does not like to be

37 The Royal Aquarium was demolished in 1902. It stood on the site of the current Central Hall opposite Westminster Abbey in London.
considered a freak of Nature’.\textsuperscript{40} Chang was aware that his role in the public eye was simply that of an abnormally tall man, supposedly possessing little intelligence.

When not on the stage in England, he wore a Western suit and acted as an English gentleman.\textsuperscript{41} Chang did not feel obliged to wear traditional Chinese dress all the time. This might be explained by the simple fact that, to Chang, traditional Chinese dress was only worn because of a performance need. The traditional Chinese dress was a crucial element of his show, indicating who he was and where he came from, but constructed for the stage. All the costumes and props were stored backstage, and put on as ‘authentic’ attire for the show. However, when Western audiences saw him off-stage, they seem to have expected to see the same clothes (Figure 3-8).

In the show, a small Chinese lady called Kin Foo played his stage wife, but in real life, Chang met a young lady named Catherine Santley in Australia. They fell in love and married, moving to Bournemouth, England.\textsuperscript{42} Having retired from show business in 1890, Chang went on to import Chinese tea to Britain. He purchased a Villa at 6 Southcote Road where he opened a tea house, and which is now a hotel called the Ashleigh. Their website says: ‘In the late 19th century, The Ashleigh, then known as Moyeun, was home to the “Chinese Giant”, Chang Woo Gow and his family. Chang was said to be 8’1” in height and he and his wife ran a Chinese Tea

\textsuperscript{40} ‘Chang To-Day: The Tallest Man in the World Talks Seven Language’, \textit{Star}, Issue 4667, 10 June, 1893.
Room and Curio Bazaar where he would welcome visitors who came to see him.\(^{43}\) (Figure 3-9 and 3-10).

According to Robert Bogdan’s analysis, ‘giant’ and ‘freak’ shows provide an illustration of duality. On the one hand, they provide a site where discourses of government, science, entertainment, ethics and industry overlap, but on the other hand, it suggests the physical limits of cultural practices in some societies, representing notions of sickness and disease as defined in alternative cultural settings.\(^{44}\) At the end of the nineteenth century, in English speaking countries, the public idea of freakishness ‘was generally as a disease’.\(^{45}\) These ‘freaks’ such as giant were gazed at and judged by thousands of prying eyes, both British and American. ‘Low social status and negative connotations regarding physical difference, is what most people today think of when they hear the term freak show’.\(^{46}\)

However, within freak shows, the role of Chang the Emperor of China was not usually considered disreputable. Chang’s physical performance, executed wearing his traditional Chinese dress, came to symbolise both the Chinese body and the body of the Chinese nation. At the same time, it seems that Chang was torn between two cultures, forced to adopt a hybrid identity. Chang perhaps enjoyed the attention he

\(^{43}\) The Ashleigh, [http://www.ashleighhotel.com/about/](http://www.ashleighhotel.com/about/) [accessed 3 March 2019]. Chang died, at the age of only 52, in 1893. Many of his closest friends came to his funeral to pay their respects, for example the photographer William J. Day, who described his friend Chang as ‘a gentle giant, a giant of giants, great of stature, but with the kindest nature and a heart as true and tender as ever beat.’ See also, Pustak Mahal Editorial Board (Delhi: 2012), pp. 67-69.


gained by acting as the extraordinary Emperor of China in the Western imagination, despite his lack of celebrity in China.

However, people and objects being characterised as ‘giant’ refers to far more than simply the dimension of size. A giant is ‘an imaginary being of human form but super human size and strength’. The large size of the Chinese man is critical in the theatrical calculation of its effect on the audience. In Greek mythology, the giants were huge human-like beings who warred with the gods. The large Chinoiserie teapot described in Section 2.3 also creates a different vision of reality, conjuring up a meticulously realistic power behind the object. On one hand the giant object and Chinese emperor giant, would seem to relate directly to embodied experiences, their China associations, but on the other, in the process of creation and imagination of self and others, as in Charles Cooley’s idea of the reflexive self-consciousness of people’s experience, they continually monitor themselves from the point of view of others. Cooley states that the self-idea has three elements, ‘the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance, and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification’. In Britain, such Sino-British interactions and experiences as Chinoiserie objects or the creation of a Chinese giant, seem to describe the British sense of self, as they see these objects and figures and are interested in them because they are theirs. Thus, the presence of giant in the British context acts as a mirror, representing the British vision of world, and even their image of themselves at the time.

Figure 3-8: ‘Monsieur Chang: Incidents in the Life of the Tallest Man in the World’, Logansport Pharos, on July 14, 1893.
Figure 3-9: Kin Foo; Chang Woo Gow (Chang Yu Sing), by Wright & Son, albumen carte-de-visite, circa 1870-1871, 4 1/8 in. x 2 1/2 in. (104 mm x 63 mm) overall. Given by Terence Pepper, 2014, no. x197184, National Portrait Gallery, London.
Figure 3-10: Advertisement for Chang in ‘the Bournemouth Observer’ on 7 January 1893.

3.4 From Queue to Western Suit

The queue (pigtail) and traditional Qing Dynasty garments are generally understood to be typical Chinese accessories in the West. To the Chinese in the early twentieth century, these were probably not traditions the Chinese wished to conserve. However, the issue of the queue is complex. Bodies are not only the products of biological, social and cultural interactions, they act as platforms for communication from the person to the memory. For example, the famous Chinese opera singer May Lan Fang 梅蘭芳 wrote about the memory of cutting the queue in his *May Lan Fang Autobiography* 梅蘭芳自述, saying:

Two of my assistants Da Lee and Long Zi, I tell them to cut their braids, but they insist on keeping their queue, so that one day I had to take a chance, and secretly took a pair of scissors to cut them off. The
next day, Da Lee was tearing up and holding his queue, crying on my grandmother’s shoulder. Even after a while, when he talked of his queue, he was tinged with sorrow as if he had lost a big part of his body. At that period, many people shared the same feeling about their queue.50

One way of looking at this is that the Chinese considered the queue to be a sophisticated style. Another way of looking at the matter of Da Lee lamenting the loss of his hair, is that he saw his hair as a part of his body; he ‘was tearing up and holding his queue’, because in the moment that he touches his own hair, he feels connected to his own memories and the cultural practices that had shaped him in the past. Hair, as much scholarship has demonstrated, has its own magical powers, and was associated with religion in many cultures.51 Hair could also be considered as part of a kind of ‘witchcraft’, as Philip Kuhn refers to it in his study.52 In some cultures, hair is seen as a gift. For example, in the Orthodox Jewish faith, hair is a gift from God and should never be cut.53

Nevertheless, following the success of the Republican revolution against the Qing dynasty (1911), led by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, the Chinese were likely eager to cut their braids, and they actively sought a new national identity. Robes and mandarin


51 For example, in the Orthodox Jewish faith (Hasidic Judaism), the men wear their hair with the traditional payots, to remind that there are two parts of the brain, spiritual thought and bodily function.


jackets were initially abandoned in major cities in favour of Western-style suits. It may be argued that Chinese clothing was influenced by Western culture as early as 1840, after China’s defeat during the Opium War and its subsequent exposure to the outside world. Despite this, around 1900, the Chinese were ready to shed their Manchu style as a means of self-definition against the Qing Dynasty.

It is important to rethink the modern look of Chinese men within the context of Chinese history. One should not assume Chinese men adopted Western modes of dress for the benefit of Westerners. The Chinese word for ‘pigtail’, for example, literally means ‘shaving one’s hair’ in Chinese, tifa 剃髮, and was a requirement for the Han Chinese male under Manchu rule (1644-1911). To the Han Chinese man, the notorious ‘shaving hair’ order was a bitter memory of ethnic conflict and political tension that lasted almost three hundred years. A recent study of a sorcery scare in 1768 reveals that, more than a hundred and twenty years later, the combination of queue-cutting and sorcery still posed a serious potential threat to the Qing dynasty.54 Until the victory of the republic in 1911, cutting the queue and abandoning robes and mandarin jackets was likely seen as a symbolic rejection of Manchu hegemony.55

From 1900 to 1920, many Chinese men chose the Western style of dress. The Chinese national uniform was created at the end of the 1920s. The Chinese Republican government realized that the Chinese had to preserve their identity via clothing and issued orders, ‘Regulations on Uniforms’, and provided uniforms for male and female civil servants. The Chinese tunic suit became popular - a design

based on Japanese student uniforms. With a straight, turned down collar, a single row of five buttons and a tight waist, it combined the convenience of Western suits and the comfort of Chinese garments. As it was worn and popularized by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen and quickly became ‘Sun’s Suit’, a symbol of the democratic revolution (Figure 3-11).

Western suits and Chinese tunic suits were popular in major cities in China where people, especially elite intellectuals and merchants, were more open-minded, since Chinese men in Britain were mostly from Shanghai and Canton, their Western dress was as much a reflection of the change in the Chinese political situation as the influence of their British host culture.

In his article, ‘In Limehouse and the Isle of Dogs’, published in 1905, British journalist George Sims assumed the Chinese did not keep their clothes in order to appease the British government. When Sims visited Limehouse, he wrote:

The bus terminus – the West India Dock Station – is an excellent point from which to take a trip around Limehouse. Close at hand is the Causeway, the Chinese quarter... in Lime house the Asiatic seafaring man is still a conspicuous note. You will find specimens of him – Oriental, mysterious, romantic – at almost every turn.

There are no Oriental garments or pigtails in this or in any other part of China Town...The Chinese lodgers in the Chinese boarding-houses round about are seafaring men, and dress in serge suits and wear cloth caps under which the pigtail, if it has not been sacrificed, is coiled up
and concealed. A pigtail would have a bad time in the hands of the local larrikin.⁵⁶

Sims’ writing suggests he searched for the exotic Chinese ‘look’ in Limehouse. When he did not see Chinese men wearing their traditional clothes but Western suits instead, he reasoned this was to avoid being treated differently by the locals. Sims’ explanation of the ‘local larrikin’ alludes to British factions that propelled racial stereotypes. Children learned derogatory terms at school such as the frightening violence of a ‘Chin Chin Chinaman’ or references such as the French are ‘a lot of frogs’.⁵⁷ Sims’ comments demonstrate how British nationalism opposed those who did not belong. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has argued that a colonial power requires the colonial subject to make him or herself into a recognisable other, thus, ‘a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite’.⁵⁸ Although Chinese men wore the Western suit in Britain, they were ‘not quite’ the same.

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Figure 3-11: THLHA, Photograph collection on Limehouse Chinese community, ca. 1910.
In 1920s London, Chinese people were regarded as an economic threat, and yet, at the same time, ‘Chineseness’ as a style held a captivating effect on the young bourgeoisie who sought entertainment. A new ‘Chinese fever’ was reflected in the luxury goods trade (tea and opium). Simultaneously, images of Chinese people were shaped and reshaped via film and advertising. Many images simply followed traditional Chinese visual representations that had been familiar in the West since the nineteenth century. For example, traditional Chinese dress was the icon of Chinese identity in the silent film ‘Broken Blossoms’ in 1919, directed by David Griffith. The film was adapted from ‘The Chink and the Child’, a story from Thomas Burke’s *Limehouse Nights*. Richard Barthelmess, an American actor, played the protagonist in this film, a Chinese man named Cheng Huan. Barthelmass was portrayed as Chinese by using traditional dress. Sociologist Jan Lin, in his 1998 book *Reconstructing Chinatown: Ethnic Enclave, Global Change*, states:

> White actors who wore Chinese shirts, baggy pants, and Qing-era queue hairpieces…bumbling and prone to opium addiction…[were] staged as pagans unable to accept Christianity and western morality.\(^59\)

This describes the stereotypical Chinese role played by white men in Hollywood cinema, particularly from 1920 to 1930. The main character, Cheng Huan, leaves China to spread the word of Buddha in the Western world. The film tells the love story between a Chinese man and white woman. His mission is realised in his devotion to the ‘Broken Blossoms’, Lucy Burrows (played by Lillian Gish),

the beautiful but unwanted and abused daughter of boxer Battling Burrows (played by Donald Crisp). It narrates how Huan’s optimism fades as he is faced with the brutal reality of London’s gritty inner city, bringing a more sympathetic impression of Chinese migration to London. Another theme in the film is the forbidden love between Huan and Burrows.60

‘Broken Blossoms’ is a small-scale film produced in a controlled studio environment. The visual style of the film emphasises the seedy Limehouse streets, with their dark shadows, drug addicts and drunkards, and contrasts them with the beauty of Huan and Burrows’ innocent attachment. Huan lives in a decorative apartment while Burrows’ bare cell reeks of oppression and hostility. The contrast not merely evokes a sense of exoticism but also a sense of spectacle, seemingly representing the Chinese man as an object for Western consumption. If the Chinese aesthetic and customs here simultaneously represent all that is destructive, mysterious and nostalgic, then its binary opposition to British culture must be an attempt to exaggerate the ‘whiteness’ of Americans and Britons.61

With ‘Broken Blossoms’, a stereotypical ‘Chinoiserie’ aesthetic of the Limehouse area was given to the world. Director David Griffith had not been to London’s Limehouse district. Three years after he made the film he made his first visit. Griffith told the British newspaper Start that he was surprised by the fashionable, modern style of the Chinese residents. He also suggested this was unlike Chinatowns of the United States:

Four couples we saw in the early hours strolling the streets—white girls and Chinese—arm in arm. The women—there at least—among the most beautiful I have seen in this country, and most neatly and fashionably dressed. We get nothing like that in America. White and yellows live poles apart.\(^{62}\)

With this statement, the mystical, exotic Chinese quarter promised a captivating destination for young middle-class men and women.\(^{63}\) The film created a spectacle of ‘otherness’ through Western eyes. In his book, *London through Chinese Eyes*, published in 1920, written to record nearly eight years in London, Min-Ch’ien Tyan attempts to explain Chinese life in London to a Western reader, ‘they are mostly uneducated, but none the less law-abiding and orderly. They have no doubt their vices, but they compare favourably with any similar group in any part of the world.’\(^{64}\) To describe London’s East End, for example, he does little more than append criticisms contained in a 1913 *Times* article:

Chinatowns all over the world have lost immensely in picturesqueness of late by the disappearance of the ‘pigtail’ and adoption of European dress. Now and then one may see here a small child gay in Chinese costume; but most of children are clothed like English boys and girls of the same age, while many of the men are neater and more dandified than are the same classes in a foreign port...The colony is orderly, clean-living, after its national ways, and very gentle-mannered. The visitor may guess that he is not over-welcome, for the intrusion of

\(^{62}\) ‘Mr. Griffith Sees Chinatown. Midnight Glimpses of Life in Limehouse’, *Star*, 26 April 1922.

\(^{63}\) Ibid, Selma Siew Li Bidingmaler, (1985).

inquisitive strangers has too often been followed by an outcry in the press, by routings-out of peaceful households, and fierce measures of reform. So the news that strangers are about soon spreads, and as they emerge from one door or another they will be conscious of being watched by little knots of idlers in the roads.65

This simultaneously depicts two different images of the spectacle of the Chinese man. On the one hand, there is the familiar image of the Chinese as a consumable object constructed by the Western media. On the other hand, there is the real Chinese ‘look’, which attracts the visitor to Limehouse.

Several photographs from Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives take this ambiguity further. For example, in Figure 3-2, two Chinese men smile at each other while standing in front of a grocery shop in Pennyfields. On the right side, four white, working-class men talk on the street. When comparing the dress of the two groups, it seems that the two Chinese men’s suits indicate that they are merchants rather than labourers, they are surrounded by an optimistic aura. We learn little from the context behind the image, only from the picture itself. The image seems to present a different side of the life of Chinese people living in Limehouse, particularly those who no longer wore their traditional dress.

Reading the Limehouse images, there is a conflict between traditional Chinese dress and modern Western values. Zhang Deyi’s diary tells of a young Chinese man sent to England in his childhood by his parents, who wanted him to be familiar with Western knowledge and techniques. This young man went on to marry

a British woman and wore Western suits, regardless of the demands of traditional filial piety, and was proud of his acquired Western background.\footnote{Zhang Deyi, \textit{Shuqi}, vol. VI, ch.6, (China: Guangxu shu shen, 1908).} Overall, the evidence suggests that most Chinese men in London Limehouse Chinatown changed their traditional dress to Western style during this time.\footnote{Ibid, Deyi (1908), ch.6.}

The spectacle of Chinese men in Britain diverged between 1850 and 1920. By 1900 the image of the Chinese man was constructed so as to satisfy the demands of audiences at international expositions and ‘Chinese’ performances. In the second period, from 1900 to 1920, Chinese imagery branched into two categories. On one hand, stereotypes were perpetuated via ‘Chinese subject play’ and films like ‘Broken blossom’ to fulfil the Western appetite for Chinoiserie. On the other hand, photography put forward a different image of Chinese men. This new medium revolutionised documentary images by providing a new way of seeing - a further complexity in the representation of the real and the remade.\footnote{Some photographs in the THLHA collections are blurred images, they are collected with the same value as one’s own family album. Some of them are more ‘expressive’ and frame a deliberate scene. The function of the Limehouse collections in the archive is more than a community album.’} It is important to consider the possibility that, a century ago, these images may have been produced as propaganda for the Chinese residents of Limehouse.

The local East End photographer William Whiffin appears to have taken the majority of professional photographs of Limehouse. He was born in Poplar in 1878, the eldest son of William H. Whiffin, who was also a photographer.\footnote{In June 1907, William Whiffin and his wife, Minnie, lived at 770 Harrow Road, and, from 1908, he operated a photography studio on West Green Road, Kensal Rise. He moved back to Poplar around 1911 and opened a studio with his brother, Ernest, and his father at 237 East India Dock Road. After the Second World War Whiffin returned to his former studio in Poplar and lived at 231 East India Dock Road.} Between the First and Second World Wars, Whiffin took a keen interest in compiling a

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photographic record of the London area. He worked as a freelance press photographer during this period and was also engaged by the Poplar Borough Council to photograph local buildings. Whiffin photographed some events of interest from his studio on East India Dock Road, including the Poplar Councilors’ march to prison in 1921, and the troops who guarded convoys of food delivered to the docks during the General Strike in 1926. In addition to Wonderful London, Whiffin’s photographs illustrated two Poplar Borough Official Guides and appeared in A Loiterer in London, a book written by American author Helen Henderson.70

Photographs are memories as well as representations of local state apparatuses of power. While some photographs in the collections are blurred images, they are collected with the same value as one’s own family album. Some of the collection’s images are more ‘expressive’ and frame a deliberate scene. John Tagg argues, ‘photographs are never “evidence” of history; they are themselves the historical’.71 Since photographs implicate structures of power-knowledge, the image as document is as much the object of study as that which it represents. If the photograph is not only evidence, but also history itself, then it leads one to ask: What is behind this history: whose idea of Limehouse is represented through these images, and did the image actively frame an identity by creating a visual narrative?

Previous studies of Limehouse Chinatown touch upon the theme of the fear the place engendered in its British hosts. Certainly, there was tension between the Chinese community and British society. A new way of framing spectacle and the British Chinese mimic men in the British images of the resident Chinese might

impact not only the political and economic spheres, but also the socio-historical clash inherent in the traditional versus modern Chinese looks. This reading of the image of Chinese men in Britain reveals how meanings are formed through representation and what possible influences and impacts these body and embodiment experiences may have had during this process.

Figure 3-12: THLHA, Photograph collection on Limehouse Chinese community, 1920.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the meaning of the spectacle of the Chinese man in Britain changed over time. In the nineteenth century, British assumptions about the
Chinese were formed through representations in various media, including oil paintings, news reports, popular film and photography. Traditional Chinese garments played an essential part in all these, and served to enhance the spectacle. Despite the Chinese adopting Western-style dress between 1900 and 1920, as photographs of the Chinese residents of London’s Limehouse demonstrate, Western films continued to portray Chinese men and women in traditional contexts.

This chapter has investigated these visual representations of Chinese men in Britain through three case studies. The first, focusing on early Chinese visitors to Britain, compares the seventeenth-century painting of the ‘The Chinese Convert’ to the ‘unknown’ Chinese man shown in the painting of the opening ceremony of the Great Exhibition in 1851 by Henry Selous. The former can be seen in terms of an aesthetic blurring between Chinese dress and religious dress; the latter is a subjective representation. The second focuses on the Chinese subject plays of the Victoria era, and the Chinese giant Chang Woo Gow, with his traditional Chinese garments and queues, owe their bodies and embodiments, I have sought to demonstrate, to the widespread and well-known image of the Chinese emperor himself. As Pierre Bourdieu, with his concept of the ‘social informed body’, notes, the body is a social production with various cultural and historical dimensions.72 In this case, the Chinese Emperor acts as a British-made social informed body, and the process of appropriation, within the two societies, thereby becomes a paradigm of the structure of society and the cosmos. The third case study is the Chinese in Limehouse. Despite the Chinese having adopted Western-style dress, another problem was the conflict

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between traditional Chinese dress and modern Western values. The British preferred to portray them with traditional attributes.

This chapter has revealed another anxiety about the Yellow Peril and Fu Manchu that British society might perceive from the Chinese mimic men. In colonial mimicry the colonised pretend to have become one with those who colonise them. Homi Bhabha borrows V.S. Naipaul’s words to describe this:

We pretend to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new.73

The British hosts would want to produce Chinese men who resembled them in their dress and tastes, but at the same time, they were conflicted as they wished to maintain their British Chinoiserie tastes. The idea of mimic men has been applied to the Chinese in Britain in this chapter. However, the narrative of Chineseness in Limehouse is not simple. Debord reminds us that ‘the spectacle is not a collection of images, rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images’.74 Using this working definition of the spectacle, that of a relationship governed by images, one can see how the idea, as it applies to images of the Chinese in Britain, evolved to manifest new meanings over time.

Finally, identifying the importance of fear of the so-called Yellow Peril and the mimic men implied by the photographs, enables us to rethink the symbolic meaning of social interactions between British and Chinese. The Western-styled Chinese images, now held in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library, reveal an

image that was ‘received by individuals who are situated in a specific social-historical context’, such that these images are not only the outcome of the Chinese presence, but at the same time the active tools by which society’s assumptions are received and understood.\textsuperscript{75} The Chinese male body with a Western suit thus becomes a projection screen for images of an imagined, threatening Chinese in Britain. Overall, by drawing on historical records and visual presentations, what has emerged is a new, masculine British Chinoiserie in nineteenth-century Britain. This sheds light on our understanding of how Chinese men were seen as spectacle, and the presence of Chinese mimic men was perceived as threatening, and these two aspects shaped the ways in which the British both produced and consumed representations of Chineseness.

Chapter 4 Making a Visual Economy of Chineseness: British Photographer John Thomson and His Chinese Images Produced in Britain ca. 1870

4.1 Introduction

In the wake of the Opium Wars (1839 – 1842 and 1856 – 1860) the Qing government was forced to sign the so-called Unequal Treaties, whereby it yielded significant concessions to the British, French, and American governments. The treaties of Nanking and Tianjin meant that numerous ports in China had to be opened, enabling foreign traders and missionaries to establish residential and commercial bases along the Chinese coast. Although this situation created a ‘semi-colonial’ condition it allowed the first opportunities for Western photographers to go into China and begin to display China to the world through their photographic productions.

This chapter looks at the representation of the Chinese poor by British photographer John Thomson, ca.1870, and how it came to represent Chineseness. It explores some of the ways in which photography’s selective exposure of Chinese types, such as labourers, beggars and opium addicts, depicted the decline of China’s late Qing empire, and highlighted the characteristics that came to be associated with China, so much so that the image of the London poor was perpetuated. The chapter uses visual materials, photographs and literary sources to explore Thomson’s stereotypes of Chinese men, and shows how this theme was developed through Thomson’s focus on the lower classes and their life stories, which fuelled the Victorian public’s prejudices of the time.

From its inception in the nineteenth century, photography was intimately bound to race. Photography was used to classify and categorise human bodies and
create a racial hierarchy of being, with indigenous people and ‘coloured’ bodies on
the lowest rung, which was believed to reflect their temporal as well as cultural
distance from European and British modernity.¹ Western scientists applied five main
racial groupings based on colour. Chinese and Japanese both belonged to the
‘yellow’ race.² During the nineteenth century, international interest in China and
Chinese people drew anthropologists and photographers from around the globe, for
whom the Chinese constituted vital evidence in debates about human nature and
progress.³

As one of the first British photographers to arrive in China, Thomson’s first
published work was a set of photographs to accompany an account of the ‘Ever
Victorious Army’ Chang sheng jun 常勝軍 (1860-1864). The Ever Victorious Army
was part of the Qing army, made up of Western-trained troops, which helped put
down the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). It was the first Chinese army trained in
European tactics. A British general, Charles George Gordon (1833-1885), was the
commander of this army. In the book The Ever Victorious Army by Andrew Wilson,
published in 1868, Wilson states, ‘in the complete suppression of the Tai-ping
Rebellion and the restoration of China to a state of comparative order and peace…
foreigners in China took an important part’.⁴ After the Tai-ping Rebellion, Thomson

¹ Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Sampson, Colonialist Photography: Imagining Race and Place
(New York: Routledge, 2004); Alan Sekula, ‘The Body and the Archive’, The Contest of Meaning:
Kemp and Marina Wallace, Spectacular Bodies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and
Maria Morris Hambourg, The Waking Dream: Photography’s First Century (New York: The
Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1993).
² Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, ‘On the Natural Varieties of Mankind’, The Anthropological
Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (London, [1775] 1865). See also Milford Wolpoff, Race
³ Photographers such as British William Saunders (1832-1892) and American James Ricalton (1844-
1929).
decided to travel and take photographs in China and Asia, later publishing one of his early photographic books *Illustration of China and its People* (1872-4), which contained images and captions suggesting the existence of social classes and racial types. In his book *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914*, published in 2012, Robert Bickers discusses Thomson’s *Illustration of China and its People*. He writes, ‘a photographer and his caravan were also, of course, foreigners, and their presence beyond the safe confines of the treaty ports was still capable of misinterpretation…. But allowance must be made for the imaginative power of these 200 images in projecting a new idea of China’.\(^5\)

In the study of the photography of John Thomson, many scholars have explored themes including photography and science, race, cultural geography, national identity and the representation and construction of national identity. Geoffrey Belknap points out that the images created through Thomson’s lens were ‘embedded in practices of taxonomical colonial encounter’, borrowing concepts developed by Kelly Wilder in her book *Photography and Science*.\(^6\) The nineteenth century saw the ‘photographic medium as scientific eye metaphor’ and the ‘camera as eye analogy’, thus the *Illustration of China and its People* was ‘intended to offer representational proof of racial classification’.\(^7\) Belknap shows the process of reproduction, through which the first representation was created as an original


\(^{7}\) Belknap, (2014), pp. 73-74.
source, after which images were manipulated as they were reproduced in several publications for Victorian audiences.\(^8\)

Similarly, Allen Hockley examines the ‘Chinese types’ created by Thomson, with a documentary style that favours ‘colonial interests’. He explains that, ‘despite Thomson’s attempts to systematically document the people of China using the methodologies promoted by Britain’s learned societies, his taxonomy was riddled with inconsistencies and bias that favoured colonial interests’.\(^9\) Thomson uses his Chinese types to argue, often emphatically, that ‘a viable role in the neo-colonial administration and economy awaits China’s human resources, provided it acquires the appropriate training and incentives’.\(^10\) Sarah Fraser states that nineteenth-century foreign photographers such as John Thomson repeated and produced themes that classified types of people as ‘barbaric’, which influenced the international understanding of China during the period, and provided a foundation for the construction of modern Chinese identity. Chinese writers such as Lu Xu 魯迅 (1881-1936) and Bo Yang 柏楊 (1920-2008), author of the *Ugly Chinaman* (醜陋的中國人), adopted this same language, and addressed the impact of this barbaric image of the Chinese on the failures of Chinese culture.\(^11\)

Photographs are, however, more than just a record of specific races, events and phenomena. Images have the potential to reveal relationships through a range of visual narratives, and even create a sense of universal humanity and shared global

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8 Ibid, pp. 73-74.
visual culture. Thomson was interested in his own artistic practice and the imagination shown in his work. When he travelled around Asia making his photographic album *Illustrations of China and Its People*, he took many photographs of groups of Chinese people, initially using the anthropometric photographic method. Later, his artistic ideas and imagination came to play a larger part, with the images of China and the Chinese reported by Thomson intended to give an ‘accurate impression of the country’. Meanwhile, the subject of race and human rights set off a debate, around the middle of the nineteenth century, ranging from anti-slavery to the rise of labour and human rights in British society. As an international photographer, how could he make this subject visible despite the tremendous historical and political sleight of hand that tried to make it invisible? What do photographs of racialised bodies mean, given our modern understanding of race and the labouring class and the poor as socially constructed?

Deborah Poole, in *Vision, Race, and Modernity* published in 1997, develops a critical concept of photography moving from ‘image worlds’ to a ‘visual economy’, stating: ‘We do not simply “see” what is there before us, rather, the specific ways in which we see (and represent) the world determine how we act upon that world and, in so doing, create what that world is’. For example, Thomson deployed a range of visual strategies echoing Henry Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor* to provide descriptions of the ‘moral, intellectual, material and physical’ conditions of

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14 Between 1828 and 1830, the Anti-Slavery Group coordinated over 5000 petitions in Britain, and the British Parliament passed the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act.
the ‘industrial poor’. Images of Chinese labourers and beggars are among Thomson’s visual stereotypes of Chinese men, and show how the theme was developed through Thomson’s focus on the lower classes and their life stories, fuelling the Victorian public’s prejudices.

This chapter begins with a discussion of nineteenth-century photography through ideas of race, science and art. It rethinks what it meant for Thomson to be ‘indebted for the faithful reproduction of the scenes I visited, and of the types of race with which I came into contact’, while employing a Western photographer’s gaze. It considers the relationship between race and photography in the nineteenth century; the purpose photographs should serve; whether the photographers’ work fell within the aesthetic established in other arts and imaginations; and whether photography is best understood as an art or a science.

In order to explore these questions, I briefly analyse the early Chinese indexical nature of the photographs taken by Thomson and its connection to the different aesthetic expressions of Chinese and Western photographers. I discuss representations of Chinese types from Thomson’s photographic work, showing that Thomson’s construction of the Chinese seems to embody the material culture of Chineseness, including dress, accessories, objects and imagination. Robert Bickers notes that Thomson ‘aimed to produce poems’ rather than ‘agglomerations of intricate detail’.

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The second section provides a brief introduction to John Thomson’s early life and his photographic work in China. This section includes a selection of photographs from Thomson’s *Illustrations of China and Its People* in order to reveal the ways in which it created a threatening image of China. For example, the images of labourers and the poor often hint at an underlying fear of the social condition of the poor. In section 4.4, I return to the question of what Chinese bodies can be made to signify in British society. The debate about race and human rights in the nineteenth century included ideologies from anti-slavery to labour and human rights in British society. These in-between or transitional ideas play a role in Thomson’s Chinese photographic work. The subjects depicted represent the photographer’s own interests and concerns, and serve as a mirror for the photographer’s own experiences rather than what the Victorian public perceived to be the reality of China.

The final section focuses on a single Thomson photograph, the ‘Chinese opium smoker’, reproduced across various print formats and its visual meanings. This is an important case that exemplifies what Deborah Poole would call the ‘visual economy’ of an image. ‘The specific ways in which we see (and represent) the world determine how we act upon that world and, in so doing, create what that world is’.19 Firstly, I discuss the visual meanings placed on this specific image across multiple print formats.20 Secondly, I discuss the framing and how the prostrate body reflects a certain concept of the *yin* body in Chinese medicine and its cultural meanings.21 I

21 The *yin* body, as opposed to the *yang* body, can be applied into the idea of the body politic in the *Tao Te Ching*, that is, not as a body but transformed into bodily metaphors with relative direction; inner/outer, high/low, father/son and emperor/minister. *Yin* refers to the ‘empty’ state, and Lao Zi states, ‘one has a body’ as ‘if one does not have a body’ associated with political participation, meaning if one can take part in the conduct of political affairs, he must obey the emperor, he cannot
hope to add to the argument that Thomson’s framing and construction of frightful Chinese characters served to reinforce British Victorian prejudices, leading to a better understanding of the ‘visual economy’ of Chineseness in a transnational context. This chapter argues that Thomson’s framing and construction of frightful Chinese characters served to reinforce Victorian prejudices and helped the emergence of the visual economy of Chineseness as a part of nineteenth-century British masculine Chinoiserie within a transnational context. It opens a discussion about the connection between Chinese male body and image making, through the lens of John Thomson, and British society; what Deborah Poole would call a Sino-Anglo visual economy. *Illustrations of China and Its People* could be seen as a form of internationalisation of London’s urban poor, with Chinese beggars and the London urban poor inevitably coming to be cast in the same light.

4.2 Photography: Race, Science and Art

In 2018, the first London exhibition devoted to the photographer John Thomson (1837-1921) and his photographs of China and Asia opened at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). The exhibition, titled ‘China and Siam: Through the Lens of John Thomson’, featured a display of historical

then go against the emperor’s rule, he should be soft as a ‘no body’. Nevertheless, both engaging in political affairs and maintaining political silence are equivalent to the harmonious system of the yin and yang states. Apart from bodily metaphors, the Chinese also see the mind as controlling the body, in zhuti (ruling and body). As Angela Zito states, ‘in the Qing conceptual universe, the body personal and the body political were available for discursive modelling of social relations in terms associated with activity, rather than merely through metaphors of resemblance.’ From a Daoist point of view, a useless body is more valuable than a useful body. So we see that the yin body may not be the favoured type of body position for the Chinese, but if we consider that perhaps the Han Chinese practice opium smoking so they maintain a political silence in preference to open political rebellion against the late Qing-Manchu ruler. The Han Chinese may refuse to maintain their position on the body politic, although it is hard to identify the psychological undercurrents of the traditional constructive body theory and practice in the Han Chinese world.
photographs taken in China during the late Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and Siam (Thailand) in the nineteenth century. As well as photographs, the exhibition contained craft objects such as Qing dynasty textiles in a special ‘Women’s Gallery’, and royal Siamese headwear in the Siam section. The photographs depict landscapes, figures, buildings and streets in Beijing, Fujian and Guangdong provinces and Bangkok. Discussion of early photographic processes is taken up in the display of an old wooden camera, a short video explaining the wet-collodion process and one of Thomson’s actual negatives. 

The exhibition had 128 images on large canvas, printed from scans of the original glass negatives from the Wellcome Library. There are about seven hundred of Thomson’s negative glass plates stored in the Wellcome Library, recently subject to a major digitisation project. According to one of the curators, Betty Yao:

John Thompson is a key figure in 19th century travel and documentary photography and this exhibition, which is 10 years in the making, gives recognition to the international appeal of his work…. After the First and Second Opium Wars (1840-42, 1856-60), China’s image in the eyes of Westerners was quite negative, but Thompson’s photography demonstrates the beauty of China at that time without any bias or prejudice.

22 ‘China and Siam: Through the Lens of John Thomson, Curated by Betty Yao and Narisa Chakrabongse, from 13 April-23 June, 2018, at the Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London. See also http://www.johnthomsonexhibition.org (15 February 2019).
The selected images show a mix of pleasant scenery and moving portraits, providing an interesting overview of the beautiful aesthetic of Thomson’s work. One critic’s review of the exhibit is particularly interesting. Having started her review by saying that the exhibition of historic photography is ‘no easy task’, Stéphanie Hornstein of British Photographic History notes:

What this exhibition provides is the photograph as artwork; something perhaps more familiar to today’s gallery-goer than the travel books in which Thomson’s photographs originally appeared. We are told to look for detail, to marvel at the photographer’s sensitive portraits and his mastery of the medium…. But at this size, a format which would have been simply impossible for Thomson to achieve, it becomes difficult for the viewer to assess the photographs as anything other than aesthetic objects, making a critical eye harder to muster…. No doubt sensing this need for contextualisation, the curators chose to display copies of both Thomson’s *The Straits of Malacca, Indo-China and China* and a volume of his *Illustrations of China and its People*. However, they appear to have missed an opportunity to inform their viewers of the content of these publications and how Thomson’s photographs were mobilised as proof of the imperialist views expressed within their pages.25

Through new printing technology, we have the opportunity to see specific features of the Asian faces, particularly the Chinese people. The exhibition

showcases a ‘modern connection’ aesthetically. One photograph shows Thomson with two Manchu Soldiers (Thomson rarely appeared in his own photographs). Curator Yao says that ‘this exhibition may include the first ever “selfie”, echoing curatorial themes, connecting the past and now’.26 (Figure 4-1) Nevertheless, as Gillian Rose explains, photographs are always embedded in social subjectivities. Processes are embedded in concrete sociocultural, historical contexts and power relations.27 But, what subjects were photographed in the nineteenth century, and what purpose did they serve?

Photographic technologies were put to the service of racial ideas and the colonial desires of the nineteenth-century. The invention and innovations of photography were particularly used to bolster the Victorian view of Britain’s role in empire. Following the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, the theory of natural selection quickly became scientific orthodoxy, accompanied by intense discussion among anthropologists, ethnologists and photographers, about the indigenous peoples and various races of the world. One important feature of the hierarchy of racial difference was the way in which it

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demonstrated a particular view of indexicality, and both a scientific and humanistic justification of Western imperial ideas. By 1869, the British biologist Thomas Henry Huxley had ‘initiated a project to produce a photographic record of the races of the British Empire’. Huxley’s method consisted of taking photographs of human subjects without clothes. These portraits were taken a standard distance from the camera, with subjects in standard anthropometric poses against a clearly marked measuring rod.

Thomson was among the first generation of photographers who became part scientist as they mastered new technologies and processes and learned how to use their equipment and materials. In Thomson’s early works we can see evidence of racial indexing, particularly in ‘Male Heads, Chinese and Mongolian’ in Illustrations of China and of Its People (Figure 4-2). Deborah Poole argues that ‘part of the scientific and voyeuristic fascination of the engravings and, especially, the photographs of non-European peoples and places that circulated in nineteenth-century Europe had to do with the ways in which their material nature as image objects lent support to an emerging idea of race as a material, historical and biological fact’. Clearly, Thomson was influenced by Darwin and used Huxley’s method, as did other photographers of the period. This type of photography, in creating racial subjects based on indexicality, shows the development of photography and science being bound together.

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The fact that, as an individual and commercial photographer, Thomson grappled with aesthetic issues, such as how to convey tone and texture, and how to express the detail of reality in a monochrome medium, led to the development of photographic practice, culture, technology, taste and aesthetic exchange. For example, Thomson set up a photography studio in Hong Kong in around 1860 where he worked with Chinese pictorial media artists and shared clientele. Thomson once
described his workplace in Hong Kong, illustrating the fluid transitions between photography and other media, such as oil on canvas or miniatures on ivory:

We are in a small room, the walls of which are hung with portraits, some in oil and of a large size, for the firm paints on canvas…. There are four or five artists at work in the light part of the room and veranda copying photographs, on a large scale, in oil…. There is an old man in this establishment…. He is a miniature painter on ivory, whose work is held in high estimation for its delicacy, careful drawing, and beauty of colouring…. There is a degree of refinement and beauty about his miniatures which is rare and surprising when one considers his most inartistic surroundings. His work is done chiefly from photographs. If the subject has to be enlarged he places over the photograph a piece of glass marked with small squares. Corresponding squares of larger size are then pencilled on the ivory and filled in from the photograph. This device is adopted by the painters in oil, but with much less success, as their productions are always out of drawing, and are distressing caricatures of humanity. They are done in this way: A master hand paints in the head, an inferior the hands, and an apprentice the costume and jewellery, the latter being generally profuse, as it costs nothing.33

Thomson’s description shows that the early photographic studio involved a wide range of media and used various traditional skills. Experimentation played a

role in early photography. Many photographers advertised themselves as ‘artist and photographer,’ or ‘photographic artists.’ The photographic collaboration and exchange between China and the West, leads us to ask how the Chinese responded to the creation of Western photography. In his article ‘Hong Kong Photographers’, published in the *British Journal of Photography*, in 1872, Thomson parodied photographic portraits by Chinese photographers (Figure 4-3). Offering a different opinion, Thomson gave voice to a Chinese photographer, A-hung, who described Western photographers’ tendency to portray explicitly Chinese taste, accompanied by an exaggerated caricature:

‘You foreigners,’ says A-hung, ‘always wish to be taken off the straight or perpendicular. It is not so with our men of taste; they must look straight at the camera so as to show their friends at a distance that they have two eyes and two ears. They won’t have shadows about their faces, because, you see, shadows form no part of the face. It isn’t one’s nose, or any other feature; therefore it should not be there. The camera, you see, is defective. It won't work up to that point; it won’t recognise our laws of art’.35

Interestingly, this description shows that Chinese photographers seemed to focus on how to make the face objectively Chinese, with different ideas regarding photographic methods. When Western photographers took pictures of the Chinese face, they added too much drama, making it seem that they ‘have shadows about

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their faces’. A-hung suggests that the Chinese photographers have a more objective viewpoint, portraying the Chinese face more realistically and less emotionally. In her studies on early Hong Kong photography, Roberta Wue notes that the Chinese face taken by Chinese photographers is looked at as ‘the disjuncture between face and body’ and ‘the minimisation of space and volume’, partly because they used photography as a new media to expand the concept of Chinese aesthetic painting. However, Western photographers were the opposite, discerning an alien notion of likeness and explaining it as a manifestation of racial and cultural difference.

Thomson, describing his methods of making *Illustrations of China and Its People*, wrote, ‘I am indebted for the faithful reproduction of the scenes I visited, and of the types of race with which I came into contact’. What he meant by ‘faithful reproduction of the scenes’ might well be perceived as what photographers do as a travelling journalists: ‘like journalism and travel writing, these are so called scientific activity based on the witnessing and reporting of matters of fact’. To Thomson, photographs were more than just a record of specific races, events or phenomena. Such images had the potential to reveal the relationships between a range of visual narratives. Roberta Wue states that Thomson was not the only Western photographer working in this way, and there exist similar accounts by other Victorian men.

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38 Ibid, p. 122-123.
Artistic practice and imagination became an important part of the creation of photography.\textsuperscript{42} Thomson drew attention to the details of the Chinese, not only as bodies, but as embodied figures, through their dress, pose, accessories and what they held in their hands, which he felt embodied their cultural identity. For an example of this, see Figure 4-4 which shows Dong Xun (1810-1892), Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Qing dynasty, holding a Chinese hand fan and a long Chinese smoking pipe. Through seeing things in a great detail and paying attention to the wider material

culture context, Thomson developed a unique creative style and tone in his photographs.

Figure 4-4: Dong Xun (1810-1892), Minister of Foreign Affairs, late Qing, Peking, China. Photograph by John Thomson, 1869, Wellcome Collection, London.

4.3 British photographer John Thomson and His Illustrations of China and its People ca. 1870

In 1870, John Thomson was one of the first photographers to go to the interior of China and document the lives and faces of the late Qing Chinese he encountered in
the fields and streets. He is now often seen as the first Western *photojournalist* in China. The term ‘photojournalism’, originally coined by the American historian Fran Luther Mott in 1924, is a form combining photography with documentary text, often where there is a social or environmental focus. John Thomson was a pioneer in the field of journalism, working in photography and captioning his images in a journalistic fashion. He was not only the photographer but also the writer; using the image as his principal medium and imparting to the narrative a visual quality, instead of using the images as a supplement to the text.43

Thomson was born in Edinburgh in 1837. He was apprentice to an optician and scientific instrument maker before he attended two years of evening classes at the Watt Institution and School of Arts (previously the Edinburgh School of Arts) from 1856 to 1858. During this period, he specialised in chemistry and undertook two years of studies in visual art. He attained an ‘Attestation of Proficiency’ in Natural Philosophy in 1857 and in Junior Mathematics and Chemistry in 1858.44 Thomson’s educational background was key to helping him build his professional photography career. After his studies, still in his early twenties, Thomson set out for Asia, as many Scottish people set off to distant parts of the British Empire. He followed his older brother, William, who preceded him to Singapore where William established a professional photographic workshop on Beach Road between 1860 and 1861, although we do not know the exact date Thomson arrived in Singapore. Their business was renamed Thomson Brothers after John joined his brother. However, the

43 The combination of photography and journalism, or photojournalism - a term coined by Frank Luther Mott, historian and dean of the University of Missouri School of Journalism - became familiar after World War II (1939-1945).
partnership soon dissolved, and John arrived in Sri Lanka in 1862.\textsuperscript{45} During 1865 he became ill and returned to England. His own records show that he visited temples, cities and palaces in Cambodia from 1862 to 1865. He stayed for about ten months before sailing to Penang, off the North-West coast of present-day Malaysia. While there, he hired two ‘Madras men’ as assistants who were the ‘colour of well-sunned nitrate of silver stain all over’ because the Chinese ‘refused to lend themselves to such devilry as taking likeness of objects without the touch of human hands’.\textsuperscript{46} The exact dates he arrived and left Asia are uncertain, but it seems that he repeatedly moved back and forth to Asia between 1860 and 1870.\textsuperscript{47}

He visited Singapore again, and Bangkok in 1865, where he was invited to photograph King Mongkut (Rama IV) kneeling at prayer in the uniform of a French Field Marshal. He carried a passport issued by King Mongkut and quite appreciated the king’s support, which he described as ‘a great help’.\textsuperscript{48} At the same time he had his second assistant Mr H. G. Kennedy, a student interpreter at the British embassy in Bangkok, along with two boatmen and four servants, who helped to carry his photographic equipment. In 1866, they departed on a dangerous trip to Laos and Cambodia, and during this visit Thomson almost died from jungle fever. After a brief visit to Singapore, he left for England. A year later, he again returned to Singapore, then travelled to Saigon for three months.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{45} Jason Toh, \textit{Singapore Through 19\textsuperscript{th} Century Photographs}, in Didier Millet, ed., (Singapore, 2009), p. 20.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, pp. 465-6.
Finally, in 1868, he settled in Hong Kong, where he began his project photographing the people of China. Thomson set up his own commercial studio and advertised in the *Hong Kong Daily Press*, in the ‘Intimations’ column. He announced he had opened his new rooms next door to Messrs Lane, Crawford & Co. on Queen’s Road. It was the first road in Hong Kong, constructed by the British Empire between 1841 and 1843. The area was modern and Westernised, being situated between the Central and Western districts on the Northern shore of Hong Kong Island. He then returned to England in 1872, where he selected two hundred of them and published his first Chinese album, entitled the *Illustrations of China and Its People*. It was the most extensive visual survey of China available at the time, as it documented the social conditions of street people, customs, occupations and landscapes. While Thomson was reputed to be a talented commercial photographer, he used classical ideas of ethnology and self-trained documentary skills in his work and approach to photographic display and geographical study.

This publication was extremely successful, not only for its artistic achievement but also the way it used a new documentary method to show what he considered to be the ‘real’ face of China to the world. This specific style made his work very different from that of other photographers.50 We see this for example, if we compare Thomson’s work with contemporary photographers that deal with China and the Chinese people, such as William Saunders, who also published several albums including *Chinese Life and Character Studies* in 1861 and *Portfolio of Sketches of Chinese Life and Character* in 1871. Saunders was an important

photographic contributor to Western publications such as the *Far East* and the *Illustrated London News*. However, Saunders’ work received a very different reception and was criticised for being either too perfect or too artificial, which means the photographs he took were mostly re-settings of the theme, including, for example, images of cangue punishments. With a beautiful blue sky and the labourers identified by their uniform, the people look arranged on purpose. As Sarah Fraser states of Saunders’ work, ‘these are highly artificial constructions that Saunders staged by posing subjects and giving them profession-specific props and clothing’. The images Saunders created lack credibility as they were based on a purely commercial approach that served to please the Western public rather than seek to reflect what was perceived to be the reality.

Thomson’s work, in contrast, was very different. Sometimes, when he needed to capture the image quickly, he intentionally did not focus on the subject’s face, so as to create a sense of movement. This slight blurring effect did not reduce his touch, but added value (Figure 4-5). Thomson explained his intention clearly in the preface to *Illustrations of China and Its People*:

> My design in the accompanying work is to present a series of pictures of China and its people, such as shall convey an accurate impression of the country I traversed as well as the arts, usages, and manners which prevail in different provinces of the Empire. Within this intention I made the camera the constant companion of my wanderings, and to it I am indebted for the faithful reproduction of the

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scenes I visited, and of the types of race with which I came into contact.⁵²

Western photographers in China played an active role in developing such initial imagery as they began to depict what were thought to be China’s first encounters with the outside world in the nineteenth century. In this way, the pictures were presented with the intention of conjuring an ‘accurate’ reflection of Chinese people.

Figure 4-5: ‘One of the City Guard, Peking’, plate XXII, no. 51, volume 2, Illustrations of China and of Its People (1873-74)

However, this imagery was an oversimplification. China was still viewed as an underdeveloped country, irrespective of her glorious past and culture. In fact, by the end of the eighteenth century, China, under the Manchu-led Qing dynasty, ruled more than one-third of the world’s population, and had the world’s largest economy. The Qing dynasty was among the largest empires ever created. It is important to understand in what ways the images constructed would be considered ‘reality’ for the readers of the time. At the time, Thomson’s images were seen as genuine, authentic photographs as opposed to ‘staged scenes’. Thomson’s claim that he was ‘indebted for the faithful reproduction of the scenes I visited, and of the types of race with which I came into contact.’ In the *British Journal of Photography*, the reviewer was abundant in his praise of the work, writing:

[Thomson was] just the photographer of all others with whom we are acquainted best fitted to penetrate with his camera into unexplored regions… an artist, a photographer, a geographer, and a man of general scientific attainments. When Mr Thomson’s magnificent work is completed, it will form one of the most valuable records of the life, customs, and costumes of the celestial empire that has ever been given to the world.”

Another review from the *Pall Mall Gazette* on November 11, 1874, contained the following passage:

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[Thomson] has secured a full record of all that is most interesting for us to learn concerning the ways of a remote civilisation, and he has even succeeded in registering types of the different classes of the population, from the highest to the lowest. No picture of Chinese manners at once so full and so vivid has yet been attempted. There is scarcely any side of Chinese life, either public or domestic, of which he has not secured some record.\footnote{Pall Mall Gazette, November 11, 1874.}

This positive feedback reveals not only the unique experience that this album offered, but also the lack of information about China that people in the West had at the time, when very few Westerners had ever even been to China. There was very little information about China at that time, yet people in Britain were looking for good quality images of China. Thomson’s work became significant as it was widely accepted by the public and considered to reflect reality accurately. As a result, \textit{Illustrations of China and Its People} brought Thomson financial success. He shot to fame with this book, and his success had a big impact on other photographers who followed his model for similar subjects. His success allowed him to continue his career as a photographer. The cost of producing \textit{Illustrations of China and Its People} was high. In 1876, it was advertised at £12,12, an exorbitant price, and it was unlikely that more than 1,000 copies were printed.\footnote{James R. Ryan, \textit{Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire} (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 64.} Based on this print quantity, it did not reach a wide audience, but after the initial publication, many of Thomson’s images from the \textit{Illustrations of China and Its People} were reused as separate...
engravings, woodcuts or half-tones, in less costly publications that were produced in
their thousands.57

Until 1868, it was impossible to print photographs in the press except by
means of engravings or lithographs. Illustrations of China and of Its People was one
of the first printed publications to feature photographs. In 1872 Ernest Edward
revolutionised printing through a method called Heliotype for mass re-production of
photographs in books; the first appeared that same year. As the curator of prints and
photographs Weston J. Naef states, ‘Thomson’s Illustrations of China and of Its
People stands along with Charles Darwin’s Expression of the Emotions in Man and
Animals as a landmark in the history of illustrated books’.58 Hence, as an illustrated
text, Illustrations of China and of Its People made an important contribution to the
history of photographs being used to illustrate books. Affordable versions of his
books were published that ordinary people could buy, such as The Straits of
Malacca, Indo-China and China (1875) and Through China with a Camera (1898).
Thomson’s works reached a wide audience through the selling of a separated set, and
the work was reproduced in various publications.

On top of this commercial success, it is also important to note that Thomson
played a role in British educational circles which further increased demand for his
publication. Before setting up his commercial studio in Hong Kong in 1868, he
returned to England for a short stay in 1866 during which time he became a member
of both the Ethnological Society of London and the Royal Geographical Society. His
association with these learned societies predetermined, to some extent, the

57 Ibid, p. 64.
methodologies he developed and the concerns he expressed in Illustrations of China and Its People. This relationship with the learned societies placed his work in an academic context. For example, in 1873, his work received notable attention in both the meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the exhibitions of the Photographic Society, since his work was recognised for both its artistic and scientific merit.

In August 1875, part of Illustrations of China and Its People was exhibited at the Royal Geographical Society collection at the International Geographical Congress in Paris, where Thomson was rewarded with a second-class medal for his photographic work. This suggests Thomson’s work had a big impact on both the academic and commercial worlds. Thomson’s works were viewed as scientific documents due to his documentary approach to the topics of ‘race’ and ‘type’. Today we would probably regard his method of taking exotic faces without adding the wider story as at best superficial and probably highly problematic, but at the time, many self-trained photographers would extract basic classifications from human features, for example classifying human appearance or measuring the aboriginal’s head size or skin colour. This ‘scientific’ discipline, known as phrenology, forms the subject of a recent study by James Poskett. In his book Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race, and the Global History of Science, 1815-1920, published in 2019, Poskett examines the relationship between phrenology and political power. He argues that, during this specific period, phrenology was used as a global political project. Through this scientific practice, phrenology allowed the phrenologists and

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59 Ryan, Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire, p. 64.
60 Ibid, p. 64.
political reformers to present their arguments with political agendas in terms of a new understanding of human character.61

The political was incorporated into early photographic methods of collecting ethnological data, including by the Scottish medical missionary David Livingstone in his Zambezi Expedition of 1858 to 1864. He advised his brother Charles to use his photographic equipment to capture people, writing:

Secure characteristic specimens of the different tribes… for the purposes of ethnology. Do not choose the ugliest but (as among ourselves) the better class of natives who are believed to be characteristic of the race… and, if possible, get men women and children grouped together.62

Livingstone’s instructions show how the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘type’ were incorporated into photography. This usage was not limited to official expeditions of scientific societies. For example, Thomson’s selective subjects and ‘types’ of groupings were explicitly identified in the series of male heads he described as ‘types’ at the beginning of Illustrations of China and Its People. He used the format of the cameo portrait, or small ovals, to present the heads of Chinese and Mongols (Figure 4-2). As Anne Maxwell wrote, ‘the series of male’s heads that appears in John Thomson’s Illustrations of China and Its People reveals much about the techniques that European photographers used to demonstrate the barbarity of the

Chinese’. In one set, Thomson commences at the centre top with a young child’s portraits. Against No. 20 he notes:

…a boy of the upper or most educated class, the son of a distinguished civil officer of Canton. He is a fine, attractive-looking little fellow, his full hazel eyes beaming with kindness and intelligence. The oblique setting of the eye, so peculiar to natives of the South, is well brought out in this picture. The face is altogether a pleasing one, but, as is common among children in China, it will gradually lose its attractions as it grows to maturity. The softness of the eye is then frequently replaced by a cold, calculating expression, the result of their peculiar training, and the countenance assumes an air of apathetic indifference which is so necessary to veil the inner feelings of a polished gentleman.63

After this comment on this young child, Thomson leads the reader to the left and below in order to ‘convey an idea of what this bright little fellow may in time become’. Maxwell suggests that Thomson’s comments about the Chinese ruling classes almost ‘perfectly mirror the complaints of the English working class about the implacable gaze of the English aristocracy’.64 Nevertheless, it is important to note which ‘type’ of characters Thomson took. There are six portraits, classified into four classes: ruling classes, merchant, working class and nomadic Mongols (Figure 4-2: The child is no. 20 and the young man on the left is no. 21, the rest following by this

63 John Thomson, Illustrations of China and Its People, no. 20-25, volume 2 (London, 1873-4), plate IX.
64 Maxwell, Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the Native and the Making of European Identities, p. 60.
order. The two men on the right wearing skull caps are Mongols. Thomson was sympathetic to the Mongol working class portrayed at the bottom left, noting:

No. 24 presents the head of an ordinary Chinese coolie, a fine specimen of the lower orders in China. A man of this sort has enjoyed no opportunities of taking on the polish which is acquired by study and by the high experiences of official life. He is, as a rule, a kindly-disposed person, quite alive to his own interests, and endowed by nature with a profound contempt and compassion for all barbarians who dwell in the pale of Chinese civilisation. This will account for the expression he is casting upon me as I am about to hand him down to posterity to be a type of his class. He is thoroughly honest and sincere in his views, whishing in his heart, when kindly treated by a foreigner, that his benefactor had enjoyed the exalted privilege of being born a Chinaman, and that he may yet, in after periods of transmigration, luckily attain that dignity of birth in some future state.⁶⁵

This suggests that Thomson had his favourite characters in the society he was seeking to document, as shown in his image-making and his accompanying words: ‘this will account for the expression he is casting upon me as I am about to hand him down to posterity to be a type of his class. He is thoroughly honest and sincere in his views’. Thomson explicitly shows his own interest in the working classes as he is conscious of the fact that he is constructing a type by selecting this one individual ‘to be a type of his class’. His words, ‘whishing in his heart, when kindly treated by foreigner, that his benefactor had enjoyed the exalted privilege of being born a Chinaman, and that he may yet, in after periods of transmigration, luckily attain that dignity of birth in some future state.’

dignity of birth in some future state’, are a reference to what was at the time perceived to be a self-perception of Chinese centrality. 66

The European visitors who came to China were surprised that the Chinese were proud and pleased to be Chinese, and that they had a sense of cultural superiority. The British were very surprised to learn that the Chinese thought others might wish to come to China to become transformed (guihua 歸化). Guihua has the connotation not only of being transformed but becoming civilised. The Chinese perception was that non-Chinese would desire to come to China to receive the beneficial influence of Chinese civilization. Meanwhile, of course, the British were blind to the fact that they themselves, the English, thought exactly the same way about their Englishness and their sense of superiority, having a sense of pity for anyone who was not born English. In a way, Thomson was surprised that the Chinese child behaves just like an English child, although he does not say so. In addition, Thomson’s practice of creating Chinese ‘types’, by grouping together images of men, children, the upper class, the working class and nomadic tribes, conformed to the established anthropological use of photography. British anthropologist Sir Edward B. Tylor went further in developing this methodology of grouping ‘types’ in *Hints to Travellers*, when he states:

…the general likeness of build and feature is very close, as may be seen in a photograph of a party of Caribs or Andamaners, whose uniformity contrasts instructively with the individualised faces of a party of Europeans. The consequence is that the traveller among a rude people, if he has something of the artist’s faculty of judging

66 Ibid, plate IX.
form, may select groups for photography which will fairly represent the type of a whole tribe or nation.67

This statement shows the power and authority of British photographers to create the impression of a ‘rude’ type of people, especially as the photographer is located outside the country. Obviously, Tylor’s viewpoint fitted within the views held more widely in the British Empire. His idea of ‘the individualised faces of a party of Europeans’ shows a typically racist view, that one recognises individuality in one’s own group, but assumes that ‘others’, the ‘rude’ people, all look identical. Furthermore, this grouping of the uncivilised ‘type’ selected by the photographer, emphasises their political representation of ‘the type of a whole tribe or nation’. Thus, Thomson’s selected ‘type’ represented the whole nation, and he was given the power to interpret this, regardless of what evidence there was for it. Seen in this light, it is clear that Thomson no longer read his own photographs objectively.

As Allen Hockley suggests, ‘Thomson abandons the objective authority he accords his photographs in the introduction to Illustrations of China and of Its People and reverts to pre-photographic pseudoscience of physiognomy (reading a person’s character from the appearance of their face) and phrenology (reading personality from the shape of the skull)’.68 Phrenology played a crucial role in 1820s academic society in Europe. In his book The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organisation of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain, Roger Cooter states: ‘as a body of natural knowledge that not only celebrated intellect, but celebrated it through a physiological interpretation of cerebral reality that located intellectual and

moral faculties physically at the top of a value-laden hierarchy of mental organs, phrenology indeed was almost a caricature of the aspirations of the “thinking class”. Nevertheless, phrenology is always oversimplified. As a social explorer, Thomson was eager to create a narrative about the lower classes, such as the working class, nomadic tribes and the urban poor, as these characters mirrored Victorian society and conformed to a Victorian reader’s prejudices. Thus, Thomson’s ideas about the Chinese faces and ‘types’ were already predetermined, as he was focused on social issues, and it was only left to mould them into a visual manifestation through his creative process.

4.4 Images of Chinese labourers and beggars

Photography was a new medium, used to fulfil people’s curiosity about the world. It was invented in 1839, just three years before the first Opium War of 1842, when China was forced to open five ports to trade with the West. Due to the wars and trading issues between China and the West, there was a certain urgency in people who wanted to know more about China. News of the war with China dominated the headlines, and Westerners often needed to update their knowledge of China. Thomson’s Illustrations of China and Its People became available to the wider population, providing details about the ‘real’ face of China. His claim that his work was created in a documentary fashion lent it credibility. Today, we understand that photographs are in fact constructed, or at least that the photographer manipulates the image by deciding what is or is not part of the photograph. Thus, we need to analyse

Thomson’s work and determine what role Thompson played in the construction of his images.

In this section, I look at No. 51, *An Old Tartar Bannerman* (Figure 4-5), from *Illustrations of China and Its People*. In this photograph, a poor, sick, old man is placed at the centre. It is a striking image that forces the viewer to keep looking, especially because of his facial expression. It looks like the man reacted immediately to the photographer taking this picture. His facial expression reveals emotion, seeming to have suffered great hardship. Through the lens of Thomson, he is either Chinese, or just a labourer, or a mixture of the two roles and narratives. However, his poor dress, identified as ‘a regulation sheep-skin coat’, reveals his poor condition and socially tense situation. Thomson uses a long view, with close-ups of his face, as if the character were standing on the other side of the street and we were looking at him from a distance, our eyes replaced by his camera. Thomson took the picture from afar, but brought it closely into focus, thus creating an image of this character looking at us, seeming as if he had something to say, turning object into subject. Thomson uses a caption to echo this ambiguity, telling us of the simple and banal life of this character, whom he named ‘Old Wang’, a retired Tartar soldier now turned city guard with his wooden board, used to sound that all was well:

The subject of this picture (No. 51) is an old Tartar bannerman, a humble member of the Manchu camp, who kept watch at the gate of the French hotel by night; and although in the pay of the government, and allowed a salary sufficient for his own support, yet, by the time the amount reaches his hands through the official channel, it dwindles to about six shillings a month, and a regulation sheep-skin coat once a
year. Old Wang, for I believe that was his name, was perhaps an unfortunate specimen of the soldiers of the standing army, the bold conquerors who once subjugated China. Wrapped in his sheep-skin coat, and in an underclothing of rags, he lay through the cold nights on the stone step of the outer gateway, and only roused himself at times to answer the call of his fellow-watchman near at hand. This call is supposed to be passed from watchman to watchman all around the city.70

Although it is unknown if Old Wang is the real name of this character, it is interesting to look at the Chinese meaning of the word ‘Wang’. Wang is one of the most common Han Chinese surnames in China. It means king, and in one sense could be translated literally as ‘old king’. Thomson depicts Old Wang as ‘perhaps an unfortunate specimen of the soldiers of the standing army, the bold conquerors who once subjugated China’. He seems to use the retired soldier as a metaphor for old China, showing his sorrow for the Qing dynasty’s weakness.

Although we do not know if the character was a real person, Thomson draws much attention to Old Wang’s identity as an old Manchu Tartar, a nomadic tribe that Thomson explicitly shows his interests in, in many of his works. It seems to me, that this is the key role, and the main idea that Thomson tried to convey, echoed by the Victorian writer Henry Mayhew’s vision of himself as a ‘traveller in the undiscovered country of the poor’, who brought back extraordinary but everyday stories about people ‘of whom the public had less knowledge than of the most distant

Old Wang has become a metaphor of the Old Qing China, captured in Thomson’s Illustrations of China and Its People.

Street thieves, beggars and the poor were common urban issues in nineteenth-century British society. Thomson makes a selective exposure of the late Qing China’s urban ‘disease’ to British readers, focusing on beggars, those with disease and the poor. An example that Thomson regards as inimical to a productive China is shown in Figure 4-6. Thomson had a dislike for Buddhists and criticised the weak power and societal conditions of the late Qing government. His photographs reflect his personal disdain for the beggars plaguing Chinese cities and created a negative impression of China. He states:

Professional beggars are numerous in all parts of China, but it is in the larger cities that they more particularly abound, and their skill in dodges and deception would have furnished advantageous hints to the mendicants who used to infest our English thoroughfares. In China the beggar pursues his calling unmolested, and even has received for himself a recognition and quasi-protection at the hands of the civic authorities. The fact is, that the charitable institutions—of which there are many all over the country, and which are conducted in some cases with a fair degree of honesty—are yet totally unable to cope with the misery and destitution that prevails in populous localities. No poor-law system is known, and the only plan adopted to palliate the evil is to tolerate begging in public, and to place the lazzaroni [At the French Revolution, lazzaroni is the term given to describe the poorest

71 Ryan, Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualisation of the British Empire, p. 3.
of the lower class in the city of Naples, Italy] under the local jurisdiction of a responsible chief. In Foochow the city is divided into wards, and within the limits of each ward a head man is appointed, who can count his descent from a line of illustrious beggars, and in him rests the right, which would seem to be, to keep the members of his order under his own management and control. During my visit to Foochow I was introduced to one of these beggar kings, and he it is, with three of his subjects, who are presented to the reader in No. 53. I found this man to be an inveterate opium smoker, and consequently in bad circumstances, in spite of the handsome revenue which he was known to receive.\(^\text{72}\)

In Figure 4-6, there are four characters, the man on the right, as the chief of the beggars, pointing to three more beggars on the left. The image serves to underline Thomson’s caption perfectly, ‘in him rests the right, which would seem to be, to keep the members of his order under his own management and control’. This is the plot before the photograph was taken, and in the next description he continues, sure that these kind of beggar groups exist in real life, because he was once invited to witness the beggar king in Foochow city. Whether it was the writings or the pictures that came first, Thomson used photographic enrichment to develop visual skills, such as composition from painting. He expressed himself with originality and creative flair.

It is interesting to make a connection between this photograph and the cartoon ‘Great Stink’, originally published in 1858 in *Punch*. Comparing the two pictures,

Figure 4-7, Great Stink, and figure 4-6 Thomson’s Beggars, surprisingly, the beggars show not only similar facial expressions along with their exaggeratedly poor clothes, but the composition of the photograph is very similar to that of Great Stink. The beggars’ facial characteristics were very possibly inspired by Great Stink, which depicts an event in the city of London in 1858. Over the summer, residents of central London were overwhelmed by the smell of raw sewage, heightened by the hot weather, coming from the Thames. While Thomson shows the poverty, dirt and urban disease common in late Qing China, the similarity suggests, that London was overwhelmed with the same atmosphere, with city thieves and beggars.

Figure 4-6: ‘The Chief of the Thieves’, plate XXI, no. 53, volume 2, Illustrations of China and of Its People (1873-74)
In 1851, London was already the largest city in the world, but by 1860 it had grown three-fold to have 3,188,485 people, and many of the residents came from elsewhere. The large influx of immigrants was due to the political and economic disorder caused by the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. By 1851, over 38 per cent of Londoners were born somewhere other than in the city, which continuously expanded to adapt to the growing population. Generally, the larger a city’s population, the more efficient the urban system needs to be. The dynamic of the city space changes its residents’ way of life. The fast-paced life style of a city transforms people into hurrying, scurrying social creatures, taking their cues from each other. This is reflected in genres such as comedy and melodrama which were particularly fertile ground for the snapshot judgments that seem to be an inevitable consequence.

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of the speed and crowds of urban life. A similar drive can be detected in other Victorian works of social investigation that look for the crowd-pleasing simplicity of comedy or melodrama rather than analyse anything subtler. Henry Mayhew’s well-known *London Labour and the London Poor* of 1851 was produced in this environment and was surprisingly popular, influencing many works of the time.\(^{74}\)

Another work that made Thomson particularly famous was *Street Life in London*, published in 1876, in which he collaborated with journalist Adolphe Smith. The preface discusses Smith and Thomson’s ‘careful observation among the poor of London… a subject which has already been amply and ably treated’.\(^{75}\) referring to Mayhew’s *London Labour and the London Poor*. Mayhew started interviewing poor people in 1840 for a series of articles in the newspaper the *Morning Chronicle*. He served as a ‘special correspondent to the metropolis’ for the paper and was instructed to provide descriptions of the ‘moral, intellectual, material and physical’ conditions of the ‘industrial poor’.\(^{76}\) Mayhew allowed his subjects to speak directly to the reader in their own words as character voices.\(^{77}\) In this way, the world of the poor would open up to the public. The subject of London’s poor had become a strange new world of fascination for the Victorian public, and such publication proved extremely successful in a commercial sense. Even after Mayhew left the *Chronicle*, he continued to issue weekly pamphlets, then bound volumes, of *London Labour and the London Poor*, throughout the 1850s and 1860s. These books played an important

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\(^{74}\) Adolphe Smith and John Thomson, *Street Life in London*, 1877, (Yorkshire, 1973), i.  
\(^{75}\) Ibid, i.  
\(^{77}\) Mundhenk and Fletcher, *Victorian Prose: An Anthology*, p. 19.
part in the development of investigative journalism. The similarity of the images suggests that we can identify a strong link between the two, concluding that Street Life in London was greatly influenced by Mayhew’s London Labour and the London Poor. Exploration of the relationship between these publications helps us to understand the inter-related factors of the photographs in Illustrations of China and Its People and the primary focus of the author.

As I have argued, in the work of Thomson, the Manchu character Old Wang and the three beggars have become metaphors for the Chinese urban poor, in the same way as the ‘London nomad’ characters became metaphors for the London poor in Street Life in London. Both echo the introduction to Henry Mayhew’s 1851 edition of London Labour and the London Poor, in which Mayhew argues that beggars and costermongers were part of ‘nomadic tribes’, a distinct race who opposed themselves to a settled way of life. Mayhew considered himself to be an anthropologist or ethnologist, as did Thomson, based on his method of social investigation through photography. In Thomson’s photographs, the Chinese become as exotic, as silent, and as untouchable as the London poor. The framing and reproduction of his photographic practice stems from a way of categorising phenomenon, such as division of the social state in an economic way. Thomson, self-trained in early social-science research methodology, based his project on the British experience and, influenced by the images of the darker side of Victorian London within which he


operated, approached his photography and explanation of the Chinese world as one of meaning and accurate representation.

After Thomson published *Illustrations of China and Its People* in 1873 and 1874, he began work on *Street Life in London* in 1876. These two albums were related to each other, not only because they were published within a few years of one another but also because they both used photography as an objective recorder of the reality claimed by Thomson. Angela Vanhaelen, in her article ‘Street Life in London and the Organisation of Labour’ wrote ‘we do not know how he acquired his photographic skills… before taking on the *Street Life in London* project, he had travelled widely throughout Asia, and kept a photographic record of the people he encountered there… Thomson’s images of London’s urban poor demonstrate the same concerns’.\(^81\) In *Illustrations of China and Its People*, Thomson clearly took his photography of China to be an experiment, but the key point here is that it was through the lens of the urban poor that the view of China was introduced to the British and the world reading public.

4.5 Reproduction, Image and the Prostrate Body of the Chinese Opium Smoker

Figure 4-8: ‘Opium-smoking in a Restaurant’, no. 50, plate IX, volume.
Figure 4-9: Benjamin Broomhall, Truth About Opium-smoking (London, 1882), preface.

Thomson’s *Illustration of China and Its People* was originally printed in 1873-1874, but received a greater audience through the publication of over 200 of Thomson’s prints in the *Graphic* and other publications between 1872 and 1884. Thomson states his idea of the reproduction of images in the preface of *Illustration of China and Its People*:

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82 Ibid, pp. 40-45.
It is a novel experiment to attempt to illustrate a book of travels with photographs, a few years back so perishable, and so difficult to reproduce. But the art is now so far advanced, that we can multiply the copies with the same facility, and print them with the same materials as in the case of woodcuts or engravings. I feel somewhat sanguine about the success of the undertaking, and I hope to see the process which I have thus applied adopted by other travellers; for the faithfulness of such pictures affords the nearest approach that can be made towards placing the reader actually before the scene which is represented.\(^{83}\)

Thomson’s words help us to better understand the presentation and display of photographs in the Victorian period: ‘the photograph that this image reproduces alludes to stability across visual genres: the importance of photography here does not seem to be essential to the value of the image’.\(^{84}\) Figure 4-8 shows an important image of a Chinese opium smoker with a specific prostrate body pose. The smoker is lying on one side with a tray in front of him, his eyes staring into a tiny opium lamp and his hands tightly holding an opium pipe just above. The camera has caught his skinny body curled into a ball around the opium lamp in the dark. This image was first published in 1872, but ten years later was re-printed and spread widely as visual propaganda in the *Truth About Opium-smoking* published by the Anglo-Oriental

Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade (SSOT) (Figure 4-9), an anti-opium ideological pamphlet.85

This single image of a Chinese opium smoker, created by John Thomson, was used and circulated in various ways, serving various agendas. Looking at the two images, the original photograph and the illustration on the pamphlet, although the subject is the same, there are two differences. Firstly, the image is flipped left to right, and secondly the focus and colour highlighting are changed. The reproduction of an image involves technical decisions and manipulation, such as framing, cutting out details from larger layouts, colour, brightness and even change of focus. In the original photograph (Figure 4-8), the focus is on the face of the smoker, but on the pamphlet cover (Figure 4-9), the focus is on the opium lamp, with the face and the body of the smoker in the dark background. What these two images suggest is that the original photograph in Thomson’s Illustration of China and Its People focuses on an individual Chinese person’s action, and that smoking opium is this specific person’s choice, hence the emphasised facial expression. But the reproduction tells a different story, with the face and body slightly in the dark and the focus on the opium lamp, it emphasises the matter of smoking. In doing so, it successfully transforms a single issue into a collective issue. This shows how, through reproduction, the engraver can manipulate the image to suit their own design and create a different way of the reading the image.

What else does the pose of the body signify? The lying body represents a negative stereotype of Chinese opium smokers, and both the original photograph and the reproduction reinforce this narrative visually. A recumbent body often suggests

85 Benjamin Broomhall, Truth About Opium-smoking (London, 1882), preface.
laziness or idleness in Western society, evoking someone who does not work, but without negative judgement. It is important to consider the different meaning of body shapes in the Chinese cultural context. The following deconstructs what it means for Chinese people to be the ‘lying position’ (qinxi 寢息), explores ideas from Chinese medicine and discusses correct opium smoking practice by the Chinese.

Opium was first introduced to China via Arab merchants from the eighth century. Taken orally to relieve pain as a medicine, from earliest times, opium was used in limited amounts. From the seventeenth century, in China, opium as the new leisure activity of smoking pure opium, instead of mixing raw opium with tobacco, became popular in China. According to German physician Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716), who worked for the Dutch East Indian Company, the Japanese soaked their tobacco in water which made the head spin violently and provided a convenient alternative to tea and alcohol.\(^6\) Mixing opium with other substances was believed to relate to the smoking practice in Java, and this new way to smoke opium became popular. It was probably introduced into China by Dutch traders between 1660 and 1624. It spread first to Taiwan and then to Fujian, mainland China.\(^7\)

Javanese opium was blended with roots of other plants and mixed with tobacco, and this was called madak (or chandu).\(^8\) These tobacco-opium mixtures were prepared by the owners of smoking houses and sold at a higher price than a pure tobacco. The early practice of madak smoking in Taiwan is key to understanding the later design of the Chinese opium smoking pipe in China. In

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\(^7\) Ibid, p. 32.
\(^8\) Ibid, p. 88.
Taiwan, the opium house provided the smoking implement, a small bamboo tube with a filter made of fibres from local coconut palms.\(^8^9\) During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at the time of the early Qing conquest of Taiwan, many Chinese officers sent to Taiwan wrote of either their observations or memories of Taiwan or those when they returned to mainland China. Detailed descriptions of the early use of madak helps us understand the original pipe craft design of the opium smoking implements in Taiwan. According to one Qing officer sent to Taiwan, Zhu Jingying in his *Haidong zhaji*:

Opium is produced in Java, Philippines and other oceanic countries; it is a prohibited article by sea. Taiwan has many idles (*wulai 無賴*) that mix opium and tobacco and inhale it. It is said that it helps to restore vigour and can help one stay awake through the night. People are invited to gather together for the practice of inhaling smoke, and smoke it by turns. They place a mat on the floor on which everyone lies, burn a lamp in the middle and inhale it. …this leads to a hundred or several hundred mouthfuls. The pipe is made of a bamboo tube, about eight or nine *fen 分* [about 2.99 cm] (26 cm in length), in the middle stuffed with palm slices and there is a silver rim under both sides. The tube has a little finger-sized hole cut on the side, and they use the yellow clay to shape a jug, cut a hole in the middle of this jug so that fire can burn through, insert the jug into the top side, put opium tobacco on top of the hole, then, when the smoke comes out a

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little bit, inhale it into the mouth and blow it out ‘til the end. It makes a gege sound.\(^9^0\)

This suggests that the practice of smoking opium in Taiwan, at that time, was different from in China later, for example, smoking pure opium is a slow process, which is not conducive to ‘a hundred or several hundred mouthfuls’ at one time. But the similarity with the recumbent body position, shows that those smokers in Taiwan already heated the tobacco mixture to vaporise it rather than burn it to produce dry smoke, because the procedure of vaporising requires one to lie down, be close to the heat, and puff fast. One of the features of the bamboo tube described as a hole on the side and a yellow clay jug, indicates that this bamboo tube of the Taiwanese smokers was very likely to be a design prototype for the Chinese opium pipe, which was developed later from a variety of materials such as ebony, ivory, silver, iron, porcelain, jade etc.

That which is called *yapian yan* 烏片煙 in Chinese can be equated to madak (opium-tobacco mixture) for inhaling pure opium alone. Madak was used first in Taiwan and from there went to Fujian.\(^9^1\) It is noteworthy that during the eighteenth century, tobacco was accepted in both Europe and China. In 1833, the celebrated Chinese scholar Yu Zhengxie in his essay ‘Yapianyan shixu’ (‘Essay on opium’), commented on opium as having an important role in traditional Chinese medicine:

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From various translations of documents and from the *Tongwen Guan*同文館 we know that in the Ming period opium was a royal gift, as well as a popular medicine.\(^{92}\) In China, opium has been known as wuxiang (black incense), or wuyan (black smoke), although originally it was known as yapian, apian, yarong [yapian 鴉片] afurong or hefurong [a fu rong 阿富榮], terms common in a variety of texts from the Ming onwards.\(^{93}\)

Opium continued to be used as Chinese pain relief until the outbreak of the First Opium War. In 1729, the Emperor Yongzheng banned recreational smoking of madak (opium-tobacco mixtures), but opium (yapian yan) itself was still accepted as a medicine.\(^{94}\) For example, in the same year, a Chinese man, Chen Yuan, purchased opium at a pharmacy and was arrested. His defence was that he purchased the opium for medical reasons. The official verdict was as follows:

> Opium is a pharmaceutical substance required by medical practitioners. Only when it is blended with tobacco can it become harmful and lead to lustful acts: it can then be referred to as an illegal item.\(^{95}\)

\(^{92}\) Tongwen Guan 同文館 was set up during 1861 and 1862 in Qing China as a result of a memorial to the Throne by Prince Gong 恭 (1833-1898), Wenxiang 文祥 (1818-1876) and Guiliang 桂良 (1785-1898), leading members of the Self-Strengthening faction at the Qing court. It was the first government-funded Chinese school specialising in Western languages. The primary sources on the Tongwen Guan, *Calender of the Tongwen College* (Beijing, 1879) and W. A. P. Martin, *A Cycle of Cathy or China, South and North, with Personal Reminiscences* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1896), pp. 293-327 cited by David Wright, *Translating Science: The Transmission of Western Chemistry into Late Imperial China, 1840-1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 296.


This leads us to rethink the fundamental issues around opium smoking in China. Tobacco entered China from the bottom levels in society, and its use moved upwards to the higher echelons of society. Figure 4-10, a detail of a series called ‘Imperial Birthday Celebrations’ (Wanshou shengdian tu 萬壽盛典圖) painted in 1711 and published in 1717, serves as a perfect illustration of this point. This series of paintings was originally drawn by two painters Wang Yuanqi 王原祁(1642-1715) and Song Junye 宋駿業(?-1713). The paintings adopt a Western perspective on the celebration of the emperor’s sixtieth birthday. They depict people on the street from the Suburban Palace to the Northern Gate of the Forbidden City, showing the characters’ expressions, postures and clothing and the decorated shops. One of the pieces, half-way through the scroll, shown in Figure 4-10, shows a few smokers with a pipe, which shows that smoking was clearly part of Chinese public life. According to Lucie Olivova this is the earliest pictorial record of tobacco smokers in China.96 We know that the Ming emperor Chongzhen (1628-1645) issued a ban against tobacco. The ban was only maintained for a short while and did not generally affect the practice of tobacco smoking.97 After 1644, the Qing dynasty ruled China, and there were no more official tobacco bans until the leaders of the Taiping movement (1850-1864) banned tobacco, wine and opium.

97 Carol Benedict, Golden-Silk Smoke: A History of Tobacco in China, 1550–2010 (Oakland, University of California Press, 2011), pp. 34–40. See also a Chinese scholar Yang Shicong (1597-1648) explained that it might have been because the term chi yan (to smoke/eat tobacco) was a bad omen, as the word in Chinese sounds like the capital was eaten or occupied, however this is unclear.
Figure 4-10: Wanshou shengdian tu 萬壽盛典圖, 1717, Source: Qing dian banhua huikan 清殿版畫匯刊 (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 1998), p. 105.
As the use of opium as medicine and the smoking of tobacco were generally accepted in China, this raises the question of why the smoking of madak came to be banned and the smoking of pure opium considered a problem. I would like to suggest that this might have had something to do with the recumbent pose of opium smokers. In Zhu Jingying’s depiction of madak in Taiwan, the smokers ‘place a mat on the floor on which everyone lies down’, thus, the smokers’ bodies and body postures play an important role in the practice. In both madak and pure opium smoking, the smoker had to be lying down. Figure 4-11 shows a drawing from *Opium des fumeurs*, a book published in 1890 by the Archives de Médecine Navale which provides a detailed design of the opium pipe, lamp and bowl attached to the pipe, and shows how the opium vapour that is set free is inhaled through the little hole in the opium bowl.

Figure 4-11: ‘Opium des fumeur’, Archives de Médecine Navale, (*Paris, 1890*).

Figure 4-11 shows the whole procedure of smoking opium, practised lying down in order to be close to the lamp. The body is curled towards the centre of the opium lamp. In this body position, the tiny quantity of costly opium could be enjoyed
most effectively. Smoking opium is therefore different from smoking tobacco
because opium is not simply burnt like tobacco; it is vaporised by the heat, which
requires implements such as a bamboo pipe. This illustrates that the bodily
interaction with the opium object has to be very close.

One of opium’s side effects is that it can keep one awake during the night.
Staying awake at night is considered taboo in traditional Chinese medicine, and seen
as incompatible with keeping in good health. One of the most famous and influential
Chinese writers and pharmacologists of the Song dynasty, Su Shi (1037-1101),
mentions that sleeplessness during the night would stimulate sexual desire.98 So it is
perhaps not surprising that opium was seen as chun yao: an aphrodisiac (translated
literally ‘spring drug’) because it kept users awake. Later, it also became commonly
used in the Chinese sex trade. But throughout this time, opium was a luxury good,
and the elites and officials smoked in luxuriously decorated ‘riverboats’ or leisure
vessels. Opium was used for the art of sex as ‘songs charm the ear and ravishing
women surround you. This is really a dream celestial world’.99 Nevertheless, staying
awake and sexual desire are not the same thing. It is arguable that when Zhu Jingying
in his Haidong zhaji states, ‘it is said that it helps to restore vigour and can keep one
awake through the night’100 he was referring to opium as an aphrodisiac. In Yangwen
Zheng’s study The Social Life of the Opium in China, she translates the same line
from Chinese to English ‘it is said that it helps with the performance [during sexual

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睡，則朝旦面色黃燥，意思荒浪，以血不得歸故也。
100 Zhu Jingying, Haidong zhaji, p. 29.
intercourse] and one does not need to sleep during the whole night.’

This translation seems to me to push at the boundary between sleeplessness and sex performance. At any rate, Zhu’s original Chinese description only explains the sleepless effect of opium rather than showing it helps sexual performance.

Both Chinese and British medical experts believed that opium could boost vigour. However, they had a different opinion of opium’s effect on libido. A Welsh physician, Sir William Roberts, giving evidence to the Royal Commission on Opium between 1893 and 1895, described the after-effects of use. He was a medical expert but he did not approve of opium being used to stimulate the libido. When political pressure was brought against the British government’s involvement in the Sino-Indian opium trade, the Royal Commission on Opium was created to investigate the drug, and Sir William Roberts said:

A small dose not infrequently acts as a stimulant; there is a feeling of vigour, a capability of severe exertion and an endurance of labour without fatigue. A large dose often exerts a calming influence with a dreamy state in which images and ideas pass rapidly before the mind without fatigue and often in disorder and without apparent sequence. Time seems to be shortened as one state of consciousness quickly succeeds another, and there is a pleasant feeling of grateful rest. This is succeeded by sleep, which, according to the strength of the dose and the idiosyncrasy of the person, may be light and dreamy, or like normal profound sleep, or deep and heavy, passing into stupor or

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coma. From this a person may awaken with a feeling of depression or languor or wretchedness, often associated with sickness, headache, or vomiting. The deadening of the vital functions which overtakes the opium eater who habitually exceeds his tolerance involves the sexual function and leads to impotence.103

This suggests that opium, when taken in a large dose either as pills or smoked, leads to lying down in ‘a dreamy state’. The word used in Chinese for ‘lie or lying’ is qin 寢 as a verb, similar in meaning to ‘sleep’. Depending on the circumstances, qin can be used in various senses, but most of the synonyms of qin carry a relative meaning involving lying or sleep, for example the noun qin shi is ‘bedroom’.

To the Chinese, the body is controlled by the mind; when a person is in a private place, asleep or lying down, his or her body position still needs to be controlled by the self in accordance with correct ritual. In the *Analects of Confucius*, Book 10, Chapter 16, Confucius states: ‘In bed, one does not lie like a corpse’.104 By this, Confucius meant that a person has to pay attention to body position even when lying down. In Zhou Lu Jing’s essay ‘Lying asleep’, he mentions that when lying down, the perfect position is lying on one’s side and bending the knees.105 This explains that the body position of those Chinese opium smokers was actually following the Chinese ritual: lying down on their sides, bending their knees and doing their best to become ‘spherical’. (Figure 4-8) Furthermore, to understand the

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104 Confucian Analects, Book X: Heang Tang 鄉黨第十, Chapter 16, [206 BC–220], Chinese text: 寢不尸，居不客。
105 Zhou Lu Jing 周履靖 (1549-1640), ‘qinxi’寢息, Yi ling dan 益齡單, Cong shu ji cheng xin bian 叢書集成新編 vol. 9 (Taipei, 1985), p. 12, Chinese text: 睡宜側臥屈膝。
Chinese body, we need to understand how Chinese traditional medicine first came to establish the meaning of the body. One of the important aspect of a living body is qi (air), which also means energy flow. The Chinese medical text the Emperor’s Inner Classic (Huangdi Neijing, 黃帝內經) mentions that if a person stays lying down, his body maintains the *yin* 陰 status as his qi is weak.\(^{106}\) The lying down body is not only seen as yin on the basis of a person’s health but also represents the aesthetic of the Chinese body politic.

While my discussion started with a single photograph of the Chinese opium smoker and its reproduction and visual meaning, I close here with an open question about how the representations of opium smoking bodies can be understood, and how they connect with the visual economy of Chineseness. What negative consequences follow from the image of the Chinese opium smoker? For Thomson, photographing a Chinese opium smoker was either a scientific or artistic pursuit. But the visible bodily signs represented by the Chinese opium smoker are subject to interpretation through political and economic ideas. Thomson had a commercial and public presence in British society.\(^{107}\) The visual economy of Chineseness that emerged around the production, reproduction and circulation of image objects can be read and interpreted through the racialised body and the colonial discourse of Western

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\(^{106}\) Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Ying: Gender in China’s Medical History: 960-1665*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 27-29. The symbolic meanings associated with the *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 of the body are related to traditional ways of understanding and treating health issues in Chinese medicine. *Yin* and *yang* are two opposite energies, for example, the moon is *yin* and the sun is *yang*. See also, Huangdi Neijing, Zhong guo zhe xue shu dian zi hua ji hua, Chinese text: 天帝曰：人之多寐者，何氣使然？歧伯曰：此人腸胃大而皮膚濕，而分肉不解焉。腸胃大則衛氣留久，皮膚濕則分肉不解，其行遲。夫衛氣者，晝日常行於陽，夜行於陰，故陽氣盡則臥，陰氣盡則寤。故腸胃大則衛氣行留久；皮膚濕，分肉不解，則行遲。留於陰也久，其氣不清則欲瞑；故多寐矣。其腸胃小，皮膚滑以緩，行肉解利，衛氣之留於陽也久，故少瞑焉。帝曰：其非常經也，卒然多寐者何氣使然？歧伯曰：邪氣留於上焦，上焦閉而不通，已食若飲湯，衛氣留久於陰而不行，故卒然多寐焉。

modernity. The images seem to have circulated only within the Western community, but with increasing cultural exchange between China and the West, the visual economy of the Chinese opium smoker created by Thomson also became part of self-perception within China. Visual representations of Chinese bodies began to serve the purpose of telling the Western world about the identity of the Chinese as much as they told the Chinese about who they were. In the end, such images and perspectives came to be referred to as the ‘sick man of East Asia’ in Chinese society.  

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the photographs of Chinese faces and types in John Thomson’s Illustrations of China and Its People were not only a construction of the ‘imaginative geography’ of the British Empire, but also reveal limitations in the

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108 In China, the expression the ‘sick man of East Asia’ is translated as Dong Ya Bing Fu 東亞病夫 (sick man of East Asia) by modern Chinese reformists, particularly the scholar Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929). The image is not only of the late Qing government’s national recession and political reform but also the Chinese people’s physical quality. Liang was the first to use the expression ‘sick men’ to describe Chinese men’s appearance and lack of physical qualities in 1903. In the same year, the revolutionary Chen Tianhua 陳天華(1875-1905) used the term ‘sick men of East Asia’ in his book An Alarm to Awaken the Age (Jingshizhong). In 1905, the author Zeng Pu 曾樸 (1891-1935) took the pseudonym Dong Ya Bing Fu 東亞病夫 when publishing his novel The Flower in the Vicious Sea (Niehiaihua), which became very popular and contributed to the dissemination of self-derogatory expression in China. While Liang translated Dong Ya Bing Fu literally from English to Chinese, in the beginning it maintained the original sense that referred to an ill-governed nation. He wrote: ‘our country is notorious for being considered a sick man in the world, the ill governmental system a paralysed patient, with no power to function as a nation. Other nations have power over us in the twentieth-century arena’. 梁啟超，《新民說》，收入夏曉虹編，《梁啟超文選》(北京:中國廣播電視出版社, 1992), 頁163。‘…吾以病夫聞於世界，手足癱瘓，以盡失防護之機能，東西諸國，莫不磨刀霍霍，內向魚肉我矣，我不能拔文弱之惡根，一雪不武之積恥，二十世紀競爭之場，寧復有支那人種立足之地哉! Liang Qichao, ‘Xinmin Shuo’ in Xia Xiaohong ed., Liang Qichao Collection (Beijing, [1992]1923), p. 163. 梁啟超，《新民說》，收入夏曉虹編，《梁啟超文選》，(北京:中國廣播電視出版社, 1992) 頁163。 ‘…以文弱為美稱，以羸怯為嬌貴，翩翩年少，弱不禁風，名曰丈夫，弱子少女，弱冠而後，則又縛綁束縛以耗其精力，吸食鴉片以戕其身體，鬼態鬼幽，一蹶不振，面有死容，病體奄奄，氣息才屬合四萬萬人，而不能得一完備之體格。呜呼!其人皆為病夫，其國安得不為病國也!以此而出與悍猛勇鸕之異族遇，則猶強絲弱之鬥巨無霸，彼雖不持一械，一揮手而我已傾跌矣。呜呼!生存競爭，優勝劣敗，吾望我同胞練其筋骨，習子力勇，無然頑憨以坐廢也’ (The Chinese men’s look, gentle and frail-looking (wenruo), is a well-known feature. A twenty-something young man looks more fragile than a girl. A so-called Chinese masculine true man, smoking opium, damaging his health, looks pale and sick, and thus the nation has an illness).
subtle relationship between John Thomson’s photography and production practice. The aesthetic and imaginative aspects all need to be reconsidered. I have broken down the complexity of the inner story of Thomson’s photographs by looking at his early life and the context of Victorian society’s reading public in section 4-2 ‘British photographer John Thomson and his Illustrations of China and its People’. I have provided a micro-level look at small-scale interactions between perceptions and photographs, their mutual influences and connections, and the impact of images such as ‘Chinese opium smoker’ on the British and Chinese eyes. In Thomson’s constructed Chinese ‘type’ images, specifically those which tap into this otherworldly (Victorian London society) theme and closely map the conditions in London, poverty, theft and begging are all part of the threat posed by the lower classes. This was the mutual influence of subject and production between Chinese and English images at the time.

In section 4.4 ‘Images of Chinese labourers and beggars’ and section 4.5 ‘Reproduction, Image and the Prostrate Body of the Chinese Opium Smoker’, I have made a photograph-object analysis. I have shown that photographs enable us to investigate the image of Chinese faces which are often accompanied by frightful poverty, and the full circle of visual propaganda, those who brought the images into circulation by publishing them for the public with intervention in both images and captions that engaged with learned British societies. Notably in Thomson’s selected exposé—exemplified by the lower classes, the urban poor and the opium smokers—the type of image provided a version of the Chinese look, which may well have been perceived in relation to the implication of the Chinese as the ‘sick man of East Asia’.
This photographic analysis and my exploration of the fear of the poor in Thomson’s photographs show that the same urban themes existed in England and China in the early modern period. On one hand, China and the Chinese ‘faces’ appear as Thomson’s re-interpretation of China rather than a reflection of reality. Thomson’s idea of China interprets the subject and superimposes the idea of the London urban poor, thus making it recognisable. He made a constructed version of China by retouching British types. Thomson transformed frightful British faces into Chinese faces, and, going full circle, these frightful Chinese faces became British fears. Meanwhile, to the Chinese, the Chinese image, such as the Chinese poor and opium smoker became part of the self-humiliation of the modern Chinese world, which became one of the images associated with the ‘sick man of East Asia’ in the nineteenth century. On the other hand, the frightful images of Chinese labours captured by Thomson, convey his sympathy and acknowledgement of the Chinese poor and Chinese society. Such images create a sense of universal humanity and shared global culture. As a new form of communication, photography developed a ‘visual economy’ as a part of nineteenth century’s British masculine Chinoiserie which linked people across Chinese and British society.

To sum up, the subject of the urban poor pre-existed in London as a popular topic that concerned the British public. Thomson imposed his exploration of poverty in China on the image of the London poor. When he came back to England he improved on his ideas from Illustrations of China and Its People and started the project Street Life in London. In doing so, Illustrations of China and Its People

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became a trial sketch for *Street Life in London*, but *Illustrations of China and Its People* grew out of the images of London’s urban poor of Henry Mayhew. The photographic work of Thomson leads to considerations of power, social and transcultural relations and demonstrates the importance of using a global perspective for interpreting such image collections.

In this chapter, unlike current John Thomson studies that largely focus on the relationship between photographic technologies and visual representation, I have considered alternative frameworks of re-imagining Chineseness and the use of the photographic sources to examine how images construct Chinese identity, the British understanding of China and the Chinese, and the ‘visual economy’ of Chineseness. In doing so, I have been able to demonstrate different perspectives on the visual meaning of Chinese faces, the body of labour, and the body of opium smokers, with a transcultural theme. Overall, this chapter has set up the British Chineseness on which the thesis is based, and provided a transcultural point of view which deals with the ‘in-between’ cultural model which constructs its own ideas of internal impulses and interests which occur at the time. Above all it has considered how transcultural creativity encounters other cultures.
Chapter 5 London Limehouse Chinatown as a Heterotopia ca. 1890 – ca. 1920

5.1 Introduction

This chapter situates the discussion both in the context of social history and urban design practice, revealing that Limehouse Chinatown was a space where Chineseness was in a process of change and hybridisation.¹ There is much research on the Chinatowns of America, Canada and New Zealand, but less concerning London. One of the main questions is whether Chinatown in Limehouse was a misnomer or real. Ng Kwee Choo argues that Limehouse Chinatown was a misnomer and not at all like the larger Chinatowns in San Francisco or New York.² John Seed refers to the space of Limehouse Chinatown as manipulated into being by British newspapers and modern authors. For him it is a Chinatown representing the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.³ Similarly, Jon Burrows, in his study ‘A Vague Chinese Quarter Elsewhere: Limehouse in the Cinema 1914-36’, writing about D.W. Griffith’s film ‘Broken Blossoms’, asserts that this locale has little to do with real Chinese people and Limhouse Chinatown. He concludes that, ‘the image of Limehouse could be seen as another transatlantic import, no more indexically linked to native reality than a Western film’.⁴

¹ This chapter follows Chapter 3 ‘Fantasy and Fear: The Chinese Man as a Prototype of China’s National Image’ which discusses the image of Chinese men based on both fantasy and fear in Limehouse Chinatown.
One thing missing from these studies is the Chinatown that once existed in London’s Limehouse district was destroyed in about 1940. The community of Limehouse, however, was recorded photographically, and this evidence remains. In 2006, the BBC produced a documentary called ‘Memories of the Genuine Children of Limehouse Chinatown’. In the film, a couple named Connie and Leslie Hoa, who grew up in Limehouse Chinatown, relay their memories using personal photographs, and tell the story of a Limehouse Chinatown that no longer exists. This chapter was originally inspired by the ideas of the narrative of space through photographs and memory.

In a similar vein, I use other visual resources such as maps, paintings, photographs and film to suggest a way of seeing Limehouse Chinatown. This chapter adds to the design history of culture through re-examining the ‘Limehouse Chinatown’ of reproduction. The commonly assumed Chinatown in design history has a strong link to traditional Chinese culture, and one’s appropriation of culture is determined by ones’ position in the class or occupational system or ethnicity. The key goal of the chapter is to explore the intersection between transculture and design, for example, individuals and ethnic groups, occupations, shopfront designs and meaning making. Drawing on the idea of Foucault’s heterotopia, the chapter analyses photographs of Limehouse Chinatown’s streets, buildings and shopfront signs in order to better understand how Limehouse’s design history is relevant to British Chinoiserie.

This chapter examines various forms of socio-historical visual materials that focus on the space and shopfront design. Evidence is drawn from a range of sources including local newspapers, Chinese texts, photographs in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library (THLHL) taken between 1900 and 1930, and the notebooks of the social scientist Charles Booth composed during his London map project (ca. 1900) now in the London School of Economics archive. This diverse material demonstrates how Limehouse Chinatown was primarily a small business manifestation that was applied to two streets (Pennyfields and Causeway), with its characteristic hybrid and divergent language shopfront signs that became an ‘other’ space in London.

The term heterotopia is taken from Michel Foucault, and specifically from Of Other Spaces, an original lecture given to a group of architectural students in 1967. Foucault provides a new way of thinking about space, seeing space as a mirror, forming a metaphor for the duality and contradiction embedded in the concept: the reality and the unreality of utopia and heterotopia. Foucault gives six principles to establish what he calls heterotopology, which he applies to various sites, such as ships, cemeteries, gardens, museums and urban spaces. In an urban space design context, the buildings of Limehouse Chinatown were, in terms of the aesthetics of the British traditional style, no different to the Victorian terraced houses in the rest of London. However, in Limehouse Chinatown, the Chinese migrants opened Chinese stores, and used the shopfronts as a site for linguistic codes, implying multiple meanings. In particular, the use of the language codes in the shopfront designs illustrates a hybrid aesthetic fashion of Chinoiserie as spectacle for British

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consumption. The Chinoiserie aesthetic had an impact via the lifestyles the shopfront linguistic design produced, but it also informed perceptions of the heterotopia of the place and its people. This chapter argues that Limehouse Chinatown was a heterotopian site, where the processes of change and hybridisation were facilitated.

5.2 Limehouse Chinatown: Ethnic Groups, Inter-racial Marriage and Occupations

Map 5-1: ‘London Map’, the street on the right is Pennyfields street and on the left is Limehouse Causeway street, Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives, 1920.

Limehouse Chinatown area was a cosmopolitan district with Swedish, Danish, German, Italian and Russian households crowded into two narrow streets, Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway (Map 5-1). It was not uncommon to find shops and cafes where English working-class families ate among the Chinese boarding houses. Although we do not know exactly when the Chinese community was established, the above records suggest that the Chinese community began to be
specifically located in place and recognised by the British press as a designated Chinatown around 1900. Chinese residents of Limehouse settled along just two streets. Chinese boarding houses, patronised by sea crews between voyages, were the first establishments in these settlements. But from 1900 to 1920, the Chinese were not merely strangers, they were suspected of posing an economic threat to the English.8

According to the social scientist Charles Booth’s notebooks, compiled from 1886 to 1903, Pennyfields was a mixed-ethnicity area by 1888.9 Booth does not depict the physical appearance of the place, which may suggest that the buildings were not unlike other suburban streets in London at the time. Charles Booth used seven colours to classify London poverty rates in his map. The colours indicate if a street contained a fair proportion of each class of wealth: black represents the lowest class, vicious, semi-criminal; dark blue, very poor, casual labourers, chronic needs groups; light blue, poor; purple, mixed, some comfortable others poor; pink, fairly comfortable, good earnings; red, middle class, well-to-do; and yellow, upper-middle and upper classes, wealthy.10 It is important to note a tension between his writing in

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8 See Chapter 3.5 ‘The Creation of Chinese Spectacle and Mimic Men’.
9 Charles Booth’s online archive, http://booth.lse.ac.uk/ [accessed 20 February 2013]. Charles Booth’s London Poverty Map in 1889, B 31 and B331, see also Hermione Hobhouse (General Editor), ‘Pennyfields’, Survey of London: Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dog, vol. 43 -44, (London: University of London & History of Parliament Trust, 1994), pp. 111-113. Booth described the north side as inclusive of at least five middle-class households, a Commercial Tavern (No. 1), the Rose and Crown (No. 17), and three small shops (Nos. 33–37). The south side was poorer and contained the homes of several destitute labourers, a few well-frequented brothels, and a lodging-house (No. 62).
10 Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London Volume 1 (London: Macmillan, 1902) pp. 33-62. In the first volume of the poverty series in the final edition of Life and Labour of the People in London, Booth expounds further on the system of classification. Here he uses an eight-tier system, A: The lowest class, which consists of some occasional labourers, street sellers, loafers, criminals and semi-criminals. Their life is the life of savages, with vicissitudes of extreme hardship and their only luxury is drink. B: Casual earnings, very poor. The labourers do not get as much as three days work a week, but it is doubtful if many could or would work full time for long together if they had the opportunity. Class B is not one in which men are born and live and die so much as a deposit of those who from mental, moral and physical reasons are incapable of better work. C: Intermittent earning, 18s to 21s per week for a moderate family. The victims of competition and on them falls with
the notebooks, which describe Pennyfields as miserable and poor, and his poverty map, which illustrates the area in purple, indicating a mixed-wealth area. Limehouse Causeway is presented as pink, which is fairly comfortable with good earnings. Nevertheless, almost all textual sources record this Chinese community as poor and dangerous (Table 5-1).

Table 5-1: Charles Booth Poverty Map, Colours Classification, London School of Economics and Political Science Archives, 26 May 1897.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td>Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARK BLUE</td>
<td>Very poor, casual. Chronic want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIGHT BLUE</td>
<td>Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPLE</td>
<td>Mixed. Some comfortable others poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PINK</td>
<td>Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RED</td>
<td>Middle class. Well-to-do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YELLOW</td>
<td>Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A combination of colours - as dark blue or black, or pink and red - indicates that the street contains a fair proportion of each of the classes represented by the respective colours.

particular severity the weight of recurrent depressions of trade. Labourers, poorer artisans and street sellers. This irregularity of employment may show itself in the week or in the year: stevedores and waterside porters may secure only one of two days' work in a week, whereas labourers in the building trades may get only eight or nine months in a year. D: Small regular earnings, poor, regular earnings. Factory, dock, and warehouse labourers, messengers and porters. Of the whole section none can be said to rise above poverty, nor are many to be classed as very poor. As a general rule they have a hard struggle to make ends meet, but they are, as a body, decent steady men, paying their way and bringing up their children respectfully. E: Regular standard earnings, 22s to 30s per week for regular work, fairly comfortable. As a rule the wives do not work, but the children do: the boys commonly following the father, the girls taking local trades or going out to service. F: Higher class labour and the best paid of the artisans. Earnings exceed 30s per week. Foremen are included, city warehousemen of the better class and first hand lightermen; they are usually paid for responsibility and are men of good character and much intelligence. G: Lower middle class. Shopkeepers and small employers, clerks and subordinate professional men. A hardworking sober, energetic class. H: Upper middle class, servant keeping class.

11 J.A.G. Roberts, *China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), pp. 155-157. ‘…in London’s East End there were some 30 Chinese shops and restaurants along two streets, Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway…’
Booth’s unpublished notebooks demonstrate his focus on describing residents. Booth seems to express his own judgment much like the travel writers previously mentioned. The crucial parts of Charles Booth’s observations relate to socio-economic detail, but when he investigates migrant areas, he cannot avoid an attitude of moral and civic superiority. Beginning in 1890, the Chinese population in Limehouse eventually spread from Limehouse Causeway to Pennyfields. The initial Asian community settlement included Chinese and Japanese seamen who worked the Oriental sea routes into the Port of London. When Booth studied this area, he noted:

The Japs and Chinamen are as a rule quiet and easy to deal with. Of the two the Japs are the noisiest. The Chinaman is tame quiet and once you have made an arrangement with him he keep to it. Chinese cooks sometimes escape from a ‘board’ ship and hide in Limehouse causeway. But with the help of the chap at the Chinese general shop ‘last’ generally can put his hand on them. That means a sovereign in
his pocket - About Christmas, the Japs and the Chinamen found out that their countries had been at war with one another so they started fighting on their own account but it wasn’t much. The Chinaman has a great respect for authority. The Jap is ‘more’ like an Englishman. He is a good sailor and more and more are being employed on English ships. He tries to be like an Englishman. When he comes to London he drinks beer, gets drunk and runs after women12 (Figure 5-1).

What strikes us in Booth’s observation of the Chinese community is the comparison he makes between the Chinese and Japanese residents. For example, he concludes that the Japanese are the ‘noisiest’ and the Chinese are ‘quiet’ – both ethnic judgments put forth by a host culture. It cannot be denied that Booth held a superior attitude when he came to investigating the migrant community. It is also certain that the British public and government responses to areas such as Limehouse labelled them as troublesome communities. The Aliens Act of 1905 affirms this, and is filled with anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic sentiment. This order was imposed on immigrant groups including Irish, Jewish, German, Polish, Russian, Chinese, Italian and Afro-Caribbean communities.13

However, Charles Booth not only drew conclusions based on the behaviour of Asian immigrant groups but compared them to other immigrant groups, particularly the Jewish population. There are a number of social problems projected on Chinese migrant populations in Britain and reported in the local press, including cheap labour, criminal and sexual activity, and, between 1920 and 1930, inter-racial marriage. The press claimed a moral crisis was befalling ‘those white women’ who married ‘yellow men’. In her article, *Poplar - Apart from Politics* from *The Nineteenth Century* published in 1924, Sydney K. Phelps notes:
Poplar’s second trouble is its foreign population. The foreigners accused, in most of the tales of woe I have heard, are either Chinese or Jews. In the case of the Chinese the affair turns as a rule on the unhappy plight of some white girl, for though gambling is mentioned, it is regarded with the utmost toleration. In the case of the Jews the story turns always on houses or money.\textsuperscript{14}

Phelps implies that Chinese men and British women’s inter-racial marriage posed more of a social problem than the economic threat allegedly brought on by the Jewish community. She also indicates the toleration of certain activities, such as gambling, amongst the British. The early period of the Limehouse community saw the area become an entertainment and commercial site for Chinese sailors on shore-leave. Popular establishments such as opium dens, Chinese grocers, restaurants and seamen’s lodging-houses were built to accommodate demand. Many British people came to patronise the establishments and seek entertainment in the area. The opium dens and gambling became as attractive to the British customers as the Chinese seamen.

The Chinese settled along Pennyfields and Causeway, and there are some similarities and differences between the two. Immigrants from Shanghai populated Pennyfields whereas Chinese from Guangdong province and Hong Kong inhabited Causeway. This separation was psychological as well as physical. In an edition of the \textit{Evening News} (1920), an article entitled \textit{Chinatown as I know it: Glimpses into the Life of Yellow Men’s Wives}, included an interview with a Chinese man’s English

wife, Laura, who explained, ‘if you take up with a Hong Kong man, you mustn’t make friends with a chap from Shanghai, or you’re in for it’. Before the treaty of Nanking (1842), Shanghai was considered an important trading place for Western markets. Shanghai City moderated between the traditional and modern aspects and became the ‘background of the Shanghai educated class’. Shanghai natives were well known for their modern urban lifestyle, which may be linked with their economic interests and success.

In comparison, the Cantonese in Limehouse, according to Min-Ch’ien Tyau, in his book *London Through Chinese Eyes* (1920) held the most imperfect knowledge and childlike views of public affairs. The majority professed themselves admirers of Dr Sun Yat-sen, who is generally believed, to have done much for China, and to have been Cantonese. Despite the linguistic differences and the quite separate political-economic backgrounds, in British perception, the Chinese from Canton or Shanghai were largely homogeneous. The cultural differences outlined above exemplify the complexity of this Chinese district. The two streets were mentally segregated in their urban context, and different immigrant groups structurally negotiated the identity of the place, and gave shape to the particular human and cultural geography. When we look closely at this location and the physical signs of these two distinct streets, we see that the Chinese communities cannot be treated as a single unit.

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The early arrivals to the Chinese settlement came from Canton. These immigrants stayed in Limehouse Causeway and mixed with the Irish community. Subsequently, the people from Shanghai arrived, and they moved to the Pennyfields area. This separation was enforced as they did not speak the same language: the Cantonese and the Shanghainese found it difficult to communicate with each other. The immigrant groups generally preferred to be with those from the same province or village, which may reflect the strong desire to keep traditional family ties intact. Nevertheless, the British, such as journalist John Platt, saw the Chinese as a single entity. When the Shanghai population moved to Pennyfields, he interpreted the reason as a combination of escape from the Irish sailors’ racial discrimination and their inability to speak English. Platt could not see the difference between the Chinese groups because he came to visit the area and create a story rather than understand what he saw.\(^1\)

However, the Chinese were perceived to pose an economic threat to British society. In the *East London Observer*, a journalist reported in 1916 that ‘the undoubted superior ability is turned away from shipping offices because their jobs are given to the cheaper “Chink”’.\(^2\) After the First World War, with the British economy in crisis, many British citizens could not find jobs. The term ‘Chinaman’ became synonymous with those who would accept work at any wage.\(^3\) Chinese seamen soon became scapegoats in the eyes of British Trade Unionists. Mr Chambers, as Treasurer of the sailors and firemen’s union, claimed that 20 per cent

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of British seamen were unemployed during the war due to Chinese labourers. These economic conflicts encouraged anti-Chinese sentiment. An article in *The Star*, dated 17 June 1919, ran the headline ‘Chinaman’s Home Smashed’. The story reports:

Before the war the Chinese were mainly grounded round Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway, but since the war the yellow population of the East End has increased, in many of the streets around the East and West India Dock-roads there are Chinese families now living. As Englishmen joined the Army, Chinese came in to replace them in many instances in the factories and in the kitchens of hotels and restaurants. The Chinaman gave up the sea for a shore job, earned good money, and then he and his compatriots overflowed from his original quarter, forming alliances in some cases with white women. This report claims that Chinese men had taken what should be Englishmen’s jobs during the First World War, regardless of the fact that such jobs were comprised of small businesses within London’s Limehouse district. Gregor Benton states in his study, *Chinatown and Transnationalism: Ethnic Chinese in Europe and Southeast Asia*, published in 2001:

The switch to petty entrepreneurship was hastened by new laws restricting immigration, especially the 1905 Alien Act, which confined immigrants to 14 ports (including Cardiff, Liverpool, and

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22 Chinaman’s Home Smashed’, *Star*, 17 June 1919.
London) and the 1919 amendment to the 1914 Aliens Restriction Act, which admitted only self-supporting immigrants.23

Benton’s research proves that the Chinese established small businesses because they were not offered job opportunities in Britain due to the Alien Act. However, it is difficult to calculate the exact number of Chinese seamen in Limehouse since the census reports highlight the national population, while all foreigners were classified, collectively, as ‘aliens’. The mobility of seamen as a transient population further complicates the census results.24 A comparison between the rate books of the Chinese and non-Chinese occupiers of Pennyfields, between 1905 and 1935, provides a valuable insight. Table 5-2 illustrates that Chinese immigrants had occupied the street since 1910, before which there was no record of Chinese occupants in the area.

Despite a slight population decline, there were twice as many Chinese occupants as non-Chinese occupants by 1920.25 A British government report, *Chinese Quarter: Report of Public Health and Housing and Maternity and Child Welfare Committees* for the Borough of Poplar Town Council, dated 28 October 1920, notes that ninety-five houses in Poplar were registered as ‘house let in lodgings’. These records, however, do not give a clear idea of how many Chinese residents lived in the area. In an effort to solve this question, I investigate the nature of Chinese occupation at the time.

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25 The rate books after 1935 were destroyed during the War. See also records in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library, Borough of Poplar, 1920.
Table 5-2: Rate Books, Borough of Poplar, 1905-1935. Table by Shengfang Chou.

In her study, *The Construction of London’s Chinatown 1900-1990*, in 2000, Joanna Herbert exposes an interesting source, an Application for Ration Book dated 1918 in Pennyfields. This record states there were 182 Chinese in Pennyfields, only three houses contained non-Chinese residents, among which was a non-Chinese woman living with other Chinese immigrants. The record also identifies 63 Chinese men whose main occupation was defined as ‘cook’. The next significant occupation was that of shopkeeper or manager, of which there were twenty such employed. Only thirteen seamen were recorded, as well as two clerks, two firemen, two carpenters and an interpreter. This record not only corrects the census reports and rate books previously mentioned but also redraws the portrait of the Chinese community in Limehouse. Furthermore, the rate books highlight the variety of occupations found within the small Chinese community. It is important to understand the function of the

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community, and, with this evidence, one can better understand the Chinese character of the region at the time. The occupational diversity in the region is revealing. The decreased proportion of sailors suggests the Chinese population was no longer a predominantly transient one. (Table 5-2)

Having clarified these facts about the social history of the Chinese community in Limehouse in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century helps us draw a picture of the social circumstances in which Chinese male immigrants lived. In the following sections, I study Limehouse Chinatown from a design perspective, examining the buildings, Chinatown in the linguistic term, Chinoiserie in transit and shopfront signs, to explore how these signs served as an important dynamic factor in the British imagination of this place.

5.3 Limehouse Chinatown: Street and Building Design

The early period of the Limehouse community saw the area become an entertainment and commercial site for Chinese sailors on shore-leave. As noted above, the Chinese community of London settled along two main streets, Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway. These streets provided a ‘buffer’ from the main commercial stretch of High Street.28 According to the 1881 census, of the 622 residents of the area, 37 were of Irish descent and 23 of German and Scandinavian origin - a rather cosmopolitan demographic before the Chinese population arrived.29 Walter Besant, in his monograph All Sorts and Conditions of Men—An Impossible Story (1882), writes about this area of London in the chapter entitled Sunday at the East End:

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28 GLRO, LRB, Property Services Dept, Register of Property 3780/3, 4, 11, 45, 50, 51.
Strange and wonderful result of the gathering of men in great cities! It is not a French, or an English, or a German, or an American result – it is universal; in every great city of the world, below a certain level, there is no religion – men have grown dead to their higher instincts; they no longer feel the possibilities of humanity; faith brings to them no more the evidence of things unseen. They are crowded together, so that they have ceased to feel their individuality.\(^{30}\)

Besant does not mention a Chinese demographic, suggesting a Chinese community had not yet settled in the East End at the time of his book’s publication in 1882. Besant describes the East End as a manifestation of cosmopolitan multiculturalism. His writing expresses a positive view in its celebration of the expanding terrain of London as it reflects a ‘Modern Babylon’. London began to connote the universal and international as it became a global city.\(^{31}\) Besant’s work hints at the emerging, fashionable style of travel writing and touring the city of London.\(^{32}\) If the East End was ‘one of the handsomest suburbs of London’ it attracted the journalists and novelists in search of new ways to express their vision.\(^{33}\) Writers believed that, by experiencing the urban life and city, they could gain a sense of the world; visiting the communities of those poor immigrant areas was an important part of this experience.

The area of Limehouse is described in the Survey of London, published by London County Council in 1994, as follows: ‘The origins of Pennyfields are obscure, hidden in the landholding complexities of the manor of Stepney. Some properties were held by manorial tenure well into the twentieth century’.34 There was little development in Pennyfields before 1650, although Limehouse Causeway appears on a map of 1573 and was built before Pennyfields.35 In 1652, a goldsmith named Abraham Chambers purchased six cottages with adjoining land including sixteen acres ‘commonly called Penny Field’.36 By 1668, Abraham’s son had extended his property holdings by purchasing forty-three tenements and twenty-seven cottages in or near Pennyfields in Poplar and sixteen acres of ground called Pennyfields.37 Building on this property increased dramatically during the 1650s and 1660s.

Structures were raised in similar style including three rooms placed one above the other. There were seventy-seven buildings built in the Pennyfields area by 1868.38 A map dated 1894 suggests there were forty-three houses in Limehouse Causeway. (Map 5-3 and 5-4)

34 ‘Chapter V- Pennyfields, Ming Street and West India Dock Road’, British History Online http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=46475 [accessed 06 June 2016].
38 ‘Chapter V- Pennyfields, Ming Street and West India Dock Road’, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=46475 [accessed 06 June 2016].
The similar building developments of Pennyfield and Limehouse Causeway appeared in the early or mid-nineteenth century, and some survived into the 1960s. Over half of the houses were in dual occupation in 1850, including residential and commercial tenancies, while lodging houses accommodated numerous resident families. Most of the houses were small two storey buildings constructed using plum-coloured bricks, their most attractive feature being a wooden doorframe with an open pediment. These features are often seen in photographs of Limehouse during the early twentieth century (see Figure 5-6).
The 1894 ordinance survey demonstrates how the houses were similar in size and arranged close to one another. The houses were utilised for different purposes over time, but the building façade was often maintained. Take for example, house number forty-one, which, according to the record of *Survey of London*:

No. 41 was of two storeys plus attics, of plum-coloured brick, with red-brick dressings. Facing the street was a later brick parapet, behind which was a hipped gable. At one end was an attractive small stone-dressed porch, thought to have been built in the late eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century No. 41 was a boarding school and later a lodging house. In the 1930s and 1940s it had become a rag-and-bone merchant's store, but retained a ‘charming interior’ on its upper floors. The house was demolished in 1968.\(^{39}\)

Between 1850 and 1880, the houses and the streets changed very little. The migrant residents went forth and started to become involved in local small business: there was much activity and movement from the residential households to the commercial stores. The movements of residents, rather than the physical design of this area, gained attention amongst the British.

In comparison to other Chinese communities such as San Francisco’s Stockton Chinatown of the same period (ca. 1890-1920), lack a Chinese design style. When designing Stockton Chinatown, the American architect Charles Beasley was commissioned by the local merchants to design and realise a few remarkable buildings with pagoda towers, Greek motifs and Oriental ornaments. One might

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argue that those styles did not embody the Chinese-style building but rather a western Chinoiserie aesthetic. Nevertheless, Stockton Chinatown had its own multiple-design canon and was a new town where a new hybrid urbanism developed. In her study, *Charles Beasley, Architect (1827-1913): Issues and Images*, Karen Weitse writes,

Beasley’s design could be understood to represent the Chinese community; it appears, in fact, that the architect so intended… In all discussions the exhibition hall [Agricultural pavilion in the Stockton Chinatown as an landmark] was referred to only as ‘the pavilion’ while the Chinese quarter was ‘Chinatown’[^40] (Figure 5-2 and 5-3).

The particular buildings are urban artefacts that give the place an identity. In 1887, the Agricultural Pavilion, designed by Charles Beasley, occupied the Stockton city block bound by Lafayette, Hunter, Washington and San Joaquin Streets, where the Chinoiserie design and residences were settled. In contrast, the Chinese community in London’s Limehouse was formed of two streets in an area where the buildings followed the British standard style, lacking traditional Chinoiserie models or design features. Limehouse Chinatown consisted of ordinary British buildings, but shifted the understanding of space from delineating its property to analysing its positioning in a web of divergent spaces (from otherness, to various cultures and languages). Limehouse Chinatown seems to be a site that represents incompatible spaces and reveals paradoxes, contesting what Foucault would call a heterotopia, but a real place that exists, like a counter-site.

Figure 5-2: Charles Beasley, Agricultural Pavilion, Stockton, California, Pioneer Museum and Haggin Galleries, Stockton, California, 1887.
5.4 Chinatown or the Street of Chinese people Beyond

The linguistic term Chinatown, in general, is only used in the English language, with English-speaking Chinese using the term with reference to specific, overseas Chinese communities in English-speaking countries.41 In Chinese, Chinatown was Tangren Jie 唐人街 (the street of Chinese people) in the nineteenth century.42 These different

41 There is no Chinese translation for the terms ‘Enlishtown’, ‘Frenchtown’ or ‘Indiantown’.
42 Tang people here means Chinese people.
linguistic designations change the perception of the place’s character. On one hand, the different terms suggest that the communities saw the space in their own ways, and used their chosen terminology to identify the aspect most significant for them. But on the other, the terms ‘town’ and ‘street’ have different meanings in an urban context. The main difference lies in a town’s development around a centre with an area of land enclosed by walls or a fence. A street is a network made up of de-centred lines. Secondly, the definition of town changes depending on its economic, social, political and religious nature. The New Oxford American Dictionary, published in 2005, defines town as ‘an urban area that has a name, defined boundaries, and local government, and that is larger than a village and generally smaller than a city’. The meaning of town in etymological terms is ‘a settlement; an area with residential districts, shops and amenities, and its own local government; especially one larger than a village and smaller than a city’. Both describe a town as a local autonomy with a central power and defined boundary.

However, there are also two variations of a town, one based on economic purpose, such as an agricultural settlement in medieval times, and the other relying on historical and cultural characteristics, such as an old town located within a modern area. Both varieties can bear the label town, because of their need to distinguish themselves. A street, on the other hand, is an element of a town. It is

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43 Zhongguocheng 中国城 contains modern meanings, particularly, in modern Chinese literature. See also Chi Kang 志刚, Chu Shi Tai Xi Ji 初使泰西记 (China: 1872), Zhang De-yi 张德彝, Ou Mei huan You Ji 欧美环游记, (China: 1875), Lao She 老舍, Mr. Ma and Son: A Sojourn in London 二马 (China, London: Foreign Languages Press, 2004 [1929]), Leo Ou-Fan Lee 李歐梵, The Chinatown of America (China: Bai Hua Wen Yi chu Ban She 百花文艺出版社, 1993 [1975]).
traditionally smaller in scale than a town but, like the town of which it may be a part, it can be lengthened as houses are built side-by-side. Due to its elasticity, the street is an important element in shaping the basic urban form. Socio-economic concerns, relating to the physical character of a street may include the houses or the façades of the buildings and their occupants and the shops flanking it. In general, the term street is defined as a ‘public road in a city or town, typically with houses and buildings on one or both sides’. In order to capture the urban differences between a town and a street, I suggest the former is a fixed territory, while the latter implies mobility. The area of the Limehouse Chinese community, therefore, seems better represented by the Chinese term Tangren Jie rather than Chinatown. In the modern urban context, the label main street or high street, for example, denotes strong, commercial activity.

5.5 Chinoiserie in Transit: Hybrid Language Code in Limehouse Chinatown’s Shopfront Signs

Many scholars have explored the social significance of physical objects such as shopfront signs and how they communicate meanings of form of space. According to Mark Gottdiener and Alexandros Lagopoulos in their book *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* published in 1986, ‘material objects are the vehicles of significance, so that the symbolic act always involves some physical

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objects as well as social discourse in it.’ Thus, objects such as shopfronts and informational signage play an important role in communicating and giving people messages about a place. As signs often contain the use of language, the code of the language becomes a meaning-making activity. According to human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan:

Words alone, used in an appropriate situation, can have the power to render objects, formally invisible because unattended, visible, and impart to them a certain character: thus a mere rise on a flat surface becomes something far more—a place that promises to open up to other places—when it is named ‘Mount Prospect.’

In particular, Chinatown acts as a contact zone in-between two or more cultures and languages. The meaning of the space is grounded in the material world, and the use of the words and languages is central in the creation of the space. This analytical method of considering the use of words and language makes an interesting subject for the study of Limehouse Chinatown.

Between the 1900 and 1920, many British people came to patronise the establishments and seek entertainment in the Limehouse area. However, of the two streets in Limehouse Chinatown, Pennyfields’ Chinese shops with their Oriental decorations seemed to be the more attractive to British visitors. In his article, *Chinese London and its Opium Dens* published in *Gentleman’s Magazine*, in 1895,

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John Platt describes the Pennyfields Chinese shops as having colourful interiors, an exotic contrast to the grey streets of Poplar:

The Chinese shops are the quaintest places imaginable. Their walls decorated with red and orange papers, covered with Chinese writing indicating the ‘chop’ or style of the firm, or some such announcement. There is also sure to be a map of China and a hanging Chinese Almanac.\(^\text{52}\)

The façade of the Chinese stores, with their Chinese character, was pleasing to British taste, but there is little evidence about the exact nature of the interiors of the Chinese shops. Platt’s description suggests that visitors came to the area expecting a Chinese style in the shops, separating them from the surrounding area. In 1905, the journalist George Sims referred to the area (Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway) as ‘China Town’ in the British press. In his article, *In Limehouse and the Isle of Dogs*, published in *The Strand* magazine, he writes: ‘close at hand is the Causeway, the Chinese quarter. Now that a considerable portion of it has been pulled down, the Chinese element is not so prominent as it used to be’.\(^\text{53}\)

Taking, for example, a photograph of a Chinese store in Limehouse (Figure 5-4), the store advertises the shop’s name only but lacks any signage indicating what kind of business the shop provides. When Sims saw the façade of such stores, he wrote:

But first let us make our way through narrow, winding China Town. There is no mistake about the Chinese element. The Chinese names


are up over the doors of the little shops, and as we peer inside them we see the unmistakable Celestial behind the counter and Chinese inscriptions on the walls… Here is a Chinese grocery store. Some of the canned goods are familiar to European eyes, but all are labelled in Chinese characters.54

Other texts and photographic evidence suggest that Limehouse Chinatown’s shops and commercial design did not follow a particular Chinese style, and yet ‘there is no mistake about the Chinese element’.55 It reveals ambiguities insomuch as, on the one hand, he seems a little awkward when he first saw the Chinese shopfront signs in Chinese characters, but on the other, Chinese characters on shopfronts were taken for granted in the area.

The following, based on the Limehouse Chinatown photographic source in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library, is an analysis focused on three types of language signs: monolingual English (non-Chinese) signs; monolingual Chinese signs; and mixed Chinese and English (non-Chinese) signs. Each type has some examples provided.

Firstly, monolingual English (non-Chinese) signs: the Chinese shops and restaurants were regarded by the British as objects of attraction in Limehouse Chinatown. This leads us to hypothesise that bilingual shopfront signs would make sense in this area. However, looking through the Limehouse Photographic Collections in the Tower Hamlets Local History Library, it is quite surprising to find that bilingual shopfront signs were not commonly used during the period. There are

54 Ibid, George R. Sims (1905).
55 Ibid, George R. Sims (1905).
three photographs chosen for analysis, representing different types: a clearly purposed business store, a personal name used as a store sign without a clear business idea, and a Chinese Freemason Society.

The first case is a clearly purposed business store. In Figure 3-2 and Figure 5-4, the shopfront signs use only English. Figure 3-2 shows the shop name, ‘H. SING’ with two Chinese men sitting in front of the door. The window display shows they sell Fry’s Chocolate. In Figure 5-4, an Asian man, the tea shop owner, crosses his arms on his chest confidently sitting in front of the store. The window shows he sells Lyons Tea. Meanwhile, we can see his window display is full of Oriental objects such as teapots and Chinese-style decorated vases. Fry’s Chocolate was the first British mass-produced chocolate bar, made in Bristol since 1847, and Lyons Tea was one of Ireland’s biggest tea brands from a business started in Dublin in 1902. The goods they sell show that these two shops were designed to engage with British customers rather than Chinese, therefore there is no need to communicate in Chinese characters in their shopfronts.
Figure 5-4: THLHA, Photograph collection on Limehouse Chinese community, ca. 1900-1920.
The second case is an example of a personal name used as a store sign without a clear business idea. It is still unclear how Limehouse Chinatown gained its reputation for gambling and opium-smoking, however, this type of shop sign without any clear business message leaves an ambiguous space that seems suspicious. Sax Rohmer claimed that the fictional Chinese character Dr Fu Manchu was modelled on a Chinese man of unusual appearance whom he had glimpsed on Limehouse Causeway with its ‘dens’ or ‘ku-p’ai’ (the gambling house). Figure 5-4 shows two Chinese men standing in front of their shops, no. 16 and no. 18. The business features of the signage say, no. 16 ‘CHING YUE KEE’ and no. 18 ‘CHUNG SHUNG’. Neither tell us what kind of business they operate or what kind of things they sell. Given the chosen Chinese phonic writing system, both are likely to be Cantonese, one of the dialects of southern China. YUE KEE 裕記 is commonly used in Cantonese restaurants or food related businesses even today, and CHUNG
SHUNG is likely to be a personal name. However, the shop façade itself is covered with window cloths such that one cannot discern the nature of the business. Although the shopfront signs are in English, without a clear business idea they remain mysterious, even untruthful, to the British public.

Min-Ch’ien Tyau, one of the first overseas Chinese students, wrote the book, *London through Chinese Eyes* published in 1920. Tyau studied at the University of London from 1909 to 1916. During this period, he acted as the London correspondent of the *Republican Advocate* in Shanghai, he edited the *East in the West* and frequently contributed articles and reviews to the *Times* in London. He attempts to explain Chinese life in London to a Western reader, saying ‘they are mostly uneducated, but none the less law-abiding and orderly. They have no doubt their vices, but they compare favourably with any similar group in any part of the world’. Tyau criticises the rumours of mysterious gambling and opium dens in Limehouse Chinatown. His report in the *Times* suggests, it may be that these places were either ‘dens’ or ‘ku-p’ai’: ‘...those “dens” for all that they are so clean and orderly and so little withdrawal from public gaze... “ku-p’ai” with the gambling ... so far as can be discovered, there is nothing in the nature of a “hell” now in existence in London’s Chinatown’. Notably, other ethnic groups, such as Irish sailors, were also gambling, but in separate establishments. There were Irish bars located in the East End as well.

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56 In Cantonese cuisine, also known as Yue cuisine (粵菜), *Kee* 記 refers to trademarks, and is often used as the last character in Cantonese or Hong Kong restaurant names.
59 Ibid, Min-Ch’ien Tyau, (1920), pp. 308-309.
J.A.G. Roberts in his book *China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West*, published in 2004, records the Chinese restaurants in Limehouse Chinatown:

In 1911 there were some 668 China- and Hong Kong-born Chinese living in London, some 502 living in Liverpool and a smaller number living in Cardiff. The majority had formerly been seamen, although many of those who had settled had taken up laundry work. In addition a small trickle of Chinese students had begun to arrive. In London’s East End there were some 30 Chinese shops and restaurants along two streets, Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway.\(^{60}\)

This indication that ‘there were some 30 Chinese shops and restaurants along two streets, Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway’ suggests that a quarter of the buildings in that area were restaurants or involved the food business. According to the Ordnance Survey map of 1894, Pennyfields had 72 buildings and Limehouse Causeway had 44 (see also Maps 5-3 and 5-4). Roberts mentions that Chinese food had an impact on British food culture during that time, noting: ‘in the 1920s ignorance of, and prejudice against, Chinese food was still the dominant mind-set in Britain, but a few Westerners, among them the poet and aesthete Harold Acton, had begun to voice their appreciation of it’.\(^{61}\) Acton even hired a Guangzhou man named Chong Sung as his cook.\(^{62}\) Chong Sung brought with him Chinese bowls, cups, and spoons and imported Chinese food such as tea, ginger, rice vermicelli, lychees, mushrooms and other dainties including precious herbal species from Canton.\(^{63}\)


\(^{63}\) British Chinese Food Culture, available online at [http://www.britishchinesefoodculture.org.uk](http://www.britishchinesefoodculture.org.uk) [accessed 20 Dec, 2018].
growing popularity of Chinese food at the time probably explains the high number of restaurants in the Limehouse Chinatown area. Considering the implications of the language code, the names of the businesses, ‘CHING YUE KEE’ and ‘CHUNG SHUNG’, being written in Western transcription suggests that both may well have been associated with the food business. It is very possible that rather than opium dens, both were Chinese restaurants oriented towards British consumers, or other food-related businesses.

Interestingly, some shopfront signs show Chinese meaning-making activity, but the language choice is still English. Figure 5-6 shows the Chinese Freemason Society. Its Chinese name is 致公堂, which translates into English as Chee Kong Tong (CKT). CKT was a blood-brotherhood group, actively involved in opposition to the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911), and as such they operated as a secret society. The Chinese Freemason Society was first established in Victoria, Canada in 1876. Later, between 1885 and 1914, it grew to have over 40 branches across Canada and America and in European cities such as Paris, London and Brussels. CKT secretly supported the Chinese reformists. Dr Sun Yat-sen officially joined the CKT during a visit to Hawaii in 1903. In 1911, he raised $12,000 for the last rebellion against the Qing Dynasty. This rebellion soon succeeded in establishing a ‘New China’, which became the Republic of China, and the CKT shed its secret nature and became an open political party. The name ‘Freemason’ has nothing to do with the European Freemasons. Having gone from an association of overseas immigrants to a political party and the centre of Chinese political power, the CKT, created in

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Chinatown, acted as both an agent and a symbol defining nation and identity. The signage on this building, then, demonstrates that this is not a commercial store. It is, in fact, a building that represents a transnational tie to the new China. The tie was created by the overseas Chinese community, and connected the Chinese beyond dialect, language and culture. Why, then, did the house of CKT use a monolingual English shopfront sign in Limehouse Chinatown? It is difficult to know for sure, but it seems likely that the impact of Chinese politics extended to London. Sun Yat-sen was kidnapped in London in 1896 because of his anti-Qing activities. A secret society posed a direct challenge to Qing government authority in 1911, and probably the occupants of the building did not find it safe or comfortable to have a Chinese sign.

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Figure 5-6: THLHA, Photograph collection on Limehouse Chinese community, ca. 1900-1920.
Figure 5-7: TRLHA, Photograph collection on Limehouse Chinese community, ca. 1900-1920.
There were buildings with signs in monolingual Chinese code. Although Chinatowns became places where diverse emigrants from China found a home, shop signs using monolingual Chinese were rare. In Figure 5-7, the shopfront sign uses the traditional Chinese characters for Chinese grocery and pharmacy, *Zhongguo zahuo yaocai* 中國雜貨藥材. The shop would have most likely sold all kinds of Chinese things, acting as a grocery store and a pharmacy. Sometimes, Chinese drug stores in
Chinatown are ‘also clinics that had Chinese doctors to serve the medical needs of this population’. 66

Interestingly, the traditional Chinese vertical writing would originally be read from right to left, but in Figure 5-10, the writing of 中國雜貨藥材 is from left to right. This phenomenon should perhaps be attributed to the influence of the Chinese-Western language exchange in early printing or publication. After the opium wars, many missionaries went to China, where they became involved in local Chinese publications, for example the early bible translation, Chinese-English dictionaries and Chinese textbooks. Figure 5-8 shows the book Chinese Without a Teacher published in Shanghai in 1892, in which we can see the Chinese writing 漢言無師自明 adapting to the Roman alphabet written from left to right.

Although Limehouse Chinatown overtly engaged with the pleasures of British Chinoiserie, Orientalism and self-Orientalism, it had a dimension which distanced itself from the consumer-orientated use of the exotic China business campaign. As Jia Lou notes, ‘the monolingual drug store sign, on one hand, excluded English speakers from its implied readers and positioned its owner as a businessman serving only the Chinese community’. 67 The Chinese are sensitive to the difference between their businesses and the consumer-orientated use of self-identification. The Chinese grocery pharmacy is something like a ‘counter’, as Foucault explains, ‘because these places are absolutely different from all the site… there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience’. 68 In order to determine whether such a heterotopia does

exit, he develops the concept of the ‘mirror’ to illustrate such a place. Foucault explains:

But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am.69

A Chinese grocery pharmacy is practical for Chinese people, providing what they need and reflecting where they are from. However, it appears exotic to British eyes and the Western imagination. Thus, it is a ‘mirror’ which contains a double vision, of the Chinese seen through British eyes and the representation of the Chinese in other lands as seen through Chinese eyes. Thus, the monolingual Chinese code in Chinatown acts as an intervention in the interaction of real and virtual space. To the Chinese, the monolingual Chinese code is not exotic but a mirror of society, of which Foucault says ‘I come back toward myself’. But to Britons, this strangeness and otherness seems ‘arbitrary… the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand’.70 This ‘impossible to understand’ somehow shows

Limehouse Chinatown in its ‘role to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned’ as a heterotopia.71

Chinese and non-Chinese (English) language signs: in Figure 5-9, a bilingual shop signs show both the English ‘Dung Chang hand laundry’ and the Chinese東昌衣館 (Dong Chang yi guan, Dong means East and Chang means prosperous, yi guan means laundry hall). This is a natural use of the bilingual shop sign, in the geographic location of Chinatown where both Chinese speakers and English speakers are to be found. The English part ‘Dung Chong hand laundry’ is arranged at the preferred position in the centre of the shopfront, while the Chinese name is in a less preferred position. Also, the Chinese name is separated into two parts, the東昌Dong Chang set to right and衣館yi guan to the left. The Chinese is read from right to left which preserves the traditional Chinese way, the implication is that the languages are correlated. Similarly, in Figure 5-10, the English words ‘Chinese restaurant English and Chinese Grill’ are set vertically in the centre of the façade. Interestingly, the Chinese writing Datong lou 大同樓 (Datong means a great harmony, a great unity, an ideal or perfect society or ‘utopia’, and lou is building), does not refer to any sort of restaurant or ‘English and Chinese Grill’. The Chinese sign is in the centre of the shopfront but distanced from the English sign through visual means.

The name of Datong in Chinese has a deep philosophical meaning. It was first introduced in the ‘Liyun’禮運 section of Liji 禮記 (the Book of Rite) as a ‘Great Unity’, ‘Great Community’ and ‘Great University’ in the Confucian classics. It later evolved into one of the political ideological foundations of the Republic of China.

developed by Dr Sun Yat-sen. Dr Sun Yat-sen borrowed the old Chinese
philosophical meaning of Datong and applied it to modern Chinese thinking.72 As
Datong reflects something like Chinese philosophical and political ideology, it does
not correlate with ‘Chinese restaurant English and Chinese Grill’. As Ron Scollon
and Suzanne Wong Scollon note in describing the key elements of place semiotics,
visual images tend to take their meaning from where they are located in the world.73
The use of Datong in Chinese seems to be a transgressive emplacement, which refers
to any placement of a sign that is in the ‘wrong’ place.74 On one hand, using the
English language is Chinese self-Orientalisation, or mimicry, using Western desire
and imagination in order to attract English-speaking customers. On the other hand,
the Chinese Datong is a self-reflective play between here, there, everywhere and
nowhere. It subtly deploys an exoticism of exoticism, a mimicry of mimicry. The
Chinese shopfronts situated in London Limehouse Chinatown are somehow exotic,
and the various and hybrid shopfronts show various stories, somehow connected with
the self and other images produced and negotiated in such a material context.

72 Zhang Qijun, Shudao yu datong 怨道與大同 (The Way of Forbearance and Datong), (Taipei:
Dongda, 1988), p.6. See also Kang Youwei, Datong shu 大同書 (Book on the Great Unity),
(Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju,1936).
73 Ron Scollon, Suzanne Wong Scollon, Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach
Figure 5-9: THLHA, Photograph collection on Limehouse Chinese community, ca. 1900-1920.
Figure 5-10: TGLHA, Photograph collection on Limehouse Chinese community, ca. 1900-1920.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has offered various themes and ways in which to approach the central objective: exploring Limehouse Chinatown through its social history and designs. With an increase in research concerning overseas Chinese communities since 1960, the term Chinatown has been widely adopted by sociologists and is well-established in Western academic discourse. In his 1967 essay *The Segmentary Structure of Urban Overseas Chinese Communities*, Lawrence W. Crissman offers this definition:

> Chinese living in big cities overseas tended in the past to form compact and comparatively exclusive settlements known as Chinatowns, in which they resided, worked, and traded.75

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75 Lawrence W. Crissman, ‘The Segmentary Structure of Urban Overseas Chinese Communities’,
It is with this acknowledgement of Chinatown as a significant overseas settlement of Chinese people, that sociological scholarship addresses the history of immigration. The place called Chinatown, however, generates a mental, linguistic and urban design image of a diasporic community. The categorisation of Chinatown, in academic terms, raises necessary questions such as: ‘how does it function?’; and ‘who lives in Chinatown?’ To date, studies have focused on time and people rather than the lived space. Therefore, this study has brought diverse sources and considered the design pattern of the Chinatown environment in order to gain insight into the Limehouse Chinese community in London.

To the Chinese, Chinatown was a place of foreign construction, whether it was expressed in English or Chinese. The terms Chinatown and Tangren Jie, the street of Chinese people, reveal different impressions of the same place and culture. This chapter has detailed the growth pattern of Tangren Jie on London maps, and suggests we should be more aware of the stereotypical associations of the term Chinatown. Having discussed the evolution of the linguistic term Chinatown, it seems that the Chinese term Tangren Jie reflects the area’s urban nature better, as the area only consisted of two small streets, Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway. This chapter has shown that Charles Booth’s London Map and his notes about Limehouse Chinatown illustrate a complex and conflicted social history attached to the area. Limehouse Chinatown did not attract British visitors merely because of its Chinese-style buildings, indeed most buildings appear to have been the same Victorian style as other areas of London.

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In addition, this chapter has discussed issues of ethnicity represented by these two streets. The Chinese settled along Pennyfield and Causeway, which were a mixture of lower-class housing and shops. The two streets served as a buffer between the respectable High Street, West India Dock Road, and the immigrant settlement. For the Chinese, this separation was psychological as well as physical. Immigrants from Shanghai populated Pennyfields whereas Chinese from Guangdong province and Hong Kong inhabited Causeway. This separation was enforced by both migrant waves, as they did not speak the same language. The Cantonese and the Shanghainese found it difficult to communicate with each other, but through British eyes, all were Chinese, regardless of the similarities or differences between them. This chapter has used the photographic collection of Limehouse Chinatown to illustrate that London Limehouse Chinatown was a commercial site, a heterogeneous urban landscape that was nowhere and everywhere. These findings contribute to the socio-history and design history of Limehouse Chinatown, but also underscore the tension between socio-cultural differentiation, on the one hand, and the perception of sameness in the eyes of the non-Chinese on the other. Examined from this perspective, not only do the signs and language codes constitute a major part of urban meaning, they acquire a transit status from their placement within an alternative Chinoiserie aesthetic.
Chapter 6 Beyond Eighteenth-century Chinoiserie: The London Chinese Opium Den, ca. 1850 – ca. 1920

6.1 Introduction

In Britain, opium was taken by poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) and Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) who believed it gave them creative powers.¹ Later, the use of opium spread to a large percentage of the working population as laudanum dissolved in sherry. Laudanum was cheap and easy to buy in Britain. It created serious issues associated with working-class health. In 1868, Britain enacted pharmacy laws to control dangerous substances. At the same time, many British visitors explored the mysterious and exotic Limehouse Chinatown, with a particular interest in the London opium den. However, there is no photographic evidence to prove that opium dens ever existed in London, yet we have many drawings, novels and other writings by individuals immersed in this fictional world that depict opium dens. This chapter examines how the London Chinese opium den was constructed as an icon of Chineseness in the literary and British masculine cultural imagination.

The explosion of published novels concerning London’s urban Chinese opium dens, for example those of Charles Dickens, Blanchard Jerrold, Gustave Doré, Conan Doyle and Thomas Burke, provide insight into development of literary Chinoiserie in commercial publishing, and show a division in the creation of meaning in modern cultural activities. The idea of Chinoiserie in transit has been taken up by English literature studies, with Anne Witchard calling it ‘literary

Chinoiserie’. The depictions of London’s Chinese opium dens inspired and fascinated the British literary world. What is the story behind the fictional image making of the London Chinese opium den? Moreover, to what extent were these narratives in and about London Chinese opium dens, which took different forms from the British masculine Chinoiserie, vital factors in the construction of British nineteenth-century Chineseness?

The London opium den was represented in accounts of events, in material culture and in literature. These representations made it possible for the opium den to become a site for the construction of an alternative nineteenth-century Chinoiserie. Three examples are explored and examined in this chapter. The first illustration is the literary and ideological work on London opium dens by British writers who fuelled a London opium den flâneur–like narrative movement, a dynamic new network in which modern experiences took place. The second is the Chinese opium pipe, in particular, one labelled ‘Chando Pipe Intl Exn 1873’, part of the Bragge Pipe Collection shown at the South Kensington International Exhibition, and now stored in the British Museum. The third is a live show, the ‘Opium Smoking Parlour’ at the Western Gardens of the Earl’s Court Exhibition London in 1899. This chapter argues that the London Chinese opium den represents a new model of nineteenth-century Chineseness, as a transcultural production which goes beyond eighteenth-century Chinoiserie, and constitutes a rethinking of the history of the cultural negotiation of the Chinoiserie movement within a modern experience in Britain, from 1850 to 1920.

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6.2 Opium in Britain: Issues and Conflicts

From 1880 to 1920, the British anti-opium movement engaged in political debate with the British government and the many British merchants who feared the loss of their opium business. The effect was not only on the opium trade in China, for smoking opium was not merely an Oriental activity but also hugely popular among the British. *The Truth About Opium-smoking* edited by Benjamin Broomhall, a member of the Executive Committee of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade (SSOT), published in 1881, records the debate and presents testimonies of the British about the trade between China and England. It summarises seven excuses for why the British public were misled, and supported the British opium trade. I paraphrase here the words from the introduction to the *Truth About Opium-smoking*, in which Benjamin Broomhall states:

1. Opium-smoking is not very injurious.
2. The British government has never forced opium upon the Chinese.
3. The Chinese are not sincere in their professional desire to put down opium-smoking, and the cultivation of the poppy in China is proof of their insincerity.
4. If we do not send opium to China, others will.
5. If the opium trade was forced upon China, we are not now responsible for what others did long ago.
6. If opium is injurious in China, it is no worse than intoxicating drink in England.
7. India cannot do without the revenue derived from the opium trade.³

These excuses were, in a way, rooted in the minds of the British public by 1880. But most make no reference at all to the one central issue: that the British smuggling opium to China was morally wrong. It also says that opium-smoking is not very injurious, because opium use is harmless compared to alcohol abuse. Sir George Birdwood, in a letter published in the *Times* on Dec 6, 1881, put it as follows: ‘as regards opium-smoking, I can from experience testify that it is of itself absolutely harmless…we are as free to introduce opium into China, and to raise a revenue from it in India, as to export our cotton, iron and woollen manufactures to France’.\(^4\) Such a statement circulating in the *Times*, in fact, misled the public.

To the British government, the complex transfer of benefits through the opium trade might have created difficult considerations. Another official, Sir Alexander Arbuthnot, defended the opium trade, saying:

Without the opium revenue… the education of the natives of India could never have been attempted upon its present scale; the funds available for the administration of justice must have been largely curtailed; the cheap postage and the telegraph could not have been introduced; the police must have been left upon its old inefficient footing; the expenditure upon public works must have been very much less than it has been.\(^5\)

This statement directs persuasive propaganda at the political right, passing the buck to the Indians, and justifying wrongdoing to China. Surely Sir Alexander Arbuthnot, Sir George Birdwood and other Indian officials would not plead for the

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Indian opium revenue if they knew all that its maintenance involved in China. B. Broomhall, in his introduction to *The Truth About Opium-smoking*, questions:

> How incongruous the thought! If “the funds available for the administration of justice” in India have been obtained by the perpetration of injustice in China, what then? If the education of the natives in one country has caused the destruction of the natives in another, what then? If efficient police in India means the corruption of officials in China, what then? If cheap postage, telegraphs, public works and other improvements in India involve the deterioration of China, what then?”

These lines show anger from Broomhall, who strongly denounced the government’s wrongdoing in China. The SSOT campaigned on two fronts; first, lobbying for the British Government to cease its military and diplomatic pressure on China’s opium issue, and secondly, removing direct governmental power from India’s trading business. They started their campaign in China, from where it spread to Britain, launching magazines, press, posters and lectures. They built good networks among the Chinese and had friends in China, including Chinese officials. It is difficult to find any dialogue between Chinese voices and the British. Most of the testimonies were taken in Britain. Nevertheless, the correspondence between SSOT and a Chinese official Li Hongzhzhang is significant. Li, the most important politician in China, in his letter dated May 24, 1881, in answer to one addressed to him on the question of whether the Chinese government would sincerely like to stop the use of opium, from the secretary of the SSOT, London, Mr. F. Storrs Turner, replied in

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these remarkable words, referring to the Chinese Qing government’s attitude to opium:

Opium is a subject in the discussion of which England and China can never meet on common ground. China views the whole question from a moral standpoint; England from a fiscal. England would sustain a source of revenue in India, while China contends for the lives and prosperity of her people. The ruling motive with China is to repress opium by heavy taxation everywhere, whereas with England the manifest object is to make opium cheaper, and thus increase and stimulate the demand in China.7

Li’s opinion is thoughtful and powerful, ‘impossible to read without feelings of humiliation and shame’, Broomhall comments.8 However, in responding to Lin’s words, Minister of the British Crown, the Marquis of Hartington, Spencer Cavendish, 8th Duke of Devonshire, speaking in the House of Commons, said:

It is not my intention on this occasion to assent to any resolution, or to say anything which would have any tendency to disturb, to endanger, or even to diminish so important a branch of India revenue as that derived from the opium trade… I must make some protest against the invitation… to consider this question from the point of view of the dictates of morality… as they are entertained by some members of this House, are to altogether neglect the subject as it relates to India and India policy. My hon. Friends say he should be sorry to be

8 Ibid, Broomhall (1882), pp. 76-77.
suspected of judging this question on the low standard of India
finance. But it is a question of Indian finance.⁹

Obviously, British economic consideration of the opium trade to China drove
the political agenda. Indian revenue was very important to the British Empire.
Nevertheless, such a political subject could be explosive, in terms of the anxious
feelings, often related to race, aroused by anti-opium propaganda. In addition,
Victorian mass culture included fictional novels of London Chinese opium dens that
evoked the image of these dens as if they represented a social scene. The British
perception of political and cultural conflicts involving China associated with opium
issues were tainted both by fantasy and fear.

In addition, opium and other narcotic drugs such as laudanum, cocaine and
arsenic, were widely available in Britain by the middle of the nineteenth century.
They were sold in chemist’s shops, barbers, tobacco stores and even stationers,
without prescription. During the industrial revolution, opium and alcohol
consumption became widespread in Britain. As De Quincey, in *The Confessions of
an English Opium-Eater*, writes:

…as opium-eaters; such for instance, as the eloquent and benevolent
—, the late dean of —; Lord —; Mr —, the philosopher; a late under-
secretary of state’ that they all once tasted the divine luxuries of
opium. On the other hand, opium was popular amongst the working-
class as well, who ‘were rapidly getting into the practice of opium-
eating… so, that on a Saturday afternoon the counters of the druggists

⁹ Ibid, Broomhall (1882), p. 76.
were strewed with pills of one, two, or three grains, in preparation for
the known demand of the evening’. 10

Opium was generally accepted as a medical remedy for the treatment of
delirium tremens, but later became popular, especially among the labour class.
Opium cost less than a pint of ale. As this low price could be afforded by the poor
and working classes, opium became a common means to relieve fatigue and re-
energise. To the rich, opium served to stimulate leisure activities and alleviate
boredom. The use of opium expanded beyond class boundaries towards the end of
the Victorian period.

As people could buy any kind of opium product in every small corner shop,
they would ‘put down their penny and get opium’. 11 In rural areas like the Fens,
covering parts of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and
Huntingdonshire, however, the opposite happened (see Figure 6-1). Twenty or
twenty-five drops of laudanum could be bought for just a penny, which was quite
affordable for everyone. To meet the demand of the market, many people engaged in
selling drugs and chemicals, including opium, with complete freedom. Their number
was estimated in 1850s to be between 16,000 and 26,000, although even this
calculation does not cover small ordinary stores selling all manner of goods as well
as opiates. 12 The Morning Chronicle reported the habit centred on the Isle of Ely,
referring to one resident as ‘one of the most notorious opium eaters in the opium-
eating city of Ely’. 13 In such areas of England, the drug was sold in immense

11 Virginia Berridge and Gareth Edwards, Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-century
12 Ibid, p. 28.
13 ‘Opium-eating city of Ely’, Morning Chronicle, 27 September 27, 1850.
quantities, attracting the particular attention of doctors, visitors and social investigators.

The use of opium by the working-class was one reason behind the drive to control sales of opium in the mid-century. Lower-class use in urban areas was used as an argument for greater professional control over the sales of the drug. The Fens’ pharmacists were considered to be out of control, and the area was known as Opium City. The public mid-century health concern abated, but the Fens continued to be important to those involved in the debate about the Indo-Chinese opium trade, and the allied issue of the effects of regular opium use.

Map 6-1: Map of the Fens, covering parts of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. - www.huntingdonshire.info

The out-of-control selling of opium products forced the British state to make new laws banning domestic opium use. In 1868, Britain enacted pharmacy laws to
control dangerous substances. ‘Opium and all preparations of opium or of poppies’ were listed alongside such substances such as oxalic acid, as commodities that could not be sold without being labelled ‘poison’.\textsuperscript{14} The Pharmacy Act of 1868 was regulated, in large part, by the organised association of pharmacists, the Pharmaceutical Society (established in 1841). In order to retail, dispense or compound ‘poisons’, or assume the title of chemist, druggist, pharmacist or dispensing druggist or chemist, an individual had to be registered by the Pharmaceutical Society. As well as being the testing and registering body, the Society was also given the initial responsibility of adding new drugs to the poison list.

It is important to note that the use of opium in Britain was not limited to working-class men, but also women and children. Opium’s most infamous use in Victorian Britain was as an infant quietener. Children were often given Godfrey’s Cordial, consisting of opium, water and treacle, as a soporific to keep them quiet, so that working parents could rest, and mothers could go to work. It was also called Mother’s Friend.\textsuperscript{15} Opiate abuse is believed to have been a cause of infant death in the Victorian period. Dr Greenhow noted that children ‘kept in a state of continued narcotism will be thereby disinclined for food and be but imperfectly nourished’ in his investigation to the Privy Council.\textsuperscript{16} Opium killed far more infants through starvation than directly through overdoses, and those overdoses of Godfrey’s Cordial were usually accidental, as there was no central quality control and each chemist

\textsuperscript{14} Drugs for Pleasure, Drugs for Pain? Developing Treatments with Controlled Drugs Part Two: Opium, Morphine and Heroin, Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, (London, 2011).
made up mixtures of varying strength. For example, in 1879, one Old Bailey case
records a family to have lost their new-born baby, who had yet to be given a name,
due to an opiate overdose, saying:

there was enough laudanum in the body to account for death, if it had
not been caused by violence — I went through the regular routine to
test for laudanum — I removed the stomach and examined it in my
surgery — I think the laudanum was given in the milk — it is possible
that it might be given in a simple form, the milk might be given on
one occasion and the laudanum on another… I believe the laudanum
was laudanum pure and simple, not in the shape of a cordial, but such
as you would buy at a chemist’s, tincture of opium.¹⁷

This suggests that tinctures of opium, such as Godfrey’s Cordial, were
obtained without any formal control, and in this specific case the infant’s deaths at
the hands of Godfrey’s Cordial was simply due to the child wasting away from
hunger. Babies need to feed frequently, especially new-borns. If they are constantly
drugged, they do not wake up often enough to get the nutrients they need. Another
examiner in the same case commented, ‘… there was sufficient opium in the stomach
to have caused death if time had been given;… sometimes death from laudanum is
very quick, … laudanum in cordials is a very wrong thing to give to any child; it is a
very common thing…’.¹⁸ Such an ambiguous comment reflects the Victorian public

¹⁸ Ibid., reference number: t18790805-698, the Proceedings of the Old Bailey, 1674-1913, (1879).
opinion that ‘opium is not very injurious’. To the British, opium was not considered very toxic, and it was rare for someone to die from a fatal opium overdose.

Additionally, narratives around the use of opium in Victorian society included the public anti-opium discourse of the SSOT. The society’s two main tasks were political; to lobby the British Government to cease its military and diplomatic pressures on the Indo-Chinese opium trade, and to remove direct government involvement from the trade in India. A British domestic political campaign against the Anglo-Sino opium trade highlighted the evils of Chinese opium practice, appealing to sympathetic and humanitarian considerations and demanding an end to the British opium trade in China. Such political rhetoric drew the public’s attention to the opium problem at home and to the subject of the London Chinese opium den.

6.3 Searching for the London Chinese Opium Den in the Old Bailey Records, 1840 - 1913

In Britain, opium and the London Chinese opium den were associated with criminal elements in both real life and fiction. The stereotypical image of Chineseness had been connected to attitudes about opium smokers and opium dens situated in the Limehouse Chinese community since the mid-nineteenth century. According to the proceedings of the Old Bailey, there were ninety-one criminal cases involving opium between 1840 and 1913, but it is important to note that in all these cases, opium was not necessarily the motivation for the crime. For example, an offender may have

19 Broomhall, Truth About Opium-smoking, p. 11.
smoked or eaten opium before the crime. There were forty-five cases related to murder, most of which were cases where opium was used as a poison, and seventeen cases of theft involving the stealing and hiding of opium. There were twenty-two cases of breaking the peace, also known as breach of the peace, which is an offense that occurs when a person engages in some form of disorderly conduct, such as fighting or causing loud noise.22

It is important to note that opium use was not introduced to Britain by the Chinese immigrants who came to work temporarily as seamen on the London East End docks. These Chinese seamen brought the practice of smoking opium with them merely for their own relaxation in private. The use of opium spread to Britain before the Chinese immigrants settled in the country, as Thomas De Quincey reveals in his book *The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, published in 1821.23 It seems likely that the opium den served as a scapegoat, based on the uncertain economic situation and racial threats toward Chinese immigrants. As historians Virginia Berridge and Gareth Edwards conclude in their chapter ‘The Myth of the Opium Den in Late Victorian England’:

> The myth of the opium den was in the wider sense a domestic result of imperialism and the reaction to economic uncertainty. The Chinese and their opium use were a useful scapegoat. The cultural insensitivity which informed the reactions to Far Eastern opium use had its domestic counterpart; and the reaction to what was in reality only the customary relaxation of Chinese seamen illustrated both the structural

tensions of late Victorian society and the changed place of opium within it.\textsuperscript{24}

This conclusion is confirmed by another criminal case involving the Chinese and associated with opium, in 1863. In case number t18630302-487, two Chinese friends started fighting and tried to kill one another. A Chinese man, Saqui, was wounded by his friend Yon Ahqui Neen. At the beginning of Saqui’s testimony he insisted that he did not know Neen, but in the end Neen was judged not guilty because the final testimony from the interpreter, Joseph Gaetin, at the strangers’ home confirmed the two were friends. He said, ‘I found that statement to be false… I generally found him (Saqui) in opium-rooms and brothels – he seemed to be hanging on to the prisoner’.\textsuperscript{25} In the end, the prisoner received a good character reference. However, this suggests that the judgement was made based on the fact that Saqui lied, he was of poor character, and ‘seemed to be hanging on to the prisoner’, suggesting that Neen was defending himself. Nevertheless, the use of the word ‘opium-rooms’ from interpreter Joseph Gaetin raises a question: did the seamen bring their own opium to smoke in the private rooms or was opium sold to them in private rooms? In Chinese, ‘opium rooms’ is \textit{yapian fang} (鴉片房) and ‘opium den’ is \textit{yapian guan} (鴉片館). They are different as mentioned in section 5.4 about the Chinese word \textit{guan} 館 was used in businesses and shops to refer to a publicly accessible space. The definition of \textit{yapian guan} is a place where opium is sold, and which supplies equipment like pipes and lamps, whereas, \textit{yapian fang} refers to private rooms where invited friends gather together to smoke opium. Thus, when the

interpreter Joseph Gaetin uses the phrase ‘opium-rooms’ to describe the meeting place, this is more likely to be a private room rather than an opium den.

In addition, only two of the ninety-one cases involved the Chinese. The rate of Chinese crime was low, and both cases involved fights over money between friends.26 For example, one breaking the peace case in which Chinese were involved (criminal reference number t18550820-788) concluded that four Chinese men named Assam, Afuck, Apoi and Ayang cut and wounded another Chinese man, Tuck Quy. It was not clear if Tuck Quy’s attack was related to opium, but Quy’s wife Wang Noo, said ‘they came in they asked me for some money — I said I had got none — I said, “You are natives of Canton, and I am of Nankin, why should I give you money?” — when I gave them that answer, they instantly took out their knives and attacked my husband’.27 Her testimony suggests that the attack was related to money and the conflict between the early Chinese immigrants in London. One of the assailants, Apoi, was friends with Quy, as Quy’s ten years old son described: ‘Apoi came at 10 o’clock, and smoked opium on the bed till half past 10 o’clock — my father did not smoke — my father kept his money in his belt, and in his box — I could not see the box in the room — no money was taken from him’.28 The involvement of opium in this case was that one of the criminals, Apoi, came to smoke opium before the group attacked. This crime might be the first official record of Chinese seamen smoking opium in private in the East End of London. Based on this finding, it is confirmed that the first Chinese man smoking opium in London

26 Ibid.
Limehouse Chinatown, was in 1855. These records indicate a significant difference between the early Chinese immigrant groups and a lack of official records of Chinese opium dens in Britain.

Figure 6-1: ‘Saqui, Killing, 2 March 1863’, in the Proceedings of the Old Bailey, (1674-1913), Reference Number: t18630302-487.

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29 Ibid., Reference Number: t18550820-788.
6.4 The London Chinese Opium Den as a Modern Cultural Production

The London Chinese opium den occurs in literature, and was initially introduced into the public imagination by two lines: one in Dickens’ novel, in which the image of the opium den in the East End of London shows a perspective on a cultural factor implicit to the opium den narrative; and the other reported by an anonymous writer in 1868 in the London Society: An Illustrated Magazine of Light and Amusing Literature for the Hours of Relaxation concerning the Prince of Wales’ visit to an East End Chinese opium den. Although the story is presented ‘for the hours of relaxation’, it encourages British people, particularly male writers, to indulge in dangerous and thrilling night-time visits to this alien land in the dark streets of London’s East End. In 1870, Dickens published his last work, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and used the London Chinese opium den to advance the main plot of the novel. Dating back to 1866, Dickens introduced a vivid pre-written first-hand description which was ‘one of the first published portrayals of an opium den’. From then on, the Chinese opium den had a big impact on the various social explorers of the East End of London.

The most notorious literary account of a London Chinese opium den appears in Charles Dickens’ 1870 *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The story deals with John Jasper, a choirmaster who is madly in love with his pupil Miss Rosa Bud. Miss Bud, however, is engaged to Jasper’s nephew, young Edwin Drood. The plot has Edwin mysteriously disappearing one stormy Christmas Eve. Was he murdered? If so, by whom? Although, Dickens never finished the story, it is generally held that Jasper

murders Edwin. Japer’s character — veiled and mysterious — first appears in a New Court opium den. The opening plot is set in a Chinese opium den and draws an analogy between the ambiguous aesthetic of opium smoking dens and the reading of *Edwin Drood*, a story of love and hate, implying a juxtaposition between these two and hinting that the novel itself borrows opium-like powers. The novel’s opening paragraph, conflates the familiar English domestic environment and the exotic ‘Oriental’ atmosphere in a disconcerting and fanciful manner:

An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here! The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the Sultan’s orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one... He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her. Said Chinaman convulsively wrestles with one of his many Gods or Devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still.31

The enigmatic statement ‘how can that be here!’ is said by Jasper as he wakes from an opium slumber. Dickens’ writing creates a strong sense of displacement and ambivalence, with the Cathedral, Sultan and spike mixing together. The initial questions, doubting the existence of the English Cathedral, suggest the Cathedral

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does not belong in the scene, but is a symbol created by the beholder, create an exotic vision, representing the dislocation in the opium user’s Oriental dream world.

The fictional themes surrounding the Oriental style found in literature about the London Chinese opium den is not surprising. As Barry Milligan writes in his book *Pleasure and Pains; Opium and the Orient in Nineteenth-Century British Culture*:

> The lure of opium smoking for the uninitiated thus has nothing to do with a developed taste for the practice, as of course it cannot have; it is instead due to the appeal of the exotic inherent in this purportedly Oriental luxury, the seductiveness of the radically other that also makes “slumming” such a popular and closely related pastime during the same period.\(^{32}\)

These social explorers and writers tend to hark back to Dickens’ opium den in *Edwin Drood* as evidence for their existence. For example, Journalist Blanchard Jerrold and artist Gustave Doré published *London: A Pilgrimage* containing 180 engravings of the ‘shadows and sunlight’ of London in 1869. As they recall, they spent much time exploring the capital, often guarded by plain-clothes policemen. They recorded their visits to night refuges, cheap lodging houses and the East End opium den where they ‘were introduced into the same room in which Edwin Drood opens’.\(^{33}\) Another case can be seen in one of Conan Doyle’s most memorable plots, when Sherlock Holmes visits an opium den in Limehouse Chinatown in *The Man

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With The Twisted Lip of 1887. In 1891, Oscar Wilde, in The Picture of Dorian Gray, describes ‘opium dens, where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new’. Similarly, in 1895, James Platt, in his Chinese London and Its Opium Dens, mentions ‘the Dickens opium den’ and suggests that he even sees the same pipe as Dickens. These examples suggest that literary works had an impact on an emerging network of Chinese opium dens in London. A London Society reporter sums it up in 1868:

Of all the carnal delights that over which opium rules as the presiding genius is most shrouded in mystery. It is invested with a weird and fantastic interest (for which its Oriental origin is doubtless in some degree accountable), and there hovers about it a vague fascination, such as is felt towards ghostly legend and the lore of fairy land. There exists a strange yearning to make more intimate acquaintance with the miraculous drug concerning which there is so much whispering, and at the same time a superstitious dread of approaching it, such as, when it comes to the pinch, processes the rustic believer in the efficacy of repeating a prayer backwards as a means of raising the devil. It is the vulgar supposition that the one occupation of the lives of eastern grandees is to recline on soft cushions and indulge in the charming narcotic; that the thousand and one seductive stories contained in the

‘Arabian Nights’ were composed by writers whose senses were steeped in it.\textsuperscript{37}

Whether the London Chinese opium den was a real or false, through these British male writers’ social exploratory experiences it became part of a collective movement and creative ideas. For example, British writer Thomas Burke had his literary work \textit{Limehouse Nights} of 1916 set to music in America by Arthur Penn in 1919. Burke’s works were adapted into several films by the American film director David Wark Griffith, including ‘The Chink and the Child’ which became the movie ‘Broken Blossoms’, and ‘Gina of Chinatown’ and ‘Song of the Lamp’ which became the film ‘Dream Street’. Burke’s London Limehouse Chinatown stories become extremely popular in America. As Anne Veronica Witchard states, ‘Burke presents a Chinatown absolutely intended to appeal to the mythical Orient of Western imagination’.\textsuperscript{38} However, Burke also shows his critical stance on this matter, writing:

I have smiled many times at the articles that appear perennially on the wickedness of the place. Its name evokes evil tradition in the public mind. Those amazingly thrilling and amazingly ludicrous stories of East End opium-rooms are mainly, I may say, the work of journalistic specials.\textsuperscript{39}

The idea of the London Chinese opium den allowed British male writers, both individuals and social groups, to play the modern flâneur, exploring the London Limehouse Chinatown streets of an entirely different world. The image of the

\textsuperscript{38} Anne Witchard, \textit{Thomas Burke’s Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown} (Aldershot, 2009), p. 125.
\textsuperscript{39} Thomas Burke, \textit{Nights in Town} (London, 1915), p. 76.
London Chinese opium den became a modern production, involving social flâneur and cultural networking movements. Bruno Latour describes two sets of entirely different practices that create the meaning of modern. The first set ‘corresponds to what I have called networks; the second to what I shall call the modern critical stance’. The collective memories they created and adapted to Victorian literature were navigated by a collaborative literary imaginary network. Through the lens of the flâneur, both narrator and commenter fetishised the exotic opium den in the mind of the British public.

6.4.1 The Chinese Opium Pipe and Smoking Event in Britain

In 2013, one of London’s leading rare book dealers, Maggs Bros in Berkeley Square, held an exhibition entitled ‘Opium: Santo Domingo Collection’, which brought together some 3,000 objects, mainly Chinese opium pipes, books, photographs and documents on the history of opium, its use and trade. This huge collection was offered by someone who remains anonymous, according to Maggs Bros in a statement to the press, ‘an enigmatic European who spent several decades working in the East and buying anything opium-related that he came across on his travels’. The exhibition included choice pieces from a similar but smaller collection exhibited in Rotterdam in 2007 by artist and writer Ferry Bertholet, who published a book that year called Opium: Art et Histoire d’un Rituel Perdu. The limited information about the ownership shows that nineteenth-century opium-related objects still languish

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under the profound gloom of opium history. Reviewing this exhibition, commenter Peter Watts seems to note the show’s ambiguity:

Instruments of addiction are not supposed to be as exquisite as an opium pipe. Beautifully weighted and impeccably crafted, a 19th-century example from China, whether hewn from rough bamboo or shaped from elegant porcelain and finished with silver, is as sleek and deadly as an antique rifle. Even today, as one collector discovered, opium pipes can lead to hazardous temptation – and so great was the danger embodied by these beautiful objects that the Chinese destroyed thousands.42

This paradox is echoed in the phrase ‘splendour and degradation’, which appeared more than once in the exhibition flyer, referring both to the nature of the opium trade and the mixture of luxury goods made for the wealthy smoker and the lower-level items of everyday opium use. The pipe collection concentrated principally on the culture of opium use in China.43 The evocation of the London Chinese opium den scene in British literary and fictional works brings into question the engagement between the London Chinese opium den and its network. The opium related Chinoiserie object plays an important role in this narrative.

In British art and design, Chinoiserie is characterised by the use of Chinese designs and ideas. The craze for this style is particularly associated with high society

during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. China seemed a far-away place, full of mystery. Chinoiserie objects drew on this exotic image. They featured fantastic landscapes with fanciful pavilions and fabulous birds, sometimes inspired by actual Chinese objects. This eighteenth-century Chinoiserie shaped and was shaped by a female aesthetic. Women loved its beauty, exotic provenance and the secrets surrounding its fabrication. The fashion at the time was to arrange porcelain in Chinoiserie rooms. Exoticism was staged through the use of baroque mirrors, creating and endless perspective of rows of porcelain which provided onlookers with a sense of defamiliarisation and displacement through projection into an imaginary ornamental China.\(^{44}\) However, in nineteenth-century, the interest in Chinoiserie objects was not exclusive to women; men could also show a keen interest in Chinoiserie along with their taste for antiquity and objects.\(^{45}\) Because the collection defined the owner’s social and cultural identity, male Chinoiserie connoisseurship demanded a collection full of nature’s wonders as well as artistic, unique and rare pieces, as Barbara Benedict remarks:

Such accumulation advertises wealth and space: collections testify to class. The collector, moreover, gets to possess what others wonder at and admire, so that the collection is designed to stimulate envy. It also grants the collector authority: […] gentlemen would “dress up in Chinese costumes” to show visitors their Oriental collections.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{44}\) Robert J. Charleston, ‘Porcelain as a Room Decoration in Eighteenth-Century England’ in *Antiques*, vol. 96 (1969), pp. 894-96. See also section 5.4. See also section 1.2 ‘What is Chinoiserie? Two Examples of Art and Craft Chinoiserie in the Eighteenth century.’

\(^{45}\) Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding, ‘From the curious to the “artinatural”: the meaning of Oriental porcelain in 17th and 18th-century English interiors’ in *Miranda*, vol. 7 (2012), https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/4390#ftn12 [accessed 5 March 2019].

Men with Chinoiserie material possessions, thus, had ‘what others wonder at and admire, so that the collection is designed to stimulate envy’\footnote{Ibid, Benedict (2001), p. 77.}. Finding a unique curio could be rather important in one’s gentlemanly status. Despite the idea found in the literature, novels and the press of the time that porcelain was mostly consumed by women, men continued to show their interest in Chinoiserie and choose exceptional pieces to display in their cabinets or interiors.\footnote{Vanessa Alayrac-Fielding, ‘From the curious to the “artinatural”: the meaning of Oriental porcelain in 17th and 18th-century English interiors’ in Miranda, vol. 7 (2012) https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/4390#ftn12 [accessed 5 March 2019].} Chinese opium pipes became such curios. Opium pipes transformed from smoking tools into collected objects and ornaments in Britain in the nineteenth century.

Indeed, today we find opium pipe collections as important and popular objects of nineteenth-century Chineseness in various Britain museums, such as the Horniman Museum (opium pipe collection), National Maritime Museum, National Army Museum, and Liverpool Museum.\footnote{In China, opium smoking began as a privilege of the elite and remained a great luxury into the nineteenth century. For example, Figure 6-1 and Figure 6-2 share some style. Figure 6-1 shows a long, sectioned ivory opium pipe with pewter saddle near the closed end, in the saddle is an octagonal brass bowl with copper lining, which has a small hole at top where the opium paste was inserted. The pipe is incised with flower vases and pots near the mouthpiece, followed by a landscape scene. The Eight Daoist Immortals adorn the middle section with bamboo, chrysanthemum and fruits at the lower section. The lobed rectangular saddle is decorated in repousse with bats and characters representing double happiness and longevity at the central panel, bordered by a pair of rhyming couplets at both sides, a zither at the top and scrolls at the bottom. The bowl is punched with semicircular floral motifs along the sides, and the Chinese inscription zhen zhi yun 真之雲, punched on the underside. See also Chinese opium pipe; pipe bowl, Ref. 99.107, (vendor: Inman, Mr, 1899-1907), Horniman Museum, London.} For example, the National Maritime Museum’s website says: ‘Come and see our opium pipe’ and notes ‘you may be surprised to see drug-taking paraphernalia at the National Maritime Museum but this
humble pipe tells of a less-than-heroic episode in the nation’s history and one with repercussions to this day’.  

An important pipe collector, William Bragge, gathered a wide range of objects. In the preface to Bibliotheca Nicotiana published in 1868, Bragge notes, ‘the decoration of pipes and of smoking appliances generally thus adds a new chapter to the Grammar of Ornament’. In 1870, the Bragge Pipe Collection, which comprised more than 6,000 pipes, was exhibited at the Birmingham Midland Institute. Three years later the collection was shown at the South Kensington International Exhibition. In the collection, one of the Chinese opium pipes was listed as ‘Chando’, now stored in the British Museum with the note, ‘Chando Pipe Intl Exn 1873’ (Figure 6-4) suggesting it was displayed in the 1873 South Kensington International Exhibition. The specific mark ‘Chando’ attached to this Chinese opium pipe highlights its simple bamboo tube shape, as the prototype for the opium pipe in early opium smoking. This piece, or a piece with similar characteristics, was described in East London Opium Smokers as ‘an instrument like a flute, with a wooden cup with a lid to it screwed on at a distance of about three inches from the end. It was not a flute, however, but a pipe – the pipe’. Joe Dunnage, in his study ‘An Opium Pipe in a Collection and in Journalism’, states that the Chinese opium pipe ‘had been transformed from its original purpose of smoking, to that of an object to be gazed at with wonder, invoking instead an idealised image of smoking and Oriental tradition,

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50 ‘Come and see our opium pipe’ https://www.rmg.co.uk/see-do/we-recommend/attractions/opium-pipe
51 Bragge William, Bibliotheca Nicotiana. pp. 1-8. See also Owen Jones, The Grammar of Ornament (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1868) p. 5. An architect, Owen Jones outlined thirty-seven propositions as the general principles in the decorative arts, such as carpets, ceilings, fabrics etc.
where the design carries as much power as the utility’. Opium pipes, released from their utility function, representing a distant nation worshipped in the form of material artefacts, acquired symbolic meaning.

Figure 6-2: Chinese opium pipe; pipe bowl, Ref. 99.107, (vendor: Inman, Mr, 1899-1907), Horniman Museum, London.

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Figure 6-3: Ivory opium pipe with metal mount and terracotta bowl, Chinese, National Maritime Museum, contributor: Science Museum, London.
Figure 6-4: William Bragge ‘Chando’ Pipe and details of label ‘Chando Pipe Intl Exn 1873’ on it, the Asia Department of the British Museum, photo taken by Joe Dunnage, 3 January 2013, available at http://open.conted.ox.ac.uk/resources/documents/opium-pipe-collection-and-journalism-joe-dunnage

In 1899, at the Western Gardens of the Earl’s Court Exhibition in London, there was an event where every visitor could pay sixpence to view a real ‘Opium
Smoking Parlour’ and a live show of Chinese opium smokers. The event hired Chinese men dressed in traditional Chinese costumes, smoking opium in the traditional Chinese manner. The event’s brochure can be found in the Museum of London as part of the Kiralfy Archive. The cover of the brochure shows an illustration of the opium smokers and exclaims, ‘opium smoking parlour in full working order’ replete with ‘living Chinamen and true to every detail’.54

The introductory notes in the accompanying booklet compare the Chinese custom of smoking opium with the British preference for alcohol, and conclude that, ‘it is in fact admitted that opium is of actual benefit, enabling everyone to do an increased amount of labour with a less amount of fatigue. So far as outward appearance and demeanour go, the moderate opium smoker is a far less objectionable person than even the moderate drinker’.55 Visitors to the parlour, however, watched rather than took part in the smoking of opium. This statement comparing the use of opium and alcohol in the view of the Victorian public, is no surprise, as it echoes the British view, ‘if opium is injurious in China, it is no worse than intoxicating drink in England’.56 Such an ambiguous view reveals a moral crisis and imperial decline.

54 ‘Opium Smoking Parlour’ issued to accompany the exhibit at the Western Gardens of the Earl’s Court Exhibition, 1899. Museum of London as part of the Kiralfy Archive.
55 Ibid., ‘Opium Smoking Parlour’, 1899.
Figure 6-5: The brochure ‘Opium Smoking Parlour’ issued to accompany the exhibit at the Western Gardens of the Earl’s Court Exhibition, Kiralfy Archive, 1899, Museum of London, London.
The brochure for the Opium Smoking Parlour (Figure 6-5) drew inspiration from John Wimbush’s 1889 oil painting, entitled ‘An Opium Den at Lime Street’. This painting appeared in Sotheby’s 2017 spring auction, with the note, ‘it is likely that this work is the one entitled Lingering Clouds exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1889’. In fact, towards the end of the nineteenth century a new style of genre painting emerged. Here, ‘genre’ refers to paintings which depict scenes of everyday life. Artists wanted to capture the excitement and fleeting nature of modern life, especially in fast-growing metropolises such as London. Artists and writers shared the same fashion, as modern flâneurs, wandering and exploring the urban setting.

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The simple and somewhat sentimental genre scenes captured by the artists of the Victorian era were replaced by bustling street scenes. In this sense, the London Chinese opium den is a perfect subject to explore. In this painting, three Chinese men, two reclining on a low bed, hold long opium pipes, heated over the glowing lamp shown on a tray brought by the other. Comparing the brochure for the Opium Smoking Parlour with Wimbush’s painting, they share a similar proposition and, dark, mysterious artistic touches (see Figures 6-5 and 6-6).

The two figures of the opium smokers in the brochure illustration are virtually identical to the characters in ‘Opium-smoking in a Restaurant’ from John Thomson’s photographic album Illustrations of China and of Its People, published in 1873-4 (Figure 4-8). The only observable differences between the photographs and the brochure design is the man on the left, performing the role of ‘opium master’ as described by the narrator of East London Opium Smokers published in 1868. The article elaborates:

It is this secret which constitutes the rarity of the luxury. To be enjoyed, the opium must be prepared by a competent hand. There are few such in London… How few their number is determined by the fact that when an ‘opium master’ is discovered, even though his den is situated in, without exception, the most vile and villainous part of the metropolis, he is regarded as a person worth visiting by lords, and dukes and even princes and kings.  

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60 See illustrations ‘Opium-smoking in a Restaurant’, no. 50, plate IX, volume 1’ and ‘A Whiff of the Opium Pipe at Home, no, 51, plate X, volume 1’, Illustrations of China and of Its People (1873-74).
This suggests that opium dens also drew the attention of customers from the upper classes. As we see from the text, opium was fetishised as a commodity and the mystery of its preparation by a specialised opium master played an important role in this fetishisation. The focus on Chinese opium related objects such as opium pipes and Opium Smoking Parlour event illustrate the network of imaginary sites of London Chinese opium dens in Britain during the nineteenth-century. With the same Chinoiserie interests, British male writers and artists connected with local opium issues, and with the political conflicts with China.

6.4.2 British Fictional Chinese Opium Den and American Society ca. 1850 - 1870

In the English-speaking world, London’s Chinese opium dens were a site of entertainment produced by British writers, media and publishers. The ensuing globalization of opium smoking and opium dens through the Chinese diaspora provoked bans in the English-speaking world, particularly in America. The opium den fiction served to entertain British readers, but seems to have been a real social issue for American society. Diana Ahmad examines how smoking-opium and its culture fuelled racism, alarmed the American middle class, and led to political pressure to both suppress opium dens and exclude the Chinese from American life. The dominant image of the Chinese opium den was one of contagion in America society.62 However, a social problem or a social scene in one country may often be held up as an example to others. This section explores the connection between the

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images of opium dens created and circulated in the literary works of Britain and America.

Unlike in Britain, opium use was introduced to the United States with the influx of Chinese immigrants who came to work on the railroad. In 1850, the California gold rush triggered global emigration of ambitious fortune-seekers from China, Germany, Chile, Mexico, Ireland, Turkey and France. The number of Chinese gold-seekers was particularly large. The Chinese called San Francisco Xiou gin san 舊金山, meaning ‘The Old Gold Mountain’. In 1876, the Chinese in America numbered 151,000, of whom 116,000 were in California. They worked very hard because they wanted to acquire as much gold as possible before returning to China. When the gold grew scarce, the influx of Chinese and other foreign labourers led to ethnic tensions in California.

In 1850, the California state legislature passed the first Foreign Miners Tax Law, which levied a monthly twenty-dollar tax on each foreigner engaged in mining.63 Many Chinese stopped prospecting for gold. The Foreign Miners Tax Law was the first act in a campaign by Americans to restrict the entry of Chinese labourers into California to compete for jobs and wages. In the spring of 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by Congress and signed by President Chester Arthur.64 This act effectively halted Chinese immigration for ten years, and prohibited Chinese from becoming US citizens.65 For the first time, Federal Law

prohibited the entry of an ethnic group on the premise that it endangered the good order of certain localities.

During this time, immigrants brought the practice of smoking opium with them. Many settled in the Chinatown district of San Francisco and opium dens were established, later spreading eastward to New York. In 1885, there were 26 opium dens in San Francisco’s Chinatown, most of which ‘catered for twenty-four smokers at a time and were located mainly in an area bounded by Stockton, Washington, Dupont and Pacific Streets’. Opium dens were associated with Chinese immigrants, because the establishments were usually run by Chinese men called ‘opium masters’ who knew the ways of opium smoking, supplied the opium and stored the unique pipes and lamps. Their unique way of smoking opium began to attract non-Chinese smokers. According to Harry Hubbell, in his book *Opium-smoking in America and China: A Study of Its Prevalence, and Effects, Immediate and Remote, On the Individual and the Nation*, published in 1882:

The first white man who smoked opium in America is said to have been a sporting character, name Clendenyn. This was in California, in 1868. The second — induced to try it by the first — smoked in 1871. The practice spread rapidly and quietly among this class of gamblers and prostitutes.

Although opium smoking was not as widespread as morphine use at the time, the isolation of the opium dens made them a safe haven for criminals. After 1875, the

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opium dens became a safety concern for the general populace, as ‘many women and young girls, and young men from respectable families, were being induced to visit opium dens, where they were ruined morally and otherwise’. Anti-Chinese sentiments among the general public produced a type of anti-opium and opium den hysteria, as the problem of opium addiction was acknowledged by the urban population at large. Consequently, in 1878, the city of San Francisco passed its first anti-opium regulation.

Opium dens became notorious in America and received negative public attention. American authors recycled narratives of the London Chinese opium dens and republished them again and again. For example, the ‘East London Opium Smokers’, published in Britain in 1868, was republished in America under the title ‘Flag of Our Union’ in 1870. The American author states in his opening: ‘We take the following account of the manner in which opium is smoked in London, from an English journal. The practice is on the increase’. This suggests that the British articles, had a big influence on the literature that followed towards the end of the nineteenth century in both Britain and America. Barry Milligan says that, ‘even before nineteenth-century readers entered these authors’ fictional opium dens, they were veterans of the East End and its opium establishments, having vicariously traversed the narrow alleyways of Bluegate Fields in countless magazines, newspapers, and books presenting reports from “roving correspondents”’.

The opium problem and the anti-Chinese sentiment among the American public, may well explain the American reaction to, and interest in, fictional London Chinese opium den stories. The London Chinese opium den may well have been perceived as an ‘opium dream’ to Britons like Dickens, whose novel the Mystery of Edwin Drood provided an escape from the tensions of public discourse about the British-Chinese opium trade and the anti-opium movement at the British domestic level. But this ‘opium dream’ became a nightmare when it addressed a subject that American society tried to suppress. American readers either received a shock, or were forced to face the brutal reality of their situation. Understanding what it is to be ‘other’ helped American society describe its own situation more accurately. Finally, this reading of the London Chinese opium den contains multiple layers, from object to event, from literary to urban exploration, the London Chinese opium den as part of nineteenth-century Chineseness, brings an alternative modern Chinoiserie, as fantasy and fear, to a wide audience in both Britain and the US. For studies of opium related Chinoiserie narratives, objects and activities in Britain, the exploration of such networks, both in Britain and transnationally, is significant as it sheds light on the motivational factors and brings a better understanding of the British construction of nineteenth-century Chineseness.

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72 This view is inspired by Jacques Lacan’s ‘Symbol and Language.’ The Language of the Self. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956). In 1950, in Lacan’s seminar I, for example, he describes how anxiety does not quite have any particular connection to the real. Also, see Amanda Loos’ article ‘Symbolic, Real, Imaginary’, http://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/symbolicrealimaginary.htm [accessed 08 March 2017].
6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has explored how the network of London Chinese opium dens was shaped and fascinated by the British modern experience of flâneur-like narratives, both individual and social, stimulated by mainly male participants who played important roles in shaping the aesthetic. However, little research has been conducted into the masculine Chinoiserie aesthetic or the image and narrative making of London Chinese opium dens. This chapter has rephrased the research questions from previous inquiries, such as ‘was London Chinese opium den real?’ by John Seed and Jon Burrows to ‘What is the story behind the fictional image making of the London Chinese opium den?’ The approach adopted in this chapter combines criminal records, literary works, events, objects and visual representations and illustrates the development of London Chinese opium dens. These interdisciplinary methodologies and rephrased research questions add to previous inquiries into London Limehouse Chinatown’s historiography.

This chapter has demonstrated that London Chinese opium dens, on the one hand, exemplify the modernity of Britain’s Chineseness, which is a part of the hybrid fashion of imagined British-made Chinoiserie, but, on the other, problematise themselves by connecting fictional themes with urban exploration, opium-related events and opium pipes. This chapter argues that the London Chinese opium den is a nineteenth-century modern cultural production. The section ‘Consuming the London Chinese Opium Den’ explores narratives about the London Chinese opium dens which were of interest not only to the home British market, but also drew the attention of the American public. This leads us to ask whether the London Chinese opium dens had any implications for American society or even represented one of
the nineteenth-century’s global Chineseness models. Thus, the mode of ‘outside within the inside’ British Chineseness, plays a crucial part in the specifically modern Chinoiserie experience.
Chapter 7 Conclusion

This thesis has shown the process of construction of a British Chineseness between 1850 and 1920. It has investigated representations of Chinese people in Britain, images of China and Chinese people in the images produced by British photographer John Thomson, and representations of Chinese people in Limehouse Chinatown, their attire, cultural identity, lived experiences and shopfront designs. This transcultural study has employed an interdisciplinary methodology, and drawn on a range of theories and concepts, including diaspora, heterotopia, identity, and migration. It has analysed various nineteenth-century visual and material cultural sources to demonstrate how these should be understood as part of Chinoiserie. It has explored how patterns of Chineseness and Chinoiserie emerged in Britain, in the nineteenth century, which in turn had an impact on the Chinese population in Britain, and their representations of themselves. This thesis has shown that a particular version of Chineseness emerged in nineteenth-century Britain, one that has to be understood from within a British context, and one that was shaped by both fantasy and fear, in particular, by a British masculine form of Chinoiserie.

The study has illustrated that the years 1850 to 1920 were critical in the history of British and Chinese interaction. It was during this period that Chinese people arrived and began to play an important role in Britain, interacting with the British public and ultimately shaping their representation within British society. Each chapter has contributed to the overall aim of the thesis, offering case studies to show how nineteenth-century Sino-British interactions by Chinese people, images and diasporic space informed the British masculine Chinoiserie and constructed Chineseness in Britain. Throughout these chapters, what has emerged is a male-
gendered aesthetic imagination that should be identified as Chinoiserie. However, this raises questions about why the transition from an eighteenth-century version of Chinoiserie that was largely gendered female to this nineteenth-century masculine Chinoiserie came about. I suggest two possible explanations: firstly, the masculinity of British male writers, who overwhelmed the feminine fashion of Chinoiserie; and secondly, the spatial displacement of Chineseness from the landscape of design to the Chinatown of Limehouse, Chinese migrants and the Chinese opium den.

The British public tended to believe that opium was not very injurious. Creating exotic Chinese opium dens in their homeland meant that the source of their anxiety — the real opium problem — was suddenly not very far away. This dual attitude of attraction and distaste can be seen in the processes of cultural negotiation and adaptation that occurred in the Sino-British relationship at this time, situated between outsiders and insiders, self and other, West and East. In these processes, the British public’s attention shifted away from the old Chinoiserie objects of the eighteenth century, and towards the way of life of Chinese male immigrants in the nineteenth century.

In order to understand how the change in Chinese people’s socially constructed appearance presented itself in Britain, this study has used visual sources such as photographs combined with theoretical approaches to the research questions. This has shown that the identities of the Chinese residents in Britain were not simply determined by their region of origin or their profession; identities were subject to an element of choice of attire and profession. For example, the styles of dress worn by the three types of Chinese visitors to Britain, huaju, huaqiao and huagong, were not the same. When we construct a chronological timeline of events in the history of
Chinese migrants to Britain, we see that choices of dress changed, and that these choices had significant implications for the construction of their Chineseness. The image of Chinese people in Britain was fragmented, which allows us to consider how Chineseness was constructed through the British gaze, and ask whether there was ever a singular construction. Were the Chinese treated as a single body, a treatment that was based on fantasy and fear? Undoubtedly, the Chinese in Britain were characterised by multiple experiences and perspectives.

The change of dress of Chinese men in Britain, particularly in Limehouse, has been discussed in relation to cultural identity studies, material culture studies, and transcultural discussions of hybrid culture, migration, media and historical design studies. Hybrid cultural adaptations and negotiations were often the result of interactions between Chinese and Britons. In a certain sense, Western or hybrid styles of dress gave the Chinese in Limehouse compensation for their lack of position as a minority group and labouring class in Britain. They looked for equality and opportunity in British society, as Georg Simmel states, ‘naturally the lower classes look and strive towards the upper, and they encounter the least resistance in those fields which are subject to the whims of fashion; for it is here that mere external imitation is most readily applied’.\(^1\) In this way, dress and style allowed British Chinese to express themselves, showing both who they were and who they wanted to be.

This research has shown that the Chinese migrants in Limehouse did not have a purely traditional Chinese way of reproducing their Chineseness, which signifies

the hybrid cultural adaptations and meanings of in-between Britishness and Chineseness, with the hybridity of Chinoiserie appearing in their attire and their shopfronts. As one of the arguments of the thesis, the study has explored the use of hybrid language in Limehouse Chinatown shopfront designs, illustrating the freedom and flexible positioning as a new model of Chinoiserie.

Following the discussion of British perceptions of Chinese image making in Chapter 4, the study branches into two discussions, Chineseness as a visual economy, and the alternative narrative of the body of the Chinese poor and the opium smoker. Firstly, I have discussed issues surrounding the Chinese images by British photographer John Thomson. The process of deliberate inclusion and exclusion, a combination of the photographer’s individual opinions with the printing technology and social challenges, means that the images of the Chinese poor project a similar pattern to the images of London’s poor. Secondly, Thomson’s images of the Chinese opium smoker were once considered documentary resources, but through political pressure became propaganda. This study has also explored the practice of opium smoking, with its association to the Chinese body politic.

The study contains a series of detailed case studies from literature, criminal reports and lived events, such as the Opium Smoking Parlour. In Victorian mass culture, the London Chinese opium den appeared in various works of fiction and newspapers and constituted one British perception of fictional Chinese space. The materials I have used in this research demonstrate that Victorian writers and their creations can be seen as the embodiment of a reform of Chinoiserie as part of a wider cultural transformation. In the flâneur-like narratives of nineteenth-century Britain, the image of the den was naturalised within the context of consumption as a modern
aesthetic practice. My analysis has demonstrated how the idea, and subsequently the fantasy and fear, of China’s masculine image grew from the interactions between China and Britain, then, through the fantasy of Chinoiserie, were re-imposed on the British imagination and its popular cultural practices. This study has interrogated the meaning of being British Chinese in the context of image making and media consumption of the British communication industry.

The contribution of this research lies in its analysis of the various visual representations of Chineseness produced in Britain between 1850 and 1920. This thesis has shown that Chinese people, Chinese images and Chinese spaces were all sites for the construction of Chineseness and the emergence of a British masculine Chinoiserie in Britain. In order to see the hybridity in this image formation, we need to draw on a variety of theoretical approaches. Nineteenth-century studies of Chinoiserie must be combined with diaspora studies of Chineseness. I have suggested that the cultural diversity of Chineseness and Chinoiserie can be revealed through conceptual categories, such as ‘being in-between’ and ‘mimic men’, and using concepts such as ‘visual economy’ and ‘heterotopia’. These help us see that Chineseness involved a process of ‘becoming’, by way of cultural interweaving, negotiation and adaptation. The concept of mimic men from Homi Bhabha has allowed us to see how the British idea of the ‘Yellow Peril’ contained constructed or stereotyped aspects of, at times conflicting, meanings, revealing the complex interplay between self and other, and the interwoven social structural forces in the process of British Chinese identity formation.

It is difficult to find textual records from within the Chinese community, and therefore I have used British literary sources and materials to build a narrative of
British-made Chineseness. I am aware that imagined boundaries between historical and literary materials can often be misleading. However, the research questions were carefully set. Ross Forman states: ‘China is certainly a missing piece in the imperial jigsaw, but like a puzzle piece, its significance lies in helping us to complete the whole. Or to use different metaphor, studying China helps us to identify the ties that bound together Britain and her scattered outposts of empire’. Therefore, the use of literature and press materials from British narrators has been important for demonstrating the mobility and multiplicities of cultural interactions in the settings of Chineseness.

My research may be followed in many ways. One of the key topics in this study is the subject of male dress and masculinity. The gendered implications of people and their dress should be taken into account in further research. For example, research could consider the impact of the yi fu jian bian (changing clothes and cutting-queue) movement as a platform for body and dress, mediating not only the male body but also the female body, or by extension, the trans-sexual body. The focus on the male body could be extended to include models of androgyny, and more traditionally feminine dress. During the 1900s, dress and fashion became highly politicised issues within the militant suffragette campaign in both China and the West. Feminist struggles over the representation of women became ‘written’ on the bodies of suffragettes. In Britain, a great number of suffragettes created a hybridised gendered appearance. The tailoring, bowler-hats, cravats, collars and ties of suffragette dress directly conflicted with the Women’s Suffrage Procession

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Committee (WSPC) directive stressing the political importance of a traditionally feminine appearance. In China, Han Chinese feminists and female students wore cropped hair and unashamedly showed their large feet. They also wore long robes to look like men. There are examples of women cross-dressing as men in the public and political sphere, including the Chinese revolutionary Qiu Jin 秋瑾 (1875-1907), who devoted herself to liberating women from their role in the family in order to work towards a modern version of Chineseness. Men also experimented with various ways of dressing and caring for their bodies. The transformation of men, women, gender, social hierarchy and national identity became one of central themes in China’s modernisation. This subtle relationship between cultural psychology, personal desire and gender concerning Chinese dress in a global context has been overlooked as a research theme thus far. A specific investigation of body, design and transgender issues in national and global settings might be an avenue for further investigation.

Overall, this thesis has shed light on the various diverse meanings of the image of the Chinese and Chinoiserie in Britain and its associated masculinity. It is hoped that this study will contribute to fostering a renewed way of looking at Chineseness and Chinoiserie in Britain or globally. This research has demonstrated that the fantasies and fears surrounding Limehouse Chinatown were, on one hand, pervasive because of the idea of the Yellow Peril which was evident in a whole series of novels and films, while on the other, the space of Limehouse Chinatown was rooted in the fantasy of possession of Chinoiserie material things by the British. Such Chineseness can be referred to an in-between socio-cultural adaption to a global setting. This study has examined the ways in which Chineseness was constructed through diverse material cultures, out of which emerged a sense of self and other that can only be understood in transcultural terms.
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