Introduction
Topsy-turvy Britain and China

> This 19th century has been almost as pregnant in change and prophesy for China as for Europe. It had seen the steadfast encroachment of Western innovations on a civilization which had endured without change for over 2,000 years. . . In fact, solid and impenetrable as was the bulk of native conservatism, no observant Chinaman could leave his inland home without realizing that an irresistible encroachment had taken place and could never be pushed back save by the extermination of every foreigner, and every convert to foreignism, within the limits of the Empire.
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> Julian Croskey, *"The S. G.": A Romance of Peking* (1900)[1]

> If the Chinaman can thus compete with our artizans and working men in his native country, notwithstanding the many disadvantages which must attend the exercise there of his intelligence and strength, what will he not be able to accomplish when encouraged and taught to rival a foreign antagonist on his own ground, and at a more moderate rate of remuneration than the latter can afford to demand? Should matters go on as they are now doing in England, the labouring and manufacturing classes must not wonder if they find themselves ere very long displaced and distanced by the hitherto despised, but none the less practical, useful, and labour-loving Chinaman.
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> Walter Henry Medhurst, *The Foreigner in Far Cathay* (1872)[2]

Imagined possibilities

Scenario 1. The year is 1905. The place is Hong Kong, Britain's outpost on the edge of China. The pseudonymous "Betty" publishes a book with Anglo-Asian press giant Kelly & Walsh entitled *Intercepted Letters: A Mild Satire on Hongkong Society*. The author is a British woman living in Hong Kong whose *Letters* first appeared in the local English-language daily, the *China Mail*. She ends her collection of missives with a blast from the future: her granddaughter "Betty III" writes back from the vantage of 1960 to

record her impressions of the place where her "grandmamma" spent her youth. Like Thomas Macaulay's New Zealander surveying a London that never came to be, Betty III conjures up a Hong Kong that is a far cry from the world of Suzie Wong or the colony that fashioned itself as the financial hub for another global power. Her Hong Kong – as she explains in her "coney," or telegraph – is "conducted for the benefit of Britishers, and might, but for the palm-trees, be mistaken for a well governed county of England."[3] Betty III has arrived in Hong Kong, thanks to the London–Kowloon Monorail. Fifty hours has taken her from Charing Cross through the Channel Tunnel on a train that travels more than 200 miles an hour and joins together the metropole and its easternmost crown colony.

Betty got it wrong. Hong Kong was never destined to become Britain on the Pearl River Delta. Although she badly misread the future of Hong Kong and Anglo-Chinese relations, she is an invaluable guide to recovering how the Victorians imagined China and their place in it. Her book highlights the Victorian view that China would become and remain, in some way, integrally tied to the future and success of global imperialism. It hints at an empire constructed as a worldwide network in which China, India, Japan, Africa, Australasia, and the Americas all form part of a differentiated but entwined system. And it extends empire far beyond India; Kowloon, not Calcutta, serves as the terminus for this monorail. Betty's book itself is the product of a China-based British publishing firm (with offices in Shanghai, Yokohama, and Singapore, among other places) and a daily newspaper tailored to meet the needs of colonists far from home. This points to the complexity of literary production in and about empire: its many and diffuse circuits of publication and distribution; its potential for site-specific, regional, and Empire-wide circulation; and its ability to foreground local concerns and to connect them together with the larger structures of governance which imperialism entailed.

Scenario 2. The year is 1898. China is the fulcrum for Western debates about the future of empire: Will it expand or contract? Is it morally justified or bankrupt? Will the balance of power between Britain and her rivals remain stable, or will it shift away from Britain's favor in response to new realities in Asia and Africa? In specific, Britain's trade and naval supremacy in the East is under threat because of the failure of the "Open Door" policy in and around China. Japan has invaded Korea, Russia has secured Port Arthur, the Americans are fighting for control of the Philippines, and Germany is militarizing its base in Tsingtao (Qingdao). The Yangtze River basin is potentially up for grabs; China's possible partition looms large and captures the British public's imagination.[4]

Under the auspices of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Great Britain, Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, an aide to Queen Victoria and a sitting MP, travels to China.[5] He prepares a report, which appears in book form in 1899 as *The Break-up of China*. Amid myriad calls for the "carve-up" of China and the competing claims for attention posed by events in South Africa, where a war is underway, Beresford concludes that "the maintenance of the Chinese Empire is essential to the honour as well as the interests of the Anglo-Saxon race."[6] This is the British government's view, too. The Chinese Empire cannot be allowed to fall apart. Britain's aim should be to shore up the Qing dynasty and, in so doing, protect Victoria's political and economic interests in the region, but more direct interference is best avoided. The "last thing that the British commercial communities, and indeed the whole British people, desired," Beresford tells Chinese officials, "was any addition being made to the British Empire, either in the nature of dominion, sphere of influence, or protectorate" (13). Beresford further predicts that any collapse of China threatens to bring on a world war.

Unlike Betty, Beresford was mostly right. The carve-up of China would never happen, nor would Britain actively expand her role in administering Chinese affairs. The event that might have made a difference was the Boxer Rebellion – a loosely organized, anti-foreign uprising that took place in the summer of 1900. During the conflict, much of the Western population of the Chinese capital was holed up in the British Legation for that summer, before a military force arrived to relieve them. The relief involved an invasion in Northern China and a foreign intervention sufficiently profound to make the Chinese leadership flee the palace in Beijing. But the invasion force was an international one, including US and Japanese troops, while relative newcomers like Germany, Italy, and Russia failed to capitalize on the uprising to expand their power base in the region. The upshot? A stronger Anglo-American alliance was forged; the Qing dynasty limped along, in the view of Western observers, until 1911, when the Republic of China replaced it.

In these respective scenarios, Betty and Beresford address different potentialities for the future of Britain's relationship with China. Their different views underscore Thomas Richards's point that the British Empire in the long nineteenth century was "something of a collective improvisation."[7] Desperate to maintain the status quo in the midst of internal Chinese instability, Beresford urges caution. He rejects the notion of direct territorial acquisition in favor of military assistance to protect Britain's control over 64 percent of the "whole foreign trade of China" (13). Betty, meanwhile, envisages a future in which Britain turns its Chinese population into yellow-skinned Englishmen. She foresees a world in which the colonial is essentially

absorbed into the metropole. Both of these writers help us to recover the great sense of importance and possibility that China held for the Victorians, as well as the feeling, as late as the turn of the century, that China's relevance to British imperialism on the whole remained undetermined.

Empires entwined

Through their texts and arguments, Betty and Beresford also show us something that everyone in Victorian Britain took for granted: the realization that their empire was interconnected with other empires, that modern empires stood not alone, but were intricately entwined with each other. It was commonsense in the late nineteenth century that Britain's empire was not a vast and geographically disparate set of locations that defined themselves by their affiliation to a putative motherland. Instead, the Victorians and their interlocutors knew that the British Empire emerged out of geopolitical rivalries, out of the competition *and* cooperation between various European powers as well as numerous non-European ones, and out of the conjunction of different kinds of civilizations and systems of knowledge in different parts of the world. They knew, for instance, that what made the relatively obscure Crimean Peninsula important was its focalization of tensions between the Russian, Ottoman, and British Empires. And they had learned by bitter experience not to underestimate the ambitions of groups like the Zulus in Southern Africa. They knew, too, that building and running the infrastructure of other sovereign nations – as they did in Brazil, itself an "empire" until 1889 – exerted a powerful symbolic, ideological, and even cultural force both at home and abroad.

I have given this book the subtitle *Empires Entwined* because the word "entwined" emphasizes three fundamental aspects of the way in which I use British textual production about China and the Chinese as a case study of larger patterns of Britain's interaction with other parts of the world. First, the term conjures up images of plants that twine or twist together – like the rose and the briar – with all the associated implications of symbiosis and potential parasitism. This is an accurate definition of the way in which empires engage with and conceive of each other; interaction is both necessary for survival and potentially damaging. It is also an apt description of the two faces of empire represented by British communities abroad and at home, a set of interconnections that this book also traces. Second, "to entwine" means to enfold or to embrace, again like the rose and the briar. Transcultural intimacy and its depiction form a major part of my study. "Entwined" is therefore an

appropriate metaphor to underscore the imbrication of the proverbial personal and political across cultures and geographic spaces.

Third and finally, the word "entwined" recalls its etymological origins in the sense of "twin" or "two." It points to multiple, interrelated, and mutually constitutive notions of agency. This usage underscores my contention that China and the Chinese appear as imagined figures within British literature and as textual objects precisely because they were important social actors across the British Empire – from the mines of the Transvaal to the infamous opium dens of London's Limehouse to the International Settlement of Shanghai. "Entwining" therefore implies a notion of partnership – however unequal or elliptical – and of interdependence that is crucial to expanding our vision of empire beyond the traditional paradigms of colonizer and colonized, Self and Other. "Entwining" thus breaks away from a top-down or centralized theory of imperialism and its literary production and instead emphasizes the idea that imperial discourse is engaged in a dialogue with players both internal and external to itself.

Suggesting that Britain and China were in some way doubled or twinned is, I acknowledge, potentially problematic. First, it might lead some readers to believe that this book will juxtapose British and Chinese texts, whereas *China and the Victorian Imagination* is patently a work about British literature and culture. Second, it might suggest that Britain and China are two monolithic structures at odds with each other, whereas my emphasis is primarily on interlacing, on the multiple tendrils each one sent out into the other. However, the real intervention of this book is to pluralize imperialisms and to demonstrate how British versions of these imperialisms were tempered by an exchange with the geographical space called "China" and the people identified with that space.[8]

What does it actually mean to consider Britain and China as "empires entwined"? What happens to our understanding of imperial literary production when we see "entwined empires"? The answer to these questions involves redirecting the study of the literature of imperialism in several ways:

1. It requires an expansion of, or change in, the way in which we understand nineteenth-century British imperialism. Once we embrace the notion of "empires entwined," we can return to older arguments about the myriad varieties of imperialism – chiefly, those about "informal" imperialism, business imperialism, and extra-imperialism – but with fresh eyes. Two things differentiate this usage of informal imperialism from the dependency debates of the 1950s and 1960s. The first is that my lens is literary and cultural studies, meaning that my emphasis is on discourse and rhetoric, not economic fundamentals. The second is that

this study employs current methodological tools for thinking about globalization and historiography, so that informal imperialism forms part of a geopolitical spectrum that emphasizes the diversity of the way in which cultures and societies engage with each other. Revisiting informal imperialism in this way also allows me to reclaim the idea of "Greater Britain," which offered the Victorians a meaningful heading under which to group the kinds of affiliations and influences that exceeded the grasp of formal imperialism.

2. One of this study's key interventions into current critical debates about imperialism and literary production is the direct comparison it offers of literary production in the colonial sphere and related production in Britain. By charting the surprisingly vibrant publishing scene for books in English in East Asia, this study argues that there are significant differences in the way in which Britons publishing abroad understood their relationship to their "host" environments and to the future of imperialism, as well as significant differences in publishing patterns that point to the intensely local nature of imperialism's operations and the unevenness of the application of imperial policy about such topics as miscegenation. The study also investigates how local production was more self-aware than metropolitan production or, more cogently, the sorts of circumstances that sparked the kind of self-awareness and ethical dilemmas later evident in works such as George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" (1936).[9] Miscegenation is openly pronounced in the colonies, especially by men, even if the voices of Eurasians and other groups of multiple heritages are not particularly prominent. In the metropole, it is obscured, as the example of "Yellow Peril" writer M. P. Shiel shows. Being of West Indian origin and mixed race was no barrier to creating archetypal imperial heroes and recycling unsettling stereotypes about Asians.
3. This study repositions Orientalism not just by extending it to China, but by reconstituting East and West as a complicated network of entwined imperial projects. Building on the work of scholars such as Lydia H. Liu, it asks fundamental questions about how the British defined sovereignty in Asian arenas and how they inserted themselves within a society in which they, and not their interlocutors, were sometimes framed as the barbarians – a fact of which they were acutely aware.[10] More importantly, this study looks to literary production in and about China to understand how China functioned in a continuum of "Oriental" spaces that, like Betty's monorail, linked together the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, and East Asia – that defined points

of comparability and allegiance – but without defining them as equivalent. China, in particular, is useful for breaking down the assumption that imperial discourse simply projected itself onto another space. For instance, British writers' consciousness of their liminal position in China provides a corrective to the idea that Orientalism merely proffered a fantasy image that preconditioned their responses to the landscape, people, and cultural systems they encountered. Moreover, the evidently "civilized" nature of much of what they encountered – the built environment, the examination system, etc. – rendered simple hierarchical classifications impossible.

4. Above all, studying "empires entwined" emphasizes the need to disaggregate a unified notion of "the East." Doing this allows me to pinpoint the similarities and differences in the way that imperial literature treated spaces of formal and informal empire. It allows me to isolate the way in which these writers themselves drew comparisons across the colonial spaces they had experienced (often India and China, but Africa too). And it allows me to locate the way in which such literature may have emphasized issues of contingency as much as – if not more than – mastery. Restoring China's place in Britain's imagined sense of its own imperium therefore insists on seeing Orientalism as the Victorians saw it – as an evolving, unstable, and sometimes ideologically inconsistent means to grapple with their changing position in Asia and beyond.

This project has had a long gestation. When I began working on this material as a doctoral student in the 1990s, there were almost no published studies about China and the Victorians from a literary and cultural point of view. In the last five years alone, there has been an explosion of interest. For obvious reasons, many of the most recent publications on the subject do not appear here, but I hope the book gives a sense of the lively conversation now being carried on. The advent of World Literature and its proposals for recalibrating notions of reading across cultures and time is another development that deserves mention. My methodological interests are more historical than those of David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, and others, but there are important synergies between my approach and theirs in terms of the emphasis on circulation and the way that location changes literature and literary reception.

Overview: Why China and the Chinese?

As the largest territory in the world not to fall under direct European control during the nineteenth century, China sparked tremendous interest in

Britain and among Britons abroad. China and its people were, commentators insisted (in a rhetoric that would not seem out of place today), an untapped and potentially vast market for the exchange of goods, ideas, religion, and labor. Shortly after the Opium Wars, the China trade accounted for approximately one-third of the export economy of British India. By the end of the century, Friedrich Engels was citing China as a potential bulwark against capitalism's collapse. "The last new market which could bring on a temporary revival of prosperity by its being thrown open to English commerce, is China."[11] China was figured as a site of almost infinite possibility; her much-vaunted air of isolationism, elevated to a Victorian commonplace, simply fueled speculation about what lay behind the "bamboo curtain."

China and the Chinese inspired a vast array of literary production, an archival base as potentially large and limitless as the Victorians themselves perceived China to be. Ranging from novels, short stories, and adventure fiction to poetry, travelogues, and missionary tracts to periodicals produced in enclaves across "foreign China," this production is noteworthy both for its sheer volume – itself an index of the aspirational tendencies of the imperial archive – and for the diversity of its producers. From bored wives and customs officials stuck in lonely "outports" to sailors like James Dalziel to well-known adventure writers like G. A. Henty, everyone who came into contact with China seemed to have an opinion about it, an opinion which they felt compelled to set to paper. It is no accident, then, that, at the start of *Intercepted Letters*, Betty describes Hong Kong as "the most prolific literary workshop for its size in the whole world" (26), and her observation rings true for the other focal points of the region, particularly Shanghai, which was the center of the European presence in China.

The six chapters that make up this book are not primarily a survey of what the Victorians thought about China and the Chinese. Instead, I focus on three often overlapping areas of British representations of all things Chinese: narratives about China and the Chinese set in China; works expressing anxieties about the sexual or physical threat posed by the presence of or potential invasion of British and colonial spaces by the Chinese; and texts about the spectacle of Chinese people, objects, and food in Britain, most notably in London. The first section of the book covers literature produced in and about the treaty ports and Hong Kong. Its two chapters provide case studies of the forms of Anglophone literary production taking place on the China Coast and of the way in which Britons described China's material culture to readers back home. The second section discusses how literary production about the Chinese narrativized political events

surrounding Britain's relationship to the "Middle Kingdom." Its two chapters analyze respectively fiction written in response to the Boxer Rebellion and novels thematizing Asiatic invasion of Britain and the Empire. The book's final section describes metropolitan impressions of China and the Chinese in the form of literature about the Chinese community in Britain and in representations of China and the Chinese on the Victorian stage.

There are two types of narratives studied in *China and the Victorian Imagination*. One set hails from the imperial center and was published principally by major houses in London or Edinburgh. The second set comes from China itself and was published by locally based British houses, such as Kelly & Walsh, the offices of English-language daily newspapers, and the Oriental Press. One goal of the book is to showcase English-language literary production in China and to contrast the literary and material conditions of its production and circulation with that of literature produced in the metropole (and, to a lesser extent, in other colonial locations, such as Australia). Studying the wealth of texts not only written by Britons "out in China" but also published there reveals patterns of production that differ markedly from those disseminated in or by the metropole, including a greater prominence of women writers and the rejection of the identikit model of empire espoused by adventure writers like Henty. It also exposes different modes of consumption, namely a thriving and competitive trade in works about the local, marketed with a defined local audience in mind. Consumption and distribution of this literature might also be regional – with works circulating between India and "foreign" China, for instance – thus emphasizing the importance of seeing beyond the center–periphery model to audience groups joined together by steamship routes or by their common experience of being "in empire" – and thus unified by their distance from the metropole of origin.

The small size of the foreign presence in China and the fact that there could be practically no indigenous Chinese readership (unlike the situation in India) gave British authors certain latitude to describe the local populations. For one thing, it meant they could write with relative impunity. The sort of counter-reaction by emancipated blacks that Catherine Hall discusses with regards to James Mursell Phillippo and his book *Jamaica: Its Past and Present State* (1843) seems never to have occurred.[12] Nevertheless, narratives written by British men and women who lived "way out East" highlight the particularities of Britain's engagement with China on the ground, treating issues such as miscegenation, "going native," and extreme cultural difference with much greater sympathy and nuance than metropolitan authors, who more commonly sought to fit China into their grander

schemes of empire, and thus to efface or flatten out local particularities or to create "types" of Chinamen, such as the pirate, the inscrutable servant, or nefarious evildoer.

China-based authors, too, often evinced much more doubt than their metropolitan counterparts about the benefits of a late Victorian "scramble for China," which intensified as competition between European powers grew, as American influence in the region increased in 1898 (following the annexation of Hawaii and the transfer of Spain's colonies in the region to the US after the latter's victory in the Spanish American War), and as Japan developed its colonization projects in Taiwan, Manchuria, and Korea.

Why China matters

Far from being eclipsed as Britain consolidated its hold over the Indian subcontinent and Africa, China remained in the public eye throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What Robert Markley has noted about the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remained equally true in the late nineteenth century: "No literate man or woman in western Europe could plead ignorance of the relative size, wealth, and natural resources of, say, England and China. . . China had become a crucial site of contention and speculation in a variety of fields."[13] Naturally, the discourses associated with China during the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries changed as a result of the shifting imperial situation: opium now rivaled porcelain as a symbol of "Chineseness." But its fundamental importance only intensified. Even the most blatantly positivist method – counting the number of articles about some aspect of China appearing in elite and popular magazines – casts doubt on Bernard Porter's recent assertions that domestic culture during Victoria's reign was little affected by Britain's new global aspirations.[14]

This book invites us to return to a Victorian worldview in which India, although crucial, is not the sole focus of Britons' self-conception of their global role. It restores the commonsense need to think about South Africa, India, the West Indies, and other sites of formal activity within the context of Britain's broader commercial empire. By expanding the scope of our investigation of what constituted nineteenth-century imperialism, it encourages us to see what other types of imperialism flourished – and what other forms of narrativity they engendered. A comparative, "entwined" perspective also replaces a potentially anachronistic reading of empire seen from its aftermath with one that recovers the sense of potential and desire motivating a variety of Britons over the course of the long