Introduction

CHINA AND ORIENTALISM

Forging Romantic China is a cultural study focusing on one of the most decisive periods in the history of modern British and Chinese relations. It argues that Qing China was a central, though problematic, referent in the culture and literature of what we know of as the British Romantic period, demarcated generously in this study as *c.* 1760–*c.* 1840, and that this crucial presence has been oddly evaded in much of the literary writing of the period and its criticism. The idea of China, as Eric Hayot, David Porter, and Chi-ming Yang have reminded us, was central to the making of modernity and the formation of the modern Western human self.[1] A. O. Lovejoy, many years ago, put forward the thesis that one of the key origins of Romanticism signified a Chinese source, the preference for a form of wildness and irregularity in the eighteenth-century British landscape garden.[2] Other scholars of British literature and culture in the long eighteenth century, such as Robert Markley and Ros Ballaster, have addressed such issues placing British cultural responses to China in the context of a sinocentric global economy up until around 1800. Such criticism has demonstrated the sustained allure that Chinese commodities, tea, silk, porcelain, furniture, lacquerware, and Chinese designs in gardening and interior decoration held throughout the long eighteenth century.[3] Yet this British desire for Chinese forms and products was always balanced with either anxiety or an ambivalence for what David Porter describes as "an aesthetic monstrosity" underpinning this allure.[4] This study argues that the Chinese contribution to "Romanticism" or the literature of the British Romantic period was in fact substantial and just as important as the later, more discussed, nineteenth-century influence of Chinese aesthetics on European aestheticism and modernism.[5]

This study is cognate with such recent exemplary scholarship, but it attempts to address the specific question of how British knowledge of

China, its cultures, products, and its peoples, was constructed or forged from the writings and translations of a diverse range of missionaries, diplomats, travelers, East India Company employees, and literary personalities in certain key sites, notably Bengal, Canton (Guangzhou), and Malacca. Such knowledge was constructed from texts, cultural commodities, and physical artifacts, including Chinese export art and porcelain as well as plants and flowers, governed by long-established (and some newer) global flows of trade and existing networks of collaboration. The new perceptions and understandings of China that this body of knowledge gave rise to were mediated via a dynamic print and visual culture to a diverse range of poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists, and reviewers, including Jane Austen, S. T. Coleridge, Charles Lamb, the Wordsworths, and others, and subsequently informed British understandings and imaginings of China on the eve of the first Opium War of 1839–42. *Forging Romantic China* thus aims to restore China as a topos as well as a geographical place to its truly global presence in our understandings of the culture and literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to speculate about the kind of cultural landscape this assertion presents.

China is predicted to overtake the US and become the world's leading economy by 2016. In recent years, commentators and scholars in the West have become increasingly engaged in a whole range of enquiry, historical, political, economic, linguistic, and cultural, relating to China's global presence and its relationship with the West. China looms large in the consciousness of the twenty-first century but it also loomed quite as large in the minds of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Political scientists such as Martin Jacques and William A. Callahan have persuasively argued for the crucial importance of the period of what is known by the Chinese as "the Century of National Humiliation" (*bainian guochi*) (1840–1940) to their understandings of their history and their proper role and place in the modern world.[6] The period prior to this century, *c.* 1760–1842, is thus the crucial watershed in which many modern British attitudes to China were established and explored. It was during this time that a new view of China was established in the anglophone world by the development of a body of work, that I provisionally describe as a "Romantic Sinology," which provided the underpinning for Britain's policies towards China and for the imaginings of Romantic period writers and artists about China, prior to the Opium Wars. This book explores this crucial process, examining a substantial number of textual and cultural artifacts that created a form of new British knowledge about China that enabled (and sometimes critiqued) British power in the "Far East."

Forging Romantic China thus seeks to write a new study of the cultural history of Romantic-period anglophone representation of, and exchange with, the Qing empire, informed by those changes in our understanding occasioned by current historical and postcolonial scholarship on the "East," that has adopting a "China-centered" approach.[7] This school of historical enquiry has rejected the conventional historical notion of a rich but stationary and largely unchanging Qing China confronted by a dynamic and modern Britain, a narrative largely inspired by a partial reading and misunderstanding of the economic analysis of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) as mediated by the key accounts of the British Macartney embassy to China of 1792–94 and later developed by J. S. Mill, Hegel, Marx, and Weber. I will thus attempt to bring together several strands of recent scholarship combining literary studies of Romantic-period colonialism and imperialism with new research on the history and culture of the late Qing empire. Combining Linda Colley's influential use of "forge" in the context of the creation of national identity to symbolize a process of both construction and fabrication, and Lionel Jensen's notion of "manufacturing," this study seeks to demonstrate the processes by which Britons and their collaborators constructed a "new" idea of China in the period and the ways in which this process was inflected by their own increasingly national concerns.[8] This book also argues that such knowledge was a part of a process of "co-constitution" and intercultural encounter by which both Georgian Britain and Qing China, mirrors and inversions of each other, were formed in an already "globalized" eighteenth-century world order.[9] Rather than imposing a fully formed notion of British science and modernity on Southeast Asia, Britain was at this crucial time forging its own sense of national identity informed by its encounters with other cultures such as China's. This study argues that Qing China is an under-explored and crucial, possibly *the* crucial, informing context for this process of identity formation.

I am thus primarily concerned with the cultural transmission of knowledge about China to Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Adapting Mary Louise Pratt's concept of "transculturation" by which Europeans transmit indigenous non-European knowledge from the "contact zone" and produce "European knowledge infiltrated by non-European ones," this study argues that such European understandings were never simply a colonial mirror or inversion of the Western self, but neither were they the objective empirical enquiries that they claimed.[10] In this regard the new body of translations of key Chinese texts assumes a major significance. Though still largely ignored in recent influential

theorizations of world literature, Chinese writings exerted a substantial cultural impact in the nineteenth century.[11] Such translations are usually dismissed by modern sinologists because they lack scholarly accuracy and were arrived at before the Chinese language was professionally mastered. Conventionally, the major British Sinologist and first professor of Chinese at Oxford in 1876, James Legge, is perceived as the first such person to deserve serious and extensive critical scrutiny.[12] Yet there was a range of Britons in the period, including Thomas Percy, William Jones, George Thomas Staunton, Robert Morrison, William Milne, John Francis Davis, and Walter Henry Medhurst, who were involved in producing key translations of Chinese writings and accounts of Chinese customs. My study is not concerned with the accuracy or authenticity of these translated texts *per se*, but rather with the "knowledge" that they contained about China, and the ways in which that knowledge was acquired, constructed, framed, and then mediated and transmitted to early nineteenth-century Britain in both orientalist institutional and more popular forms.

Translation studies have, in recent years, moved markedly in the direction of emphasizing the complex processes of the transmission of texts and ideas from one culture to another, rather than focusing on the formal importance of accurate translation. Translation, in this context, becomes less of a linguistic activity, and more of a cultural practice. Lydia H. Liu, for instance, poses the crucial questions about how "signs and meaning travel from place to place in global circulations," and whether or not "translatability" is a value in itself "or a product of repeated exchange and negotiation in the translation process."[13] Translation from and into Chinese involves extra levels of complexity due to the ideogrammatic and non-alphabetical nature of the language. The essays recently collected in *Sinographies: Writing China* (2008) have explored such issues, identifying the "distortions wrought by translation," but not presuming to correct such "misperceptions by asserting that their own perceptions are authentic." The editors conclude that "the intricacies of the relationship between various written Chinas—the texts—and the nation/culture known simply as 'China'—their main shared context—are so complex as to be nearly unspeakable."[14] The vexed question as to whether there is something known as a "Chinese aesthetic" that resists translation is also a complicating factor. Although the visual aesthetic properties of the Chinese character are not, to my knowledge, exploited by Romantic-period writers and translators in the ways that they would later be by Ezra Pound and other modernist writers, the status of the character as picture and word

was often commented upon.[15] Yet, by and large, the period's concern with Chinese aesthetics is confined to the visual, to paintings, ceramic designs, architecture, and landscapes, rather than the aesthetic properties of the Chinese character. Mindful of the extraordinary complexity of this linguistic intercultural encounter, the conclusions I draw regarding the knowledge transmitted by the translations of Romantic Sinology remain hesitant, provisional, but I hope suggestive for other enquirers.

From the perspective of Said's powerful theorization of orientalism, all such translations would be viewed as a merely a "textual attitude" and part of a colonialist discourse by which source texts are appropriated and anything authentically Chinese lost.[16] We know that the English East India Company in Bengal was able to facilitate and reinforce its rule by translating and interpreting classical Indian texts, and that the orientalist William Jones, a Bengal judge, was the leading figure in this process.[17] Yet like Liu, Lawrence Venuti has shown how problematic the act of translation can be, arguing that at least two forms of translation strategy exist, one that seeks to "domesticate" the translated text and the other to "foreignize it."[18] The intercultural encounter between Britain and China in the nineteenth century is thus extremely complex and sophisticated, incapable of being constrained within conventional orientalist boundaries of "East" and "West" and "self" and "other." Increasingly, Chinese cultural critics are moving beyond such horizons. Wang Ning, in a series of publications, has argued that there is no longer any need to decry the contemporary Western impact on Chinese culture, or to accentuate those familiar, well-recorded orientalist misunderstandings perpetuated by Western sinology. He argues that such phenomena constitute the necessary stages in the process of the integration of Chinese culture into a global culture, in which Chinese literature and philosophy will become more accessible around the globe. Wang's insight is that, as "Oriental culture and Occidental culture usually influence each other, when one of these is in the state of temporary forcefulness, it might well influence the other, but even so, such influence is mutual and largely depends on the other's dynamic and creative reception."[19] Similarly Xiaomei Chen, in her challenging study of Occidentalism in post-Mao China, argues that this appropriation of Western discourse – what she calls "Occidentalism" – can have a politically and ideologically liberating effect on contemporary non-Western cultures. Chen refutes the connections that Said established between European power and orientalism, claiming that European representations of China mean very different things in different contexts. She argues that an official form of "occidentalism" has been used as a

justification for political repression in China, whereas an anti-official version can be used to validate resistance against such oppression.

Wang and Chen are both largely concerned with modern China and the impact of contemporary Western culture and ideas, yet their differing critiques of orientalism in a twenty-first-century global context indicate that what is important are the ways in which Chinese and British ideas have been received in different historical and political contexts, and that their reception was never singular or homogenous.[20] This is especially so if we are discussing the response of a mixed and large audience to a nineteenth-century play about China as I do in the final chapter of this study. I will attempt to negotiate the complex cross-cultural encounter between Qing China and Georgian Britain in a way that respects the shifting allegiances of power and authority (economic, military, and cultural) between the two empires in the period restoring, I hope, a sense of the complexity to that fascinating cultural encounter, fashioned as it was from multiple poles of engagement and recognition produced from on-the-ground collaborations and negotiations between Chinese, British, and other peoples in the multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan cities of Southeast Asia: Canton, Calcutta, Malacca, Penang, and Singapore.[21]

SINICIZING ROMANTIC-PERIOD WRITING

According to the OED the term "sinology" was not coined until 1816, and scholars often date the birth of the modern academic discipline to the establishment of Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat as the first professor of Chinese at the Collège de France in 1814 and the subsequent publication of his *Elémens de la grammaire chinoise* of 1822. Abel-Rémusat and his successor, Stanislas Julien, were both sophisticated academics. This book, however, argues that British or Romantic Sinology begins at least as early as the 1760s, a decade marked by the publication of Thomas Percy's key writings on China and the direct translation of the first Chinese novel form (*xiaoshuo*) into English or any other European language. It thus covers roughly eighty years, to the abolition of the East India Company's monopoly at Canton of the China trade in 1833 (in many ways the crucial date) and the eve of the Opium Wars in 1839. In this respect it is coincident with the Romantic period in British letters and culture, especially if one accepts Percy as an important precursor of Romantic literary concerns. The period includes the arrival of the Macartney embassy to China in 1793 and its important successor led by Lord Amherst in 1816, as well as of the first British Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison, in Canton

in 1807. It contains the establishment of the first institution dedicated to the study and teaching of the Chinese language, the Anglo-Chinese College, at Malacca in 1818, as well as the founding of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1823. The first English chairs in Chinese were established at the new University of London in 1837 (Samuel Kidd) and at King's College London in 1845 (Samuel Turner Fearon). During this period key translations of Chinese writings appeared, including the first direct translation of the Confucian *Lunyu* or *Analects* (1809) and the first complete translation of the classic Four Books (*Sishu*) (1828).

One of the key historical events during this period was the ending of the Company's monopoly of the China trade in 1833, which marked a watershed in British attitudes to a China that henceforth resisted newly invigorated attempts to impose Western ideologies of free trade and national sovereignty upon it. The Treaty of Nanjing (1842), which concluded the first Opium War, marked an end of the old "Canton system" where that city was the only and crucial point of contact with mainland China, and the removal, by the second-generation missionary James Legge, of the Anglo-Chinese College from Malacca to Hong Kong Island, one of five new treaty ports granted in 1843. In 1841 the American Nathan Dunn's "Ten Thousand Chinese Things," the first major exhibition about China, opened in London.[22] Post-1840 the study and representation of China would change significantly and attitudes would harden in the run-up to the second Opium War, and the notorious looting of the Summer Palace in 1860. Probably, the most significant event in this period occurred in 1792–94 when the British government sent its first diplomatic embassy to Qing China in an attempt to open formal relations between the two world empires, and regularize the substantially expanding trade in tea, porcelain, and other commodities. Famously, the Chinese required payment in silver bullion for their desirable teas, occasioning a substantial specie crisis for the Company. This flow of silver bullion from the West to the East was later reversed when the Company began to harvest opium in Bengal and sell this on to independent, private traders ("country traders") with China. Brief though its acquaintance with China was, the Macartney embassy generated a mass of textual commentary that signaled a definitive move away from the earlier, Jesuit-inspired writing on China to a new British or "Romantic Sinology."

Though extremely prominent in historical scholarship, Britain's problematic relationship with the China of the Qing empire in the early nineteenth century itself has received comparatively little recent attention in studies of British literature and culture, certainly in the comparison with

the masses of scholarship and enquiry devoted to the cultural impact of the British in India, their participation in the transatlantic slave trade and plantation slavery, and their response to Islam at this time. The urgent issue of the expanding presence of China in the global economy now obliges contemporary enquiry to delve back into the historical, intellectual, and cultural origins of the relationship between Britain and China and to reassess the complex ways in which Britain interacted with the Qing empire.[23]

This book is a contribution to the current critical debate exploring this crucial historical moment and the literary culture of the Romantic period's engagement with China. Though there are now a series of exemplary publications by Porter, Markley, Ballaster, Yang, Hayot, Keevak, and Chang on Britain's cultural relationship with China in the longer historical view, the British Romantic period has been somewhat neglected.[24] Similarly in contrast to the substantial amount of excellent and authoritative scholarship on Jesuit sinology in the early modern period, there is still no authoritative and standard history of sinology in Britain, though several important accounts exist, notably T. H. Barrett's *Singular Listlessness: A Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars* (1989). There are still no major studies of Britain's early sinologists, prior to Legge, and though Robert Morrison has attracted the attentions of a recent biographer, it is largely his religious and missionary activity in China which remains the focus and rationale of such study.[25]

Four recent sophisticated studies have defined the field in which *Forging Romantic China* attempts to intervene. Robert Markley's *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (2006); David Porter's *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (2010); Chi-ming Yang's *Performing China, Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-century England 1660–1760* (2010); and Elizabeth Hope Chang's *Britain's Chinese Eye* (2010). Markley's, Porter's, and Yang's studies are concerned primarily with the earlier eighteenth century. Markley's study considers British writing between 1600 and 1730 and places this writing in the context of a world economy dominated by China and India up until around 1800. British writing, notably Defoe's *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, is thus engaged in a series of compensatory strategies to address European marginalization.[26] The methodological focus of *Forging Romantic China* is thus cognate with that of Markley but my study examines the crucial later period when British confidence is increasing and Qing power on the wane. Porter's study also has significant overlaps with *Forging Romantic China* in terms of his pioneering scholarship on Thomas Percy (in many

ways a terminus for his study rather than the beginning of mine). His earlier *Ideographia* (2001) likewise contained a groundbreaking reading of the discourse of sovereignty and economic liberalism relating to the Macartney embassy to China in the 1790s to which all scholars remain indebted. In a major collection of essays "China and the making of Global Modernity" for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2010), edited by Markley, Porter further argues for the importance of "historical cosmopolitanism" in global early modernity, questioning "deep-seated assumptions of exemplarity," re-situating England "within an expansively global context," and counseling against reliance on "sterile orientalist clichés concerning the stagnant traditionalism and uniformity of societies that missed the fast train to modernity."[27]

Yang's major study of the representation of China in literature, theater, and material culture between 1660 and 1760 has contributed much to our understanding of this European construction of the ambivalent idea of China, especially as regards the spectacular performance of China. This crucial work is focused on certain key areas, notably major seventeenth- and eighteent-century plays by Elkanah Settle and Arthur Murphy, arguing that China functions in this period as a key *exemplar* for Europeans. Yang argues convincingly that China mediated between conflicting British attitudes to virtue, commerce, and luxury. It was at the same time both a "symbol of imperial excess" and of "Confucian moderation," alternately a threat and yet also an aspiration.[28] A key text for Yang's thesis is Arthur Murphy's drama *The Orphan of China* (1756), itself a redacted adaptation of a thirteenth-century Yuan dynasty play *Zhao shi guer*, which I discuss in the final chapter of this book as a crucial intertext for the transmission of the idea of China well into the Romantic period. Murphy's *Orphan* emerges from such accounts as an important text for the study of China in world literature and one that should be taught and read.[29]

Yang's study is informed by Eric Hayot's brilliant *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (2009). Taking his cue from Adam Smith's famous use, in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), of the hypothetical example of an earthquake that destroys the empire of China to explore notions of moral distance and the limitations of the European sensibility and sympathy, Hayot demonstrates how China and Chinese people frequently function in Western discourse as philosophical or literary examples or anecdotes. Smith argued that such an event would produce little disturbance in the European sympathetic imagination, as China was geographically too distant to arouse empathy with its people's

plight. China is thus at the very heart of the construction of the modern, liberal, and humane European self, as an exemplar, a limit case, or horizon of otherness against which to measure the borders of "human" sympathy. This otherness has a peculiar quality distinct from the "generic Oriental otherness under whose aegis it sometimes appears." Hayot, like Markley and Porter, convincingly links this particular Chinese otherness to the pronounced economic and technological advantages that China held over Europe well into the nineteenth century, especially in the manufacture of porcelain, production of tea, and other desirable commodities: the dismissal of Chinese legitimacy and the forgetting of its massive impact is at least partly an effect of the dramatic rise of European power after Waterloo. Crucially, he argues, the "sympathetic exchange," which can to be generated between British readers of the sufferings of the Chinese, can also be understood within the parameters of the literal exchange of goods and commodities between Britain and China; "a kind of aggressive affective response … in which British impotence at the level of the material good was assuaged by Chinese impotence at the level of the emotional one."[30] Hayot reminds us that the exchanges between Britain and China are wide ranging and that an affective and aesthetic economy is as of fundamental an importance as the literal one of goods and commodities.

This forgetting or evasion of China is a major theme of this book. In The *Chinese Taste*, Porter, like Markley and Hayot, explores this "instrumental amnesia" that deliberately occludes "rival claimants to exemplarity" and the memory of "a more truly cosmopolitan early modern past."[31] For example, a common trope of the Romantic-period literary response to China, witnessed in Baillie, Southey, Leigh Hunt, and Lamb, is that Britons knew very little about this isolated and exclusive empire, apart from what they could glean from visual representations on teacups and porcelain ware. Yet a substantial archive about China existed, formed from two hundred years of sophisticated Jesuit scholarship in several English translations. In addition, the Macartney and Amherst embassies generated numerous new "first-hand" accounts. Missionaries and traders were now resident in China, sending back narratives of their experiences of the country and translations of its literature and philosophy. Yet some Britons persisted in reading China through an older chinoiserie-inspired aesthetic with Leigh Hunt, for example, decrying the "Chinese deformities" and monstrosities of the newly designed Grand Salon of Drury Lane Theatre as late as 1817.

China was not remote for many Romantic-period writers in the simple sense that they had family and friends closely involved in trade with the