

REPRESENTATIONS OF CHINA IN BRITISH CHILDREN'S FICTION, 1851–1911

In her extensively researched exploration of China in British children's literature, Shih-Wen Chen provides a sustained critique of the reductive dichotomies that have limited insight into the cultural and educative role these fictions played in disseminating ideas and knowledge about China. Chen considers a range of different genres and types of publication – travelogue storybooks, historical novels, adventure stories, and periodicals – to demonstrate the diversity of images of China in the Victorian and Edwardian imagination. Turning a critical eye on popular and prolific writers such as Anne Bowman, William Dalton, Edwin Harcourt Burrage, Bessie Marchant, G.A. Henty, and Charles Gilson, Chen shows how Sino-British relations were influential in the representation of China in children's literature, challenges the notion that nineteenth-century children's literature simply parroted the dominant ideologies of the age, and offers insights into how attitudes towards children's relationship with knowledge changed over the course of the century. Her book provides a fresh context for understanding how China was constructed in the period from 1851 to 1911 and sheds light on British cultural history and the history and uses of children's literature.

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Representations of China in British Children's Fiction, 1851–1911

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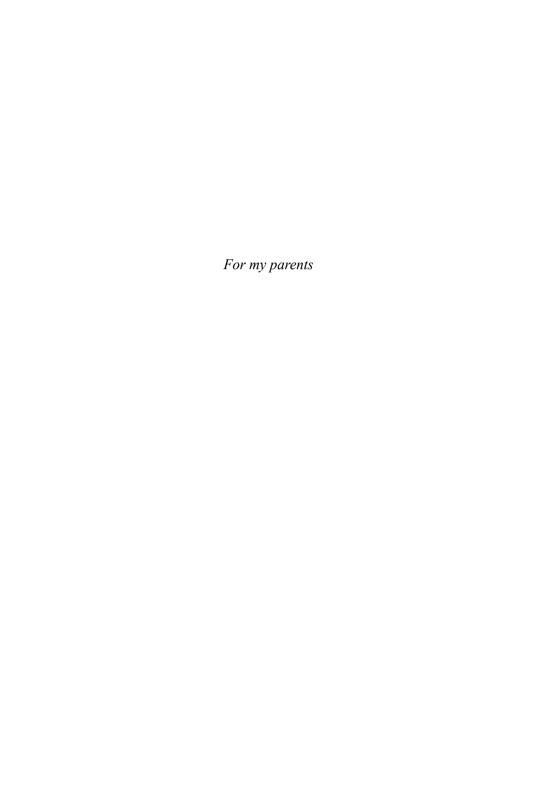
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Note on Chinese Romanization

There are several systems of Chinese romanization, the earliest attributed to Matteo Ricci, the Italian Jesuit who travelled to China in 1583. Nicolas Trigault, another Jesuit missionary to China, later modified Ricci's system of representing Chinese in Roman script. In the nineteenth century, British diplomat Thomas F. Wade developed a system of transliteration based on British missionary Robert Morrison's work, which was then modified by Herbert A. Giles, who served in the British consular service. The Wade-Giles system, as it became known, was widely used until 1979, when *Hanyu Pinyin*, which was developed in the People's Republic of China in the 1950s, became the standard for Chinese romanization according to the International Organization for Standardization. I use the Hanvu Pinvin system for Chinese romanization in this book. For citations from sources where alternative systems of transcription are used, all Chinese names and terms, with the exception of Peking (Beijing) and Canton (Guangzhou) which are familiar historical place names, are given in their original form with *Pinvin* equivalent in square brackets where possible. For titles of books and articles, the original romanization is retained.



Chapter 1

A Kaleidoscope of Knowledge: Children, Knowledge, and China in Victorian and Edwardian Britain

My papa and I went up and made the proper ceremony. The Emperor gave my papa a ruyi [a ritual gift], ... and took off a little yellow purse hanging by his side and gave it to me. He wanted me to say a few words in Chinese, which I did, to thank him for the present.

—from the diary of George Thomas Staunton (12 years old)¹

In an illustration by English artist William Alexander, a member of Lord Macartney's Embassy to China (1792–1794), 12-year-old George Thomas Staunton (1781–1859), page of the Ambassador, receives a silk purse from the Qianlong Emperor. The boy had been brought before the Emperor when he asked if anyone in the group could speak Chinese.² In fact, young George was the only member of the Embassy who had proficiency in the language, having learned Chinese from two missionaries who were returning to China from Naples, where he and his father Sir George Leonard Staunton (1737–1801) had travelled to hire some interpreters for the Embassy. Some of Lord Macartney's objectives for going to China include trying the negotiation of a reduction of export-import duties, gaining additional trade ports, enticing China to import more British products, and acquiring more information about the 'Celestial Kingdom'.³ As Pamela Kyle Crossley has said of young George Staunton's role in the Embassy:

It is hard to believe that the success of such a grand undertaking by the world's most ambitious empire rested almost entirely on the shoulders of a well-behaved, home-sick boy, and almost as difficult to imagine the pressures upon the child as the complex and rigid ritual demands of the two empires came closer and closer to collision.⁴

¹ George Thomas Staunton, 'Staunton Diary 1792–1793: Journey to China, 1792–1793', China: Trade, Politics & Culture, 1793–1980, 2007 [accessed 19 May 2012].">http://www.china.amdigital.co.uk/collections/doc-search-results.aspx?documentid=188041&searchmode=true&previous=0>[accessed 19 May 2012].

² George Thomas Staunton, *Memoirs of the Chief Incidents of the Public Life of Sir George Thomas Staunton, Bart* (London, 1856), p. 12.

³ David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800* (Lanham, MD, 1999), p. 96. For more information on the Embassy, see James Louis Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, 1995).

⁴ Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus* (Oxford, 2002), p. 147.

Young George's meeting with the Emperor is a significant historical moment not only because it was a notable incident in the first Embassy to China, but more importantly, it suggests that children had the potential to play an important role in Sino-British relations.

Although Macartney's Embassy was regarded as a diplomatic failure, it succeeded in collecting a great deal of information about China, which was presented to the British public in a number of government reports widely circulated after the Embassy's return, such as Aeneas Anderson's A Narrative of Lord Macartney's Embassy to China (1795) and George Leonard Staunton's An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China (1797).⁵ These authors' books appeared in a list called 'Works upon China' that was published in August 1849 in the Chinese Repository (1832–1851), a monthly periodical started by the first American missionary to China E.C. Bridgman (1801–1861). Comprising over 370 English and French texts, this list is an indicator of how books on China proliferated during the nineteenth century as British contact with the 'Celestial Kingdom' increased, particularly in the wake of the First Opium War (1839–1842), when Hong Kong became a colony of Britain and five treaty ports were opened to foreign residence and trade. Who was reading these books and what did they do with the information they obtained? Most of the books on the list were targeted at adult readers with an interest in China, in particular missionaries, diplomats, merchants, and travellers. However, the fact that Jane Austen depicted the heroine of Mansfield Park reading a book about Macartney's Embassy indicates that young nineteenth-century readers were also expected to read these books about China.⁷

This book is concerned with how children's fiction published from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century disseminated and popularized 'knowledge' of China through various discourses about 'the Chinese'. It examines the role of children's writers in mediating between the leading China 'experts' of the time and young readers by drawing on and utilizing the wealth of material provided by travel writers, embassy officials, missionaries, and journalists to construct certain visions of China for children.

Engaging with China in the Nineteenth Century

The number of British travellers to China greatly increased after the Treaties of Tianjin were signed on 26 June 1858 towards the end of the Second Opium War (1856–1860), because foreigners were then given the right to travel in the interior of China, the Yangzi River was opened to foreign ships, and Christian missionaries

⁵ Aeneas Anderson, A Narrative of the British Embassy to China, in the Years 1792, 1793, and 1794 (London, 1795); George Leonard Staunton, An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China (3 vols, London, 1797).

⁶ 'List of Works upon China', *Chinese Repository*, XVIII.VIII (1849): pp. 416–44.

Jane Austen, Mansfield Park: A Novel, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford, [1814] 1990), pp. 140–41.

were allowed to do mission work in the inner provinces.⁸ After the Opium Wars interest in China reached new heights: Chinese products were highly sought after and China itself became 'a marketable commodity'.⁹ Books providing information about the 'half-known' country became a valuable commodity because people wanted to become acquainted with this land which had previously been closed to foreign trade. As more British subjects came into contact with China, more writing about the country appeared. Numerous descriptions of firsthand experiences in China could be found in travel books, personal memoirs, embassy and missionary reports, speeches, and letters. By 1892, the amount of writing on China had multiplied exponentially. As Henri Cordier indicated in *Half a Decade of Chinese Studies (1886–1891)*:

None but a bibliographer can have an exact idea of the enormous literary and scientific production having China as its object. In my *Bibliotheca Sinica*, published between the years 1878–1885, I have tried to give a complete survey of the immense field of researches on China. It is a little over five years since, and I have in print a supplement, a volume in itself, which shows more than any other fact the important place taken nowadays by studies not only of a scientific interest, but equally indispensable to commerce and politics.¹⁰

In 1901, a book review in *The Times* commented on the 'crowd of books on China'. By 1904, according to an article entitled 'The Flood of Books about China', the two Opium Wars, 'the trouble with France in the eighties [Sino-French War (1884–1885)], the war with Japan in 1894 [Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895)], and most of all the Boxer business of 1900 onwards, have been the source or fountain of a steady stream of booklets, volumes, and tomes in sets, running to a frightful aggregate'. The words 'crowd', 'frightful', and 'flood' suggest a sense of being overwhelmed and inundated by this mass of information being published at such an unprecedented rate that the reading public felt threatened with 'information overload'.

The explosion of knowledge during the nineteenth century can be attributed to expanded sources of information and greater demand for knowledge from a society with higher income and more educational opportunities. Technological developments in printing, engraving, papermaking, and transport made mass production and

⁸ See the Appendix for a timeline of major events in Sino-British relations, 1839– 1911.

⁹ Catherine Pagani, 'Chinese Material Culture and British Perceptions of China in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', in T.J. Barringer and Tom Flynn (eds), *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture, and the Museum* (London, 1998), pp. 28–40 (pp. 29; 34).

Henri Cordier, Half a Decade of Chinese Studies (1886–1891) (Leyden, 1892), p. 1.

^{11 &#}x27;Reviews of Books', *The Times*, 20 August 1901, p. 5. All articles from *The Times* mentioned in this book were accessed online at *The Times* Digital Archive, 1785–1985 http://www.gale.com/Times/; 'The Flood of Books about China', *North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*, 29 July 1904, pp. 234–5 (p. 234).

distribution of information much easier. Ordering, archiving, and reproducing this mass of information became a central concern. ¹² As Thomas Richards observes in his *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*, Victorians were obsessed with trying to control knowledge and order it in a systematic way because they believed that 'the control of Empire hinge[d] on a British monopoly over knowledge'. ¹³ He argues that the Victorian archive was 'a prototype for a global system of domination through circulation, an apparatus for controlling territory by producing, distributing, and consuming information about it'. ¹⁴ However, according to Richards, the imperial archive was a 'fantasy' because it was not located in a central vault but comprised of documents scattered across the globe, making it impossible to fully monitor, control, and manipulate the information.

In *Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality, and the March of Intellect*, Alan Rauch argues persuasively that during the nineteenth century, 'knowledge was being produced and consumed at such an unprecedented rate that few could ignore its growing impact on the culture'. He emphasizes the importance of considering 'the seemingly peripheral constructions and popularizations of knowledge, such as encyclopedias and children's books ... as both cultural signifiers and cultural forces' because 'knowledge has been – and continues to be – fetishized as something valuable for its own sake'. In 1812, Joseph Guy stated in the preface to *Guy's Pocket Cyclopædia*: 'useful knowledge ... will give intelligence to youth, it will accustom them to habits of reflection and inquiry, and teach them to look on objects around them with the EYE OF REASON'. Realizing that 'knowledge' was a valuable currency, publishers marketed their books in response to the Victorian thirst for 'useful knowledge'. For example, Thomas Nelson had a 'books of useful knowledge' category in its 1874 catalogue and C. Knight had 'The Library of Entertaining Knowledge' series.

Knowledge about China was not confined to print culture. Its presence in material culture in the form of willow pattern plates and other objects has been discussed by Catherine Pagani, Elizabeth Hope Chang, and Sarah Cheang.¹⁸

Martin Daunton, 'Introduction', in Martin Daunton (ed.), *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 1–27 (p. 16).

 $^{^{\}rm 13}$ Thomas Richards, The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire (London, 1993), p. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵ Alan Rauch, Useful Knowledge: The Victorians, Morality, and the March of Intellect (Durham, 2001), p. 21.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 6; 3.

¹⁷ Joseph Guy, Guy's Pocket Cyclopaedia: Or Miscellany of Useful Knowledge (London, 1810), p. ix.

Catherine Pagani, 'Objects and the Press: Images of China in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in Julie F. Codell (ed.), *Imperial Co-Histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press* (Madison, NJ, 2003), pp. 147–66; Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire and Aesthetics in the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford, 2010); Sarah Cheang, 'The Ownership and Collection of Chinese Material Culture by Women in Britain, ca. 1890–1935' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Sussex, 2003).

China was also very much a part of British visual culture from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Victorians were invited to 'visualize' China by attending various exhibitions or shows, including the Chinese Collection at Hyde Park, the Great Exhibition of 1851, the Chinese junk *Keying*, Albert Smith's 'Mont Blanc to China', and numerous missionary exhibitions such as *The Orient in London* (1908).¹⁹

In 1842, American collector Nathan Dunn (1782–1844), who had lived in China for over a decade, introduced the British to his 'Ten Thousand Chinese Things', previously exhibited in the United States at the Philadelphia Museum before arriving in London's Hyde Park. Although the admission price (2s 6d) was higher than the entrance fee of most London shows (usually 1s), large crowds flocked to see the exhibition when it was opened to the general public on 23 June 1842 because they regarded it 'as one of the duties of the London season'. 20 The Times reported that the exhibit was 'amongst the most curious ever opened in London'. 21 Those outside the capital also had the opportunity to view the collection because it toured large towns and cities in Britain after 1846. The exhibition catalogue sold well despite a *Chinese Repository* article that addressed its inaccuracies: by 1844, sales of the pamphlet had accumulated to 54,000 and Catherine Pagani estimates that more than 300,000 copies of the London edition were sold.²² As an illustration in the *Illustrated London News* reveals, children were among the visitors to the 'Ten Thousand Chinese Things' exhibition (see Figure 1.1).²³

The article in the *Illustrated London News* praises the exhibit for teaching by 'things rather than words', claiming that as 'a means of education this enterprise is invaluable'.²⁴ Therefore it is not surprising that Old Humphrey (pseudonym of George Mogridge), the narrator of the well-received *The Celestial Empire; or, Points and Pickings of Information about China and the Chinese* (1844),

For more information on the *Keying* see Pagani, 'Objects and the Press', pp. 154–8. For more information on the 'Mont Blanc to China' show, see J. Monroe Thorington, *Mont Blanc Sideshow: The Life and Times of Albert Smith* (Philadelphia, 1934). For information on missionary exhibitions, see Sarah Cheang, "'Our Missionary Wembley": China, Local Community and the British Missionary Empire, 1901–1924', *East Asian History*, 32/33 (2006/2007): pp. 177–98.

Alan Cox, 'Pagoda and Celestial Palace: The Chinese Collection in Knightsbridge', *Westminster History Review*, 3 (1999): pp. 19–24 (p. 19).

²¹ 'The Chinese Collection', *The Times*, 5 November 1844, p. 1. For more information on the exhibit, see Elizabeth Phillips, 'A Pagoda in Knightsbridge', *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, IV.2 (1984): pp. 37–42.

See 'Ten Thousand Chinese Things Relating to China and the Chinese', *Chinese Repository*, XII.11 (1843): pp. 561–82; Cox, 'Pagoda and Celestial Palace', p. 21; Pagani, 'Chinese Material Culture', p. 35.

²³ 'The Chinese Collection, Hyde Park Corner', *Illustrated London News*, 6 August 1842, pp. 204–5 (p. 205).

²⁴ Ibid., p. 204.



Fig. 1.1 'The Chinese Collection, Hyde Park Corner' from the *Illustrated London News*, 6 August 1842 (Mary Evans Picture Library).

informs his young readers that he has been to the exhibit many times and urges them to visit as well, because it is 'the best Collection of Chinese Curiosities in the whole world'.²⁵ He also notes that the collection will correct some misguided views of China:

Should it be that you happen to think, as hundreds do, that the Chinese are a race of sleek-headed simpletons, incapable of works of art, the Exhibition will at once reprove and correct you. The proprietor of it has three good things in his possession, good sense, good taste, and a good knowledge of China.²⁶

This statement suggests that China should not be underestimated and that children who thought dismissively of the Chinese must be corrected.

Old Humphrey, *The Celestial Empire; or, Points and Pickings of Information About China and the Chinese* (London, 1844), p. 9. George Mogridge (1787–1854) first used the pseudonym 'Old Humphrey' in 1833 when he began writing for the Religious Tract Society's periodical *The Weekly Visitor*.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 8–9.

Why did British children need to have 'good knowledge' of China? Old Humphrey explains that 'late events have rendered it [China] of increasing importance to Great Britain. Some knowledge of it, then, becomes interesting, if not necessary to all; and you would hardly like to be found ignorant of that which other young people know'. 27 Because his book was published in 1844, 'the late events' Old Humphrey referred to must have been China's defeat in the First Opium War (1839–1842) and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing on 29 August 1842 which allowed the British, whose previous activities were restricted to an area called the Factories near the Canton River, to step outside the boundaries to conduct trade in five treaty ports. Old Humphrey notes that people may have different views of the Opium War but 'true philanthropists will unite in the desire that it may lead to the prosperity of both Great Britain and China'. 28

The narrator identifies China as an important country to know about not only because of Britain's interest in it, but more significantly, because one does not want to be found 'ignorant', like the 'hundreds' that think 'the Chinese are a race of sleekheaded simpletons'. He implies that it would be shameful to be found 'ignorant' compared to other young people. Considering that *The Celestial Empire* was priced at 3s 6d, it was clearly meant for middle- and upper-class households headed by parents who wanted their children to succeed in a society where 'cultural capital' (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's term) was becoming an important thing to possess.²⁹ Just as a visit to a museum or an exhibit such as the Chinese Collection at Hyde Park was an indicator of 'good taste', being knowledgeable about China distinguished one from the 'hundreds' of uninformed people who held a simplistic view of the Chinese. As Dennis Denisoff points out, during the nineteenth century, 'the young did function as possessions with currency within a system of cultural exchange'. 30 Therefore it could also be argued that knowledgeable children could also be seen as part of their parents' 'symbolic capital' (also Bourdieu's term). Being a parent of well-educated sons and daughters would help elevate one's status and prestige in a society where most bourgeois households had an encyclopædia.³¹ In the context of this cultural climate, parents who wished the best for their children were not only encouraged to purchase encyclopædias by salesmen who suggested that 'a family deprived of an encyclopedia is a family that is willing to limit its children', but also

²⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 88.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, 2nd edn (London, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Market of Symbolic Goods', *Poetics*, 14.1–2 (1985): pp. 13–44. For discussion on the importance of cultural capital to Victorians, see Lara Kriegel, *Grand Designs: Labor, Empire, and the Museum in Victorian Culture* (Durham, 2008).

Dennis Denisoff, 'Small Change: The Consumerist Designs of the Nineteenth-Century Child', in Dennis Denisoff (ed.), *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 1–26 (p. 8).

Daniel R. Headrick, When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700–1850 (New York, 2000), p. 172.