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CHINAS UNLIMITED

Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness

Gregory B. Lee

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... je vous dis qu’il faut regarder tous les hommes comme nos frères. Quoi! mon frère le Turc? mon frère le Chinois? le Juif? le Siamois? Oui, sans doute ...

I tell you that we should regard all men as our brothers. What! My brother the Turk? My brother the Chinese? The Jew? The Siamese? Yes, definitely ...

VOLTAIRE, Traité sur la tolérance (1763)

This book addresses aspects of the representation of China and its identity, ‘Chineseness,’ over the past hundred years or so. Much of the book analyses the Orientalizing and crude racist ideologies that have formed the foundations of the way white people, particularly in Britain, have both popularly and ‘scientifically’ imagined China. But the book also discusses how Chinese producers of culture in China, and in exile, have imagined China, sometimes challenging and sometimes reproducing nationalist narratives of Chineseness. Thus the book considers, on the one hand, elite literary representations such as the Chinese contemporary writer Duoduo’s story ‘Going Home’, and, on the other, popular cultural texts including contemporary Chinese television ‘soap’ serials and MTV clips. British popular cultural forms which have focussed on Chinese and China, such as the songs of George Formby and the pantomime Aladdin, also come within the purview of this book. Last, the increasing number of relevant texts to be found on the Internet are also used and critiqued. That stereotypical racist views of Chinese people remain endemic in British society is beyond question; the chapter on British cultural representations of the Chinese, Chapter Two, proves as much I believe. What is perhaps more surprising is the fact that racist references, often intended to be humorous, have been current at the
highest levels of social discourse. In a recent report on the British Labour government’s role in industrial arbitration in the 1970s we read that the chief spokesman of the then Secretary of State for Unemployment, Barbara Castle, would emerge from late night negotiations to announce signs of successful conciliation with the words: ‘Gentlemen, the Chinese electrician is at work,’ which translated as ‘there’s a chink of light.’

While the author has no intention of denying the material, historical reality of China over the past two centuries, indeed one ambition of the book is to facilitate seeing that reality more clearly, what is emphasized in this book is the power of the social imaginary in determining the way those in ‘the West’ and in China, whether white, ‘Chinese’, or ‘hybrid’, imagine and conceptualise China. There has been no single way of imagining China, for while there have been dominant ways of representing China, there have also been minority and contestatory ways of doing so. Thus, the pluralism in the title of the book: Chinas Unlimited.

The hybrid mentioned in the preceding paragraph, is intended in the sense of individuals and communities who have found themselves in mixed and in-between situations in the wake of the history of the colonialism and modernity of the past two centuries. Much of the book discusses these historical realities in terms of lived experience and the difficulty of representing that experience. The hybrid also refers to the socio-cultural practices and ways of being and expressing that have developed as a result of, and in response to these new conditions of modernity that individuals and communities have been obliged to accept. The notion of such hybridity has often been critiqued as a postmodern exculpation of colonial responsibility, and as a means of slipping into a collective amnesia that is history-free. I do not disagree with such criticisms of this postmodern re-invented hybridity. But there are cultural and human conditions that can and do only correspond to the state of hybridity, of mixity, of intermingling, of in-betweenness, of liminality, of existing at the junctions of constantly evolving and rapidly converging global histories. It is this hybrid reality that is so abhorrent to the advocates of purity, authenticity, and nationhood.

I was recently made to reflect on the imbrication of hybridity with postmodernism, which I have never understood as more than a reality to be lived and negotiated, by arguments advanced by Ziauddin Sardar who represents postmodernism as but a more subtle agent of Western cultural imperialism continuing the expansion and the imposition of domi

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modernity. The invention of postmodernism for Sardar constitutes a process in which Other cultures are simply being taken from one domain of oppression into another.\textsuperscript{2}

Sardar's condemnation of the cynicism of postmodernism and his arguments for 'non-western cultural resistance to postmodernism' are compelling, but the appeal to tradition as the instrument of transformation of non-western societies into cultures of resistance raises certain concerns for me.\textsuperscript{3} While Sardar is at pains to distance his conception of 'authentic' tradition from 'traditionalism', whence I would ask is this authenticity to be resurrected or reinvented, what would it imply in concrete terms, and would such a reinvention even be desirable? While Sardar sees the representation of tradition in pre-modern Islamic and Chinese painting as a 'dynamic force ready to confront the problems of modernity and the nihilism of postmodernism', can we forget the economic and technological modes to which pre-modern Chinese painting corresponded? While I should not oppose the recuperation of pre-modern painting and other forms of cultural productions from the grip of the Orientalists and sinologists, I am however concerned at the prospect of privileging a supposedly cultural authenticity in the name of respecting 'traditional physical, intellectual and spiritual environments'.

Where after all is this authentic to be found, or rather how is it to be (re)invented in societies such as Hong Kong, in diasporic communities, and indeed in China itself? When and what 'Chineseness' would constitute 'tradition'? Over the past century or more China has been subjected to forces and ideologies of colonialism, capitalism, and nationalism? As a result China has been splintered into various fragments. Most strikingly after 1949, the People's Republic of China developed in a very different way to nationalist China on Taiwan where a Chinese nationalist government and its supporters imposed its rule on a local community that had already diverged culturally and socially over the preceding century. Similarly communities have developed in South-East Asia well beyond the institutional influence of 'China proper'. But perhaps the sharpest historical divergences are to be found in the twentieth-century development of Hong Kong from British colonial outpost to major bastion of capitalism, at once modern yet still colonised. The story of the making of the imaginaries of Hong Kong while unique, also alludes to many of the social and cultural questions generated by the paths of uneven development onto which the colonized world has been forced. For instance, how modernity is to
be married to tradition is a question that has been posed a multi-
tude of times in many once 'traditional' societies. But what is this
'tradition'? Is it static, was it shared by all classes and levels of soci­
ety, and what was the place of woman in such societies? Who, in
other words, defined the 'tradition'?

On this point, the recent history of Hong Kong is instructive. Its
traditions were clearly invented, or their invention nurtured, by the
post-1950s late colonialism of a British authority representing the
interests of post-World War Two neo-colonialism in Asia. That
authority was anxious to construct an alternative Chineseness that
separated Hong Kong from both mainland Communist and Taiwan
nationalist appeals to the patriotic anti-colonialist imaginary. But
in negotiation with that official and imposed alternative Chinese
identity, or Hongkongness, other colonised-produced identities
have been constructed and imagined. None of the resultant cultural
spaces and practices can be described as 'pure' or 'authentic',
rather they represent groups and classes that are found in all
modernized industrial societies. That is not to say that the various
levels and enclaves of Hong Kong society have not developed pecu­
liarities or that there are not traces of pre-modern Chinese social
imaginaries, but the concerns of the majority of Hong Kong people
today – the working class who are intended to imagine themselves
as middle-class – are those of any industrial society subject to the
inevitable (as the financial events of the last few months of 1997
have clearly demonstrated) crises of capitalism. Worries about the
implications for Hong Kong's autonomy or rather its multiple and
multilevelled identities were real, but the major events of 1997 for
most Hong Kong people are seen in the economic reality that was
the prolonged Crash of 1997–1998. For the first time in their lives,
the youth of Hong Kong were awakened to the uncertain and
fluctuating nature of capitalist economic success, and concerns
over unemployment and economic survival in a market-driven yet
heavily state-regulated, non-welfare state economy are now domi­
nant over concerns with local identity. Local identity or identities
can no longer be used simply to mediate the neuroses of postmod­
ern alienation, but must now engage in the de-alienation that will
imply challenging both the historical oppressions of colonialism
and of the dominant economic system.

While concurring with the opinion that there exists a desperate
need to encourage the de-alienation of (post)modernity and to
combat the almost viral nature of ideological legacy of colonialism,
I also want to emphasise the importance of recognizing historical
realities that have produced ‘non-authentic’, hybrid lived realities. Over the past one hundred and fifty years not only social and cultural forces in Hong Kong, but in China as a whole have been obliged to negotiate the realities of colonialism, semi-colonialism and neo-colonialism. New forms and practices have evolved or have been actively developed, new identities have been invented or imposed. Emancipatory change, I believe, will not necessarily imply a ‘cleansing’ of the non-authentic, but a redeployment and détournement of hybridized and local practices with the aim of imagining that new future.

To be overly concerned with impossible ambitions of reversing already existing reifications, and of undoing hybridizations that result from historical colonialism, will not help us assume the challenges of contemporary reality. Recently I was privileged to visit the film set of Away With Words (Sam Tiao Yan) by Chris Doyle, frequent cinematographic collaborator of Hong Kong director, Wong Kar-wai. Set in Hong Kong, it tells the story of three young marginalized characters, Asano (Tadanobu Asano) an autistic Japanese recently arrived in Hong Kong who speaks nothing but Japanese, a gay Englishman, Kevin (Kevin Sherlock), and a Chinese woman Susie (Mavis Xu). The three overcome all their differences to become a powerful trio linked by close camaraderie. While doubtless more pressing social problems might have been found in the public housing estates of Hong Kong, I think the storyline of this film can stand as an allegory for the kinds of alliances that are possible and fruitful in the lived reality of post-colonial late capitalism. As Braudel wrote ‘civilizations create connections, that is to say, an arrangement between thousands of actually disparate cultural possessions, at first glance foreign to one another – from those that emanate from religion and intellect to the objects and tools of daily life.’ It is with those seemingly ‘disparate cultural possessions’, as well as with the already merged, ‘impure’ hybrid, that the processes of state and market oppressions that now go by the name of ‘globalization’ can be challenged.
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Finally, I should like to thank all those who have taken a interest in this project and who have encouraged me along the way. In particular, I am grateful to my former colleagues and current friends Harry Harootunian and Maureen Sabine; for their comments and enthusiasm former students who attended my University of Hong Kong workshop on Chinese cultural studies; my thanks also to Brian Castro for several intelligent discussions about hybridity and identity, and to Graham Chan for lengthy conversations about Liverpool Chinatown and 'British Chineseness.' I should also like to thank Manolete Mora who afforded me invaluable advice on the musicological questions addressed in Chapter Three and Marion Morrison for the cover design.

I should like to express my respect to my mother who has experienced with stoicism much of what is critiqued in this book. As always, my thanks are due to Isabelle for her endless patience, her constant companionship, and her judicious guidance.
But reverie does not tell stories. Or, at least, there are reveries so deep, reveries which help us to descend so deeply into ourselves that they relieve us of our history. They liberate us from our name. They deliver us, these solitudes of the present, to our first solitudes. Those first solitudes, those solitudes of childhood, leave, in certain souls, indelible marks. For them the whole of life is receptive to poetic reverie, to a reverie that knows the price of solitude ...

... The task before us calls for a poetico-analysis which help us reconstitute in ourselves the being of emancipatory solitudes. Poetico-analyses will return to us all the privileges of the imagination. Memory is a field of psychological ruins, a jumble of recollections. Our whole childhood has to be re-imagined, and in re-imagining it we have the possibility of rediscovering it in the very life of our dreams of solitary childhood.

Gaston Bachelard

The sense of 'Chinese reveries' in the title of this chapter is doubtless quite clear: Chinese dreams, dreams about China. Yet, reveries are something more than this. They are also daydreams, musings, wishful thinking. As to the second part of the title, 'railings' constitute one of the concrete central images of the story I discuss here. In the story an old alligator is kept behind railings in a zoo in a small and ancient English seaside town. But the railings may also be read as a metaphor for the incarcerating impulse of English colonialism, and of Western cultural dominance in general. In other words, the railings stand as a trope for the attempt to restrain and to impose closure on narratives large and small. In this story, as we shall see, there are several efforts to interrupt the storytelling of the protagonist, but such efforts are rebuffed as stories are told and retold and divergent versions are recounted.
At another level, the story constructs a space within which to represent the confused and scattered detritus of political and cultural dreams and nightmares of modernity, and the beginnings of an attempt to re-imagine, by what Bachelard has called ‘reveries of will’ (*les rêveries de la volonté*), the narratives that have recounted twentieth-century history in China and elsewhere. In the story I address here the space where this re-imagining happens lies within the railings. ‘Railings’ establish enclosures, but still leave spaces between the bars for the willful to squeeze through. And then ‘railing’ etymologically can also signify abusive scolding; the Latin from which *rail* is presumed to derive indicated the act of braying or neighing. In this story such railing is done by the English who must stand metonymically for the West and the Whiteman. But there is also the railing *about* the English by the Other, by the non-English, and this railing invokes other senses of the word; in early French and English the word referred to ‘mocking or joking.’ All of these senses seem appropriate to my reading of the railings in the story entitled ‘Going Home.’ It is a text written a decade ago by the Chinese poet, essayist, fiction writer and playwright Duoduo. Duoduo by sheer coincidence left China for a reading tour of England and Holland on the morning of June 4th 1989, after the night of the Tiananmen massacre he had witnessed. Having recounted his experience to the British media, he was unable to return to China and found himself in involuntary exile. The story ‘Going Home’ was written a year or so after the author’s arrival in Europe, around the time he turned forty. It is a story about being Chinese in England, about the concurrence of Chineseness and of Englishness (neologisms that cannot be uttered without evoking multiple questions and contradictions) and such stories have always interested me.

But before presenting my reading of Duoduo’s Chinese text, I beg the reader’s indulgence while I set it aside for an instant so as to preface Duoduo’s story with a story about another Chinese man, and about myself, the author of this book. I am obliged to make this diversion so as to explain where my own interest in Chinese comes from, and why I perceive my career as an intersection, a historical conjunction of small and large histories of the last hundred years or so.

I am often asked, as are many white-looking people who are engaged in Asian studies, how and why I became interested in Chinese studies. As a schoolboy I was an innocent yet keen reader of modern French and Spanish poetry, of Latin American novels, and so I would often tell people that I took pleasure in learning languages, and having learned French and Spanish wanted to try
something more challenging. I had also read some Chinese poetry in translation and wanted to be able to do so in the original. Neither reason, however, was the principal one.

The fact is that my grandfather was a Chinese who emigrated to Britain, and settled in Liverpool. I tell his story, and analyse the difficulty of narrating it, in the final chapter of this book. However, there are a few details that are immediately necessary to the discussion that follows on how we read and write texts.

As a child I lived in my grandfather’s house. He and my grandmother looked after me while my mother worked. He often took me to Chinatown. My grandfather died when I was seven or eight.

After his death, I realized that no-one was really very familiar with who he had been, or what he had done. He was educated. He interpreted for Chinese seamen in trouble with the authorities in the English courts. He negotiated disputes in Chinatown. He visited people. He gambled. But he was a sober man, perhaps one would even say dour.

The lack of family knowledge about him made me inquisitive. I was interested in what his life was about, what ideas and ideologies ran through his head, what constituted the imaginary of this old Chinese man who had washed up on Merseyside. But all that were left behind were traces of his speech, his turns of phrase, an occasional negative comment about the dislodged anti-communist Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, some newspaper cuttings of the Long March. But that was not quite all that remained.

After he died I inherited a notebook, or rather I took possession of it. It was small and black with a red spine. On the front was the word ‘Cash’ in florid gold script. Inside there some twenty or so pages of writing, Chinese writing. This was the only writing by my grandfather that survived him. As a boy I first used the unfilled pages as an album for bubble gum cards featuring allied news photographs of the Second World War. They were like baseball cards but with pictures of soldiers and amphibious landing craft rather than ball players. The cards had captions such as:

‘HIT AND RUN: NORWAY—DECEMBER 27, 1941’,
‘FOX ON THE RUN: LIBYA—DECEMBER 14, 1942’,
‘THE NOOSE TIGHTENS: TUNISIA—APRIL 23, 1943’,
‘TOKYO EXPRESS: SAIPAN—MAY 19, 1945’.

A white heroic mythology pasted into an old Chinaman’s notebook.

Later I used some of the pages for ornithological notes. They are written in a childish ungainly hand, two or three words to a page:
Only later did the Chinese words, the characters in the notebook seem important or interesting.

The subsequent course of my adult life could be explained as the pursuit of a grail, the attempt to decode a history, to 'decode' a few years of an old man's life observed at first hand only from the perspective of a three-foot high child who had not known what questions to ask. But more precisely, and perhaps subconsciously, I had been aiming to engage in a more literal decoding at a textual level: a decoding of writing, the written Chinese characters of the little black cash book that excluded me from the power of reading, and from what I perceived then as the power of knowing.

Over the subsequent decades, that desire to read the written Chinese word was subsequently fulfilled, but also multiply displaced into the decoding of other Chinese texts; the necessity to know was diverted into other Chinese contexts and transtexts. During the first four years or so of my sinological training I was content to acquire the power to read poems written in classical Chinese. Yet, after I had actually lived and studied in China I quickly realized that what interested me were the texts, contexts and transtexts of China's modernity, a modernity that was a product of Western colonialism. I understood also that the academic training I had received with its emphasis on the 'tradition' and its suspicion of the modern was a means of continuing or submitting to a practice of Western colonial masking of the China the West had produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That is not to say studying China's past is of no interest, but at that point in time, and from my own position it was not. Sinology's neglect of the temporarily and spatially near, the modern, and the close-to-home (Britain's occupation of Hong Kong, and the presence
and cultural practices of Chinese people in Britain was of no concern to British sinology whatsoever) except as an object of the state-sponsored social scientific gaze, seemed to me part of that process, and so I devoted my time to the study of modern Chinese literary culture, and then to the contemporary. It was only then that I understood that the ‘nativist’ interrogators of colonial power and history themselves, the Chinese intellectuals, had engaged in their own project of invention and masking, a project of writing a univocal literature of China in celebration of official history, especially in its metanarrative of progress and modernity, a project equal in its effect to the monologic construction of official Chinese dynastic discourses and of the official canon that sustained them.

The cultural and intellectual history of twentieth-century China can be read as a linear history which parallels the history of China’s efforts to compensate for the effects of the technological and economic uneven development so brutally foregrounded by Western and Japanese, but in particular British, imperialist aggression in ‘opening up’ China. This would be a linear, nationalist, grand narrative, or metanarrative, extending over a hundred and fifty years and interrupted with regularity by internal struggles and wars.

We can also find in that same period of China’s intellectual and political history, the attempt to break out of feudal modes of thought and their cultural reproduction, and simultaneous attempts to mediate and assimilate a model of modernity imposed from outside. This would be less of a linear model and more a conceptualization of this period of time as a long moment, a *longue durée*; a useful French historiographical concept popular since the Second World War. Within such a framework, concerns about the condition of modern China’s culture and the wider questions relating to modernity converge as the problems of postcolonialism in general.

More specific and shorter moments can also be isolated. In terms of major political, social and cultural crises and turning points, there would be perhaps 20 to 30 such moments since the mid-nineteenth century, and 10 to 15 such moments over the forty years separating 1949, the year of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China and 1989 the year of its ultimate ideological unmasking in the debacle at Tiananmen Square.

With the idea of the long *durée*, comes the notion of stable history. But in the history of modernity such stability has become
increasingly rare. The histories of the twentieth century are complex and stability cannot be understood in the same way; especially for the semi-colonized, semi-modernized society that has been China. In the field of cultural production such historical conditions have produced cultural histories of instability. Western modern literary endeavours produced novels which were negotiations and textual representations of the longues durées of history, of the moments when bourgeois national cultures produced the necessary conditions for the writing of such novels, for the reproduction of class and national identities. They were also moments during which national vernacular languages were available to the literary producer. China did not share such conditions and it should not be surprising that from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century Chinese writers produced few novels, but rather a plethora of short fiction. It was not until the 1930s and 1940s that writers negotiated the representation of the turmoil that was everyday life in the form of longer fiction. The novel by Qian Zhongshu entitled Weicheng or Besieged City stands out; the story of a young student returned after five years overseas with only a fake diploma to his name and his gradual journey to ruin, it is something like a modern Chinese rake’s progress, a tale of disenchantment with new social and cultural conditions.

At the level of language, the same invention and consolidation of language that had been proceeding in France for two hundred years and in Italy and other new nation-states for a much shorter time, was suddenly also demanded in China. At this level China’s intellectuals, its writers, were engaged in the basic labour of constructing a new national language. By this wilful action of textual production they sought the realization of a reinvented China, China reinvented as modern nation-state. But new language, new means of verbal representation was needed even by those who questioned the new nationalism and statism of modern China, who contested the closed linear strategy constituted by the mimicry of the model of modernity presented by the Western powers and Japan.

Poetry had need of new language, new forms, new modes to overcome the now tortured formalistic legacy of inappropriately anachronistic modes of writing at the end of the 19th century. It was not until the mid 1940s that a new language with which to engage modernity became fully and powerfully available. And then the tutelage of the bureaucratic state and the rhythmic certainty of socio-cultural instabilities diverted and warped the new language,
so that after Mao, from the mid 1970s onwards, the process of language creation, reinvention, renovation began again, as it did in Germany after the defeat of Nazism.

In the early part of this century new language was seen as necessary not only to cultural but also to social renovation, and those who were interested in the new language were not only the enlightened literati but the politicians. If China were to be rebuilt as a new nation-state on the model of Europe and America and Japan, then like these nation-states China required a national vernacular language, and language, literature and culture were destined to be instruments of nationalization. In that sense even the cultural modernists and the feminists, critics of the metanarrative of this French Jacobin and Soviet Russian inspired, centralizing modernization, were trapped within the nationalizing and totalizing discourse. While on mainland China the May Fourth Movement, that was mounted in reaction to the imperialist and racist treatment of their ally China by the great powers at the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919, spearheaded a cultural and linguistic revolution and promoted multiple practical steps to make the new nationalizing literature and language instruments of state reform, revolution, and reinvention, on Formosa, Taiwan, then a Japanese colony, the popularization of a new and vernacular Chinese written language was based not as on the mainland on northern Chinese, but on the local Minnan language. Where necessary, characters were invented to facilitate this language-making process, just as today characters are created or improvised in written Hong Kong Cantonese on a daily basis. The reality, a reality viewed with suspicion and fear by centralist ideologues, is that there is no linguistic impediment to the development of a dozen different written vernacular Chinese regional languages. But while initiatives tending to linguistic diversification have been taken on Taiwan, and in part in Hong Kong, the dominant trend amongst intellectuals has been to accept without question the centralization and standardization of language. This twentieth-century preoccupation with language may indeed be seen as part of the complex *longue durée* whose contours are so hard to discern, for the concern with language is imbricated with what C.T. Hsia rightly called in his discussion of the modern Chinese writer, the ‘obsession with China’. This dominant attachment to the nation can itself be seen as a form of stability, if not of intellectual stasis, for the modern intellectual who, from the mid-19th century onwards, is persistently preoccupied with the nation, with the people-as-nation, with the intellectual’s relationship to it,
and how to represent it. How to represent the nation in the mimetic sense, but also how to be its representative.

In a sense the key to the opening up of this closed discursive dilemma, the interruption of the obsessive narrative of national salvation and sacrifice for the nation, for the people as authentic national essence (as they were during the Mao years in an almost Heideggerian conflation of nation, people and race) is contingent upon the acceptance and incorporation of instabilities, the insecurities, the temporariness of the present moment. It is that capacity to negotiate and represent that quality of being that has been gradually learned by some of those attempting to represent the kind of space and time that is constituted by China, Chinas, Chineseness, by modernity and increasingly (to borrow Marc Augé's terminology) by the supermodernity (surmodernité) of the non-place that is increasingly the locus of Chineseness: The Chinese producer of culture working at the margins within Chinese national territory, in the wilderness of exile, or beyond the bounds of accepted Chineseness, writing in English in Europe or America or Hong Kong. 4

The experience of exile, of banishment, like the experience of in-betweenness, at any rate of exclusion, the acceptance and aestheticization of insecurity is what Maurice Blanchot pointed to in his description of the poetic realities of the elite orphic poet of European modernity:

... to speak poetically and to disappear belong to the profundity of the same movement, that those who sing must enter into it totally and, ultimately, perish, for they speak only when the early approach of death, accelerated separation, the farewell given ahead of time erase the false certitude of being, dispel protective securities, and deliver them to a boundless insecurity. 5

But those Chinese writers and thinkers who have understood the futility of the discourse-bound mentality of saving the nation, reinventing the nation, developing the nation, of negotiating modernity, of squaring the circle are few, as indeed are their counterparts the products of other modern and modernizing societies.

So much needs to be forgotten in the striving for cultural modernity, just as so much must be forgotten in assuming the mantle of post-modern post-culture. So much history, so many histories, so much geography, so many geographies, so much archaeology of many one-time disciplines.

Those who do not participate in the process of forgetting, those who have never invested in narratives of a single singular linearity,
but who live and produce along and between multiple and intersecting axes are content to have these lines projected elsewhere, but not to sever them altogether. Indeed, these interweaved lines cannot be severed, they can only dawdle in near-stationary spirals. So they, you, we have to wait.

The character Lee in Duoduo’s story Going Home is a Chinese who has gone to live in a village on the north-east coast of England. At the beginning of this story we find him waiting for the arrival of another Chinese. He seems to have waited forty years. This is not a simple national allegory, nor is it a globalizing postmodernist narrative, but rather an oneiric representation of the lived reality of late modernity, and not simply of China:

Many years have passed, and whether I have spoken or not spoken with the townsfolk has become equally unimportant; they have aged with me amidst our unchanging relations, and the children of the youngsters who used to call me Lee still call me Lee today. Sometimes, when they come to visit their parents buried beneath the earth, I stand with them for a while ...

Like this country cemetery and this church, my arrival and stay have long lost their rationale; or, that rationale has long lost its flavour. I tend to the flowers and foliage throughout the year, and as long as it is not raining, I go to the fields to watch the sky. If it is raining, I stay in; but if there is a storm, then I must go out. In the storm, I sit on the bench of the church across from the town square holding a red umbrella. At those times, behind the shop windows, the people speak: look, that Chinese is waiting again.

What they say is perfectly correct; I am waiting.

I am waiting for the arrival of another Chinese. I think he must be a young man, perhaps with a backpack, perhaps without. Emerging from the long-distance bus depot, he will pass a second-hand bookstore and walk straight into the square; he will see me in the rain and approach me, and listen to the tale I tell him. If he is willing to listen, then I shall be able to depart from this world; or, as the Chinese say, I shall be able to go home ....

The apparent serenity of Iremond, of this rural traditional England provides a space for dream, for an imagining of a China unknown to and by modernity. In the Other’s metropolis the Chinese exile imagines all too easily the Chinese metropolis, Beijing, Peking, the Northern capital, which constitutes not yesterday’s China, but the China of just yesterday, China on the eve of the exile’s departure,
China in chaos, the China of butchery, the China the exile has fled and not without guilt:

I was already a middle-aged man in London, yet every day I walked to and from school carrying my book bag and waving my arms, as if there were a youth in my heart pointing out this, and that. The cluster of red smokestacks near Paddington station, and the grey buildings around King’s Cross, brought sudden memories back to me of a coal yard outside Beijing’s Xizhimen; sometimes the wash basin used by the butchers in Ox Alley just before the slaughter would clearly appear in the sky at dusk in Hyde Park; a corner store on Jinshi Street would sometimes flash across the doors of the bank on Piccadilly Circus; and I even saw, from a narrow alley near London’s Euston railway station, a stampede of white horses in Beijing’s Guang’anmenwai! The past in London rumbled into the distance with the Underground.

But London is not simply a matrix for the easy imagining of undesired memories, the Other’s metropolis is also strewn with the searching, questioning faces of other Chinese refugees. It was always hard to leave China, the exit from China often required resort to compromise, to venal practices, to nepotism, and all other Chinese who were out knew that. Just occasionally departure was a function of aleatory circumstance as in the instance of Duoduo himself. Right after Tiananmen it was almost impossible to leave, and the associated discomfort of having left was therefore multiplied. To be out of China meant having avoided a collective suffering, having fled a battle, being no longer there to mourn and tend the national cemetery. Still on the subway the narrator recounts:

I once rode in those segmented steel coffins, and when I met a Chinese, on occasion, we would turn away from each other at first, and then do a double take, consciously or unconsciously, with a significance in our gazes: how the fuck did you get over here? Well, didn’t you fucking get here too?

And that is why I left London and came to Iremond.

...

It was when I was still a student in London; I went out for a stroll and made my way to Iremond. When I left the bus station and walked into the town square, the tourist season when the stores would be selling plastic beach gear had not yet arrived. The little
rows of houses seemed to have grown out of a dream, and the
rolled up newspapers in front of each door had not yet been
picked up; it was just like today, with no one around, only
well-fed horses in the distance that seemed half-buried due to
undulating of the slopes. As I found my way to the sea wall, the
beach was full of people; the whole town was probably right
there. Each of their hearts followed its own movements, and their
silence seemed to explain itself, as if a single prearranged gesture
would cause them to plunge into the sea all at once. I did not
know what they were waiting for; I knew only that they had a
reason to be waiting, whereas I had none.

The perceived Englishness, an almost clichéd, quaint, purposeful
Englishness constructed in this story serves to foreground the
absence of China, the absence of Chinese meaning, the futility of
Chinese waiting. The lack of Chineseness is accentuated by the
Chinese character's consciousness of being Other to his English
hosts. This is accomplished not without some irony as when we
read of the reaction of the woman who runs the local antique store
every time she sees Lee approach:

Old Maria wore spectacles, and whenever she spotted me coming
she pretended to be reading: from left to right, then right to left,
and finally from top to bottom. That was from a time in her
youth in a London pub when she saw three men in a row, read­
ing: the first had been an Englishman, the second a Jew, and the
third a Chinese.

Indulgence of English humour is not excessive, however. Quite the
contrary, as we read later in the story that 'you might laugh at an
English joke if you didn’t understand it, but you wouldn’t once
you did.’ A reflection that betrays not merely an attachment to the
notion of national characteristics, and thus of the integrity of
peoples and the identity of nations, but which also points to the
supposedly instinctive reaction of the intruding Other when
ignorant of the host’s language and culture: embarrassed and
compensatory laughter.

Chineseness, made present by a sense of Chinese absence is
represented not simply by being elsewhere, being in England, and
by English reactions to the Chinese presence, but also by the traces
of Chineseness, by the appearances of Chineseness, by Chinese
presences that fail to translate into Chinese valences for the narra­
tor. The sense of Chineseness that is sought by the exile is not a
sense of cultural Chineseness, of greater Chineseness that might be
found elsewhere than China. The only satisfactory Chineseness is that framed by a national sense of Chinese space, a geographically specific China:

Iremond never had another Chinese besides me, and naturally it had no Chinese bookstore either. There was only a large plaque across the road from Maria’s antique shop bearing four large Chinese characters that translated as: ‘Phoenix Restaurant.’ I was quite happy the first time I entered the restaurant, and I asked in Chinese: ‘Do you serve Cantonese or Szechwan?’ The owner waved his hands at me. I then asked: ‘Is this a Chinese restaurant?’ The owner waved his hands again. I understood what he meant: don’t ask. And so I sat for a moment, ordering neither food nor tea, but paying a tip for the sole purpose of looking at a painting on the wall. ‘Was this painted by a Chinese?’ I asked. The owner waved his hands; ‘Was this not painted by a Chinese?’ I asked. The owner waved his hands again. ‘Let’s just speak English,’ I said. Still he waved his hands, and he never stopped for the decades to follow. I still came to see the painting as I grew old, but the owner was no longer there; but the painting will still be there when I no longer exist.

It was an oil painting: a towering Chinese palace amidst verdant hills, an arch nearby, a pagoda in the distance, and nothing else; that is, no human figures. The weather is calm and bright, and everything is in bloom; there is no sun, but its light fills the canvas; nothing but a magnificent structure with no signs of age or time, leaving the rise and fall of the dynasties imperceptible. I could never grow tired of looking at it. It was god-sent, that honesty and warmth of a continental topography, which no perpetually sea-gazing people could ever possess.

I thus always felt, upon leaving the Phoenix Restaurant, a sense of leaving a clinic, cured of all maladies of the heart. The light in the painting is extremely gentle, like a music, like Chinese speech. The last time I heard Chinese spoken was on the Underground in London:

‘Well, let’s just go back, then; why don’t we go back?’
‘Who says we’re not going back? Can we? I’d go back if I were Ma Yo-yo.’
‘It’s Yo-yo Ma.’
‘Whatever the hell he’s called, he gets 3000 pounds just for taking a piss!’

The muteness represented here, the lack of power to enunciate, could be read as a criticism of the ‘inauthenticity’ of the diasporic Chinese, of their ‘rootlessness’, but perhaps there is a less superficial
reading here of the modern Chinese subject’s incapacity to interrogate itself, China’s inability to imagine itself otherwise than as an entity mimicking the West, the nation-state narratives of modernity, and the invention and redeployment of Tradition. Not just the non-communication of China after 1989, of China after Mao, after 1949, but even further back, China after colonialism, China after the white man. Powerless to speak, only able to be spoken in the global diction of banality. The Chinese restaurant owner cannot speak, will not speak. This Chinese space, this space that calls itself Chinese and yet is located in an English village, the global village. This Chinese space is empty of meaning, of the capacity to communicate, except for a visual representation, a spatial and temporal window, the Western-medium painting of a Chinese landscape. A representation of a physicality and territoriality of China, somewhere, some time. Not a reality, an unreality, a dreamed painting.

When Lee points to the inability of island peoples to conceptualize on a grand scale, the significance of the painting is constituted by its historicity, and its lengthy history as a component of the mentality of the Chinese elite. As Lacoste notes in *Paysages Politiques* [Political Landscapes] while ‘Western’ painting incorporates the landscape relatively late, Chinese and Japanese painters had done so for centuries. And yet contradiction remains, because the Chinese space has been represented in a Western space, on a Western canvas in oils.

In the painting in the Chinese restaurant, the Chinese-space-that-is-not-Chinese, rather than the constructed ideological importance of the Chinese continental vision, the significance in fact lies in the anxiety it represents, in the quest for identity, for essence in an English village, in the globalized world. ‘Was this painted by a Chinese.’ ‘Was this not painted by a Chinese.’ It is not at the level of national characteristics, nor ‘ethnic’ consciousness, that the difference is constructed, but upon a historical practice, itself mimicked as Lacoste tells us by the European painter. Thus while in the narrator’s imaginary it provides the catalyst for reverie, it represents at another and real and historical level a practice recuperated by the Other. Its Chineseness then constituted only by piercing through our forgetfulness, our lack of memory, our ignorance of history. The painting is evoked to represent China’s difference but as an oil painting, a distinctively Western mode simultaneously affirms the global transcendence of practices which until the age of essentializing ideologies of modernity were everyday transcultural currency.
At another level, the China represented in this painting is not the China of the Great Wall, not the China of national signs that been sifted into the contemporary collective imaginary. No, this is a different order of mythic China. It is not the 'authentic' China sought by that group of post-Mao cultural producers known as the 'roots seekers' who in the wake of the ideological disillusionment produced by the Cultural Revolution, attempted to invent an alternative empowerment to Maoism but with the same end, the maintenance of Chinese centralism and Chinese essentialism. No, the China dreamt here, via the Western medium, Western negotiation in oils of Chinese space, whether or not authored by a Chinese, is an imagining of an alternative vision of human life perceived as having run counter to the pragmatism and instrumentalism of Confucian centralist bureaucratic feudalism and subsequently bureaucratic modernising centralism.

It is a cliché to talk of an unchanging China, a cliché dismantled by one sort of history, buttressed by others. Even if ultimately the idea of a longue durée stable history of China is impossible to sustain, contemporary oppositionism reads the history of cultural and intellectual opposition and divergence as indeed a continuous thread unravelling back through narratives of heterodox unreality opposed to dominant, orthodox, realist and pragmatic literary modes, all the way back to Daoist aesthetics, and textually displayed within the metaphoric modes of narrative and poetry. Chinese modernist critics of modernity throughout the twentieth century have been among those, as I have sought to demonstrate in previous books, who have been attracted to what they perceive as a discourse of resistance to monologic ideological dominance, a discourse recuperable to, and deployable in, their own critique of modernity.7

'I never dream in England' declares the narrator Lee. But to produce no dreams is to produce no poetry and this narrative seems like a web of poetically dreamed moments. Perhaps then these are dreams dreamt in China, now mapped onto an experience called England, or Iremond, the experience of not-China, of the long imagined not-China. This is the story of dreams being forced through the mesh of Englishness, unChineseness, which instructs that the imagined Chineseness and unChineseness coincide only partially with experience and that these categories leach the one into the other with the temporal and physical distancing from the space of former dreaming.

'The imagination', writes Bachelard, 'is not ... the faculty to form images of reality; it is the faculty to form images that go beyond reality, which sing reality.' He continues:
The imagination invents more than things and tragedies, it invents new life, new spirit; it opens eyes which have new types of vision. The imagination will see if it has visions. It will have visions if it is educated through reveries before being educated by experiences, if experience follows as affirmation of its reveries.  

Duoduo’s narrative is a poetic narrative in that it is a cluster of visions, narrated in a series of vertical progressions and regressions, a series of poetic instants in which the reader can ascend and descend. It is a poetic narrative in that it is a succession of visions which are the result of imagining through reveries before being educated by the experience of lived realities. Here exile, a distancing from the place of reverie, supplements reverie, but it not only supplies confirmation, it also interjects a deception, a contortion of the imagination’s reveries. This narrative, then, is at one level the telling of that process of mapping of experience onto reverie. An imagination and language that has merely dreamed the critical distance, the gap, provided by Western modernism as critique of modernity, as what William’s called modernity’s Other, with which to write China, in particular the China of the ideological disillusionment of the post-Cultural Revolution, Dengist consumer capitalistic moment. Duoduo like many others of his generation was attracted by the resistance to the banality of modern programmed existence that they read in the modernist reveries of the West’s poets, in Baudelaire and in Lorca, in Dylan Thomas, in David Gascoyne, and more sonorously in the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva; and Sylvia Plath. But the heroically constructed imagination now has to accommodate the material reality, the lived experience of Western reality and Western ideology. The trope of the confusion and doubleness of the young-becoming-old and the old-becoming-young Chinese constitutes a representation of the knowledge that is the experience of exile. It is the narrator’s exile, the author’s also, but China’s too, as reverie surrenders to the experience of a reality of modernity that demonstrates that this alienation is not only the author’s, not just the narrator’s or China’s but is a generalized alienation of a globalized modernity. In the light of 1989 the imagining of living otherwise is not transferred from China to England, it is deferred. That experience of the West’s modernity has replaced the innocent anticipation that were 1989’s collective dreams of emancipation with the anxiety of having to reimagine, to dream again. It is not anxiety alone, however, but once again mourning before life and thus the tropes of death and cemeteries. In this story
and in Duoduo’s poetry and the poetry of some of his contemporaries, tropes of death, of spaces of the dead occur repeatedly, since as Bachelard writes in a phrase that presages Raoul Vaneigem’s distinction that discerns that which is life and that which is the numbing substitute for life that is mere survival, ‘If dream is a reminiscence, it is the reminiscence of a state preceding life, of a state of dead life, a kind of mourning before happiness.’ Thus the struggle to achieve a life, Life, rather than survival, rather than death in life, before the finality of Death itself. Thus the refusal ‘to go gentle into that good night’, thus the poet’s railing resistance to Death’s dominion.

If dream is a reminiscence, ‘a kind of mourning before happiness,’ then that imperative to mourn before happiness, post 1989, is not confined to Chinese dreamers.

Here again, I intend dreaming in Bachelard’s sense which includes ‘dreams of definite action’, which he calls ‘reveries of will’. In Duoduo’s story reverie incessantly intrudes into, is mapped onto the function of reality, or as Bachelard puts it more elegantly ‘the oneiric forces ceaselessly flow into conscious life.’

There is no history without memory, but when both official history and collective memory have been strategically détourné, diverted off course, warped, then perhaps the only recourse is the kind of poetic function, the function of unreality that Hélène Cixous finds in the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva operating as a substitute for the telling of history.

If the cemetery is the site of mourning before happiness, the zoo is the site of storytelling, of wilful dreaming, where oppressions are overturned:

‘Here for the alligators?’
The zookeeper seemed to have worked something out: ‘An old Chinese man has been coming every day for 40 years.’

‘40 years? It must be 70 years now.’

‘Chinese people like looking at the alligators. That’s interesting.’

‘The Chinese have had alligators for a long time; they’ve seen enough of them. But the English haven’t, so it’s their turn now.’

The zookeeper shrugged. ‘Well then, I hope you enjoy your visit.’

A story written in 1990, the author’s fortieth year of his life. A story written in 1990 forty years after the ‘birth’ of New China. Is Iremond the locus of reflection on either of these temporal
anniversaries territorialized as milestones? Are both anniversaries perhaps conflated, are both the national and the authorial body coexistent in the Chinese who spends forty years in Iremond, and does Iremond then lend itself to a multiple reading both as England and China. Forty years of life, forty years of China, forty years of life all lived in China. Or in England. London as Beijing, Iremond as place of exile, as England, but also as China. And why the hesitation between forty years and seventy years if the larger number doesn’t echo the origins of the intellectual’s engagement with the modern Chinese state in 1919 when another manifestation of popular unrest took place at Tiananmen, a political event redeployed by a sophisticated populace in 1989 with slogans demanding the resurrection of the twin demands of 1919 Science and Democracy.

If the confusion between forty years and seventy years in ‘Going Home’ can be read as an allusion to the landmarks of official Chinese history, then it should also be read as alluding to the conception of history as repetitive because manipulable, what Debray has termed ‘programmable and recapitulable political history’ that is dominant in ‘societies of commemoration’. Here we see the conflation of forty years and seventy years, the convergence of two landmark moments in Chinese history, the association of the narrator who is perhaps, sometimes forty, and the author who is forty, with the 70 year old May Fourth intellectual revolution tradition which re-produced and nurtured the discourse of modernity and progress whose logic surely terminated in Tiananmen Square. Yet, that logic is still dominant amongst intellectuals and cultural producers, the putative saviours of China.

Here the two long moments of seventy and forty years, one a moment of intellectual and political history, the other life-span of a generation (that of the Cultural Revolution Red Guard), of a social class (urban middle class), of an individual writer are not only mapped the one over the other but are also enmeshed, imbricated. The conjuncture of forty years and seventy years is not a failure of memory, but an indecision over which history, which meta-narrative to privilege, an interrogatory imprecision about when technically to date the beginning of these ironically stable repetitions of closed, routine historical events, for even violence and chaos can take on the aura of habit.

China, then, is the zoo, the zookeeper the colonial figurehead, the white man, the custodian. The alligator is China, Chinaman, Orientalist discourse, the old Chinese man waiting.
... Little Seven, and Little Eight, are nicknames reserved for a cluster of alligators; they’re always kept on the bottom by the larger ones. As for the one in solitary confinement, I call it ‘Third Uncle.’

Every time he sees me sitting there cross-legged, the zookeeper tactfully steps aside, or else he goes to the gate and smokes a cigarette. But today he insists on watching over me: ‘May I bother you for a minute? It’s just a bit of personal curiosity.’

‘No, I don’t mind.’

‘Haven’t you noticed any change?’ he asked, pointing to Third Uncle.

A shudder runs through me whenever I meet someone who doesn’t know how to tell jokes trying to tell one.

‘What I mean is, have you never felt that it’s dead, or that it’s a fake?’ I didn’t answer. ‘Never? Well, I did. I had never seen it change over the past 40 odd years, and no one ever paid any attention to it except for a young girl. She stuck her head over the railing, and unfortunately I wasn’t by her side; her scarf was too long, and there it dangled – luckily it wasn’t knotted.’ He paused and waited for me to ask what happened next.

‘And then?’

‘There wasn’t any and then.’ The zookeeper put his hands in his pockets. ‘The girl is still typing today in that BBC building that the Japanese purchased; as for the scarf, I think that it’s still in the alligator’s stomach. Actually that girl was Japanese.’ He stepped aside rather self-contentedly.

As with the dumb Chinese restaurateur and the painting of China on the restaurant wall, again, muteness is the response when the spectre of mimicry appears, when the Chinese is forced to confront the reality of globality, the absence of authenticity, of Chineseness. Here the inability to speak in response, to situate the Self outside of the logic of the late twentieth-century, is compensated for by near hysterical but wordless reaction. The zookeeper continues his storytelling:

The English have a holiday, St. Valentine’s, which one year happened to fall on the same day as Chinese New Year’s Day. That old Chinese man had made a kind of Chinese hotdog, with thick rice noodles on the outside and a Chinese sausage on the inside, which he carried in a basket as he walked through the streets yelling: ‘It’s a Chinese holiday today; please help yourself to a Chinese hotdog.’ Most of the townsfolk politely declined, but there was one young lady who said to him: ‘So St. Valentine’s Day is a great Chinese holiday?’ Suddenly the old man changed;
he froze for a moment, and then did something quite incredible: taking a wild bite out of a hotdog, he squeezed the sausage out of the noodle as he laughed lewdly and crazily at the young lady. And that wasn’t the end of it – he wept out loud all that night at the cemetery, which really gave everyone around there the chills. He denied everything afterwards – he said that it was only ghosts who’d been howling, and that squeezing the hotdog was something he’d learned from English schoolboys, and was certainly not some Chinese tradition.’

The explosion of a gesture of obscenity, like the ejaculation of missiles when trapped in a political discourse whose very agents even find it distasteful, and the shock of realization leads the Chinese to howl wordlessly all night, and subsequently deny history, deny experience, deny meaning, displacing meaning onto the English schoolboys, onto the other, the foreigner, the colonizer who invented the discourse the Self is now trapped within, so that the act is read as mimicry, its valences thus shifted. Innocence, no blame, no responsibility. Continuity.

But let’s recall that the narrator of this story within the story is the English zookeeper, the Chinese with the Chinese hotdog bun is, in the zookeeper’s story, none other than Lee, the narrator of the story within which the zookeeper has challenged the Chinese, and indeed buried him, in the belly of the alligator:

‘That’s rather serious,’ I sighed.

‘There’s more serious yet,’ said the zookeeper as he pushed his face closer to mine. ‘That old Chinese man has been coming every day for 40 odd years to see the alligator, watching it grow old like himself. One day, just like on any other day, I was smoking outside the gate, and when I came back the old man had disappeared. He didn’t leave from the front gate: that I’m sure of.’

‘What you mean is that the alligator ate him.’

‘I didn’t say that. I only said that he disappeared.’

‘You’re lying.’

‘For 900 years no one in this town has ever lied.’

The zookeeper’s face seemed a little younger now.

‘You don’t have to believe me, but it’s no lie,’ the zookeeper continued quite seriously. ‘Anyhow, the old man disappeared, and in any case that’s why after that I never saw this alligator shit again.’

And as he finished talking he turned around so that I couldn’t see if he was laughing; I sensed that he was laughing so hard that even the remaining change in his pocket was jingling. ‘Excuse me,’ he said, leaving me with this story about an old Chinese man.
So our 40 some years of silence had allowed him to construct such a little story.

Silence, forty years of history with no communication, forty years in which myths of the Other can be constructed, as a mimic man, an inauthentic product of hybridity, forty years in which the Other can be spoken but does not speak, in which he can be constructed as the weak and arriviste colonized incapable of enunciating 'truth', capable only of manipulating lies, against which there are the 900 years during which the zookeeper and his forbears have never lied.

But then the zookeeper is not just local authority, he is all authority, he is also Chinese authority who has authored and here still attempts to author the Chinese into a narrative of disappearance, consumed by the alligator, a constipated China (the alligator who doesn't shit). But here in this narrative the reified Chinese refuses the narrative, reclaims the story, becomes the author, erases the dry, encrusted Orientalizing and bureaucratic constructions of China:

This wouldn't do - you couldn't just bury me like that, it won't do. And then I heard a sound over and over again, and it put me in a frenzy. This won't do, this just won't do. Struggling, I stood up and slipped in through the railing. I needed to retell this story.

I walked the length of Third Uncle from head to tail several times, I walked the life of this damned old man anew several times, until it was walked to a dust as white as cocaine. Better to say stomped than walked - it was long since dried out, but had I not walked it once, it would still be an alligator, with an old Chinese man and a Japanese scarf in its stomach....

It was gone now - only I remained within the railing. And the old Chinese man was gone as well, leaving just me in the story about him, only this story hadn't ended.

Unreality, wilful reverie, oneiric forces refusing dominant realities. One of Bachelard's tenets of what he terms a 'sort of Copernican revolution of the imagination' is the placing of 'fright before the monster'. The monster at the end of the twentieth century is well entrenched. If only we could erase it with the same act of imagination with which Lee stamps out of existence the old crocodile.

When the zookeeper showed up again, half of his face dropped, numb and frozen in place.

'Good God.'
'Good God, the old Chinese man has come back to life.'
'You know,' said the zookeeper, displaying excellent self-control, 'you know that that was only a joke.'
'It would do as a story, but not as a joke.' I stepped back.
'Then let me tell this story again for you: one day you saw an old Chinese man enter the zoo. In the time it took for you to smoke a cigarette, the old alligator had disappeared, and there remained only the old Chinese man behind the railing. That day was today.' I raised my leg and flicked the cuff of my trousers, which was covered with the remains of Third Uncle's body.
'That's it, sir.' The zookeeper's few remaining hairs seemed to lift up. 'That's enough. Let me remind you not to take advantage of April Fool's day— it's no time to be fooling around.'
'Let me remind you that today is Easter.'
'Yesterday was Easter. It's April 1st today— it just so happens that April Fool's follows Easter this year. So don't play dumb, you well understand that anything goes today. Nevertheless, this is too much— it can't be allowed. From a legal point of view, it's animal cruelty, it's the destruction of public property, or perhaps just money!' The zookeeper's two little fists seemed ready to beat his little stomach now. 'Wait here, please don't go anywhere.' His leather shoes slid across the ground, all the way to the offices.

Money, the fundamental imperative of English society beneath the civilizing, colonizing, cultural superiority, of narrating the Other into Otherness, beneath all of these constructs, the material reality of money and property.

I waited, of course. I waited within this story as if I were waiting in a cemetery.

From birth this cemetery has enriched me; it has given me even a bit more than I would have had. And for this I must thank the light that is unique to England, as if it could turn time back 300 years.

The cemetery, the place of contemplation of death, which has allowed life to be grasped, history to be overturned, by reimagining it with wilful reverie. The cemetery where stories end. But the story does not end there. The function of reality, a reality, forces another renarration of the story:

Only as the police sirens hastened, shaking even the windows, did I suddenly realize: I can't let them see that the railings around the alligators are now only railings in a joke.
So, this story must be told once again.

I crept out of Third Uncle's confines and climbed over another set of rails, and I saw that pile, that younger pile, with Little Seven and Eight among them, their gaping jaws pointing to the sky like so many pairs of scissors. I sighed; a man's greatest mistake is to have so little time left. Just before I trudged up and finally managed to squeeze my buttocks through the railing, I heard a grinding of teeth.

It was the sound of my mother chewing a guava on her very last breath - her greatest wish before dying was to taste the fresh guavas that had just arrived at the markets. I'd always had a wish of my own, which was to bring her out and bury her in this cemetery, so that I could watch over her and scrub her gravestone every day. And if someone passed by, I would be able to say look, I'm watching over my mother. I'd thought so many times of discussing it with the church: it won't take up space, it's not a coffin, it's only a little box ...

In my last glimpse I saw the English police officer's insignia; it was just like the one upon China Air's pilots' caps. No one stopped me, just so as to let the story conclude.

Here the narrative is brusquely elevated through several levels onto an autobiographical plane, as the narrator tells the story of the death of his mother, like the death of the author's mother in the spring of 1990 while the author lived in Holland. I was in Beijing that spring, just for a few days to make a BBC radio programme on culture in China one year after Tiananmen. Duoduo had asked me to buy Western heart medication for his mother. I did. I tried to call to arrange a rendezvous to deliver the medicine. Each time the phone was either answered and put down or left to ring. I mailed the drugs. It was only much later I knew, he knew. He wasn't told for months. That day I rang she was already dead, dead that day or the day before. So in the last glimpse of the English police officer's insignia the story does not conclude but is deferred as it spills over into other stories, into autobiographies, into, for instance, the author's and into mine.

Some twenty or more years after my grandfather's death, after years of subjecting my mind to the frequently unpleasant discipline, order, and routine that learning that language demands, I took out the notebook which I had kept safely. The Chinese consisted of poems that read like riddles. They seemed to be in the ci or sung lyric form of pre-modern poetry. But they were no known lyrics. There are enormous encyclopaedic tomes to assist the sinologist in locating lines of poetry, but none of these appeared there. Perhaps
then they were popular Cantonese lyrics, copied from a newspaper maybe, or perhaps even his own words.

Blanchot writes of the relationship between power and impossibility involved in the act of reading, 'between the power tied to the moment of reading and the impossibility tied to the moment of writing'. But merely for me to reach the moment, or rather space, 'a space held open by the reader' as Blanchot puts it, had demanded an investment of time and labour during which I had engaged numerous other texts; the reading of this notebook in any case had never constituted a conscious aim. The impossibility of the writing had for me been occulted by the impossibility of the reading. Again Blanchot paraphrasing René Char, points to the gap, or the écart between the one who commences or forms the work and its completion. The work has to be separated or distanced from the one who commences, and indeed is only accomplished in this separation, in this distancing, a 'separation which takes exactly the shape of reading (and where the reading takes shape).'

I must confess that, once I could read Chinese, I returned to that cash book only in a desultory and gingerly manner. I looked at the odd line, but have never yet invested the necessary time and labour in the text to decode it. I have imagined from the odd phrase readings that could be established. There are tantalizing references to brothers and boats and comings and goings, and days spent in travel, but all in verse form. I decided not to proceed, not simply because I didn't wish to be disappointed by what might eventually be as banal as bubble gum cards or the observations of birds copied from a children's encyclopaedia, but because it would seem to represent the end of a progression from what Blanchot terms the vide, the void, or emptiness, in which reading is born and out of which it progresses 'to the moment when the distance from the work with regard to itself changes sign, and no longer indicates its incompleteness, but its accomplishment, no longer signifies that it is not yet done, but that it never had to be done.'

In a sense my reading of other Chinese texts has been enabled by and taken place in that 'écart' or gap. In the gap between that initial impossibility not of writing but of reading and the deferred accomplishment of reading, the reading of that little black book, much reading of numerous other texts has taken place, and much more I hope is yet to take place.
ADDICTED, DEMENTED, AND TAKEN TO THE CLEANERS

The White Invention and Representation of the ‘Chinaman’

In this chapter my concern is with white, mainly British, representations of ‘Chinese characteristics’. I first discuss the representation of the Chinese as an opiomaniac, and the ways in which the ‘Oriental habit’ of opium consumption was constructed and nuanced by the English. Of particular interest to me are the contradictions that emerged between the ideological project of the purification and construction of the English national body in the British colonial metropolis (a task requiring the suppression of a widespread British opiate consumption), and the conflicting economic interests of the British imperial state in its ‘Chinese colonies’ (an interest demanding a different gloss on the taking of opium). Later in this chapter, I go on to discuss the colonial representation of the peculiarities of the Chinese mind, and specifically of madness. This discussion relates in the main to official government reports (in the instance of Hong Kong), and newspaper reportage in the case of representations of the Chinese in England. In the final part of the chapter I analyse the representation of the Chinese in modern British popular entertainment media, in song and in the pantomime. In particular, I examine the persistence of a racist and orientalizing discourse in popular culture. In the 1940s the affable singer and entertainer George Formby popularized in lyrics the figure of Mr. Wu, a Chinese laundryman. The Chinese as laundryman, also figures large in the British pantomime version of *Aladdin*; dating back to the nineteenth-century but still being staged in the late twentieth, and continuing to reproduce the white racist panoply of perceived Chinese biological and cultural difference.
The British imperial addiction: ideology, economics and the consumption of opium

We find that your country is sixty or seventy thousand li [three li make one mile] from China. Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade for the purpose of making a great profit. The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug to injure the Chinese people? Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit to an extreme, they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience? I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden by your country; that is because the harm caused by opium is clearly understood. Since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on to the harm of other countries – how much less to China!

*Letter from Lin Zexu to Queen Victoria, 1839.*

The use of opium by British and other foreign imperialist authorities as a means of oppression and coercion, the resulting Opium Wars and as a consequence the British colonization of Hong Kong have all been embedded in the Chinese national imaginary for a century and half. It is rather the representation by the British authorities of opium and its consumption in Hong Kong, as compared to its representation in the metropolis, which is the focus of my current inquiry. I come to the story of opium via my interest in representations of race in nineteenth and twentieth century texts; the representation of opium consumption being just one part of that larger meta-representation. And yet I find that I am compelled to address the interest in a larger context. Indeed, the story of opium is vast, and here I focus on the representation in the Victorian and early twentieth-century periods of the Chinese as consumer of opium.

What is perhaps unexpected is the bifurcation of representation of opium use in England on the one hand and on the other in the colonies, especially the port of Hong Kong obtained by the British as a result of the nineteenth-century Opium Wars fought over Britain’s right to freely trade in opium in China. The effects of opiate substances on health, for instance, were represented differently depending on whether the Chinese concerned were to be found in Britain’s Chinese colonies (Malay Straits, Singapore, Hong Kong) or in the colonial metropolis – in London and in Liverpool.
The issue I concentrate on here is of opium consumption and its function in the British imperial order. While in Britain from the early to mid-nineteenth century onwards opium consumption became taboo and constructed as an alien, indeed Oriental custom unworthy of Victorian citizens, in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong, an official British imperial government campaign of denial of the ill-effects of opium on the Chinese was waged for a century against English abolitionists, who were by and large constituted by the same class that had fought for the abolition of slavery. Colonial medical health officers were at the forefront of those campaigns to maintain the consumption of opium and thus the financing of the British empire's administration east of Suez.

Thus, the same discourse of racial physical and mental difference could be used in England to negatively construct the Chinese so as to promote strategies of segregation or exclusion (as had occurred in the USA in the second half of the nineteenth century), and in the Colonies to justify and maintain practices that were forbidden to citizens of Britain but which were economically lucrative to the state machine in the Colonies. For while it had become imperative to the modern British nation-state to construct a healthy national body, the sickness of the non-white colonized body could be tolerated and indeed encouraged for reasons of economic necessity. This is not to deny the importance of the ideological stance which for much of the period under discussion was based on the precepts of scientific racism. However, whether in Liverpool (as local government functionary) or in Hong Kong (as colonial officer) the role of the medical health official was to bolster the state or local authorities. Thus while medical officers' reports tend to be more ideologically moderate than other official or media representations of the Chinese, they are nevertheless complicit in reproducing myths that sustain the idea of major innate biological difference as the cause of patterns of social behavioural difference.

The recent history of opium, then, can be seen as an archetypal story of modernity: a story of economics (the commodity, profit, and revenue to finance the state apparatus that promotes and negotiates with venture capital) and a story of ideology (the construction of the Chinese as a genetic opiophile).

The British passion for opium has been well documented by Berridge and Edwards in their book *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-Century England*. The availability of the drug
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[in Britain] in the first half of the century was 'rarely seen as a “problem” and opium-use was not yet construed in terms of an Orientalist discourse that would construct the drug as being seminally Oriental. However, from the 1830s onwards bourgeois and professional opinion began to shift and soon ‘opium use was no longer regarded as an everyday part of life for all sections of society’. By the time Oscar Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray* opium had been established as a marker of difference, of the exotic and of the transgressive.

The level of consumption of opium in Britain was extremely high. According to Anthony S. Wohl:

Medical officers were convinced that one of the major causes of infant mortality was the widespread practice of giving children narcotics, especially opium, to quieten them. At one penny an ounce laudanum was cheap enough – about the price of a pint of beer – and its sale was totally unregulated until late in the century. The use of opium was widespread both in town and country. In Manchester, according to one account, five out of six working-class families used it habitually.

But prior to these mid-nineteenth century concerns opium had been seen as totally benign. In Coleridge's day, as Alethea Hayter has noted, 'most doctors and patients still thought of opium not as a dangerous addictive narcotic drug but primarily as a useful analgesic and tranquilliser of which every household should have a supply, for minor ailments and nervous crises of all kinds, much as aspirin is used today'.

Hayter goes on to recount the remarkable ignorance that shrouded the drug in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and notes that while the substance 'was widely used and easily available, almost nothing was known about it ... few people realised, for example, that opium was addictive, and no one understood that withdrawal symptoms were the result of discontinuation or diminished dosages. Indeed, everything that was known about it seemed positive and beneficial.'

Laudanum was widely dispensed and in the form of a patent medicine it was administered to restless babies, often inducing a permanent sleep.

'Supplies were readily available: in 1830, for instance, Britain imported 22,000 pounds of raw opium .... By and large, opium was taken for granted; and it was only the terrible experiences of such articulate addicts as Coleridge and De Quincey that eventually began to bring the horrors of the drug to public attention.'
the mid to late nineteenth century, however, official attitudes towards opium consumption changed.

It was during this moment of ideological and institutional transformation relative to the consumption of opium and its effect on British individual and national bodies, that Britain was engaged in militarily promoting the use of opium in China. A hypocritical, fork-tongued approach to opium was thus inevitable. At one level, a divergence in the textual representation of opium consumption arises from the doubleness of the concerns invested in its late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century re-representation in the colonies themselves and in the metropolis. These concerns were, I reiterate, both economic and ideological.

The discourse that underpinned the economic agenda was associated with the needs of both colonial governmental apparatuses and of capital (represented by mid-nineteenth century opportunists such as Jardine and Matheson who would later become heads of respectable and powerful Hong Kong-based corporations). The ideological arguments were produced by those concerned with the integrity of the Victorian English nation, and its (re)construction which necessitated an Other against which to achieve that construction; in textual terms we can look to Sax Rohmer's popular fictional Fu-Manchu, and to the media (the newspapers and magazines), and even to seemingly avant-garde elite producers of literature such as Oscar Wilde and his story of Dorian Gray.7

In specific terms in the mid to late nineteenth century, the ideological necessity of constructing ‘the Chinese’ as the totally different Other in Europe and the USA, an Other against which the white could be legitimated in terms of the dominant ideology of scientific racism, was pitted against the economic interests not only of capital (the logic of capitalism), but also against the interests of the imperial apparatus with which capital was imbricated. Ideological concerns over racial purity, the integrity of the national body and so on, led to the Chinese or ‘Chinaman’ being constructed negatively (as the Irish were, and as the English working class had been) as the embodiment of the antithesis of Anglo-Saxon bourgeois decency and national rectitude.

In other words the Chinaman was represented as dirty, impure, sick, decaying, decadent, mentally different, cunning, wily, and biologically and morally inferior, and ridden with vices, such as opium smoking, that were innate. Thus, the opium den became a metaphor for vice and evil that hid plans of conquest and invasion symbolised in Sax Rohmer’s famous, and profitable character, Dr. Fu-Manchu.
The economic imperatives of capital however made it essential to minimise such a construction of the Chinese. In the USA and in British South Africa the economic argument was over cheap labour for the rapid development of natural resources and the construction of national infrastructures. Capitalists wanted Chinese labour; government and media however responded to popular fears of a 'flood' (the most common racist and anti-immigration metaphor of the last century or so) by successfully resisting even temporary (guest worker) Chinese immigration. This resistance inevitably took the form of arguments based on racist ideology. The logic of capitalism was subsumed under the logic of the capitalist-nation-state which while privileging the interests of capitalism had also to pursue a strategy of nationalism that indeed clashed with the ideology of an inclusive imperial happy family. The relatively loose institutional domination of China by colonial powers (manifested by a territorial presence in a network of treaty ports such as Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tianjin, and by legal autonomy for foreigners under the concept of extraterritoriality), as opposed to their military and economic domination of China (ownership of railways, control of the customs and excise) that was the precursor of a later global, post-colonialist economic mode, meant that it was in fact comparatively easy to represent as minimal Britain's imperial ties to China and to foreground China's total and irrecuperable foreignness.

At the turn of the century, apart from a dominant ambience of popular racism that had been bolstered by late nineteenth-century scientific racism and which had entered the collective imaginary in vulgarized form, there were specific economic reasons why anti-Chinese sentiment in particular resurfaced in Britain and its 'white' colonies. The American campaign to exclude totally the Chinese from emigrating to the USA had been successful and would-be Chinese emigrants fleeing China's ruined economic condition in the hope of survival or even enrichment elsewhere were now heading to various other developing economies. In particular, Chinese migrated to Australia and to South Africa where they became targets for white labour's resentment. In particular, certain union leaders and politicians attempted to make major electoral capital out of the issue of Chinese labour in the Transvaal; an issue that almost dominated the 1906 British general election. In Britain itself where the Chinese population could be counted in mere hundreds, Chinese residents became the targets of racism and came under attack from labour union leadership. The press and middlebrow fiction, such as Sax Rohmer's Fu-Manchu novels, both recuper-
ated popular racism, re-representing and reinscribing it. A popular trope was of the addicted Chinese opium-smoker; a trope that always forgot and occulted the real history of Chinese opium smoking and the British Empire's role in its promotion.

In 1906 the major concentration of Chinese in Britain was to be found in the major imperial port of Liverpool. A local Liverpool Irish former seaman turned union organiser James Sexton who was also Labour Party parliamentary candidate and local councillor, had been instrumental in calling for an official inquiry into the immorality and vice of Chinese residents. A number of press reports and investigative articles followed. An article from the *Liverpool Weekly Courier* entitled simply 'Chinatown' and subtitled 'Opium, Gaming, Joss-Sticks' was typical of the kind of report produced. These articles, even when reluctantly concluding that the local Chinese are ultimately harmless and innocent, invoke the whole range of Orientalist discursive language constructed and developed over the course of the nineteenth century in regard to Chinese people and Chineseness. For example, while 'one could not but admire John Chinaman's restraint' one had to reflect 'with apprehension on the volcanic personality which it conceals.' The discourse then always constructs the Chinese as totally different, totally Other to the white Anglo-Saxon, and as ready at any second to shed their inscrutable exterior and commit monstrous acts of violence. For instance, while there was only one recorded case of violent crime committed by a Chinese in Liverpool, it was nevertheless a 'murder conceived in Oriental passion and perpetrated with shocking coolness.'

Chinatown was described thus:

Suddenly out of the dusk loom strange figures moving with the stiff-jointed shamble of the Orient, and gazing with impassive eyes, set aslant in saffron, mask-like faces, at the incongruous surroundings. The street is part of Liverpool's Chinatown.

In the space of a single sentence, the Chinese is associated with darkness (the 'dusk'), with alterity and difference (the Chinese is 'strange', walks differently, 'shambles', is unknowable, or inscrutable 'with impassive eyes' which are shaped differently ('slanted') set inscrutably again in motionless, 'mask-like faces' which are not white, but yellow or rather 'saffron' which also alludes the exoticism, the out of the ordinariness of the Orient. Ultimately, they are deemed to be out of place, or 'incongruous'.

30
Gambling and opium-smoking were of particular interest – as if the ‘pure’ Anglo-Saxon folk, here constructed as both ethnically and morally ‘pure’, had never indulged in these vices. The Courier continues:

More sinister scenes could be surveyed in the

HAUNTS OF THE OPIUM SMOKERS

which are by no means unknown in the neighbourhood. There on their floor mattresses recline silent figures, puffing at the slender, tiny bowled pipes of disastrous peace; ... the air is almost drowned in the reek of the charmed narcotic, but squalid as it is, the scene is not without Dantesque and Rembrandtesque suggestiveness. Then though yonder contorted sleeper is horrible to look upon, who shall say in what realms of delight he wanders ... It is not good, however, to linger in this dismal den of dreams.

And with that alliterative flourish the writer takes his leave of what is evidently a small, pathetic, local instantiation of the imagined and imaginary exotic Oriental opium den that has fascinated writer and filmmaker alike for over a century. In 1894, in the very infancy of the cinematic industry, America produced a film entitled Chinese Opium Den; in 1898 the American Mutoscope Company produced a two-part film entitled A Chinese Opium Joint; in 1908 French director Georges Méliès directed Le rêve d’un fumeur d’opium, released in the USA as The Dream of an Opium Fiend; 1912 saw The Opium Smugglers starring Myrtle Stedman appear; in 1919 the German director Robert Dinesen made a film called simply Opium. All these films reproduced and reinforced white Western myths about Chinatowns, and made possible the kinds of groundless and exaggerated claims made by the anti-Chinese campaigners active in turn-of-the-century England. Throughout the twentieth century such films would continue to be made. In 1962, Thomas De Quincey’s book Confessions of an Opium Eater was turned into a film starring Vincent Price as De Quincey. Released first under its original literary title in the USA, it was reissued as Souls for Sale; in Britain it was released as Evils of Chinatown. Depicting Chinese women sold into San Francisco Chinatown slavery, lewd old Chinese men bidding at auction for nubile girls, Tong (Chinese mafia) wars, and the centrepiece of the opium den,
the film reproduces all the standard white imaginary of Chinatown.

Opium consumption was undoubtedly a practice that existed amongst a minority of the Chinese community in Britain, although not as widely as in Chinese populated British colonies of Asia and consumption was confined to transient members of the community such as seamen. Compared to the average British consumption of opium in the nineteenth century, the use of opium in Chinatowns would have been almost nugatory. Nevertheless, its reporting was part of an obligatory representation of Chineseness just as that of the gambling den was. We read in the subsequent paragraph that:

At [the Chinese card game of] fan-tan ..., the Chinaman spends much of his time ashore; and this and opium smoking constitute the most marked of his failings. He is a born gambler ...

In this sentence we see that not only were all Chinese constructed as congenital gamblers and opium-smokers, but that all Chinese were considered to be seafarers. In fact, a number of Chinese who resided temporarily in Liverpool were seamen, but many had boarded ship simply as a means of escape, and many were long-standing residents who had forsaken the sea. Some, like my own grandfather had never been seamen and the ship had simply been the means of transport to the heart of Britain’s empire.

In a sense however, while the opium smoker might be seen as he who had abandoned hope, the gambler was the eternal optimist who lacking a part in any collective hope ‘invested’ (like the millions of lottery players in Britain today) in a hope of individual liberation.

Apart from the 1906 elections and the furore over the putative threat posed by Chinese labourers to white English would-be emigrants to South Africa, the other more immediate concern in Liverpool was the recent Immigration Board decision to allow 31 legal Chinese immigrants to proceed from the Port of London to Liverpool to take up work that Chinese laundry owners had arranged for them in advance. In the same issue of the Liverpool Weekly Courier and on the same page as the above report we read of the anger of the English laundrymen’s representative, a Mr. Arthur J. Tudor, who had organized a petition of three thousand names to exclude the thirty-one Chinese. He declared that: ‘We who are engaged in the laundry business ... are being literally driven out of it by the crowds of Chinamen who are coming to the city.’
At that moment in the twentieth century, it should be noted, the Head Constable reported to the Liverpool City Council inquiry which followed this series of anti-Chinese complaints, that only 356 Chinese people resided in the city, ‘of whom about 224 were resident and 132 transient.’ And indeed, the numbers involved were always inconsequential. But this did not prevent that most common of racist tropes the ‘flood’ and the ‘tide’ being repeatedly applied to the small numbers of Chinese settling in Britain.

Mr. Tudor furthermore invoked the moral decadence of Chinese immigrants, which he and the newspaper refer to as the ‘Yellow Peril.’ Another aspect of the Yellow Peril, the newspaper continues, ‘was that of morality. The code of morals amongst the Chinese, he [Tudor] pointed out was having a serious effect upon the English people amongst whom they came to live in Liverpool.’ Referring to the streets known as Chinatown, Pitt Street and Frederick Street, Tudor claimed that they ‘were now almost infested with Chinese.’ In the same column Mr. Tudor vowed that ‘if the authorities would not help the people of Liverpool to resist the incursion of Chinese into the city the people must help themselves.’ Asked what he meant by that remark, the following reply was given: ‘I mean that we shall force them to leave our city; we shall drive them out, and if a riot results, the Home Secretary must not hold us responsible.’

Of interest here is the use of the word ‘infested’, a trope which proceeds from the association of Chinese with forms of undesirable animal life such as rats, in other words a denial of the humanity of the Chinese. And as with any such vermin, Tudor wishes to ‘drive them out.’

The official Liverpool Council inquiry, in fact, unveiled little that corresponded to the popular representations of the Chinese. The enquiry found that the opium habit prevailed only among seamen ‘as distinguished from resident Chinamen’ and that ‘a large number of the resident Chinamen are not in the habit of using the drug.’ ‘A statement to the effect that the Chinese were in the habit of giving sweets impregnated with opium to children is not confirmed by the evidence.’ That even such a charge should have been made, given the wholesale nineteenth-century English custom of doping infants, is indicative of the collective amnesia that marked the stigmatisation of the Chinese as the instigators of opium consumption.

Yet, when small quantities of opium were discovered in the possession of the rare Chinese consumers the Chineseness of the
practice was always emphasised. One instance, the case of Law Sing, a Liverpool laundryman, was represented by the print media as an example of the dishonesty typifying the Chinese. Here the eating and leisure habits of the Chinaman are not only treated as a curiosity, but also as giving rise to hilarity. Raided under a warrant to search for illicit gaming activities, Law Sing claims the wrapping papers found by the police contained Chinese opiate-based medicine for indigestion caused by the consumption of pork. At the trial Chief Inspector Howard of the Liverpool Police was questioned by advocate Mr. Noel B. Goldie about the peculiar alimentary habits of ‘the Chinaman’:

Did he tell you he had to consult a distinguished Liverpool doctor because he had pork for supper and followed it with pork for breakfast?

No sir.

You agree that if even a Chinaman had pork for supper and pork for breakfast in all probability he would want some medicine?

Not a Chinaman (laughter).

While in Liverpool, the local newspaper could now mock Chinese opium consumption, a formerly widespread British practice now erased from the collective memory, opium use was hardly open to such censorious comment in that other British imperial port, Hong Kong. And indeed, British imperial officials there persisted in defending a very different interpretation of the practice of opium consumption.

In Britain’s so-called Chinese colonies (Hong Kong and Singapore principally), the concerns were different. There was no need for government to pander to ideological concerns, and there was no white labour to appease. Moreover, in addition to the direct interests of capital, which the colonial structure was clearly meant to serve, the imperial apparatus itself was financially dependent on the opium trade. Indeed, the total monopoly maintained by the imperial authorities over the drug industry and its distribution was the financial foundation of the imperial state apparatus. In Hong Kong, while to this day the erroneous impression of laissez faire economy still dominates, government has paid its way, and thus facilitated the advance of capital, via indirect taxation and monopolies on specific goods. In the nineteenth century the major monopoly and source of colonial revenue derived from the opium license; a license to import and distribute was sold to a Chinese...
agent known as the Opium Farmer for a limited number of years, usually a period of three years at a time. My interest here is not so much with the enormous profits generated by the opium trade for the British capitalists who invested in and managed the opium trade, but rather with the direct financial support of the British colonial apparatus furnished by opium taxation. However, on several levels the concerns of the traders and the government are inseparable. First, because the very reasons for the establishment of Hong Kong as a British colony and the Opium Wars that enabled its colonization, were directly the protection and promotion of the trade in opium. Secondly, because those who directly profited from India, the Straits colonies, and Hong Kong (traders such as Jardine, Matheson and others) were also directly involved in the legislative and executive branches of colonial government; Jardine Mathesons and the Swire brothers enjoyed special representation in the Hong Kong government.11

In other words, opium smoking, introduced and spread into China by the British in order to generate profits to cover the purchase of tea (and later that too was grown in British India), was a major source of revenue for the maintenance of the colonial apparatus and thus of the colonial apparatus’s own position and power within the empire.

The importance of opium as state apparatus-financing revenue

‘[T]he opium trade was vital to the solvency of the East India Company – which is to say the solvency of the Indian Government.’12 Although nominally indigenous princes still had executive power, in fact, real regnant power was increasingly in the hands of the Company, or rather with ‘the agents of a limited company trading out of offices in Leadenhall Street. To help finance its governing activities, the Company had in 1773 acquired a monopoly of opium cultivation in Bengal. By 1832, the proceeds of this amounted to one eighteenth of the Indian revenue, and would later in the century rise to one seventh.’13

The larger picture is also addressed by Trocki in his book on opium and the Chinese-populated colony of Singapore: ‘the British agency houses in Singapore were the pioneers of British colonial capitalism. The British came as merchants of opium, and in a very real sense we can best understand the British Empire east of Suez as of 1800 as essentially a drug cartel.’14
Trocki points to the almost pathological dependence of the east of Suez empire on opium revenues and profits, and to the consequent ‘incredibly determined efforts by the Colonial Office, British officials in Malaya, and the British economic community in the colonies to oppose anything that might decrease the opium revenue or otherwise shift the tax burden. Any argument that the imperial system did not rely on opium and was not, in the pathogenic sense, systemically dependent on the drug is simply not in accordance with the facts. This was true not only of Malaya, but also of all India and virtually every place under British control east of Suez.'15

Amongst the Malayan Chinese community the extent of opium use was enormous. Singapore opium traders and government lacking the economically strategic position in the opium trade with China that was occupied by Hong Kong developed a market for the drug among Chinese labourers imported to Malaya. Even after the global depression of 1929, when opium revenues plunged ‘it was estimated that there were over three hundred thousand opium addicts in British Malaya out of a total adult population of three million.’ A Singapore Chinese Anti-Opium Society pamphleteer Chen So Lan, estimated one in four Chinese was an addict.16

In Hong Kong the importance of opium revenue was paramount. Even at the height of abolitionist sentiment, colonial officials staunchly defended opium use, and for good financial reasons. In 1909 in his ‘Memorandum regarding the restriction of opium in Hongkong and China’, the Governor, Lugard (a foreign office Africanist exiled to Hong Kong for his particularly violent approach to colonial government, a man once accused even by Winston Churchill of being a ‘butcher’), stated that ‘the farm is a lucrative business and its acquisition therefore is the object of keen competition and the Government derives from the sale of the Monopoly a sum equal to nearly a fourth of its entire Revenue.’17

In one sense, the anti-abolitionist apologists for opium were right in their claim that ‘forcing’ the Chinese to use opium was no different from the idea that you could force any society to import any commodity. And indeed, in economic terms, opium is no different from any other commodity that a society does not need; the history of capitalist modernity is stuffed full of such commodities. However, once dependence is established opium becomes the perfect commodity. As an addictive commodity, opium was the optimum good.
The economic effects, however extend beyond profits and state-apparatus financing revenues. In a comment that could apply universally to drug use in British Asia and in China, Trocki points out that nothing 'destroyed peasant self-sufficiency faster than the need for silver to feed a habit. Nothing kept a labourer working for a substandard wage more effectively than dependence on a drug.'\textsuperscript{18} Thus the economic effects of opium went beyond considerations of revenue and profit that was derived directly from the drug and affected wage-levels and worker demands, and peasant economies.

Both in England and in the colonies the habit of opium smoking was reinvented as an essentially Chinese habit, and Britain’s part in its promotion and imposition, through the Opium Wars and their aftermath, was minimised or forgotten. This is not to say that the medical profession in England and various clergymen were not vociferous long before the first opium war even, in their denunciation of the opium trade, but their opinion was never dominant and their campaign to suppress opium consumption unsuccessful until the economic returns of the opium trade themselves declined. However, in the colonies the economic and bureaucratic imperatives of maintaining opium-smoking were always paramount. And thus while in England a negative representation of the opium smoking Chinaman was predominant, in Hong Kong officials, governors, chief medical officers and the opium traders themselves were vigorously engaged in the demystification and naturalization of the practice of opium.

It is interesting that in this discourse that maintains the innocuity of opium-smoking a comparison with alcohol is always made. Opium is benign, has beneficial effects; it calms, it sedates. Alcohol, on the other hand, excites and incites aggression and subversion. For Atkinson, the superintendent of the Civil Hospital, alcohol 'was much the greater evil in its results on those who take it to excess'.\textsuperscript{19} Ignoring the fairly recent historical reality of the massive promotion and distribution in China of Indian opium by the British, while reproducing late nineteenth-century scientific racist thinking, Atkinson supports the likelihood of a racial and biological Chinese difference when he suggests that 'there is in the Chinese an hereditary toleration, if not a craving, for opium'. Yet, in the next sentence, in order to explain the difference between Chinese and European habits, Atkinson shifts to a an argument based not so much on race, but rather on economic class, the fact that the Chinese constitute the labouring classes, and are thus more exposed to the environment. Here it
emerges that the Chinese need for opium is due to the weather: 'It is not necessary for Europeans to take opium to withstand the ill effects of the climate, as for one reason we are not so much exposed to the climate as the Chinese from our manner of living, occupations etcetera and alcohol in moderation fulfils the same purpose.' None of this tortuous logic explains why the Chinese may not take alcohol in moderation, and why they must seek their relief in opium.

As Trocki records 'international pressures to end the opium trade had been growing since the 1880s. In 1893, the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade had prevailed on the House of Commons to organize a royal commission to study the opium trade and, along with it, the farming system.'20 However, it would be another twenty years before anti-opium forces would start to prevail.

In October 1893 the ‘Royal Commission on Opium’ solicited answers to a questionnaire (Questions regarding opium consumption and opium revenue in the Colonies and Dependencies of Singapore, Penang and Hongkong). In Hong Kong both the Colonial Surgeon and the Superintendent of the Civil Hospital responded to the questionnaire.21 The survey consisted of seventeen questions prefaced by the request that 'gentlemen who kindly undertake to deal with these questions should answer as many as they can.' The two medical officers answered fifteen of the questions. Neither 'gentleman' responded to the sixteenth question: 'Is there among the Asiatic race in your Colony a feeling of hostility against England for allowing opium to be exported from India? If so, how does that feeling display itself.' However, the Colonial Surgeon Ayres was particularly virulent in denying the deleterious effects of opium smoking. Commenting on what many European employers took to be the after-effects of opium smoking, Ayres insisted; 'These are the effects among the Chinese of a night in a brothel and over-copulation, but neither the servant nor his friends, the other servants, will tell the cause.'

It was only in 1943, by which time Japanese forces in any case occupied much of British colonial territory in East and Southeast Asia, that the British government, conforming to international political and economic developments, prohibited opium-smoking. The stereotype image of the opium-smoking Chinaman is not so easily eliminated, however, and the representation persists and continues to be reproduced to this day in the 'western' imaginary of China and Chineseness.
Chinese mind and Chinese language: infantile decrepitude

Closely related to the physical characteristics of the Chinese constructed and reproduced in the representation of opium consumption was the supposed biologically determined mental condition of the Chinese. As in the discourse on opium consumption which reveals bifurcated and almost incommensurate interpretations of Chinese opium practices in Britain on the one hand and in the colonies 'East of Suez' on the other, the discourse on mental health also seems to be contradictory. The Chinese being represented both as wily, scheming and capable of the most intricate machinations, and as degenerate, unbalanced, demented and mentally deficient. There are, for instance, numerous examples in popular discursive texts, most famously Sax Rohmer’s Fu-Manchu novels, of the ‘apparent’ serenity and calm of the Chinese under which is concealed a wild, uncontrollable, deranged and passionate nature.

The stage of development of the Chinese mind in scientific racist discourse is also an important element of the overall representation of the Chinese mental state. In 1926, the French ‘man of science’ Dr. A. Legendre writing in the popular weekly newspaper Illustration repeated many of the discursive elements commonly reproduced in Europe to represent the mental capacities of the Chinese:

To what then should this deficiency in the Chinese brain be attributed? Without doubt to the catastrophic reaction of this mass of negroids and métis – the Yellow – forming the majority of the population and whose blood, by dint of a widely practiced polygamy, impregnated the elite, originally of white race.22

Legendre is attached to widely current late nineteenth-century scientific racist theories that were deeply invested in a hierarchisation of races and which accounted for racial degeneracy in terms of the ‘impregnation’ by the non-white of pure national bodies. Thus, Chinese or ‘yellow’ civilization can be discounted, and Chinese intelligence with it:

There is, and there has never been, a yellow civilization, no more than there has been a negro civilization. The white race alone, constituted of Aryans and Semites, has been, in the history of peoples, a ferment of intelligence and activity .... The Yellow is only a métis of conquering whites and negroids.23
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Thus, in a discursive turn that seems to presage late twentieth-century relativist positions on human rights in Asia, Legendre claims it is 'destabilizing' to introduce the biologically, mentally immature, infantile Chinese to notions of autonomy and democracy:

... the teaching of certain democratic doctrines [in China is] detestable to, detrimental for peoples still closer to childhood than maturity. Our political and social concepts, in undiluted doses, destabilizes the Asiatic who has not yet achieved the biological age when their assimilation could be real and productive.24

And finally, 'the Chinese' is represented as mentally incapable of organizing an economy: 'This incapacity of the Chinese to organize in the economic field is surely a characteristic of a biological nature. It reveals a retarded evolution due to organic and racial deficiency.'25 The idea that 'the Chinese' is congenitally incapable of running an economy was a notion that underpinned colonialist justificatory discourse for the white colonial presence in Asia and Africa. But this notion has reverberations to this day, and doubtless has constituted the sub-text of the West's late twentieth-century discourse of the Asian 'economic miracle', for people incapable of advanced economic organization, capitalist development can only be understood as miraculous.

Legendre, like many other Europeans and Americans in twentieth-century writing on Chineseness, relied on the narrative of biological and mental difference established by an American missionary named Arthur H. Smith whose monograph Chinese Characteristics would become a standard work of reference for those seeking to reproduced the discourse of Chinese difference.26

As I have noted previously, the Chinese language has always been easily capable of reification as an indicator of total difference, of the hidden and the impenetrable. The Chinese language was represented as a mysterious writing system as yet undeciphered, a code which only Western scientific enquiry could break. American philologist, Stephen Pearl Andrews, wrote a book in the mid-nineteenth century entitled Discoveries In China: On The Symbolism Of The Primitive Character Of The Chinese System Of Writing. The New York newspaper, The Daily Tribune, credited Andrews with the 'solution of the mystery of Chinese writing.'27 Reified, the Chinese language is represented as concealed, and thus discoverable, solvable like a Chinese puzzle:
The composition of the characters offers a sort of a puzzle and a charm equal to a game or a child's riddle book, so that the work [by Andrews] cannot fail to attract many readers as an object of amusement ...  

As we shall see in the discussion of pantomime below, the Chinese language still is a reified source of amusement, and the idea of the Chinese language as odd, quirky, and infantile has entered into the Western cultural imaginary. For the Times correspondent Cooke, writing in the mid nineteenth century the ‘Chinese language is the most intricate, cumbrous, and unwieldy vehicle of thought that ever obtained among any people.’

For Holcombe, at the end of the nineteenth century, it was the nature of Chinese that excluded the outsider:

A barrier far more serious than the Great Wall to any intimate acquaintance with the Chinese is found in their language. It is the oldest spoken language now existent on the earth, has been the mother tongue of a far larger number of human beings than any other either in the past or present, and, so far as can be determined, has undergone no serious changes either in his construction or written form since it came into existence.

While seeming to be impressed by the monumental qualities of the language (‘the Great Wall’, ‘oldest spoken language’, ‘the mother tongue of an enormous number of human beings’), the writer reinscribes the idea of the language as conservative and unchanging. The historical reality is far more complex. There is first the distinction between the elite literary language, wenyan (classical or pre-modern Chinese) and the vernacular language. Wenyan, although a ‘dead’ language, had like Latin undergone multiple stylistic and other changes over its millennia-long history. As for the vernacular, it was, like any other language, in a constant state of evolution in both its written and spoken forms. The numerous dialects which existed and exist in Chinese also go unmentioned by this author.

Holcombe goes on to reproduce another shibboleth concerning the non-existence of scientific thought and the incapacity of the language to express scientific ideas:

While the Chinese tongue discloses various line of thought, delicate turns of speech and, so to speak, accurate shades of idea unknown in England, there are many subjects in which the language is totally devoid of words, many ideas for which there are
no forms of expression, simply because those ideas have never entered a Chinese head. In the whole range of scientific language, for example, and the simpler terms and phrases used in our textbooks in common schools, no equivalent expressions are found in Chinese, because the sciences and even the simpler studies are unknown to them.31

The ‘western sciences’ were, in fact, not unknown to China, and China has its own extremely long scientific history, witness the enormous investment of time and labour necessary to the production of the Cambridge scientist Joseph Needham’s encyclopedic multi-volume work, Science and Civilization in China. Chinese science may not have always posed the same questions in the same ways as European had, but science and technology did not go neglected by the ‘Chinese head’.

It was Arthur Smith writing in 1890 who represented as tightly imbricated the mental capacities of the Chinese with the characteristics of the Chinese language. Smith claimed that the Chinese language was essentially responsible for rendering the Chinese stupid:

We are not about to complain that the Chinese language cannot be made to convey human thought, nor that there are wide ranges of human thought which it is difficult or impossible to render intelligible in the Chinese language (though this appears to be a truth), but only to insist that such language, so constructed, invites to ‘intellectual turbidity’, as the incandescent heats of summer gently woo to afternoon repose.32

The Chinese, Smith claims, have enormous difficulty in understanding a linguistic message, a difficulty attributed to a lack of intellectual capacity:

He does not understand, because he does not expect to understand, and it takes him an appreciable time to get such intellectual forces as he has, into a position to be used at all. His mind is like a rusty old smooth-bore cannon mounted on an old decrepit carriage.33

Notice here how the habitual Orientalist charge of decadence and senility of the Chinese mind is reproduced in the allusion to a ‘decrepit old carriage’. But not only can the Chinese not grasp enlightened, modern, Western speech, neither can the Chinese talk sense: ‘Nothing is more common in conversation with an educated Chinese, than to experience extreme difficulty in ascertaining what he is talking about.’34
Smith was enormously influential upon writers in Europe, and numerous were those who popularized and disseminated his ideas on Chineseness. In a book entitled *Chine et Chinois d’aujourd’hui, le nouveau péris jaune* [China and Chinese today: the new yellow peril] (1926) d’Auxion de Ruffe reproduces Smith’s discourse on the Chinese language and what he termed ‘intellectual torpor’. At the beginning of the book is reproduced a photograph with the following legend: ‘Xenophobic Chinese student type: His coat bears inscriptions such as ‘Give Back the Concessions! Down With the English’ etc. All the signs of mental deficiency can be noticed on this physiognomy’.

Such a description was in keeping with the anthropological mode of categorizing ‘types’ that was in vogue until World War Two. The English edition of d’Auxion de Ruffe’s work appeared in 1928 with the title *Is China Mad?*

Among the more celebrated disciples of the Reverend Smith was Paul Claudel who writes that the Chinese language is the ‘main source of that ‘intellectual torpor’ to which the Reverend Smith devotes several very amusing and very correct pages’.

Claudel also discerns a connection between Chinese syntax and that other ‘Chinese characteristic’ foregrounded by Orientalists and scientific racists, a trait that has entered into the Western popular imaginary, that of ‘mercantilism’, the universally Chinese desire for material profit. For Claudel the love of profit ‘is the strongest sentiment in the Chinese heart’, the Chinese is instinctively ‘above all a “profit-seeker” [gagneur], a trader [marchand]’:

One can see an index of this mercantile instinct in the way questions are formed in the Chinese language in which the question consists of an affirmative followed immediately by a negative: You have – you haven’t – you are – you aren’t – like a trader who offers the various objects on his inventory, leaving the buyer to choose.

The Chinese then was marked as different in terms of intelligence and the capacity to use language logically.

While Claudel concludes that the Chinese language betrays the mercantile propensities of the Chinese character, others writing without the slightest modicum of linguistic analytical prowess, frequently discerned in the language an instantiation of the infantile nature of the Chinese mind. Writing in the second decade of the twentieth century Johnston describes the language thus:
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When a baby begins to talk, he can only say little words - ‘ta’ for ‘thank you’; ‘mo’ for ‘more’. He sometimes says the same sound twice to make a word, as ‘ma-ma’, ‘pa-pa’, ‘ta-ta’. The Chinese language is all of short words of one syllable, and they, too, often repeat the same sound. Learned men say that this simple language is like the primitive talk of a baby race.39

The implication here is that the Chinese ‘as a race’ have not grown up. They have remained at the stage of an infant. Linguistically they resemble toddlers, and their mind must inevitably be incapable of adaptation to adult thought processes. In a paragraph that reproduces two scientific racist charges, the innate childishness of the Chinese coupled with the Chinese society’s decrepitude, Johnston goes on to attribute the motive for this perceived lack of linguistic development to China’s distance from the rest of the world:

Does it seem strange that so old a people as the Chinese should have a baby language? Baby learns as he grows older to use longer words and more words by hearing all the people round use them. China was too much alone to hear the languages of other nations, and so it kept on using its first language, while other nations have forgotten or altered theirs.40

Once again China’s distance from Europe and China’s ‘isolation’ underline China’s immense ‘difference’. In the next section, I shall discuss how this discourse of ‘difference’ was, and still is, represented and exploited in other forms of media and in popularly consumed entertainment.

Oh, Mr. Wu, What Shall I Do?: ‘Chinese fourths’, Western triads, and the laundryman in the British popular cultural imaginary

While the Chinese in China may have been constructed as the ‘instinctual’ profit-seeking trader, in Europe and the United States the Chinese was always the ‘laundryman’ who frequently indulged in the ‘Chinese’ vices of opium-smoking, illicit sexual intercourse, and gambling. But the major trope found in the comic discourses of both the mid twentieth-century novelty song and the ‘tradition’ of British pantomime, was of the Chinaman not as an distant agent of evil, but rather the Chinaman who ran the laundry on Britain’s main streets, the lowly laundryman marked by minor vices, the Chinaman who was the butt of the music-hall joke.
There is a certain irony in the celebration of the Chinese as a cleaner of laundry. The Chinaman, after all, has been long discursively configured as 'dirty'. Indeed, the notion that the Chinese, the 'Oriental', and more generally the non-anglo-saxon, is 'naturally' unclean has been ingrained in the white popular imaginary, and many a Chinese immigrant child over the past 100 years has had to endure the playground chant:

Chinese
Japanese
Dirty knees

The allusion to dirt in this ditty is not aleatory. The construction of the Other, the poor, the manual worker, the immigrant, and within those categories and as a discreet category, 'woman' as dirty, unhygienic, infected, is well documented. However, such contradictions are common to discourses of race and class. The immigrant, the colonized, the worker is lazy but still produces the wealth, he is dirty but still produces cleanliness.

The figure of the Chinese laundryman became fixed in the American and European imaginaries from the late nineteenth century onwards. But even after the passing of the laundry with the advent of the washing machine, the trope of the Chinese laundryman has remained a feature of popular cultural representation, and thus also a seemingly unerasable figure in the white popular imaginary.

As mentioned previously, in England at the beginning of the twentieth century the issue of Chinese laundries displacing 'English' laundries was a source of major debate within the British labour movement and was integrated into the 1906 election campaign issue of the use of Chinese labour in the British Transvaal, South Africa. The laundry was an easy and visible target both during the election campaign of 1906 and, in the economic depression that followed the First World War, during the race riots of 1919. The laundry like the restaurant and take-away outlets in contemporary European and American society put the Chinese physically in the midst of the white community, and away from the relative protection of Chinatowns. As the most immediate locus of Chinese presence the laundry often attracted racist attacks. Similarly the laundry business was the object in 1906 of a white laundry owners' boycott in protest at the arrival of a couple of dozen Chinese workers destined for British laundries. What was,
in fact, in question was the cheaper and more efficient service offered by Chinese laundries prepared to accept narrower margins of profit.

In the cartoon accompanying the Liverpool Weekly Courier's report on the boycott, a pigtailed 'Chinaman', stands idly on the doorstep of the 'Go Bang' laundry. The caption reads 'Go Bang (boycotted): Dese Liverpool folk have grown vellly dirty all of a quick!' The name of the laundry accords with English perceptions of the supposed monosyllabic aural quality of the Chinese language, and provides (as in many a music-hall joke) the basis for punning. Here, for instance, 'Go bang' can be glossed as 'go bust', go bankrupt. A sign in the window of the laundry reads: ONLY MOONLIGHT SOAP USED HERE,' alluding both to the allegedly illegally employed workers used in Chinese laundries, and to 'Sunlight' soap, a popular brand of soap made by Lever Brothers at nearby Port Sunlight.

As we saw in the instance of Law Sing, the 'Chinaman' with the 'propensity for pork', laundries were also suspected of being 'fronts' or 'covers' for illicit activities, as establishments that masked the Chinese vices and habits of indulgence in gambling, opium and sexual intercourse with white women.

George Formby, also known by the sobriquets 'the Emperor of Lancashire' and 'Mr. Ukulele', a northern English popular singer and ukulele player of working class origins who for decades from the 1920s to the 1950s was the most popular English entertainer in British social life, both satirised and popularised the Chinese laundryman. Formby's Chinaman was called Mr. Wu and became celebrated in the song 'Chinese Laundry Blues.' Mr. Wu entered the popular cultural imaginary of twentieth-century Britain as the comic stereotype of the Chinaman. Formby, who had secured a contract with the Decca recording company in June 1932, recorded 'Chinese Laundry Blues' with Jack Hylton and his band.

Just as the Chinese language is represented in popular cultural discourse as a marker of extensive difference and separation, similarly Chinese music is distinguished as being totally alien to the Western musical tradition. Thus, in Formby's 'Chinese' songs, apart from the narrative recounted by the lyrics, the Chineseness of Mr. Wu and his milieu is indicated by a standard musical trope, the use of 'Chinese fourths'. 'Chinese fourths' refer to the arrangement of notes representing what was understood by late nineteenth-century 'Western' musicians to be the typical traits and sound of Chinese music.
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To the Western-trained musical ear Chinese music lacked what was then understood as the basis of Western music musical harmony, the triad. ‘Chinese fourths’ constitute a non-triadic sound, and thus Chinese Otherness may be represented by a lack or absence of Western tonal, triadic, harmony. Chineseness is thus once more represented by a negativity.

The first song narrative in which Mr. Wu appears, ‘Chinese laundry Blues’ reproduces several metaphors already common to the representation of the Chinese in Britain. Formby’s songs were always marked by a coy allusion to titillating images such as ladies’ undergarments, and the Chinaman’s reputation for womanizing, for having an unusually voracious sexual appetite, was easily recuperable to Formby’s use of slightly risqué innuendo. For instance the lines ‘Now Mr. Wu he’s got a naughty eye that flickers/You ought to see it wobble when he’s ironing ladies’ blouses’, where the expected rhyming word is ‘knickers’. Even more outre are the lines ‘Now Mr. Wu he’s got a laundry kind of tricky/He starched me shirt and collars but he never touched me waistcoat’, in which ‘waistcoat’ presumably stands for ‘dicky’.

Mr Wu has become enamoured of ‘a Chinese girl and his laundry’s all gone wrong’, ‘My vest is so short it won’t fit my little brother/And my new Sunday shirt has got a perforated rudder’. In other words, the song lyrics point to white British, especially middle-class, dependence on the Chinese laundry in the 1930s, a moment when domestic servants had become rare, and the washing machine was not yet in people’s homes. So, ‘Oh Mr. Wu what shall I do’ without your laundry-cleaning services?

Subsequently Mr. Wu was emancipated from the laundry in the song ‘Mr. Wu’s a Window-Cleaner Now’, to indulge his taste for women in the occupation of window-cleaner. The subject matter of the song, a window-cleaning Chinese facilitated a combination of a series of music-hall ‘gags’ about Chineseness and Formby’s stock-in-trade coy jokes about ladies’ underwear and semi-naked women – the sight of which was supposed to constitute one of the privileges of window-cleaning.

Formby had previously had a success with his chart hit ‘When I’m Cleaning Windows’, and ‘Mr. Wu’s a Window-Cleaner Now’ was perhaps intended to replicate and recuperate the success of the proven profitable songs which had depended on the apparently comic qualities of window-cleaning and Chineseness. The song was featured in Ealing Studios’ first film to address directly the Second World War, Let George Do It, directed by Marcel Varnel in 1940.
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The following bar of music

![Musical notation]

recurs throughout ‘Mr. Wu’s a Window Cleaner Now’ and was, and continues to be, common to many musical representations of Chineseness in film soundtracks. It is also notable that the liberally sprinkled ‘Chinese fourths’ in this song are lent a distinct percussive quality; the notation marking the notes as being played staccato. Moreover, ‘Mr. Wu’s a Window Cleaner Now’ is musically prefaced by the sound of the banging of a ‘Chinese’ gong. The foregrounding of percussion here corresponds to the impression reproduced in the Western musical imaginary that music from ‘the East’ is dominated by percussion.

As to the representation of Mr. Wu’s physical appearance, the song reproduces all the clichés pertaining to the ‘typical’ Chinese physique. Mr. Wu is depicted as ‘naturally’, biologically, myopic and thus with a ‘hi-dee-hi and a won-long too’, he ‘had his eyesight tested’. As a result of his window-cleaning, a career that allows him to peer into women’s apartments, ‘his eyesight’s getting better.’ However, this activity results in a deterioration in another supposedly biologically determined feature since, as a result of flattening his face against window panes better to glimpse women in their underwear, his already flat nose ‘is getting flatter’. Moreover, Mr. Wu’s sexual libido excited by his voyeurism leads him to make excessive demands on his ‘little Chinese wifey’: ‘Tearing her silk stockings her husband makes her sadder/All day long he wants to keep on running up the ladder.’

But with the coming of the Second World War the representation of the Chinaman became more positive. After successive and partially successful attempts to erase Chinatown and the Chinese from Britain’s soil, Chinese seamen suddenly became indispensable to the allied war effort. In the First World War the Chinese labourers had dug the trenches, now they were to man the merchant ships, provide the menial labour on Royal Navy vessels, and thus keep open the shipping lanes of the world.46

George Formby similarly improved the status of his fictitious Chinese. Formby’s Chinaman was even elevated beyond the level of a lowly seaman, when Mr. Wu enlists in the Royal Air Force. Of
course, in the song ‘Mr. Wu in the Air Force’, as he forsakes the
laundry for the skies, Mr. Wu is still a figure of fun: ‘Packing his
laundry bag he said bye-bye/The RAF he went with glee/He said
“Please you take me!”’

Again there is a reference here to the innate inability of the Chinese
to master the English language; here Mr. Wu can still only speak
Pidgin. In subsequent lines, the listener hears that: ‘Our language so
confuses him he gets in a mix/When ordered on parade one day gosh
what a fix/Instead of wearing camouflage he wore cammy knicks.’

The reference to women’s underwear also reminds the audience
not to forget that Mr. Wu is by nature and profession a laundry­
man more used to ironing undergarments than dropping bombs,
but in times of national emergency with that other Asian evil, the
Japanese, to defeat, all skills and bodies are redeployable: ‘still his
laundry training is handy perhaps/He used to stiffen collars now he
stiffening the Japs.’

Air force pilots were in the habit of painting personalized
insignia on their aircraft and Mr. Wu is no exception, and yet Mr.
Wu’s Chineseness has to be marked by the trappings of the laundry
with which Chineseness in England has been made synonymous:
‘His coat of arms are painted rather tricky/It’s two stiff collars and
a shirt that’s got no elbow.’

Given the reputation of the RAF’s Brylcreem boys as ‘ladies’
men’ Mr. Wu is for once not out of step as he ‘chases women all
day long and gives ’em no rest’ in indulging his sex drive.

Mr. Wu was doubtless a lucrative invention for Formby, the
song-writers and the recording company. But the impact of Mr. Wu
has spilt over beyond the Formby years and become encrusted onto
the persistent British image of the Chinaman.

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Neither the character nor the story of Aladdin is usually associated
with Chinese laundries these days, but rather with the Walt Disney
Technicolor mega-hit cartoon movie. There is however one popu­
lar cultural medium in which Aladdin is still a ‘Chinaman’, and
that is in the traditional British pantomime. Its present-day
aficionados describe its history in celebratory prose:

Pantomime was, at one point, a short piece put on after the
evening’s main performance, and consisted largely of acrobatic
tricks and knock-about humour. The first known mention of
pantomime in Glasgow was in 1751 with the presentation of *Harlequin Pantomime* or the *Dutchman Bitt* at Burrell's Hall near the Cathedral. Aladdin was produced at the Theatre Royal in Queen Street in 1814, although it was described as a melodrama. By 1866 however the Theatre Royal, Dunlop Street billed Aladdin as the 'gorgeous pantomime.' The poster for that show uses Chinese figures for the letters of the title, and describes it as 'a most Magnificently Magnumptious Processional Production, Profusely Produced and Peculiarly Pretty.'

The story of *Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp* first appears in nineteenth-century European translations of *One Thousand and One Nights* or *One Thousand Tales.* There had never been a thousand tales, and *Aladdin* was one of those stories added to the corpus to assuage the literal-mindedness of bourgeois Europe.

Aladdin is the offspring of a deceased Chinese tailor and a poor widow. In a type of exoticist fusion, an African magician uses Aladdin to enter a cave to retrieve a lamp. But Aladdin uses the powers of the lamp to become wealthy and marries the Sultan's daughter, Bedr-el-Budur, now known in the pantomime as Balroubador.

The first pantomime performance of *Aladdin* took place at London's Covent Garden in 1788, and the version that is performed today was first staged at the Strand Theatre, London in 1861, when Aladdin's mother became known as Widow Twankey; Twankey was the brand name of a Chinese green tea popular in Britain in the nineteenth century.

Pantomime is celebrated as a very British form of entertainment, as family entertainment. However, sadly much of the humour is based on sexist and racist innuendo, and the reason for pantomime's endurance has probably more to do with the economic necessity of theatres needing to survive through what would otherwise be the dead season of mid-winter by providing popular non-elite entertainment; pantomimes are performed through December and January, thus coinciding with the festive season and school holidays.

Pantomime holds a special place in the hearts of many people connected with the British stage. It is often a child's first experience of the theatre, and can draw in crowds who would not normally go to see a play or show at any other time of the year. People go to be entertained, to feel the 'magic' of live performance, secure in the knowledge that it will be bright and boisterous, with glitzy and fantastical costumes and sets, lively
music and dancing, romance, adventure, and jokes galore. It is reassuringly traditional with the same titles appearing throughout the years, and yet at the same time each pantomime is different, features television personalities, can make fun of current affairs and unpopular politicians of the day; in short the pantomime is traditional while deploying topical socio-cultural allusions. However, the populist ideology underpinning the pantomime also operates so as to socialize children, a major part of the audience, into the masculinist, and racist stereotypes of the popular British imaginary.

In a sort of participatory practice of call and response, each time the main pantomime character (leading man or woman) appears, the children in the audience are supposed to respond to his call. The call and response are established by the actor or actress early in the performance.

In the Liverpool Royal Court Theatre 1997–98 pantomime version of this tale from One Thousand and One Nights, Aladdin works in a laundry in Peking. Aladdin’s call is ‘Ah-so, kids’. The children’s response: ‘Ah-so, Aladdin.’ The ‘humour’ underlying this particular call and response is based on the homophony between the supposed Chinese, Japanese, ‘oriental’ at any rate, expletive and the English profanity ‘arse hole.’

Further in the category of derogatory linguistic usage, we find that Widow Twankey, Aladdin’s mother, addresses her son as ‘Oriental Oik’. Mrs. Twankey runs a combined laundry and take-away restaurant, thus accommodating early and late twentieth century perceptions of typical Chinese occupations. The establishment is called ‘Mrs Twankey’s Wash n’Nosh’.

Many of the jokes are puns on the popularly imagined characteristics of the Chinese language. The scenery has shop signs that read ‘Lee Kee Plumber’ (leakey plumber) and ‘Tet-Lee Teashop’ (a reference to a brand of tea popular in Britain, Tetley tea). One shop is lamely labelled ‘Kung-Fu’.

The police constable, P.C. Noodle, wears a uniform displaying not Chinese writing, but Japanese hiragana script, as do the chorus children’s costumes. Japanese has evidently been mistaken by the set and costume designers for Chinese, but in any case supplies the requisite aura of the Oriental and indecipherable. The stage curtain is intended to represent a Beijing street. Chinese lanterns are painted on it, and on the lanterns are inscribed representations of Chinese writing much of which does not correspond to any real Chinese characters.
The script-writers notions of the spoken Chinese language are occasionally represented by 'stage' Chinese accents, as when Aladdin in disguise declares 'My name is One Hung Low'. Mrs. Wong's telephone number is mis-dialled, it is the 'Wong number'. Mrs. Wong is described as the 'woman with more chins (Chins) than the Peking phone directory'. There is even an innovative item of rhyming slang: 'I'm prawn crackered' which rhymes with 'knackered' meaning 'worn out'.

At the level of visual appearance, all the adult white 'chorus girls', the female dancers, appear in 'Chinese' tunics with no skirts or pants, and all wear long black wigs. At a most rudimentary level, they correspond to male fantasies of available and seductive Chinese women. In the tradition of the Orientalist confusion in which Aladdin was invented, later in the performance the chorus girls appear against a backdrop of Japan's Mount Fuji wearing Japanese kimonos, as does the Princess Balroubador who has now become Chinese, as has the Sultan who is now the Emperor of China.

There seems to be a tradition of pantomime's producers indulging in the incongruous. Just as in the Royal Court 1997 production the latest Spice Girls song (performed by a local copy-cat children's group, the Spice Kids) is reproduced, at the beginning of the twentieth century in Scotland the latest popular songs were featured in the contemporary production of Aladdin. The Scottish comedian Harry Lauder played 'Roderick MacSwankey', the young Glasgow boy apprenticed to the Wicked Magician in Aladdin, at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow in 1905. He performed several songs in the show, but it is recorded that the 'hit' of the evening was his new song, 'I Love a Lassie'. Six years later he had another success in pantomime with the song 'Roamin' in the Gloaming'.

It seems that it was never problematic for pantomime's producers to incorporate a Scottish 'flavour' into the scenario. A Punch cartoon from the 1935 Almanack makes a wry comment on this practice. It is a typical pantomime Chinese street scene, except that one of the Chinamen is playing the bagpipes, and the caption reads:

Librettist: But dash it, you can't introduce a Scotch song into a Chinese street scene!

Producer: Perfectly simple dear boy. You just make Aladdin say 'Although I am only a chinaman, there are times when I yearn for
As to the musical accompaniment, the usual aural representations of Chineseness, 'the Chinese fourths' are deployed. In addition, the audience is treated to any popular song that refers to China and Chineseness. Thus, the seemingly Slavic early 1980s hit-song 'Rasputin' is performed with the line 'brightly coloured dragons drinking Chinese tea' emphasised. There is a rendering of George Formby's 'Chinese Laundry Blues'; even sixty-five years after George Formby first had a hit with 'Chinese Laundry Blues' no mimicry of Chineseness would resonate with a British pantomime audience without it.

Socialized into English society, the author of this present work can never hear the name Wu without George Formby's song springing to mind; such is the power of the popular cultural imaginary.

In its ability to deploy the visual, verbal and musical in a comic ensemble, the popular cultural imaginary force of the pantomime rivals that of the television and the cinema. However, in its ability to legitimize itself with the aura of community and populism it undoubtedly surpasses the cinematic and the televisual in its 'innocent' yet authoritative sway over its young spectators and auditors, and in its ability to reinscribe myths and tropes in the social imaginary of the child, the pantomime remains extremely powerful.

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I saw that performance of Aladdin towards the very end of 1997. Earlier in the day I had noticed in Blackwell's bookshop a new omnibus reprint of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu stories. On the front and back covers appeared a citation credited to Time Out's Christopher Fowler, declaring that the reprint had made 'his heart sing' and hoping new generations would discover the joys of reading about the evil Oriental Fu-Manchu.

Evidently, even at the very end of the twentieth century British popular culture persists in its crude, simplistic representation of the Chinese. Moreover, such perceptions and clichés have become firmly lodged in the minds of the British public. But it is not just the popular cultural media which are responsible for the pervasive portrayal of the Chinese in this supposedly satirical vein. Later that same evening, after visiting the bookshop and attending the pantomime, I tuned into BBC Radio 4. It was the special end of the year edition of the news quiz programme, and there emanating
from the airwaves of the most eminent of radio stations, I heard yet another Chinese joke trading on the monosyllabism, the ‘difference,’ of Chinese names. The joke focussed on the recent 1997 Hong Kong stock exchange crash. A spoof news item claimed that a correspondent reported never having seen chins so low on the floor of the stock exchange, but then Chin So Low stood up, and said it was not the first time he had fallen down.

So much for the facile comedy. Britain’s quality newspapers also paid attention to Hong Kong and the Asian economic collapse at the end of the year. It coincided with another major news item, avian ‘flu or bird influenza which led to the slaughter of Hong Kong’s entire chicken population. I noticed that the two news stories, the stock market collapse and the chicken ‘flu, gradually became enmeshed the one with the other. Asian stock troubles were already being described as a sort of transmitted ‘contagion,’ and then came the chicken ‘flu. Suddenly contagion was spreading everywhere. The West, it seemed, was again under threat from the East. In addition to the menace of poisonous foodstuffs, the Asian economic miracle had now succumbed to a deadly ‘virus.’ When capitalism in Asia succeeds (despite the mythic character faults of the Chinese, and the Oriental in general) the experts describe it as a ‘miracle’, and when economies fails, as they frequently do under capitalism, they talk in terms of fearsome, irresistible, pandemic disease: a new ‘Yellow Peril.’

In 2001, foot and mouth disease broke out in Britain and led to an economic and environmental catastrophe. In late March, Ministry of Agriculture officials advanced the theory that meat from Chinese restaurants had contaminated pigswill and caused the outbreak. The popular press immediately reacted against this new Oriental menace. The Mirror newspaper (28 March 2001) ran the headline ‘SHEEP AND SOW SAUCE’ along with a colour photograph of a sweet and sour pork dish; the paper also printed pictures of dried meat originating from China. The Chinese community’s restaurant and takeaway trade suffered particularly from these spectacular claims, despite the government’s hasty retraction of the ‘Chinese theory’. Much more serious, however, was the re-entrenchment of the perception of China and people and things Chinese as an evil foreign menace.

And so, as we enter the twentieth-first century, nineteenth-century anti-Chinese racist discourse remains common currency in Britain’s media, culture and collective imaginary.
Over the past two decades consumer capitalism and market economics have been so integrally embedded in China’s socioeconomy that today Western market-analysts complain that China has a much less interventionist economy than Hong Kong’s. Indeed, while commentators are now admitting that the representation of Hong Kong’s economy as the concretization of the spirit of free enterprise is and always has been a myth, consumerism in China, on the other hand, is a material reality.

The advent of consumerist, spectacular capitalism to China has left the Chinese state machine intact and even emboldened. While Chinese citizens have been inducted into consumerism, the Chinese state and its ideology have learned well the lessons of spectacular self-representation in late twentieth-century consumer capitalist culture. In the two sections that follow two kinds of televisual text are discussed: the first a Chinese soap from the early 1990s illustrates how Chinese official cultural producers have deployed television to introduce the Chinese spectator-consumer to the mores and modalities of consumption and everyday capitalism. The second text I discuss reveals the extent to which the potentially subversive redeployment of Maoist and nationalist iconography has now been successfully reined in to be displaced by a sophisticated reproduction of nationalist ideology resituated in the new consumerism of emerging middle-class urban China.

At the conclusion of the twentieth century what has emerged in China is a new capitalist nationalist state underpinned by a negotiated accommodation with, and integration of, global capitalism.
Soap, Cola and 555: Cultural imperialism in Chinese consumed televisual production

‘Cultural imperialism,’ wrote Herbert Schiller, is ‘the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system.’ This has long been a useful definition, and yet cultural imperialism is not necessarily and solely, as women and other minorities know too well, imposed from outside the nation; it also emanates from dominant formations within the nation.

There have been a number of recent works devoted to defining and mapping cultural imperialism, but here I prefer the theory of the French cultural and political theorist Guy Debord, whose most useful contribution to critical thinking about modernity has been his elaboration of the theory of the ‘society of the spectacle’ and of the power relations sustained by it.

Debord has described as ‘concentrated’ spectacular power that ideology which is ‘condensed around a dictatorial personality;’ a form of power that had ‘accomplished the totalitarian counter-revolution, fascist as well as Stalinist.’ The other form of spectacular power, the ‘diffuse’ was that which drove wage-earners to use their ‘freedom of choice’ to purchase the array of commodities available in post World War Two consumer societies. Debord arrived at these theorized conclusions in 1967. Twenty years later he discerned the emergence of a third and dominant form of spectacular power which would ultimately replace the other forms, a combination of the two based on ‘the general victory of the form which had showed itself stronger: the diffuse. This is the integrated spectacle, which has since tended to impose itself globally.’ Nowhere has that integration of the two forms of the spectacle been more thoroughgoing than in the China of the last decade or so. While capitalist practices have been steadily entrenched in a society where there have never been bourgeois forms of democracy, dictatorial practices have continued to thrive, so that market capitalism and its supposed ‘freedom of choice’ are limited by the ideological needs of the state.

For instance, in October and November of 1993, the Chinese authorities implemented a range of censorship measures aimed at controlling distribution of information and cultural products and
practices. The official New China news agency, Xinhua, announced the government’s intention to close illegal dance halls, video game parlours and other types of entertainment categorized as harmful to ‘the body and mind of the people.’ Controls on publishing were also reinforced and publishing houses were closed down for printing ‘anti-government’ books. Xinhua claimed that ‘some of the profit-oriented entertainment facilities’ had been used as ‘gambling dens, brothels and for showing pornographic videotapes,’ and that pornographic shots had been inserted into video games ‘to corrupt young game lovers.’ Meanwhile, paradoxically many dance and karaoke halls are owned by the state’s own government offices or the army.

In the last decade of the twentieth century the Chinese authorities have had to attempt to extend their control over an exploding domain of consumer products and services. In October 1993, the government banned the use of unauthorized satellite dishes, estimated to number in the millions, in an attempt to prevent reception of direct satellite broadcasts from Hong Kong and elsewhere. Subsequently invoking Proclamation 129 the authorities closed down several dish manufacturers. Yet despite these measures several months later it was estimated that 30 million of the 49 million viewers of Rupert Murdoch’s Hong Kong-based Star TV were constituted by Chinese living in the PRC. In order to maintain and expand that audience, Murdoch announced in March 1994 that Star TV would cease to carry BBC World Service television news, a channel the Chinese authorities find odious. In the same month Singapore businessman Robert Chua announced an all-Mandarin station to be beamed from a mainland and overseas Chinese-owned satellite Apstar-1, with a ‘footprint’ (the area within which a satellite signal may be received) ‘stretching from Mongolia to Indonesia and Xinjiang in western China; the channel ‘planned to be acceptable to Chinese authorities.’

As early as November 1993 the Chinese authorities recognized the importance of controlling new forms of telecommunication by declaring a state monopoly over mobile telephones, pagers, radio and television stations; at the time there were just 460,000 mobile telephone subscribers and 6 million radio pager users in mainland China. Six years later there were already 60 million mobile telephones in use, a figure expected to double by 2001; the pager or ‘beeper’ (bipiji) being already obsolete. In mid-2000 the Finnish mobile telecommunications giant Nokia and Fujian Mobile Communications Corporation launched the ‘world’s first fully
standards compliant commercial GPRS network,' a technology permitting continuous connectivity to the Internet and opening up a range of services to mobile users via a WAP [wireless application protocol] portal. Thus, the expansion of mobile telephone possession will have consequences going far beyond more convenient voice communication. While for reasons of cost, and of lack of availability of standard telephone lines, the number of home computers linked to the Internet still lags behind consumer desire for access to the world wide web, the new WAP technology permitting connection to the Internet over a portable telephone will result in an ever more huge increase in Chinese Internet traffic; even without WAP technology, the number of Chinese households connected to the Internet had reached 9 million at the end of 1999, and 17 million by August 2000 with the number of Chinese internauts doubling every six months.13 The prediction of foreign telecommunications companies is that by 2004 there will be 250 million portable telephones in China equipped with WAP technology yielding an equal number of potential Internet users.14 Evidently, the expansion-minded Chinese state seems to have set itself the ambitious and somewhat contradictory targets both of monitoring ‘dissident’ use of new technologies, and of encouraging the massive expansion in production, consumption and distribution of new forms of telecommunication. Regnant Chinese authority is wary of losing control over the means of communication, and the means of distribution of information. Official political authority always wants to maintain the monopoly over being heard and dies without it; ‘a leader reduced to silence is no longer a leader ... taking away his power of speech leaves him destitute; to tear away the microphone is to kill him.”15

Moreover, censorship remains a much-used government tool in the suppression of dissent and also serves to indicate its boundaries of tolerance. A particularly sensitive topic is the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. Recently a team of Guangdong television journalists were stripped of their posts for having ‘unintentionally’ broadcast a 1.8 second video clip of the 1989 student movement.16 Government corruption is also a delicate area. Guangdong People’s Broadcasting Station in Guangzhou was reprimanded for permitting a caller to criticize the government for rampant corruption in a radio call-in programme on 27 July 2000.17 Similarly, a new television drama mini-series filmed in 1999, and due for release in 2000, was banned for failing to ‘fully demonstrate the central leadership’s determination’ to eradicate corruption.18 Also in the mid-summer of 2000, the
government took measures against the print media, more than a
dozen publication houses and publishers of periodicals were closed
down or reprimanded for alleged violation of new publishing
criteria. Contravention of the rules was constituted by publishing
material which was critical of the 'Four Cardinal Principles' of
Marxism, which contradicted essential party and state policies,
which contained pornography or military and other state secrets,
which opposed official policies on ethnic minorities, or which
otherwise threatened social stability. 19

But new technology media are more difficult to censor. Not only
the Chinese government, but also the British government fears the
possibilities of untrammelled free expression offered by e-mail and
Internet communication as demonstrated by the passing into law of
the United Kingdom's 2000 Interception of Communications Act
obliging Internet service providers to facilitate government
'tapping' of their clients' Internet communications. In China, the
government's action is more visible and direct, as is illustrated by
the recent closure of a China-based dissident web site, www.xin­
wenming.net, and the announcement that 525 of Shanghai's one
thousand or so cybercafes were to be closed for encouraging the
youth of the city to play 'morally corrupting' computer games. 20

However, sanctions against dissident Chinese web sites based
abroad are more difficult to implement, and measures can only be
taken against those in China who consult dissident sites. Such
measures of restriction and suppression are rarely comprehensive,
however, and often are followed by greater consumption of officially
disdained foreign media consumer products. As Joseph Chan has
noted, 'after each crackdown there will likely be a spurt of growth.
This may repeat until reception goes beyond policing, putting China
in a state of 'illegal openness' to foreign media.' 21 The 'spillover'
phenomenon of television programmes from Hong Kong to the Pearl
River delta ensures that at least twenty million viewers in mainland
China receive terrestrial Hong Kong television programming, and
there is also access to Hong Kong television through local cable;
widespread piracy ensures that such programming is sold on to the
interior of China. 22 With increasing miniaturization of satellite
reception technology, and the gradual imbrication of telecommuni­
cations with broadcasting, in order to police the reception in China
of extra-national words, sounds and images the state will need to
invent ever more ingenious means of censorship and control.

Yet, despite the fears of the Chinese State, the liberatory effects
of new globalized electronic media and computer technology are
probably overestimated, there being 'a tremendous utopianism about proselytes for electronic media.' A succinct critique of this electronic network utopianism is provided by Sean Cubitt:

Undoubtedly, the enormous potential of such media is for a new mode of democracy, one intimated by the networks in which research, games and gossip are exchanged on a global scale already. But since these media are very precisely designed with profit maximization in mind, their design itself is a matter of concern. Whatever the technology in general is capable of ... those capacities are being framed, contained and limited by decisions that have nothing to do with any production of the future. They are to do with the maintenance of the status quo, or rather with the extension of the status quo.

The ultimate balance of the authoritarian 'concentrated' form of power and the 'diffuse' form giving full play to commodity capitalism is still under negotiation, and yet a consolidation leading to what Debord calls an 'integrated' form of the society of the spectacle has certainly occurred. For more than twenty-five years China's 'closed society' has been increasingly exposed to the outside world, and communications have expanded enormously; by 2010 it is expected that there will be more air travel to and from China than to and from the USA in 2000. And yet, the state has maintained ultimate control over the daily lives and the political expression of its citizens, while skilfully (and this despite the debacle of 1989) negotiating China's integration into global spectacular consumerism. Debord wrote of the development of the 'diffuse' form of spectacular power as an 'Americanization,' as 'a process which in some respect frightened but also successfully seduced those countries where it had been possible to maintain traditional forms of bourgeois democracy.' Now in the 'integrated' society not just economic practices but ideological practices are conflated. Not only is commodity capitalism globalized but also ideological attempts to control the citizen-consumer. State authorities are, indeed, desperate to maintain ideological domination, but once again the only ideology left available to them is nationalism, an ideology they attempt to nurture and exploit by appeals to patriotic sentimentality and its associated practices. The Chinese state authorities, for instance, recently called for the national flag to be raised and for the national anthem to be sung at all meetings and popular activities. Is this the new 'Americanization,' as economic and cultural globalization gathers pace, will allegiance to the
national flag now be demanded in all societies of the spectacle, as a token obeisance to the vestiges of particularist cultures? Are we not now living in a globalized world dominated by increasingly convergent cultural practices manipulated by forms of capitalist spectacular power which are becoming ever more similar? While then we may still talk of media imperialism or cultural imperialism, domestic televisual broadcast production as well as transnational or supranational broadcasting is exploiting, and reinforcing the same spectacular power.

In this chapter I shall discuss the role of Chinese soap opera, but to assume that Chinese domestic production of soap operas is somehow liberatory or resistant to transnational spectacle is to misunderstand the global nature and economic underpinnings of its power. Spectacular power may be wielded at a local level by state or official authority, but it is fundamentally however a form of the same capitalist spectacular power that deprives and suppresses the powerless around the globe. In terms of televisual production the only practice that does stand in potential opposition to the dominant media is independent video production, such as that produced by Asian American women video makers in the 1990s. A theorizing of that independent practice has already been undertaken by Sean Cubitt. This other practice is popular not in terms of consumption but in terms of production. Videotape and its technology is comparatively cheap, and anyone with a hand held camera can produce a video. Hypothetically, anyone may challenge the way network and satellite television unites or reunites image and sound. We can use video as a means of critique alongside, or even in place of, theory.

But here again in the practice of video production, as in computer technology, ‘opportunities are being closed down as rapidly as they are being opened.’ Rather than women making videos, women are reinscribed as the objects of desire that help to sell consumer products.

In the Chinese televisual catchment area of Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China, woman is portrayed, as in general in the masculinist discourse of MTV, soap opera, television advertising, and the recently popularized supermodel television fashion show, as the seductive, and seducible objectified commodity. Whether on the catwalk, in the TV studio singing the praises of the latest SONY product, or falling for a macho mate, the camera lens is probingly thrust in her face and at her body. In late twentieth century Chinese television the figure of woman as object of male desire is reproduced.
again and again. Interleaved into the constantly repeated shots of woman-as-object, are the model MTV and TV beer commercial men: masculine, street-wise, male-bonding, and cool.

Helping to make China cool is that classic vanguard commodity of American and global consumer capitalism, COCA COLA. Coca-Cola is post-modern, Coke is cool, Coke is zany: cartoon colours, cartoon Coke. Be cool, make China, a funky, masculinist, capitalist paradise, and BUY A COKE.

Chinese Soap

The terrestrially broadcast soap *A Native of Beijing in New York* (*Beijingren zai Niuyue*) is also sponsored by Coca Cola. Thus, besuited professional white men are portrayed sitting around sipping diet Coke, and chain smoking 555s, a brand of American cigarette which is particularly popular in China.29

Soft drinks and cigarettes, in the narrative of Western consumerism, have traditionally been the bottom rung of the ladder to consumer paradise to which the subjects of China's regnant authority are now meant to aspire. The domestic television soap opera *Beijingren zai Niuyue* (*A Native of Beijing in New York*), a twenty-one part television series, aired on Chinese television in the autumn and winter of 1993 is a *Dallas*-type of soap opera and the sort of ideological text to which Chinese viewers can relate their own common sense ideas, or popular ideology. This ideology is something of a mélange of pre-Maoist 'traditional Asian values', of which Singaporean and Hong Kong politicians would approve, and remnants of post-1949 official Communism and nationalist ideology. A major element of that populist ideology is an emphasis on the family unit.

In some ways Feng Xiaogang's *Beijingren*, resembles the Latin American variant of soap opera, the *telenovela* which is limited to a 'specific number of episodes', as is *A Native of Beijing in New York*, 'in contrast to the never-ending openness of the narrative in Anglo-American soaps' such as the longrunning British soaps *Coronation Street*, *East Enders* and *Brookside*.30 In the mid-1980s, the Latin American *telenovela*, dubbed into Chinese with two or three episodes often aired back to back, was extremely popular with Chinese television audiences and the particularities of the form would not have escaped Chinese television producers. The Latin American format lays a greater stress on 'class, social mobility, freedom, choice, consumption and other themes of mobility,'
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and these are indeed the very concerns represented and mediated in *Beijingren*.31

One of the earliest academic commentators on soap opera, Len Ang, in her book *Watching Dallas* has noted how ‘personal life’ provides the ‘ideological problematic’ of the soap opera: ‘The family is regarded as the ideal cradle for human happiness. At least it should be.’32 It is the external world, society, in the instance of *Beijingren*, which threatens the ideal. In *Dallas* the external world is the world beyond Southfork ranch: ‘The outside world, i.e. the world outside the family, is presented in *Dallas* as a hotbed of activity threatening to the family’.33

One of the hooks which attracts the viewer is an appeal to, and exploitation of, her or his dissatisfaction with the lack of fulfilment, and the standardization of capitalist urban life, in other words with the effects of dehumanization and alienation. *Dallas* was exceedingly popular with British audiences in the 1980s, mainly because the almost totally urban British viewing public had little or no idea of the reality of American life as lived by the majority in the USA, and was content to let the spectacle of America as configured in the British imaginary be reinscribed. Just as the Hollywood movies of the 1930s–1950s had successfully lulled the spectators of Britain’s cinemas through the depression and the war, *Beijingren* would nourish the secret yearnings of the long materially-deprived urban Chinese viewer. Despite the occasional negative representation of capitalist life in New York, despite the disintegration of his family and dreams of being a symphony cellist, the allure of protagonist Wang Qiming’s two-storey palatial modern house in the New York suburbia constituted a powerful vision for the Shanghai or Beijing dweller who inhabited a comparatively minute and frugal apartment.

Because personal life and families, something to which all viewers can relate, are always in a constant state of negotiation, no character is ‘invulnerable, however, heroic, powerful or strong he or she might be.’34 This vulnerability is intended to be tragic in a soap like *Dallas*, but it also surely signifies that if there is never a permanent winner, the spectator, therefore might not always be a loser, at least no more so than a major figure like J.R. Ewing. The intimation that the soap hero’s survival under modernity is uncertain and precarious renders the viewer’s own permanent state of domination, alienation and unpredictability more bearable.

J.R., of course, is the classic soap opera dominator. By isolating him as a ‘bad guy’, the rest of the system, of which he is only an
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extreme example, is rendered almost decent, normal, and natural. In alienated capitalist modernity individuals are compelled to search for satisfaction of their egoistic needs by attempting to establish an alien power over others, and this is one of the foregrounded human motivations of soap. As in Dallas, so in Beijingren. The major characters in both soaps are driven by the impulse to establish power over others. Such domination is one of the prizes of capitalism. That both Dallas and Beijingren foreground those characters who are the most extreme in striving to realize their dreams of domination is a function of the ideology that such soaps are instrumental in reinforcing, or in the case of Beijingren, in establishing. The ideology depends on a bourgeois morality of sentimentalism which the viewer is called upon to adopt, or which the viewer has already long ago internalized. Thus, capitalism need not be so morally repugnant, the ‘decent person’ can profit from capitalism and still feel moral rectitude. Of course, the Chinese cultural producers who are mediating this visual introductory manual to capitalist life still have to negotiate the current official and popular ideologies and the collective imaginary. Capitalism is shown to some extent to be problematic: loose morality, and hard-nosed individualistic self-reliance are just two among many blemishes of capitalism that Beijingren allows.

Wang Qiming asks his white American competitor in the garment trade why his friend the buyer did not help him out when he was going bankrupt, and Wang is made to understand that such is not the American capitalist way: ‘When you are in trouble you are on your own.’

In a confrontation with his newly arrived, but rapidly Americanized teen-age daughter, the one-time aspiring cellist Wang Qiming in a fit of temper destroys the pop record collection he has given her to demonstrate that he has no love for material possessions. She has accused him of being a capitalist. But, he seems insulted more by the inference that he has not worked hard, struggled and suffered (a good old fashioned ideological tenet of the capitalist work ethic and of heroic Maoism) to obtain his wealth. The breaking of the record albums provides a brief moment of ambiguity in what is otherwise an unproblematic representation of the objects of consumer desire. And yet only a moment, for the motives for acquisition are ideologically justified. It is the love of family that forces the individual to give up his/her motherland and personal ambitions (in Wang’s case to be a professional cellist) to secure the future of the next generation. Similarly, Wang Qiming,
who has lost his wife to his American business competitor, seen his daughter swept away by a young white high school student, and then by the student’s father, and his musical ambitions exchanged for the proprietorship of a knitwear sweatshop, is redeemed by secretly paying for his ex-wife’s medical school education. This prompts the glaring populist reading: If every Chinese emigrant family could achieve the good life at no moral cost except the sacrifice of a Wang Qiming, maybe the American capitalist gamble would be worth it after all.

This television series is necessarily set in New York, but Chinese capitalism will be different, the soap seems to inform its viewers. But, of course, it will not be different, least of all for women. The capitalist post-modern affirmation of women as commodity object, sits nicely with the re-encroachment of feudal attitudes towards women; witness the literal buying and selling of women in recent years.

Foreign broadcast television, and in particular MTV, screams at China and the rest of Asia, ‘Capitalism is great, capitalism is fun (especially if you’re a man), capitalism is emancipatory.’ ‘Hi there, Asia,’ grins the VJ, as glibly as if he were saying: ‘Hi, Chicago’, ‘Good morning, Brooklyn’. Chinese soap shouts back: ‘China, watch out for American-style capitalism. Stay at home. Enjoy Coca Cola with Chinese characteristics. Don’t let your women get infected by ideas of emancipation. Support traditional Chinese family values.’ MTV screeches: ‘Global capitalism is great.’ Chinese soap yells back: ‘Capitalism with Chinese characteristics: capitalism tempered with Chinese patriotism will be better!’

**Backbeat of the nation: Chinese MTV and the official national imaginary**

Although performed by a private individual, in other words not a state employee, the text discussed below is an officially sanctioned and broadcast song and video clip. While most independent popular music makers in contemporary China have been consistently excluded from official broadcast media, Gao Feng, a young Chinese singer and musician has been warmly received by the official media. In 1996 he produced a hugely successful (in terms of air time) song and four-minute video entitled ‘Da Zhongguo’, ‘Greater China’. The title may also be translated as ‘Greater China’, a space imagined territorially that would include Taiwan, and disputed areas over which China claims sovereignty. Greater China
may also be understood non-territorially, as the framework for a culturally imagined space intended to appeal to overseas Chinese communities.

What foregrounds this song in terms of importance and meaning, is that it has been enthusiastically received by the national official broadcast authorities as politically acceptable. The song has also been broadcast on satellite TV, and commercial radio, beyond China’s borders, and in particular in Hong Kong where it has even been covered by local Hong Kong singers. But before discussing the song and video in detail, let me first address the context of the song in terms of the politics and music-culture of the past two decades.

In my previous work on Chinese popular music and music television, I wrote about non-official, or underground, musicians whose songs and performances had redeployed or diverted (détourné) ethnic or national ideologies and imaginaries. I discussed the Chinese rock and roll singer Cui Jian whose mockery and defiance of the state and the party centre was represented bodily by a people’s army uniform and red kerchief both worn in transgressive and unauthorised ways to emphasise the party’s alienation from the people and its original principles. But there was also a vocal and instrumental unorthodoxy. Cui Jian redeployed the trumpet he had learnt as a child in the People’s Liberation Army orchestra in deliberately inharmonious ways, and sang in a raucous, guttural Beijing proletarian street accent, in contrast to the mellow undisturbing voice of official and centralized standard Chinese language singers found on state radio and television.

I also discussed a group named Panther which has now disbanded. Panther was a more middle-of-the-road rock group which in its video productions aggressively and physically occupied centralized national space, while again musically using a basic rock and roll as a representation of non-official, non-authorised noise against state control over the production and distribution of noise.

There was also a heavy metal band Tang Dynasty whose recuperation of national and ethnic space and history involved both the televisually forceful images of Buddhist temples on the desert fringes of the old empire, and the setting of Chinese classical poems to heavy metal rhythms. Tang’s main ploy was to foreground the moribund ideology of the PRC state by squeezing it between a recuperation of past Chineseness and heavy metal masculinist Otherness.

None of these groups ever used lyrics overtly to challenge the central authorities. Rather it was the absence of direct, political
content (either in terms of patriotic rhetoric, or the standard official lyric references to ‘socialist’ successes) that was sufficient to foreground the songs as anti-authoritarian texts. Lyrics in both pre-modern and modern Chinese traditions have always been the target of a close political censorial gaze, and readers are adept at reading between lines. Similarly none of the musical and performative practices would have appeared at all transgressive if the ideology of the state did not privilege an official imaginary in which ethnic authenticity and purity was somehow intended to be inherent in ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ as the current mode of capitalist modernization in China is called.

While in Europe and America rock music and its surrounding culture is no longer perceived as constituting a real threat to regnant authority, in China it still is. For instance, in early 1996, in the northern Chinese city of Tianjin a concert featuring self-styled punk rocker He Yong was permitted by the authorities. However, the usual practices and aura of a rock concert were strictly forbidden. The police authorities allowed no dancing or even standing-up, no exuberant behaviour of any sort. Police and security guards employed aggressive and insistent tactics to ensure compliance in the enforcement of their desire to suppress and control the rock concert ethos and its latent dangers for authority.40

I should like now to discuss briefly the issues of ethnicity and nationalism in Chinese popular music. There are numerically large ethnic minority communities in China. The Tibetans are the best known outside of China, but officially there are over eighty recognized non-Han Chinese minority groups. Statistically the minorities constitute only seven per cent of the whole population. However, the 93% supposed Han ethnic majority is not a homogenous group, let alone a ‘race’, a category in any case no longer sustained by scientific analysis. ‘Han’, then, is an unsatisfactory term that refers to the dominant supposedly ‘homogenous’, invented and socially constructed majority, an ‘ethnicity’ referred to outside of China simply as ‘Chinese’. But the ethnic can only be the national when an ethnically ‘authentic’ nation has been constructed, and this the Chinese central authorities have done as convincingly as any modern European state. Once the Han majority becomes represented as (almost) the whole nation, the marginalization of other ‘ethnicities’ as minorities follows as a matter of course, and minorities become, as Engels so bluntly put it, ‘non-historic peoples’ whose destiny is tied to that of powerful ‘ethnically homogenous’ nations.
It was against, yet also within, this monolithic discourse of centralized nationalized modernity promoted by the Chinese state that 1980s 'underground' pop musicians produced their music and their spectacle. For even while they challenged the authority of the state, the discourse within which they did so was both national and nationalist, as it was for the students at Tiananmen square in 1989. The nationalist discourse was deployed against the central state authorities who themselves were not only propagators of nationalist ideology, but were also its product. Within this dominant discourse, however, popular music culture, emergent Chinese rock and roll in particular, positioned itself oppositionally with regard to the central authorities. Gao Feng's song and video clip, however, recuperated and reoriented that national space, the collective imaginary, the panoply of national symbols, in favour of the centralized state, so as to privilege official ideology.

In the Tang, Panther and Cui Jian performances one could, to varying degrees, discern a dissatisfaction with central control, a critical stance that represented or exploited popular discontent with economic and social realities. Cui Jian pointed to the new consumerist materialism as one of his specific targets. And more than that there was a resentment of the betrayal of the ideals of the Revolution, and even of those of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) whose stated aims, if not its real results, were enthusiastically supported by Chinese urban youth in the 1960s.

But the oppositional music culture that so dismayed the authorities and that now seems to have been brought under control by the emergence of cultural producers such as Gao Feng, has never been a dominant musical idiom widely available to even the urban population of China. Musically, what followed the Cultural Revolution, that honeymoon period in Sino-American relations of the late 1970s and early 1980s, was an official music policy that permitted only the distribution of folksy, seemingly patriotic melodies and sentiments representing an imaginary homeliness, cosiness and harmony of American life. Such music was consumed eagerly by an audience that had only had access to the narrow and limited repertoire of Cultural Revolution model operatic music and military-style songs. For the regnant authorities, the clean, white, ethnically unproblematic music of singers such as John Denver, and the Carpenters, represented the acceptable face of American pop music, an acceptable model for China's popular music, unlike the 'miscegenated', hybrid, ethnically unclear and confused music constituted by rock, soul and blues. The traces of the official policy
that favoured such musical models are to be found in the musical and ideological simplicity of the Gao Feng song discussed here.

The rock and roll that emerged slowly and unofficially throughout the 1980s, was firmly identified with youth and dissidence, with what the authorities called ‘bourgeois spiritual pollution’, which in the official Chinese political lexicon translates as ‘Western influence’. Rock and roll emphasised every social and cultural reality the state was engaged in occluding. Rock music culture foregrounded difference, divisions, Otherness, ideological gaps, and above all it positioned itself against official ideology and authoritarian control. Meanwhile the state broadcast authorities continued to air unsophisticated middle-of-the-road pop products that celebrated national, and ethnic and social unity in a banal and unfashionable style. But, Gao Feng's song was different.

At the level of the lyrics, which are very simple, and yet which avoid the directness and over-deployment of patriotic terminology of official song-writing, the intention is to reinscribe and reaffirm the centralizing and totalizing construction of China as a 'naturally' cohesive nation. The collective first person lives in a single, unitary home, 'its name is China' in which there are many brothers and sisters. The geographical features mentioned include the two dragons (the Yangzi river and the Yellow River), and Mount Everest – deftly recuperated as wholly Chinese. And no patriotic song would be complete without mention of the Great Wall, but citing the Tibetan Plateau indicates clearly where the ideological stance of the song lies. While re-inscribing the Chinese state's territorial claims, what is privileged here is obviously the unity of the monolithic nation. The sub-text alludes to the current incorporation of Hong Kong into the Chinese state, and the official long-term project of recuperating Taiwan, but also to maintaining the internal cohesion of a state challenged by minority peoples such as the Tibetans and the Turkic peoples of the north-west border region. In other words, as the 'return' of Hong Kong and Macao approached and the party-state pushed for a similar arrangement with Taiwan, there could be no question but to foreground the integrity of the motherland and the state's staunch rejection of any degree of Tibetan sovereignty, an eventuality seen by the leadership as the first step towards Soviet-style disintegration. Tibet, in this song, is solidly part of the Chinese jia.

Neither must the 'inclement weather' of history disturb the stability of the 'great big home' which is 'our great China'. The homeliness of the 'great big home', the sense of cogent and willing community, that has
survived the trials of history, and the loyalty of the Chinese citizen/subject are all represented here. The 'inclement weather' may allude to the specific or the general tribulations of Chinese society over the past two hundred years: the encroachment and exploitation of foreign imperialist powers, the establishment of the treaty ports such as Hong Kong, the war against the Japanese, the Civil war with the Nationalists (which led so many Chinese to flee to Taiwan and elsewhere – remember that they too are the target of this song), the economic disasters of the 1950s and 1960s, the divisive, fratricidal Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), or more recently the massacre in and around Tiananmen Square that ended the political dissatisfaction and protests of 1989, described by the authorities as 'a counter-revolutionary rebellion.'

However, more forceful yet than the lyrics, are the visual and musical aspects of Gao Feng's product which constitute a transformation of style and presentation in their re-presentation of the nationalist and centralizing ideology as positive and seductive. Instead of a cynical and ironic use of national memory and space, Gao Feng produces a music and imagery of celebration. In celebrating the national, the central, the ethnically dominant, the ethnically integrated, in ways that parallel, or derive from, official ideology, with musical and video techniques that previously had been the marker of dissident and marginalized voices, Gao Feng renaturalizes a totalizing national popular imaginary. Rather than recuperate national and ethnic space for alternative visions of society, Gao Feng recuperates it for the nation, or rather for a quasi-official representation of the nation that effectively aims at rallying not the People, but a new urban middle class represented as the nation.

In terms of the music, Gao Feng's simple folk-like melody, is accompanied by a heroic chorus. The tune can be listened to by anyone, but the tune is designed to appeal to, and to give the impression of accentuating and emulating, the 'local'; that is in 'Chinese' terms, the national and the central. The pentatonic verse provides a constant reminder of the nativist, the 'authentic' with its almost Heideggerian conflation of national/racial/ethnic 'roots', at the same time accommodating and recuperating the Western, the contemporary, the commercially popular. The chorus alludes to a sort of Western folk-rock reminiscent of John Denver. There is also one musical phrase redolent of the revolutionary songs of the Cultural Revolution. The verse is not only pentatonic but folk-like. The folk element of state-sponsored popular song is nothing new of course, neither in China nor elsewhere where state ideologies are
RE-TAKING TIGER MOUNTAIN BY TELEVISION

dominated and formed by the project of nationalization and modernization. In China, state recuperation of folk song and folk dance dates back even before the 1930s revolutionary era of the Yan’an communist guerrilla base; both left and right from the early twentieth-century had attempted to recuperate and deploy the academic yet ‘patriotic’ study and reinvention of the many regional varieties of Chinese folk music. In the 1930s the collection, ordering and rewriting of Chinese folk songs became central to Chinese Communist cultural policy and since the Communist base was situated in north-western China, folk melodies and styles of that region not only became dominant, but thereafter assumed a certain revolutionary aura connected temporally and spatially to the terminus of the mythically important Long March that was Yan’an.43

In an attempt to synthesize the supposedly typically ‘Western’ with the supposedly typically national ‘Chinese’, in a contemporary somewhat perverse instantiation of Mao’s formulaic admonition to ‘make the West serve China, and the old serve the new’, the pentatonic verse supplies a generalized folk aura, while the folk-rock chorus provides the musical mood of the modern and the Western. In the effort to realize a synthesis in which the musical allusions to ‘ethnic authenticity’ are nonetheless not lost, the background, deploying a typical Western 1980s production, employs drum machines and synthesizers to evoke a convenient conflation of the ethnic and the national which is deliberately pentatonic. A heavy backbeat marking out time helps to bind together these disparate musical (and visual) elements, and a ‘world beat’ is also invoked in the production of the music in the attempt to achieve a cohesive texture.

But with a little attention the viewer and listener may conclude that all is not what it seems. The percussion instruments we hear are not the drums of the drum-dancers we see, but a mere minimalist impression of them. Visually, the folk dance alludes to the seductive cinematic redeployment of the folk-dance and its characteristic drumbeats in recent Chinese cinematic productions (principally Chen Kaige’s Yellow Earth), again drawing on the recuperated local culture of the area surrounding the 1930s–1940s Yan’an revolutionary base, but the sound is a mere an electronic simulacrum.

While this drum dance sequence could also be read as a token representation of the geographically peripheral, I would rather conclude that the drum dancers of Shaanxi are in fact merely
RE-TAKING TIGER MOUNTAIN BY TELEVISION

representative of a long-standing historical recuperation of a local peasant cultural practice by the state, by the centre. In other words, they represent and symbolise the legitimacy and historical revolutionary credentials of the centre, when the Communists fought first the Japanese and then the Nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek (Jiang Jieshi). These drum dancers then are not only folklorized but nationalized. They are representative of a revolutionary tradition that claims to embody the popular desire for a centralized, national and cohesive construction of China. The dancers may also be seen as representing a nostalgia for what even the disillusioned and dissident perceive as an innocent national revolutionary moment; the rock musician Cui Jian has produced cover versions of a number of pre-1949 revolutionary songs, most strikingly the old revolutionary favourite Nanniwan. However, that revolutionary moment and its musical and performative representation are simply commodified in the Gao Feng product.

While bells in various musical traditions seem almost always to represent the calling together of the community, especially in Western musical usage, in some societies the artefacts and the sound stand as tropes of both unity, and authority. In the Chinese case the bells are also visually and musically a marker of history, authenticity and tradition; even more than the comparatively recent Christian church bell. Bells in China also represented state power, and thus they constitute the physical evidence not only of cultural but also of political sophistication stretching back three thousand years; such markers of civilization and territorial continuity also form a trope of legitimacy frequently invoked internally and internationally by the modern Chinese authorities. Bells were important in ancient Chinese state rituals and in the Gao Feng video production the visual mapping of shots of ancient ritual bells onto the sound of bells invokes centralized court ceremonies and the illusion of a ‘timeless’ national authority; the use of bells also has a more contemporary significance. The bell chimes that open the song and the music video ring out that internationally recognizable tune, ‘The East Is Red’. ‘The East is Red’ is not the Chinese national anthem, but is nevertheless probably China’s best known tune and song eulogizing that national and revolutionary hero, the late Chairman Mao; the first lines of the song are ‘The East is red/The sun has risen/China has produced a Mao Zedong’. The tune, recorded on recently discovered and restored ancient bells similar to those we see in the video clip, was broadcast incessantly by China’s first satellite in orbit around the globe.
‘The East is Red’ has the same place in the national imaginary and produces the same patriotic sentimentality as Elgar’s ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ in the English imaginary. The song itself has numerous historical connotations, but the chimes version alone is laden with significance. Every Chinese knows that the chimes sound on the hour at the clock tower of Beijing’s main railway station, and thus the chimes also occupy a place in the national imaginary, akin to that of the centralized and nationalizing chimes of Big Ben in London.

In a production intended not simply for domestic consumption but also for propagation amongst the overseas Chinese communities, the Chinese diaspora, the musical cliché of ‘The East is Red’ also clearly identifies this particular nationalist patriotic narrative with the Communist PRC version of nationalism, indeed the ambition is to make that version of nationalism seem natural and to have all Chinese everywhere accept it.

The chimes evoke and represent at once, revolutionary history, and the unity of China assured by and at the centre. The chimes represent also both the beginning of the long narrative of the Chinese nation, and mapped onto that the historical narrative of the People’s Republic of China. This is foregrounded visually by the first shot of ancient Chinese bells in the sunrise; evoking both the birth of the nation and the words of the song ‘The East is Red’. That shot is succeeded by a group of children (always represented as the hope of any nation and, of course, always also the excuse for adult suffering while awaiting the nation’s utopian destiny) who walk determinedly forwards, towards the camera, and thus into the future of the nation. This opening shot also constitutes a mimicry of a well-known scene from the photographic record of Mao’s life. The children release doves into the air as a sign of desire for peaceful progress, and hold up lit candles in the dark in a quasi-religious gesture. As the garishly coloured head of a lion dancer twirls across the screen, the soundtrack switches from ‘The East is Red’ into Gao Feng’s melody.

The lion dancer represents tradition and Chineseness and visually masks the segue into a Western-style popular music mode. Similarly the Chinese women dancers in white robes enacting Buddhist, and thus traditional, beliefs, facilitate the shift into a seemingly less Chinese musical practice; this allusion to Buddhism may also be read as emblematic of the national subject’s, China’s, historical capacity to absorb, naturalize and nationalize external cultures and thought.
There are several shots of Peking Opera characters in the first few seconds of the video. Their function is to supply national colour, and the aura of tradition, but their use probably also is linked to the recent successful exploitation of traditional opera in sophisticated made-for-export Chinese Fifth Generation cinema. The Peking Opera woman character (who appears to enact the lead role of a famous patriotic, militaristic Chinese opera Women Generals of the Yang Family) twirls away from the camera in front of Tiananmen and the famous picture of Chairman Mao fixed onto the grand podium that overlooks Tiananmen Square; the viewer at no moment actually sees memory-laden Tiananmen Square itself, although the camera is shooting from that position.

In the opera scenes there is again a disjuncture between sound and image, since while the visual exoticism of Peking Opera is deployed, there is little or no attempt at a musical representation of the very different, very Other, music of Peking Opera. Indeed, there is nothing in fact to fix these actors as representative of specifically Peking Opera rather than any other Chinese opera of which there are many regional variants. Peking Opera is one of many local operas, but has the distinction that it was elevated over the centuries into the court, and thus the centralized, national sung drama form. Musically, then, traditional Chinese opera music is indicated only by its absence. But given that each region has its own opera sung in its own dialect, only the visual can represent a sort of mute national image. Aurally, then there is only a lack of specific musical references, so that while the rapid visual changes overlap with the musical continuity in this production, the visual allusions to traditional music culture nevertheless digress from, and even oppose, the music that would normally be commensurate with the images.

Cutting to the next frame of the video, four or five middle aged couples are shown running into each other's embrace against the backdrop of the red PRC flag which fills the screen entirely. The camera pans out to reveal those embracing as members of various ethnic minorities, known in China as 'minority nationalities'. The first shot of singer-performer Gao Feng shows him in classic Mao pose, overcoat flapping, one hand held high in emulation of the well-known Chairman's greeting. Pictures of Mao had previously been used by ordinary citizens (bus and taxi drivers stuck up portraits of Mao on their vehicle windows in the early 1990s) as a form of protest against the political order, and a reminder to the authorities of the revolutionary idealism on which the state was founded; it is a clever détournement of an iconography to which
the authorities could hardly object. But here we see Gao Feng striking poses redolent of those of Chairman Mao, and long etched into the popular imaginary, not to critique contemporary authority, but rather to affirm and celebrate it. We had seen during the Cultural Revolution Mao as pop idol, now we see pop idol as Mao.

As in many standard pop-rock videos there is an alternance between the street, (the real world where the artist is in touch with the people) and the studio or concert hall (the space where electronic wizardry, fanciful lighting and electrical equipment can boast their modernity). In *Da Zhongguo*, against a dark background the spotlight sweeps across Mao/Gao Feng to reveal him now on a studio concert stage. The audience includes children, and again national minority members who in this video are always represented as smiling and seemingly contented women dressed in attractive colourful costumes which mark them as ‘feminised’, innocent and harmless. Such indicators of their difference accord with the official ideology’s construction and representation of non-Han minorities, and incidentally supply supplemental, peripheral colour. But here, not just the minorities and children smile, all the studio audience smile, all sway in time with the music, hands in the air in a gesture of responsive salutation, and almost religious exaltation as they sing along with Gao Feng’s patriotic celebratory song. One great China, one big happy family.

Space, history and multitudes have been repeatedly employed in Communist China to reinforce national pride and to establish national authority, and also to invigorate the nostalgic dream of a national return to a Chinese golden age of political and military supremacy. As the Chinese saying, which finds its place in the popular discursive negotiation of everyday life, has it: *lishi chang, difang da, ren duo* (‘history is long, the place is big, and people are numerous’). Each of these three elements of common-sense ideology is alluded to here both visually and musically. The chorus and crowds of children and concert spectators imply multitude, while the bells imply both length of history and provide a sense of aural space. The very occasional shots showing space outside Beijing, also allude to the notion of vastness.

Ultimately, this music video production constitutes a successful attempt to recuperate national iconography, to reinscribe and reaffirm the associations of party with nation, of an integrated people inclusive of yet beyond minorities, in which the image of a dominant Han majority at the centre represents metonymically the entirety of Chinese society.
‘They must be represented’ wrote Marx, and yet in this produc­tion where are the workers, the peasants, where indeed is the rest of China? Where are those who are Other to China’s consumer and industrialized capitalist cities? Where in this video of celebration are those relegated to the lower echelons of the socio-economic hierarchy, where is the representation of the reality of beggars and prostitution, and what of the so-called floating population of 100 million plus unemployed (twice the population of France or ten times the population of Portugal), those constantly dependent on the arbitrary regulation of the economy by the global market, state planners and local functionaries?

Gao Feng’s song and its televsual presentation constitute a response to a fear of national fragmentation. The yawning inequalities that daily fragment and threaten the integrity of the Chinese nation-state, the daily peasant uprisings happening somewhere and everywhere in rural China, even more than local or ethnic difference, are well concealed beneath the mask of national centralized well-being this video constructs.

While the video attempts to nuance, nationalize and make specific an increasingly global popular culture, the local social fragmentation and increasing economic inequality it hides is not of an order than can be negotiated or contained within national boundaries. As Étienne Balibar recently noted:

the territorial distinction between the developed regions and the under-developed regions is less stable, the polarisation of economic statuses translates less directly into territorial structures, the interference or the overdetermination of class differences and ethnic discriminations are produced equally in the North and the South, so that everywhere internal exclusion replaces external exclusion. An ‘underclass’ which is not at all a neo-proletariat, seems to be being constructed on a world scale, while at the other extreme a transnational privileged class is striving to establish common interests and a common language for itself.45

Earlier in this chapter, I noted how the lyrics and images of this production serve to elide the realities of China’s ethnic diversity. Such members of Chinese society can be constructed as the Other to the nationalized, and increasingly transnationalized, new urban middle class, but at a stage in world history when populations are ‘at one and the same time completely atomized and yet irreversibly mixed’, the language of alterity becomes increasingly inadequate.46 Not only are minorities and women reinscribed in their traditional
roles in this video, but the economically disadvantaged are again forgotten. Thus it is not a critique focussed merely on the exclusion and marginalization of the ethnic Other that will suffice to counter discursive strategies such as we see and hear deployed by Gao Feng. Rather what is required is a response framed by the real universality which marks this historical stage in which ‘for the first time, humanity is not simply an ideal, a utopian notion, but has become the condition of existence of human beings themselves ... a condition that coincides with the generalisation of conflicts and of exclusions.’

Gao Feng’s production eulogises not simply a nationalist ideology, but also a new economic order whose beneficiaries however can only ever be a minority of the people existing within China’s border. But this economic expansion ‘abolishes neither political domination nor economic inequalities’, and on the contrary is part of an unprecedented stage of ‘polarisation of wealth and misery, of power and powerlessness’. While Gao Feng’s product may have served to bolster the new economic and ideological positions of the relatively wealthy and powerful, a little satisfaction may be drawn from the fact that the miserable and powerless, deprived of consumer durables, did not have to endure it.

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Debray has written that ‘liberal capitalism apparently has nothing to fear...from economic self-regulation [l’auto-contrôle économique].’ Yet, over the past five years or so, it has been noticeable in ‘liberal capitalist’ societies that the state has increasingly encroached on this ‘self-regulation’. Perhaps this is merely a manifestation of the convergence of the two forms of spectacular power, the diffuse and the concentrated. Of course, in reality, televsional distribution and consumption has never been totally ‘free’; in capitalist societies, ‘nothing is forbidden but not everything is sellable, and if the citizen has the right to see and hear everything, distribution has its constraints.’

If there is to be optimism for the future in China or elsewhere in the capitalist and unified world, if there is to be ‘resistance’, it will not come from satellite TV (Chinese or non-Chinese), nor from Chinese-produced soap, nor MTV.

However, I would not want to deny the usefulness of the medium of televsional representation in terms of its critical potential. Over the last decade alternative video-makers in Latin America and Nigeria have been exploiting the potential of the VCR to evade the
centralized mass media system and produce independent material for the home video market.\textsuperscript{51} Even traditional television may still provide the opportunity for critical intervention as the work of the BBC North-East's social investigative journalist, David Morrison, has recently shown.\textsuperscript{52} There can be radical makers of video and television documentary just as there are radical writers of books and newspapers; television and video is not \textit{the} new culture, merely a new cultural medium. Optimism should be tempered, however, by the reality that while the techniques may have changed, the manipulators of power relations and the ideology they seek to enforce, and reinforce, have not.
PADDY’S CHINATOWN, OR
THE HARLEQUIN’S COAT

A Short (Hi)story of a Liverpool
Hybridity

Individual experience of separate daily life remains without language, without concept, without critical access to its own past which has been recorded nowhere. It is not communicated. It is not understood and is forgotten to the profit of the false spectacular memory of the unmemorable.

Guy Debord

Contemporary ethnic autobiographies partake of the mood of metadiscourse, of drawing attention to their own linguistic and fictive nature, of using the narrator as an inscribed figure within the text whose manipulation calls attention to authority structures, of encouraging the reader to self-consciously participate in the production of meaning.

Michael Fischer

Leave. Exit. Let yourself be seduced one day. Become multiple people, brave the outside, split off elsewhere. There you have the three first unfamiliarities, the three kinds of alterity, the three first ways of exposing yourself. For there is no apprenticeship without exposition, often dangerous, to the other. I shall never again know who I am, where I am, whence I come, where I am going, which way to go. I expose myself to others, to unfamiliarities.

Michel Serres

Incomprehension is present everywhere in everyday encounters. Something must be specified, made clear, but there’s not enough time and you are not sure of having been understood. Before you have done or said what was necessary, you’ve already gone. Across the street. Overseas. There will never be another chance.

Guy Debord
It is, naturally, not a question of this absolute secret that each carries to their grave, sometimes even in ignorance that they do so, but rather of that moving of the border between the said and the unsaid which involves several levels: the individual, the family, the village or the neighbourhood, a basic group, a ‘gang’, a ‘society’ and so on. Perhaps we can talk of a ‘history of indiscretion’, not in the primary sense of this word (inability to discern) but in its ordinary and accepted sense (to communicate to the uninitiated information thus far retained within the spheres of individual, family, or friends).

Histoire de la vie privée

Toute biographie est un roman qui n’ose pas dire son nom.
Roland Barthes

After my grandfather died, my English grandmother burned joss sticks and lit red and black candles for months. I shall never forget that odour of incense pervading the gloomy, crumbling Victorian Liverpool house we all lived in. My grandmother was not just remembering the dead but trying to ‘make contact’ with the dead, and my own involvement in Chinese studies for the past twenty-five years in a sense has been an attempt to make contact with that same deadman, to know the things he did not tell me, to find answers to the questions I did not know to ask.

My particular ambition when I started thinking about what became this chapter was to write ‘academically’ about the British Chinese diaspora. But memories of my own relationship with a particular moment and locus of that diasporic experience and, more insistently, memories of the dead and the dead’s memories kept interrupting my determined narrative and pushed me onto irresistible side roads. However, neither did I wish to write a ‘history’; I had already theorized and written on the history of anti-Chinese racism. And yet History and histories kept intervening. Untold and half-told stories of others, like spectres, keep demanding that we return to these nebulous narratives, force ourselves to recall and narrate the interstices of the ghost stories of the previously ignored, insignificant, marginalized, of those who are now dead but still within living memory.

One particular result of thinking about this task has been realization of how the marginalized’s, the hybrid’s, and the migrant’s remembering is constructed as ‘inauthentic’ and thus how such subjects must defy linear and narrative strategies of constructing histories of communities whose duration has been necessarily fixed.
by their production by, and dependence on, modern European colonialism. For while the mapping of postmodern critiques onto a wilfully persistent modernist project in China continues to be resisted by the economic realities of uneven development, the compass of postmodernity and postcolonialism may account for our incapacity to narrate, if not otherwise to represent, the histories of those beyond history, the ‘hybrid,’ ‘non-historic’ peoples’ of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Others have problematized the question of hybridity and foregrounded the way in which proponents of ‘postmodern hybridity ... typically obliterate significant portions of the reality of a colonized culture’. But my principal concern here is to discuss particular representatives and instantiations of a hybrid community which, like many such communities before, has never had the historical opportunity to become the site of postmodern fantasizing.

In the era of postmodernism then, the notion of hybridity is contentious and questionable. But I am not ready to surrender the concept of hybridity as unusable. It is a concept essential to the understanding of many modern communities, and the hybridity I discuss here is materially and historically real.

It was not my intention to write an autobiographical ‘testimony,’ and yet I have come to accept that this will be an autobiography of sorts, but in a real sense it is only incidentally so. This essay started as an attempt to tell a community’s story and the story of a representative of that community whose story for most of my adult life I have sought to know and explain, the story of a man whom, during the formative years of my childhood, I followed and observed as closely as a shadow. I belonged to a single parent family, and my single parent worked all day until late in the evenings. But in a sense for much of my childhood I belonged to a three-parent family. At home I was looked after by my English grandmother and my Chinese grandfather. I had a great deal of affection for my grandmother. I witnessed her sadness at the way her life had evolved, but also the great exuberant joy and infectious humour of which she was capable. She belonged to a legion of modern women whose gender and social position kept them from realizing their dreams. My mother always told me I had never known my grandmother at her best, and regretfully, I am sure that is so. But as for my grandfather it seems that no-one ever knew him at all.

I had long wanted to write my biographical/autobiographical version of the old man’s story and that is what I started to do as an undertaking separate from my work on Liverpool’s Chinatown.
But it soon became clear to me that the demarcation line between the project of reconstructing the history of the Chinese diasporic community of Liverpool and the narration of my attempt to know my grandfather by telling, not his story but, stories about him was a porous boundary. In the author's mind the two narratives flowed in and out of each other uncontrollably. Portions of this chapter, marked off in italicized print, represent remnants of the attempted biographical narrative. But in assembling this chapter, I was compelled to write further passages in a similar autobiographical mode. I deploy both here to illustrate the difficulty of maintaining the distinctions between the mode of narrativization that I first attempted and my project to write about a particular diasporic community.

Early in my research I realized that while the stories of the people of the historical Liverpool Chinatown were imaginable, they nevertheless remained unknowable. The efforts that have been made to produce local minority histories of Chinatown rely like mine on newspaper accounts and official reports and amateur ethnologists' often racist philippics which enable us to reconstruct and deconstruct the discursive means by which the historically dominant forces situated the immigrant and hybrid Chinese populations. Such efforts have also drawn on personal testimonies of second generation hybrid Chinatown subjects. That sort of work is extremely valuable in reconstructing the anguish and victimization suffered by these subjects, but can only tangentially unmask stories of the first generation. Moreover, the new, more recent Chinese immigration to Britain mainly from post-1949 Hong Kong has established new 'all-Chinese' communities replete with grandparents and grandchildren. The particular hybrid Chinatown of which I write is no more. Like many diasporic communities in the past, the hybrid community I had wanted to write about had existed for a very short historical moment. To write about this history then I would have to narrativize my own memories of that moment. I perhaps would have wanted to continue to hide behind the shibboleth of academic 'objectivity', of critical distance. But over the past few years I have been moving away from that position, moving away from the displacement of my own concerns onto those of a conveniently academically reified object of research. I had a conversation with an African American student at the University of Chicago several years ago in which she made me realize that I was 'passing'; when a person of colour looks white enough to pass as a white person. I had thought of 'passing'
PADDY'S CHINATOWN, OR THE HARLEQUIN'S COAT

as a practice wilfully engaged in by others. But was this student right. I have what could be a Chinese name, I teach Chinese studies, but on the first day of a new academic year, I always feel that I disappoint the eager European students as they see a white man walk into the room. When teaching in Hong Kong I sensed a similar sort of surprise when walking into a classroom of Hong Kong Chinese students for the first time. A colleague of mine told me that he had heard that amongst my department’s students at Hong Kong University there were two schools of thought: that either I was a gwailo (or ‘ghost’ as foreigners are called in Hong Kong) with an assumed Chinese name and faking Chinese ancestry, or that I was somehow Cantonese and that I was pretending that I was foreign-born and foreign-educated. There was no trend of thought corresponding to the reality.

No, I had never consciously thought that I was passing; although I did experience some of what people who think of themselves as passing experience, most notably being included in white racist conversation about Asians and Blacks. Like other ‘miscegenated’ people who ‘pass’ as white I hear directly the discourse of white racism which is now unspeakable in the presence of the non-white. I suppose that such is the particular privilege of the hybrid who ‘passes’.

I have never suffered for my ‘hybrity’, for my part-Chineseness. I think the only times I have felt emotionally offended have been in China and Chinatowns. When I lived in China, passing operated to my disadvantage much of the time. Of course, being white allowed me without question to enter hotels and shops reserved for foreigners whilst a British friend of mine who looked more Chinese always had to carry her passport. I, however, was always a foreigner. However well I spoke Chinese, however long I lived in China, I remained a foreigner. Every time I opened my mouth I needed to re-establish my linguistic and cultural qualifications. It could happen dozens of times a day. Each time I could prove I was not a foreigner like all the others, not a tourist, not a businessman, that I knew Beijing, that I was Zhongguo tong (knew the ins and outs of Chinese society), but I was always a foreigner to begin with. To my intellectual friends their knowledge of my Chineseness worked to my advantage, made me more acceptable, made me liable to a greater degree of confidence but also gave them license to indulge in a greater degree of abuse, and ultimately in the final stages of sometimes ferocious arguments, my foreignness was always used against me: ‘You do not understand, because you are
not Chinese.' Living in China was very instructive in the politics of race and ethnicity. I sometimes thought it unfair, but it was historically and intellectually understandable. Perhaps what I experienced in China was institutional racism, but the whole narrative of the last two centuries of history, of the way the West has treated China and Chinese people, renders such complaints pathetic. If I knew and understood the nature of hierarchical prejudice, I knew it in England. I knew class prejudice and I knew the prejudice known to all identifiable inhabitants of Liverpool; and Liverpudlians are inevitably and inimitably identifiable as soon as they open their mouths. 'Liverpool is the only city in Britain (apart from London) upon which other Britons have definite opinions and it is seen as a city of problems where the people themselves are reckoned to be part of the problem.' Imagine then, not just the double bind, but the triple bind of the Chinese Liverpudlian: Chinese, working class, and from Liverpool, and the quadruple bind of the Chinese Liverpudlian woman. I was fortunate. I did not look Chinese, I could lose my accent, and I could even pretend not to be from Liverpool (although that I have never done).

Ien Ang has broached this problem of writing about identity from her own specifically liminal position as a non Chinese-speaking Chinese and considers autobiography 'as a more or less deliberate, rhetorical construction of a 'self' for public, not private purposes'. My own attempt at writing about diaspora differs from hers in that I aimed naively to write about not myself but others, about the Liverpool Chinese, but then had to admit that the figure of my own grandfather is centrally important to the construction of that community for me, and that my storytelling would incidentally but necessarily tell my story. In the process of recollecting, recollections would refuse to simply centre on my grandfather, they rushed forward to later childhood years after his death when I lived in another Liverpool, a non-Chinatown last-gasp Liverpool of working-class bravado and Merseybeat myths of the 'swinging sixties', that itself was a special and hybrid space. 'Liverpool's people became accustomed to thinking of themselves as belonging to a city with a place in the world. Horizons were seldom lower than that. Never down to the region and unthinkably not to the Southwest corner of Lancashire'.

But it was not just in the process of reminiscing that I recalled other moments of my youth that took place over the physical traces of my childhood-Chinese grandfather in Liverpool, it was also during the very academic process of researching this particular
diasporic community that such recollections pushed aside the ‘object’ of my research. Whether at a microfilm machine, or walking in and out of the library where the archives were held, disparate narratives of my own Liverpool history persistently flowed over one another. So that like Ien Ang, I concluded that I could not exclude the autobiographical from the biographical, the personal from the academic. Indeed, I refused to do so, not because the imposable ‘lines’ between all these were no longer clear to me, but because they appeared as barriers that I wanted to dismantle. Born in Indonesia, Ien Ang has throughout her life been ‘implicitly or explicitly categorized, willy-nilly, as a ‘Chinese’. I look Chinese. Why then don’t I speak Chinese?’ I have had a somewhat contrary experience. My Chineseness was totally invisible; on that count some might even deny my capacity to claim a Chineseness at all. Many of my mother’s half-Chinese generation had spent much of their mid twentieth-century lives desiring such invisibility. Although a few phrases of Cantonese stuck in my head from my sorties into Chinatown with my grandfather, like Ien Ang I did not know the Chinese language, but then I did not need to. Unlike Ien Ang no-one expected me to. I decided to learn Chinese anyway. I remember when I was an undergraduate doing Chinese studies, I did a class presentation on Macao, and ‘revealed’ that my grandfather had spent much of his childhood there, and that he was indeed Chinese. My fellow students refused to believe me, and if and when they did could see no point in advertising such ‘inauthenticity’. In the 1970s students of Chinese were either interested in Taoism or Maoism, not Chinatowns. There seemed no point in going around advertising my imperceptible Chineseness. I understand that in Britain today even quite famous literary theorists in places like Oxford University are now ‘rediscovering’ their Irishness, or Welshness, anything rather than be just plain English. But a quarter of a century ago ethnicity was not so socially or politically acceptable. The plain fact is I did not look Chinese, I did not suffer racism for being Chinese, but I had been, still am, an observer of my own family’s suffering, of their being treated differently.

My mother, for instance, has always attracted the curious gaze of others. People stare at her and cannot quite identify her. She asks, ‘I don’t look that foreign do I?’ But the fact is she does look somehow different. All her life she has been treated differently from, and by, her fellow Liverpudlians. Once as she descended from a bus she was helped across the road by someone who imagined she had just
arrived in England; regrettably, she told me later, she did not even *want* to cross that road. Quite recently she was hailed by a young woman on a bicycle cycling down one of those magnificent Edwardian streets in central Liverpool. The young woman was proselytising for Jesus; I didn’t believe anyone but Mormons still did that, and then only in Asia, but perhaps Liverpool is perceived as in need of civilizing. The young woman stopped her bicycle and thrust a tract into my mother’s hands:

‘Do you speak English?’ she asked. She was ‘well-spoken’ my mother said, that is she did not speak with a Liverpool accent. ‘Not very well,’ my mother replied disingenuously.

‘Do you think you could manage to read this?’ the young woman continued. By this time the tract was starting to crumple as they both continued to clutch at it while the negotiation proceeded. ‘Not really,’ replied my mother.

‘Oh,’ said the young woman rapidly recuperating her tract and cycling off. Presumably my mother was abandoned as an irredeemable alien pagan. Perhaps there is a special space in limbo reserved for the ‘half-caste’ people who seem not to speak English very well. But, in fact, what my mother experienced is what any ‘Oriental-looking’ person experiences in Britain regardless of being British-born, and that is being treated like a recent arrival, as if they had ‘just got off the banana boat’, as they used to say in Liverpool. While being ‘half-caste’ may confer dubious benefits in the colonies, it confers none in the colonial metropolis. In the 1950s my mother had been offered a job through an employment agency with the Liverpool office of an American tobacco company. The first morning she reported for work she was immediately asked to leave. She would understand, wouldn’t she? During World War Two however she had been deemed white enough to be conscripted to work in a munitions factory. Like many others she found the alternative of being in the services less monotonous, so when the recruiters visited the factory she signed up. She was a Petty Officer in the navy, working as an accountant. She passed the examinations to become a Chief Petty Officer, but could not afford the paraphernalia essential to British officer status, even in a supposedly democratized war time military. But for most of her life she has experienced discrimination for her ‘foreign looks.’

Narratives and testimonies of diversity and difference, of racist injustice, of patriarchal oppression are now legion. Yet we still need to keep reading and writing such stories. The hybrid who ‘passes’ perhaps has a particular responsibility to tell such stories, to point
to such injustice. But is this quality of human hybridity only present in the ‘racially,’ ethnically or culturally miscegenated? Michel Serres has written of the attribute of métissage (the preferred French word for our notion of ‘hybridity’) as a phenomenon of human existence that ideologies and discourses of race and ethnicity fail to take into account. Thus, he would say, we all possess the attribute of hybridity and all have the potential to increase the degree and nature of such hybridity:

Strange and original, already a mixture of genes of its father and its mother, a third between them, every child evolves by new interbreeding alone, all pedagogy remakes the engendering and birth of a child: born left-handed, they learn to use the right hand, remaining left-handed, are reborn right-handed, at the confluence of two directions; born Gascon, they remain Gascon and become French, in fact mixed; French, they make themselves Spanish, Italian, English, or German, if they marry and learn their spouses culture and language while keeping their own, then already you have a fourth, soul and body mixed. Their mind resembles the Harlequin’s coat. 13

Serres points to the ease with which multiple social identities accumulate in the society in which he grew up and lives. All the other identities he uses to illustrate his argument are also, however, national and sub-national identities. Beyond the national identity of France Serres describes only other national identities, the identities of those modern nation states which border France; intruding even into Serre’s eloquent plea for the recognition of difference and coexisting identities, the dominant spectre of Jacobin centralizing ideology. Occulted behind Serres’ discourse the fact that legally and institutionally it is through marriage that one acquires Spanish nationality, and that one acquires Spanishness only by accepting the state’s national(ist) ideology. Physically, geographically, and materially, however, while the French state may share an administrative border with the Spanish state, it is the Basque language, community and identity that straddle the northern section of that border; the Catalan, that is mapped over the southern section of that political frontier. Serres is right, however, to point to subject’s making ideological links at national levels. Does Serres see such hybrid subjects as somehow ideal, or is he merely describing a manifestation of European capitalist modernity? In the ‘globalized’ modern world desired non-national connections between sub-national and anti-national communities are still obstructed by the
more dominant national authorities which dispose of almost total
linguistic and economic power. More serious perhaps than the
neglect of local communities in Serres’ narrative is the lack of a
space for the non-white, the non-European European, the black
French, the Arab French, the ‘Indochinese’ French. It is as though
French colonial history has been erased, when it has never been so
problematic. Beyond the two dimensional borders of France’s
hexagon are the hybrid communities that France constructed in
Asia and Africa, communities now in France and as French an
identity as is Gascon. And yet these communities are surrounded
by internal borders, excluded within and from the Frenchness that
once desired nothing more than to render them totally French, to
Gallicize them, to efface their indigenous cultures. Having only
half-succeeded, having created subjects with new and vibrant iden­
tities, French yet not French, laying claim to whatever they choose
to take from Frenchness, just as the French colonizers took what
they wanted from their conquered subjects, the forces of white
racist French wish to eradicate the ‘impure,’ the ‘inauthentic’ from
metropolitan France. The evident métissage of these once colonial,
once French, still (culturally and psychologically) colonized, sub­
jects is too painful a reminder of white France’s own inauthenticity,
or rather of the impossibility of authenticity. They are those who
the colonial would like to forget.

This desire for forgetfulness can be traced to an ‘amnesia’ whose
construction Iain Chambers has located in the Baroque century,
‘witness to the violent and extensive elaboration of a eurocentrism
that seeks to model and mould the rest of the world in its image
and imaginary.’ While ‘non-European bodies and histories’ could
be contained and repressed as a forgotten and ‘invisible presence’
on the ‘colonial periphery’ the racially hybrid, the ‘half-caste’, the
métis, like the colonial migrant drawn through economic necessity
to the colonial metropolis, is irritatingly present in the colonial
body and less easily forgotten.14 In order to forget you need to find
‘final solutions’, to eliminate, to erase. And erasing is precisely
what colonial powers have long sought to do. Sometimes eradica­
tion has taken the form of elaborate national policies that have
sought to destroy the ethnic memories of Native American lands
and reinscribe them with the face of the white man (sometimes
literally – Mount Rushmore). Sometimes such elimination operates
at levels of the local and the everyday; for instance, through the
media’s manipulation of racist fears and the deployment of munici­
pal housing ordinances to ‘erase’ Chinatowns.
Today the majority of ethnically Chinese people in Britain are confined to the takeaway catering trade, but before World War Two they worked, as did many Chinese in America, in the laundry business, 'for many whites the epitome of all that was foreign'. The lowliness of the occupation was not lost on the modern Chinese poet Wen Yiduo who as a, relatively, privileged student in the United States wrote these lines in 1928:

The Laundry Song

Laundering is the most common occupation of the Chinese in the United States, so often many students from China are asked: 'Is your father a laundryman?'

(One, two, three)
Washing clothes that must be washed clean,
(Four, five, six)
Ironing clothes that must be ironed smooth.

I can wash out kerchiefs wet with grief,
I can wash white guilt-black shirts,
Greed's grease and lust's ashes...
All your home's dirty washing,
Give it to me to wash.

Metal that smells and blood that stinks,
Sullied things must be washed until clean,
Things washed will again be sullied...

You say a laundryman's trade is too menial,
The Chinese alone will stoop so low,

Soapsuds can produce nothing imposing,
Washing linen pales against building of destroyers.
I agree it can't bring renown –
Bathing in bloody sweat, to wash the sweat of others
Would you stoop to it, would you?

The fear of the foreign as Theweleit and Taguieff in particular have demonstrated is imbricated in the fear of contamination. The foreign, the unclear is filth. That the foreigner should be relegated to purify the white man's filth is then perhaps fitting; how can the contaminated be further contaminated? But it is also paradoxical: how can the contaminated not fail to contaminate anew in the very act of purifying the white man's sullied clothes?
In the space of one afternoon in 1911, during a seaman’s strike in Cardiff, Wales, every Chinese laundry in the city was ransacked; it was the same year my grandfather, who had left China two years earlier, arrived in Liverpool. Ten years later, in June of 1919, as the dismal reality of post-war unemployment and social misery embraced World War One’s returning servicemen, Britain saw its worst ‘race riots’ yet; and ‘race’ would continue to be exploited by British labour leaders, even those with seemingly impeccable ‘socialist’ credentials. The Jewish socialist Emmanuel (Manny) Shinwell, who when I was a child I recall was always appearing on television represented as the grand old hero of the left, in 1919 in his capacity as secretary of the Seafarer’s Union, was one of the most vociferous campaigners against the employment of Black seamen, and ‘master-minded the colour bar on ships sailing from Glasgow harbour.’18

The unions’ exploitation of race was not new, however. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, in 1906, a general election year, the deployment of Chinese labour in British South Africa, rather than white labourers from England, had been a major political issue. James Sexton, Liverpool Irish labour organizer and politician, led the anti-Chinese campaign in Liverpool, writing in his Weekly Courier column, December 15, 1906:

My strictures on Chinatown have been responsible for a considerable increase in my correspondence. The bulk of the letters have been in support of my attitude though for reasons to which I do not subscribe. I have endeavoured to make it clear from the outset that it is not on narrow racial grounds or out of prejudice to the presence of foreigners in our midst that I base my objection, but upon the grounds of experience and the knowledge of what is meant by the congregation of low caste Chinamen in other countries, their tendency to lower the standard of morality. The same type of Chinaman is here in Liverpool, with the same standard of morals. I have been to some trouble to investigate the matter, not in the broad open light of day, like the Medical Officer of Health and other public officers, when all is calm and bright and the Chinamen away at their ships, but in the witching hours of night, when the Chinese dens are packed, and where immoral practices are in full swing. We have no law to stop

INDULGENCE IN OPIUM

Neither had New York or San Francisco or the colonies when the yellow men first crept upon them. Eventually, however, laws had to be adopted in all these places making indulgence in opium

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illegal, and it is so to-day. In China itself the edict has gone forth that ten years from now opium smoking will be treated as an offence. The pernicious effect of the habit is admitted. And if there be no law to prevent it at present, then the agitation will at least do some good by calling attention to a necessity for a change in the law.

We cannot now know whether Sexton was writing out of ignorance or was consciously revising history when he represented the history of opium as a Chinese-originated problem. But here, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, historical reality is turned on its head. It was Britain’s regnant authority in the nineteenth-century that through the two Opium Wars had intentionally transformed China into a nation of ‘junkies’ in order to pay for England’s own addiction to tea. Eventually, not only was the opium exported to China grown and produced in India but tea was grown there also, thus depriving China of any effective revenue from the trade, assisting in the ruination of China’s economy, and forcing thousands of desperate southern Chinese to chance their hand abroad. For the twentieth-century British and American newspaper reader, middle-brow-fiction fan, and cinema-goer, opium would be uniquely understood as an inherently Chinese ‘evil’. ‘Indulgence in opium’, pace Sexton, was illegal in China and yet opium throughout was imported into China by the great British hongs such as Jardine Matheson whose fortune is now secreted in that lingering British colony of Bermuda.

Sexton claims to be founding his anti-Chinese arguments on ‘no narrow racial grounds’ and yet he deploys the language typical of racist and in particular Orientalist rhetoric when he represents the Chinese as cunning and stealthy in the manner in which ‘yellow men first crept upon’ New York and San Francisco. Sexton continues:

There is a still graver danger, viz., the attraction – I could use a stronger term – of girls of 14 and 15 years of age. That this is going on I am convinced. I have seen the girls going into the Chinese places at night. I have seen girls coming out in the company of Chinamen who took them to shops to buy finery. It is difficult to give a concrete case, but the facts I have stated speak in favour of a close investigation. I should be pleased indeed to learn that my impressions are not well-founded.

Let us leave the unsavoury subject for the time being until we see what the local authorities will do to grapple with it, and turn to our own industrial affairs. The Autumn session of the Imperial
Parliament is drawing to a close. And again, as in the previous session, from a Labour point of view the result is magnificent...

What exactly is at issue here is not simply sexual permissiveness, or the corruption of minors *per se*, but the allegation that such practices are pursued by Chinese men. That Sexton represents such 'crimes' as being committed solely by Chinese men as though non-Chinese sailors and other men did not exploit the poverty-stricken circumstances in which the women of Liverpool's proletariat lived is unsurprising, what is of greater interest is Sexton's foregrounding anxiety over contamination of the white body by a non-white, extraneous, foreign body.

Many of the young white women who eventually made their homes in Chinatown were penniless Irish immigrants with no other recourse. My grandfather would arrange for many of them to marry Chinese seamen. While Sexton assures the reader that he is 'convinced' of the occurrence of such crimes, he nevertheless finds it 'difficult to give a concrete case', and yet concludes that the 'facts' he has provided warrant a 'close investigation'. Sexton was successful in his demand. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Liverpool City Council decided to investigate the claims made in the city's newspapers against the Chinese in Liverpool, and appointed a Committee of Inquiry. One of the members of this committee was Councillor Sexton himself.

Except during World War Two when Chinese seamen manned the allied merchant marine, Liverpool's Chinese population did not exceed three figures. At the time Sexton was writing it was no more than a few hundred. The numerical strength of the non-white Other has always been a malleable instrument in racist discourse. A few hundred Chinese can be made to represent the vanguard of a horde of invaders or be made to seem so minuscule and insignificant a number that they should be disregarded altogether.

The Liverpool City Council's Committee found that there were few grounds for concern. Sexton and the majority of his fellow 'concerned' Liverpool dignitaries' fears over the penetration of the local white body by the alien Chinese were unfounded. The inquiry had been based entirely on the racist dread of contamination and on the desire to rid Liverpool of this Chinese minority. The councillors were not interested in the maintenance of petit bourgeois morality as such, nor were they preoccupied by the treatment of the city's women and children in general; Sexton and his colleagues betrayed no anxiety over moral behaviour within other Liverpool
communities, nor did they seem perturbed by the generalized practice of wife-battering endemic in Liverpool's white communities.

A dozen years later, in the 1919 riots, British union activists again incited racist sentiment when promoting action against non-white seamen. However, the unionists were in something of a quandary when playing the patriotic card, and hesitated over stressing the foreignness and non-whiteness of their targets; many foreign seamen were Scandinavians and thus very white, while many of the British seamen were from the British West Indian colonies. The opportunity to exploit racial differences was not lost however. In Hull the Britishness of Black sailors was upheld against the foreignness of the Chinese when 'coloured seamen cleared the shipping office of Chinese sailors so that only British - Black and White - would be employed.'

My grandfather walked down Duke Street with his copious overcoat flapping around and behind him. One of the items in the newspaper the previous day was headed: 'Chinese Man and English Wife Evicted By Angry Mob' and told of a house in Northumberland Street which had been rented by a Chinese man and his white wife, since they had allegedly offered more money than a returned soldier. The mob had invaded the house, abused the couple, thrown the furniture into the street and set it alight. In that morning's newspaper he read that a London mob had attacked a Chinese laundry. 'So,' thought Chan looking up from the newspaper 'the economy is not so good, the bosses blame the Chinese seamen, the union men blame the Chinese. But they need Chinese seamen. They're cheap. But now it's getting like America where we Chinese are banned by law, and there they don't let Chinese marry white women. Here I've got a wife, children. How long before the English copy the Americans? Maybe soon I should take the family back to China.'

I saw my grandfather read the English newspapers everyday. I know he was involved in local Chinese matters. He represented Chinese people in trouble with the law (runaway seamen, overstayers, illegal immigrants) in the local courts. I saw him walking down the old slum street in Liverpool many a time, and in particular one grey winter's afternoon with a half dozen eggs in a white paper bag that he had just bought at the corner shop. On the side of the bag was printed an advert for Typhoo tea, a tea he never drank. It was a week before he died. I stood in the street in front of
the house and watched him come towards me with his baggy yet elegant charcoal grey overcoat flapping around him; a coat like the one worn by Mao Zedong in a well-known portrait of the Great Helmsman that I would come to know only a decade later. He chided me, I think, for being outside in the cold; it was sometime between Christmas and New Year. On New Year’s Day he boiled himself a small duck.

He never did take his family back to China. He had planned it. He acquired all the documents, had the children pose for Chinese passport photographs. But the grand return did not happen. Why after so much planning and dreaming did he not go? The Japanese war in China in the 1930s? The fact that two of his friends were reputed to have got off the ship only to be met by ‘agents’ and were never seen again? Or was it simply that he suddenly did not have the financial means? Did he lose at the gambling table, did he fail to win as planned? No-one knows, or none of his descendants can remember. After so many years of trying to be invisible, to be forgotten, perhaps you just forget.

There are, however, some moments of my grandfather’s life that are celebrated in family lore, because my mother and her younger brother (who in his fifties decided he wanted to remember) were there. Then there are other moments that are unmentioned or simply confused. None of these memories can be dated with any accuracy. None can be put for sure into the sequence of family or world history, but occasionally while sifting through newspaper archives, obscure monographs, and social science dissertations on the Chinese community, I stumble upon the interstices of his story and official documented history. Or sometimes a past memory suddenly makes historical sense. The trigger is often revisiting a place that I first knew in childhood. I remember once my grandfather took me to New Brighton, a working class day-trippers’ seaside town across the River Mersey from Liverpool. It was a treat. First we had gone by underground train to a hospital of some sort, where he sat and chatted to a Chinese man in hospital-issue pyjamas. It must have been spring or summer. We sat outside under candy-striped parasols, but I recall there was no sun. They talked, the man gave my grandfather some papers. I never knew where we had been until many years after my grandfather’s death. A high school friend of mine, a team-mate on the hockey team was taken ill with what turned out to be leukaemia and stomach cancer. No-one ever told him. I went with some of the other hockey players to see him. It was the
same place I'd been to as a small boy. It was a hospital for the terminally ill. My friend lived only six months. The Chinese man must have been dying also.

My family was engaged eventually in all those occupations Chinese were allowed to pursue. In the late 1930s, they were in the laundry business, not in Liverpool but in Rhyl, in North Wales, forty miles or so from Liverpool's Chinatown. All of the stories about those times seem to relate to events that took place during World War Two, like the one about my grandmother and mother escaping the blazing cinema which had just been hit by a German bomb. It seemed like my grandmother had spent much of the war not in Rhyl but in Hollywood. Who could blame her? Apart from Hollywood there was only the Chinese laundry. My grandfather would work in the back of the laundry and occasionally go down to Liverpool Chinatown to chance his hand with the takings. He had not bought the business. He was in partnership with a friend who had a big win on the gambling tables and bought a laundry. But the accounts were bogus. There was no way that the laundry could make enough money to keep the family let alone generate enough to pay the fifty per cent of the estimated profits to my grandfather's partner. There was also a house that was constantly remortgaged and eventually repossessed, and that precipitated the move back to Liverpool, to what had been the seamen's cafe he ran during the late 1940s and in which gambling took place; many Chinese seamen had been stranded in Liverpool during the Second World War and the Chinese population had been in the tens of thousands.

The major family folkloric anecdote relating to the laundry – apart from the routine accidents with irons, scalding water and bleach – is centred on the day my grandfather acted with what I perceive as unbounded dignity and irreverence. Some people might have thought my grandfather an arrogant man, and it is true, he was occasionally an ill-tempered, and domineering figure within the family. He ought not to be over-sentimentalized. But as a Chinese immigrant living in a hostile and racist environment I credit him with much courage. With a history and life already behind him by the time he arrived in England at the age of thirty, who knows what sadnesses his silence concealed. It seems more than probable that there were still those he cared for alive in China; his mother had abandoned his father, his father had later died in a typhoon, but there was talk of a brother, and perhaps there had been a first, Chinese, wife. Once, when I was already at
primary school he won seven hundred pounds on the football pools. A great deal of money. At that time my mother earned only a few pounds a week. My grandfather sent his entire winnings back to China.

The laundry story went like this: A man, a white man naturally, came in to collect his meticulously cleaned, ironed and starched shirts. My mother and her younger brother were minding the counter. The man complained about the cost of the laundering. My uncle called his father.

‘I’m not paying all this just for cleaning a few shirts,’ said the man defiantly.

‘Don’t want to pay?’ replied my grandfather tartly.

‘No, I don’t,’ said the man.

‘All right,’ said my grandfather as he took back the packet of shirts. He dispassionately thrust the whole package into a bucket of water meant for cooling the hot irons, and thwacked the man across the face with the soggy bundle. Blathering and swearing, the astonished and admonished man left the shop.

I like that story. Despite its pathos, its smallness, it remains for me one of the most poignant and heartening narratives of anti-colonial resistance I have heard.

Eventually, the laundry went bankrupt. I don’t suppose it was because my grandfather frequently exacted such retribution on recalcitrant customers, but simply because in the 1950s with the advent of coin-operated launderettes, the bottom fell out of the market. When I first went to America in the 1980s and saw Chinese and Korean people still working in laundries I was astonished. They had long-since disappeared from the do-it-yourself automated consumerizing England in which I grew up.

The other story, which much more directly affected a whole community of people, dealt with the razing of Chinatown. In Europe as in America, the territorial space occupied by the ethnic Chinese communities has frequently been perceived as particularly invasive and infectious, a space where the contagion of ‘Yellow Peril’ was cultured. Even though Chinese communities were limited and contained by the sometimes physical boundaries of Chinatown, and even when these peripheral sites were forced upon their inhabitants institutionally or legally, or ‘chosen’ by the Chinese people by economic necessity, they have still been perceived as menacing spaces, and metaphorically constructed as such. In California, the San Jose Chinatown was consumed by fire as local white inhabitants stood by and local authorities offered no assistance; it was
replaced by a walled village, paid for by a local white philanthropist. The population was segregated from the surrounding whites, until its tiny community deprived of new members by the USA’s Chinese exclusion laws, simply faded away, and the town could finally be literally razed and erased. In the case of Liverpool’s Chinatown, the local white authorities, especially the local press, seemed to relish the moment when erasure could be effected, and constantly invented rationales and strategies for the disappearance of the ‘alien’ Chinese presence. While less than thirty years previously a far fewer number of Chinese inhabitants had been inflated into a ‘Yellow Peril’ menace of huge proportions, now in 1934 the alleged diminution and diffusion of Liverpool’s Chinese population is represented in the Liverpool media as a rationale for razing Chinatown:

POST AND MERCURY, April 19, 1934
“Chinatown”
I am told that many residents in Pitt-street and Frederick-street are becoming increasingly resentful of that particular area being dubbed ‘Chinatown’.

My informant, a Liverpool alderman, says that there has been a considerable reduction in recent years in the number of Chinese nationals resident in and around Pitt-street, which he attributes to the depressed state of shipping. And the fact that the Corporation has been responsible for some attractive housing developments in Pitt-street has accentuated still further the inaptitude of the term ‘Chinatown’ as locally applied.

POST AND MERCURY, April 25, 1934
“Chinatown”
There can be no doubt that Liverpool to-day, as a Liverpool alderman suggests, has no longer a Chinatown. The nickname will continue to stick, I dare say, to the region of Pitt-street and Frederick-street, but nowadays there is nothing discreditable in it...

At the end of the war over 6,000 Chinese lived in Liverpool; but shipping depression has changed all that. The University survey three years ago showed that Liverpool had only about 500 adult Chinese males and there had been considerable inter-marriage with white women. Many out of work have been deported, and the present small Chinese community is sprinkled all over the city, chiefly as laundry keepers.

POST AND MERCURY, November 19, 1934
Chinatown Doomed
Plans have been provisionally approved for the rebuilding of
Chinatown, and indeed of the whole area on each side of Pitt-street and Upper Pitt-street.

A block of flats erected in Pitt-street some years ago and the two churches of St. Michael and St. Vincent de Paul – the latter designed by the famous Pug – will remain; but otherwise the entire district will be demolished, replanted and rebuilt in harmony with the new block of flats fronting St. James-street.

Upper Frederick-street will disappear and Pitt-street will be widened to sixty feet, while both Cleveland-square and Kent-square, dating from the time of Queen Anne, are doomed. The much dwindled Chinese colony will have to find a new home.

During the Second World War, when the Allies were dependent on Chinese labour to keep maritime communications open, the responsibility for razing Chinatown would be displaced onto the German Luftwaffe’s blitzkrieg.

After the war, the desire to see superfluous Chinatowns erased re-emerged. In the 1950s, London’s Chinatown was the target for elimination, a project which attracted the following statement from the Lettrist International (later to become the Situationist International):

LETTRIST INTERVENTION
Letter to The Times re Chinatown

Sir,

The Times has just announced the projected demolition of the Chinese quarter in London. We protest against such moral ideas in town-planning, ideas which must obviously make England more boring than it has in recent years already become.

The only pageants left are a coronation from time to time, an occasional royal marriage which seldom bears fruit; nothing else...

We hold that so called modern town-planning which you recommend is fatuously idealistic and reactionary. The sole end of architecture is to serve the passions of people.

Anyway, it is inconvenient that this Chinese quarter of London should be destroyed before we have the opportunity to visit it and carry out certain psycho-geographical experiments we are at present undertaking.

Finally, if modernisation appears to you, as it does to us, to be historically necessary, we would counsel you to carry your enth-
At the end of the millenium, Chinatowns were suddenly re-invented and refurbished with garish-coloured dragon-headed lamp-posts, red plastic pagoda-topped phone boxes, and imposing arches imported from China. Chinatown restoration societies advertise themselves on the internet, along side Chinatown business associations. This may seem like a reprieve for Chinatowns, but is more probably the final knell following the funeral we all missed.

Back in 1934, Liverpool City Council had already proceeded with its plans to raze Chinatown, condemned Chinatown houses and businesses, and the inhabitants thus evicted without compensation. For my grandfather there followed a sequence of events that led perhaps to the preparatory steps he took towards returning with his family to China, and more immediately to his leaving Liverpool for the unviable laundry in Wales. Everything he owned, and everything to which he was attached was to be found in Chinatown. Not only did it represent his and others’ livelihoods, it was their home, their social life, their community. My grandfather refused to vacate his premises. He fought the city in court. He defended himself. How could he have thought he would win? Was it merely an act of defiance for himself, for his family, for his community?

Not only did he lose the case, and thus lose Chinatown, he was ordered to pay the court costs. Again he refused. It was not that he could not pay – he could always have borrowed the money from Chinatown acquaintances – he would not pay. He was sent to gaol for a month. My grandmother took him food, went everyday to see him, the lone Chinaman in the white man’s gaol.

I like this story also. It gives the lie to the myth of the cowering, submissive Chinaman. He challenged local government power, and he defied the judicial authority of the state.

In a work which undoubtedly changed the course of thinking about culture, society and history, *Daily Life in the Modern World*, Henri Lefebvre opens the presentation of his research and thinking on daily life with some remarks about a quest to discover the significance of a particular day in early twentieth-century history, a
day chosen completely at random. He concludes that the newspaper archive as a record of history not only hides infinitely more than it reveals about the real trends of world history, but also that it fails to tells us anything of the day to day lives of ‘unimportant’ people:

Now you want to know what happened on this day seemingly like any other, during a relatively peaceful and prosperous year, at least in our beloved West and in our dear old country. So you will go to the National Library. You will consult the newspapers. You will find items of news, accidents, the statements of the important people of the day, a dusty mass of news and varied events, dubious revelations of current wars and revolutions. You will find practically nothing that will help you foresee ... what was going to happen, what was brewing hidden by the depths of time. You will find little either about how people of no importance lived that day: their business, their concerns, their work, their amusements. Only the adverts (as yet undeveloped), items of news, the minor marginal news reports will inform you about what happened at the centre of daily life during those hours.

Bent over the newspapers and the magazines of this not too distant era ... you can now dream. On that day, didn’t something essential happen that doesn’t appear in the record ... 23

Lefebvre, like Bachelard, authorizes us, appeals to us, to dream, to account for the sub-surface of the newspaper’s seamless inscriptions of authorized history quantifiable on any particular day by a fixed number of pages: eight, or sixteen, or thirty-two. But never any more or less. No more, no less of official life is permitted to happen. Official daily life takes on a plateau-like equivalence. In advocating and authorizing our dreaming, Lefebvre is reflecting on the unnarrativized day as either a day when a seemingly minor event (on a date now unknowable) significantly shifted forward our common history, or a day which constituted a more or less significant moment in a process, a longer moment of intellectual development such as Einstein’s work on relativity, to cite Lefebvre’s own example. But he is also concerned that there is no record ‘how people of no importance lived that day,’ and without a sense of that day there can be no sense of all the days constitutive of the life of the ‘people of no importance.’ In her prefatory comments to the revised edition of the second volume of *L’invention du quotidien*, Luce Giard, likens the ‘transgressive’ quality of Michel de Certeau’s, Pierre Mayol’s and her work on the everyday when it appeared in 1980 to the transgressivity of May 1968, ‘believing in
the imagination, and the interior liberty of the "man without qualities".\textsuperscript{24} De Certeau and his colleagues' work surely in a large measure addressed Lefebvre's concern over the lack of space afforded to the everyday and the common people in the official record. To the extent that the titles of the American university presses have recently been peppered with the word 'everyday' Giard is no doubt entitled to a certain satisfaction with having popularized a certain style of inquiry. But as the authors' afterthoughts, in particular Mayol's, on the impact of French youth unemployment, themselves reveal, there is always the danger of seeing in the social and economic conditions that dictate the everyday life of a comparatively affluent society, such as was the case in the France of the 1970s, a greater emancipatory potential than really exists. For there are also moments when the everyday existence in the modern world of the 'people of no importance' is challenged by official ideological and economic changes, and by the narratives of modernity and progress. While economic and technical 'progress' may transform everyday life practices such as shopping for groceries and the time allotted to cooking, more catastrophic events such as a prolonged strike, an economic slump, a civil war, racially-inspired forced migrations, will shatter the norms and routines of material everyday life. And while, as Lefebvre intimates, the official national impact of such events may be recounted in the newspapers, the effect on the 'people of no importance' is concealed beneath the official pages of record. It was just such an official movement against 'people of no importance' that took place with the dispossession of Liverpool Chinatown's inhabitants, and which the Post and Mercury reported so glibly.

In my own search of the newspaper archives, I was not seeking an 'accurate' record of the everyday life of the poor white women, Chinese merchants and sailors and their 'half-caste' children of Liverpool Chinatown. All I hoped to do was to match stories of official provincial life with the necessarily imprecise narratives of unofficial history. 'Bent over the newspapers and the magazines of this not too distant era ... you can now dream,' wrote Lefebvre, and so on the day I found the newspaper reports of the threats to erase Chinatown, I dreamed of something essential happening that did not appear in the record.

'I will go back to China.' Sitting in the white ceramic tiled cell in Walton gaol, Chan decided he had had enough. The English had forced their way into his homeland, had made the people into
opium addicts, had taken Hong Kong for themselves, could come and go as they pleased, but here in England they would not even concede the smallest space to Chinese people. They didn't want Chinatown. They didn't want Chinese in Liverpool. 'They don't want us here. They call us barbarians and flaunt their "civilization" and their justice and their churches, and then they just take away our livelihood, take away our home. We can only go back to China.'

'Dearie,' he said to my grandmother, using their preferred term of endearment, when she came to visit, 'We must go back to China.'

'Yes, Lee,' she replied. 'We shall go.'

After all what incentive was there to remain? Every act of central and local authority must have seemed rooted in the desire to expunge the contaminating presence of the Chinaman. British citizenship legislation had even taken away my grandmother's British nationality for marrying an alien. She had been excised from the British national body.

Had my grandparents and my mother and her brothers returned to China they would have encountered numerous difficulties, especially through the years of Chinese political turmoil, in the 1950s and 1960s when to have foreign connections could be tantamount to treason. And what of the practical difficulties, the language, everyday existence? What kind of loyalty, what kind of bond did it require for this woman, my grandmother, to consider taking such a step, to consent to accompany her husband to, what was for her, a very foreign land.

Their had not been a forced marriage as such, more a marriage of circumstance perhaps, or of necessity. Both my grandmother and her mother were products of the British suffragette era, my great-grandmother was known as a 'woman of character'. She was a fairly well-educated woman, a liberated woman for her time. She decided one day that she no longer wished to tolerate her husband's behaviour, the routine of daily life and taking her four children she quit the little Cotswold village where they lived. She liked to travel. She liked to move house frequently. She was a born migrant. She met a Greek ship's carpenter; my great-grandmother and grandmother accompanied him on a long circuitous voyage around the Mediterranean. My grandmother fell in love with Palestine. She ate fresh figs and became enamoured of a Palestinian boy. She was seventeen. Later when she retold her adventure, it always sounded
like Paradise. I remember my mother and I would buy her dried figs as a treat, they were not the same, but they were a token of past pleasures. They brought her the pleasure of reminiscence. All her life, she dwelled on that moment of autonomy, of passionate life untrammelled by the boredom of habit and routine. It was her sustaining dream, the glimmer of an alternative life she might have known.

Returned from the sea, the ship's carpenter deceased, my grandmother and her elder sister worked in a Liverpool tobacconist's near Frederick Street. My grandfather bought his cigarettes there everyday.

My grandparents would eventually have five children. My mother's younger sister died in infancy. One blustery, cold day, my grandfather, euphoric after a win on the gambling tables, swept off his baby daughter to the corner sweet shop. She wasn't well wrapped up, she was fragile, and was dead within the week. My grandmother never really recovered from that trauma. She spent the rest of her life in a sort of unspoken mourning for her lost daughter, and for her lost Palestine.

It must have been difficult also to bear the weight of white disapprobation of her marriage to a Chinese. In the first half of this century, for a white woman to associate with a Chinese man, a representative of the Yellow Peril, was considered tantamount to prostitution, not to mention infidelity to the nation.

The newspapers did not neglect this aberrant phenomenon. Under the headlines 'A Yellow Peril', 'Questions of Morality' and 'Public Indignation Increasing,' the local newspaper published an editorial that foregrounded the problem of Chinese men 'tainting the race' by marrying white women, even if most of the white women, my grandmother being an exception, were Irish and thus belonged to another habitually undesirable 'racial' minority. The rhetoric of the racist discourse of the time always constructed intermarriage between 'races' as though a boundary between species had been transgressed. Physical union was seen as a bestial act. Women who associated with, or married, Chinese men were thus described as having 'mated' with them:

It is not only degraded women who mate with these men. Frequently one comes across a decent-looking, apparently happy and contented woman with three or four half white, half yellow children at her feet. It is with a shock that one sees such names as Mary Chung and Norman Sing. It is at once sorrowful and
sickening to observe such apparently decent British women succumbing to the attractions of the yellow man; but it is to be seen not alone in Chinatown, but wherever Chinese laundries are established, that is to say, all over Liverpool. Young women are fascinated by these dark-eyed Celestials.\textsuperscript{25}

My grandmother cared for her children, stood by her husband. She survived him by five or six years. In her later years she was blind and ill with diabetes, but most of all, it seemed to me, saddened by the mundanity of her life. She loved to play the piano, but needed to read music, which in her later years she could not do. On occasion she would bang the keys in frustration. She loved colour, but could not see. She told me humorous anecdotes of train journeys in the Ottoman Empire. It was a wondrous world far from the drab and poor circumstances in which she found herself. She was an adventurous women, an extravagant woman, she had the air of an actress about her. She had been one of the first women in Liverpool to drive. The car was a white Packard. It must have been one of the moments when my grandfather was comparatively affluent. He drove the car into a ditch one day and, disgusted but unconcerned, walked off and left it there for good.

For my grandmother, there had been moments of happiness, but it must have been difficult living with such a strong-willed, seemingly rash man, who lived and earned his living in a Chinatown world she could not share. I saw more of that world than she or her children did. My grandfather was not just a gambler after all. He was a literate man. He knew some law. He defended Chinese seamen, runaways, illegals, in the courts. We would hide out illegal immigrants in the attic. If they could go six months without being caught they got a residence permit; I suppose that's what used to be known as British fair play. He acted as a sort of ombudsman in disputes in Chinatown, negotiated with the police. Years after he died ageing CID police sergeants would stop my mother and ask her if she were Chan's daughter. He was the unofficial leader of Chinatown. Once a small official-looking man, dressed in what we now call a Mao suit, came from Paris to see my grandfather. My mother who was a young girl remembers that day well. The man told her she had the map of China stamped on her face and that one day she would be very proud of that. I suppose it was meant as a compliment, but also as an assertion of resistance, hope and patriotic fervour. After all this was a moment in history when the anti-colonialist struggle inevitably equated with nationalist
struggle. But my mother did not have a national face, but an ethnic face, not the face of China, but a Chinese face which led people to refuse her employment, ask her if she needed help finding her way around the city she had grown up in, or whether she understood English. Apart from his intervention in the matter of my mother’s physiognomy this Chinese man’s provenance from France reminds me of my grandfather’s own acquaintance with the French language. My grandfather read the French newspapers, perhaps then as now there was more news about China to be found in the French press. But when and where did he learn French? His childhood was spent in Canton and, after his father’s death, in Macao. Apart from Macao and Hong Kong that southern region of China fell under the French colonial sphere of influence, but surely the level of French necessary to read a newspaper would require more than just chance encounters with the colonial French presence. As a young man he had studied in Nanking, and since he had been orphaned at an early age it seems probable he was already making his living from his gambling skills. Perhaps he learnt French in Nanking. It is said he expected a consulate to open in Liverpool after World War Two, and he looked forward to being named the honorary consul. Perhaps it was his childhood ambition to be a scholar-official just like thousands of others who went to Nanking to prepare for the civil service examinations before they were abolished in 1905. But a consulate never did open in Liverpool.

Whenever my grandfather was about to go off to Chinatown, I would run the two or three blocks to the main intersection where there was a cab rank and bring back a taxi; no-one in our street had a telephone and radio cabs in any case were not yet invented. Sometimes I would go with him, and spend what seemed like eternities sitting in the drab front room of the Chinese Freemasons’ house. He would disappear for a few minutes and return with a hambao, which much later I discovered was properly called a charsiu bao. I would sit there clutching it while he disappeared again to conduct his business. Sometimes the journeys were longer, like the trip to the cancer hospital. I remember once we went out to a Chinese restaurant some miles out of town. Two chefs had been fighting with choppers. One had ended up dead on the big wooden chopping table. I cannot remember now whether the body was still on the table. I think it was there or maybe it had been removed and it was just mentioned; but since I couldn’t follow the conversation, how would I have known that? It must have been there.
With regularity he would take me to the corner candy store. I called it Paddy's. No-one else called it that. My grandfather spoke good English but with a not altogether perfect pronunciation. The English 'r' escaped him. My middle name, the name by which I was called as a boy, was Barry. When the shopkeeper asked my name my grandfather would tell him, and the shopkeeper heard it as 'Paddy'. Whenever we went into the shop the shopkeeper would say 'Paddy'. It took my mother and I a long while to work out why the shop was called Paddy's, and we didn't work it out until my grandfather had died. Occasionally he would take me to women's houses. He knew a number of women. One or two were Chinese and lived nearby. Several of the women were white and had 'half-caste' children about my age. Who were these women? The wives of Chinese seamen whose marriages he had arranged?

Apart from the scenes I personally observed or participated in, much of what I have narrated here happened before I can even claim to remember, either before I was born or before I could understand, so I must invent it, reconstruct it. However, the racist discourse is a documented historical reality, the official acts took place, and the family's reactions to their treatment, which survive as undated anecdotes, happened some time. However much research I might do as a descendant of an immigrant, of a diaspora dweller with a whole undisclosed life locked in her/his head, ultimately I can do no more than, indeed am compelled to, re-imagine. Imagination is the stuff of fiction, but it is also the reality of half-known, half-sensed, half-spoken, half-gone-with-the-dead diaspora stories. If the stories are to be known they have to be written imaginatively, inventively. In a sense then this chapter is an attempt to make sense of my own personal diaspora, but it is also an approach to comprehending the impossibility of such an attempt.

To talk of this inheritance, to refer to history, as to refer to translation or memory, is always to speak of the incomplete, the never fully decipherable. It is to betray any hope of transparency. For to translate is always to transform. It always involves a necessary travesty of any metaphysics of authenticity or origins. We find ourselves employing a language that is always shadowed by loss, an elsewhere, a ghost: the unconscious, an 'other' text, an 'other' voice, an 'other' world ...

Iain Chambers
PADDY’S CHINATOWN, OR THE HARLEQUIN’S COAT

The everyday is what grips us intimately from inside. It is a halfway history of ourselves, almost in retreat, sometimes veiled; we must not forget this ‘monde mémoire’, as Péguy put it. A similar world grips our mind, olfactory memory, memory of places of childhood, memory of the body, of childhood gestures, of pleasures. Perhaps it is not superfluous to underline the importance of the domain of this ‘irrational’ history, or of this ‘non-history ...

Paul Leuilliot

Bent over the newspapers and magazines in the Liverpool City Library, I looked up and wondered whether on that day in reading in the newspapers of the Hull riots, Chan Lee did not take some essential decision. He always read the papers – English, Chinese, sometimes French too my mother tells me. I ordered some photocopies of dusty newspaper court reports of proceedings against Chinese seamen and laundry workers arrested for opium smoking or gambling, and left the public library. I walked back across the gardens at the back of Saint George’s Hall, gardens I’d walked across so many times before. I was a teenager studying in the public library for university entrance examinations, reading up on barely known Latin American novelists who thirty years later are heroes, politicians or ghosts. But I wasn’t thinking about that moment of my life. I was thinking about the summer I went to my first summer camp, the summer we moved house from the old Victorian ‘slum’ to the high rise council flat, the summer I moved up to the central Liverpool high school. It was a glorious summer. England won soccer’s World Cup, although I had supported Pelé and Brazil, until the finals, and even bought a yellow pennant with Pelé’s face printed on one side and a blue globe on the other. My mother gave me the money to buy some World Cup mementoes and in addition to the pennant I bought an England key ring that had a plastic replica of the England mascot, ‘World Cup Willie’ who looked something like a cross between a lion and a teddy bear and sported a union jack tee-shirt. The two-year old Labour government was re-elected, no doubt in no small part thanks to England’s soccer victory. But that wasn’t the first election I remembered. The first was the 1964 election. In the yard of the school in a posh part of Liverpool, which I reached each day only after taking two public buses, I was the only boy or girl to support Labour, all the others were Conservatives, except for one senior boy whose father was destined to be a Liberal leader in the town one day. I must have been eight or nine years old, and I recalled Labour posters posted
over the old Co-op shop window in Myrtle Street; a shopping street which was already closing down shop by shop because of slum clearance, declining trade and the gradual incursion of the supermarket in Liverpool. But that was 1964. The most memorable day in what seemed now like the endless and sunny summer of 1966 was when I went ‘down town’ with my mother to welcome the Everton and Liverpool soccer teams arriving on top of an open-top double decker bus for the Lord Mayor’s banquet in their honour; (in Liverpool although not in other parts of Britain people say ‘downtown’, a seafaring town’s linguistic import from America may be, or just the fact that the centre of town is a dell, I was once admonished in an undergraduate translation class at London University for using the expression). Both teams were Liverpool teams. I wore Everton and Liverpool ribbons and an Everton plastic boater. Liverpool and Everton had between them achieved a double by winning the Football Association cup and the League title. Bill Shankly, the gruff and avuncular Scot, Liverpool’s manager, was King, so that parts of Liverpool’s Irish population then worshipped two King Billies. I no longer remembered who the Everton manager was. Like the election of the Labour governments, the day had become confused in my mind. The memory had become fused with that of the day I went to see the Beatles on the balcony of the Empire Theatre and stood on the steps of the impressively neo-classic St. George’s Hall to get a better view. Maybe I hadn’t seen them. Maybe they hadn’t come out. Maybe I had it confused with a Pathé news clip that showed them coming out, that I saw later. I couldn’t recall. ‘One thing’s for sure’, I muttered to myself, ‘they built that bloody hall back to front.’ And they had. Or so it was said. The builders read the plans upside down. The magnificent St. George’s Hall was meant to give onto the splendour of its gardens, look out towards the river, towards the Ocean, the New World. But they built it backwards. It looked onto the grimy old building that was Lime Street station, towards Manchester, towards the industrial mill towns of northern England. Somehow, I thought, that was the beginning of the end for Liverpool. They say the architect committed suicide when he received the news by telegram while aboard ship in the Mediterranean. It was raining again. I counted my change and caught a taxi. Since Thatcher had deregulated the city’s bus authority a plethora of busses with liveries of different colours had sprung up, besides their route numbers had all changed since I was a boy, and I no longer knew which bus to catch home.
In the narration of my leaving the library that day, I omitted a mundane memory from my catalogue of random thoughts. I had actually worked in that library. I mean I had not just consulted the collection, I had actually trained as a librarian there. Between high school and university I worked as a library assistant. I was dispatched to the branch library in the undesirable area of Toxteth; the area in which I had grown up. I worked in a humdrum unexciting job in a library building built for the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and now barely frequented except by the poor and unemployed in search of warmth. I wanted to be gone from Liverpool. The time I worked there would have been about five or six years before the riots which gave that area notoriety. Twelve years before I had used that library on my way home from primary school. I had been issued with tickets and borrowed a book on space exploration; I remember it recounting stories of monkeys and cosmonauts. I think I must have decided it was too rough an area to chance my luck in with regularity because I used libraries in other places after that. A hundred yards up Parliament Street from the fine old neo-classical public library building was the Rialto Cinema where my grandfather took me on several occasions. We did not go often. We usually went to the Tatler news and cartoon cinemas down town. Grandfather would watch the Pathé news and I got to see Tweetie Pie and Tom and Jerry. But just occasionally we went to the Rialto. We saw the Disney cartoon *The Sword in the Stone*, and a film about the 301 Spartans, which impressed me a good deal. It was a great story, later taught to me at school with much less panache and colour. The Athenians wore purple tunics and the Spartans red, I recall. Just sometimes, my grandmother took me to the cinema. I remember we went when I was about five or six to see *Summer Holiday* at the Majestic. It was a sort of pre-MTV pop musical starring the Shadows and Cliff Richard, England’s recording industry’s tame answer to Elvis Presley. I was reminded of that trip to the cinema just recently when watching British television Channel Four’s *Bhaji on the Beach*, a wonderful film telling the story of Indian women of various generations, and their day-to-day harassment at the hands of husbands, families, and ordinary English racists. The local Indian women’s group organises a day out to Blackpool, and the music chosen to accompany the journey sequence is a Hindi cover version of the theme tune from *Summer Holiday*.

When I went to see Cliff Richards that day, the status of the Majestic cinema as a daily landmark in my life was another five
years away, for the unremarkable cinema building was only a stone’s throw away from the high school I attended throughout my teenage years. As for the Rialto, an unusual and memorable building by reason of its tiled whiteness which foregrounded it against the neighbouring redbrick Edwardian terraces, it was destined, like many other cinemas and churches in the 1960s, to become a furniture warehouse. And yet its final hour would be much more heroic as it ultimately became a centrepiece of the 1981 Toxteth riots and was to be consumed dramatically by flames. I didn’t witness it. I was then at Peking University pursuing a quest determined by boyhood affection and fascination for an old Chinaman I still strove to understand.

As a child I saw the residues of aging lives. I ‘knew’ an old Chinese, a ‘Chinaman’ as white people called him then, the scholar-official manqué, a would-be returnee to China, ultimately just an old gambler whose luck had run out, or who had no further need of luck. I remember arguments over money. One in particular sticks in my mind. My grandfather wanted a sum of money for his own purposes, perhaps to go and gamble with. My mother wanted to use it to pay the electricity bill. That argument must have happened when I was already about seven years old, since for much of my early childhood we had only gaslight; I used to play with the little replacement gas mantles. One day there was no more gas. It had been disconnected. The bill had not been paid. It seems now that we had neither gas nor electricity for a very long period of time. Eventually my mother found the money to have one floor of the old house wired. I don’t know who won the argument over the electricity bill that day, but I do not recall the electricity being disconnected. However I do remember that my grandfather pronounced the word electricity ‘Electric City.’ I imagined giant electricity generating plants brightly illuminated and working through the night, and for a long time wondered about the exact location of Electric City.

My grandmother loathed routine and habit. She knew the value of the passionate life she had been denied. She abhorred the dismal greyness of everyday decaying city life. My grandmother once so effervescent became during the time I knew her a sad, old woman whose worst fears came to pass. Her name was Gwenllian. She and her mother had spent many years in Wales; when I was a boy my grandmother would take me to see my great aunt, the one with whom she had worked in the tobacconist’s. My great aunt lived in Wales. I was enchanted by the countryside and the nation. I
wandered alone over the hills imagining adventures, inventing stories about having caught trout by tickling their bellies, and playing with the local Welsh-speaking boys who made me feel like a foreigner (I was) and gave me my first glimpse of the realities of English colonialism. My great grandmother like my grandmother adored that country. She named my grandmother after a Welsh Princess who had been locked up at the top of a tower and left to there die. When Liverpool City Council eventually rehoused my family out of the old slum Victorian building that had housed the seaman’s cafe, it was to the top floor of a high-rise block of flats. My grandmother blind and unable to walk more than a few steps at a time felt she was re-living the legend of Princess Gwenllian, and the council flat was indeed her prison tower.

If you asked my uncles about my grandfather, you would hear very different stories, or perhaps no story at all. I asked my mother’s eldest brother once to talk about his father. He had managed to graduate from medical school thanks to remittances from the laundry, but could not survive the race and class ideologies of the 1950s British medical profession. He settled in Canada, where he was a surgeon. He had been the closest to my grandfather, he worked in the laundry himself. He knew the Chinese characters for ‘collar’ and ‘shirt’. It’s almost like a rags to riches fairy tale. But he had nothing to say, no tale to tell. He too is now dead, along with his own untold history.

The funeral cortège drove into Nelson Street. Two or three Chinese men were standing on the steps of the small terraced house that served as the headquarters of the Chinese Freemasons, the tong house; it was the house where I’d sat clutching a charsiubao many a time as I waited for my grandfather to return from his errands. I had been sitting in the small sepia and maroon coloured front room only a few days before the funeral, but I have never set foot in that house since. The house is now painted white and has a red door and plastic sign proclaiming it be the Headquarters of the UK Chinese Freemasons. I have never seen anyone go in or out.

The Chinese men who were dawdling on the pavement were smoking. They quickly dropped their lit cigarettes and ran into the house. It was a mid-winter’s day, but I remember clearly that the sun was shining brightly, I wanted to take the family Brownie camera to the cemetery. The black cars drove slowly down the street. There were a number of people standing on the pavement to watch Chan Lee’s funeral procession go by. The hearse drove around the
block and passed in front of the freemasons' house again. By now the men were struggling to hoist up a flag on the pole that still stands in front of the first floor window. The procession was repeated and this time the flag was up but from the gesticulating in the street beneath the flagpole it seemed something was wrong. It was the wrong flag. The hearse went around the block again and the next time the funeral procession drove by the flag seemed to everyone's satisfaction.

Were my grandfather to return today to that Freemason's House where the flags were run up, to that haven of stranded old Chinese, he would find towering before it a brilliant, garishly coloured red-lacquered Chinese archway, imported from the People's Republic of China and erected by workers from China, the Chinese translation of 'Chinatown', 'Zhongguocheng' (there used not to be such a word in Chinese), emblazoned across the upper part of the monument. It would be sentimentally appealing to interpret the arch as a memorial for he who never did go back to China. But no, his story, my story cannot be resolved so glibly. Rather, I see that arch as an anachronistic structure, out of time and out of place, closing off the Chinatown I once knew, casting its shadow over that front room of the tong house where I patiently awaited the return of my grandfather, wondering where he had been and what he had done, and wonder I still do.
NOTES

PREFACE


3 Sardar 273.


1 CHINESE REVERIES, ENGLISH RAILINGS


7 See discussions of the assimilation of Daoist tropes and thought by modernist poets in my Dai Wangshu: The Life and Poetry of a Chinese
NOTES


11 Bachelard, Poetic Imagination and Reverie 13.

12 Blanchot 263.

13 Blanchot 266.

14 Blanchot 266–7.


2 Berridge and Edwards 75.


8 See novelist Brian Castro's splendid account of the now forgotten generations of Chinese immigrants to Australia, Birds of Passage, and for South Africa see Melanie Yap and Diane Leong Man, Colour, Confusion and Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press).


10 Report of the Commission Appointed by the City Council to Inquire into Chinese Settlements in Liverpool in the Proceedings of the Council, 1906–1907, page 1748. The figure for March had been 337, as against 356 in December, which fact leads the report to conclude that the Chinese population had 'increased considerably during the nine months succeeding March.' Nevertheless, the report concedes: 'It

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is possible that some of the Chinamen may have been born in Hong Kong and so be British subjects.'

11 As Ian Scott put it in his *Political Change and The Crisis of Legitimacy in Hong Kong* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1989) the British merchants 'found the system appropriate to their needs and interests. It gave the larger hongs, such as Jardine and Matheson and John Swire, official recognition of their pre-eminence in the colony and provided them with a platform from which they could defend their wider economic concerns ...' (page 65).


13 Gabb.


15 Trocki 237.


17 *Hong Kong Legislative Council Sessional Papers*, 3/1909, 30.

18 Trocki 237.


26 Printed and Published at the *North China Herald* office, Shanghai, 1890.


31 Holcombe 60.

32 Smith 131.

33 Smith 133.

34 Smith 133.


36 (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh).

37 'C'est là [le language] la principale origine de cette 'intellectual turbidity'

38 Claudel 69.


40 Johnston 12.


42 The *Weekly Courier*, [Liverpool] 8 December 1906.

43 Still such jokes are common. Surfing the Internet, I came across the following joke that relies on a Chinese–English translilngual pun: 'This guy is walking through Chinatown. He is fascinated with all the Chinese restaurants, the Chinese shops, the Chinese signs and banners on the buildings. He is having the best time just walking and looking. He turns a corner and sees a building with a sign ‘Hans Olaffsen’s Laundry’. ‘Hans Olaffsen?’ he thinks. ‘How in the world does that fit in here?’. So, he walks into the shop and sees an old Chinese gentleman sitting in the corner. The visitor asks, ‘How in the world did this place get a name like Hans Olaffsen’s Laundry?’ The old man answers ‘Is name of owner.’ The visitor asks ‘Well, who in the heck is the owner?’ ‘I am he’, answers the old man. ‘You? How in the heck did you ever get a name like Hans Olaffsen?’ The old man replies, ‘Many years ago when I come to this country, I was standing in line at Documentation Center. Man in front of me was big blond Swede. Lady look at him and go ‘What your name? He say Hans Olaffsen. She look at me. What your name? I say Sam Ting.’

In an e-mail communication the web page’s author told me that he had not realized the joke might be offensive and had not intended to cause offence.

44 Formby was born in 1904, in a poor working-class area of Wigan, in Lancashire. He toured the battle fronts of North Africa, India, Burma, Malta, Gibraltar and Italy, and Normandy after D-Day. In 1946 his popularity was recognised officially with the award of an O.B.E. Between the years of 1934 to 1946 Formby made a total of 20 films. He remains a cult figure; in Lancashire there is a Graceland-type centre where for a few pounds the enthusiast can relive the ‘The George Formby Experience’. There are dozens of pages relating to Formby on the internet.

45 ‘George Formby – It’s turned out nice again, hasn’t it .... A brief history of the world’s greatest music-hall star’ http://users.powernet.co.uk/lampost/formnotes.html [Accessed 17 January 1998].

46 Even to the Royal Navy itself the ‘Chinaman’ was invaluable, and indeed until 1995 the British navy’s laundry was done on board ship by Chinese laudrymen. Thus the Chinese laundryman can be counted among the unsung heroes not only of the first and second world wars (trench diggers in the former, seamen in the latter) but also of Britain last ‘great naval adventure’ the ‘Falklands Conflict’.

NOTES


3 RE-TAKING TIGER MOUNTAIN BY TELEVISION


4 Debord 8.
5 UPI, 28 October 1993.
6 UPI, 28 October 1993.
8 *The Economist*, 26–March–1 April 1994, page 74.
10 UPI, 6 November 1993.
14 CND 18 May 2000.
16 ‘A spokesman of Zhuhai TV station said that the footage was part of a news report on the opening of the Macau Cable Television Station and was broadcasted on July 9. He said that the editors did not notice that the footage was among the images in the background display.’ *China News Digest* (CND), 13 August 2000.
17 CND 13 August 2000.
18 ‘The drama, in 35 segments, mirrors very closely the corruption scandal of Chen Xitong, the former mayor of Beijing and the deputy mayor, Wang Baosen, whose suicide finally exposed the scandal in 1995. Reportedly, the TV series points to the involvement of other high officials who have, as yet, not been officially implicated, and still remain in power.’ CND 7 May 2000.
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22 Chan 140-1.


24 Cubitt 156.


26 Debord 8.

27 Agence France Presse, 9 November 1993.

28 Cubitt 156.

29 Just as the Western music industry is depending on the Asian market to compensate for declining sales of its products in the industrialized nations, likewise the tobacco industry will substitute Chinese consumers for its declining Western markets.


31 Barker 93.


33 Ien Ang 70.

34 Ien Ang 69.


36 Witness this typical news report of a police round-up of human 'merchandise': 'Women and children from the poorer inland provinces are abducted and sold to the richer provinces in the south, either as spouses or as adopted children. Many are forced into prostitution or beggar syndicates. The Guangdong police announced on Monday [11 April 2000] that they had arrested 484 suspects working for 54 human-trafficking syndicates and saved more than 1,000 women and 500 children from slavery. Similar police crack-downs were also reported in Fujian, Anhui, and Sichuan province.' CND 13 April 2000.

37 Lyrics and music by Gao Feng; performed by Gao Feng; video directed by Zhao Lei; cinematography by Feng Yan; art work by Shu Gang. All translations mine.

38 Both the song and video were produced in 1995 and broadcast widely and frequently during 1996 on Chinese state television, and by the independent Hong Kong-based satellite television company Star Television whose footprint covers most of the Chinese-speaking areas of the Asia-Pacific region. The song has also been broadcast on Hong Kong commercial radio and Hong Kong terrestrial television variety shows.

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40 As evidenced by CNN un-edited footage of which the author has a video copy.

41 The word I translate here as 'home' (jia) also means family in Chinese, thus facilitating the slide into representation of all Chinese as brothers and sisters; the Chinese word for the nation, or country is guojia, the element guo meaning 'state', and jia 'home/family'.

42 See note 38 above.

43 In the early 1920s an institute was established at National Beijing University to collect folksongs. Major intellectual figures such as Gu Jiegang, Zhou Zuoren and Liu Fu were deeply committed to this movement. For more detail see Hung Chang-tai, Going to the People; Chinese Intellectuals and folk literature 1918-1937 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

The basic plot of Chen Kaige’s ‘fifth generation’ 1985 film Yellow Earth is based on the Yan’an practice of cultural workers roaming the countryside in search of folk songs. The lyrics would be altered to convey a revolutionary method and then redistributed to the masses. One of the of the visual centerpieces of Chen’s film was a Yan’an drum dance, a dance reproduced in Gao Feng’s video as well as in other films and television advertisements of the 1980 and 1990s.

44 A comprehensive study of chime bells and their importance to the feudal Chinese state is to be found in Lothar Von Falkenhausen, Suspended Music: Chime-Bells in the Culture of Bronze Age China (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).


46 Balibar 430.

47 Balibar 430.

48 Balibar 425.

49 Debray 318.

50 Debray 318.

51 Reeves 68.

52 Royal Television Society North East and Border Area Awards Journalist of the Year, 1999.

4 PADDY’S CHINATOWN, OR THE HARLEQUIN’S COAT


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6 *Tel Quel*, no 47, 1971, p. 89.
8 Rey Chow, ‘Between Colonizers’ in *Diaspora* 2.2 (Fall 1992).
12 Lane 22–3.
13 Serres, jacket note.
17 See my discussion of hybridity and contamination in Chapter Seven of Lee *Troubadours*.
18 Jenkinson 187.
19 Owing to massive emigration from Ireland in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Liverpool became a very Irish city. Liverpool was the hub for onward emigration to America and many would-be Americans got no further. By 1851 twenty-five per cent of the city’s population was Irish; see Foster, R. F. *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* (London & New York: Penguin, 1988) 355. The voters of the Scotland Division of Liverpool, from 1885 to 1929 elected as their Member of Parliament the Irish Home Rule advocate T. P. O’Connor, and Liverpool Irish voters ‘seem to have remained readier to mobilize for Irish issues than British ones’ (Foster 366).
20 At a conference I attended in Boston in 1994, I presented a paper on Chinese television, and remarked on the tendency of oppressed minorities once empowered to in turn oppress ‘lesser’ minorities and gave as an example the situation of the Native Americans in Quebec. At the end of the session a member of the audience approached me and complimented me on my paper but added that I really should not make too much of the Native American minority problem in Quebec, since there were only 80,000 of them after all, and how could they be allowed to stand in the way of Francophone Quebec’s aspirations in the face of the Anglophonic Canadian oppressor. I am generally favourable towards Francophone Canadian autonomy, but this person’s comments confirmed my doubts about the status of minorities within minorities.
21 Jenkinson 204. ‘Between January and August 1919 there were racial riots in seven major population centres in Britain: Barry, Cardiff,
Glasgow, Liverpool, London, Newport, and South Shields .... In Hull the uneasy atmosphere between Whites and Blacks also resulted in a full scale riot in 1920' (Jenkinson 182). The Britishness of black citizens of British colonies was frequently interrogated, in 1925 following pressure from the seamen's union, the Home Office employed its "coloured Alien Seamen Order" to oblige African, Asian and West Indian seamen to register with the police as aliens even though, as citizens of the empire, they were British.' (Tony Lane, The Merchant Seamen's War (Liverpool: The Bluecoat Press, 1990) 36.

22 See the excellent documentary by Jessica Yu (producer and director), Home Base: A Chinatown Called Heinlenville (American Film Foundation, 1333 Ocean Avenue, Santa Monica, CA 90401) 1991.


27 de Certeau 11.