Introduction

On 1 October 1839 – exactly a hundred and ten years before Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China to a huge crowd in Tiananmen Square – a secret cabinet meeting was held behind closed doors in Windsor Castle, England. On this occasion, ministers of the Whig government led by Prime Minister Lord Melbourne and Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston made a historic decision to send a military expedition to China for the protection of British commerce, interests and honour. This decision effectively resulted in the First Anglo-Chinese War (1840–2), popularly referred to as the 'Opium War'. Although the conflict has been de-emphasised by some scholars as the dividing line between modern and premodern Chinese history,[1] it is still widely recognised as a deeply consequential event in the history of Sino-Western relations. The war not only substantially 'opened up' China to the West but also marked the beginning of a 'century of humiliation' for the Chinese.

As such a defining moment, the Opium War has been much commented upon by historians. In explaining its origins, some emphasised the irreconcilability of Britain's economic expansion and China's containment policies.[2] Scholars of this school maintained that a war was inevitable, while opium was but an instrument of British commercial expansion: 'Had there been an effective alternative to opium, say molasses or rice, the conflict might have been called the Molasses War or the Rice War'.[3] Another school of historians believed that the military conflicts between Britain and China in the mid-nineteenth century were indeed unavoidable, but they were primarily the outcome of a clash of opposing cultures.[4] Pre-Opium War China was considered as backward, stagnant, irrational and unable to understand Britain's 'modern' civilisation. In the late 1960s, John K. Fairbank famously suggested

that the war was caused by the wide cultural differences between the conservative East and the progressive West.[5] Almost a decade later, Tan Chung, a Chinese historian based in India, explored the connections between the opium traffic and British imperialism in Asia. With a strong anti-imperialist tone, Tan pointed out that the vital importance of the opium trade had been underestimated as a cause of the war by Fairbank and others, whereas the Sino-British cultural differences had been exaggerated. After a careful investigation into the triangular trade between Britain, India and China, Tan concluded that the clash of socio-economic interests around the opium traffic was the primary cause of the First Anglo-Chinese War.[6] In 1998, J.Y. Wong endorsed Tan's views by conducting sophisticated statistical analysis into Britain's commerce with China. Focusing on the importance of the opium trade to the maintenance of the British Empire, his research confirmed that opium sales to China were extremely important for British rule in India and for the development of British imperialism in general. For this reason, Wong maintained that both Opium Wars – the 1840–2 war and the 1856–60 *Arrow* War (commonly known as the Second Opium War) – arose from Britain's need to protect the crucial opium trade, rather than from a general commercial or cultural conflict.[7] As an overall explanation for the origins of the Opium War, this war-due-to-opium theory has been probably the most widely accepted one in recent decades. 'The evidence overwhelmingly suggests', as Julia Lovell has recently summarised, 'the principal cause of the war was … Britain's determination to maintain its illegal, profitable opium trade between Britain, India and China, in the face of the Qing government's resolution to ban drug smuggling'.[8]

In addition to these interpretations, which sought to pinpoint the fundamental cause of the Opium War, other scholars have mentioned some less discernible but still significant causes. Peter Fay, for example, claimed that the determination of Protestant missionaries to 'open up' China was crucial to the outbreak of the war.[9] Glenn Melancon pointed out that Britain's concern for its national honour and the domestic political crisis facing the Whig government in the late 1830s were also important factors in influencing Britain's decision to go to war with China.[10] Lydia Liu's study on the translation of the Chinese character *yi* has analysed the manner in which translingual communication influenced Sino-British encounters. Her work has shown that negative connotations were produced when the British translated *yi* as 'barbarian' and how this discourse created anger and indignation on the British side to fuel the drift to the Opium War.[11] Li Chen, in his sophisticated work *Chinese Law in Imperial Eyes*, has added a legal dimension to the study on the origins of the war.[12] Chen is concerned with British

and Western conceptions of sovereignty, extraterritoriality and international law, as well as how the British strove to justify a war of highly questionable legality within their own legal framework. Chen's work illustrated how the discourses on Chinese and international law came to influence the causes, decision-making and long-term results of the Opium War. Chen revealed that 'the popular perception of Chinese judicial administration as despotic and barbaric' encouraged defiance of Chinese laws and that Charles Elliot's intervention in the opium crisis of 1839 helped convert the Chinese anti-opium campaign into 'an unjust aggression against British lives, liberty, property and national dignity'.[13] These legal notions, according to Chen, provided an opportunity for key British actors to legitimise British military action against China. With respect to the identities of these 'key British actors', Song-Chuan Chen has recently added that a group of British merchants in Canton, known as the 'warlike party', should be held primarily responsible for the outbreak of war between the two nations.[14] His book *Merchants of War and Peace* is helpful in expanding the existing knowledge on the British mercantile community in Canton in the 1830s, by providing very useful contextual information on the making of the Canton system, the debate on the translation of *yi* (barbarian/stranger), the formation of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in China and so on. Chen, however, refused to accept that the opium trade or the crisis in 1839 was the origin of the war. 'The war's origin', he insisted, 'lay in the Warlike party's actions to force the Whig government to respond'.[15]

These existing studies have revealed many interesting aspects of the Opium War, but they also share some common weaknesses. In particular, in explaining the causes of the war, previous research has produced either grand narratives which have overlooked some important historical details (such as Fairbank's case challenged by Tan),[16] or specific 'short-term (*courte durée*)' studies of the kind which 'centred on the drama of "great events"'[17] only. Much research concentrating on the war itself has traced its origins back no earlier than the rise of the opium trade and more attention has therefore been paid to the immediate triggers of hostilities.[18] Moreover, some researchers of the Opium War appear to be keen to identify *the* principal cause of the conflict – either the general expansion of Britain's trade, or the opium trade in particular, or a clash of Western and Eastern cultures, or the need to safeguard Britain's national honour, or the war campaigns waged by the 'warlike party'. In contrast, some underlying but equally important questions remain unclear: how was China perceived in the British eyes before the war idea was formed? How was the China question discussed in a longer duration prior to the war? On the basis of these perceptions and

attitudes, how exactly was the idea of the Opium War created, developed and justified in the British minds? To answer these questions, I argue for the necessity of surveying a medium-term (*moyenne durée*) period – a nearly half-century timespan before the war – to examine British imperial attitudes formed as a result of Sino-British encounters both before and during the years in which the opium trade became a serious concern. The purpose of this study, however, is not to replace the existing theories on the causes of the war with a brand new one. Its aim is to explore some hitherto under-researched aspects of Sino-British relations through a new perspective, to analyse the important factors *without* which open hostilities between Britain and China could *not* have been possible, in order to understand the origins of the Opium War more fully.

It needs to be pointed out that independent from the above-mentioned scholarship, which largely consists of diplomatic and commercial histories, there is another relevant body of literature offering cultural investigations of early British–Chinese relations. This field of cultural studies, however, has not previously been brought into dialogue with the former in a sustained manner. Some early publications of this scholarship often do not differentiate clearly between Britain and the West or between China and Asia.[19] In 1998, a group of Chinese historians published an edited volume entitled *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*,[20] in which they began to comment on the positive and negative images of China presented by English writers. Since the beginning of the new millennium, there has been a significant increase in work from Western scholars on early British perceptions of China. Rachel Ramsey and Robert Batchelor, in their respective papers, have discussed how individuals in Britain used China as an imaginary space to advocate for change at home.[21] By analysing John Webb's *An Historical Essay*,[22] for example, they have revealed that the Chinese system of meritocracy, as opposed to aristocracy in Britain at the time, served as an enviable model for the British middle and upper classes to criticise Britain's government bureaucracy. Focusing on the years from 1600 to 1730, Robert Markley has challenged the assumptions of earlier scholars that China was technologically, economically and culturally inferior to Europe in the English imagination during the discussed period.[23] In Markley's study, a range of English writings, including those of John Milton, John Dryden and Daniel Defoe, have been utilised to demonstrate that a sense of admiration for China's wealth and power clearly existed in the minds of early modern English writers. These perceptions of China, according to Markley, helped shape national and individual identities in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English literature.

In addition to these general studies on British/English cultural representations of China, other scholars tend to focus on more specific themes. Beth Kowaleski-Wallace and Kristin Bayer, for instance, have analysed how British consumption of Chinese tea defined notions of gender, class and opinions of China in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[24] David Porter, Elizabeth Hope Chang and Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins have examined the British/English cultural awareness of China from the perspectives of aesthetic practice, consumer tastes and material culture.[25] Porter, in particular, has explored the process by which Chinese aesthetic ideas were assimilated within English culture through imports of Chinese goods such as porcelain and furniture. He agrees with Kowaleski-Wallace and Bayer that because the trade in and the consumption of Chinese products were largely associated with the English female, they gave rise to a feminisation of China in the English imagination. It, in turn, contributed to the increasingly negative views of China and Chinese culture in England in the early nineteenth century. To understand this shift from positive to negative attitudes, William Christie and Logan Collins have investigated the representations of China in British periodicals.[26] They are concerned with the roles that were played by the writers and editors of periodical journals in constructing images of China in the minds of the British reading public, the former concentrating on the representation of the Macartney embassy, while the latter surveying how China was defined in major British periodicals from 1793 to 1830.

This scholarship of cultural histories has substantially enriched our understanding of Sino-British cultural exchange in the centuries and decades before the Opium War, but one common feature of these studies is that they tend to dwell on how China as a civilisation was understood by the literate public, especially by intellectuals.[27] These impressions were not formed by those who had visited China or who possessed political influence as a direct result of early Sino-British encounters. In 1992, Mary Louise Pratt pointed out in *Imperial Eyes* the importance of studying cross-cultural perceptions from the perspective of a 'contact zone'. [28] This approach has been adopted more recently by Ulrike Hillemann, who has indicated that changing British knowledge of its empire in Asia might have made a military attack on China more imaginable.[29] Peter J. Kitson's *Forging Romantic China* is probably the best study so far in analysing the works of those individuals who had first-hand experience in China through embassies, trade and missionary work during the British Romantic period, demarcated by Kitson as *c*.1760 – *c*.1840.[30] Kitson has shown how new British perceptions of China were constructed by these so-called 'China experts', as a response to the previous images of China transmitted by Jesuit missionaries, or

formed through the acquisition of Chinese commercial goods as discussed by Porter and others. Kitson's methodological focus, however, is not exclusively on the writings and translations of these Britons who were acknowledged as authorities in interpreting China. He is also concerned with the process in which these new understandings of China were mediated via a dynamic print culture to a variety of British poets, essayists, novelists and dramatists, including Jane Austen, Thomas Percy, William Jones and George Colman who had never been to China. Kitson's emphasis, therefore, is not the question of *political* reception. The possible connection between the changing British attitudes towards China and the drift to the Opium War remains unexplored.

This book makes the first attempt to connect the two largely separate bodies of literature – the diplomatic and commercial histories of the Opium War and the cultural studies of early British representations of China. It explores the complex interplay between cultural representations and policy towards China, as a way of understanding the origins of the Opium War. This study examines the crucial half-century before the war, a medium-term period which Kitson and Markley have recently compared in importance with that of American and French Revolutions and the Napoleonic Wars.[31] This period produced a range of Sino-British political moments of connection, from the Macartney embassy (1792–4), through the Amherst embassy (1816–17) to the Napier incident (1834) and the lead-up to the opium crisis (1839–40). To grasp more fully how the idea of war against China developed as a result of changing attitudes, this book focuses on the perceptions formed by those who had first-hand experience of China or possessed political influence in Britain. In comparison with the multifarious representations of China's image created by the British writers 'at home', whose impact on policies is somewhat difficult to ascertain, Britain's direct discoveries in China clearly received much attention from the policy-makers. From Amherst to Napier, as well as some Members of Parliament who participated in the debates on the opium question, many of them had declared that they placed emphasis on the 'local experience' obtained by British travellers to and residents in China.[32] These first-hand observations were also more likely to have had a greater influence on the opinions of those who later travelled to China or helped to shape the development of British–Chinese relations. Li Chen's and Song-Chuan Chen's works have demonstrated that the views of Charles Elliot, Britain's Superintendent of Trade in China 1836–41, and William Jardine, one of the leading opium traders, were key to convince Palmerston of the necessity to go to war against the Middle Kingdom.[33] For these reasons, this book examines a wealth of primary materials, some in more detail than ever before, with a special focus on how British observers perceived and

interpreted aspects of China, such as its government, society and people, when these were met and confronted. By using these sources in such a way, this study seeks to discover how changing images of China were connected to British discussions over whether to adopt a pacific or aggressive policy towards the Qing court. Only by investigating how key opinion-formers and decision-makers developed and justified their views on this matter can we ascertain how the idea of open warfare against China gradually became acceptable and why the First Anglo-Chinese War broke out at such a point in time. On this basis, this book eventually illuminates the underlying causes as well as immediate triggers of the Opium War from a perceptional point of view.

This book starts with a brief introduction to British knowledge of China before official Sino-British encounters took place. The main body of this book consists of two parts (in five chapters). In Part I, two British royal embassies to China, the Macartney and the Amherst missions, are investigated and analysed. Since they both failed to achieve their diplomatic and commercial goals, these two early contacts with China are conventionally regarded as unsuccessful. Nevertheless, if we take into consideration their impact on the development of British attitudes towards China, these embassies can be considered of much greater long-term importance. In general, they not only encouraged initial official contacts with the Chinese government but led to more visits into the interiors of many Chinese cities and rural areas by British travellers. This experience helped the British participants in these embassies to obtain more in-depth perceptions of China's circumstances at the time. On the basis of this newly acquired knowledge, however, the two embassies reached contrasting opinions on whether Britain should abandon the conciliatory attitude towards China that had previously been adopted. A more aggressive policy towards the Qing government, as a result, was becoming more imaginable to the British on the one hand, but on the other hand it was also developing into a controversial issue.

In Part II, British perceptions of China during the 1830s, the immediate pre-Opium War period, are closely examined. From the debate between the East India Company [EIC] advocates and free traders in the early 1830s, to the controversy over the opium crisis at the end of the decade, the perception of a Chinese government manipulated by a capricious and despotic monarchy was developed and seen as the primary cause of China's backwardness. China was increasingly interpreted as an isolated 'other' that could not be communicated with through normal diplomatic negotiations. As a consequence, a firm attitude, supported by a British naval force, became seen as a necessary approach to safeguard the wellbeing of British interests in China as well as that of the Chinese

common people. This part, in the end, shows how the continuity and changes in British imperial attitudes towards China through this critical period shaped Britain's final decision to attack the Chinese empire.

Early British knowledge of China

Before examining British attitudes towards China during the early British–Chinese encounters, it is necessary to sketch what a Briton such as Lord George Macartney (1737–1806) could have read about China, or what second-hand knowledge of China an informed British public could have gained, prior to the two countries' official encounters. As stated above, there has been considerable research on early European perceptions of China, but, generally speaking, such information might have reached Britain from the following sources. First of all, Catholic missionaries, especially the Jesuits who visited the Chinese empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, are well-known for transmitting rather favourable images of China to Europe. In order to convert the Chinese to Catholicism, these missionaries believed that it was essential to adapt to the culture and society of China in the first place. They not only learned the Chinese language but also spent much time studying China's orthodox histories, philosophical works and religious texts. As a result of these dedicated efforts, as well as their expertise in Western science and technology, some of these missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–88), won the friendship of the Chinese literati and consequently gained favour at the imperial court. Partly because of this close relationship with elite Chinese society, and partly because of the necessity to justify their unconventional approach to converting the Chinese, the Jesuit writings were mostly laudatory of Chinese culture and government. China, according to these accounts, was a powerful and wealthy empire with advanced political and moral systems. In Louis Le Comte's (1656–1729) *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état present de la Chine* (1696), an influential work that was translated into English in 1697, the author spoke highly of the great empire in the East. Le Comte particularly praised the antiquity of Chinese civilisation, which he believed 'furnishes us [the Europeans] with an infinite number of examples of conspicuous wisdom'.[34] Another monumental work, the four-volume *Description geographique, historique, chronologique et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (1735),[35] edited by Jean Baptiste Du Halde, was the largest and most comprehensive single product of Jesuit scholarship on China. Du Halde was immensely positive about China and he appreciated almost every aspect of Chinese society. Du Halde claimed that China was governed in such a philosophic and enlightened

way that material prosperity as well as mental contentment could be achieved for a vast population. In addition to Le Comte's and Du Halde's works, the Jesuit sinophilic series, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses des missions étrangères par quelques missionaires de la Compagnie de Jesus*, which was published between 1702 and 1776,[36] was another important reference work for information about China. This series was clearly subjected to careful selection and editing, so that a similar idealised image of China was presented to its European readers.[37]

Under the influence of the Jesuits, some key philosophers of the Enlightenment became enthusiastic about China. From the mid-seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, the Jesuit reports on China were widely read by European intellectuals. As a result, China was seen by many as an ideal model, which might be a rational alternative to the existing order of royal autocracy and religious intolerance in Europe. The German logician and mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) for example, was fascinated by Chinese culture. In particular, he admired the Kangxi emperor (1654–1722, r. 1662–1722), who was known to have tolerated Christianity and to have shown a strong interest in mathematics, philosophy and European science. Leibniz regarded the Kangxi emperor as a model of a benevolent monarch, because, although 'being a god-like mortal, ruling all by a nod of his head', he was 'educated to virtue and wisdom … thereby earning the right to rule'.[38] Voltaire (1694–1778), prince of the *philosophes*, was also famously laudatory of Chinese institutions. Since it was illegal to criticise openly the state or the church in his time, Voltaire employed China as a polemical weapon to cloak his attacks on obscurantism and misgovernment in France. In *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756), Voltaire offered a panegyric on the rationality of Chinese culture and philosophy. He extolled the secular nature of Confucianism, because the religion of the emperors and the tribunals had never been troubled by priestly quarrels.[39] China, moreover, was appreciated by Voltaire as a great ancient civilisation that was founded upon paternal authority and governed by an enlightened literary class, recruited by competitive examination not by noble birth. Like Leibniz and Voltaire, François Quesnay (1694–1774), the leader of the Physiocratic school, was an ardent admirer of China. Quesnay and his fellow Physiocrats highly valued the fact that 'in China … agriculture has always been held in veneration, and those who profess it have always merited the special attention of the emperor'.[40] Quesnay also eulogised the Chinese constitution as founded on wise and irrevocable laws so that even 'the emperor himself is not immune from … censure when his conduct offends the laws and rules of the state'.[41] Quesnay, unlike Voltaire, did not deny that the Chinese government was in essence despotic, but he asserted

that the power of the Chinese emperor did not prevent China from having the best form of government, because 'It is a generally established maxim among the people … that as they should have a filial obedience toward their sovereign, he in turn should love them like a father'.[42] Although Quesnay's high regard for China's enlightened despotism was not shared by some other great European thinkers, such as Montesquieu (1689–1755), who condemned the oppressiveness of the Chinese government and discredited the Jesuits' accounts, European intellectuals' admiration for China, on the whole, was striking from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries.

Along with the appeal of Chinese moral and political systems, a general fascination with Chinese artistic tastes became a notable feature of European culture at this time. As trade with China increased significantly from the late seventeenth century onwards, Chinese objects were more widely circulated throughout Europe. A lively vogue for Chinese fashions, which was later known as '*Chinoiserie*',[43] spread over much of Europe. In consequence, not only were Chinese porcelain, lacquer ware, silk cloth and wallpaper extensively imported and copied but a number of Chinese summer houses, pavilions, pagodas and bridges were constructed, as ornaments to royal parks and aristocratic estates throughout Europe. It is worth noting that Britain excelled in Chinese-style garden designs. Sir William Chambers (1723–96), a Scottish-Swedish architect who had twice visited Canton (Guangzhou), was the foremost authority on Chinese architecture and gardening at this time. Chambers published in 1757 his *Designs of Chinese Buildings, Furniture, Dresses, Machines and Utensils* and, several years later, he produced a more detailed *Dissertation on Oriental Gardening* (1772). Both of these books drew much attention from within and beyond Britain. In the early 1760s, according to his notions of naturalistic style of Chinese gardening, Chambers redesigned Kew Gardens in the vicinity of London. The famous Great Pagoda, which was designed by Chambers and still remains, was considered the most accurate reconstruction of a Chinese building in Europe at the time.

On the basis of the favourable accounts written by Jesuits and enlightened philosophers, as well as the enthusiasm for Chinese material culture, Britain developed a considerable admiration for China, especially in the second half of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, unlike Voltaire and Quesnay who were activists for social progress and political reforms, British admirers of China were sceptical about the achievements of their own age and tended to believe that British society and institutions were in a worsening state. China, for this reason, was interpreted by British commentators as a venerable and ancient civilisation that 'had kept its pristine excellence to a remarkable extent in a world

prone to deterioration'.[44] John Webb (1611–72), for example, praised the antiquity of Chinese civilisation. In *An Historical Essay*, Webb justified his admiration for China upon a biblical footing. Webb claimed that, prior to the Confusion of Tongues (*confusio linguarum*), Noah carried the world's primitive language into the Ark with him and settled in the East. Because of the superiority and hence the independence of Chinese civilisation, the Chinese language had kept the original tongue that was common to the world before the Flood. In this respect, Emperor Yao, a legendary Chinese ruler, was even recognised by Webb as no other than Noah himself.[45] Sir William Temple (1628–99), Britain's most famous sinophile in the seventeenth century, agreed with the antiquity of Chinese civilisation by maintaining that the seeds of Grecian learning and institutions could be easily found in ancient China. Temple pointed out that China in his own age was 'the greatest, richest, and most populous kingdom now known in the world', because, ever since ancient times, the 'admirable constitution of its government' had been 'established upon the deepest and wisest foundations'.[46] As with some Enlightenment thinkers on the Continent, Temple wrote very highly of the Chinese form of government, which was believed to have been established upon the wisdom of Confucius. Together with the fair and efficient system of its civil service examinations, the Chinese political system overall was regarded 'in practice to excel the very speculations … and all those imaginary schemes of the European wits, the institutions of Xenophon, the republic of Plato, the Utopia's, or Oceana's of our modern writers'.[47] As a result of Temple's vigorous efforts to promote such positive images of China, Britain's enthusiasm for Chinese culture reached its peak in English literature during the seventeenth century.

Despite the fact that a similar esteem for Chinese culture and institutions can be detected in the British Isles as on the Continent, European respect for China declined first in Britain. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, the excellence of Chinese civilisation began to be doubted by British commentators. Publications censorious of China increased markedly, especially during the second half of the century. Some reasons can be offered to explain this shift in British attitudes towards China at this particular time. Most immediately, because of the Rites Controversy, the Kangxi emperor banned Christian missions in China in 1721. It deprived the Jesuits of the imperial patronage which they had long enjoyed at the Chinese court and most missionaries were expelled from China in the following years. In 1773, the Society of Jesus was formally dissolved in Europe on the orders of Pope Clement XIV. These events resulted in Jesuit writers on China being unsupported by the authorities both in China and in Europe. Moreover, to the British, who were largely Protestant, the Society of Jesus had always been a

suspicious body which could not be fully trusted. Jesuit admiration for China was therefore undermined and could no longer be so relied upon to offer a positive image of the government of China.

The values of British society and its changing preoccupations also helped to cause mounting scepticism about China and things Chinese. From the very beginning, British fascination with China, especially among intellectuals, had been weaker than on the Continent. Compared with Voltaire and others in France who produced a romanticised image of China in order to veil their criticisms of the French government, the British were generally more satisfied with their own political system. Particularly after the Glorious Revolution, Britain basically lost the 'motivation to hold up China for utopian contrast with the home country which was prevalent among the French *philosophes*'.[48] Moreover, in the eighteenth century, as British society was undergoing rapid but mainly positive changes, which reinforced the pride and sense of superiority of the British nation, far fewer Britons adhered to the belief that Britain's civilisation was in decline. Instead, 'change' or 'progress' was widely accepted as the natural expectation of society. For this reason, the antiquity and changelessness of Chinese civilisation, which were appreciated by Webb and Temple, lost their attractions in Britain. Increasingly, 'China was not judged by how well it adhered to its ancient traditions but by how it performed at the present time in terms of military power, effective government, scientific knowledge, technological skill and the living standards of the mass of the population'.[49] A stagnant and backward image of China began to take shape. Adam Smith (1723–90), for instance, admitted that China used to be 'one of the richest, that is, one of the most fertile, best cultivated, most industrious and most populous countries in the world', but '[it] seems … to have been long stationary'.[50] In order to avoid such a stagnant state, Smith pointed out the value of cultivating an extensive foreign trade. If China decided to engage in such foreign trade, it would be able to 'learn the art of … different machines made use of in other countries, as well as the other improvements of art and industry which are practised in all the different parts of the world'.[51] Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, was more straightforward in his contempt for China. As he put it in Crusoe's words, the Chinese people were 'a contemptible herd or crowd of ignorant, sordid slaves, subjected to a government qualified only to rule such a people'.[52] In a similar tone, Defoe belittled Chinese cities, architecture, commerce and so on. Even the Chinese mode of husbandry, which had been particularly eulogised by previous commentators, was now deemed as 'imperfect and impotent'[53] according to European standards. Like Defoe, Sir William Jones (1746–94), the great Orientalist, held completely negative views of Chinese civilisation.

In a speech he delivered to the Asiatic Society, in 1790, Jones stated that:

> Their popular religion was imported from India in an age comparatively modern; and their philosophy seems yet in so rude a state, as hardly deserve the appellation; they have no ancient monuments; … their sciences are wholly exotick; and their mechanical arts have nothing in them characteristic of a particular family … They have indeed, both national music and national poetry, and both of them beautifully pathetick, but of painting, sculpture, of architecture, as arts of imagination, they seem (like other Asiaticks) to have no idea.[54]

It was probably owing to these unfavourable views of China, which were becoming commonly held in eighteenth-century Britain, that Samuel Johnson (1709–84), in sharp contrast to Temple, categorised the Chinese as 'East-Indian barbarians'. Although Johnson still acknowledged the Chinese people as 'great, or wise', this was 'only in comparison with the nations that surround them',[55] rather than in comparison to Britain or any other major European state.

Another reason for the worsening British impressions of China in the eighteenth century was the rapid growth of Britain's China trade. As a considerable number of Britons were now able to set foot on Chinese soil, merchants, instead of Catholic missionaries, became the principal source of the images of China that were transmitted to Britain. The main contacts of these new visitors to China were no longer the upper or middle classes of Chinese society but the Chinese merchants and seamen who belonged to the lower classes and who were much more disposed to take advantage of foreigners engaged in commerce with them. As a result, reports about deceitful Chinese tradesmen were constantly on the rise. George Anson's *Voyage Round the World* (1748), according to Mackerras, was 'the first full-scale attack on the rosy images of China which the French Jesuits were pushing'.[56] Although Anson only skirted the coast of Canton, he formed a range of negative views of the Chinese character diametrically different from those which had appeared in the accounts of earlier missionaries. Anson was particularly incensed at the dishonest Chinese practices he encountered, such as cramming ducks and chickens with stones and gravel to bloating hogs with water. On the basis of these experiences, Anson concluded that 'these instances may serve as a specimen of the manners of this celebrated nation, which is often recommended to the rest of the world as a pattern of all kinds of laudable qualities'.[57] In addition, as China's external trade at this time was confined only to the south-east coast, the local authorities there, who operated thousands of miles from the central government, also tended to be interested in soaking the foreign

traders for money. With the increase in British–Chinese commerce, the East India Company's employees in China gradually discovered that, whatever might be the theory, many Chinese officials were in fact grasping extortionists rather than enlightened governors. In one of the Company's reports to the Westminster Parliament, the Chinese government was characterised as 'the most corrupt in the universe'.[58] Probably as a result of these new first-hand findings, the notion that the Chinese were in fact a crafty and avaricious nation gradually spread in Britain. Anti-Chinese writings kept emerging and their tone generally became ruder.

In sum, from the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century, Jesuits and Continental philosophers had inspired considerable enthusiasm for China in Europe. With the changing values of British society and the increasing first-hand knowledge about the Chinese, however, eighteenth-century Britain experienced a gradual decline in its admiration for China. Although the balance between favourable and unfavourable views was shifting away from the former and towards the latter, it should be noted, as Marshall and Williams have pointed out, that 'at any time in the eighteenth century British readers were never wholly dependent on one set of sources rather than another'.[59] By the end of the eighteenth century, despite the mounting scepticism about China, the British public still 'enjoyed some freedom to choose what published version of China it would or would not believe'.[60] It was in this context that Macartney and his retinue embarked on their journey to the East, by which Britain, for the first time, began to take the lead in informing Europe about China.

Notes

1 Philip Kuhn, for example, has doubted whether the modern period of China's history can be demarcated by largely external events. Instead, he suggests that 'we can reasonably seek the beginning of the old order's decline … no earlier than 1864, the year the Taiping Rebellion was destroyed'. See Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796–1864* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 5, 8.

2 See, for example, W.C. Costin, *Great Britain and China: 1833–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937); Michael Greenberg, *British Trade and the Opening of China 1800–42* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951); Hsin-pao Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); and Gerald S. Graham, *The China Station: War and Diplomacy 1830–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

3 Chang, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*, p. 15.

4 Some of these works were first published in the early twentieth century and then reprinted in the 1970s. See, for example, James Bromley Eames, *The English in China: Being an Account of the Intercourse and Relations between England and China from the Year 1600 to the Year 1843 and a Summary of Later Developments* (1909; reprinted, London: Curzon, 1974); Earl Pritchard, *Anglo-Chinese Relations during*

the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1929; reprinted, New York: Octagon Books, 1970); Earl Pritchard, *The Crucial Years of Early Anglo-Chinese Relations, 1750–1800* (Washington, DC: Pullman, 1936; reprinted, New York: Octagon Books, 1970); P.C. Kuo, *A Critical Study of the First Anglo-Chinese War with Documents* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1935; reprinted, Westport, CT: Hyperion, 1973); Evan Luard, *Britain and China* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962); John K. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842–1854* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1969).

5 Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast*, p. 74.

6 Tan Chung, *China and the Brave New World: A Study of the Origins of the Opium War 1840–42* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1978).

7 J.Y. Wong, *Deadly Dreams: Opium, Imperialism and the Arrow War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

8 Julia Lovell, 'Introduction to the English Edition', in Mao Haijian, *The Qing Empire and the Opium War: The Collapse of the Heavenly Dynasty*, trans. Joseph Lawson, Craig Smith and Peter Lavelle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. xvi.

9 P.W. Fay, 'The Protestant Mission and the Opium War', *Pacific Historical Review*, 40 (1971), 145–61.

10 Glenn Melancon, 'Honour in Opium? The British Declaration of War on China, 1839–1840', *International History Review*, 21 (1999), 855–74; and Glenn Melancon, *Britain's China Policy and the Opium Crisis: Balancing Drugs, Violence and National Honour, 1833–1840* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 5–6, 133–9. Harry Gelber agreed with Melancon's view. See Harry G. Gelber, *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals: Britain's 1840–42 War with China, and Its Aftermath* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

11 Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 31–69.

12 Li Chen, *Chinese Laws in Imperial Eyes: Sovereignty, Justice, and Transcultural Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

13 *Ibid*., p. 239.

14 Song-Chuan Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace: British Knowledge of China in the Making of the Opium War* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017).

15 *Ibid*., p. 123.

16 Other long-term studies that have covered the pre-Opium War period include: Hosea Ballou Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635–1834* (5 vols, Oxford: Clarendon, 1926; reprinted, London: Routledge, 2000); Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (3 vols, London: Longmans, 1910–18; reprinted, Folkestone: Global Oriental, 2008); Wolfgang Franke, *China and the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967); Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History* (New York; London: Norton, 1999); John S. Gregory, *The West and China since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and D.E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006). These works have offered wide-ranging narratives of China's engagement with the outside world over the centuries, but they have focused principally on the major trends in political and commercial factors. Stephen Platt's popular book *Imperial Twilight*, indeed, vividly tells many detailed stories on both the Western and the Chinese sides about the lead-up to the Opium War and the decline of the Qing from the peak of its power. The book, however, is not concentrated on identifying what caused the conflict between Britain and China. See Stephen R. Platt, *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018).

17 Fernand Braudel, *On History*, trans. Sarah Matthews (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p. 28.

18 See, for example, Peter Ward Fay, *The Opium War 1840–1842* (New York; London: Norton, 1975); James M. Polachek, *The Inner Opium War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard

University Press, 1992); W. Travis Hanes III and Frank Sanello, *The Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2002); Gelber, *Opium, Soldiers and Evangelicals*; Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of Chin*a (London: Picador, 2011); and Mao, *The Qing Empire and the Opium War*.

19 See, for example, Donald Lach, *Asia in the Making of Europe* (3 vols, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965–93); P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: Perceptions of New Worlds in the Age of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982); Henry A. Myers (ed.), *Western Views of China and the Far East* (2 vols, Hong Kong: Asian Research Service, 1982); and V.G. Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes towards the Outside World in the Imperial Age* (London: Serif, 1995).

20 Adrian Hsia (ed.), *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1998).

21 Rachel Ramsey, 'China and the Idea of Order in John Webb's *An Historical Essay*', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 3 (2001), 483–503; Robert Batchelor, 'Concealing the Bounds: Imagining the British Nation through China', in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), pp. 79–92.

22 John Webb, *An Historical Essay Endeavoring a Probability that the Language of the Empire of China is the Primitive Language* (London: Nath. Brook, 1669).

23 Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

24 Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Kristin Bayer, 'Contagious Consumption: Commodity Debates over the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century China Trade', *International Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, 8 (2012), 73–94.

25 David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Hope Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins, *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also: Catherine Pagani, 'Chinese Material Culture and British Perceptions of China in the Mid-nineteenth Century', in *Colonialism and the Object: Empire, Material Culture and the Museum*, ed. Tim Barringer and Tom Flynn (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 28–40.

26 William Christie, 'China in Early Romantic Periodicals', *European Romantic Review*, 1 (2016), 25–38; Logan P. Collins, 'British Periodical Representations of China: 1793–1830' (MA thesis, University of Houston, 2014).

27 Other studies which do not distinguish Britain from the West include: Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Raymond Dawson, 'Western Conceptions of Chinese Civilization', in *The Legacy of China*, ed. Dawson (Boston, MA: Cheng & Tsui, 1990), pp. 1–27; Gregory Blue, 'China and Western social thought in the modern period', in *China and Historical Capitalism: Genealogies of Sinological Knowledge*, ed. Timothy Brook and Gregory Blue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 57–109; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds* (London: Penguin, 2000).

28 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

29 Ulrike Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge: China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 104–5. She has not, however, explored this specific aspect in great detail.

30 Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

31 Peter J. Kitson and Robert Markley, 'Introduction: Writing China', in *Writing China: Essays on the Amherst Embassy (1816) and Sino-British Cultural Relations*, ed.

Kitson and Markley (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), p. 2. They have also attached importance to the Second Opium War (1856–60).

32 For example, British Library, London: India Office Library and Records (hereafter IOLR): India Office Amherst Correspondence, Lord Amherst's Embassy, 1815–17, G/12/197/271. Letter from Amherst to George Canning, 28 Feb. 1817; George T. Staunton, *Miscellaneous Notices Relating to China, and Our Commercial Intercourse with that Country* (London: John Murray, 1822), p. 238; Napier to Palmerston, 9 Aug. 1834, in *Correspondence Relating to China, Presented to Both Houses of Parliament, by Command of Her Majesty* (London: T.R. Harrison, 1840), p. 8; and *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, House of Commons, 9 Apr. 1840, Third series, vol. 53, 937.

33 Chen, *Chinese Laws in Imperial Eyes*, pp. 232–5; Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace*, pp. 118–22.

34 Le Comte, *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état present de la Chine* (Paris, 1696), p. 125. See Qian Zhongshu, 'China in the English Literature of the Eighteenth Century', in *A Collection of Qian Zhongshu's English Essays* (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2005), p. 151. This article was originally published in *Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Bibliography*, new series, 2 (1941), 7–48, 113–52.

35 There are two English translations of this book: one published by John Watts in 1736 under the title *The General History of China*, the other published by Edward Cave between 1738 to 1741 in two folio volumes, which was entitled *A Description of the Empire of China and Chinese Tartary*.

36 It has a selective English translation entitled *Travels of the Jesuits into various parts of the World*. This book was edited by the English author John Lockman. The first edition appeared in two volumes in 1743 with a second one in 1762.

37 It is worth noting that, while the Jesuit accounts were influential, they were also contested by the Franciscan and Dominican missionaries.

38 Donald F. Lach, 'Leibniz and China', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 6 (1945), 440.

39 Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII* (1756; reprinted, Paris, 1963), p. 69, in Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, p. 38.

40 Lewis A. Maverick, *China: A Model for Europe* (San Antonio, TX: Paul Anderson, 1946), p. 206. This work was originally published in two volumes, the second of which is the author's translation of Quesnay's works.

41 Quesnay, in *ibid.*, p. 216.

42 Quesnay, *Le despotisme de la Chine* (1767), II, 226, in William Joseph Eaton, 'The Old Regime and the Middle Kingdom: The French Physiocrats and China as a Model for Reform in the Eighteenth Century, a Cautionary Tale', *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs*, 10 (2006), 75.

43 'Chinoiserie' as a term to describe a European fantasy vision of China was not known in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is an expression of relatively recent invention, which first appeared in dictionaries in 1883. See David Beevers, '"Mand'rin only is the man of taste": 17th and 18th Century Chinoiserie in Britain', in *Chinese Whispers: Chinoiserie in Britain 1650–1930*, ed. Beevers (Brighton: The Royal Pavilion and Museums, 2008), p. 13.

44 Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, p. 132.

45 Webb, *An Historical Essay*, pp. 15–26, 44, 60, see Qian Zhongshu, 'China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth Century', in *The Vision of China*, ed. Hsia, p. 46. Qian's article was originally published in *Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Bibliography*, new series, 1 (1940), 351–84.

46 William Temple, *The Works of Sir William Temple* (4 vols, London: J. Brotherton, 1770; reprinted, New York: Greenwood, 1968), III, 41, 328.

47 *Ibid.*, III, 332.

48 Myers (ed.), *Western Views of China and the Far East*, I, 38.

49 Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, p. 175.

50 Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner (2 vols, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), I, 89.

51 *Ibid*., II, 681.
52 Daniel Defoe, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719; reprinted, Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1812), p. 395.
53 *Ibid*.
54 William Jones, *The Works of Sir William Jones* (6 vols, London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1799), I, 102.
55 James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson: Together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales*, ed. L.F. Powell (6 vols, Oxford: Clarendon, 1934–50), III, 339; IV, 188.
56 Mackerras, *Western Images of China*, p. 43.
57 George Anson, *A Voyage Round the World in the Years 1740–1744* (London: John and Paul Knapton, 1748), p. 525.
58 East India Company, *Three Reports of the Select Committee, Appointed by the Court of Directors to Take into Consideration the Export Trade from Great Britain to the East Indies, China, Japan, and Persia* (London: J.S. Jordan, 1793), p. 82.
59 Marshall and Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind*, p. 174.
60 *Ibid*.