**“The Kindness of my Friends in England”: Chinese Visitors to Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and discourses of friendship and estrangement.**

*Peter J. Kitson\**

*School of Literature, Drama, and Creative Writing, University of East Anglia, UK*

\*Email: [p.kitson@uea.ac.uk](mailto:p.kitson@uea.ac.uk)

This essay deals with the presence of Chinese visitors in London from the 1750s onwards. Its focus is on the discourses of hospitality, cosmopolitanism, gift-exchange and linguistic exchanges that were involved in these seldom discussed encounters between Britons and Chinese. While the dominant and paradigmatic textual encounter of the period remains meeting of Thomas De Quincey with his uncanny Malay in Grasmere, this should not be regarded as *the* primal encounter that informs later discussion. Instead this essay deals with a number of “elite” Chinese visitors to London. It describes the ways in which they were, for the most part, welcomed by late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century polite society according to the rituals of rational civility and cosmopolitanism. These cultural exchanges involved the linguistic, music, works of art, botanical, medical, scientific knowledge, and even literature.

This essay concerns encounters between Chinese and British people in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this case the encounters are not between courts, armies, or companies, but between British and Chinese individuals. It involves a discussion of the textual representations of the ways in which British people have received Chinese visitors or worked with Chinese collaborators. Recently, we have become much more sensitised to the expression of the intercultural encounter, identifying discursive practices relating to guest rituals, gift exchange, hospitality, sympathy, refinement and civility, reciprocation and rationality. In particular, much of our understanding of inter cultural encounter in the period has been informed by Kant’s well-known understanding that cosmopolitanism is built upon the prior condition of universal hospitality. In this formulation, hospitality is the right of the guest who may not be treated as an inhabitant of the country and that any violation of this principle calls into question an international order (Kleingeld *passim*). David Simpson’s major study of intercultural encounter, *Romanticism and the Question of the Strang*er (2013) argues for the crucial importance of studying the Romantic reception of the stranger/guest. He regards the foundational cultural dialectic of the hospitality and rejection of the stranger as crucial in an age of burgeoning mercantile and colonial expansion. Employing key tropes, notably the antimony of the *pharmakon* (via Plato and Derrida) that, like the alien or stranger, may either cure or poison the host culture, or, in the mode of *pharmakós*, act as a scapegoat whose ritual exclusion or sacrifice is imagined as securing the community. Strangers, sojourners, visitors, both fictional and real, are frequent in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century British fictional writing. Their troubling or calming presence is, in Simpson’s account, impelled by the growth of a new British identity and the development of global commercial activities, both within and outwith the formal constraints of colonialism and empire.

Central to this critical endeavour is the formulation of a hospitality that “enunciates the common linguistic positing and synthesis of host and guest, hospitality and enmity, welcome and unwelcome stranger.” Simpson claims that earlier utopian eighteenth-century understandings of a polite and sociable cosmopolitanism give way to encounters with truly strange strangers in Romantic accounts. What is new is the element of the “undecidable or ‘uneconomizable,” fuelling a “distinct ramping up of the depth and scope of the stranger syndrome.” Such encounters can be measured on a scale between a form of “unconditional hospitality and absolute aversion.” Ideas of universalism and cosmopolitanism thus battle with nascent, emerging Romantic understandings of the organic nation state and constructions of the foreign invader (5-10). Simpson’s thesis provides an enabling paradigm within which to situate the encounters discussed in this essay. Whereas the encounters that he discusses are largely fictive and frequently imaginary, I focus entirely on documented encounters and collaborations between Britons and Chinese in the period from the mid-eighteenth century to the first decade of the nineteenth, arguing that such meetings tend to be framed largely within an established and still robust eighteenth-century discourse of polite civility, rather than demonstrating the emerging and racialized fears, suspicions, and estrangement, exemplified by De Quincey’s sensationalist *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821), closer to unconditional hospitality than visceral aversion.

In terms of encounters with China or Southeast Asia, commentators and critics very often take their cultural and critical bearings from this notorious encounter with a person described as a “Malay,” a symbolic “Asiatic.” The Malay unaccountably knocks on the door of De Quincey’s cottage. He can speak little or no English and De Quincey or his servant, no Malay. An “impassable gulph” is fixed from the start between all communication. The Malay is a “tiger-cat” with “sallow and bilious skin,” restless eyes, thin lips, and slavish gestures and adoration. De Quincey addresses the Malay with “some lines from the Iliad” as, archly, he writes that “Greek,” in point of longitude, came geographically nearest to an Oriental one.” The guest replies in what De Quincey thinks is Malay. The linguistic aspect of the intercultural exchange is crucial. Why this exchange is not conducted (at least on the Malay’s part) in the hybridized lingua franca of South Coast China pidgin, the *accepted language* of trade and commerce for Southeast Asia by the British is not clear. On his departure, De Quincey presents the Malay with a large piece of opium, enough to kill “three dragoons and their horses” which the Malay bolts down at once. The Malay, however, vengefully returns to De Quincey’s opium nightmares to run “amuk,” in this notably hybridized term, not Greek nor Latin, nor English (62-65). This passage with its important discussions by John Barrell, Nigel Leask, Rajani Sudan, Sanjay Krishnan, David Simpson, and many others, has since come to stand, almost metonymically, for the British Romantic encounter with Southeast Asia. Yet the encounters that I would like to dwell on here are very different, though perhaps equally problematic. I suggest that it is these encounters that deserve as much, if not more, of our critical attention as does the imperative to search and recover other examples of Chinese visiting that have so-far eluded the historical record, a critical venture which has been a central imperative, for instance, in studies of transatlantic slavery and the African diaspora.

**II. Loum Kitqua and Chitqua**

The first recorded Chinese visitors to Europe arrived as a result of their connections with that great cultural and historical event, the Jesuit mission to China, alluded to by Christie and Lloyd in this volume. One of these, Michael Alphonsius Shen Fu-Tsung, visited Britain in 1685 (Barrett 37-38; Mungello 255-56; Spence *passim*). Shen was a sophisticated intellectual able to catalogue and describe the content of the Chinese books present in the Bodleian Library, something, nobody in England had hitherto been capable of doing. Shen met James II who had Godfrey Kneller paint his portrait before leaving England in 1688. Although details of his visit are sparse, it is clear that he was regarded as a learned and prestigious guest, a stranger bringing valuable and knowledge of his world to Europe and to whom hospitality was generously afforded. Shen functioned as a Jesuit showcase for conversions brought to Europe to validate the order’s much-criticized policy of ideological accommodation with China, stressing (or inventing) the cultural similarities between classical Confucianism and Catholic Christianity (Munghello *passim*; Porter *passim*).

After Shen, there are five later eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Chinese visitors to Britain for whom we have some reasonably substantial documented materials: Loum Kiqua, Chitqua, Whang at Tong, and Yong Sam-Tak as they were mostly known in the period. These visitors to London were generally all caught up in that great flow of goods and peoples that was the English East India Company’s vastly expanding trade with China, later entwined with emerging British Protestant missionary activity. Chinese people living in London at this time were few, census returns indicating that rather were seventy-eight Chinese in London 1851, most sailors who had jumped ship and settled, rising to 545 by 1901 (Pan 84-85; Auerbach 164; Fraying 282-83). Most of these were working people, seamen caught up in the China tea trade, rather than the rare elite travellers that feature in this essay. These Chinese figures are silent or virtually silent travellers. The first substantial account of Britain from the perspective of a Chinese, which we know of, is that of Guo Songtao (Kuo), the highly accomplished Chinese ambassador to Britain from 1877-79. Not being taught Latin, the *lingua franca* of Shen and his Jesuit educated predecessors, communication in written and spoken English posed problems. Of the four Chinese discussed here, only Whang at Tong appears to have been able to speak and write standard English, combining sophisticated scholarly abilities with highly-accomplished social and networking skills. Both Loum and Chitqua communicated through what has been described as “China Coast Pidgin English,” the linguistic medium that largely replaced an earlier, common usage of Portuguese for exchanges between Europeans and Chinese (Van Dyke 77-93; Clarke, “Chiqua’s English Adventure”).

In 1756 a correspondent to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (known as “A.B.”) reported that he had “accidentally fallen in with the Chinese merchant lately arrived in this city from *Canton*.” The correspondent reports how the merchant informed him of “some of the customs and manners of his native country” but as the Chinese “understands very little of our language,” he was unable to communicate. To make up for this want of conversation, the merchant played him some Chinese tunes on a musical instrument resembling a guitar, the first recorded example of Chinese music played in Britain (*Gentleman’s Magazine* [1757] 33). David Clarke has convincingly speculated that this Chinese merchant and musician is a man known as Loum Kiqua, whose portrait was painted by Dominic Serres (“Encounter”). The painting is lost but a well-known engraving of it by Thomas Burford exists. In this depiction, Loum wears Chinese costume and is holding a long pipe in his left hand. Behind him is a riverside landscape, presumably intended to represent Canton. The print indicates that Loum journeyed to Lisbon arriving in 1755 and after hardship and ill treatment,

… came over to England in 1756, where he met with different usage, having had the honour of being seen by his Majesty and the rest of the Royal-Family, most of the Nobility, &e, by whom he was much caress’d. Having made application to the Honble the East India Company, for his passage home, he was kindly received and generously accommodated on Board one of their Ships, to carry him to canton his Native Country (Burford).

Loum’s motives in visiting Britain are unknown and he appears to have been an independent traveller, coincidentally deflected to Britain from Portugal, his intended destination, by the notorious Lisbon earthquake that so deeply affected Voltaire. What is most notable here is the excessive sympathy accorded to him. Laurence Williams has discussed the use of the unexpected term “caressed” as part of the fashionable British discourse of polite civility within which Loum Kitqua and other Chinese are unambiguously included and which would persist up until the Macartney embassy and beyond. This extraordinary metropolitan inter cultural encounter with the unnamed *Magazine*’s correspondent is starkly different from that of De Quincey’s later meeting with his Malay, though even that retains the vestiges of cosmopolitan rituals, including hospitality and gift exchange. Loum Kiqua communicates through the cross-cultural medium, or universal language, of music rather than the problematic commodity gift exchange of opium. This Chinese is heartily welcomed into the world of Georgian England’s cultural elite, *caressed,* in a rather stark and pointed contrast to his indifferent treatment in Catholic Portugal.

This sympathetic incorporation into the British cultural elite of is also shown in the case of the artist commonly known to us as Chitqua (c.1728-1796) or Tan-Che-Qua (with many variant romanizations). His portrait, attributed to John Hamilton Mortimer (c.1769-72), was commissioned or purchased in 1793 by the London surgeon and theorist of human variety, John Hunter, and now hangs in the Hunterian Museum (Chaplin 11-12). Chitqua was the first Chinese artist that we know of to visit Europe. His biography is recorded in a notice from the *Gentleman’s Magazine* from 1771. Readers are informed that “Mr Chitqua” is an “ingenious Chinese artist whose models after the life have been justly admired.” Chitqua, who successfully modeled portraits in clay, came to Britain in 1769 aboard an East Indiaman, the *Horsendon*, travelling with a Mr Walton and lodging in a hatter’s shop in Norfolk Street, off the Strand. Possessed of an unusual wanderlust, Chitqua had originally been granted permission to leave China for Batavia, but his “curiosity and respect for the British, induced him to visit this island” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* [1771] 41, 171, 238). The antiquary, Richard Gough, described him in a letter as “a middle-sized man, about or above forty, thin and lank … his upper lip covered with thin hair an inch long, and very strong and black; on his head no hair except the long lock braided into a tail almost a yard long … he wears the dress of his own country.” Gough indicates that Chitqua’s motive for visiting may have been either “curiosity” or the more pragmatic need to evade his creditors. He describes Chitqua’s “English as broken, and his speech thick” and remarks that it was “impossible to have a proper conversation with him” (Quoted in Clarke, *Chinese Art* 25). Chitqua was reported to be “elegantly clothed after the fashion of his own country” and was “very sensible and a great observer” and that he was “remarkably ingenious in forming small busts with a sort of China earth, many of which carry a striking likeness of the person they are designed to represent” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* [1771] 41, 171, 238). Chitqua had his own shop in Canton, making sculptures of visiting Europeans to commission. He was a leading artist of his kind among a vibrant artistic community at Canton.

Charging ten guineas for his clay sculptures in Britain, Chitqua is known to have made figures of Josiah Wedgwood I and others, although only one, a portrait of the physician Dr Anthony Askew, can with certainty be attributed to him (Clarke, *Chinese Art* 23-26, 30, 39-43, 74-75). A now well-known representation claimed to be of David Garrick and over-enthusiastically attributed to Chitqua was sold at Christies in 2007 for £72,000. It was probably neither his work nor a representation of Garrick, but, more likely, that of an earlier Canton artist with its own as yet unknown story to tell (Fenton 76; Clarke, *Chinese Art* 45-48). Like other exotic travellers, Chitqua was of great interest to polite Georgian society, meeting George III and other luminaries, including Samuel Johnson, William Chambers (who used him as a persona in his own China project), Josiah Wedgwood, James Boswell, and Johann Zoffany. His stay in London was possibly not as congenial as he may have wished as it reported that he tried to return home in 1771 but met with sustained hostility from unfriendly and superstitious sailors owing “probably to his strange dress and appearance” (*Gentleman’s Magazine* [1771] 41, 171, 238). Out of the context of refined Georgian civility, foreign dress could be interpreted as potentially threatening, yet it also got him out of trouble as well when his loose gown was reported to have buoyed him up after accidentally falling overboard. Although feted by the cultural elite according to the conventions of hospitality outside of this charmed circle people could be less welcoming and more hesitant and suspicious of his strange apparel and manners. It is reported that after returning to his lodgings, Chitqua was persuaded henceforth to adopt British dress.

Chitqua is remarkable for a number of things. He was quickly incorporated into the high metropolitan cultural life, absorbed into the newly-established Royal Academy and regarded as a successful and significant artist. We know he visited the Academy and actually exhibited in its second exhibition of 1770 and also appeared in Zoffany’s celebrated portrait *The Life School in the Royal Academy* (1771-72), where he can be seen familiarly overlooking the shoulder of another academician. He was present at the grand dinner of 23 April 1770 with other guests, David Garrick, George Colman, William Whitehead, and that noted erstwhile sinophile, later sinophobe, Horace Walpole (Clarke, *Chinese Art* 30-33). This presence again argues for the existence of a discourse and serious practice of enlightened cosmopolitanism among polite society, where Chitqua’s status as artist transcended any perceived cultural, ethnic, or racial alterity, as Clarke comments, he “is a part of the convivial group depicted, and not an outsider” (*Chinese Art* 33). The extent of this cosmopolitanism is truly global. When in 1793 when the artist William Alexander, who served as the draughtsman on the Macartney embassy to China (1792-94), visited Canton he deliberately sought out the shops of Chinese artists. His unpublished manuscript journal records how he met the well-known Chinese export artists “Pu Qua” and “Chamfou” who were industriously engaged in copying prints by the British caricaturist Henry Bunbury and Angelica Kauffman (Hayot 79-85). Alexander also visited a Chinese face sculptor who claimed to “ ‘sa-vy Mis-sa Banks velley well.’ ”

This man modelled small busts of officers &c, which would have been very well, had not the bad taste of his employers required them to be coloured with blue coats, red cheeks, & powdered hair, which quite spoiled them. On his door front was written Handsome Face Maker as a good recommendation. I wished much to procure from him a cast of his wife’s small foot, but tho’ he had promised me, some trifling plea was always assigned & I never obtained it. [f35r].

This apparent good friend of Sir Joseph Banks was probably Chitqua who was reported in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of 1797 to have died just some three years later in 1796 from self-poisoning. It is quite extraordinary that Alexander, browsing the Canton shops, should come across the Chitqua who dined with Reynolds, Banks, and their circles. Notably, Chitqua, here still speaks a version of China Coast pidgin. He politely agrees to procure a cast of his wife’s bound foot for Alexander but markedly never produces it; the request was probably deemed an inappropriate one for Alexander to make, not an acceptable move in the ritual gift exchange of this inter cultural encounter. Even the notorious English opium eater could be more tactful than this.

Chitqua also brought knowledge. He provided information about Chinese written language and spoken languages and an album of Chinese paintings; he also examined the Chinese books held by the new British Museum. Wedgwood, we know, had a substantial interest in producing porcelain of the quality of the Chinese and may well have hoped Chitqua, as a clay modeller, might have some valuable information about this mysterious process, possibly he did. When Chitqua visited Dr Anthony Askew, who had travelled to Istanbul as a young man, he was so grateful for the hospitality that was afforded to him that he requested he would be permitted to make a model of Askew in his robes as a gift, a structurally similar but very different gift exchange to that of the De Quincey episode (Clarke, *Chinese Art* 26-30, 40, 74-75). Chitqua was also significant for providing what may be the earliest example of Chinese writing in English. Discovered by David Clarke, in the form of transcription within a letter in the British library, Chitqua’s letter refers to his earlier attempt to leave Britain in 1772:

‘The two Wife-Women and the Single-woman Chin Chin Chitqua the China gentleman – and what time they quiere flirt those nice things truly never can forget for him. Some time he make voyage to Oxford, Christchurch will then open his gates and make Chitqua so welcome he no more tinkee go Canton again. There he find much bisn as he so well savee Art of Modelling Heads, thing much wanted among Mandarinemen of that place. Once more tankee fine present, Adios’ (Quoted in Clarke, “Chitqua’s English Adventure” 280).

Here Chitqua communicates with his elite friends in the China Coast pidgin that he never seems to have replaced with what we know as standard English, providing us with an authentic voice of a Chinese person in Britain for the first time. Sensitized to the notion that there cannot be a hierarchy of linguistic utterance this communicative exchange, practical, playful, humorous, flirtatious, and assured, is in stark contrast with the linguistic zero sum game of De Quincey’s peddling of a Greek lingua franca, that now seems as ridiculous to us.

**II. Whang at Tong**

The eighteenth-century Chinese visitor to London about whom most is known is Whang at Tong (*var*. Whang Atong, Wang-o-Tang, Whang-At Ting, Wang-y-Tong) as he was commonly known in the period (Sloan and Lloyd 158; Keevak 66-69; Fan Cunzhong, 325-37; Chaplin, 11–12; de Bruijn). Whang’s Chinese name may be transliterated as *huang* in pinyin and signifies both a family name and the colour “yellow,” and *yadong* as “east,” hence Whang’s period identification as “yellow man from the east.”[[1]](#endnote-1) What his real Chinese name was we cannot thus know with certainty. Whang was clearly a sophisticated and intelligent person. It appears that around 1770 he was brought from Canton to Knole House in Kent, the home of John Frederick Sackville, third Duke of Dorset, to act as a companion for either his mistress or the Duchess. John Bradby Blake, an East India Company employee and school friend of the Duke’s, facilitated his passage to Britain and it was reported that Blake accompanied Whang back to London, but this is not certain given the dates and that Blake senior was also referred to as “Mr Blake.” Blake was a serious naturalist who returned from China with plants from Canton. Anticipating Joseph Bank’s later schemes of global bio-piracy, he procured the seeds of Chinese vegetables used in medicine, manufactures, and food and hoped to propagate them in Britain, Ireland and the colonies. He had some success. Cochin-China rice was grown in Jamaica and South Carolina; the tallow-tree prospered in Jamaica, in Carolina, and in other American colonies; and many of the plants the seeds of which he transmitted were raised in botanical gardens, including Kew, near London (Clarke, *Chinese Art* 16-17-18, 82; Mozley 1-28; Crane et al, 247-48; *Doddsley’s Annual Register* [1776]: 31). He probably selected the precocious Whang as an appropriate traveller because he possessed knowledge of Chinese botany and was very well educated. In Britain, Blake’s father, Captain John Blake, looked after Whang and, in redolent phrase, “had him instructed in the knowledge” (McConnell 2004).

According to Sir William Jones, Whang had by this time already passed the first stage of his examinations in China and had good knowledge of the propagation and medicinal use of Chinese plants (he must have been around 17 or so). He was given an English education (“the knowledge”) at the nearby Sevenoaks School, making him unique in the period for being educated in both the Chinese and English systems. In a letter of 18 February 1775, possibly authored by Joshua Reynolds, it is reported that Whang had heard from Chitqua of his favourable reception in England, and had “determined to make the voyage likewise, partly from curiosity, and a desire to improve himself in science, and partly with a view of procuring some advantages in trade, in which he and his elder brother are engaged” (quoted de Bruijn). Jones later described more directly how Whang was “allured from the pursuit of learning by a prospect of success in trade” (*Second Classical Book* 2: 203). We know that sometime after 1776, Whang, like Chitqua, also returned to Canton. He is known to have dined in company with Reynolds and Jones while in London. The Duke commissioned Reynolds to paint Whang in 1776 and the portrait now hangs at Knole. It is the portrait of a young man, aged about 22 years old, seated on a Chinese bench and wearing Chinese clothes, holding a fan. It emphasizes Whang’s Chinese identity, while at the same time, representing him as individual and not a chinoiserie object (Reynolds). A later drawing said to be him as a man by the artist George Dance the younger survives in the British museum (British Museum). Here, Whang is in British dress, which may have been what he wore in London.

Because of his knowledge of Chinese culture and science Whang was in great demand. It is reported that he advised the Duchess of Portland about the strawberry Begonia, a plant extensively used for medicinal purposes. He visited the Royal Society on 12 January 1775 and in that year Josiah Wedgwood I recorded in his Commonplace Book that Whang was at “Mr Blake’s in London” where he gave him information about the Chinese method of “manufacturing their China ware” (Sloan and Lloyd 158). What knowledge Whang, or earlier Chitqua, may have passed to Wedgwood about Chinese porcelain production we do not know for certain, but Wedgwood had some success around this time with the development of a hard paste porcelain that attempted to imitate the whiteness of the tea-ware imported from China. In early 1775 Whang was requested to help translate Chinese writing. Later that year he went to Oxford with Blake senior and rearranged the Chinese lexicon and several of the books in the library of St John’s College (Weston 1; *The Bee* [1809] 48-52; Clarke, *Chinese Art* 218-19). He is also reported to have explained the purpose of acupuncture to the physician Andrew Duncan (Sloan and Lloyd 158).

Whang’s contribution to the growth of what I have elsewhere described as ”Romantic Sinology,” was significant (48-52). He collaborated with the most prominent British orientalist of his generation, Sir William Jones. Although we chiefly know Jones for his researches into Persian and Sanskrit and his understanding of Hindu culture, he was also an enthusiastic, if limited, scholar of Chinese language and literature. Studying the Chinese language as a young man, Jones wrote to a friend in 1771, requesting him to “enquire after a native of China, who is now in London.” This reference is most probably to Chitqua who was already established on the London scene (*Letters* 1. 79; Clarke 40; Fan 328). Yet we know Jones met Whang in London sometime after and that he established a very cordial relationship with him. In 1784 Jones, newly-arrived in Calcutta (Kolkata) as Judge of the Supreme Court of Bengal, renewed his epistolary friendship with Whang, via the independent merchant, John Henry Cox at Canton. In so doing, Jones was attempting to initiate an ambitious research network, exchanging knowledge about Chinese culture, between Canton and Calcutta based on existing friendships. Whang wrote back recalling his pleasure at dining with Jones and Reynolds, emphasising that he would always “remember the kindness of my friends in England,” exploiting the rhetoric of polite sentimentality. Instead of the De Quinceian gift exchange of opium, Whang enclosed with his letter, extremely valuable Chinese copies of the Confucian text on education, the *Daxue* (the Great Learning), and the *Shijing* (the *Classic of Poetry*), and he promised to procure other works for him as requested. Jones desired that Whang help him with a cherished ambition by providing the first English language translation of the *Shijing*, but the busy merchant politely declined in the first letter, that we currently know, written by a Chinese and published in standard English rather than the China Coast pidgin, utilised by Kiqua and Chitqua. Whang cited as his excuse the grounds that this was far too ambitious a project for him to reconcile with his now extensive commercial commitments:

The Chinese book, Shi King, that contains three hundred Poems with remarks thereon, and the work of Con-fu-tsu, and his grandson the Tai Ho [*Daxue*], I beg you will accept; but to translate the work into English will require a great deal of time; perhaps three or four years; and I am so much engaged in business, that I hope you will excuse my not undertaking it.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Jones also hoped that Huang might visit Bengal with some of his fellow Chinese and “considerable advantage […] might be reaped from the knowledge of such emigrants” (*Second Classical Book* 2: 204). The Company, however, was not willing to fund this venture. Nevertheless there was a significant process of cultural transmission and encounter occurring involving the Orientalist, the Chinese merchant and naturalist, and the British private trader, all bound up in a nexus involving the global flows of people, ideas, commerce, and commodities be they “sing-songs,” tea shipments, or commissioned translations. Whang, sadly, appears to have been yet another virtually “silent traveller” and to have left no written account of his time in London in either English or Chinese, at least that we know. What impact a poetic translation by Jones of the *Shijing*, enabled by Whang, might have had on British Romantic writing remains a matter for speculation, a tantalizing “might-have-been” in the story of this cultural encounter.

If Jones’s relationship with Whang demonstrates the continuance of that strong universalist and cosmopolitan strand in Enlightenment thinking, buttressed by polite norms of civic rationality, his case is also illustrative of a less attractive strand of thinking that underpinned later nineteenth-century racial theorising (Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race* 11-49). In his influential work on human variety, *De generis humani varietate nativa* (1776), the German natural philosopher, Johan Friedrich Blumenbach, constructed a “Mongolian” variety of humanity, the people “beyond the Ganges.” Blumenbach used Whang, whom he described as “the great [or learned] Botanist,” as his exemplar to instance the physical features of this variety: “ [t]hose Chinese whom Büttner saw at London were exactly of this kind, and so also was the great botanist Whang-at-tong (*the yellow man of the East*)*,* whose acquaintance was made there by Lichtenberg (Blumenbach 110; Keevak 66-69). The Büttner that Blumenbach refers to is Christian Wilhelm Büttner a professor of natural history and chemistry at Gottingen and one of Lichtenberg’s teachers and whom we may also include among Whang’s intellectual circle. In a letter to Blumenbach, Büttner had commented that Huang’s head was “rather egg shaped” and that his name translated as “yellow man from the east” (Demel 59-85). Büttner, who published an essay on the Chinese, *Etwas über die Sineser* in 1784, appears to have visited London in the early 1770s and, according to Blumenbach, saw several Chinese people there, including Whang (Lehner 88-89; Gierl 278-81). Exactly, how many other Chinese people Büttner saw, who they were, and what they did is not recorded, but is further confirmation of a culturally significant, if numerically small, Chinese presence in eighteenth-century London. What knowledge the learned botanist Whang passed to Britain through various channels about Chinese medicine, Chinese porcelain, Chinese literature and philosophy, and other matters is thus not yet known, but it is clear that he was seen by many leading thinkers to possess a valuable resource portfolio of Chinese skills. Like Chitqua and Loum Kiqua, Whang was treated with much respect, sympathy, and affection by the elite cultural circles he worked within, and appears to have returned this by participating in this affective discourse of polite civility. Of course, the reality and strength of such discursive expressions of affection and the inevitable possibilities of ironization remain unknown quantities.

**III. Ahui and Yong Sam Tak**

The historical narrative of the Macartney Embassy to China of 1792-94 is now very well known but there are still many areas of its activities and cultural impact that remain underexplored. One such area relates to the Chinese companions or servants that returned with the embassy. George Thomas, the eleven year-old son of Macartney’s deputy, George Leopold Staunton, accompanied the embassy as the ambassador’s page. He learned some Mandarin Chinese on the voyage out and impressed the Qianlong emperor with his grasp of the language. In a review of the adult George Thomas Staunton’s translation of the Qing legal code, *Ta Tsing Leu Lee* in the *Quarterly Review* (1810), John Barrow claimed that its author had brought back with “him to England several Chinese servants” (*Quarterly Review* 3 [May 1810] 277). Barrow’s remark implies that there may have been at least three or even more such “servants.” I have not yet been able to locate any other reference to these servants among the fifteen accounts of the embassy, nor among Staunton’s other writings. The only firm evidence known to support Barrow’s claim that Chinese servant returned t England with Staunton is an intriguing group portrait by John Hoppner entitled *Lady Staunton with her son George Thomas Staunton and a Chinese servant carrying a chest of tea* (1794) now on display at the School of African and Oriental Studies, London. In view of the date of the picture it seems to have been painted soon after the return of father and son to Britain, bringing their new Chinese servant or servants with them. Staunton would reluctantly return to Canton in 1798 to act as a writer for the East India Company and it is very likely that this servant, named Ahui, accompanied him. Hoppner’s portrait is rather enigmatic, the young Chinese follows Staunton like an uncanny shadow, a sort of dark ghosting, displacing the long, anxiously awaited reunion between mother and son (sentimentally arranged with her son’s letter in her hand) into a triptych of figures. The Chinese brings a gift of tea (presumably purchased by Staunton or possibly an imperial gift) with him for Lady Staunton. The presence of this Chinese man, at the heart of the domestic encounter between a mother and returning son, oddly estranges this encounter (Tillotson 73-74).

Throughout this essay we have seen evidence that there was a culturally significant Chinese presence in eighteenth-century London, including educated and sophisticated persons. The cases of Loum Kiqua Chitqua, and Whang have been known about for some time, but others are only now just becoming visible. My final examples are located in the ambiguous interstices of the activities of British commercial and nascent missionary activity. Robert Morrison, the first British missionary to China, began to study Chinese while in still in London while during 1805, a year before his departure. His tutor was a young Chinese, “Yong Sam-Tak” (var. “Yung-san-tih,” “Rong Sande”), who came to England to study English for commercial purposes under the protection of the East India Captain, Henry Wilson. Wilson seems to have relinquished “Sam” (as he was known) swiftly into the care of evangelical Christians in Clapham in South West London who, no doubt eager to capitalise on his linguistic skills, introduced him to Morrison (Morrison 1: 77-79; Moseley 82-87; Hancock 25-27; Daily 92-93). It is very likely that Sam also tutored Thomas Manning, friend of Charles Lamb, who was to attempt a series of independent journeys into China after 1806. It has been claimed that he was taught the language “with the aid of a Chinese” while in London in 1805 (Markham clx). Morrison does not confirm this but mentions Manning’s unsuccessful petition from Canton to travel Beijing to serve as an astronomer in the same paragraph as he notes Sam’s arrival at Canton the previous month (Morrison 1: 186). Sam’s introduction to Morrison was the beginning of a long, not always harmonious, but complex intercultural relationship. Morrison’s future missionary colleague, William Milne recalled that Morrison studied Chinese with Sam,

… a native of some education, who will be often mentioned in his journal and letters. He was introduced to this young foreigner through the influence of Dr. Moseley of Clapham; from him he obtained his first insight into the Chinese language; and in him he found a specimen of that proud and domineering temper for which his nation is so proverbial (Morrison 1: 77).

Morrison travelled to Clapham to interview Sam, recollecting that the Chinese had come to England to learn the English language, “and such other matters as might gratify his curiosity and render him useful in some situation or other at his return to Canton” (Quoted in Daily 92). Sam, a very disciplined scholar, worked assiduously to master reading and writing in English, but did not engage much with the outside world, enjoying the company of his guardians. In the premises were also ten young Africans, supported by the Sierra Leone Company and the Society for Missions to Africa and the East with whom Sam was reluctant to mix. Morrison noted that it was obvious Sam did not “like the Africans and this cannot be wondered at, more especially in a Chinese whose national pride is far greater than can be conceived by any Englishman” (Quoted in Daily 92-93). Sam taught Morrison the rudiments of Mandarin and Cantonese from 1805 onwards, utilising Chinese materials in the British Museum. He thus acted as Morrison’s first Chinese teacher. It is also possible that he became Morrison’s roommate at 14 Pitt Street, Fitzroy Square (Morrison 1: 81; Moseley 82-87; Daily 93). Morrison clearly wanted to convert Sam but cultural mis-understandings intervened. At one stage Sam, perhaps mischievously, asked Morrison if “Jesus was a woman.” In response to Sam’s understanding of God as the governor of the Universe, Morrison responded that God was the “creator of the heart and, how ungrateful it was not to love him” (1: 82-83).

In 1806 Sam refused to continue teaching Morrison in and was only persuaded to resume the teaching seven months later. We do not know why Sam and Morrison fell out. Morrison does not mention it but later recorded that “Sam Tak's instructions respecting the mode of writing and the pronunciation” was one of the “helps with which God in his good providence furnished me for the study of the Chinese language” (Quoted in Daily 104). In his troubled and stormy crossing to China via New York, an anguished Morrison once more felt the need to record his gratitude for Sam’s assistance, affirming, “it was he who first gave me insight into the subject” adding that he felt his “heart much knit to him, notwithstanding all his obstinacy and contempt of me” (1: 149). In this case Morrison’s relationship to Sam is one of reciprocity. Morrison is dependent on his Chinese tutor for his invaluable Chinese education and Sam’s teaching of Morrison in return for the support of his protectors. Again the exchange is very different from that of De Quincey and his Malay, in his case, the gifted linguist is Chinese not English.

Morrison’s rather problematic relationship with Sam Tak was not over when he left London. Strolling along the Canton waterfront on 3 October 1807, he recalled how, as he was,

… returning by Sap-Saam-Hong ... Saam Tak touched me on the shoulder in the midst of a crowd saying, "Mr Morrison! How do you do? “When I turned round and saw who it was, I felt considerably agitated. Home and all that passed whilst Saam was with me came fresh to my recollection. I wished to get out of the streets and desired Saam to accompany me to my room. I expressed the pleasure which I felt in seeing him safely in his native country. "Had you a good passage", said I. He replied, "A good passage thank God" (Quoted in Daily 111).

Oddly recalling William Alexander’s chance encounter with Chitqua in Canton some fourteen years earlier, this unexpected re-union is also framed through civility and politeness, yet tinged with anxiety and nostalgia. Lonely, isolated, and troubled in Canton, Morrison’s emotional fragility is clearly demonstrated and Sam paradoxically, reminds him of the familiar and the homely. Sam it seems was not as pleased to see Morrison as this account suggests and he subsequently kept his distance, presumably not wishing to continue the education of this difficult pupil, especially as it was illegal to teach Chinese to foreigners. Contact was maintained but only, thought Morrison, when Sam needed some assistance, “I never see him but on such occasions: and as formerly though asking a favour he does not seem disposed to communicate any knowledge of the language” (Quoted in Daily 112). Sam nevertheless helped Morrison to a new tutor, domestic servants, and stood surety for him, even if he would not help him any more with his Mandarin. Morrison related that he “is the same high man that he formerly was. He is polite and respectful” though he “cannot say that there is anything of real affectionate friendship towards me” (1: 167-68). In 1808 Morrison praised Sam for taking “a brother’s part” in his affairs, but regretted that, “Poor man, I wish I could call him a brother in the best of bonds.” What possibly lay behind Morrison’s trouble with Sam is hinted at in this comment. Sam “was extremely violent in his temper, as well as high-minded—more disposed and suited to govern than to serve.” Clearly, Sam would not be Morrison’s first Chinese convert, a “brother in the best of bonds” (1: 217, 234, 235, 237-38, 256). Morrison had several other Chinese collaborators who taught him Chinese writing and reading, both Cantonese and mandarin, but his perplexed encounter in London and Canton with Yong Sam Tak, remains the most intriguing and resonant (see Zetsche).

**IV “A a native of the remotest shores of Asia”**

This essay concludes with an unnamed visitor to London, who authored the first literary account of the city by a Chinese person. From the evidence that we have this person was a Chinese merchant who visited London in 1813. The first mention of this man is in a translation by John Francis Davis of a Chinese drama published in 1817. Davis claims to have in his possession the translation of “a copy of verses, entitled “London;” written by a Chinese.” This Chinese had “accompanied a gentleman to England, in the capacity of a servant” (*Lao-Seng-Urh* vi). Reviewing Davis’s drama translation for the *Quarterly* in 1817, John Barrow mentioned that he had procured a copy of this Chinese poem. Barrow notes that the poem’s author was ignorant of English and that his observations, though just, derived only from what he could see rather than read. He also indicates that the manuscript he saw included a series of notes. This traveller, Barrow adds, is “not deficient in intelligence” and that the poem is an attempt to provide information for “his countrymen” (*Quarterly Review* [16 January 1817] 399-400). The merchant and his poem are next mentioned in 1829 in John Francis Davis’ extensive commentary on Chinese poetry, *Poeseos Sinensis commentarii: on the Poetry of the Chinese,* read to the Royal Society and published that year. Davis prints both the whole of the original poem and his literal translation. Sadly, he did not think it necessary to include the “explanatory notes, and commentary” of the original mentioned by Barrow, and now probably lost. Davis tells his readers that a Chinese person who visited London in 1813, “a native of the remotest shores of Asia who sings the glories of the British capital,” wrote the poem. However, he corrects Barrow’s comment that the poem was written by a “common Chinese,” stating instead that its author was “in a respectable station of life, a person of good acquirement, who accompanied home an English gentleman as his instructor in language.” He claims that the poem is confined “exclusively to objects as at once strike the eye” given the author’s “very limited knowledge of our language, and total inability to comprehend the nature of our institutions” and the verse thus contains “few flights of fancy” (53; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China* 114-16). The poem depicts, the Thames, the buildings, the fashionable men and women, and the general liveliness of the city. It comments on the rise and fall of the price of provisions and notes that the climate of the country is “too cold for the cultivation of rice.” The ritual taking of tea and buttered toast is described as Londoners drink their “strong tea” immingled with cream and spread their “baked wheated bread” with “unctuous lard.” The personae of the poem notably recalls Oliver Goldsmith’s *Citizen of the World* (1762) with its rationalist Confucian narrator, Lien Chi Altingi, commenting on the foibles of London metropolitan life and makes a very interesting companion with the many other period descriptions by Wordsworth, Byron, Blake, De Quincey, and Mary Robinson. Davis says that his translation avoids giving “dignity in verse to matters so perfectly domestic and familiar to ourselves,” and that he omits what he regards as “all the extravagancies and hyperboles of the original” (53-59). Subsequently, this extraordinary poem was reprinted by the Pomeranian missionary, Karl Friedrich August (Charles) Gutzlaff for his Chinese language magazine, *Dong xi yang kao mei yue tong ji zhuan* (*Eastern-Western Monthly Magazine*) (1833-38), published first at Canton, then (after 1835) at Singapore. Gutzlaff’s magazine was the first Chinese language magazine printed within Chinese borders. It promote western ideas and learning often through the use of Chinese personae that he created. Those, if any, afterwards noticed this curious poem would presume that its author was Gutzlaff himself (Lutz182 -84, 186-93).

The encounters described in this essay are not meant to serve simply as an informing context for the epiphanic Romantic moment of De Quincey’s meeting with his Malay in Grasmere, nor merely to instance the gradual replacement of an eighteenth-century discourse of civil rationality and cosmopolitan assimilation with that of a putative Romantic racialism fuelled by British colonial expansion in the nineteenth century. While we cannot be sure of all that occurred, these encounters took place and personal relationships were formed between Chinese and British people in the long eighteenth century, whereas there is no certainty that De Quincey’s powerful, racist vignette ever occurred. These encounters, while demonstrating areas of cultural misunderstanding do not argue in the period for any incommensurability of cultures or mutual incomprehension. They involved communication through several media, music, language, culture, and the exchanges involved were those of friendship, civility, culture and precious knowledge. No doubt there were many other such encounters that will become increasingly relevant as the archives are explored and rendered digitally accessible. My suggestion is that the focus of our critical enquiry should now be to recover these important examples of genuine encounters and give them the prominence in our accounts of the cultural history of the period that they deserve, at the very least equal in significance to that of De Quincey’s vignette if not in terms of his aestheticized and immensely powerful prose rhetoric.

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**Notes**

1. O’Connell identifies Whang as Huang Yadong (230-31, 383-84), [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Whang’s letter was printed in *Asiatick Researches* (1790) as “A Letter to the President from a Young Chinese.” (Jones, *Second Classical Book* 2: 204). See Jones, *Letters* 2:684, 684n. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)