Through the Looking Glass

China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao

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— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Through the Looking Glass

> "He (the foreign correspondent in China) deals with a difficult subject, there are no established sources of news, hardly two persons view the same incident in the same light, there are critics on all sides ready to condemn a reporter as having turned a propagandist, and so on, and difficulties by the score could be enumerated."
>
> The problems faced by foreign correspondents in China as expounded by "One of Them", *China Weekly Review*, 1928

> "Trained newspapermen are supposed to be able to dive into a new environment and, no matter how murky the medium, come up briskly and triumphantly with the pearl of truth. If that is the safe general rule, then I was a shocking exception when I first went to the Far East early in 1926, for I was wrong from the beginning, and my errors of appraisal were continuous …"
>
> Hallett Abend, *New York Times* China correspondent, 1927–41

It's a cliché, but journalists and foreign correspondents are in many ways mirrors of the society they exist in and write about. They try to reflect often-complex events in faraway lands in a way their readers can hopefully understand. This was especially true of the old China press corps that started in the Canton Factories of the opium-dealers in the 1820s and reached its high point, both in terms of word count and number of reporters, in the 1930s and during the Second World War. Whether they wrote for an audience back in Europe or America, Japan or elsewhere, or worked on the foreign language press in China attempting to interpret events to the foreign community through their own newspapers, magazines and journals, the China press corps was the major interpreter of China to the outside world then as it is now.

The foreign press corps of China, from its very small beginnings to its heyday, experienced China's history and development; its convulsions and upheavals; revolutions, reforms and wars. The members of the press corps were uniquely privileged in that they, as a group, and collectively *Zelig*-like, had front row seats for nearly every major twist and turn in China's fortunes. They witnessed the Opium Wars; stood on the sidelines as the Taiping Rebellion rose and fell; saw the Summer Palace burn; endured the Siege of the Legations and the onslaught of the Boxers; witnessed the collapse of the Qing dynasty, the birth of a Nationalist China; its struggle for survival against rampant warlordism; the Japanese encroachment; the rise of the Communists; total war and then revolution. When the Treaty of Tientsin was signed in 1858, opening China forcibly to foreign trade, the foreign press corps was there; when the Allied Relief Force occupied Beijing at the end of the Siege of the Legations in 1900 they were present too; and they saw the Republic born in 1911 and a young, increasingly politically strident China assert itself on May Fourth 1919. The old China press corps stood in the street witnessing the blood-letting of the First Shanghai War in 1932 as the Nationalists slaughtered the Communists and they were blown off their feet by the convulsions of the Second Shanghai War on Black Saturday in 1937. They tracked Japan's incursions into China from the invasion and annexation of Manchuria in 1931, the bombing of Shanghai and the Rape of Nanjing through to the assault on the Nationalist wartime capital of Chongqing as they sheltered in the same bomb shelters as everybody else until the conflict ended. They took tea with the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang and visited Mao and his comrades in the caves of Yenan. They witnessed the civil war, the flight of Chiang Kai-shek to Taiwan and the early days of the People's Republic. The members of the old China press corps were the witnesses and the primary interpreters of the history of modern China to millions around the world.

Like journalists everywhere, they took sides and brought their own assumptions and prejudices to China but a fair number also brought their personal hopes, dreams and fears with them too. They certainly weren't infallible; they got the story completely wrong as often as they got it partially right. Most did their jobs ably and professionally, some even passionately and a select few with rare flair and touches of genius. They were human beings with all the flaws inherent in the species. A fair few were drunks, philanderers and frauds and more than one was a spy; they changed sides, they lost their impartiality, they displayed bias and a few were downright scoundrels and liars of the first order.

What united virtually all of the old China press corps from the first journalists cranking out small papers on hand-presses in the Canton Factories to the foreign correspondents telegraphing back articles to the great newspapers

of the world in London or New York was a desire to try to understand China and somehow share that knowledge with their readers. This was what essentially made China such a fascinating and challenging "beat" for so many men and women from the 1820s to the 1949 revolution. The problem they collectively found was that there were no easy interpretations of China. They were like Lewis Carroll's Alice who, after passing through her looking glass, found herself in The Garden of Live Flowers where she realised that no path ever leads where she expects, and the twists and turns on the journey result in unexpected places and chance encounters:

> "I should see the garden far better," said Alice to herself, "if I could get to the top of that hill: and here's a path that leads straight to it — at least, no, it doesn't do *that* ..." (after going along the path and turning several sharp corners), "but I suppose it will at last. But how curiously it twists! It's more like a corkscrew than a path! Well, *this* turn goes to the hill, I suppose — no it doesn't! This goes straight back to the house! Well then, I'll try it the other way".

Characters Like No Others

The story of the old China press corps starts with a duel between two editors over the smuggling of opium into China in the 1820s and ends with an affable Belgian reporter sharing his booze with his beleaguered colleagues as the "bamboo curtain" fell after the revolution. It would be possible to write a history of accountants, lawyers or engineers in China but you wouldn't uncover anything like as interesting a group of people. The old China press corps was top heavy with mavericks, individuals and compelling characters. Unlike any other profession they roamed free, mostly, though at times they encountered resistance and outright hostility from the officials of the Qing dynasty, the Nationalist government or, finally, the Communists. They could be out of contact for weeks, even months without postal services or telegraph stations for hundreds of miles. They wrote when they could and wired their despatches when possible; and they frustrated their editors who tore their hair out until a cable or finally a letter arrived. Even those tied to their desks on local publications such as the *North-China Daily News* in Shanghai or the *Peking and Tientsin Times* regularly wrote features, travelled and pursued their own personal interests for their readers' amusement.

Why were so many journalists attracted by China? Some were posted for obvious reasons such as their knowledge of the Chinese language and their

experience of the East; and many were the children of missionaries, born and raised in China as "mishkids". Others were sent, or hired, frequently pulled away from very different beats, though they often ultimately became experts and Old China Hands. For example, Tom Millard, who became a legend in the Shanghai press corps in the early part of the twentieth century, had been a drama critic in New York before being sent to cover the Boxer Rebellion; Carl Crow left the crime beat on the *Fort-Worth Star Telegram* to join Millard in Shanghai on the eve of the Nationalist revolution; and J. B. Powell followed both men from their roots in Missouri to China. Times of war called for a redistribution of labour on the world's major newspapers. Willard Dickerman Straight was poached from the China Imperial Maritime Customs Service to cover the 1905 Russo-Japanese War for Reuters while "accidental Orientalist" Brooks Atkinson was the *New York Times* chief drama critic before he was plucked off Broadway where he was championing the plays of Eugene O'Neill and sent to China's besieged wartime capital of Chongqing in 1941. It was a contrast to say the least, and one they all came to fully appreciate and revel in.

Some were natural-born adventurers looking for a better life. William Wood left the opium business to start a newspaper in 1831; and Shanghai's leading auctioneer founded the *North China Herald* in 1850. Also, James Ricalton resigned as a school teacher in New Jersey to report on China in the 1890s, while Gareth Jones resigned as British prime minister David Lloyd George's foreign affairs adviser to become a freelance reporter until his untimely death at the hands of Mongolian bandits, or perhaps Soviet spies, or possibly Japanese mercenaries (his murderers have never been positively identified) in the mid-1930s. In addition, Ralph Shaw bought himself out of the Durham Light Infantry after being posted to Shanghai on the eve of the Second World War and became a reporter with the *North-China Daily News*, a job which was much more to his liking.

Not a few desperately needed a touch of glamour and danger to spice up their reputations. War junkies a plenty headed to China over the decades. They ranged from Jack London, who became a leader of the self proclaimed "Vultures" — the band of foreign correspondents that covered the Russo-Japanese War in Manchuria — to many of the members of the so-called "Hankow Last Ditchers" who clustered in the besieged and heavily bombed Nationalist retreat of Hankou in 1938, chasing another war after having covered Abyssinia, Spain and a dozen other conflicts. As the Nationalist government retreated further inland to make its last stand at Chongqing, yet more war junkies arrived looking for action, including Ernest Hemingway and Martha Gellhorn. For others, China was to be an important stop on an international trail to a sparkling career. Vincent Sheean was only 27 when he arrived in China but he

already knew that China would be a stepping stone to greater things and had already cultivated the air of the "roving reporter deluxe".[1] Teddy White, who was to become the doyen of the China press corps, was only 23 when he arrived. Between the wars, a stint in China was almost essential for any truly serious would-be top flight international correspondent.

There were a large number of correspondents with a background in sinology who mixed a passion for China with a love of journalism. China-born Arthur de Carle Sowerby combined being the foremost authority on China's flora and fauna with being the founder, editor and proprietor of the highly regarded *China Journal of Science and Arts* from 1912 till the Japanese shut it down after Pearl Harbour. Also, H. G. W. Woodhead, the long-serving editor of the *Peking and Tientsin Times*, had a strong background in China and Chinese affairs and eventually entered partial retirement in the 1930s as the editor of the respected quarterly journal *Oriental Affairs*. There were also a few missionaries who liked the journalistic life. They had little else to do in the evenings in their remote inland missions and provided valuable services as stringers, sending news of China's mysterious interior to their editors in Shanghai or Hong Kong.

The 1930s saw an influx of refugees from the Great Depression. Edgar Snow originally shipped out to China after finding himself disillusioned, unemployed and broke in America; and Jack Belden jumped ship in Tianjin by bribing a customs officer with $200 and his gold watch to be let ashore. Indeed a surprising number of jobless hacks in Europe, America or Australia worked their passage to China to find employment on the China coast press. They were determined young men and women, anxious to see the world and write about it. Others were refugees from revolutionary upheavals. For example, Sapajou, the prolific cartoonist of the *North-China Daily News* was a graduate of the Aleksandrovskoe Military School in Moscow and a lieutenant in the Russian Imperial Army, and had been aide-de-camp to a czarist general before the Bolsheviks swept his Russia away. Also, a young Israel Epstein arrived in Tianjin with his Polish Marxist parents, who were unable to get along with the Bolsheviks and were forced into exile. When Epstein was barely 15 years old, he was hired as a cub reporter by H. G. W. Woodhead and he went on to stay in China after 1949 and eventually took Chinese citizenship in 1957.

From the start, the foreign press corps in China took political stands. The Philadelphian William Wood launched the *Canton Courier* in 1831 after becoming disillusioned with the opium trade; the chief opium-dealer William Jardine had already launched the *Canton Register* to spread his free-trade views; and the missionaries who wished to bring God to China followed shortly afterwards. Arguably the first full-time China correspondent, G. E. Morrison ("Morrison of Peking") was hired by the London *Times* which felt sure he would

remain a trenchant voice of the British Empire even when far from home — and they were not to be disappointed. Also, Woodhead in Tianjin stoutly and unwaveringly supported extraterritoriality in the 1920s and 1930s while J. B. Powell in Shanghai equally as stoutly and unwaveringly opposed the system whereby foreigners were not subject to Chinese law, and he was criticised for his efforts by the Shanghai Municipal Council and thrown out of the American Chamber of Commerce for his apparently radical views.

Journalists reflected the politics of their contemporary world. Some correspondents were committed Trotskyists while working as journalists — such as Frank Glass, a South African who worked on most of the English-language dailies in Shanghai in the 1930s, Rayna Prohme of the *Peking People's Tribune* and prolific freelancer Harold Isaacs, the son of a New York real estate magnate. Others were Stalinists, while Arthur de Carle Sowerby was admired for his thoughtful writing on China but despised by many as the head of Shanghai's *Fascisti*.

Long-time China Hands and journalists such as Carl Crow, J. B. Powell and Hallett Abend sounded an early alarm about Japanese meddling in Chinese affairs and its inevitable escalation, but others like George Bronson Rea, who ran the right-wing *Far Eastern Review*, actively supported Tokyo and Japanese expansion into China. Also, of course, we should not forget those who found themselves becoming sympathetic to the communist cause, ranging from dedicated revolutionaries such as Agnes Smedley, who covered China for years for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Manchester Guardian*, to open sympathisers such as Edgar Snow, to the numerous "softliners" who found themselves gravitating away from the Nationalists towards the Communists during the late 1930s and the Second World War.

And then, inevitably, some were just plain weird. Englishman Edwin Dingle was a Shanghai-based journalist who walked to Tibet in 1909, wrote, edited and founded a number of publications in China and then packed it all in to establish a strange religious cult in California.

Sojourners to Differing Degrees

The foreign press corps, more than any other group of foreigners in China in the last 200 years, represented the three strands of the foreign experience. Some immersed themselves in China's culture, language and mores, and others remained resolutely foreign sojourners to their dying days, or the day their ships departed from a Chinese dock. A third group became archetypal China coast foreigners who adopted what Arthur Ransome — himself a journalist who spent

time in China after covering the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution — called the "Shanghai mind", the mindset of the "hermetically sealed glass case" that was the privileged foreign-controlled treaty port life of China.

Among those who immersed themselves deeply in China and revelled in the contrasts was Emily Hahn. In the late 1930s Hahn straddled the lush life of high-living foreign Shanghai but also edited *avant garde* Chinese magazines with her poet lover and man-about-town Zau Sinmay. She famously became a concubine, got hooked on opium, got off it and then wrote it all up for the *New Yorker*. Others didn't cross the lines in the way Hahn did but their sympathies lay with sections of Chinese society. Millard, Crow and Powell actively supported the Guomindang after the founding of the Nationalist republic. As founder and managing editor of the *China Press* in 1911, Millard was the first foreign editor to declare the events of 1911 a "revolution"; Crow started work on Sun Yat-sen's authorised biography, which was never completed; and Powell's *China Weekly Review* was considered the best foreign propaganda possible for the Nationalists by Chiang Kai-shek (a rather backhanded compliment Powell felt). However, a later generation such as Snow and others rejected the Nationalists to support the Communists. Interestingly a large number of these reporters started their China careers on the publications founded, edited and managed by Millard, Crow and, especially, Powell. Though its numbers grew, the old China press corps was always in many respects a village where everyone knew everyone else and allegiances, relationships and assignments overlapped constantly.

For many of the foreign press corps, their experiences as reporters in China led them to ultimately become more directly engaged in the country and its development, rather than simply reporting events, however partisan their interpretations one way or the other. A surprising number of foreign journalists moved from being commentators to being activists and direct agents in China's development. For instance, Morrison of Peking left the *Times* to become an adviser to China's erratic "strongman" leader Yuan Shih-kai; prolific journalist B. L. Putnam Weale became an adviser to any number of warlords before becoming involved in one intrigue too many and ending up being assassinated on a Tianjin street; Tom Millard left Shanghai to become a lobbyist for the Nationalist government in Washington; and Bill Donald became well-known as "Donald of China", advising first a warlord and then most famously Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang. Also, Hallett Abend was offered the job of publicity manager for the Old Marshal Zhang Zuolin, a warlord known as the Tiger of Mukden, but, though thanking him profusely, Abend turned down the job. This tradition of moving from reporting to advising and actively lobbying on behalf of various Chinese political interests was to be a major theme of the old China

press corps, particularly its American members and it's worth noting at the start that rarely, if ever, was this move from impartiality to advocacy undertaken for money. Whether supporting the status quo or revolutionary change, the decision to engage actively rather than simply observe was invariably heartfelt and committed.

Some, of course, only came for weeks or months, though often their vivid impressions have lived on. The handsome and dashing Peter Fleming of the *Times* visited only a handful of times, yet his two China books — *One's Company* and *News From Tartary* — remain classics and he became a pin-up for many an English schoolgirl. Also, the English writers Auden and Isherwood came for only a matter of months in 1938, but their recollections gathered together in *Journey to a War* remain one of the most atmospheric descriptions of China on the brink of total conflict. The same cannot be said of others. For instance, Hemingway and Gellhorn wrote nothing of substance while in Chongqing during the war. China knowledge was not a pre-requisite for the sojourner: most came with little or no knowledge of the country, though some were less willing to admit their ignorance than others. Typically Peter Fleming positively boasted of his inadequacies:

> The recorded history of Chinese civilisation covers a period of four thousand years. The population of China is estimated at 450 millions. China is larger than Europe. The author of this book is twenty-six years old. He has spent, altogether, about seven months in China. He does not speak Chinese.[2]

Others devoted their entire working and productive lives to China. Millard, Crow, Powell, Epstein, Woodhead and many others stayed for 20, 30, 40 or more years. Some knew nowhere else. For example, Epstein had arrived as a child and the knowledge-fixer and journalist Roy Anderson had been born in China, the son of the founder of Suzhou University. And some died practising their craft. For example, the popular London *Times* correspondent Thomas Bowlby was the sole reporter on the ill-fated Elgin Mission in 1860 to affirm British and French treaty rights, the so-called "Unequal Treaties", and he was kidnapped, tortured and died in incarceration. When Elgin torched the Summer Palace and unleashed a massive looting spree, he declared as his justification: "What would the *Times* say of me if I did not avenge its correspondent?"

Bowlby was the first, but not the last, foreign correspondent to die in China. Among others, Pembroke Stephens of the *Daily Telegraph* was shot dead by a Japanese sniper in Shanghai's old Chinese city; the intrepid Italian journalist Sandro Sandri was mortally wounded when Japanese fighter planes strafed and

bombed the American gunboat *Panay* as the ship was evacuating Americans and other neutrals from Nanjing in December 1937; and the veteran J. B. Powell tragically died as a result of Japanese torture in the 1940s.

The China Obsession in Perspective

By looking back at the men and women who have reported and written on China since the late 1820s, it might just be possible to gain some perspective on the media's current obsession with the China story. For a start, such a glance at those who wrote, edited and launched newspapers in China, as well as those correspondents who visited briefly to report back, might constructively give us pause for thought about the accepted wisdom that today the West is obsessed with China as never before. Arguably, more column inches were devoted to China in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century than since. In an article entitled "Work of the Foreign Newspaper Correspondent in China" written anonymously for *The China Weekly Review* in 1928 and simply signed "By One of Them", the author opened by writing: "During the past two years more space in the world's press has probably been given to China than during the previous decade".[3] The anonymous author was referring to the start of Chiang Kai-shek's Northern Expedition from Guangzhou to unite the country under Nationalist rule and rid it of warlords in 1926. This did indeed seem to be the case. In 1928 the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* was "… running seven and sometimes eight columns of material on China"[4] from their correspondent Hallett Abend and sending urgent telegrams instructing him to send yet more China news.

Even then, this heavy volume was not necessarily anything new. Starting around the time of the Boxers and the Siege of the Legations in 1900, the world's public began to want significantly more information about China, and so the world's great newspapers started sending and hiring full-time correspondents backed up by an army of stringers. Their numbers grew and then spurted in the 1920s, as "One of Them" notes. China was among the biggest and most prestigious foreign postings since the First World War as the fragile country appeared besieged on all sides, internally as well as externally.

It is certainly true that the foreign press corps from 1900 until 1937 was significantly larger than it has been at any time since. There were more magazines and non-academic journals devoted to understanding China then than now. From long- running publications such as J. B. Powell's *China Weekly Review* to short-lived upstarts such as Edgar Snow's *Democracy*, their number fluctuated but compared to today's handful of serious publications they were

legion. And, of course, foreigners established, edited and filled numerous newspapers published in China from Guangzhou to Shanghai and on to Tianjin and Beijing. Those are now all gone and there are no equivalents of the *North-China Daily News* or the *Peking and Tientsin Times* today, except in Hong Kong. It was also arguably true that, despite the large number of books now appearing on China and fighting desperately for shelf space, the period between 1930 and 1945 produced more and better-selling books on China, many by former members of the old China press corps, than the period between 1990 and the present day. There had already been several libraries full offered to the reading public. As the highly regarded J. O. P. Bland of the *Times* had noted at the start of the twentieth century, "Remembering all the tomes [on China] which burdened our shelves ... one wonders, as the stream of books rolls on, what and where are the people who buy them?" The flood of China books didn't recede. When, in 1937, the long-time Shanghai-based journalist Earl Leaf was set the task of compiling a list of ten recently published books that "… will provide a sound knowledge of China", he wrote:

> As I write I have here before me a list of 400 books dealing with China and the Far East, including such atrocities as "Ways That Are Dark" by Ralph Townsend who suffers from cirrhosis of the literary liver, "The Road to Shanghai", all about the white slave traffic in Shanghai by M Henry Champli, who doubtless never saw Shanghai, and "China in the Making" by HD Capper, which is guaranteed to put the reader to sleep quicker than counting sheep. Between these extremes are many excellent books well worth reading but which cannot be included because my "required reading list" is limited to only ten inexpensive books.[5]

Interestingly, his top ten list included books by several members of the old China press corps, including Edgar Snow, Gunther Stein, Agnes Smedley, H. G. W. Woodhead and occasional freelancer Pearl S. Buck, all of whom feature in this history. Despite only supposedly listing ten, Leaf goes on to note a host of other members of the China press corps who had turned to book writing to leverage their China experiences, such as Vincent Sheean, Victor Yakhontoff, Rodney Gilbert, Hallett Abend and J. O. P. Bland. Arguably too, those China books of the 1920s and 1930s heyday sold larger numbers to wider audiences than any by foreign reporters or China Hands do today. For instance, Peter Fleming became an overnight star and publishing sensation in England with his 1935 book *One's Company* and Carl Crow's 1937 *400 Million Customers* went into multiple reprints and multiple languages and sold strongly for the next 12 years. Also, novels such as Alice Tisdale Hobart's *Oil for the Lamps of China*

and Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* were best-sellers in the 1930s, staying on the book charts for months on end and becoming movies and stage plays; and Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China* had an enormous impact upon publication in 1937, going through five reprints within a month. In addition, superstar correspondents Teddy White and Annalee Jacoby's book of their experiences in wartime Chongqing — *Thunder out of China* — sold over half a million copies at its first printing and became one of the best-selling books of the Second World War through the 1950s.

By the late 1930s foreign correspondents in China were complaining that publishers were refusing their manuscripts sight unseen as they thought the China books market flooded and overdone. By the 1940s, even at the height of the war, publishers such as Harper and Brothers, which had been at the forefront of publishing books on China by former journalists, were turning down manuscripts that weren't either by star correspondents with household names or personally recommended by powerful newspaper editors who could guarantee vast publicity and correspondingly stellar sales numbers.

It's also worth considering whether there are now editors and newspaper proprietors with the personal commitment to and stake in China that many of the employers of the old China press corps had. This includes not just those who lived and worked in China for most of their lives such as Millard, Woodhead, Powell, Sowerby and others but also the likes of Henry Luce whose *Time-Life* empire constantly covered China, partly because it was a major story but also partly because Luce was himself a "mishkid". He had been born and raised in China, with the country in his blood and its fortunes, so he felt, deeply intertwined with his own.

In order to appreciate why China was such a big story between the 1820s and 1949 it is necessary to push aside the media immediacy of the current times, dominated as it is by the instantaneousness of constantly rolling news and the Internet. The first English-language newspapers in China were established to make vocal to a wider public the arguments of the China trade lobby, the opium smugglers and the businessmen looking to open China and force trade upon her. Spats over quotas, intellectual property and dumping may cause some media ripples as the European Union and Washington argue with Beijing, but these hardly compare to the trade spats that ended in the two so-called "Opium Wars" and the Unequal Treaties, the Elgin Mission that ended in the burning and looting of the Summer Palace and the Treaty of Tientsin that enforced the treaty port system.

Similarly, events in recent times such as the 1999 American bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade or the 2001 American spy plane incident, awful as they were and where some hostility to foreigners in China was seen, can hardly

compare to the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, the subsequent Siege of the Legations or the outpourings of anger and rebellion in May 1919 as China was deserted by the Great Powers at Versailles. The international media may show concern for poverty in China but can this compare to the poverty that engulfed China during the convulsion of the Taiping Rebellion or the Japanese invasion? The media may uncover corrupt and almost feudal-like local officials in obscure parts of China today but can this compare to the warlord period when men known as the Dogmeat General and the Tiger of Mukden ruled territories the size of European countries? Today correspondents debate who really makes decisions in China and the relative strength of the central government but after 1912 the debate was whether there was any effective government in China at all, central or otherwise. People opposed to government rule are uncovered by the media occasionally but can these compare to the ferocity of the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists in the 1920s, 1930s and through to 1949? The media may cover the rise of organised groups, "cults" as Beijing would have it, such as Falun Gong and speculate on how large and influential they really are, but can these movements really compare to the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in the mid-nineteenth century that left tracts of China laid waste and perhaps as many as 20 million people dead, or the Boxers severing heads at the turn of the century? Fortunately there is also nothing to compare with the global news events of the bombing of Shanghai in 1937 (arguably the point at which the Second World War became inevitable), the horrific Rape of Nanking and the numerous atrocities of the Japanese invasion.

Throughout the nineteenth century China appeared as "the sick man of Asia", a dangerously unstable, badly governed, poverty-stricken country. Bad leadership, a succession of seemingly never-ending natural disasters from floods to earthquakes, and the constant threat of coup and revolution united everyone from William Jardine to Karl Marx in the belief that China was constantly on the verge of complete disintegration, most probably in a horrible and deadly conflagration of some sort. These nineteenth- century opinions were, if anything, strengthened after 1911 when the young Republic sunk into chaotic warlordism before enduring 14 years of invasion by Japan from the 1931 "annexation" of Manchuria to Japan's final defeat in 1945. Peace was momentary and civil war and revolution soon followed. From the 1820s the China story was one of a country on the brink of collapse.

Of course, there is a story in China now — a massive and significant one. But in historical terms it is tamer, far more stable and, given the number of foreign journalists who came to China alive and left dead for one reason or another, an altogether safer beat than it was during the span of this book from 1827 to the 1950s or thereabouts. Having said all that, there is little use in looking

back at the past as if those were purely glory days. The foreign press in China itself was a product of the Unequal Treaties and foreign intervention in China's affairs, and so much of the media's interest in China came down to how its people, products and resources could further enrich the Great Powers. The stories that made the careers of so many of the old China press corps and thrilled and intrigued readers at home were nightmarish horrors for those Chinese forced to live through them, as behind the adventure and excitement of the old China press corps lies a mass of death, destruction and chaos.

Still, if there were more larger-than-life characters in the foreign press corps in China then than today, it was because the times were in many ways larger, the world certainly less known and the story more compelling. The old China press corps, flawed as its members so often were, is a crucial part of China's story and, perhaps most importantly, of our collective memory of a China now passed into history. As Mark Twain famously said, history may not repeat itself but it often rhymes.

The Old China Press Corps

Trying to compress approximately 150 years of history into one book is not necessarily a straightforward task. Historical events and significant periods overlap and decades do not always start neatly, while the members of the press corps themselves vary from short-time sojourners to "China lifers" who remained for decades. There is no neat solution to this problem. This book begins with the first stirrings of a foreign press and interest in China before the Opium Wars and continues through the flourishing that occurred after the foreign powers gunboated their way into the country around the middle of the nineteenth century. This led to the treaty port system and the expansion of a foreign press in those enclaves, notably Shanghai.

It seems more logical to follow the old China press corps through the decades. The Boxer Rebellion in 1900 was really when the full-time foreign correspondent in China emerged, most obviously in the figure of Morrison of Peking, and the period immediately following saw a combination of growth in both full-time correspondents for the international press and an increasing number of foreigners working on titles in English and other European languages in China.

The Nationalist Revolution of 1911 saw the world once again sit up and take notice of China and led to more China coast newspapers being launched and more foreign correspondents disembarking. From 1919 and the May Fourth Movement, a more noticeable trend of foreign journalists starting to identify

themselves more with China's causes and grievances emerges. Simultaneously, and in particular in the 1930s, many journalists not only began to take sides — Nationalist vs Communist and pro- or anti-extraterritorial rights — but also reflected the worldwide political divisions of left and right that became so stark in that chaotic and fascinating decade.

The situation changed sharply once again in 1937 with the onslaught of the might of Japanese militarism upon China. Foreign journalists, more than at any time before, became partisan for their chosen side and ideology as well as overt targets for retribution by the Japanese. The left-right divisions of the early to mid-1930s became yet starker. The war against Japan itself saw political divisions among the journalists accentuate as well as the forming of clear cliques in the wartime centres of Hankou and Chongqing; and the war was also a high point for foreign correspondents resident in the country as China became a major front in the global Second World War. When that war finished in most parts of the world, conflict continued in China as the civil war between Nationalists and Communists resumed and culminated in the 1949 Communist "liberation", a period that posed significant new challenges for the immediate post-war correspondents. After the revolution, foreign journalists were left fighting a losing battle and eventually their numbers dwindled to zero and the old China press corps passed into history.

This then is the story of the men and women who were the old China press corps.

1
God, Mammon and Flag

"That which we require now is, not to lose the enjoyment of what we have got."

Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, speaking to the China debate in Parliament shortly before the First Opium War

"We have no eternal allies and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow."

Lord Palmerston in the House of Commons, 1848

Rivals for the Mud Press — The Trenchant Voice of the Opium Merchants

The birth of foreign newspapers and a foreign press corps in China really begins in the small enclave of Canton, the city now known as Guangzhou, in what were called the Factories, the somewhat fortified and mostly self-sufficient warehouses where a select group of foreigners was begrudgingly permitted to trade by the Qing dynasty. The twin European imperatives in China were to trade and proselytise to advance their various national agendas, empires and treasuries. This meant that the very earliest newspapers and journals to be produced reflected a tripartite of interests: God, Mammon and flag. From the start the first newspapers were intended as much to influence the decision makers back home, which initially meant London, as to provide a forum for debate and news among the foreign community of merchants and missionaries in China. Though it was to be the merchants rather than the missionaries who were to be the first to enter into the newspaper business, the men of God were never to be far behind the men of Mammon.

The roots of the foreign press are, like so many other aspects of early European involvement in China, revealed in opium. The nineteenth century British-dominated "mud trade", based on opium as a narcotic smoked for pleasure or relaxation rather than medicinal purposes, was already over 50 years old by the time the first English-language newspapers appeared in China, coincidentally sponsored by the largest suppliers. Warren Hastings, the governor-general of British India, had started shipping "Indian treacle" or, as the self-declared opium-eater and essayist Thomas De Quincey termed it, "the celestial drug", from India to China in 1772 in exchange for Chinese-made goods and tea. Starting out as a luxury item for the rich, opium had inevitably trickled down the social scale and first raised alarm among China's rulers when it became increasingly popular with the common folk. This coincided with a dramatic fall in price due to large-scale British importation.

On 8 November 1827 the first English-language newspaper to be written, printed and distributed in China appeared — the *Canton Register*. Soon to follow were the *Canton Courier* and the *Canton Press* in July 1831 and September 1835 respectively. All of them were printed on small-scale hand-presses in the cramped Canton Factories. The *Canton Register and Price Current*, to give the paper its full name, was published twice monthly on the first and 15th of each month, though it was often late when nobody showed up to crank the press. At first it was an extremely local read: the first edition reported on the decision to enclose the small open square in the Factories, and featured a description of Chinese coins and a report of a double drowning of two sailors at Whampoa. The *Price Current* in the title referred to the fact that, like all the earliest papers, it contained as its major selling point a list of the current prices of goods received at Canton. The *Register*'s opening editorial declared:

> The want of a printed register of the commercial and other information of China, has long been felt, and its utility and convenience, full appreciated. With a view to remedy this deficiency, we have been induced to commence our present undertaking, the origin of which may be principally attributed to the kindness, and, public spirit, of a gentleman, who has obliged us with the use of his press.[1]

The *Register* owed its origins and patronage to Jardine Matheson, the trading company founded in 1828 by the Scottish merchants William Jardine and James Matheson (Alexander Matheson, James's nephew was the "gentleman" who provided the hand-press). It was no surprise, therefore, that its slogan was "the organ of free merchants in China" as they were looking to break the long-standing monopoly of the East India Company on the British-China trade. The

Register combined the latest departures and arrivals of ships with price information and notes on Chinese life from opera performances to snake charmers. Naturally, given its backers, the paper approved of the opening up of trade, was supportive of the opium business and did not look favourably upon the East India Company which was at the time the main competition to the independent traders like Jardine and Matheson. The opening issue declared that "... the free trade and the trade of the Company now move in different spheres".[2] The *Register* was to be a major shot in the war fought by the free traders to end the monopoly of the so-called "Honourable Company".

The monthly *Canton Courier*, launched in 1831 and referred to by the British as "that American publication", was founded and edited by a Philadelphian called William Whiteman Wood who had sailed to China in the 1820s in the hope of getting rich and worked as a clerk for the American opium-dealers Russell and Company. The problem was that Wood, the son of a famous American actor, was a romantic, a poet and an incessant talker with a quick temper but he had absolutely no business acumen. He was well-read and witty but also completely unsuited to the opium business. He was a skilled draughtsman and caricaturist who gave art classes to other like-minded foreigners in Macau, where he fell in love with Harriet Low, a vibrant young American woman from Massachusetts who was living in the Portuguese enclave as companion to her aunt and was generally considered the most attractive and vivacious available white woman in town. Wood courted her and attempted to marry her, proposing in secret. She accepted his proposal and they were engaged, but the nuptials were thwarted by her uncle, a senior partner in Wood's former employer Russells, who refused to give her away to a "penniless adventurer". Wood and the *Courier* were not overly fond of the opium business. He had come to have contempt for the mud trade while at Russells, and he particularly disliked the East India Company and regularly inveighed against it in his editorials. Indeed, he managed to annoy the Honourable Company to such an extent that Charles Marjoribanks, the President of the East India Company's powerful Select Committee, cancelled the company's regular order of 24 copies, which were divided among its stations at Guangzhou, Bengal, Madras, Macau and, the rather remote, St Helena. Wood appealed to the company to renew the subscription as 24 copies was a major component of his total sales. However, his assaults against the business of the Honourable Company were deemed so severe that the head of the company's even more powerful Court of Directors, Charles Ravenshaw himself, wrote to Wood confirming the cancellation and noting that the decision was "irrevocable".

The competition increased again when the *Canton Press* started in 1835 as the first weekly, published every Saturday at the "No. 3 British Hong", and was

strongly under the influence of Dent's which was Jardine and Matheson's major rival in the opium trade. The paper differed slightly from the *Register* and the *Courier* by containing a lot more news from England, in particular the ongoing China debate in Parliament, the opium trade and the imminent revocation of the Honourable Company's monopoly on the China trade. Despite both Dent's and Jardine Matheson standing to benefit from the repeal of the Honourable Company's privileges, Dent's English founder, Lancelot Dent, had an intense dislike of Matheson and the former surgeon Jardine, which the two Scots reciprocated with equal ferocity.

The first three English-language newspapers in China also led to the first newspaper wars — quite literally. When Wood had launched the *Courier*, his sweetheart in Macau, Harriet Low, declared: "I am afraid he will make enemies".[3] He did indeed. They included the missionary Robert Morrison and Arthur Saunders Keating, the *Register*'s hot-blooded Irish-born editor who was a staunch and rather zealous supporter of the opium trade and took strong exception to Wood's anti-opium editorials. Keating became so incensed that he demanded Wood apologise, but Wood refused and a challenge was immediately issued for a duel, which Wood accepted. As was his privilege, Wood got to choose the time and place of the fight and chose the Factories. Naturally, the duel was a major event for the foreign community because, first, many foreign residents were still employed by the Honourable Company and so many were a bit miffed by Wood's strident editorialising and, second, a good duel certainly livened up life. Wood prepared to defend his honour and all the foreign community took sides. However, not only did his challenger fail to show up for the fight but Keating actually fled the Factories for the opium supply station of Lin Tin Island in the Pearl River estuary, never to return. Wood considered himself "honourably exonerated". An afternoon's entertainment was cancelled and Wood returned to his editorial desk unscathed. However, his anti-opium stance meant he was shunned by many in the miniscule Guangzhou and Macau foreign community and he left for Manila in 1833 where he worked on a coffee plantation, played around with a *camera obscura* and, after having been thwarted in his passion for Harriet Low by her opium-dealing uncle, never married.

Aside from duels to the death, more familiar forms of rivalry were also immediately in evidence. After it was launched at a charge of 50 cents, the *Register* had been annoyed to find Wood coming on the scene and charging just 25 cents for the *Courier*. Price wars had begun as soon as there were two papers and the potential customers arriving at the "Europe Bazar" operated in the Factories by Messers Markwick and Lane at the No. 3 Imperial Hong could not only choose which paper's politics they preferred but also which price suited them better. However, duelling editors aside, life in the Factories offered few

distractions and so most bought any and all papers available. They also bought the *Canton Miscellany*, a non-political and anonymous journal which was written and edited by the community and was launched in May 1831. It offered some expression for the creative and intellectual juices of those in the Factories, on Lin Tin Island and Macau, featuring essays on subjects as diverse as Lord Amherst's Mission to China in 1816, the vagaries of the Chinese language, the military secrets of the Marmelukes and Lord Byron's genius.

All the papers and the *Miscellany* were written largely by the members of the self-named "Funny Club", a group of foreigners stationed in the Factories who took boat trips on the Pearl River at night to escape the claustrophobia and oppressive heat. The local Chinese thought it most odd to see a group of strangely dressed foreigners bobbing around on the river at midnight in heated debate and gossip. Members of the Funny Club regularly wrote sarcastic and pointed letters to the papers signing themselves by various *nom de plumes* such as Anglosinesis, Citizen of the World, Common Sense and Amicus.

But by day commercial rivalry resumed. In the 1830s both Jardine's and Dent's were engaged in the so-called "country trade" in commodities between China and India — opium as well as other goods to China, and other stops en-route — in defiance of the East India Company's monopoly. It was not an insignificant business. By 1830 the mud trade constituted 19,000 chests of opium a year, rising to 30,000 in 1835 and 40,000 by 1838, the first full year of Queen Victoria's reign, which also translated into something between four and 12 million opium addicts created in China.

The emergence of the *Register*, *Courier* and the *Press* saw the end of the China trade as the monopoly of the Honourable Company which had established its first base in China in 1715. The company, along with what Joseph Conrad called "the dark interlopers of the eastern trade"[4], had dominated the trade for over a century from its headquarters on London's Leadenhall Street. It took a much-debated Act of Parliament but the company finally closed its China station to hand over to the, now more respectable, "country men" such as Jardine, Matheson and Dent. They were to emerge as the first China coast versions of the Indian *nabobs*, the British who had made their fortunes in India and returned home extremely wealthy while also becoming stock characters in English newspapers, novels and plays, combining their crass *nouveau riche* lifestyle with an image of decadence and debauchery many back home associated with life in the Orient. In the December 1833 issue of the *Chinese Repository*, a missionary paper that appeared soon after the merchant papers, an article appeared, similar to what would now be called an op-ed, signed by a "British Merchant' which declared that the trade was now finally wide open. With the ending of the Honourable Company's monopoly, the entrepreneurs were massing their forces

to maximise the business opportunities which were becoming increasingly apparent. If Jardine — "Old Rat with Iron Head" as the Chinese called him after he emerged unscathed from a ruckus in which he received and survived a rather fulsome blow to the skull at Guangzhou's Petition Gate — did not write the piece himself then it was someone with very similar views.

The editorial bemoaned the fact that during the Honourable Company's monopoly little had changed to open the market to foreign merchants and argued that the company had been too conciliatory and subservient in its dealings with China to truly serve the interests of *laissez-faire* capitalism. The piece was extremely strong for the time. It even accused the Honourable Company of not being very honourable at all in its actions and so compliant with the Chinese authorities as to have actually handed over a Royal Navy gunner to be put to death in 1784 for "inadvertently" killing a Chinese man. A ship, the *Lady Hughes*, had fired a salute near Hong Kong and a Chinese man was accidentally killed by a cannon-ball rather carelessly left in one of the guns. For their part, the Chinese had threatened to stop the trade and the company had caved in. This still clearly annoyed the merchants 50 years later: "Has not the immolation up to this day remained unavenged? There is the smell of blood still" raged the author in fine tabloid style. Jardine himself or not, it reflected the changing mood of the freebooting merchant community. They were not actually very bothered about the luckless navy gunner but, in order to compel the British to hand over the man, the Chinese had kidnapped an English merchant, George Smith. This was a possible trend the merchants did not want to be continued. If the worst came to the worst, navy gunners could be sacrificed but surely not merchants! And such was the case as the luckless gunner was tried, found guilty and strangled.

This sort of tirade was something new in print and was clearly the voice of a surging British capitalism positioning itself for a new era of trade relations that could either be agreed to by China (on England's terms) or forced upon them (on England's terms). The merchants by and large didn't care how the aim was achieved as long as it didn't cost them too dearly financially. A combination of assumed racial superiority, British nationalism, trade before all else and English blood needing to be avenged were to be familiar themes to readers as the *Press* and *Register* became the major English-language organs of the China coast merchants. Along with the more independently minded *Courier*, both the *Press* and the *Register* also soon became somewhat more independent and intense rivals. Still, all of them ran shipping announcements, an essential service for the business community in the Factories, Lin Tin Island and Macau, who were waiting anxiously for news of their cargoes having arrived safely. All also ran adverts for newly arrived shipments of products that those Britons far away

from home would want to buy — primarily ale, bitter and other varieties of booze, it seems. And, of course, they all listed the current prices for opium.

The single most important function of the papers was that they published prices on opium and goods for all to read. Such information had previously been the sole knowledge of the Honourable Company and was a crucial part of their trading advantage. Suddenly everybody knew what everyone else was up to. The nascent China coast English-language press did much to level the commercial playing field. In addition, with everyone knowing everything about trading conditions and sharing information about what was happening in China, back in Europe and in related places such as India, the merchants were able to unify their position in relation to the Honourable Company, co-ordinate their ongoing campaigns in Parliament to open up the China trade and appear as one (to a point) in their individual dealings with the Chinese.

The Jardine's-backed *Register* was the most successful of the papers. It constituted one part of the overall campaign Jardine Matheson waged to promote the China trade. It also came to be supported by the power of the English manufacturers back home and that sizeable section of Parliament which was feeling rather bullish given British victories in Europe (Trafalgar and Waterloo, though some years before, still loomed foremost in the national consciousness). Despite the skeleton of opium in the cupboard, Jardine and Matheson worked extremely hard to win over political and commercial opinion in Britain to their way of thinking on free trade. In reality, the influence the *Register* and *Press* were able to wield in the debate in Britain was out of proportion to their local readership. In 1832 the British staff of the Honourable Company in the Factories and Macau totalled about 25 with another assorted 32 Britons resident in the area, and by 1839 this number had reached perhaps 200 at most. Among these were private merchants, four shopkeepers, a watchmaker and the notorious and invariably indebted painter George Chinnery — not exactly a mass readership. However, this was to be a trend repeated along the China coast. Twenty years later the *North China Herald* in Shanghai was to be highly influential in shaping the debate in Britain on treaty port policy despite there being only 175 full-time foreign residents in the Shanghai Settlement at the time.

The decade of the 1830s just prior to the First Opium War, or the Anglo-Chinese War, was to see the start of a serious and detailed foreign English-language press in China that was read and contributed to by the two major foreign communities in China — missionaries and merchants — both on the China coast and in Europe and America. What was interesting was that a broad accommodation appears to have been reached between these two groups that would hold for some time: the High Victorian ideal of ruling the world whilst also redeeming it. This was perhaps not that surprising given shifts in British

economic and philosophical thinking. In the eighteenth century influential thinkers such as Adam Smith had been largely hostile to imperialism but the rising Victorian thinkers were to take a different line and see British culture, trade and imperialism as bringing the benefits of what they considered England's advanced culture to the world: spiritual rejuvenation was linked to economic advancement promoted by trade. Evangelical Protestant Christianity meshed theoretically with capitalism.

Eventually many in the missionary community would come to openly condemn and campaign against the opium trade, but not immediately by any means, in what can be seen as a re-run of the English church's acceptance of and then repudiation of slavery slightly earlier. The presence of Protestant missionaries as translators for Jardine Matheson and the Honourable Company in the 1830s showed that the line between God and Mammon could be blurred, as these missionaries had gone ashore along the China coast engaged in opium smuggling but had also surreptitiously handed out religious tracts. In part, it appears to have been a case of taking the devil's money to do God's work and it was also partly a communality of interest in forcing both Western things and thinking upon the Chinese. This theory was supported by Maurice Collis, the Irish-born former British diplomat who was demoted down the ranks of the Indian Civil Service for being too pro-Burmese. In *Foreign Mud*, a study of the opium trade and wars that was widely read later, he wrote:

> In this way their (*the missionaries*) point of view is seen not to have differed very profoundly from Jardines. He wanted to force everything western upon China, including opium, which he considered indispensable. They wanted to force everything western upon China, except opium, for, being without commercial experience they were not convinced of its indispensability.[5]

Throughout the 1830s the two sides were to coexist until the Opium Wars forced divisions. While the merchants continued to publish the *Register* and *Press*, the missionaries formed their own journal, which voiced their concerns but rarely openly attacked the merchants and often ran parallel to them in its aims. This was not surprising given the fact that those involved with the endeavour included missionaries who had worked as translators for the opium-dealers, including Robert Morrison, Karl Gützlaff and E. C. Bridgman. Indeed Bridgman, an American missionary, had had his fare to China paid by an American trading company with opium connections. As Collis noted of the period, "… trade and the Bible were allies, and after them came the flag".[6]

The Circumspect Voice of the Missionaries

Robert Morrison and William Milne of the London Missionary Society (LMS) had started publishing the *China Monthly Magazine* in 1815. Though largely about China, it was actually produced in Malacca rather than in China itself. So it was to be the *Chinese Repository* that was the first journal of Chinese studies actually produced in China. It was published quarterly out of Macau and Guangzhou from 1832 until 1851 and was clearly the product of the missionaries who, in this case, were Protestants. The *Repository* ran to 12 volumes before ceasing publication. Remarkably each volume ran to a lengthy 650 pages with an average of 1,800 words per page, suggesting that many readers were either patient or had good eyesight (or both), while certainly indicating that the missionaries and their invited contributors had plenty to say about China and not much else to read on the long lonely nights.

The *Repository* lived up to its name in many ways and provides a fascinating snapshot of China just prior to the Opium Wars. It was a collection of essays on Chinese history, literature and geography as well as current events and reviews of all books published in Europe and America concerned with China and the Far East. The *Repository* set the standard for its many later followers in the English-language press by combining a detailed record of events and concerns of the day with an attempt to understand this strange land in which the missionaries had settled. The *Repository*'s political tone was reasonably impartial and often without bias by contemporary standards on subjects other than the spread of the Christian religion which was unsurprisingly consistently seen as a good thing. For the times, it could be judged to be not only the first serious publication in English to emerge from China but also one of the first decidedly liberal offerings. In fact, this was not a problem for the bulk of the readership — the Guangzhou and Macau merchant and missionary community — who in the 1830s and 1840s made less of a distinction between free trade and the desirability of religious conversion than later generations of businessmen did when the prevailing view became one of seeing the missionaries as annoying irritants. However, it was also most definitely a product of its time and declared in its inaugural issue in May 1832 that it would seek to uncover the culture and society of China but also declared: "We have no very strong expectation of finding much that will rival the arts and sciences, and various institutions of the Western nations".[7] Though interested in China, the *Repository* was quite clear that European and Christian superiority were real and indisputable.

The *Repository* was essentially the brainchild of two missionaries, Elijah Coleman "E. C." Bridgman and Robert Morrison. E. C. Bridgman continued to edit it until he left Guangzhou for Shanghai in 1847, whereupon his nephew

the Reverend James Granger "J. G." Bridgman succeeded him as editor till September 1848 when Samuel Wells Williams took charge of the publication. Still, E. C. remained a constant contributor until the journal finally ceased publication in 1851 and the *Repository* was to be his life's major labour of love. E. C. believed that it was essential for missionaries to keep abreast of the wider developments in China and valued the political as highly as the commercial, the social and the historical, as well as random China coast scuttlebutt. As the *Repository* grew, he widened its content to include details of events and missionary activities in Singapore, Malacca, Penang, Batavia and Indo-China.

Bridgman had been one of the first American Protestant missionaries to arrive in China prior to the Opium Wars. He had graduated from Andover Theological Seminary in Massachusetts where he had started corresponding with Robert Morrison who had reached Guangzhou as early as 1807. Bridgman had been ordained and appointed for service in China by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1829 and arrived in Guangzhou in 1830, where he finally got to meet his hero Morrison. With the links between commerce and missionaries still strong at the time, an American firm engaged in the opium trade had paid for his passage as a philanthropic donation. He immediately started studying the Chinese language, which became a lifelong passion.

In 1834 he became the first joint secretary of the wonderful-sounding Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge that had been founded in London in 1828 with the objective of publishing information to people who had been unable to obtain a formal education. The Society produced the *East-West Monthly Examiner*, a journal that sought to introduce Chinese readers to information regarding the world outside. It was a popular society, with William Jardine himself attending its first meeting in Guangzhou in October 1835. Bridgman was also a founder of the Morrison Education Society in 1836 and remained its president for many years while also being active in organizing the Medical Missionary Society in China in the late 1830s. This society had been established following a pamphlet issued by Dr. Peter Parker, another American-born Guangzhou resident who later became a diplomat in China alongside Caleb Cushing, President Tyler's envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to China; and it was to be responsible for many good works in Guangzhou, including the founding of the city's Ophthalmic Hospital. All of these good works needed recording too.

Bridgman decided he liked the publishing business and in 1832 started the Canton Mission Press just before launching the *Chinese Repository*. At the same time, during the negotiations to secure American access to China in the early 1840s, Bridgman was working as a translator and adviser to the US government.

(As Americans had come later than the Brits to the China trade, they were known as "Second Chop Englishmen" by the Chinese.) He remained the editor for many years, eventually handing over to his nephew J. G. Bridgman in 1847. E. C. had chosen to change direction after baptizing his first Chinese convert, an experience that moved him deeply (and had taken him fully 17 years to achieve). This reactivated his missionary zeal and led him to decide to go Shanghai where he prepared a Chinese translation of the Bible, which appeared shortly after his death.

J. G. had also graduated in theology before heading to Guangzhou to study Chinese with his uncle. However, he was to die in China at a young age just a few years after taking over the editor's post. His successor was to be yet another missionary, Samuel Wells Williams, originally from New York and a graduate of the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, Ohio who had arrived in China in 1833 as a printer with Bridgman's Canton Mission Press. He was certainly prolific: while editing the *Repository*, Williams contributed over 180 lengthy articles. Though a noted sinologist, he remained a missionary first and foremost, high-handedly declaring the role of the *Repository* to be bolstering "the introduction of China into the family of Christian nations, her elevation from her present state of moral, intellectual, and civil debasement, to that standing which she should take, and the free intercourse of her people and rulers with their fellow men of other climes and tongues, is a great work, and a glorious one".[8] Men like Williams appeared to be deeply interested in what China could become, while also having an interest in what it actually was. The problem was that they had clearly already decided that whatever they discovered about China it could never be a cultural or intellectual equivalent of the West.

The *Repository*'s other founder was the Englishman Robert Morrison, the first English Protestant missionary to China. As a boy in Morpeth and Newcastle, he had dreamed of being a missionary in Africa while apprenticed to his father as a boot-tree maker. He joined the Presbyterian Church, was ordained, and after an interview with the LMS, it was decided he would go to China rather than Africa. Arriving in 1807, he spent several years hiding from the Chinese authorities who had outlawed missionaries. When he did leave his house, he adopted traditional Chinese garb to try to avoid attention, but this strategy didn't fool anyone. To get permission to stay in Guangzhou, Morrison became a translator at the Honourable Company's factory by day while translating the Bible into Chinese at night and also producing a *Commercial Guide* to China that formed the first modern practical "how-to-do-business" book on China. All this meant that he didn't actually get many converts but did get a job as a translator on Lord Amherst's abortive diplomatic mission in 1816 to the Qing emperor. Though not a great converter of souls, he did spread the Word in China

through the *Repository* as well as Malacca's Anglo-Chinese College that trained missionaries, baptised the first Protestant Chinese Christian and ordained the first native Chinese pastor.

The *Repository* also had a wide variety of writers who weren't missionaries, and were mostly occasional rather than full-time staff members: the whole publication was rather *ad hoc* in its organisation. In the mid-1830s the *Repository* ran a series of pieces by a certain Dr. Twogood Downing, a British surgeon who visited China with the English fleet. Downing's articles gave a marvellous flavour of Guangzhou and Macau at the time.[9] Downing spiced up the pages of the *Repository* with tales of the Flower Boat floating brothels on the Pearl River, something we can hopefully assume the missionaries weren't too familiar with. He also recalled, among other sites, Hog Lane, a small alley close to the British Factory where visiting sailors, who at the time were allowed two visits to the city while their ships were moored up, could get drunk on a rather lethal mixture of alcohol, tobacco, juice, sugar and arsenic called "Canton Gunpowder".[10] In the time-honoured traditions of the Royal Navy, the sailors quickly became completely paralytic whereupon their pockets were picked and fights broke out. The officers would then have to bundle the booze-sodden Tars, drunk on the local *Samshoo*, back to the boats before they were lynched by angry locals they had offended and Chinese tavern-owners they had neglected to pay. Downing believed that the establishments of Hog Lane killed more British in Guangzhou than disease did in the 1830s. The pious Protestant owners of the *Repository*, though often deeply involved in the opium trade, were happy to run pieces like this showing the evils of drink and sin which left readers with vivid and (unintentionally we can assume) not a little titillating impressions of life on the China coast. They were often accompanied by illustrations by the well-known London artist, Thomas Rowlandson, who had died in 1827, but not before capturing Jack Tar in all his drunken and roistering glory.[11] To be fair, the wealthy foreign traders of Guangzhou were not any more averse to a tipple than the Royal Navy's Matlows; long boring evenings in the Factories were enhanced somewhat by the liberal imbibing of Canton Gunpowder too.

The *Repository* also contained more serious items for those who needed to get to grips with the workings and thinking of the Chinese government at the time. Just how to deal with the Chinese in terms of diplomatic niceties and customs had been a tricky issue since Lord McCartney's refusal to kow-tow to the emperor in the 1790s and then Lord Amherst's similar frustrations a quarter of a century later. By the 1830s the British were still trying to decipher the mysterious etiquette of the Flowery Court. The *Repository* was able to provide some of the earliest guides to Confucian business etiquette in China, thanks to Morrison who translated official court edicts and documents originally published

in the Qing court's daily internal newspaper and summary of court records, the *Imperial Gazette: The Emperor's Epitome of Past Events* (later to be more commonly called the *Peking Gazette*), for the benefit of the *Repository*'s readership. The *Gazette*, which later sourced much of its news directly from the *Tsungli Yamen*, the imperial Chinese foreign office which was established in 1861, was a fascinating record of the minutiae of court life, recording everything from the emperor's schedule to cataloguing gifts received as tribute. It was also not always just a slavish publication of the court, as occasionally an editorial would take issue with a court document carried in the paper on the same day. The *Repository* also produced regular translations of classical Chinese legends and poems to further elucidate the Middle Kingdom to its readers. Morrison was a formidable translator but he was greatly helped by another early sinologist and translator for the *Repository*, the former Pomeranian saddle-maker and employee of the Netherlands Missionary Society to the Far East, the Reverend Gützlaff.

Karl Friedrich August Gützlaff, known as Charles to his British and American friends, was a missionary-doctor and diplomat-interpreter, and later an employee of opium-dealers, who came to China on the *Lord Amherst*, the same British ship that had brought the first plenipotentiary of the East India Company to Shanghai. The *Lord Amherst* first visited Fuzhou where her captain managed to sell some goods and Gützlaff, calling himself Guo Shila, distributed Christian tracts to what he claimed were "eager and grateful readers", though there is no independent confirmation of this. Gützlaff had first been posted to Java where he had learnt Cantonese and several other Chinese dialects and then to Bangkok in the Kingdom of Siam where sadly both his wife and son died in childbirth while he was working together with her on a Khmer/Lao-English dictionary. In mourning, he went in 1832 to Macau where he started printing Bibles and publishing the Chinese-language monthly journal *Dongxiyang kao meiyue tongjichuan* (the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge's *East-West Monthly Examiner*) that was launched in 1833 and continued, with a gap of several years, until 1838. However, funding for the journal was constantly short until William Jardine offered him a job as a translator with his opium-clippers, which Gützlaff pretty quickly accepted.

It was difficult to avoid the fact that there was an obvious contradiction in Gützlaff as he was a man of God but also a translator for Jardine Matheson's opium- smuggling expeditions along the China coast. In selling opium and Christ simultaneously, Gützlaff looked like a hypocrite to many observers. However, others, downplaying his day job, saw him as an effective missionary whose achievements included handing out Christian tracts in Korea while on the *Lord Amherst* voyage and founding the Chinese Union which despatched Chinese

Christians to spread the Word in the country's interior. To be fair, Jardine had been honest with Gützlaff and told him that opium would be the principle cargo to be traded and offered the missionary "…a sum that may hereafter be employed in furthering your mission …" as well as further offering to fund the struggling *East-West Monthly Examiner* for six months. In his writings, the good Reverend made no mention of the opium that was being slipped ashore illegally. Perhaps Gützlaff agreed with Jardine who saw little wrong with the opium trade declaring it, "the safest and most gentlemanlike speculation I am aware of". Not much opprobrium had stuck, and clearly Bridgman and Morrison thought him honourable enough to contribute to the *Repository*, while Gützlaff was popular and well enough known to get a very small street named after him later in Hong Kong. Indeed, at times the workaholic Gutzlaff contributed so much to the *Repository* that it almost read like his daily diary and some described him as too self-promoting and a "bubble of self-glorification".[12] Gützlaff remarried after meeting Mary Wanstall who ran a school and a home for the blind in Macau. When her young cousin, Harry (later Sir Harry) Parkes — then a 16-year-old who had just arrived in China but who was later to rise to the heights of British consul to Guangzhou and Shanghai and then become minister to Japan — met him, he described him unflatteringly as "short and square"; and William Hunter, a young American working for Russells, noted that the Pomeranian appeared to have a rather Chinese appearance.

For the *Repository*, the involvement of Bridgman, Morrison and Gützlaff was a coup as they were generally regarded as the three leading men of learning in Guangzhou to actually understand the Chinese language at the time and to be able to best interpret the edicts of the court in Beijing. But other contributors to the *Repository* had far more bizarre reputations. The eccentric George Francis Train, "Citizen Train", had made his fortune in his youth by developing real estate in Omaha before going to England and Australia to make more money and then to China where by his mid-twenties he had made his third fortune in the China trade and wrote up his experiences for the *Repository*.[13] Thought to have been the model for Phileas Fogg in Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*, he later returned to America where he used his fortune to support Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the cause of female suffrage. He also championed the 1893 Chicago World Fair, wearing a white suit and red Turkish fez to drum up support for the exposition. The last years of his life were mainly spent on a bench in Madison Square Park where he refused conversation with all adults and held impromptu services for his self-proclaimed Church of the Laughing Jackass.

At its peak the *Repository*'s circulation reached approximately 1,000 copies an issue, which proved that it was clearly being read significantly beyond the

local English-language market in the Factories and Macau. One admirer went as far as to write what, at the time, was perhaps the highest praise a publication could receive — that the *Repository* "… would be considered good even in England".

Covering the Napier Fizzle and the First Opium War

As the opium trade with China prospered, merchants such as Jardine, Matheson and Dent became extremely rich but they still felt keenly that the onerous restrictions placed on them by the Qing needed to be jettisoned. Jardine and Matheson were rarely in the same place at the same time and invariably one, first Matheson and then Jardine, stayed in London to lobby Parliament for a more forward China policy and for the flag (i.e. gunboats) if necessary to follow trade in the way it had done so decisively in India. Matheson was not much liked in Parliament. For example, Benjamin Disraeli's 1845 novel *Sybil* contains a barely disguised reference to the Highlander: "… a dreadful man, richer than Croesus, one McDrug, fresh from Canton with a million of Opium in each pocket, denouncing competition and bellowing free trade". Jardine, also a Scot but a Lowlander, was not much liked either, especially by the Tory Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel who personally disliked the opium trade.

The British had been trading opium for a long time by now and it had dealt with Britain's balance of payments crisis with China but, as Beijing banned the trade, turning the merchants into smugglers, something had to be done. By the 1830s this situation was increasingly deemed intolerable by the merchants, but the problem was to find an excuse to force China to open its markets. London was also more than aware of the importance of opium, even if it felt a little squeamish over the trade at times. As classically educated men, they knew that a declining Roman Empire had partly beggared itself by exporting hard currency East to buy frivolous spices and silks; some offset was required by the more fiscally prudent British Empire. By the late 1830s the opium trade was "the hub of British commerce in the East".[14] By the end of the decade, fully a sixth of British overseas trade was with China and nearly two-thirds of that trade was in opium. As late as 1880 the *China Mail* in Hong Kong would oppose the overnight abolition of the trade on the grounds that it was worth £9 million to India and the removal of that income would throw the economy of the Raj into chaos.

Still, in general, relations between merchant and missionary remained cordial in the run up to the First Opium War in 1839. Writers in the *Repository* could frame arguments such as the following without raising much ire:

> They (*the Chinese*) are sensitive of their incapacity and weakness, their empire is in so crumbling a state that they dread danger beforehand … We must practise on their fears. The mere presence of our cruisers on their coast would sufficiently alarm them, however friendly might be our conduct … .[15]

Writers for the *Register*, *Press* and *Repository* called for demonstrations of force by the Royal Navy to pressure negotiations and a treaty with the Chinese favourable to British merchants. This sort of strident talk regularly appeared in the missionary-run *Repository*, but it was clearly the voice of Jardine, or someone close to him, whose support of the missionaries' activities meant he had some influence with them. The merchants called in their own newspapers for Parliament to emulate the spirit of William Pitt the Younger who (as well as creating the institution of the Press Gallery in the House of Commons) had led Britain through the Napoleonic Wars and the Battle of Trafalgar and had forced union with Ireland — all events that inspired the British merchants to both new heights of patriotic strength and ideological expansionism in the face of Napoleon's Continental System of economic warfare. As a response, Lord Napier was despatched to the East in 1834. But the merchants were to be largely disappointed by Napier's arrival. He was formal British aristocracy whose ancestors had been titled under James I for, among other less useful things, discovering logarithms, but he knew nothing of China or the Chinese. Napier arrived in Macau and from there journeyed to Guangzhou but he achieved little and died not long after arriving. He, therefore, left us without his impressions of China but with his sole published book on a subject far closer to his rather stay-at-home heart than the China trade — the rearing of mountain goats.

Napier, or "Laboriously Vile" to the Chinese, was a major disappointment to the likes of Jardine as their favoured strategy of gunboats was the one thing Parliament had ordered Napier unable to authorise; William Hunter described this period as "the Napier fizzle". In the end, the best Jardine could do was argue that Napier's diplomatic failure meant little more than the correctness of his gunboat policy. He argued in this way in the pages of the *Register* where a Dr. Thomas Colledge M.D., who occasionally turned his hand to journalism on Jardine's behalf, wrote up the meetings between the Chinese and Napier. "Laboriously Vile" was portrayed as largely ineffectual, misreading the Chinese and the political situation while Jardine was eulogised as the most trusted and canny foreigner on the China coast. Colledge was yet another multi-talented and multi-tasking foreigner in Guangzhou. A British missionary, former Honourable Company employee and eye surgeon, he was — like Morrison (who died the same month as Napier), Gützlaff and Bridgman (who provided personal religious instruction to Napier in China) — a classic of those of a religious bent who often

found common cause with the opium- smugglers of the time and the British government. Colledge was also Lord Napier's personal surgeon and therefore his accounts for the *Register* were presumably eye-witness ones. The *Register* also saw an opportunity to advance the Jardine agenda by hinting darkly that those advocating surrender rather than gunboats, namely to the pro-Jardine faction their arch rival Dent, were cowards and traitors.

Eventually Henry Temple (Lord Palmerston) was to become the merchant's man in London with his track record of not shirking from threatening the use of force in the national interest, which he did repeatedly in Turkey, Afghanistan, the Middle East and, ultimately, in China. Many missionaries were still able to stand, apparently comfortably, with the merchants in the triple goal of the supremacy of Britain over all others in the China trade, the supremacy of Christianity over all alternatives in religion and the supremacy of the British nation over all others in all regards — trade, religion, flag — and just to make sure, with the Royal Navy to safeguard and protect it all. British naval superiority was to be witnessed at the Battle of the Bogue Forts in January 1841. This battle at the structures that guarded the approaches to Guangzhou was the first clash between China and the West, and it registered with the public at home due largely to an amateur artist with the Royal Navy, Lieutenant Skinner, whose drawings of the action were published as coloured mezzotints by Ackermann and Company, London's most famous publisher of original prints and illustrated books. Skinner's stirring pictures of British forces taking on the Chinese Imperial Army accompanied reports in the newly established *Illustrated London News* that portrayed the war as a crusade to bring the benefits of English free trade and mercantilism to the despotic Orient.

By 1836 the *Register*, *Press* and *Repository* were all discussing what war between Britain and China would mean in terms of trade after the failed Napier mission and the Bogue Forts firefight from which the British had easily emerged victorious with their armour-plated ships. It was almost as if the Jardine line of an inevitable clash to open up China had been accepted by the entire foreign community, with just a few wayward dissenters. Maurice Collis described the attitude of all the papers and all the authors, both named and, as was often the case, anonymous, as "amused contempt" for the Chinese, with the *Repository* describing the abilities of the Chinese Imperial Navy as a "monstrous burlesque".[16]

At the time, however, missionaries were not the generally annoying interferers they were later to be perceived as but rather co-conspirators in the great mission to civilise China and make a lot of money along the way: trade, religion and flag remained close and invariably intertwined. However, over the period of the Opium Wars the English-language press in China was to divide in

two with missionary-funded and written papers on one side and more commercially minded publications on the other. Likewise their views diverged and the missionaries largely found themselves writing for themselves rather than the wider audience they had enjoyed in the heyday of the *Repository*.

By the summer of 1839 the British had been expelled from their Factories and were sheltering on Macau where the *Register*, *Press* and *Repository* had all relocated their presses too. Fears of further Chinese reprisals meant that many sailed rather hastily for Hong Kong with a host of small boats ferrying families across the straits. The *Repository* was by now openly lambasting the British government for not having stepped in with the fleet and thereby having reduced the British to such ignominious measures that could achieve nothing but undermine the country's prestige in the eyes of the Chinese. War was to follow with the Battle of Chuenpee that somewhat reasserted British power under the command of Captain Charles Elliot, who had earned a positive reputation as a protector of slaves in British Guiana and was known to dislike the opium trade, but he didn't seem inclined to show the same leniency to the Chinese.

Until the summer of 1840 the *Repository* had nervously hoped that all-out war could be avoided and had reported the arrival of Honourable Company armed steamers with 4,000 Irish, Scots and Indian troops — all, as Maurice Collis commented, over "a mere customs dispute". The Chinese commissioner in Guangzhou, Lin Tse-Hsu, was reported in the pages of the *Repository* (one of the only papers to ever try and really see his point of view at the time) as declaring of the advancing British fleet: "English warships are now successively arriving at Canton, and though it is certain that they will not venture to create disturbances, nevertheless, like rats they will enter all the ways in order to protect those base followers who sell opium". For the *Repository*, a crucial moment had arrived: should it support the Chinese and oppose the opium-dealers or support the policies of the mother country and Britain's merchants? Yet again they chose Mammon and the flag without too much introspection.

The situation in China also attracted the interest of the foreign press, particularly in other parts of the British Empire. The English language *Japan Gazette* covered the developments while the *India Gazette*, a British-run publication in the Raj, wrote as follows about the Sack of Chusan in July 1840:

> A more complete pillage could not be conceived than took place. Every house was broken open, every drawer and box ransacked, the streets strewn with fragments of furniture, pictures, tables, chairs, grain of all sorts — the whole set off by the dead or the living bodies of those who had been unable to leave the city from the wounds received from our merciless guns ... The plunder ceased only when there was nothing to take or destroy.[17]

The Anglo-Chinese War, which became known as the First Opium War, had basically been the Battle of Chuenpee that, by and large, was not a major press event. However, the outcome was crucial for British expansion and also the further weakening of the Qing dynasty: cession of Hong Kong to the British crown (a victory for the *Register* which had called for Hong Kong to be a British port back in 1836) as the major British trading base in southern China, substantial indemnity payments and trade on an equal footing to be reopened at Guangzhou.

The situation rumbled on with the appointment of the dashing former spy Sir Henry Pottinger as chief superintendent of trade to Hong Kong residents and eventually more fighting erupted. The young Harry Parkes was to accompany Pottinger in his expedition up the Yangtze and, after having taken part in the capture of Zhenjiang and the surrender of Nanjing, witnessed the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing on board the British warship *HMS Cornwallis* in August 1842. The Treaty basically assured the British of everything they had wanted since Lord Macartney's failed mission 50 years earlier, and without explicitly mentioning opium. As well as the so-called "barren rock" of Hong Kong, Britain obtained her desired treaty port rights in Guangzhou, Xiamen, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai, as well as receiving indemnity payments and also reimbursing Pottinger the not inconsiderable cost of sending his fleet to China. The formal creation of Hong Kong and the new "treaty ports" where foreigners enjoyed special rights and trading privileges, particularly Shanghai, meant a major change in Britain's role in China. The development of the country following the treaty was to determine the rise of the press on the China coast while the continuing and structural weakness of the Qing dynasty led to a period of intense internal disturbance across the vast Chinese hinterland.

The opium-smugglers had, by and large, had their way and their own press had influenced British politicians and the public immensely. Jardine died in 1843 but Matheson took over his seat in Parliament, holding it for 25 years in total. He also became chairman of the P&O shipping line and the second-largest landowner in Britain, bought the Isle of Lewis in the Scottish Highlands, spent over £500,000 building a castle on it and became an octogenarian. The opium business lasted even longer, and by the 1880s the British were shipping in 100,000 chests, or 6,000 tons, of opium a year.

Hong Kong — A Colony in Need of a Press

Macau had started publishing Portuguese-language newspapers early and they reflected both missionary concerns (Catholics in this case) and internal Portuguese political tensions.[18] In September 1822 Major Paulino da Silva

Barbosa, the head of the Portuguese Constitutionalists in Macau, and briefly the governor, launched the weekly *Abelha da China* (*The Bee of China*) printed on a small press in St. Dominic's Church on Senado Square in the heart of the enclave. The paper was short-lived, folding the following year when Barbosa left office, but it did provide some commentary and analysis of affairs in China by foreigners for a readership consisting primarily of Macau's missionary community. The *Abelha da China* was mainly a vehicle for Barbosa to attack the Portuguese Monarchists in Macau. They replied with their own publication, the *Gazeta de Macao* in 1824, and in the 1830s the *Boletim Official do Governo de Macau* and *O Portuguez na China* were launched. The trend continued into the 1840s with the launching of *A Aurora Macaense* for several years and *Solitario na China* and *O Procurador dos Macaistas*.

Within a year of formal British administration, Hong Kong got its first newspaper —*The Friend of China* (formally *The Friend of China and Hongkong Gazette)* — which declared, "we inscribe Free Trade on our banner and that it may wave triumphant we shall insist on the permanent occupation of Hong Kong …".[19] Prior to this, everything the few early residents had read had been published in either Macau or Guangzhou. Soon after the *Friend of China*, the colony rapidly got a bewildering range of publications given its relatively small population: *The China Mail* in 1845; *The Daily Advertiser* in 1870; *The Hongkong Daily Press* in 1871; *The Hongkong Telegraph* in 1881; *The Hongkong Times*; *The Hong Kong Mercury and Shipping Gazette* in 1886; and what was universally considered the most boring newspaper ever to be published in the colony, *The Hongkong Government Gazette*. Most focused on trade and issues related to the growing foreign presence and business dealings in Guangzhou, while *The Hongkong Government Gazette* dealt mostly with local issues affecting the colony. Such a range of newspapers was actually quite impressive for a European and American community in the colony that numbered significantly fewer than 3,000 potential readers.

The most interesting of these newspapers was probably the *Telegraph*, an evening paper owned and edited by the scandal-mongering Robert Fraser-Smith who was described by the well-known Hong Kong University professor H. J. Lethbridge as "atrabilious" (i.e. irritable as if suffering from indigestion).[20] Fraser-Smith held court daily at the Hong Kong Hotel, the colony's social centre, conveniently situated adjacent to his editorial offices on Pedder's Hill. He was a hard drinker and inveterate gambler, and most of his staff, invariably Scotsmen, followed his example. He was also a reckless editor and constantly involved in libel actions, most of which he managed to defend by arguing his opponents into submission, but in 1890 he was finally sentenced to six months' imprisonment for libelling a foreman in the Public Works Department, having

suggested he had committed rape. He remained seemingly unrepentant and the day after his release from Victoria Gaol was seen avidly betting at the Happy Valley racecourse.

Fraser-Smith featured heavily in the rather odd tale of His Majesty the King of the Sedangs who arrived in Hong Kong in 1888 with three personal servants and 13 Chinese employees and sparked a long-running war of words between Fraser-Smith and his arch-rival George Murray Bain, the editor of the *China Mail*. The king was in fact a Frenchman called David de Mayréna who took up residence in the Hong Kong Hotel and made Fraser-Smith's acquaintance. The two soon became good mates and drinking companions. The king proceeded to parade around town in a costume of Ruritanian proportions and dramatically sporting a long Annamite sword worn in a sash. After meeting the governor of Hong Kong, Sir William Des Voeux, the king awarded him the Grand Cordon de l'Ordre de Sedang. Predictably it was all a scam to get investors to hand over some cash and, while many were somewhat dubious, they weren't quite sure enough of their geography to question the king more closely.

De Mayréna had a reasonably good background but had ended up a penniless swindler in Asia, conning money out of gullible merchants with tales of expeditions to find gold, treasure and other loot. He had ventured into a remote part of Vietnam where the Sedangs lived and, in an amazing true story similar to Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King*, he really had been anointed their king and made his local mistress the queen.[21] His royal palace was a basic hut miles from anywhere but with a very impressive flag fluttering above it of de Mayréna's own design. Eventually Bain got to the truth and "outed" de Mayréna as a fraud in the *Mail*, largely by translating articles about the self-proclaimed king's similar escapades in Hanoi and elsewhere in French Indo-China from the *Courier d'Haiphong*. Fraser-Smith, as part of his ongoing war with Bain and the *Mail*, and perhaps also out of friendship with de Mayréna (and probably for the sheer hell of it) staunchly defended the fraudulent king in the *Telegraph*. Eventually the king of the Sedangs quit Hong Kong for Europe with a second-class steamer ticket in a false name. He had raised no money, paid for no drinks and given the rivals Bain and Fraser-Smith something else to argue about in their papers for months, while the entire staff of the *Telegraph* were made "chevaliers" of the kingdom of Sedang, which left Hong Kong's reading public to enjoy all of the shenanigans immensely.

Fraser-Smith and his fellow Scotsman Bain continued to argue incessantly with each other. Bain railed at Fraser-Smith and the *Telegraph* from his Wyndham Street office round the corner from Pedder's Hill and the *Telegraph*'s offices. Though different in temperament — Bain was a respectable and pious teetotaller while Fraser-Smith was anything but — the two towered over the

colony's newspaper business, which suggests that J. S. Thomson was right when he wrote in his book *The Chinese* in 1909 that "… the newspapers of the Treaty Ports were generally set up by the Macanese and edited by Scotchmen".[22] The tradition of Scotsmen and Macanese in the newspaper business was to continue as Shanghai and the other treaty port presses got underway. As a final irony, when Fraser-Smith died in 1895, J. J. Francis, the barrister who had attempted to prosecute him for libel many times, became the paper's publisher and appointed the more pro-Chinese Chesney Duncan as the *Telegraph*'s editor.

Fun as the *Mail* vs *Telegraph* spats were, ultimately more important in terms of commenting on Britain's opium trade and commercial policy after the founding of the colony was *The Friend of China*, which was published weekly on Thursdays from March 1842. The first issue was really nothing more than a long and indulgent editorial appealing for "patronage and support" and firmly identifying the newspaper as a voice of the British Empire in the East. The stated aim was to open China to free trade. *The Friend* stood stoutly for Mammon at a time when it was far from certain that Hong Kong would survive and thrive as a commercial centre. Due to the involvement of the Quaker-founded Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade, *The Friend* did stand against opium, but it noted Matheson's departure for London and hoped that Jardine would relocate the firm's factory to Hong Kong as soon as possible. Apparently the opium business wasn't ultimately that repellent. *The Friend* was influential; it advocated that Hong Kong's capital be called Victoria, as it was, rather than the suggested Queens Town. Perhaps most interesting was *The Friend*'s regular *On Dits* column that repeated gossip heard around town, mostly about Chinese officials, and also frequent letters from concerned yet eminently respectable Hong Kong residents mainly complaining about drunken sailors getting rowdy. *On Dits* was a little more caustic than today's rather tamer and more libel-aware press in mixing news with gossip: one entry wrote: "The Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor Caine, goes to England next mail — The Colony will gain something by his absence".[23]

However, one thing the early Hong Kong press agreed upon was that, despite the brothels, misbehaving soldiers, opium-dealers, pestilence and interminable heat, the colony's development was to be vigorously supported. When in 1848 a writer for the *Dublin University Magazine*, who may or may not have actually visited, wrote an article critical of Hong Kong's establishment, climate and society, *The Friend* was extremely swift to rebut the "misconceptions" and defend Hong Kong.[24] Given Hong Kong's emergence as a potentially great *entrêpot* and crossroads of trade, this need for a vigorous defence by the local press may seem a little extreme. However, in the colony's early days after the Nanjing Treaty, the economy slumped and Hong Kong

became little more than a storage depot for opium that had previously been stored at less cost on vast floating hulks. It was a "barren rock" indeed. Hong Kong was seen as worthless, and a costly burden rather than a glittering prize. In the London music halls the comedians sang "You may go to Hong Kong for me", meaning rather you than them in what many perceived to be little more than a fetid death trap of disease. There was of course some truth in all this. Hong Kong did not boom instantly, or live up to the hopes the Guangzhou merchants had initially had for it and it was certainly an unhealthy place, with the wonderfully misnamed Happy Valley being the major malarial pit of the island.

But, success or failure, the press in Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou was performing a useful function. In his classic book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said wrote that key to the Western study and reporting of the Orient has been a need to increase knowledge to consolidate power:

> … knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control. [25]

Interestingly, and perhaps ironically, it was to be the missionary-run *Repository* rather than any of the merchant-funded newspapers that was to increase this body of knowledge from close to scant to something approximating useful in the first half of the nineteenth century. The often understated *Repository* brought together a vast array of knowledgeable contributors and also dipped into the raw Chinese texts and commentaries while the merchant press, in an often foghorn-like manner, was largely fixated on the state of trade and the need to influence London to give better support to business interests. The *Press* and *Register* tended to assume and pontificate while the *Repository* investigated and enquired, while also dabbling in not a small amount of proselytising. With the foundation of Hong Kong as a crown colony and the emergence in importance of the China coast treaty ports, events within the Middle Kingdom were to come to prominence and create a need for knowledge among Westerners in excess of what they had ever needed before as they engaged China to a greater extent than previously through the new treaty port system.

Notes

Introduction — Through the Looking Glass

1 Millie Bennett (1993) *On Her Own: Journalistic Adventures from San Francisco to the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1927*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, p. 229.
2 Peter Fleming (1933) *One's Company: A Journey to China in 1933*, London: Penguin, p. 14.
3 Anonymous, "Work of the foreign newspaper correspondent in China", *China Weekly Review*, 10 October 1928.
4 Hallet Abend (1943) *My Life in China 1926–1941*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., p. 96.
5 Earl H. Leaf, "The bookworm turns," *China Weekly Review*, 1 May 1937.

Chapter 1 God, Mammon and Flag

1 *Canton Register*, vol. 1, no. 1, 8 November 1827.
2 ———, vol 1, no. 1, 8 November 1827
3 Rosmarie Lamas (2006) *Everything in Style: Harriet Low's Macau*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, p. 97.
4 Joseph Conrad (1902) *Heart of Darkness*, Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons.
5 Maurice Collis (1946) *Foreign Mud*, London: Faber and Faber, p. 108.
6 ———, p. 108.
7 *Chinese Repository*, issue 1, May 1832.
8 ———, 3 April 1835, pp. 559–70.
9 Which Downing later compiled into a book *The Fan-Qui in China in 1836–7* (1838). A *fan-qui* is a foreign devil, a phrase many of the British sailors revelled in.
10 Canton Gunpowder, a mixture of rum and tobacco, was also seen as a good cure for sailors who had been flogged, as was common in the Royal Navy. This accounted for the rum and the lash; when the sodomy, which was infamously the third element of naval tradition, occurred is not clear.
11 Rowlandson's pictures of drunk and carousing British sailors were not Guangzhou-specific but, as British sailors tended to act pretty much the same everywhere in the world when they got on shore, readers got the point.
12 Basil Lubbock (1933) *The Opium Clippers*, Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson.
13 An impressive triple rise to wealth chronicled in his autobiography (1857) *An American Merchant in Europe, Asia, and Australia*, New York: Sampson Low.

14 Jack Gray (1990) *Rebellions and Revolutions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 27.
15 Maurice Collis, *Foreign Mud*, p. 111.
16 ———, p. 189.
17 *India Gazette*, 1840.
18 The early 1800s were a time of political turmoil in Portugal. The 1807 invasion by Napoleon's armies forced the Portuguese court into exile in Brazil. In 1820 the regency was overthrown and a conflict erupted between Constitutionalists and Monarchists that did not end until 1834.
19 *Friend of China*, 17 March 1842.
20 H. J. Lethbridge, "Hong Kong Cadets, 1862–1941", http://sunzi1.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/view/44/4401180.pdf
21 The parallel is obvious but would not have been made at the time as Kipling's classic short story of two British ex-soldiers who set off from British India in search of adventure and end up as kings of Kafiristan was only published in 1888, the same year as de Mayréna arrived in Hong Kong.
22 J. S. Thomson (1909) *The Chinese*, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company.
23 *Friend of China*, 2 April 1856. William Caine got the last laugh returning as the fifth governor of Hong Kong (1859–65).
24 ———, 23 September 1848.
25 Edward Said (1978) *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, p. 36.

Chapter 2 Civil and Other Wars — Rebels, Mercenaries and More Dope

1 Issachar Jacox Roberts, *Chinese and General Missionary Gleaner*, 6 October 1852.
2 Now People's Square and previously the racecourse and public recreation ground which shows how small Shanghai was at the time.
3 *North China Herald*, 4 August 1860.
4 His sister, Helen, was an opium addict and had had to be restrained by the Lunacy Commission before dying of her addiction.
5 Niall Ferguson (2004) *Empire*, London: Penguin, p. 166.
6 Karl Marx, "The case of the Lorcha Arrow", *New York Daily Tribune*, 23 January 1857.
7 Daniele Varé (1936) *The Last of the Empresses*, London: John Murray, p. 38.
8 The first formal treaty signed between the US and China. It served as an American counterpart to the 1842 Anglo-Chinese Treaty of Nanjing.
9 See Regine Thiriez (1998) *Barbarian Lens*, London: Routledge.
10 *North China Herald*, 3 August 1850.
11 Which technically it is, as the fourth-most senior of the British Orders of Chivalry.
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Index

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