

Chiang Yee and His Circle

Chinese Artistic and Intellectual Life in Britain,
1930–1950

Edited by Paul Bevan, Anne Witchard, and Da Zheng

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Editors' Introduction

Chiang Yee and His Circle: Chinese Artistic and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1930–1950

In the 1930s, writer, poet, and painter Chiang Yee (1903–1977) was one of a small group of Chinese writers and artists who made their homes in what was then the Borough of Hampstead in Northwest London. At the time, this neighbourhood was largely inhabited by a multicultural community of artists, writers, musicians, philosophers, and critics, a number of whom had fled Nazi persecution in Europe. Many of these intellectuals lived in Hampstead well into the 1980s and 1990s, making it one of the most vibrant artistic areas in London over a period of several decades.

It was in Hampstead, on the second floor of a large Victorian house, that Chiang Yee shared a flat with Shih-I and Dymia Hsiung (Xiong Shiyi and Cai Daimei). Their circle of friends and neighbours included the married couple Wang Lixi (Shelley Wang) and Lu Jingqing, both of whom were writers and poets; Tsui Chi, a historian and writer; Hsiao Ch'ien (Xiao Qian), essayist, translator, and newspaper reporter; and the future literary translator Yang Hsien-I (Yang Xianyi), who visited London at weekends while studying at the University of Oxford. Together with their friends and families, this group comprised an important social and intellectual network of Chinese writers and artists in London during the 1930s. Later, especially after the outbreak of war, they scattered across London and to other parts of the country—notably to Oxford and Cambridge—but continued to interact and were actively involved in cultural and political activities in both the UK and China. The chapters in this collection go some way towards telling a story about the Chinese in England that up until now has received scant consideration. Although certainly not the most ostentatious part of London during the pre-war period, Hampstead, where Chiang Yee and Shih-I Hsiung made their home in the 1930s, was in striking contrast to the well-documented Limehouse district, where most of London's Chinese residents lived at the time. By uncovering this understudied aspect of British cultural history, this volume will help create a more balanced and nuanced picture of London's Chinese population and their artistic and intellectual contributions.

The subject of the Chinese in Britain has come a considerable way in just a short time, both in terms of scholarship and general attention. As recently as 1993 Colin Holmes's essay 'The Chinese Connection' was pretty much the only work on

the subject.¹ Holmes's aim was chiefly to examine the manifestations of a disproportionate animosity directed towards the Chinese in Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century. Britain's first Chinese residents were seamen who settled in the dockside neighbourhoods of London, Cardiff, and Liverpool. Despite the fact that the Chinese were statistically just a very small group—comprising only 480 out of a total of 15,246 foreign workers (UK census 1911)—Holmes demonstrated that small groups can come under hostile scrutiny when they become linked to issues of national economic or social concern. While the cheapness of Chinese labour provoked localised anger, this was exacerbated with the outbreak of the First World War, when claims of illicit sexual relations, illegal gambling, and recreational drug use were mobilised in the service of a general dynamics of racial hostility. Late nineteenth-century notions of a 'Yellow Peril' were revitalised and the dissemination of anti-Chinese sentiment in the daily press was pervasive. Holmes emphasises the role of popular culture in this, examining the interplay of the daily press, literary potboilers, and lurid films with police and government reports, a potent brew that filtered into a popular consciousness in which the Chinese presence, tiny though it was, loomed large. London's Chinatown in the Limehouse docks became a byword for vice, exoticised by Thomas Burke's bestselling *Limehouse Nights: Tales of Chinatown* (1916) and demonised in Sax Rohmer's tales of the evil mastermind Dr. Fu Manchu.

Chiang Yee arrived in the UK in 1933. Two years earlier, the 1931 UK census had recorded 1,934 Chinese living in England and Wales. Popular perceptions of Chinese people continued to be based on sensationalist press stories while caricatured stereotypes in novels and films had become firmly established. In unpicking the workings of this anti-Chinese discourse, 'The Chinese Connection' mapped out a terrain of future scholarship on the Chinese in Britain which continues to develop and broaden. Publications such as Christopher Frayling's *The Yellow Peril: Dr. Fu Manchu and the Rise of Chinaphobia* (2014) and Phil Baker and Antony Clayton's edited collection *Lord of Strange Deaths: The Fiendish World of Sax Rohmer* (2015) have thoroughly excavated the popular 'Yellow Perilism' of pulp exotica. The pernicious impact of popular cultural representation of the Chinese found its most detailed account in Robert Bickers's *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900–49* (1999). While Bickers's work is a study of British incursion in China, the first chapter, 'China in Britain, and in the British Imagination', is concerned with how the colonial mindset was informed by its mental baggage. Bickers details the films, plays, and fiction, both for children and adults, in which the cruelty

1. Colin Holmes, 'The Chinese Connection', in *Outsiders and Outcasts: Essays in Honour of William J. Fishman*, ed. Geoffrey Alderman and Colin Holmes (London: Duckworth, 1993), 71–93. This essay incorporated Holmes's previous attention to the Chinese in *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871–1971* (London: Macmillan Education, 1988). It also built on an earlier article by J. P. May, 'The Chinese in Britain, 1860–1914', that Holmes had published a decade before in his edited volume *Immigrants and Minorities in British Society* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978). The essay remains a foundational source for the wide range of studies that have come since.

and wickedness of 'China and the Chinese—and the Chinese in Britain too—were represented to the extent that those pleading for improvements in relations between Chinese and Britons routinely joked about it'.² Two significant works have explored the 'facts', as far as they can be gleaned, of London's early Chinatown in relation to the fantasies it engendered. John Seed's article 'Limehouse Blues: Looking for Chinatown in the London Docks, 1900–1940' (2006), utilises census and other data to assess the discrepancy between exotic reportage and drab reality, while Sacha Auerbach's *Race, Law, and 'The Chinese Puzzle' in Imperial Britain* (2009) examines the manner in which derogatory media representation influenced the treatment of Chinese immigrants in the British judicial system and how the reports of these legal judgments, in turn, reinforced the ways in which the Chinese were depicted in the British media.

With *The Chinese in Britain, 1800–Present: Economy, Transnationalism, Identity* (2007), Gregor Benton and E. T. Gomez published the first comprehensive study of the long history of Chinese migration to Britain. Most significantly, Benton and Gomez revised accounts that treated all Chinese emigrants as one unified diaspora. The Chinese in Britain are a highly diverse group, divided by points of origin, reasons for leaving their homeland, and linguistic, ethnic, and class differences. Studies of individual Chinese in Britain include Da Zheng's comprehensive biographies, *Chiang Yee: The Silent Traveller from the East* (2010) and *Shih-I Hsiung: A Glorious Showman* (2020), as well as Anne Witchard's *Lao She in London* (2012) and Diana Yeh's study of Shih-I and Dymia Hsiung, *The Happy Hsiungs: Performing China and the Struggle for Modernity* (2014). Further developments in the history of the Chinese in Britain were prompted by the centenary of the First World War. A series of Penguin Specials were published in 2014 to commemorate the involvement of China in the war, the consequences of its aftermath, and the neglected contribution of the Chinese Labour Corps.³

In a welcome counterpoint to the more familiar negative narrative, a growing body of work looks at the cultural impact of the Sino-British encounter in the early twentieth century, exploring the ways in which the visual iconography of China constituted a precursor of literary and visual modernism. Studies which include Patricia Laurence's *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eyes: Bloomsbury, Modernism and China* (2003), Eugenia Zuroski Jenkins's *A Taste for China: English Subjectivity and the Prehistory of Orientalism* (2013), Ross Forman's *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined* (2013), Elizabeth Chang's *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire, and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2010), and Anne Witchard's edited collection *British Modernism and Chinoiserie* (2015) demonstrate the ways in which

2. Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism, 1900–49* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 27.

3. Including Mark O'Neill, *The Chinese Labour Corps: The Forgotten Chinese Labourers of the First World War* (Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Group Australia, 2014); and Anne Witchard, *England's Yellow Peril: Sinophobia and the Great War* (Melbourne, VIC: Penguin Group Australia, 2014).

exposure to a Chinese aesthetic primed British sensibilities for the developments of a European avant-garde. Heralding this reformation of Western aesthetics, in the first decade of the twentieth century, Laurence Binyon, Keeper of East Asian Prints and Drawings at the British Museum, sought to explicate to non-specialist audiences the spiritual and unifying role of art, central to the communal traditions of China and East Asia. Binyon's diagnosis of a bankrupt contemporary culture chimed with the modernists' preoccupation with the reintegration of art and life. Through pioneering works such as *Painting in the Far East* (1908) and *Flight of the Dragon* (1911), his regular newspaper column in the *The Saturday Review*, and a series of landmark international exhibitions, Binyon argued that the philosophies which lay behind East Asian art had much to teach the twentieth-century West.

The 1930s saw a further development. Chiang Yee's publications on Chinese art and culture, along with his lectures broadcast on the BBC, marked a period in which Chinese artists and writers began to communicate information and ideas about their cultural heritage directly. Their work pushed back in various ways against the prejudices and stereotypes about their country and its people that they had encountered. This marked a significant shift in perspective, one that in the years before the Second World War was beginning to be welcomed by influential, often leftist, magazine editors, critics, and book publishers. Chiang's Silent Traveller series, with



Figure 0.1: Chiang Yee reading in his residence in the 1930s. Courtesy of San Edwards.

its alternative presentation of Britain, was an innovative attempt to synthesise two diverse cultures at a time when the Yellow Peril discourse persisted as an influence in the collective British consciousness.

Chiang Yee and His Circle: Chinese Artistic and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1930–1950 is a volume that addresses aspects of the life and work of Chiang Yee, but it is equally, and importantly, about the Chinese intellectual community in Hampstead, the network that sustained him both professionally and personally. Exiled for different reasons but all highly educated, the small group of Chinese men and women who settled in the Hampstead area would play an important role in reshaping conceptions about China in Britain, interacting with London's cultural elites and engaging in political anti-fascist activism. Theirs was a world of literary and artistic interconnectedness and wartime co-operation that is only now beginning to be explored in scholarship. In considering their lives and achievements this volume seeks to demonstrate just how important their unique contributions were to intellectual and sociocultural life in Britain during the three decades spanned by the research. It is our hope that it will stimulate scholarly interest in the field and lead to more discussion and further discoveries about the Chinese in Britain during the twentieth century and beyond.

In summer 2019, an audience of around a hundred academics, sinologists, art lovers, curious locals, international participants, and some descendants of Chiang Yee who still live in the UK gathered at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, for a symposium organised by Anne Witchard of the University of Westminster. It was convened to celebrate Chiang's life and work and to mark the occasion of the erection of an English Heritage 'blue plaque' in commemoration of his residency in Oxford. This book, which includes revised papers presented at the symposium, as well as some additional contributions, was inspired by that event.

The book is divided into two parts. Part One, 'Chiang Yee', contains six chapters and begins with a contribution by Paul Bevan that sets the scene for all that follows. Bevan's introductory chapter takes the form of a brief survey of artistic life in the Borough of Hampstead during the 1930s—the modernist architecture that was appearing at the time and the eclectic groups of people who were attracted to the area: modernist painters and sculptors, members of the Bauhaus, and artists inspired by left-wing politics and Soviet Socialist Realism. Bevan draws professional and social connections between painters, sculptors, writers, and designers—many of whom were refugees or émigrés—and their Chinese neighbours. The extent of these connections gives us a sense of the socio-geographical importance of Hampstead to its Chinese residents before they were forced to relocate in the 1940s as a result of the damage caused by the London Blitz.

The remaining five chapters in Part One focus more or less directly on the life and work of Chiang Yee. Craig Clunas's contribution places Chiang's writings on the arts of China in the context of their time, and looks at the development of his thought over the course of his career. *The Chinese Eye: An Interpretation of Chinese*

Painting (1935) and *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to Its Aesthetic and Technique* (1938) presented themselves as 'authentic' presentations of Chinese aesthetic principles by a Chinese author, contrasted with the existing literature on these subjects by Westerners. Clunas submits that a close reading of these texts reveals them to be part of a complicated process of the circulation of ideas about art in the first part of the twentieth century, when 'purely Western' and 'purely Chinese' ideas were enmeshed in a network of mutual appropriation. In her chapter, Sarah Cheang explores how the persona of the Silent Traveller created by Chiang Yee steered clear of making controversial remarks, although he had strong feelings about Chinese politics, racism, and how Chinese people were regarded in Britain and America; he could be an 'Angry Traveller'. Cheang maintains that emotions, whether difficult or joyous, do not fit smoothly into linear narratives, and make memory an unreliable witness to history; historians themselves may have a personal interest in the subjects they study. Embracing the fragmented, the personal, the emotional, and the misremembered, Cheang presents a series of moments about Chinese physical presence. She asks: What was it to be a 'Silent Traveller'? How can we understand the things in that 'silence' that couldn't be said?

As discussed by Anne Witchard, Chiang Yee was involved in the theatre, in addition to his many books, his art, and his poetry, and was at the heart of the wartime revival of ballet in Britain. In 1942, Chiang Yee was commissioned to design sets and costumes for the new ballet *The Birds*, which subsequently won many glowing reviews from critics. This overlooked episode in his career has much to tell us about his artistic versatility and his wider significance for British cultural life. Following this, in Da Zheng's contribution we step back in time to Chiang Yee's early years, and look at his book *A Chinese Childhood*, published in 1940. Zheng shows that behind this peaceful narrative of childhood life lay sorrowful feelings and emotions. Exiled in England, Chiang was tormented with anxiety and worry while working on the book. Da Zheng maintains that by writing this book, the author attempted to reconstruct a home that no longer existed, yet a home that could take him away from the pain and anxiety of a life of exile in a foreign land. Finally, Paul French looks at Chiang Yee's work during World War Two. Chiang's various contributions to war-related propaganda speak both of his position in British society at the time and his attempts to draw parallels between the twin struggles of Britain and China against the Axis powers. Chiang's *The Silent Traveller in War Time* (1939) sought to portray British resolution in the face of war. Critically, as argued by French, it also serves as an early example of propaganda work, documenting the wartime experience of solidarity, laughter in the face of adversity, and the 'Blitz spirit' under the threat of gas attacks and evacuation.

The five chapters in Part Two, 'Chiang Yee's Circle', introduce some of the Chinese writers, artists, and friends with whom Chiang associated during his time in the UK. Tessa Thorniley's chapter considers the period during and shortly after the war, when Chinese writers in Britain were enjoying something of a heyday. At

this time, a number of publishers who were sympathetic towards China helped them to find new readers and achieve a measure of literary acclaim. The chapter traces the rise to prominence of Chiang Yee, Hsiao Ch'ien, Chun-chan Yeh, Lo Hsiao Chien (Kenneth Lo, 1913–1995) and Tsui Chi, and their individual relationships with influential publishers. Diana Yeh's contribution to the volume examines Chiang Yee's relationship with the Hsiungs, who, she maintains, were probably the most famous Chinese couple living in Britain during the 1930s. In discussing the major role that the Hsiungs, and Shih-I Hsiung in particular, played in both Chiang's career and personal life, she highlights how their relationship was one of mutuality, solidarity, and conviviality as diasporic Chinese writers in Britain. However, as she further expounds, this fruitful friendship was also impacted severely by the economy of racial representation at the time, which admitted only a few Chinese artists or writers to visibility. She discusses how, by pitching them as competitors against one another, this economy ruptured solidarities and collective resistance, and eventually tore apart their fragile bonds and those of their wider circle of diasporic Chinese writers.

Another little-known aspect of the life of Shih-I Hsiung is introduced by Paul Bevan, who explores his role as a screenwriter, specifically his collaboration with the showman Lai Foun. A simple but fundamental question is posed in this chapter: should Shih-I Hsiung's *Lady Precious Stream* be seen as an example of serious drama—as it was often said to be at the time—or as the author's own contribution to the populist, Orientalist world of Fu Manchu and other sensationalist films and novels about China, as it was recognised to be by a number of Hsiung's compatriots who were active in his homeland during the 1930s? Ren Ke's chapter focusses on the Chinese writer and political activist Wang Lixi, who landed himself in political exile in England for opposing Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) regime. Adopting the English name Shelley Wang, he joined fellow Jiangxi natives Chiang Yee and Shih-I Hsiung to form a trio of displaced Chinese writers in London. The most politically engaged of the group, Wang Lixi travelled widely to gather support for China's War of Resistance against Japan and became a key participant in transnational anti-fascist movements. At the same time, he established close relationships with British leftist writers and publishers. These connections resulted in a series of transcultural literary moments, such as the publication of Wang's writings in *Left Review*, public salons in Dorset and Ulster, and the reading of Wang's poems on the BBC. Finally, taking the discussion into the 1950s, Frances Wood uses an oral history approach to introduce Shih-I Hsiung's family, which formed part of the small group of Chinese who settled in North London, exiled for different reasons but all highly educated and determined to preserve something of a Chinese lifestyle in unpromising surroundings. By the 1950s, Wood tells us, there were writers, painters, and ex-diplomats getting together for games of mahjong and cooking rather competitively! Their life in Hampstead is recalled through the memories of the second generation.

Chiang Yee's Hampstead

Paul Bevan

Although certainly not the most well-to-do part of London during the pre-war period, Hampstead, where Chiang Yee and Shih-I Hsiung made their home in the 1930s, was in striking contrast to the impoverished Limehouse area where most of London's Chinese residents lived at the time. Their flat in Upper Park Road was situated in the heart of what was arguably the most vibrant artistic area of London. Herbert Read (1893–1968), art critic, poet, and theorist, lived just around the corner at 3 Mall Studios, having moved there in 1934 with his wife 'Ludo' (Margaret Ludwig) from a flat belonging to Henry Moore (1898–1986) on nearby Parkhill Road.¹ This was an area inhabited by several modernist painters and sculptors, a group which Read later described with fondness:

Living and working together in Hampstead, as closely and intimately as artists of Florence and Siena had lived and worked in the Quattrocento . . . Within this inner group that worked within five minutes' walking distance of each other in Hampstead I do not remember any quarrels, any jealousy or spitefulness. It was a 'nest' of gentle artists . . . a spontaneous association of men and women drawn together by common sympathies, shared seriousness and some kind of group criticism.²

This 'nest of gentle artists', a phrase Read would use on more than one occasion to describe the group, included Ben Nicholson (1894–1982), Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975), and Henry Moore.³ In the years that followed, the area saw the fruits of this intellectual and artistic confluence, with the appearance of several modernist buildings of real architectural significance, a reflection of the district's progressive stance in the world of the arts. Not far from the 'nest', at 13 Downshire Hill, was one example, built in 1936 by Michael and Charlotte Bunney. By 1939, just around the

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1. Charles Darwent, *Mondrian in London: How British Art Nearly Became Modern* (London: Double-Barrelled Books, 2012), 28; Caroline Maclean, *Circles and Squares: The Lives and Art of the Hampstead Modernists* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 117.
 2. Quoted in Maclean, *Circles and Squares*, 132–33; Christopher Wade, ed., *The Streets of Belsize* (London: Camden History Society, 1991), 33. See also Herbert Read, *Art in Britain, 1930–40: Centred around Axis, Circle, Unit One* (London: Marlborough Fine Art, 1965); Herbert Read, 'A Nest of Gentle Artists', *Apollo* 77, no. 7 (September 1962): 536–40.
 3. See also Read, 'A Nest of Gentle Artists', 536–42.

corner, at 1–3 Willow Road, Ernő Goldfinger's contribution stood, facing directly onto Hampstead Heath, a favourite place at this time for Chiang Yee to take his daily walk. According to *A Silent Traveller in London*, he would stroll round the grounds of Kenwood House on Hampstead Heath at least twice a week and, depending on the route he chose to take on the day, would have frequently passed Goldfinger's house.⁴ Perhaps closest of all to the 'nest' was the Isokon Building, built on Lawn Road in 1933–1934, just two minutes' walk from both 50 Upper Park Road and the English modernist enclave.⁵ The Chinese émigrés lived in close proximity to a number of refugees from Europe. Among the residents of the Isokon flats were artists and designers formerly attached to the Bauhaus, who came to London to escape Nazi persecution.⁶ Walter Gropius (1883–1969) was resident from 1934 to 1937 and his colleagues Marcel Breuer (1902–1981) and László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946) both lived there when they first arrived in London in 1935.⁷ All three Bauhaus designers were central to the work of the Isokon Furniture Company (run by Jack Pritchard), while at the same time working for a number of other pioneering companies. Gropius was given the title 'Controller of Design' of Pritchard's company and Breuer took over that role when Gropius emigrated to the US in March 1937; Moholy-Nagy joined Gropius there just three months later, while Breuer was the third of the 'Bauhausler' trio to emigrate to the US, departing England in December of that year.⁸ The Isobar, the dining club and bar Breuer designed for the Isokon, was a favourite meeting place for the local artistic community, including artists from the 'nest'.⁹

Photomontage artist John Heartfield (Helmut Herzfeld, 1891–1968), who had no direct links to the Bauhaus, lived on nearby Downshire Hill from 1938, after suffering the indignity of being temporarily interned as an 'enemy alien'.¹⁰ English artist Roland Penrose (1900–1984) was his neighbour on the same road for a number of years and it was from there that he established the British Surrealist Group. By the time war broke out the photographer Lee Miller had joined him there and they were

4. See Chiang Yee, *The Silent Traveller in War Time* (London: Country Life, 1939), 113; Chiang Yee, *The Silent Traveller in London* (London: Country Life, 1938), 29. Goldfinger's house is now a National Trust property open to the public, see <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/2-willow-road>. Accessed 2 September 2021.

5. Built by Jack and Rosemary 'Molly' Pritchard and designed by the architect Wells Coates. See Leyla Daybelge and Magnus Englund, *Isokon and the Bauhaus in Britain* (London: Batsford, 2019).

6. Darwent, *Mondrian in London*, 26.

7. Daybelge and Englund, *Isokon and the Bauhaus in Britain*, 80–93.

8. Daybelge and Englund, *Isokon and the Bauhaus in Britain*, 106. Their time at the Isokon is celebrated by an English Heritage 'blue plaque'.

9. Darwent, *Mondrian in London*, 26; Daybelge and Englund, *Isokon and the Bauhaus in Britain*, 157–63. These included the Ukrainian former Weimar Bauhaus master Naum Slutzky (1984–1965), who lived in the Isokon flats for some time, and his old friend the Russian Constructivist Naum Gabo (1890–1977), who had taught at Weimar Bauhaus's successor in Dessau, and now lodged close by to the flats at 11 Lawn Road.

10. He was released after just six weeks due to ill health. Anna Schultz, 'John Heartfield: A Political Artist's Exile in London', in *Burning Bright: Essays in Honour of David Bindman*, ed. Diana Dethloff et al. (London: UCL Press, 2015), 254.

married later in the 1940s.¹¹ From Downshire Hill, in the summer of 1936, Penrose organised the International Surrealist Exhibition in collaboration with Herbert Read, which was mounted at the New Burlington Galleries in London's Mayfair. The previous year, in February and March, the prominent Shanghai painter Liu Haisu had organised the 'Exhibition of Modern Chinese Painting' at the same venue and was a guest at Hsiung and Chiang's Upper Park Road flat while he was in London.¹²

Down the road from Downshire Hill, opposite Belsize Park underground station on Haverstock Hill, was a new parade of shops and flats, Hillfield Mansions, built in 1934 by Hillfield Estates in the latest utilitarian style. Photographer Bill Brandt (1904–1983) made his home at 58 Hillfield Mansions from the mid-1930s, while his brother, Rolf Brandt (1906–1986), a follower of both Surrealism and Bauhaus design, was also on the long list of artists resident at the Isokon flats.¹³ The Haverstock Hill Odeon, which opened on 29 September 1934, was the focal point of the Hillfield complex.¹⁴ This would become a favourite haunt for Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), the Dutch artist who made London his home from 1938 to 1940, living at 60 Parkhill Road, not far from Herbert Read's home and those of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, off what is now Tasker Road.¹⁵

These modernist figures were not the only artists living in the area. In 1933 the Artists' International Association (AIA) was formed. This was an eclectic group of individuals whose slogan, 'Radical in Politics, Conservative in Art', saw the production of art largely inspired by Soviet Socialist Realism, as championed by art historian Anthony Blunt (1907–1983).¹⁶ Blunt's link to Chinese art in the 1930s was through Trinidadian-born left-wing journalist Jack Chen (1908–1995), who in 1937 mounted an exhibition in Charlotte Street in Central London for which Blunt wrote a glowing review in *The Spectator*.¹⁷ At this time Blunt was a great follower of Socialist Realism, but not all artists involved in the AIA were necessarily devoted to this political brand of art. Amongst the well-known names associated with this group at one time or another were the portraitist Augustus John (1878–1961); expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka (1886–1980), who lived on nearby

11. Maclean, *Circles and Squares*, 156. Commemorative 'blue plaques' have been erected at Heartfield's former residence, 47 Downshire Hill—actually the house of the German painter Fred Uhlman (1901–1985)—and that of Penrose and Miller at 21 Downshire Hill.

12. Da Zheng, *Chiang Yee: The Silent Traveller from the East – a Cultural Biography* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 59.

13. Paul Delany, *Bill Brandt: A Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 119; Daybelge and Englund, *Isokon and the Bauhaus in Britain*, 80. For more on Rolf Brandt see https://www.englishgallery.com/artists/artist_bio/?mainId=78. Accessed 2 September 2021.

14. The first film to be shown at the Odeon Haverstock Hill was *Chu Chin Chow*, starring George Robey and Anna May Wong. <http://cinematreaasures.org/theaters/15082>. Accessed 31 December 2020.

15. Darwent, *Mondrian in London*, 58–59.

16. For more on the AIA see Robert Radford, *Art for a Purpose: The Artists' International Association, 1933–1953* (Winchester: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987); Christine Lindey, *Art for All: British Socially Committed Art from the 1930s to the Cold War* (London: Artery Publications, 2018), 29–34, 177–80.

17. See Paul Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany: Shanghai Cartoon Artists, Shao Xunmei's Circle and the Travels of Jack Chen, 1926–1938* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 204–13.

King Henry's Road; and cartoonist David Low (1891–1963), whose studio on Heath Street was just round the corner from Hampstead underground station. Chiang Yee was himself a one-time member of the AIA. Even though his political and artistic aims may not have been in full accord with those propounded by the association, the AIA did raise money for aid to the wars in Spain and Abyssinia, two conflicts about which Chiang expressed great concern in his writings.¹⁸ This organisation was also, in some small way, engaged in raising money for aid to China at the time of its war with Japan (1937–1945), a role that was taken up in a rather more focussed manner by the China Campaign Committee, one of several groups for which Wang Lixi, Hsiao Ch'ien, and Shih-I Hsiung worked, together with their colleagues H. D. Liem (Liem Ham-Djang)¹⁹ and Jack Chen (another one-time resident of the Hampstead area and a member of both the AIA and the China Campaign Committee).²⁰

According to the members' register of the AIA (now in the Tate Gallery Archive), a significant number of its members lived right in the heart of the 'nest' and the vast majority in the London postcode districts of NW3 and NW1, that is, Hampstead, Belsize Park, and Chalk Farm.²¹ Henry Moore, in addition to being a major figure in the Hampstead modernist circles, was a member of the AIA, but the figure who seems to have been the strongest link between all the different artistic groups in Hampstead—the Chinese intellectuals, Moore's modernist clique, the Bauhaus group, and the Socialist Realists—was Herbert Read.

By the late 1930s Read was even well known in China, to both the Chinese- and English-speaking communities. His 1933 book *Art Now* had been published in Shanghai in 1935, translated into Chinese by the influential writer Shi Zhecun (1905–2003), and the following year an essay written by Read, 'An Approach to Modern Art', appeared in the Shanghai-published English-language periodical *T'ien Hsia Monthly*.²² His poetry, too, could be found in Chinese translation. In 1938 his 'Bombing Casualties: Spain' appeared in the Shanghai-published magazine

18. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in War Time*, 1–2.

19. Liem Ham-Djang later became London correspondent of the Chinese Central News Agency: 'Mr. H. D. Liem, the first Chinese journalist to "cover" the British capital, who is the London correspondent of the Chinese Central News Agency, addressed the China Campaign Committee luncheon yesterday, on Japan's aims in the Pacific.' 'Japan's Aim in the Pacific: Chinese View of Thai Fighting', *The Straits Times*, 23 January 1941, 10.

20. See Arthur Clegg, *Aid China, 1937–1949: A Memoir of a Forgotten Campaign* (Beijing: Xinshijie chubanshe, 1989), 18–19, 35. For more on Jack Chen see Bevan, *A Modern Miscellany*, 192, 203–4.

21. Names and addresses listed in the AIA register include the following: E. Kapp, 2 Steele's Studios, Haverstock Hill; Naum Slutsky, 31 Lawn Road; Nancy Sharp, 30 Upper Park Road; Leila Leigh, 38 Upper Park Road. 38 Upper Park Road was also the address of William Coldstream (1908–1987) from 1930 to 1941, and W. H. Auden lodged there in 1934. Many of the entries in this list include the addresses of those who lived within ten minutes' walk of Upper Park Road: Helena M. Clarke, 23c Belsize Park Gardens; Helen Kapp, 44 Belsize Park Gardens; Morris Kestelman, 27 Belsize Park Gardens; F. D. Klingender, 45 Downshire Hill; James B. Lane, 37 Belsize Square; Mary Martin, 54 Belsize Park, all in the postcode NW3; and Lord Methuen, 6 Primrose Hill Studios, Fitzroy Road, NW1. See 'Ledger Book Recording Payment of Ledger Fees', Artists' International Association, London, Tate Gallery Archive, TGA 7043/11/1.

22. Herbert Read, 'An Approach to Modern Art', *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 4, no. 4 (April 1937): 329–41; Herbert Read, *Art Now* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933); Li De 里德 [Herbert Read], *Jinri zhi yishu* 今日之藝術 [Art now], trans. Shi Zhecun 施贇存 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935).

'*Candid Comment*' (*Ziyoutan* 自由譚), translated by the magazine's publisher, Shao Xunmei.²³ In London, Read not only lived a stone's throw away from the Chinese artists but was, by all accounts, a personal friend of Chiang Yee.²⁴ Even though Chiang's account of Read in *The Silent Traveller in London* gives the impression that they were rather distant friends, by 1937 Read had already written a preface to Chiang's *The Silent Traveller: A Chinese Artist in Lakeland* (the first of his *Silent Traveller* books), in which he deemed Chiang to be 'a master of the art of landscape painting'.²⁵ Two decades later, Read would continue his hands-on support of Chiang Yee's work by writing another preface for the second edition of his book *Chinese Calligraphy*, just before Chiang left England for the US in 1955.²⁶ Read had clearly read the book when it first came out in 1938, as he wrote in his preface that at the time he had seen an 'analogy' between the aesthetic of Chinese calligraphy and that of Western abstract art.²⁷

Chinese Calligraphy was written at a time when Chiang had physically moved further into the heart of the territory of the English modernist clique, as by then he had taken up lodgings at 56 Parkhill Road. There he lived until 1940, when he was bombed-out during the London Blitz, after which time he lived for a short while with Hsiao Ch'ien before moving to Oxford.²⁸ Hsiao left an account of his own experiences of the bombing in Hampstead.

Just as I finished dinner the sirens sounded again. The area where I live, **Hampstead**, is the highest part of London. A siren in the city centre, as usual, sounded first. This distant sound – light and graceful – was like a herd boy playing a flute riding on the back of his ox. Following this, each district answered in turn, the closer it got the louder it became, until it was like a great church organ. As it began to sound close around us, the noise became such that it could awaken the dead, yet it also signified a mocking irony: after the Far East and Spain it was now London's turn.²⁹

23. Hebotuo • Lüde 赫勃脫 • 呂德 [Herbert Read], 'Hongzha can'an: Xibanya' 轟炸慘案：西班牙 [Bombing casualties: Spain], trans. Zhong Guoren 鐘國仁 [Shao Xunmei 邵洵美], *Ziyoutan* 自由譚 ['Candid comment'] 1, no. 1 (1 September 1938): 40.

24. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in London*, 257–58.

25. Chiang Yee, *The Silent Traveller: A Chinese Artist in Lakeland* (London: Country Life, 1937). See also Anna Wu, 'The Silent Traveller: Chiang Yee in Britain, 1933–55', *V&A Online Journal* 4 (Summer 2012), <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-no.-4-summer-2012/the-silent-traveller-chiang-yee-in-britain-1933-55>. Accessed 15 April 2020.

26. Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1954). In the first edition of 1938 (also published by Methuen) the preface was written by Lin Sen 林森 (1868–1943), then President of the Chinese government. For the second edition (1954) Herbert Read supplied a new preface.

27. Herbert Read, preface to *Chinese Calligraphy* by Chiang Yee, viii.

28. Zheng, *Chiang Yee*, 115. The Victorian house that once stood at 56 Parkhill Road is no longer there. In its place is a more recent building, which stands next to number 60 (Piet Mondrian's former residence). There is no number 58.

29. Fu Guangming 傅光明, ed., *Xiao Qian wenji* 蕭乾文集 [Collected works of Xiao Qian] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1998), 2:272.

Chiang Yee and British Ballet

Anne Witchard

I gained nothing in terms of money, but I thus became the first Chinese to do stage design in the West.

—Chiang Yee¹

Chiang Yee's contribution to the art of ballet is little remembered today, maybe because, as things turned out, it was to be a one-off. But it is an episode that has much to tell us, not only about his artistic versatility, but also about his significance as a Chinese artist to British cultural life. In the late summer of 1942, by now well known as an artist and author, Chiang was requested by Constant Lambert (1905–1951), musical director of the recently formed Sadler's Wells company, to design the sets and costumes for a new ballet, *The Birds*. British ballet as a national art form was then very much in its infancy.

As Karen Eliot observes in her reassessment of this period, *Albion's Dance: British Ballet During the Second World War*, critics in the post-war decades were inclined to present a distinctly British ballet as having ascended, phoenix-like, fully fledged from the ashes of adversity.² There was a tendency to skirt over the unglamorous war years and their privations, which had in fact confirmed the vitality of many small companies, in particular of Ninette de Valois's Sadler's Wells, formerly Vic-Wells, which in 1946 would become the resident ballet company of the Royal Opera House (receiving its royal charter in 1956).³ Chiang's account of his own contribution to British ballet's wartime development is, in characteristically modest style, also rather underplayed, given just a couple of pages in *The Silent Traveller in Oxford* (1944).

Constant Lambert's commissioning of Chiang attests to a sincere cultural engagement with Chinese artforms during the inter-war years. Lambert was central to the artistic zeitgeist of the period—a musical prodigy, he was mentored by the Sitwells (Edith [1887–1964], Osbert [1892–1969], and Sacheverell [1897–1988])

1. Quoted in Da Zheng, *Chiang Yee: The Silent Traveller from the East – a Cultural Biography* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 162.

2. Karen Eliot, *Albion's Dance: British Ballet During the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

3. See Alexander Bland, *The Royal Ballet: The First Fifty Years* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981).

and close friends included composers William Walton (1902–1983) and Lord Berners (1883–1950), and writers and aesthetes Anthony Powell (1905–2000), Harold Acton (1904–1994), and Cecil Beaton (1904–1980). When considering the emergence of a British national ballet it is important to recognise that Lambert's role in establishing it was key. At the age of nineteen, he had the distinction of being the first British composer from whom Sergei Diaghilev commissioned a ballet score, for *Romeo and Juliet* (1926).⁴ In the wake of Diaghilev's demise, Lambert was one of the founding triumvirate—with de Valois and dancer Frederick Ashton—at Sadler's Wells, where, following Diaghilev's influence, the tradition was maintained of working with the most innovative of fine artists rather than theatre designers, among them Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, Edward Burra, E. McKnight Kauffer, André Derain, and Rex Whistler (Whistler's *The Rake's Progress* was on the bill with *The Birds*).⁵ Altogether, Chiang was in distinguished company.

Lambert would receive numerous accolades upon his untimely death, just short of his forty-sixth birthday. Among them, de Valois mourned his loss as 'our only hope of an English Diaghilev', while Powell memorialised his friend as the composer Hugh Moreland in *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant* (1960), the fifth in his twelve-novel sequence, 'A Dance to the Music of Time' (1951–1975).⁶ The novel's 'grotesquely hybrid name', as the blurb for the 1964 Penguin edition describes it, in fact provides an esoteric clue, a poignant testament to what Lambert's biographer Stephen Lloyd describes as the composer's 'Chinese phase'.⁷ Lambert was something of a sinophile, as we shall see. His engagement of Chiang as stage designer for *The Birds* can be seen in relation to certain transcultural negotiations with 'Chineseness' on the British stage, cinema screen, and concert platform that were formative to Lambert's artistic development in the pre-war years, and concomitantly, I suggest, to the influence of Diaghilev's persistent attempts at presenting Hans Christian Andersen's chinoiserie tale, *The Emperor's Nightingale* (1843), in his pursuit of the ultimate *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a collaborative synthesis of choreographer, composer, and scenic artist).

Friday the Thirteenth, November 1942

The penultimate chapter of *The Silent Traveller in Oxford* is entitled 'Friday the Thirteenth' and begins as a discourse on the global universality of certain superstitions, brought to bear on the local frustrations of erratic train schedules.⁸ Removed from his Hampstead home to Oxford on account of the Blitz, Chiang reflects on

4. Diaghilev's only other British commission was Lord Berners's *The Triumph of Neptune* (1926).

5. See Rupert Martin, ed., *Artists Design for Dance, 1909–1984* (Bristol: Arnolfini Gallery, 1984).

6. Ninette de Valois, *Come Dance with Me: A Memoir* (Cleveland, OH: World Publishing, 1957), 118.

7. Anthony Powell, *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964); Stephen Lloyd, *Constant Lambert: Beyond the Rio Grande* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014), 530.

8. Chiang Yee, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford* (London: Methuen, 1944), 169.

the woes of his London commute given the inadequacies of the railway system, patently due to the exigencies of wartime rather than because, as an old lady repeatedly remarks: ‘To-day is Friday the thirteenth—that’s what it is.’⁹ Having been commissioned to design ‘the décor and costumes for a Sadler’s Wells ballet called *The Birds*’ he explains: ‘There seemed perpetually to be some detail or other for which my attendance was required—some costumes had been finished and were to be fitted, or certain materials that I had chosen had proved unobtainable and others must be selected. And always the matter was urgent. No time to be lost.’¹⁰ Intricate feathered dance costumes required frequent journeys back to London, invariably at short notice.

The Birds was a comic ballet intended to showcase the talents of the company’s up-and-coming young ballerinas Moyra Fraser and fifteen-year-old Beryl Grey (b. 1927).¹¹ It was staged by the Australian dancer Robert Helpmann (1909–1986), the company’s leading man and, after Ashton was called up for military service, its chief choreographer. The musical inspiration was a 1928 orchestration by Italian musicologist Ottorino Respighi—assembled from pieces by various seventeenth- and eighteenth-century composers that imitate bird sounds—respectively a Dove, Hen, Nightingale and Cuckoo—music that represents not just birdsong but the sound of their movements such as fluttering wings or scratching feet. The story or ‘action’ of Helpmann’s ballet was as follows: the handsome Dove (Alexis Rassine) falls in love with the lyrical Nightingale (Beryl Grey) and the comical Hen (Moyra Fraser) who has fallen for the Dove, attempts to charm him by trying to impersonate the Nightingale. Meanwhile the arrogant Cuckoo (Gordon Hamilton) dons the plumage of the Dove and tries to gain the favour of the Nightingale. The two imposters, Hen and Cuckoo are a laughing stock for a pair of cheeky Sparrows (Margaret Dale and Joan Sheldon) and the chorus of attendant Doves (Anne Lascelles, Moira Shearer, Pauline Clayden, and Lorna Mossford). All ends happily with the nuptials of the Nightingale and the Dove.

Chiang, we learn, managed to get to his rendezvous at the Soho studio of costumier Matilda Etches just about on time, despite the ominous date.¹² Helpmann was already there, erroneously attempting to ‘put on his head the tail-piece of the male dove’s costume, which was fan-like and looked, on him, like a Red Indian’s feathered head-dress’.¹³ Chiang was struck anew by Helpmann’s distinctive ‘big round eyes’, recalling that ‘once I almost disbelieved him when he complained of

9. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, 172.

10. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, 169–70.

11. Beryl Grey would be the first ballerina from the West to be invited to dance in Mao’s China in 1964. She worked with the Peking Ballet Company, then directed by Dai Ailian. See Beryl Grey, *Through the Bamboo Curtain* (London: Collins, 1965), 40.

12. Muriel Matilda Etches (1898–1974), a film, ballet, and opera costumier, was also a well-known couturier sticking out the war years in her Frith Street atelier despite the falling bombs. As ‘an interpreter of the costume sketches of others she worked selflessly with . . . enthusiasm and sensitivity’. Cecil Beaton, ‘Matilda Etches – Gifted Designer’, *The Times*, 26 April 1974, 20.

13. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, 172.

being tired after travelling all night from Manchester to London because his eyes were so wide-open and round.¹⁴ Here we get a glimpse of the legendary wartime stamina that propelled the fledgling Sadler's Wells company into such fond national regard. Despite the testing conditions of food rationing, bombing raids, conscription, and the long, blacked-out train travel endured on provincial tours, Sadler's Wells nurtured leading dancers who would become famous all over the world. Beryl Grey remembered her excitement that day and the novel 'satisfaction of being fitted for my very own costume, designed on me'.¹⁵ Chiang was understandably apprehensive, especially when fitting Moyra Fraser for her costume as the Hen:

I had been anxious about the execution of the elaborate hen costume, for the hen is an important character in the ballet, and her costume had to be perfect in every detail. Very little had been accomplished at that time, but when I looked at the broad smile on Moyra Fraser's face and at her quickened humorous steps executed to see how the roughly-made part of the costume would fit the movements, I was confident that she would make the finished costume most attractive on the stage.¹⁶

As well as Helpmann and Etches, Chiang tells us, Madame de Valois herself was there to help adjust each fitting: 'The founder of the Sadler's Wells ballet and its very busy director, she compelled my great admiration for the hard work she put in to make the new ballet successful. She even helped with the sewing of costumes!'¹⁷ Back in 1931, when de Valois started up her company, 'one had to be a blind patriot to talk of British ballet', the dance critic Arnold Haskell noted of her stubborn ambition.¹⁸ Unlikely as it might seem, the Second World War was to prove the hothouse in which the seedling of a native British ballet was to flourish.¹⁹

Until the arrival in London of Sergei Diaghilev's groundbreaking Ballets Russes in 1910, ballet on the British stage had been an amateur affair. The effect of the Ballets Russes was to raise the status of ballet in Britain from a rather risqué music hall entertainment to a respectable art form. As Eliot notes, 'the events that plummeted Britain into another world conflict' might well have resulted in the 'stagnation of this carefully nurtured but still youthful and fragile form'.²⁰ On the contrary, a wave of wartime patriotism swelled London audiences as soldiers on leave joined Bloomsbury aesthetes and regular balletomanes. 'One of the theatrical phenomena of wartime London, and especially since the blitz began, has been the astonishing vitality and popularity of ballet,' commented *The Tatler and Bystander*.²¹ Arts-funding bodies (such as the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts

14. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, 173.

15. Beryl Grey, *For the Love of Dance: My Autobiography* (London: Oberon Books, 2017), 30.

16. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, 174.

17. Chiang, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, 174.

18. Arnold Haskell, *Ballet* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945), 121.

19. Bland, *The Royal Ballet*, 71.

20. Karen Eliot, 'Starved for Beauty: British Ballet and Public Morale During the Second World War', *Dance Chronicle* 31, no. 2 (2008): 175.

21. *The Tatler and Bystander*, 12 March 1941; cited in Eliot, 'Starved for Beauty', 180.

the chinoiserie ballet, first in 1920 with choreography by Leonide Massine and again in a 1925 Constructivist version by twenty-year-old George Balanchine, fresh from the Soviet Union. Diaghilev had always sought out the most exciting artists rather than theatre designers to work on his ballets, and in inviting a Chinese treatment from a notable and newsworthy contemporary artist to design *The Birds*, Lambert was following suit.

Chiang Yee and Ballet

Chiang first discusses ballet in *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to Its Aesthetic and Technique* (1938), where he lights upon the art of the ballerina as the most instructive way to explain to non-Chinese readers the technique of Chinese calligraphy:

After some experience of writing one begins to feel a movement springing to life under the brush which is, as it were, spontaneous . . . The sensation is really very like that aroused by a ballerina balancing upon one toe, revolving, leaping, and poising on the other toe. She has to possess perfect control of her movements and amazing suppleness. The same qualities are demanded of the writer. A dancer's movements follow the rhythm of the accompanying music: a writer's movements depend upon the length and shape of stroke of the style he is practising.³⁶

During his three years in London (since 1933), Chiang continues, he had 'heard a good deal of the Russian Ballet' and had 'seen several of its performances'.³⁷

After Diaghilev's death in 1929, his Ballets Russes company dispersed. Some years later, in 1932, a revived company, Ballets Russes de Monte-Carlo, was reassembled by the partnership of French artistic director René Blum and White Russian émigré Colonel Wassily de Basil. After a series of acrimonious disputes Blum finally split from de Basil in 1935 and formed a separate company, Les Ballets de Monte Carlo. This similarity of names and the fact that both companies were performing concurrently in the West End during the 1936 season is undoubtedly confusing and would explain why when Chiang came to write about his experience of seeing 'the Russian ballet' he would lump the two companies (and indeed their separate venues) together. In *The Silent Traveller in London* (1938), published in the same year as *Chinese Calligraphy*, Chiang repeats the analogy of calligraphy and ballet dancing quoted above, giving it as 'a reason special to myself for liking Russian Ballet'.³⁸ Here he describes attending the 'Russian Ballet Season at Covent Garden Opera House', having been 'taken there for the first time by Sir Alexander

36. Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to Its Aesthetic and Technique* (London: Methuen, 1938), 129.

37. Chiang, *Chinese Calligraphy*, 129.

38. Chiang Yee, *The Silent Traveller in London* (London: Methuen, 1938), 170.

The Silent Traveller at Home

Da Zheng

In May 1940, Chiang Yee's memoir *A Chinese Childhood* was published by the London-based publisher Methuen. The book received rave reviews. Many pointed out that, unlike other publications on China, which had been almost exclusively by Western authors, this was a work done by a Chinese writer in England who brought a fresh and intimate outlook.¹ A review in the *Times Literary Supplement* emphasised its authenticity, stating that the author presented the Chinese and cultural life in Jiujiang 'as they see themselves and not as others see them.'² 'Few books could take us farther from the upheaval and disorder of the present day than this,' commented one reviewer, while another recommended it as 'a book to indulge in when anxiety needs a sedative.'³ 'The wisdom of the Chinese—this love of little and lovely things, this passion for peacefulness, this glorying in gardens, this exalting of contemplation and appreciation over noisy aggressiveness'—could benefit anyone 'who seek a temporary escape from dismal wartime thoughts,' wrote another.⁴ *A Chinese Childhood* underwent several reprints in England and was subsequently published in the US, India, and China. Chiang became one of Methuen's top writers.

What intrigues me the most is the phrase 'Silent Traveller at Home,' the title of a review article that appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* after John Day brought out the US edition in 1952. In that article, John Espey tries to underline the differences between *A Chinese Childhood* and other popular Silent Traveller books by Chiang. While those Silent Traveller titles, on Oxford, Edinburgh, or New York, offered the 'unexpected pleasure of seeing familiar Western scenes through Chinese eyes,' *A Chinese Childhood*, according to Espey, gives a record of the author's life in China, without his signature 'contrast and surprise.'⁵

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1. Maurice Collis, 'Dreaming in Armageddon,' *Time and Tide*, 25 May 1940. There were only a few successful English-language publications on China by Chinese writers at the time, and *A Chinese Childhood* was unique because it was a memoir by a Chinese writer residing in Britain.
 2. 'Chinese Family: Intimate Picture of a Lost Home,' *Times Literary Supplement*, 11 May 1940.
 3. G. A. G., 'A Chinese Looks Back,' *Hong Kong Radio Review* 11, no. 14 (8 February 1941); Wilfrid Rooke Ley, 'The Man Introduces the World to You,' *Catholic Herald*, 7 June 1940.
 4. E. H. J., 'A Bit of Old China,' *Christian World*, 30 May 1940.
 5. John Espey, 'Silent Traveller at Home,' *New York Times Book Review*, 16 November 1952.

There seem to me some problems in identifying this memoir as a straightforward recording and interpretation of the Chinese scene and in viewing the author as 'at home'. Espy alludes to Chiang Yee's general practice of using geographical locations in his *Silent Traveller* titles, such as *The Silent Traveller in London*, *The Silent Traveller in Oxford*, or *The Silent Traveller in New York*. Logically, this book, about his childhood experience in Jiujiang, China, should have been titled *The Silent Traveller in China*, or *The Silent Traveller in Jiujiang*, rather than *The Silent Traveller at Home*. Chiang could not possibly be at home. As is mentioned in the book, he had been 'in exile' in England for six years.⁶ He actually used the phrase 'in exile' next to his signature in his Chinese inscription on the front page of the author's copy: 'At the beginning of the eighth year in exile in England.'⁷ In other words, he was conscious of the physical distance from as well as the emotional connections with his home country on the other side of the world. Besides, the cultural environment and many of the traditional practices described in the book had disappeared forever, owing to the advent of the sociocultural revolution and the concurrent modernist movement of 1919. They existed only in memory. Aside from that, the phrase 'at home' may denote another meaning here: feeling comfortable and at ease in a place or situation. Is it possible that Chiang in fact felt 'at home' and happy in England even though it seems very unlikely?

This chapter will examine Chiang Yee's perception of and writing about home through the study of *A Chinese Childhood*. It will first highlight the feature of nostalgia in the memoir, then discuss the author's diasporic experience in England as the *Silent Traveller*, and finally argue that writing serves as an effective way for the author to construct a home away from home.

Nostalgia in *A Chinese Childhood*

On the dust jacket of *A Chinese Childhood* is an eye-catching colour self-portrait with the caption 'Three Stages of My Hair'. As one's hairstyle is an indicator of age, social status, or aesthetic taste, the three figures in that self-portrait represent the artist-author at three different stages: aged six, fifteen, and thirty, each marking a significant turning point in his life. At five, Chiang lost his mother, who had offered him tender maternal love as well as his childhood identity; at fifteen, he lost his father, whose care and affection had nurtured his artistic and literary identity; at thirty, he departed from his motherland which had endowed him with a cultural identity and became an exile overseas.

6. Chiang Yee, *A Chinese Childhood* (London: Methuen, 1940), 303.

7. Chiang Yee's inscription is as follows: 'This book was originally scheduled for publication in mid-November last year, but the outbreak of war caused its delay until May 2 this year. On April 15, Alan [White] came and brought me the first copy. I am touched by his kindness, and I record this in writing. Chung-ya, at the beginning of the eighth year in exile in England.' Chiang Yee, handwriting, in the author's copy of *A Chinese Childhood*.

The memoir outlines the vicissitudes experienced by Chiang's family, his early upbringing, and the cultural practices of the first two decades of the twentieth century. In a placid yet mirthful tone, Chiang delves into his childhood experiences, gently unfolding an encyclopedic and panoramic portrayal of life in Jiujiang, a port city on the Yangtze River in South China.

The history of the Chiang family can be traced back to the first century BCE, when Chiang Hsu (69 BCE–?) was appointed by Emperor Ai (26–1 BCE) to serve as government inspector and governor of Yanzhou.⁸ Being 'an upright and sincere man', he was unwilling to render his service in the royal court after Wang Mang (45 BCE–23 CE) usurped the power to the throne. He resigned from the post and returned to his native place, Chang'an, to live a reclusive life. He met no one except for occasional visits from two well-known poet friends. He made three footpaths in front of his house for them to travel by. Hence the phrase 'three footpaths' became known as a poetic function in Chinese literary history.⁹ In the early eighteenth century, a member of the Chiang family moved to Jiujiang on the south side of the Yangtze, built a new house, and settled there. Ten generations later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the house had developed into a compound of two walled enclosures. The main enclosure had forty-two rooms, where Chiang and most of the family lived. It was a close-knit unit of four generations, about fifty members in total, living in that spacious family compound under the unquestioned authority of his great-grandparents. To the right side of the main enclosure stood a smaller one, which was the living quarters of his third great-uncle, with two large rooms being used as a family school, as well as a big garden.

It was a world of peace and happiness: deliberate protocols and manners, reverence for elders and ancestors, the respect paid to scholars and poets, and the joys of celebrating festivals. The family followed the Confucian tradition, caring for the young and respecting the elderly, and maintaining a harmonious relationship. There was hardly any dispute among them; if disagreements did occur, they would be settled with the advice of the elders. Throughout the year, members of the family worked hard, yet they took time to rest and enjoy themselves at the beginning of the Chinese New Year. Like all other families, the Chiangs took weeks to prepare food, clean the house, and decorate the rooms and halls with new paintings and hang red paper couplets on the entrance gate to welcome prosperity. On Lunar New Year's Eve, the family gathered to enjoy a sumptuous feast and celebrate the annual reunion. After that, the elders would take out the family genealogy in the central hall, where the ancestral shrine stood, and narrate the family history to younger generations.¹⁰

8. Yanzhou in the Han dynasty encompassed approximately southwest Shandong and northeast Hebei of China today.

9. Chiang, *A Chinese Childhood*, 11.

10. Chiang, *A Chinese Childhood*, 75.

the whole scene became bright red and sparkling. The great ball of fire rose slowly from the water, and diminished as it climbed above the horizon. Father did not speak, and I could not express my wonder and excitement.¹⁶

It was such a magnificent and divine moment! How he wished it could last forever. And it did, but only in his memory. His father died soon after. Chiang tells the reader poignantly that he visited the mountain a few times later, 'but never again with my dear father'.¹⁷

A Chinese Exile in England

Chiang Yee, when writing his memoir, was in exile. He was literally homeless, thousands of miles away from his war-torn homeland, where his former home had been burned to the ground by the Japanese. As he said years later, 'only experienced political exiles can understand what I went through'.¹⁸ A discussion of his diasporic identity, as represented by his pen name, the Silent Traveller, may help to explain the layers of pain and lamentation registered in his memoir and other artistic and literary representations.

In 1932, around the time of his preparation for departure to England, Chiang created a pen name for himself: Zhongya 重啞. Like most of his contemporaries, he had a school name in childhood, which was Zhongya 仲雅, meaning 'second' (in order of birth) and 'grace'. Homophonous with Zhongya 仲雅, Zhongya 重啞 is loaded with multiple new meanings. *Ya* 啞 means 'mute' or 'dumb', and *zhong* 重 denotes 'heavy, weighty', 'considerable in amount or value', or 'discreet, prudent'. A combination of these two characters generates a rich variety of connotations, and probably from this came Yaxingzhe 啞行者, that is, the Silent Traveller, which later became his signature penname overseas.¹⁹ It needs to be pointed out that, while the phrase *xingzhe* 行者 denotes a walking man, pilgrim, or traveller, it carries another meaning, that is, a monk or a Buddhist practitioner.

As indicated by the new names Zhongya and Yaxingzhe, silence, or *ya*, is emphatically valued. In China and Confucian tradition, silence has been celebrated as a virtue of elegance, grace, modesty, and steadiness. In the case of Chiang Yee, this aspect is far more complex. It underlines his disillusionment with the corrupt government and politics of China. He studied chemistry at college in China, hoping that science could effectively help make China a prosperous and powerful nation in the world. Upon graduation, however, he found that his lofty dream to 'bring prosperity to China with scientific knowledge' was shattered by reality because he

16. Chiang, *A Chinese Childhood*, 275–76.

17. Chiang, *A Chinese Childhood*, 276.

18. Chiang Yee, *China Revisited, after Forty-Two Years* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 34.

19. For a full discussion of the name Silent Traveller see Da Zheng, 'The Traveling of Art and the Art of Traveling: Chiang Yee's Painting and Chinese Cultural Tradition', *Studies in Literary Imagination* 37, no. 1 (2004): 176.

Chiang Yee in Wartime

Paul French

When winter comes how harsh is the long night!
 This winter the night is even longer.
 Again and again I fall into brief dreams:
 Too brief to transport me to my homeland!

—Chiang Yee, September 1939¹

The Second World War in Europe (1939–1945) saw Chiang Yee's career and reputation grow with the publication of a number of books, additional invitations to speak, frequent appearances in magazines such as *Country Life* and *The Listener*, new commercial commissions, translation work, and participation in a continuing series of gallery exhibitions.² However, Chiang's wartime experiences also included seeing his Hampstead lodgings take a direct hit on the first day of the London Blitz and the entire contents of the house, including much of his previous work, collection of Chinese paintings and library, destroyed. Shortly afterwards he was blown unconscious by a falling bomb in Hampstead and after a hasty search relocated to new lodgings in Oxford for the duration of the war.

Throughout the war Chiang worked with both British and Chinese war propaganda entities and with Aid to China organisations, as well as on his own publishing and design commissions. Much of this was a continuation of work that Chiang had begun in the summer of 1937 when he became involved in efforts to promote awareness of the Second Sino-Japanese War to British audiences and, beginning in the autumn of 1939, awareness of the European war to Chinese readers, having become involved with multiple organisations promoting the wartime Sino-British alliance. Chiang was able to write for wartime audiences in both countries, in several instances arranging for translations into Chinese of his observations of the war in Britain to be distributed as part of Britain's war propaganda in China.

This chapter considers the work undertaken by Chiang Yee during the European war years (September 1939–August 1945), both his commercial art and writing, as well as specifically war-related commissions. Also, given the focus of this collection,

1. Chiang Yee, *The Silent Traveller in War Time* (London: Country Life, 1939), 33.

2. Several of Chiang Yee's wartime exhibitions are noted below. For his contributions see also 'Changing China', *The Listener*, 16 April 1942, 491–92.

it looks at Chiang's involvement with various organisations and events that continued, broadened, and varied his British circle of contacts. It is perhaps interesting to note that Chiang's most specifically war-related work, *The Silent Traveller in War Time* (1939), is an early contribution to a genre of what might be termed 'war morale literature': writing and film (and other artforms) showing the peculiarities of Britain at war and invariably accentuating the resilience and fortitude of the British people.

It is my contention that Chiang was able to produce such a work as *The Silent Traveller in War Time* due to the fact that he had, since the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in the summer of 1937, been deeply aware of the worsening situation in Nationalist China brought starkly home by the death of his elder brother, Chiang Ta-ch'uan. Ideas of 'war morale literature', the fortitude of civilian populations and national unity in the face of war, had been prominent in his thinking. This was especially so after the Japanese occupation of his hometown of Jiujiang in July 1938, which he notes in the dedication of *The Silent Traveller in London*, published later that year, after the Japanese attack on China but prior to the commencement of the European war. When we look back now on the rise of British 'war morale literature' after September 1939 it is important to note that one of the first and most popular examples of this new genre was *The Silent Traveller in War Time*, published just weeks after the start of the war.

In general, we can divide Chiang's war into two phases. First, the period from September 1939 to September 1940, beginning with the outbreak of war between Britain and Germany and the aerial bombing attacks on London (the Blitz) that saw Chiang's home on the Belsize Park/Hampstead border rendered uninhabitable.³ And, second, from December 1940 to the end of the war in 1945, a period that saw Chiang often absent from London and living in lodgings in Oxford. Despite the difficulties of transportation during the war, Chiang retained his involvement with many key London-based organisations—the British Ministry of Information, the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC), and the London office of the Ministry of Information of the Republic of China. While Chiang largely maintained his London circle of friends, he also developed overlapping and additional contacts and circles in his new home of Oxford.

The Silent Traveller in War Time

In late August 1939 Chiang Yee had just finished his first children's book, *Chin-Pao and the Giant Pandas*.⁴ He felt he needed a rest and, despite being aware of the probability of war between Britain and Germany breaking out, he decided to visit Geneva to see the Prado Museum in exile's *Les chefs-d'oeuvre* exhibition, which was

3. At the time, both Hampstead and Belsize Park were in the 'Borough of Hampstead'.

4. Chiang Yee, *Chin-Pao and the Giant Pandas* (London: Country Life, 1939).

Chiang Yee and the Hsiungs

Solidarity, Conviviality, and the Economy of Racial Representation

Diana Yeh

This chapter examines Chiang Yee's relationship with the Hsiungs, arguably the most famous Chinese literary couple living in Britain during the 1930s. Their relationship, though one of evident mutuality, solidarity, and conviviality as diasporic Chinese writers in Britain, was also shaped by the economy of racial representation at the time. Arguably, despite his highly popular Silent Traveller series, Chiang Yee did not achieve the level of visibility enjoyed by the Hsiungs. Shih-I and Dymia Hsiung were a couple who arrived in Britain from China in the 1930s and who, in an extraordinary twist of fate, unexpectedly shot to worldwide fame thanks to Shih-I Hsiung's play *Lady Precious Stream*. Hsiung became known as the first Chinese stage director ever to work in the West End and on Broadway. With her book *Flowering Exile* Dymia Hsiung became the first Chinese woman in Britain to publish a full-length work of either fiction or autobiography in English. During the 1930s and 1940s, such was their fame that the Hsiungs were household names in a way Chiang was not. However, it is also probably the case that Chiang Yee's legacy survives in a way that the Hsiungs' has not. For while Chiang Yee is still known to general readers today, thanks in part to the number of his books that can be found in second-hand bookshops around the UK, what is extraordinary is that, until recently, the story of the Hsiungs had been almost completely forgotten, erased from history.¹

In this chapter I will discuss the major role the Hsiungs played in both Chiang's career and personal life as a diasporic Chinese, exiled from his home country. In doing so, I seek to navigate an interdisciplinary path between approaches to the study of transnational migration and of immigrant and racialised minority cultural production in cultural studies, art historical, and literary research. I examine Chiang's forging of ethnic ties in diaspora but also explore how, as a migrant who was also an artist, his ethnic ties were compromised by the way in which he and other diasporic

1. Diana Yeh, *The Happy Hsiungs: Performing China and the Struggle for Modernity* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014).

Chinese writers at the time, including Hsiung, were inserted into the economy of British culture. The significance of ethnic ties for migrants is well recognised in social science literatures, so much so that in some, for example, culturalist accounts, it has become a taken-for-granted narrative based on an assumed pre-existing community. Critical of such accounts, this chapter seeks to render visible the significant labour required to achieve community in diaspora and then addresses an issue that has attracted less attention—the way in which these ethnic ties may be fractured by economies of racial representation.

As Paul Gilroy and Kobena Mercer have written about contemporary Black cultural production, the structures of racism that have marginalised Black artists in Britain confer upon them a burden of representation, such that they are seen as ‘representatives’ who speak on behalf of, and are therefore accountable to their communities.² As Mercer continues:

In such a political economy of racial representation where the part stands in for the whole, the visibility of a few token black public figures serves to legitimate, and reproduce, the invisibility, and lack of access to public discourse, of the community as a whole.³

Chiang’s relationship with Hsiung was one of mutuality, solidarity, and conviviality, and even shared calling—that of contesting dominant perceptions of the Chinese circulating in Europe and the US. Yet, in an economy of racial representation, where only a few Chinese artists or writers were admitted to visibility, but were burdened with representing their ‘culture’ or nation, it was also one fraught with tension, almost from the very beginning.

I first discuss the significance of Shih-I Hsiung in helping to launch Chiang Yee’s career as an artist and a writer, not only through commissioning him to produce drawings to accompany his own writings but also through introducing and recommending him to significant cultural figures, both Chinese and British. I then go on to discuss the role of the Hsiungs’ homes in London and Oxford in providing emotional sanctuary, a ‘home away from home’ through the convivial gatherings they held for Chiang and a range of other Chinese students, artist, and intellectuals. I then examine the political mission shared by Shih-I Hsiung and Chiang, who both sought to contest racialised representations of the Chinese circulating in Europe and the US. In the final section, however, I highlight how these different forms of solidarity could be ruptured as a result of the political economy of racial representation that the two writers found themselves in. In doing so, I bring to light not only a less known dimension of Chiang’s life, but more broadly, illuminate how economies of racial representation can shape the everyday lives of artists who are also migrants, fracturing solidarities and rupturing even the most intimate of relations.

2. Paul Gilroy, ‘Cruciality and the Frog’s Perspective’, *Third Text* 2, no. 5 (1988), 33–44; Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 240.

3. Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 240.

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