


# “OUR MISSIONARY WEMBLEY”: CHINA, LOCAL COMMUNITY AND THE BRITISH MISSIONARY EMPIRE, 1901–1924

 Sarah Cheang

For one week in June 1924, behind the orientalist facades of the Dome and Corn Exchange, the English south-coast town of Brighton played host to a missionary exhibition entitled *Africa and the East*. Missionaries were an important source of popular knowledge about China, and missionary exhibitions had been entertaining the British public since the 1880s, and indeed continued to do so until well into the mid-twentieth century. The intention was always to educate in order to raise awareness and hence funds for missionary work abroad, and within this spectacle of native cultures of the missionary field, China often occupied a prominent position as both fascinatingly heathen and yet attractively civilised. Furthermore, Brighton's Dome and Corn Exchange, part of a conspicuous complex of buildings adjacent to King George IV's early nineteenth-century chinoiserie Royal Pavilion, were seen as having an appropriately “foreign flavour” for “the trophies of an enterprise with ‘all the nations’ as its sphere”.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the titular emphasis on Africa, on first entering *Africa and the East* visitors found themselves confronted by a Chinese Street, containing a range of “Chinese” shops and two temples. India, Palestine, Japan, Canada, Uganda, South America and East and West Africa were also represented using painted backdrops, artefacts and model buildings, whilst special attractions included the African Juju Hut, the Bedouin Tent, and the Chinese Guest Room.<sup>2</sup> Thus, within two interconnected halls, a display of non-Christian cultures was offered, inviting comparison and creating particular meanings for China and Chinese culture within an overall concept of exotic Eastern heathenism. However, there are other aspects to this exhibition which may be less obvious but are no less

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<sup>1</sup> Church Missionary Society, *Africa and the East: Official Handbook* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1924), p.33.

<sup>2</sup> Church Missionary Society, *Africa and the East*, p.33; “Our Missionary Wembley,” *Brighton Herald*, 7 June 1924, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> "Our Missionary Wembley".

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), pp.8–12.

<sup>5</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp.56–61.

<sup>6</sup> Antoinette Burton, "Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating 'British' History," in *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Reader*, ed. Catherine Hall (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp.138–39.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Wilson, "Citizenship, Empire and Modernity in the English Provinces, c. 1720–90," in *Cultures of Empire*, p.162.

<sup>8</sup> See Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Leicester: Apollon, 1990).

important. Missionary exhibitions also brought Chinese material culture into the heart of British local communities, and were the work not just of the centralised committees which planned them, but also of a multiplicity of "ordinary" men and women whose lives were sometimes far from casually intertwined with events in China.

1924 was also the year of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, a coincidence that was not lost on missionary organisers who made prominent mention of their metropolitan rival, whilst a local newspaper dubbed the Brighton exhibition "Our Missionary Wembley".<sup>3</sup> Thus local, national and imperial identities were brought to a point of public convergence, in a moment which not only invokes an understanding of the relationship between empire and metropolis in a "single analytical phrase", but also points towards a twofold domestication of China.<sup>4</sup> Whilst the inclusion of China within the umbrella of "the East" brings it firmly within the ambit of a Western civilising mission, perhaps China was also to be appropriated, tamed, controlled—in short, domesticated—by its adoption as an active concern of British Christian communities as well as being subjected to the panoptic gaze of the exhibition visitor.<sup>5</sup>

Recent work by Antoinette Burton has taken up these themes to debate the writing of histories of empire as centrifugal and/or centripetal in effect, where concepts of a British nation can be in danger of being privileged as "a pretext for postmodern narrative", and debates on the presence of empire in the home might ultimately serve to naturalise binary distinctions between the "imperial" and the "domestic".<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Wilson's study of eighteenth-century provincial English imperialisms also reminds us that forms of imperial citizenship produced by print-culture communities are created "in tandem with other (local, regional, social) identities", whilst following "the social, gender, and racial contours of the national community".<sup>7</sup> Thus, in the play between local, national and imperial identities, and national and local subjectivities, it will be argued that missionary endeavour not only brought Chinese material culture into Britain, but also into a gendered British domestic space that was itself heavily charged and animated by multivalent notions of "China".

Protestant evangelism was initially driven by an urgent theological desire, first articulated in the 1790s, for the entire globe to hear of Christianity, so that all souls would be saved from the fires of hell, and the second coming of Christ could occur through the power of world prayer. The progress of the foreign missions was also inextricably bound up with the history of Western imperial activity. In a purely practical sense, contacting the heathen frequently depended on secular trade, exploration and military incursion, but also paved the way for trade and sustained colonial rule by establishing cultural connections and providing humanitarian services such as education and medicines.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the will to evangelise in foreign parts was also affected by public awareness of those



regions. Locations of contemporary political or military involvement would attract general interest and also support for the humanitarian and "civilising" work that was an essential component in the campaign to "restore" God's kingdom on earth. It should be noted that religious motivations for the missionary cause were not the same for all Christians and across all denominations and were subject to theological revision, producing a range of positions and unstable meanings within religious evangelism. Yet, whatever their main objectives, missionaries in China, especially during the 1890s and 1920s, were easily open to attack as the agents of Western imperialism. In Britain, the aims and objectives of the China missions offered an extremely accessible concept of Western cultural dominance and imperial responsibility to the British public alongside many other forms of popular imperial propaganda.<sup>9</sup>

China was never actually part of the British Empire, and yet China certainly fell within the sphere of British imperial interests and thus occupies a less ambivalent position within imperial discourse than might be expected. The Opium and Arrow Wars of the mid-nineteenth century, fought between China and allied Western forces, resulted in the cession of Hong Kong to the British, and the signing of treaties which created settler colonies at the treaty ports where Westerners could live in a semi-colonial situation known as extraterritoriality. Whilst only these small areas of China had fallen under foreign control, such key military and mercantile sites had strategic, economic and diplomatic importance, leading to what Robert Bickers argues was a "Chinese Raj", and enabling an extension of British imperialistic attitudes to China in general.<sup>10</sup> Equally as important for missionary endeavour was the right to move freely within China, granted by the Treaty of Tianjin in 1858, giving missionaries access to the interior of the country. The Taiping Rebellion enabled further British military glory in China, and the suppression of the "Boxer Uprising" in 1900–01 generated more imagery of the Chinese as inferior exotics. In the realm of popular culture, the thoroughly imperialistic British imaginary of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century did not discriminate between the official and unofficial parts of the empire. The concept of an imperial archive, conceived as an epistemological complex of imperial discourse, and featuring "nodal points" such as exhibitions, can also be used to examine missionary representations of China as places of intersection within the information network of empire where imperial knowledge could be displayed and communicated.<sup>11</sup> The motivations of the missionaries and their converts in China were without doubt multiple and various, and sometimes greatly at odds with the imperial project—missionaries could be highly critical of Western exploitation and abuse of native people, and Chinese nationalists were able to use Christianity as a route to Western education and medicine with the goal of strengthening China's international standing and ultimately throwing off foreign interference.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion: 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture and Colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp.6–10, 76–7. See also James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp.17–27.

<sup>11</sup> James L. Hevia, "The Archive State and the Fear of Pollution: From the Opium Wars to Fu-Manchu," *Cultural Studies* 12.2 (1998): 234–64, at pp.242–43. Hevia draws here from the work of Bruno Latour, Thomas Richards and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

<sup>12</sup> Bickers, *Britain in China*, pp.94–5.

<sup>13</sup> Rosemary Seton, "Archival Sources in Britain for the Study of Mission History," in *Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*, eds Robert A. Bickers and Rosemary Seton (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996), p.242.

<sup>14</sup> For a very useful exploration of the nature of community in the context of empire and English provinciality, see Kathleen Wilson's discussion of the work of Benedict Anderson, ("Citizenship, Empire and Modernity," pp.59–177).

However, as contributors to British archives of information on China, missionaries were still part of imperialistic practices.

The relationship of missionary representations of China to British imperialism and its archives is further complicated by the domestic and feminine nature of missionary fundraising activities. Missionary archives tend to be structured around large, centralised collections of letters and reports sent back to headquarters from abroad, and tend not to be concerned with local administrative matters.<sup>13</sup> In comparison, the records of the local fundraising activities which supported the missionaries are solidly embedded within local history libraries and county archives, surfacing in newspaper reports of charitable bazaars and lectures; in occasional souvenir exhibition brochures; in the records of myriad regional missionary societies, and in the ubiquitous parish magazine. Thus the location and nature of archival resources for missionary home support directly reflects the nature of the home support network; whilst missionary work in the field was a matter for central administration, the raising of funds and awareness in cities, towns and villages across Britain was part of the web of local social relationships and identities that shape a community.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, in considering the exhibiting of China at Brighton's 1924 *Africa and the East*, this paper will also provide an investigation into early twentieth-century China as a source of early twentieth-century British identities, as found embedded within the "grassroots" of an English sea-side town.

### *A History of China at the Missionary Exhibition*

<sup>15</sup> For an early history of the CMS see Pat Barr, *To China With Love: The Lives of Protestant Missionaries in China* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), pp.18–35.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Maughan, "Mighty England Do Good: The Major English Denominations and Organisation for the Support of Foreign Missions in the Nineteenth Century," in *Missionary Encounters*, pp.15, 27; F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.53.

*Africa and the East* was organised by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), who had maintained missions in China since 1844.<sup>15</sup> In order to keep the foreign missions functioning, missionary societies also produced books, pamphlets and journals, gave lectures, put on sales, and organised Sunday and evening classes, aiming to stimulate interest in all ages and all social groups. In 1899, the CMS alone raised nearly £29,000 from 1,083 fancy goods sales held across Britain, and had a total circulation of 7.5 million magazines and papers with separate marketing categories of "educated", "labouring" and "youthful". It has been suggested that foreign missions may have had the greatest impact on the cultures that sent them, rather than on cultures they aimed to convert.<sup>16</sup> Of course, it is difficult to say precisely how such missionary propaganda was read and responded to, but perhaps the mere fact of such widespread and consistent levels of public support indicates a range of gendered and class-specific interests in foreign missions, or at least in their propaganda, of which the staging of exhibitions offers ample proof.

Late nineteenth-century maps showing the distribution of world religions envisioned China as a vast desert of heathenism—an unremitting



brown mass illustrating the size and homogeneity of the Chinese population.<sup>17</sup> "China's Millions" was an enduring and flexible concept, used to articulate a potentially limitless market for Western goods, and also to denote the supposed hordes of Chinese immigrants poised to swamp Europe, North America and Australia. However, in the mid to late nineteenth-century missionary context, the term "China's Millions" conjured up an enormous and undifferentiated nation moving as one, straight toward hell. The following "facts" were given out during a lecture by a China missionary: "If the Chinese held hands, they would make seven circles round the earth as great as the equator ... . If they began to pass a certain point two abreast, it would take seventeen and a half years for them all to pass."<sup>18</sup>

Whilst Africa and China were both regarded as entirely heathen, only China's overwhelming population could physically surround the earth, so that if the key motivation of the nineteenth-century missions was to save souls, the call of "China's Millions" was a potent one. The task which therefore faced the missionary associations was how to make these faceless millions sufficiently interesting to potential supporters. The stated aim of the China Inland Mission (CIM) journal, *China's Millions*, was "to make China and its people more real and their spiritual destitution more widely known to Christians at home".<sup>19</sup> A mixture of articles on missionary work and on Chinese culture and society were presented together with a wealth of large illustrations, combining the picturesque, the exotic and the didactic between gold embossed bindings (Figure 1). Other missionary books followed the same principals of visual enticement and attractive packaging, whether in lithograph, photograph or in prose. Church of England Zenana Missionary Society (CEZMS) missionary Hessie Newcombe supplied descriptions of picturesque villages situated in mountain landscapes, complete with winding paths, meandering rivers, luxuriant vegetation, and an "endless stream of immortals" to convert.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Church Missionary Society, *The Church Missionary Atlas: Containing an Account of the Various Countries in which the Church Missionary Society Labours and of its Missionary Operations* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1896), p.169. My thanks to Sujit Sivasundara for his comments on this topic.

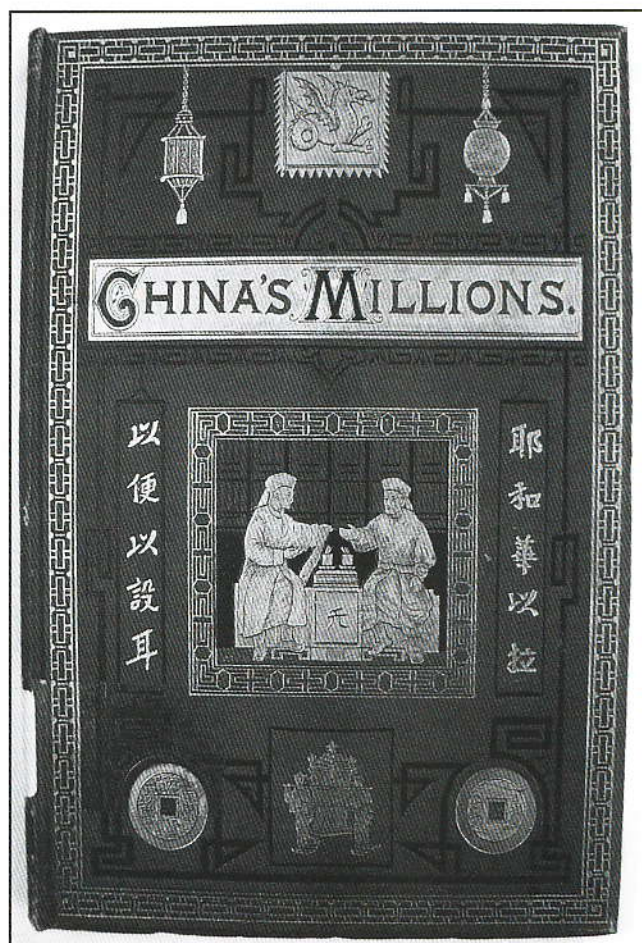
<sup>18</sup> Mary E. Watson, *Robert and Louisa Stewart: In Life and in Death* (London: Marshall Bros, 1895), p.161.

<sup>19</sup> China Inland Mission, "Preface," in *China's Millions* bound volume 1875–76. *China's Millions*, first published in 1875, was considered a very successful publication. A reviewer commented: "It is beautifully, almost sumptuously bound and if placed on the drawing-room table will excite an interest that a more modest cover would probably fail to arouse..." See Barr, *To China With Love*, p.111.

<sup>20</sup> Watson, *Robert and Louisa Stewart*, p.184.

**Figure 1**

*Cover of the bound volume of China's Millions, 1891. Copyright of OMF International. Used with permission*





<sup>21</sup> Colin Beale, *Look and See: Visual Aids in the Service of the Church* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1949), pp.7–9.

<sup>22</sup> Barr, *To China With Love*, pp.7–8.

<sup>23</sup> Maughan, “Mighty England Do Good,” pp.26; Beale, *Look and See*, pp.70.

<sup>24</sup> London Missionary Society, *Missionary Scenes* (London: London Missionary Society, 1927), p.5; Rosemary Keen, “Catalogue of the Papers of the the Missionary Leaves Association” (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Library, 1987).

<sup>25</sup> London Missionary Society, *The Service of the Hand: Missionary Handwork for Boys and Girls* (London: Livingstone Bookshop, c. 1920). In 1929, the LMS recommended *Learning by Doing* by Mary Debenham for methods of junior study. London Missionary Society, *The World Outlook 1929–1930: Materials for Missionary Education in Your Church and School* (London: London Missionary Society, 1929).

<sup>26</sup> A.T.S. James, *Twenty-five Years of the L.M.S.: 1895–1920* (London: London Missionary Society, 1923), pp.14, 46–7; Thomas Walter Lacqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working-Class Culture 1780–1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> M.O. Pelton, “Suggestions for Missionary Education, Winter 1917–1918,” *To Serve the World* (London: London Missionary Society, 1917), p.6.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Entwistle, *Chinese Play Hours* (London: London Missionary Society, 1925).

Such exoticism was being consciously utilised and alongside these various forms of print media, time-based performances and collections of objects also had an important role to play in the campaign for a broad and sustained support base, and were valued for their apparent qualities of unmediated immediacy. Thus, church lecturers frequently used lantern slides, models, maps, pictures, ethnographic objects, costumes, drama, photography, and later film, in the belief that an instant and long-lasting impression could be made on audiences through the power of the “seeing experience”.<sup>21</sup> As early as 1865, when Hudson Taylor founded the CIM, he toured England with a lecture entitled “China and the Chinese” which was advertised as being illustrated with maps, drawings, idols, Chinese clothing and other “objects of interest”.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Chinese objects had a long history of usage in missionary propaganda in order to attract the public, and although concerns were sometimes voiced that the promotion of the curious and the bizarre was not helpful, certainly up until 1939 missionary societies continued to rely upon the largely unquestioned educational qualities of their visual aids in fostering a greater understanding of Chinese culture in Britain.<sup>23</sup>

Whilst this missionary deployment of China was occurring in tandem with other and better known exhibitionary forms such as the nineteenth-century international exhibitions and twentieth-century exhibitions of Chinese art, here was one important difference. Missionaries put the objects into the hands of the congregation, and invited them to identify very directly with other cultures. Boxes of curios were available for hire for one shilling from both the LMS and the CMS Loan Departments to enable Sunday School teachers and missionary workers to illustrate their lectures and lessons.<sup>24</sup> These were not merely aimed at arousing curiosity but were also intended as aids to a deeper identification. Especially popular in children’s missionary education after the First World War was the concept of learning through doing, in which the modelling of objects such as Chinese junks was suggested as a way to focus and transmit ideas about China.<sup>25</sup> Such approaches may reflect concerns that a general decline in religiosity required fresh ideas for attracting and maintaining Sunday School attendance, and also suggest that new and more ambiguous beliefs that the heathen were not necessarily eternally damned were accompanied by a greater emphasis on comparative cultural study.<sup>26</sup>

The *Play Hours* series, in use from at least 1917, was designed for children aged between six and eleven and aimed “to develop a real sense of brotherhood with the children of other lands, based on a realisation of common interests”.<sup>27</sup> *Chinese Play Hours* outlined a series of evening meetings intended as an adjunct to Sunday School learning.<sup>28</sup> In the course of four sessions, children would be taught about China by reading Chinese stories, playing Chinese games and riddles, making models, and by engaging in role-play in which they pretended to be Chinese. Through



making Chinese clothing and Chinese everyday things such as chopsticks, missionaries tried not only to educate about China, but also to reproduce the actual experience of being Chinese, mainly by drawing contrasts between British and Chinese material cultures. Dress played a major role in these exercises, to the extent that costumes for children putting on shows and tableaux could be hired from collections held by most missionary societies.<sup>29</sup> These activities were predicated on an enunciation of difference and a reinforcement of Western material superiority, and stories and poems about Chinese female infanticide were also used to make girls feel guilty at their own good fortune at being born British, instilling in them the missionary instinct through a kind of White Girl's Burden. Thus in junior education, missionary representations of China mobilised concepts of sisterhood which have been shown to lie close to imperialistic sentiments in a privileging of white, Western middle-class models of femininity, and which made missionary activity so inclusive of feminine forms of imperialism.<sup>30</sup>

Adult church-goers were also given the opportunity to dress up and enact similar fantasies of China when they took part in missionary exhibitions. These could range from small weekend events held in a local church hall, to much bigger and more public ventures involving hundreds of volunteers. A series of particular note was begun in Norwich in October 1903 with a successful church schoolroom exhibition organised by a local Ladies' Auxiliary of the LMS.<sup>31</sup> This is said to have prompted the organisation of increasingly larger exhibitions in Blackburn, Halifax and Rochdale in 1905; Northampton, Pontypridd, Barry and Bristol in 1906; Wrexham, Manchester, Llanelly, Edinburgh, Swansea and Sheffield in 1907; and Newcastle in 1908. Whilst the souvenir handbooks of these events all had different covers, the text within remained essentially the same from exhibition to exhibition. However, local variations were apparent in the photographs and illustrations chosen, and in any written articles included in addition to the main description of exhibits and the cultures which they represented. The highlights of the Chinese courts remained the same for each of these venues, implying that key artefacts owned by the LMS had a very public life, being almost continuously on tour. These objects included ancestral tablets, Chinese women's shoes, an opium pipe and lamp, dresses and ornaments (judged "very beautiful and valuable"), a back scratcher, a model coffin, Chinese gods and goddesses, and weaponry such as a "Chinese sword used in the Battle of Wei-Hai-Wei and given by the user to Dr. Bennett of the LMS".<sup>32</sup> Thus, such curios gave the exhibitions interest, and encapsulated received notions of Chinese life: ancestor and idol-worship, detailed craftsmanship, footbinding, opium smoking and murderous xenophobia. *The Rochdale Observer* said of Rochdale's 1905 exhibition: "From an Empire with such an old and high civilisation as China, one expects to find something remarkable ..."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, London Missionary Society, *Young People's Missionary Bands*, 2nd ed. (London: London Missionary Society, c. 1900); Rev. Watcyn M. Price, *The Hope of the World: A Short Representation of Tableau Suitable for Sunday School Anniversaries and Missionary Services* (Caerwron: Presbyterian Church of Wales, c. 1920) p.5; London Missionary Society, *The John Williams Missionary Van* (London: London Missionary Society, c. 1920).

<sup>30</sup> See Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992); Barbara Ramusack, "Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India, 1865-1945," in *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance*, ed. N. Chaudhuri and M. Strobel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp.119-46; Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Rev. A.M. Gardner, "How Missionary Exhibitions Have Grown," *Christian World*, 4 June 1908, supp., p.vi.

<sup>32</sup> London Missionary Society, *Souvenir Handbook of the Missionary Exhibition to be Held at Town Hall, Pontypridd* (London: London Missionary Society, 1906), p.39; London Missionary Society, *Great Missionary Exhibition: Souvenir Handbook, St James Hall, Manchester* (London: London Missionary Society, 1907), p.35.

<sup>33</sup> *Rochdale Observer*, sheet of reprinted press coverage from 18, 22, 25 and 29 November 1905, inside London Missionary Society, *Missionary Exhibition in the Town Hall, Rochdale* (London: London Missionary Society, 1905), Council for World Mission Library, R320.

<sup>34</sup> *Rochdale Observer*, Council for World Mission Library, R320.

<sup>35</sup> London Missionary Society, *Illustrated Souvenir of the Orient in London: A Great Missionary Exhibition* (London: London Missionary Society, 1908), pp.4–5.

<sup>36</sup> “Notes by the Way,” in *The Exhibition Herald*, April 1908, p.16.

<sup>37</sup> London Missionary Society, *Illustrated Souvenir of the Orient*, pp.3–7.

<sup>38</sup> “The End of the Orient,” in *Christian World*, 16 July 1908, p.13.

However, the objects highlighted were a mixture of the mundane and the exaggerated, being listed as a sword used in the Boxer Uprising, hangings with Chinese script, a model of a Chinese inn, idols, examples of silk and other materials, and “a number of full-sized women’s shoes, so small that the foot of a new-born English babe would be too large for them”.<sup>34</sup>

Larger venues were able to accommodate an opium den and a Chinese Guest Room, for which there was usually an additional admission charge of twopence. At the exhibition held in Manchester in 1907, one could see a film entitled *Chinese Lepers at Play and at Worship*, and entertainments in the Chinese Guest Room included “A Chinese Visit”, “Chinese Ladies at Home” and “A Missionary’s Work”. At Pontypridd, Northampton and Barry in 1906, the Chinese Guest Room was advertised as containing a suite of genuine Chinese furniture, and also Chinese crockery and decorations amongst which missionaries would give talks on Chinese life. Because of the central organisation of the LMS, these exhibitions had the potential to be not merely formulaic, but pretty much identical, and they certainly seem to have set the standard for missionary exhibitions through to the early 1930s. However, variations between, for example, the exhibitions of Manchester and Pontypridd, reflect the way in which Christian communities were involved, making costumes, putting on shows, learning about other cultures, gathering objects of interest, stewarding and working on the stalls.

Exhibitions brought congregations together in study and in prayer. They were also generally very successful in attracting an audience. During its nine days of opening, the Rochdale exhibition recorded 24,000 visits and issued 18,900 tickets. The exhibition at Manchester was said to have been even larger, inspiring the huge London exhibition, *The Orient in London: A Great Missionary Exhibition*, held from 4 June to 11 July 1908 at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, which boasted 20 principal courts, 100 speakers, 10,000 trained stewards and 25,000 exhibits.<sup>35</sup> This exhibition required a total of 16,000 workers who were drawn from the ranks of London’s Protestant churches. In addition to the necessary training, 900 of the stewards also required “native” costumes, and so the costumes secretary, Miss E. Foster of Streatham, loaned specimen costumes to the churches involved for a few days each. During that time one copy of every garment was made, so that further copies could be made from the copies whilst the originals moved on to the next church.<sup>36</sup> The tremendous feat of volunteer coordination which *The Orient in London* entailed was partly achieved through the publication of a monthly journal, *The Exhibition Herald*, which was issued from November 1907. In eight months 100,000 copies were circulated, paid for by advertising and the cover price of one penny.<sup>37</sup> The exhibition itself made a profit, taking a total of nearly £23,000.<sup>38</sup>

Opened by Winston Churchill, then president of the Board of Trade, there is no doubt that *The Orient in London* was intended to thoroughly



popularise missionary work. Missionary spectacles were vying for an audience alongside other forms of popular entertainment such as music halls and early cinema, as well as the "infotainment" of international exhibitions and public lectures, where imperial patriotism had been found to be profitable.<sup>39</sup> Working-class audiences "were prepared to be thoroughly eclectic in their search for entertainment and indiscriminating in the Christian denominations that offered it. Famous travellers and missionaries could fill the Albert Hall."<sup>40</sup> At *The Orient in London*, exhibition-goers were treated to a cornucopia of sights and a cacophony of sounds in which "Buddhist monks" shouting out lectures in the Hall of Religions and stewards calling "this way to the Opium Den" could barely be heard above the gongs, tom-toms, conch shells, screeching parrots, and "the electric piano under the pagoda" (Figure 2).<sup>41</sup> Special trains were put on to tempt *Orient* visitors into London from all over England, Scotland and Wales; ordinary train travel was available at cheap rates, and large parties could apply for reduced local rail and tube fares, and use special trams provided by the London County Council.<sup>42</sup> The basic entry price of one shilling (sixpence for members of Church societies), gave admittance to the main hall, where there were courts representing South China, Central China, North China, Madagascar, South Africa, Central Africa, the South Sea Islands, New Guinea, North India, South India and the Indian State of Travancore. Additional attractions, priced from one penny to sixpence, were the Hall of Religions, the Tableaux Hall, the Opium Den, the Kinematograph, the

<sup>39</sup> On exhibitions and Western imperialism, see Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas: The Expositions Universelles, Great Exhibitions and World's Fairs, 1851–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations* 4 (1988): 73–102, at p.70; Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876–1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

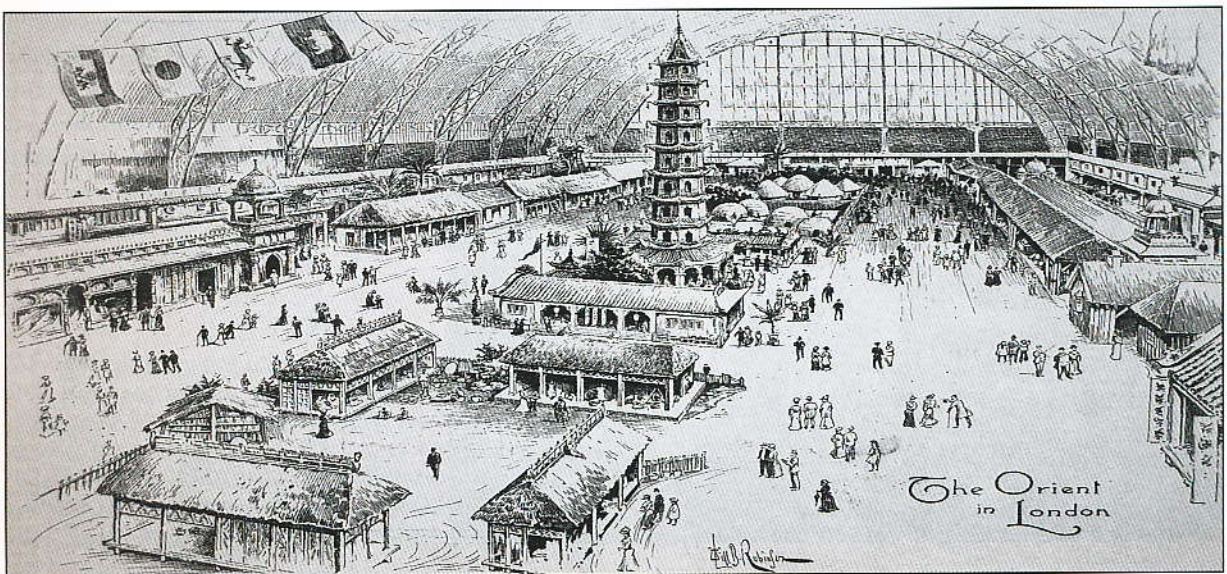
<sup>40</sup> John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.33.

<sup>41</sup> "The End of the Orient," p.6.

<sup>42</sup> "The Orient in London," *The Times*, 6 June 1908, p.4.

**Figure 2**

*General view of The Orient in London exhibition. London Missionary Society, Illustrated Souvenir of the Orient in London: A Great Missionary Exhibition (London: London Missionary Society, 1908), p. 11. School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London. CWM, Home Odds, Box 31. Reproduced from London Missionary Society/Council for World Mission Archives*





<sup>43</sup> Like all of the exhibition's structures, the pagoda was designed by Mr Spalding and made by the artists of Messrs G.M. Bridges and Son out of wood, papiermaché and canvas, whilst bamboo and thatch were used for areas which were closest to the viewer to make the buildings seem more "real". London Missionary Society, *Illustrated Souvenir of the Orient*, p.28.

<sup>44</sup> London Missionary Society, *The Orient in London: A Great Missionary Exhibition: Agricultural Hall June 4 to July 11 1908* (London: London Missionary Society, 1908).

<sup>45</sup> "The Orient in London," *The Times*, 5 June 1908, p.12.

<sup>46</sup> London Missionary Society, *Illustrated Souvenir of the Orient*, inside front cover.

<sup>47</sup> London Missionary Society, *The Orient in London: A Great Missionary /OVER*

Children's Hall and an art gallery. There were also literature and souvenir stalls, picture postcards, musical performances, a display entitled "Modes of Conveyance", and an extravaganza of costume and song called *The Pageant of Darkness and Light*.

In the main hall, the central space of the exhibition was dominated by a huge Chinese pagoda hung with bells, which towered above all other exhibits.<sup>43</sup> In common with much missionary propaganda, China was signalled as not only the most "civilised" of the "heathen" countries, but also the most aesthetically attractive and decorative. An advertising pamphlet used drawings of the pagoda as the front illustration, and the text began and ended with small line drawings of Chinese boys holding lanterns (Figure 3).<sup>44</sup> The pagoda was also cited as a key example of the exhibition's more "romantic aspects", and the stewards' Chinese costumes were described as "especially gorgeous".<sup>45</sup> Guidebooks juxtaposed Chinese houses and streets with African and Indian huts and villages, and an appeal for the Religious Tract Society remarked that "China, as in a special sense a literary nation, may most effectively be won for Christ by literature".<sup>46</sup>

Other more sensational and popular stereotypes of China were not neglected. In the Opium Den, demonstrations of opium smoking were given by Rev. E.J. Dukes and others every half hour from 3–9pm, and visitors were instructed to take note of "the pipes, lamps, and apparatus, and dark surroundings".<sup>47</sup> The Tableaux Hall, which was judged to have been one of the exhibition's greatest successes, held costumed enactments including "Perils by Boxers", which was performed twice nightly and played into an established genre of harrowing escape narratives in a wide range of media in which the East's defeat by the West was told and retold.<sup>48</sup> Such performances would have been all the more interesting because large numbers of missionaries were killed in China in the lead-up to the Boxer Uprising of 1900–1, and the relief of the besieged foreign legations at Beijing produced a plethora of imagery giving the notion of murderous "Boxers" great currency.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 3

Advertising pamphlet for The Orient in London. London Missionary Society, *The Orient in London: A Great Missionary Exhibition: Agricultural Hall June 4 to July 11 1908* (London: London Missionary Society, 1908) front page. School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, CWM, Home Odds, Box 31. Reproduced from London Missionary Society/Council for World Mission Archives



On a less harrowing note, the exhibition's cinematograph showed *John Chinaman at Home*, an entertainment which would not have much differed from ethnographic films shown in secular theatres and music halls, following on from nineteenth-century fascinations with postcards and stereoscopic images of other cultures.

At the China Courts, a more sober approach was taken. There were representations of Chinese agriculture and trade, law, domestic interiors and codes of etiquette, entertainment, and religion, as well as displays of missionary activities such as schools, hospitals and preaching. However, as the *Manchester Guardian* observed, such displays were still open to interpretation as curious entertainments that might have the effect of reinforcing rather than dispelling popular stereotypes.<sup>50</sup> The Courts were supplemented by massed displays of Chinese objects, many loaned by parishioners in response to appeals in the *Exhibition Herald*, which gave examples of Chinese objects "of human interest"—a moustache comb, a "Boxer Presentation tablet", a back scratcher, and a bagpipe which was hoped to appeal to Scottish visitors (Figure 4).<sup>51</sup> This emphasis on the body and on cultural parallels suggests that the search for Chinese objects was also a search for personal identification with the Chinese in a more adult and museum-led version of the children's Sunday School activities. However, in the final analysis, it was quantity not quality which was the order of the day, resulting in tables, glass counters, shelves and screens loaded with deities, figures, straw hats, vases, weaponry, lanterns and hangings. Chinese objects were also

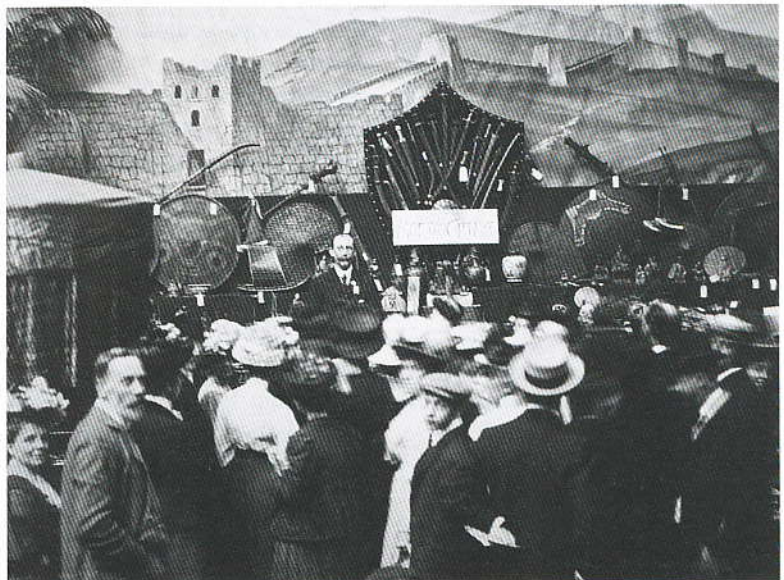
*/Exhibition: Official Handbook* (London: London Missionary Society, 1908), p.23.

<sup>48</sup> London Missionary Society, *The Orient in London: Daily Programme: Thursday June 18th* (London: London Missionary Society, 1908), pp.3–5.

<sup>49</sup> For a study of the Boxer Uprising's popular representation in Britain, see Frank Grey, "James Williamson's 'Composed Picture': Attack on a China Mission—Bluejackets to the Rescue (1900)," in *Celebrating 1895: The Centenary of Cinema*, ed. John Fullerton (Bradford: National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, 1995), pp.203–11. See also Colin MacKerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.66–70; Hevia, *English Lessons*, pp.282–314.

<sup>50</sup> "The Exhibition of Religions," in *Manchester Guardian*, 2 June 1908, p.6.

<sup>51</sup> A.J. Parnell, "Concerning the Collection of Curiosities," in *Exhibition Herald*, May 1908, p.12.



**Figure 4**

Stall representing North China, The Orient in London, 1908. School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, CWM, London Missionary Society, Home/General Photographs, File 10A. Reproduced from London Missionary Society/Council for World Mission Archives

<sup>52</sup> "Foreign Goods," in *The Exhibition Herald*, April 1908, p.13.

<sup>53</sup> London Missionary Society, *The Orient in London: Official Handbook*, p.79.

<sup>54</sup> Mission industries were seen to directly benefit the less fortunate overseas, for example by providing an income for Indian widows, or for Chinese workers experiencing social rejection as a result of converting to Christianity. The CEZMS operated mission industries between 1883 and 1917, organising work for the blind in China at Kucheng (now usually known as Gutian 古田), Nantai 南臺 and Fuzhou 福州. London Missionary Society, *The Helping Hand: Gifts for Mission Schools and Hospitals Overseas* (London: London Missionary Society, c. 1920), p.14; Rosemary Keen, "Catalogue of the Papers of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society 1872-1968" (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Library, 1987), p.6.

<sup>55</sup> "Africa and the East," *The Times*, 14 June 1909, p.8.

<sup>56</sup> "The Missionary Exhibition," *The Times*, 15 April 1909, p.5.

<sup>57</sup> "The Church Missionary Society's Exhibition," *The Times*, 31 May 1909, p.4.

<sup>58</sup> "Africa and the East," *The Times*, 8 June 1909, p.10.

available to purchase from the Foreign Goods Stall and formed part of the exhibition's attractions.<sup>52</sup> These included cloisonné ware, embroideries, brasswork, lacquerware, silverware and toys (under which category Chinese coinage and joss sticks were also placed).<sup>53</sup> Termed "native productions", these wares were marketed as distinct from products of the Industrial Mission Centres of South China, which sent drawn-thread work on grass-cloth.<sup>54</sup> China therefore provided missionary exhibitions with decorative backdrops, dramatic highlights, narcotics, danger, curiosities and souvenirs.

*The Orient in London* was certainly the largest missionary exhibition that had been held, but in its various attractions, in its representations of China and in its reliance on volunteer work, it was merely a scaled-up version of the exhibitions which had preceded it. *The Orient in London* was also clearly the model for a CMS exhibition called *Africa and the East* which was held the following year and which aimed to be larger still. This ran from 8 June to 3 July 1909 and was also held at the Agricultural Hall, Islington, presenting both a challenge and an opportunity to the home organisation department of the CMS, The Missionary Leaves Association. As with the LMS's *The Orient in London*, *Africa and the East* was the result of a centrally-organised exhibitions scheme. However, it also had to stand in direct comparison with *The Orient in London*, to the extent that Rev. Dr Wardlow, chief secretary of the LMS, publicly commented in an opening address that he had come to see how many of the LMS's mistakes had been avoided, and what new features the LMS might incorporate into their own exhibitions.<sup>55</sup> In response to this need to differentiate in what was clearly becoming a saturated market, the chief CMS exhibit was an African village which contained a compound of Yoruba craftsmen.<sup>56</sup> *Africa and the East* also sought to distinguish itself by advertising that 600 foreign costumes bought in "mission lands" had been imported for lecturers and stewards, including "a dozen gorgeous Chinese costumes" sent by the missionary girls' school in Fuzhou.<sup>57</sup> However, the central space of the Agricultural Hall was still dominated by China, represented precisely as before by a Chinese street, an opium den, and a Chinese guest room "over-shadowed by a towering pagoda".<sup>58</sup>

### *Africa and the East, 1924*

<sup>59</sup> "Africa and the East," *The Times*, 18 May 1922, p.7.

In May 1922, the CMS again staged *Africa and the East* at the Agricultural Hall, in a Britain which emerged from the First World War with no less of an emphasis on empire. *The Times* reflected:

The great object of the exhibition was that in the heart of London, the heart of the Empire, the heart of the business of the world, men should look out to the circumference of the earth ...<sup>59</sup>



This was the exhibition which then came to Brighton's Dome and Corn Exchange in 1924, a venue said to be big enough to reproduce "many of the most successful features" of the London exhibition.<sup>60</sup> Such was the overtly imperialistic profile of this exhibition, that it was promoted as a Christian foil to the huge British Empire Exhibition held at Wembley during 1924 and 1925. In the exhibition guide, direct contrasts were made between Wembley and Brighton with the conclusion that:

... the two are not rivals; they supplement one another. Say, rather, that they mutually interlock, for as in the very heart of the British Empire Exhibition witness is borne to the power and empire of Christ our Redeemer, so at Brighton the religious needs of the British Empire are remembered side by side with those of the child-races to whom that Empire is bringing law and order, peace and opportunity.<sup>61</sup>

Thus the exhibition at Brighton presented a gaze which was spread simultaneously inward and outward, oscillating between Christ's kingdom and the British empire, and between province, metropolis and colony.

Earlier exhibitions had presented a collection of essentially nineteenth-century stereotypes of China which stressed notions of an ancient civilisation and an extremely traditional society beset by the curse of opium, xenophobia and the "problems" of Confucianism. At the same time, in the wake of the Boxer Uprising, China seemed bound to change through Western pressure, and the establishment of the Chinese Republic in 1911 ushered in a new heyday for missionary work.<sup>62</sup> The changes taking place in early twentieth-century China, and the fact that China lay outside the British Empire, had in fact always been clearly acknowledged by the missionary societies. Exhibition guidebooks presented China as an awakening leviathan, on the brink of change and therefore in need of missionary guidance:

If India's claim on us is strong because it is part of the British Empire, the claim of China is strong because of the uniqueness of the present opportunity. There is a crisis in its history. The slumber of centuries is broken. China is awake!<sup>63</sup>

However, Brighton's *Africa and the East* was being staged at a moment of renewed crisis for the China missions in the face of increasing anti-Westernism and attacks on mission schools and colleges.<sup>64</sup> Opening addresses gave voice to concerns over a rise in power of "the yellow man", change in China, and Eastern nationalisms in general, and the exhibition was claimed to be an up-to-the-minute illustration of the missionary field.<sup>65</sup> General civil strife, student strikes, and a loss of respect for tradition and education were all cited as "shocks which [had] split asunder the immemorial empire", creating a social upheaval in which missionaries were needed to offer Christian comfort, even at their own peril.<sup>66</sup> Yet as the exhibition guidebook also explained, the rate of change in China was so fast that whatever was said about the Chinese would be contradicted

<sup>60</sup> *Hove Parish Magazine*, December 1923, p.6. *Africa and the East* was not the first missionary exhibition to have transferred from Islington's Agricultural Hall to Brighton's Dome, for example the *Palestine in Brighton* exhibition of October 1909 by the London Society for the Promoting of Christianity amongst Jews had previously been at Islington. "Palestine in Brighton," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, September 1909.

<sup>61</sup> Church Missionary Society, *Africa and the East*, p.33.

<sup>62</sup> Robert A. Bickers, "To Serve and Not to Rule": British Protestant Missionaries and Chinese Nationalism, 1928-1931," in *Missionary Encounters*, pp.214-16; Jane Hunter, *The Gospel of Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp.3-5.

<sup>63</sup> London Missionary Society, *The Orient in London: Official Handbook*, p.20.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.465.

<sup>65</sup> "Africa and the East," *Brighton Gazette*, 18 June 1924, p.5; "Africa and the East," *Brighton Gazette*, 7 June 1924, p.6.

<sup>66</sup> Church Missionary Society, *Africa and the East*, p.42.

<sup>67</sup> Church Missionary Society, *Africa and the East*, pp.19, 23, 42.

<sup>68</sup> "Africa and the East," *Brighton Gazette*, 7 June 1924, p.6; "Brighton and Mission Work," *Sussex Daily News*, 5 June 1924, p.5.

<sup>69</sup> "Our Missionary Wembley," p.12.

<sup>70</sup> Sarah Cheang, "The Ownership and Collection of Chinese Material Culture by Women in Britain, c. 1890 – c. 1935" (DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 2003), pp.102–13.

<sup>71</sup> A.C. Benson and Sir Lawrence Weaver, eds, *The Book of the Queen's Doll's House*, (London: Methuen & Co., 1924), Vol.1, pp.56, 112, 186; Mary Stewart-Wilson, *Queen Mary's Doll's House* (London: Bodley Head, 1988), p.116; Cheang, "The Ownership and Collection," pp.175–83.

in a couple of days; earlier notes of caution concerning China's potential for change became a lack of certainty so complete that the CMS's aims to properly represent modern China were drastically undermined. Ultimately, the 1924 exhibition displays failed to reflect notions of China as in the throes of a dynamic and progressive revolution, and fell back instead on the pre-1911 standard formats, formulated around pre-existing British collections of Chinese material culture. The shop and barber's of the Chinese Street were still "filled with interesting curiosities", and as in most earlier exhibitions, a Chinese Guest Room provided the backdrop for scenes of Chinese social customs to be enacted four times daily.<sup>67</sup>

The discrepancy between missionary rhetoric and missionary exhibition display was followed as a consequence by an equally gross mismatch between missionary intention and popular reaction to the exhibition. Far from connecting the Chinese Street with events in China, responses in the local press were turned towards the domestic. According to the *Brighton Gazette* and the *Sussex Daily News*, the Chinese Guest Room had "irresistible charm", the Japanese court also being described as "naturally" attractive, a reading of the exhibition which relies more upon aesthetic understandings of China and Japan within British taste cultures than upon new revelations about life in China and Japan.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, the Confucian Temple was judged by the *Brighton Herald* to have been the most "stylish" thing in the exhibition, "all in red and gold, with its inner shrine guarded by fearsome gilt dragons, and its impressive scrolls of Chinese characters", whereas the Buddhist temple was found to have been "much more elaborate and 'popular'".<sup>69</sup> These reproduction Chinese temples were intended as instructive examples of Chinese heathen culture. However, they were ultimately described in terms of the fashionable use of "Chinese" red and gold in Western *avant garde* interiors by a design elite during the 1920s, or in terms of popular "Chinese" design exemplified by theatrical productions such as *Chu Chin Chow* and the novels of Sax Rohmer.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, it is interesting to note that at the secular and metropolitan parallel of *Africa and the East* at Wembley, the displays of Chineseness were not merely confined to Hong Kong Street, but also occurred in the very popular exhibit of Queen Mary's Doll's House, which contained a miniaturised "Chinese" sitting-room as an exemplar of the Queen consort's personal taste and her husbanding of Chinese material culture.<sup>71</sup> At Brighton, the Chinese temples were understood as either fashionable or popular, and the artistic nature of the Japanese section was encapsulated by the presence of "a real Japanese artist ... painting cheerfully away at an elaborate design of a highly decorative character". The Indian temple, in which was displayed a "rampant" statue of Kali, was presented in direct contrast to these as something wholly undesirable, and the African "devil house" was reported to be like "an English summer house, a little untidy". Thus, within the missionary doll's house of continents and countries condensed and contained within two rooms, a sense of missionary work as



a foreign event involving foreign affairs was sacrificed to a wholesale domestication of the exhibition; a domestication in terms of a taming of the wild, in terms of a restricting of meaning to British cultural values, and in terms of a willingness to relate the exhibition displays to the home.

Such domiciliary understandings of the missionary exhibition may also signal the feminine nature of missionary work. Women and girls were the mainstay of missionary home support, fundraising in a broad and decentralised network of local committees and auxiliary organisations through activities such as collecting donations, selling needlework and circulating magazines.<sup>72</sup> The loving self-sacrifice of missionary endeavour, and the identification of "women's work" in the converting of women living in seclusion, also provided an area in which the wives of missionaries and single women could find employment and opportunities for travel and adventure.<sup>73</sup> It was reported that in 1924–25, of the CMS's 1,233 workers, 329 were male and 814 were female, so that both abroad in the field and at home in the missionary association, women were in a clear majority.<sup>74</sup> This female dominance was, however, confined to a supporting rather than central role, in which most publicly visible and officially recorded roles in exhibition organisation were taken by men, to the occlusion of most feminine participation.

There is yet a further meaning for the domestic left unconsidered, which is that of the family. Whatever the CMS's central educational motivations may have been, local exhibition organisers, participants and audiences had many reasons for giving up their time for study circles, for volunteering, and for patronising missionary events. Therefore, when we read that "strange sounds of eastern melodies often float across the exhibition, for St Saviour's Choral Society have specialized in this direction", it could be suggested that the missionary exhibition offered amusement and novelty as well as learning by doing for local communities. Along with the LMS's emphasis on participation, it should also be remembered that the entertainment value of *Africa and the East* had much in common with other local charity entertainments, and with popular entertainments in general. A bazaar held in October 1924 to raise money for the nearby Hove Hospital was given the title "The Lure of the Orient", and relied on exotic spectacle in order to generate interest:

It was very fitting that the opening of the bazaar on Tuesday should be signalled by a gong! When the sound died away, a typical Eastern melody was played on the organ by Mr Alfred W. Fisher, A.R.C.O., and the principals concerned in the ceremony made their way to the chairs in front of the Taj Mahal, followed by a long retinue of ladies and gentlemen in Oriental dresses. There were the long robes and glittering beads of India, the harem skirts of Turkey and Persia, the Kimonos of Japan, and characteristic garments of the other nations—in all, a remarkably bright and colourful procession, with a tall, pig-tailed Chinaman at the rear!<sup>75</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Cheang, "The Ownership and Collection," pp.48–55.

<sup>73</sup> Rosemary Seton, "Open Doors for Female Labourers!—Women Candidates of the London Missionary Society, 1878–1914," in *Missionary Encounters*, pp.50–69; Jennifer A. Morawiecki, "The Peculiar Mission of Christian Womanhood: The Selection and Preparation of Woman Missionaries of the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, 1880–1920" (DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1998), pp.43–4; Judith Rowbotham, "Soldiers of Christ? Images of Female Missionaries in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain: Issues of Heroism and Martyrdom," *Gender and History* 12.1 (2000): 82–106; Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy*, pp.47–72; Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (London: Virago, 1985), pp.11–16.

<sup>74</sup> "Progress of Missionary Work," *The Times*, 21 September 1925, p.15.

<sup>75</sup> "The Lure of the Orient," *Brighton Herald*, 25 October 1924, p.4.



<sup>76</sup> London Missionary Society, *Missionary Scenes* (London: London Missionary Society, 1927), pp.4, 6.

In fact, in an age when fancy-dress and amateur dramatics were a more common amusement, the LMS Loans Department found it necessary to place certain restrictions upon the hire of their materials. Play scripts, curios and costumes were only loaned if they were to be used in connection with missionary education, and if all money raised was not remitted to the LMS then loan charges would be doubled.<sup>76</sup>

It may therefore appear that *Africa and the East* appealed to many levels of popular imperialist sentiment and fascinations for the exotic, resulting in the promotion of images of a "traditional" China of orientalist fantasy above the CMS's own concerns for the position of missionary work in the New China of 1924. Yet missionary work had a special quality as a generator of images of China aimed at a broad working- and middle-class audience. Missionaries occupied a privileged position as representers of China; they truly were "on the spot", living in remote Chinese villages as well as at the Treaty Ports, and yet in constant communication with their supporters back in Britain. A closer study of the motivations of the community which produced Brighton's *Africa and the East* reveals a surprising degree of local and in some cases very personal identifications with new China which must also be considered as strong motivational forces in the staging of a missionary exhibition.

### *Brighton and China*

<sup>77</sup> Large missionary exhibitions held at the Brighton Dome and Corn Exchange between 1900 and 1924 were: *Missionary and Colonial Exhibition* (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel), 23–28 November 1900; *Palestine Exhibition*, 31 October–4 November 1905; *Palestine in Brighton Exhibition* (London Society for the Promotion of Christianity amongst Jews), 11–30 October 1909; *Great Missionary Exhibition* (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel), 19–26 November 1912; *Africa and the East* (Church Missionary Society), 1924.

<sup>78</sup> Church Missionary Society: Half yearly meeting at Brighton, Cuttings of Vicars of Brighton, scrapbook, Brighton History Centre, SB280 CUT; "Africa and the East," *Brighton Gazette*, 7 June 1924, p.6.

<sup>79</sup> "Africa and the East," *Brighton Gazette*, 7 June 1924, p.6.

Brighton's *Africa and the East* had been the first missionary exhibition to involve the entire diocese since 1903, drawing together around thirty Sussex churches across the county. However, other large-scale missionary exhibitions had occurred at regular intervals, and were tied not only to the supplying of money for missionary work, but also of new missionaries.<sup>77</sup> In 1887, a CMS exhibition was organised by the East Sussex Auxiliary on the occasion of the sailing for China of a local parishioner, Miss Mary Vaughan, which increased the Auxiliary's annual income by 120 pounds. The Chinese Courts of *Africa and the East* were "intimately associated with the name of Rev. A.K. Finnemore, formerly organising secretary for the Diocese of Chichester, and in more recent times with the work of the Rev. J.R. Wilson, who went out to China as a missionary from Newhaven".<sup>78</sup> Thus local exhibitions were closely associated with identifiable local individuals at work in the missionary field. At *Africa and the East's* opening ceremony, following remarks upon the preponderance of women in missionary support work and the need to stir up interest among laymen, the chairman remarked that:

The ladies needed no stimulating because they already had the work most warmly at heart. At present, China was particularly before their minds, because they were wondering what had happened to the besieged missionaries.<sup>79</sup>



The Chinese displays were therefore of interest because they represented the experiences and welfare of a known member of the community. For members of participating churches, these were not merely an exotic spectacle or tourism, for the raising of the profile of China in Brighton was also the raising of the profile of Brighton in China; the raising of money for the spiritual salvation of the Chinese, could also be the raising of money for the support of loved ones and associates.

One example of such a local investment in China can be found in the work of the Loaders, a family of very active participants in Brighton parish life who were particularly strong supporters of CMS and CEZMS work in China during the first half of the twentieth century. Widow Mrs Louisa Loader (1847–1931) and her large family lived close to the Brighton parish church of St Peter's from around 1888 until the mid 1930s.<sup>80</sup> Mrs Loader's Thursday afternoon Mother's Meetings raised money for the CEZMS, and parish records also show that of all local fundraisers, her daughters Mabel (b. 1873), Mary (b. 1883), Winifred (b. 1885), Ruth (b. 1887) and Constance (b. 1889) consistently donated the highest sums to the CMS through collecting boxes, concerts and sale stalls.<sup>81</sup> In 1900, Winifred Loader pioneered a scheme to send out a missionary periodical along with the parish magazine, and when the local missionary society was reformed in 1906, Winifred was named as magazine secretary. Mrs Loader was a committee member of this association, and from 1912 onwards served as assistant secretary. The Loaders also hosted a Missionary Association Library in their own home from which parishioners were invited to borrow at a cost of one penny per book, and when a CMS annual meeting showed a film about China, the tickets were sold by Mrs Loader.<sup>82</sup> During 1919, the Misses Loader's CMS boxes raised £5 6s. 1d., and Mrs Loader made £1 12s. 1d. from the selling of "Chinese work" and her Mother's Meetings raised nine shillings for the CEZMS.<sup>83</sup> This work was undertaken by the family alongside district visiting, Sunday School supervision, and fundraising for other church projects.

The primary reason for the Loaders' interest in the China missions must surely have been that two of Mrs Loader's other children, Kathleen Sophia Loader (1875–1945) and Rev. Edmund Turley Loader (b. 1881) were both missionaries in China. They worked for the CEZMS and the CMS respectively, Kathleen being stationed in Fujian province from 1901 until her death 1945, and her brother in Guangxi from 1915 until at least 1929. Such family ties may explain how Mrs Loader was able to obtain the "Chinese work" which she was selling between 1906 and 1925. It was also the reason why, when arrangements for *Africa and the East* were announced in the parish magazine, it was deemed "very appropriate" that St Peter's was one of the four churches responsible for the Chinese displays, Winifred Loader being in charge of volunteer coordination.<sup>84</sup>

Kathleen and Edmund Loader's work in China was clearly a source of great local and family pride, and they gave lectures in the town in 1908,

<sup>80</sup> 1891 Census RG12/806, folio 15; 1901 Census, RG 13/0923, folio 43; *Kelly's Directory of Brighton, Hove, Portslade and Neighbourhood 1932* (London: Kelly's Directories, 1932), p.710; *Pike's Brighton, Hove and District Blue Book and Local Directory for 1935–1936* (Brighton: The Robinson Printing Company, 1935), p.1026.

<sup>81</sup> The *Brighton Parish Magazine* gives a good indication of the Loaders' activities, including regular lists of their donations. This study is based on a survey of the parish magazine January 1900 to July 1926.

<sup>82</sup> "Missionary Association," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, October 1920; "C.M.S.," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, November 1911.

<sup>83</sup> "Collections," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, January 1920.

<sup>84</sup> "Missionary Exhibition," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, March 1924; "Africa and the East," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, February 1924.



<sup>85</sup> "Missionary Association," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, October 1908, January 1916, October 1921.

<sup>86</sup> Maughan, "Mighty England Do Good," pp.24-6.

<sup>87</sup> "Missionary Association," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, October 1908, January 1916.

<sup>88</sup> "A Chinese Lady Lecturer in Brighton," *Brighton Herald*, 21 June 1890; "Missionary Association," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, October 1911. Other CEZMS lectures on China were given by Miss Cooper in October 1900; Miss Ross in 1907; Miss Hodder in 1914; Miss Codrington in 1921 and Dr Marion Hook in November 1924.

<sup>89</sup> "St Wilfrid's Church and Mission," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, February 1911.

<sup>90</sup> "Missionary Association," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, March 1912.

<sup>91</sup> Watson, *Robert and Louisa Stewart*, pp.18-19, 166-67.

<sup>92</sup> Rev. W.J. Conybeare, "King's Messengers," in *The Church and the Empire: Addresses at the Summer School at Eastbourne*, 19 June to 16 June 1915 (London: Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, 1916), pp.161-62.

1915 and 1921 for which the appeal was twofold.<sup>85</sup> Firstly, missionaries on furlough could profit from the allure of first-hand experience with exotic spiritual destitution, and local missionary societies competed to obtain speakers who had recently returned from the field, whose fresh tales of the heathen would bring in a larger crowd.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, when a lecture by Kathleen Loader was advertised, a promised attraction was that she would be wearing Chinese dress, whilst her 1915 talk was reported as providing a "graphic description" of South China with very up-to-date material and slides.<sup>87</sup> However, China missionaries were fairly frequent lecturers in the town, particularly at CEZMS meetings held at the Royal Pavilion, where a real Chinese Christian convert, Mrs Ahok, drew an enormous crowd in 1890, and where the celebrated anti-footbinding campaigner Mrs Archibald Little gave an address in 1911.<sup>88</sup> These and other lecturers may have drawn a curious and/or dutiful crowd, but an enthusiastic response was guaranteed for news of the Loaders. According to parish magazines, when Rev. Llewellyn Lloyd mentioned the work of Kathleen Loader during his own 1911 lecture on Fujian missionary work, the audience spontaneously burst into "a hearty applause".<sup>89</sup> Similarly, in 1912 a Missionary Association lecture on CEZMS work was rendered especially interesting to the audience by the showing of illustrations by a "Chinese gentleman" which had been made at the request of Kathleen Loader "from our own parish".<sup>90</sup> Secondly, therefore, local missionaries provided a local resonance with China; they created a reason to be interested in China, offering a personal connection with people and places otherwise alien and distant.

As we have seen in Sunday School and exhibition performance and role-play, a personal experience with "China" was thought to be a highly effective method of soliciting sympathy for the Chinese and support for the missions. Sponsorship of individuals was another way in which a personal involvement could be achieved, and if readers of missionary propaganda were not inspired to become missionaries themselves, then they were at least urged to send money to support Chinese biblewomen, native women who received a wage from the mission to evangelise, and who would therefore be the readers' substitutes in China. In a CMS publication, an example was given of a woman in England who, having attended a lecture, decided to give six pounds a year to support a named biblewoman as her representative in China.<sup>91</sup> This sponsor was sent regular reports on her biblewoman's progress, and was further invited to have a "whole village of her own to care for and pray for" in a religious and feminine version of the "white man's burden".

Such encouragement to lovingly "possess" Chinese people also occurred in the pages of the parish magazine, testifying to both the effectiveness of missionary fundraising methods and the important role played by the Loaders in the work of bringing Chinese and English communities together at a time when missionary fundraising advice was proposing that, in charitable causes, "children prefer something concrete, like a baby".<sup>92</sup> In



1907, a letter was published from Kathleen Loader in Fuzhou, explaining the needs of Chinese girls rescued from infanticide and giving the history of a baby, Soi-Nguk (Felicity), who was being supported at a CEZMS orphanage by weekly collections at St Wilfrid's Sunday School.<sup>93</sup> The magazine commented: "We are pleased to see our children taking such an interest in their child, and we hope to send her a little present (probably a doll) for Christmas." Constance Loader announced the sale of marrow jam at four pence per pound, the proceeds of which would go to the Chinese Foundling Fund, and the Sunday School children continued to raise four pounds annually. However, Soi-Nguk was to die aged only two, and another St Wilfrid's Chinese Foundling was quickly sought, preferably "a child who will be able to write an occasional letter to her English supporters and thus make her existence more real to those interested in her".<sup>94</sup> The following month, in April 1909, the "adoption" of Huo-ke was announced, a seven year old who had rather significantly been found as a new born on Christmas Day 1901. Perhaps in response to certain difficulties with the baby Soi-Nguk, this older child would be taught to read and write in English, and a photograph was expected to be hung in the school room "so that her supporters seeing her will be able to pray more intelligently for this little Chinese foundling, remembering to ask God to make her grow up a strong, healthy, Christian girl and woman".<sup>95</sup> By October, Huo-ke had still not learnt to write, but Kathleen Loader, shortly to return to China from furlough, promised to go and see the girl in order to send back news.<sup>96</sup>

Further examples can be found which show that the Loaders of St Peter's parish were far from unique. In February 1912, the highlight of the Brighton and Hove Boys' Brigade missionary rally was a film and lecture on missionary work in China by Rev. J.B. Ost, at which images of the four cots in Hankou 漢口 Hospital sponsored by the Boys' Brigade were applauded loudly.<sup>97</sup> The *Brighton Herald* reported that six local Boys' Brigade officers were also currently missionaries in China, and that the brigade supported a total of 22 beds in China: "Brighton, said Mr Ost, is very closely linked with China, and he trusted that the links would become more numerous as the years go by. One of the missionaries there is a lady representing St. Mark's Church ... ."

This intersection of local, imperial and missionary pride was continued in the large Society for the Propagation of the Gospel exhibition of November 1912, where "China and Japan and Corea unfold[ed] their splendours in rapid succession".<sup>98</sup> At opening speeches, the Vicar of Brighton reflected that the exhibition had occupied the parishes of the Rural Deanery for over a year, and stated: "It is a great Imperial work in which we are engaged".<sup>99</sup> The Mayor of Brighton declared that "the consequences of the exhibition were not likely to be merely local: they were likely to be very far spreading indeed."<sup>100</sup> For the *Brighton Herald*, the exhibition represented "Christianity in its Imperial, or perhaps it would be truer to say, in its universal

<sup>93</sup> "St Wilfrid's Adopted Child," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, November 1907.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, March 1909.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, April 1909.

<sup>96</sup> "St Wilfrid's Church and Mission," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, October 1909.

<sup>97</sup> "Life in China," *Brighton Herald*, 24 February 1912, p.11.

<sup>98</sup> "The Call of Missions," *Brighton Herald*, 23 November 1912, p.10.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> "Missionary Association," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, May 1913.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., June 1913.

<sup>104</sup> Philip Harling, "The Centrality of Locality: The Local State, Local Democracy, and Local Consciousness in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 9.2 (2004): 216–34, at pp.227–29.

aspect. As such, it makes an irresistible appeal to the imagination in its illustration of a mighty force binding the peoples of the earth in one great brotherhood."<sup>101</sup> In St Peter's parish, the missionary study groups which had been formed to educate the 1,000 stewards of the exhibition were continued into 1913 on the subject of China, whose new republic was perceived as providing a "stimulating call" leading to a "highly charged" "Missionary atmosphere".<sup>102</sup> In May 1913 a "very crowded Parish Room" watched slides of Shandong province and heard how "the rapid development of the country, the westernisation of national ideas and ideals, the passing away of old national prejudices and superstitions ... provide[d] excellent opportunities and an imperative call for Mission work."<sup>103</sup>

Philip Harling's review essay on the primacy of the local in Victorian and Edwardian society argues that for the working classes, local issues overshadowed the importance of empire.<sup>104</sup> However, in the case of raising support for the China missions, it would seem that missionary societies were able to exploit the centrality of localism, and especially a sense of community, in order to make China relevant, using the familiar language of popular imperialism that included exhibitions and illustrated lectures in its vocabulary. It does seem highly probable that the Brighton communities were fundraising for their missionary, and not for the Chinese heathen, and that a sense of empire was being naturalised but not internalised. However, through the donation of money and material objects for sale or use in the field, and even through the provision of family members to work and perhaps die in China, the community could have a philanthropic awareness of China that was highly specific and at times very poignant.

Whilst it is clear that China had what might be termed a "living presence" amongst Brighton's church congregations, the question of whether Brighton had a presence in Chinese societies is an intriguing one. The Chinese foundling may have been "concrete" to her supporters in Brighton, but evidence is still to be found that she ever did write to them, creating a Brighton community in the Fuzhou imaginary. According to missionary literature, the children of mission orphanages, the pupils of mission schools, Chinese biblewomen and the patients in mission hospitals were made well aware of their sponsors, since this formed an essential part of a maternalistic bond between helpless heathen and Christian benefactor. Women's auxiliaries in Britain were also encouraged to knit and sew things for use at the mission stations abroad, assisted by useful booklets such as *What Shall We Make?*, *More Things to Make*, *Missionary Working Parties* and *What Shall We Do?* These publications, drawn up by centralised "Wants" departments, could be extremely specific in matters of taste and style as well as materials and construction. Not only were women expected to make a range of Western medical items, such as nurses' aprons, poultices and ward linen, but they were also given instructions for foreign clothing, such as loincloths. *Practical Hints for*



*Home Workers* stipulated that quilts for China must be of turkey twill or striped red, not patchwork, and that dolls (to be given as prizes) should only have dark hair and must not be dressed in white, the Chinese colour of mourning (Figure 5).<sup>105</sup>

Thus it is possible that dolls, aprons and quilts made in Brighton had a presence in China as objects that attested to the existence of a loving network of Christian supporters, but only if they could evade the centralised "Wants" system which effectively erased the stamp of the local and the familial. Furthermore, Chinese Christian Mrs Ahok, who made such an impression on her tour of Britain, even lived in a Western-style house in China and acted as Matron in a CEZMS girls' school. Yet her interest in Christianity is likely to have been connected to the Chinese Self Strengthening movement which stressed Westernisation as a means of revitalising and empowering modern China. Thus the Anglo-Chinese college in Fuzhou, which was founded with Mr Ahok's money, was named after him rather than any Western missionaries, organisations or other supporting communities.<sup>106</sup> It would therefore seem that the degree of reciprocity which may have occurred in these exchanges between Chinese and British communities is further obscured by the extremely pertinent issues of Chinese nationalism, in addition to the unequal nature of centre/periphery relationships where the local struggles for recognition and representation at the national level.

<sup>105</sup> London Missionary Society, *Practical Hints for Home Workers: List of Articles Needed in Mission Hospitals and Schools* (London: London Missionary Society, c. 1920). See also London Missionary Society, *The Helping Hand*.

<sup>106</sup> Thanks to Ryan Dunch for information concerning the Ahoks. See also Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of Modern China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).



**Figure 5**

*Sale of handicraft work at The Orient in London, 1908—the two women kneeling at the front are holding Chinese dolls. School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London, CWM, London Missionary Society, Home/General Photographs, File 10A. Reproduced from London Missionary Society/Council for World Mission Archives*

### Conclusion

<sup>107</sup> "Rev. E.T. Loader and Miss Kathleen Loader," *Brighton Parish Magazine*, September 1925.

<sup>108</sup> Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Vol. 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994), pp.4–11.

<sup>109</sup> "Our Missionary Wembley".

Brighton's "Missionary Wembley" was a doubling of empire in which local pride and local imperialism, popular orientalism and missionary propaganda produced a complexity of highly charged meanings around "China", in which, perhaps surprisingly, it is the most provincial material positioned at the periphery of the historical archive that can be most closely related to contemporary events in China. In September 1925, the parish magazine published a letter from Edmund Loader, dated 4 and 5 July 1925, describing how the unrest in China had resulted in his own recall from Liuzhou 柳州 to Beihai 北海 whilst all other missionaries were returning to Hong Kong. He continued:

Miss Kathleen Loader has had an even more thrilling time. She and another lady missionary had started for their summer holiday early in July, and had put up at an inn for one night on their journey. They were aroused in the middle of the night by the arrival of a band of Chinese soldiers who questioned them and then departed. They pushed on next day in the pouring rain and before arriving at their journey's end encountered a typhoon!<sup>107</sup>

Thus first-hand, personal accounts of the very real perils of 1920s China were couched in the most up-beat of terms and delivered to the doorsteps of Brighton's parishioners as an exciting but reassuring account of a friend's foreign adventure. The tale of Miss Loader's "thrilling time", located near the bottom of history's knowledge hierarchies, mixes the mundane with the extraordinary, creating a feminised trivia out of Chinese crisis, and confounding separations between the dangerous and the domestic within the enfolding arms of a missionary-spirited community.<sup>108</sup> Commenting on the title of *Africa and the East*, a Brighton newspaper observed "... the 'East' is a very comprehensive term. If you only go in the right direction, you can make it include most of the world. If India is east of Africa, America is east of China".<sup>109</sup> In this twofold understanding of the "East", the world was encircled, rather than divided. Parish boundaries were stretched to the provinces of China, and China was condensed within the missionary empire and read through a web of British cultural values and myriad local allegiances.

Sarah Cheang

Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies  
London College of Fashion  
University of the Arts, London  
s.cheang@fashion.arts.ac.uk