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Mid-eighteenth century Europe adopted a widespread cult of Chinoiserie. This both stimulated and was driven by an increasing amount of imported objects from China, and a mystified perception of the East held by many people at the time. There were various attempts by some English and Irish authors to construct eastern regions as real and specific cultures in the second half of the eighteenth century. One such example is Thomas Percy's first translation of a Chinese novel (*Hau Kiou Choaan; or, The Pleasing History*) in English in 1761. From this point, English views about the East became increasingly paradoxical, wavering between imaginative constructions of the eastern countries as otherworldly, and notions of the East as fundamentally similar to England.

Peter Kitson argues that Romantic Sinology (which he believes to span between 1760 and 1840) enacted 'a moment of historical watershed [...] in which competing views of China begin the uneven process of hardening and homogenizing'.¹ Such a description partly encapsulates the various types of literary representations of China in the eighteenth century. While Thomas Percy roughly represents China as a place not only inferior to England but also incomprehensible to English culture in his edition of *Hau Kiou Choaan*, Oliver Goldsmith tentatively appeals to a notion of cosmopolitan fellowship through his depiction of the experience and feelings of his Chinese protagonist in England in *The Citizen of the World* (1762). The process of 'hardening and homogenizing' was also evident historically in the

¹ Peter Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760-1840*, 15.

relationship between China and England, especially in relation to trade. While the large amount of imported goods (e.g. porcelain and tea) from China in the eighteenth century stimulated the cult of Chinoiserie in England, it also led to a trade deficit in the English market, as the Chinese government banned the trade of most European goods in their own country. The uneven condition in English and Chinese trade markets eventually resulted in the outbreak of the Opium War (1839-42), as English traders started to export illegally large amounts of opium to China in order to alleviate their trade deficit.² The history of trade and diplomacy between England and China suggests that China was not as alien and mystified as depicted in most literary texts of this period. As this study will show, such a discrepancy leads to a discussion about the evasion of the real China in eighteenth-century English literature.

This work will show how the competing views of China express entrenched tensions between different viewpoints, and that the picture of Romantic Sinology is not just black and white. This study will first discuss the idea of the 'mystified' East by focusing on oriental tales and fables of the eighteenth century, and then look at the various attempts to present a real China by English and Irish authors from the mid-eighteenth century, such as Horace Walpole, Thomas Percy and Oliver Goldsmith. The division between the Orient and the Occident seems to be at once sharpened and challenged, as eighteenth-century English and Irish writers explore and reflect upon the perceived proper knowledge of the eastern world.

Most writings about the East in eighteenth-century Europe were fanciful owing to the large amount of oriental fables and tales available to readers at the time; many writers invoked a China of their minds, and employed their own ideas of China, as a result of their lack of knowledge about this distant country. Well-known oriental and philosophical tales, such as Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) and John Hawkesworth's *Almorán and Hamet*

² 'Opium Wars', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, last accessed 14 Sep. 2014, <<http://www.britannica.com>>.

(1761), describe the East without much attention to or interest in accuracy and detail. For instance, in *Rasselas*, the place where the Abyssinian prince Rasselas and his siblings live is cast in a mysterious light by the description of being ‘a spacious valley [...] surrounded on every side by mountains’, of which the only entrance is ‘a cavern that passed under a rock’.³ Yet the reader knows little more about the culture or customs of Abyssinia after reading the story. The tale – like most oriental tales of the period – focuses on the development of the protagonists’ knowledge of the world rather than specific knowledge of a culture. The series of adventures taken by Rasselas and his sister in the world outside their palace (the valley filled with a hackneyed presence of luxury, entertainment and joy) both stimulate their curiosity and ambition, and bring about loss and misery.

The East is often associated with signs of backwardness in eighteenth-century English culture; however, the fable of the East can be seen as a reflection of eastern sophistication notwithstanding its apparent simplicity. In Johnson’s 1755 dictionary, ‘fable’ is defined as ‘a feigned story intended to enforce some moral precept’.⁴ A typical oriental fable normally involves the central character undergoing an educational experience, which sometimes contrasts oriental and occidental cultures or norms, in order to promote simple moral truths. Interconnection between the Orient and the Occident was developed by the oriental tales, which reflects the fables’ realistic means as a serious form of interaction with the modern world.

Ros Ballaster argues that the oriental tale demonstrates the ‘universality of the human mind’, and explores the same preoccupations as the realist novels that emerged in Europe in

3 Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas and Other Tales, The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson (Volume XVI)*, 8.

4 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English language on Cd-Rom the First and Fourth Editions*, ed. Anne McDermott.

the eighteenth century.⁵ For Ballaster, both literary genres are capable of displaying mentalities that resonate with circumstances in real life. She believes that the oriental fable plays an important role in the development of the western world: ‘If we started with a sense of the “backwardness” of the oriental fable for eighteenth-century readers, we should conclude with our own “reverse ethnography” which recognizes that it could also look forward’.⁶ In the oriental tale, the East acts as a kind of analogue to the West because of its assumed difference, namely, its capacity to explain truth in real life by fictional and imaginative means. For example, in Oliver Goldsmith’s *Asem, the Man-Hater* (1765), the financially distressed protagonist, Asem, feels resentful of the ingratitude of his friends and acquaintances whom he generously supported when he was affluent. Just when he is going to end his own life in hatred and despair of the world he inhabits, he is spirited by a prophet into a world inhabited by men ‘who never do wrong’.⁷ However, Asem is disappointed with what he sees in this seemingly perfect world. In order to prohibit the generation of all kinds of vice, there is no art, wisdom or friendship, thus little chance for social intercourse or mutual assistance. At the end of the tale, Asem realizes that his native world, which incorporates a balance of vice and virtue, is better than the purely rational universe designed by the prophet Alla. He therefore goes back to his native town, and works hard to have his fortune soon recovered. In this tale, the central character realizes that elements which provoke countervailing vice and virtue – such as commerce, friendship and luxury – are central to human happiness. Asem is restored to active engagement with his own world (the ‘real’ world), and his story demonstrates the power of the oriental ‘other’ to represent cosmopolitan

5 Ros Ballaster, ‘The Lure of the East: The Oriental and Philosophical Tale in Eighteenth-Century England’ (Oxford University Podcast), last accessed 14 Sep. 2014, <<http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk>>.

6 Ballaster, *Fables of the East*, 12.

7 Oliver Goldsmith, *The Man-Hater, The Life of Oliver Goldsmith, with Selections from His Writings (Volume II)*, ed. Washington Irving, 246-254, last accessed 14 Sep. 2014, *Google Books*, <<http://books.google.co.uk>>, 249.

forms of human relationships.

However, notwithstanding their potential to demonstrate sophisticated and useful ideas, oriental fables and tales were understood at least by some people in eighteenth-century England as only a light form of entertainment. In Letter XXIX ('A description of a club of authors') in *The Citizen of the World*, Lien Chi speaks of a Mr. Tibs in a writing club in London, and recounts how Tibs is regarded as an author with 'a very *useful hand*' as he writes 'receipts for the bite of a mad dog, and throws off an eastern tale to perfection'.⁸ It is likely that the fictional editor of the letters (Goldsmith) is here expressing a kind of general sarcasm towards oriental stories as being irrelevant (if not also a little backward) to the literary trend of his own culture and of his own literary ambitions.

Thomas Percy's edition of *Hau Kiou Choaan*, one of the first studies in mid-eighteenth century England that targeted China as a specific culture rather than an abstract notion, was also a fanciful work in its own way. Percy attempts to engage with the 'reality' of Chinese civilization and culture through studying an original Chinese novel, which was a unique approach in the context of eighteenth-century English interpretations of the literature of the East. However, Percy's analytical approach was incompetent, because he makes generalizations about China without solid evidence, and heavily relies upon his subjective judgement. For example, at the point when the hero, Tieh-chung-u, refuses to accept the suggestion of Shuey-ping-sin's (heroine) uncle that he marry her, Percy writes in his footnote to this incident that 'where the women in general are held *so cheap*, we must not wonder that the men should be so backward to acknowledge a soft and respectful passion for any one of them', and carries on to ask the reader to 'bear the above remarks in mind throughout this and

⁸ Oliver Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World, Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith (Volume II)*, ed. Arthur Friedman, 126.

some of the following chapters'.⁹ Percy's footnote here is heavily misleading, which may be caused by his lack of understanding of the social and cultural realities of the Chinese feudal system. Tieh-chung-u's refusal to marry the woman he loves at her uncle's suggestion should not be treated as a 'backward' action. In the context of the novel, Shuey-ping-sin has previously brought the poisoned Tieh-chung-u back to her own house to be looked after – an action in breach of restrictions to male-female relationships in feudal China. As a result, Tieh-chung-u has to protect the reputation of the woman he loves and wait until their love is formally sanctioned by their parents as well as the monarchy. Tieh-chung-u's refusal to countenance the suggestion of marrying the heroine is not caused by his being 'backward to acknowledge' his passion, but by his thoughtfulness and deep love for the woman whom he would like to marry in a feudal society where one must manifest vigilance towards social conventions.

Various English writers of the period represented English women as fortunate and free by comparison with women in Catholic Continental countries and in the East. Men paid tribute to women's talents through their works. For example, Richard Samuel's painting *The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain* (1779) portrays a group of renowned contemporary women, each of whom excelled in her chosen artistic field (Elizabeth Carter, Anna Letitia Barbauld, Angelika Kauffmann, Elizabeth Linley, Catharine Macaulay, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Griffith, Hannah More, and Charlotte Lennox).¹⁰ Their portrait is seen by Elizabeth Eger as a celebration of 'the relationship between the arts along the lines of the classical model of a *harmonious society*', and as a representation of 'the moment when English women as a group first gained acceptance as important contributors to the artistic world'.¹¹

⁹ *Hau Kiou Chooan; or, The Pleasing History [Volume II]* (London: R. & J. Dodsley, 1761), last accessed 14 Sep. 2014, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>>, 129, Italics added.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Eger, 'Representing Culture: *The Nine Living Muses*', *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1700-1830*, ed. E. Eger [et al.] 107.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Italics added.

David Hume extols the influence of women in promoting civilised behaviour, by commenting that ‘the Delicacy of [the female] Sex puts every one on his Guard, lest he give Offence by any Breach of Decency’.¹² John Millar in *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1778) suggests that women’s condition is a reflection of civilised progress:

[the condition of women] is naturally improved by every circumstance which tends to create more attention to the pleasures of sex, and increase the value of those occupations that are suited to the female character; by the cultivation of the arts of life; by the advancement of opulence, and by the gradual refinement of taste and manners.¹³

In *Hau Kiou Chooan*, Percy’s description of Chinese women’s position as ‘so cheap’ clearly reflects his awareness of the supposedly superior condition of women of his own culture – at least in ideological terms.

The kind of caution and restriction manifested in the courtship of Shuey-ping-sin and Tieh-chung-u is not altogether unfamiliar in the context of relationships between men and women in English society. Although some English women in the eighteenth century enjoyed a certain amount of liberty, such as learning and unprecedented access to books,¹⁴ they were still heavily constrained by conventional expectations of female modesty. In Eliza Haywood’s *Love in Excess* (1719-1720), while the upper-class heiress, Alovisa, claims to be under no superior authority (due to the death of her father) and therefore free from ‘the censures of the world’, she nonetheless struggles between passion and her sense of honour, when she thinks

12 David Hume, 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', *Essays, Moral and Political (Volume II)* (Edinburgh, 1742), last accessed 14 Sep. 2014, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>>, 93.

13 John Millar, *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (London, 1779), last accessed 14 Sep. 2014, *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco>>, 69.

14 Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, 259.

of offering her love to Count D'elmont.¹⁵ Moreover, when D'elmont finds his true love in Melliora, he also becomes vigilant in protecting the reputation and honour of his beloved, just like the Chinese hero of *Hau Kiou Choaan*.

Percy's heavy editorial injunction throughout the novel obstructs the readers' sympathy with the novel's main characters, especially the heroine, Shuey-ping-sin. Shuey-ping-sin is portrayed in the original story as a talented and progressive young woman who rebels against forced marriage and women's inferior status in society. Women's rebellion against society's conventional expectations of them is not an unfamiliar theme to English readers of the eighteenth century. A number of well-known English novels published in the first half of the eighteenth century, such as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1748), demonstrate the same preoccupation about women's place in society as that explored in *Hau Kiou Choaan*. Similar to *Shuey-ping-sin*, the heroines of *Pamela* and *Clarissa* find themselves forced to please men (or marry them) against their wishes, owing to society's conventional take on filial duty, gender and class. These heroines endeavour to defend their virtue as well as the right to control their own will. Despite *Pamela*'s controversial reception in the eighteenth century, namely, the debate between Pamelists (who admire the heroine's defence of virtue against unjust forces, especially her master's licentious advances) and Anti-Pamelists (who take the heroine's protection of virtue as artificial and insincere), the subtitle of this novel – 'Virtue Rewarded' – indicates that the author intends to construct his heroine in a positive light. The fact that at least one major group of readers of the period consisted of Pamelists suggests that eighteenth-century English readers were ready to pay tribute to women's resistance to unequal treatment. In this light, Percy's indication that Chinese women are incapable of winning high esteem becomes questionable. While Percy clearly reads *Hau Kiou Choaan* from within his own eighteenth-century cultural context, he does not seem to

15 Eliza Haywood, *Love in Excess*, ed. David Oakleaf, 62.

identify similarities between circumstances in this novel with those in his own culture, and therefore cannot draw connections between England and China. Even though Percy's focus on the exploration of Chinese culture is based upon real (rather than abstract) circumstances that are comparable to the life of his own people, his fundamental attitude towards China is little different from that held by most of his contemporaries, which is driven by a wilful imagination and ignorance towards (or, at times, evasion of) this specific culture.

Horace Walpole, who likewise seeks to represent a 'real' China as opposed to the portrayal of China in oriental tales and the superficial learning of travel-writing in this period, has also been criticized for his footnotes which 'assert authenticity rather than demonstrate it', and for his authorial interventions which 'expose rather than dispel ignorance', in *A Letter from Xo Ho: A Chinese Philosopher at London, to His Friend Lien Chi at Peking* (1757).¹⁶ The reason why knowledge about China is represented as so ambiguous in eighteenth-century oriental writings is complicated: genuine ignorance of a particular author provokes misunderstanding, whereas an author's performed ignorance indicates a degree of national anxiety beneath deliberate evasion and forgetting of the 'real' China.

Kitson describes eighteenth-century Britain and China as both 'mirror and inversion of each other',¹⁷ which highlights the idea of sameness within difference, as objects which are directly opposite ('inversion') become mirror-like and thus mutually enforcing. In his pamphlet *A Letter from Xo Ho*, Horace Walpole depicts Xo Ho's view of the superiority of Chinese culture, which contradicts the self-acclaimed cultural sovereignty perceived by most English people at the time. For example, Walpole's Chinese protagonist not only attacks the factionalism of eighteenth-century English politics, but also asserts that the Confucian rationalism of China is superior to the irrational pursuit of a 'scapegoat' in England, thus

¹⁶ Ros Ballaster, *Fables of the East: Selected Tales 1662-1785*, ed. R. Ballaster, 129.

¹⁷ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 3.

concluding that ‘Reason in China is not Reason in England’.¹⁸ Walpole here uses China as a ‘mirror’ for England, not only to underline how the same cultural anxieties manifested by the Chinese philosopher are similar to a British fear of eastern influence, but also manages to reveal the cultural and political problems of his own country through the perspective of the other (reverse ethnography) – a more comfortable position from which to discuss the controversial issues of his own nation.

Likewise, Oliver Goldsmith also adopts reverse ethnography in his collection of pseudo-letters, *The Citizen of the World*. In Letter XXX, the protagonist and cultural observer Lien Chi Altangi describes the purpose of his letters to Fum Hoam (recipient of most of the letters): ‘in them you will find rather a minute detail of English peculiarities, than a general picture of their manners or disposition’.¹⁹ The way Lien Chi explores English culture is clearly supported by Goldsmith’s own idea of adequate cultural observation. Trying to familiarize the Chinese to the English through this work, the author – or the ‘editor’ as he would rather position himself – criticizes the distorted understanding of the Chinese held by the English people, and indicates that with a proper knowledge of China one may find a lot more common ground between the two cultures. In order for such proper knowledge to be established, Lien Chi suggests that merchants and missionaries from the West – people who travel the most into the eastern parts of the world – are no real cultural ambassadors, because they do not acquire cultural insights into the distant regions they set foot on. The ‘proper person’ qualified for genuine and effective cultural discovery should be

a man of a philosophical turn [...] neither swollen with pride, nor hardened by prejudice, neither wedded to one particular system, nor instructed only in one

18 Ballaster, *Fables of the East*, 128.

19 Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World*, 126-127.

particular science [...] his mind should be tinctured with miscellaneous knowledge, and his manners humanized by an intercourse with men.²⁰

Through the persona of a Chinese philosopher, Goldsmith is able to reinforce his ambition of just and adequate cultural observation.

Through his protagonist, Goldsmith provides a range of comic description, cultural satire, and moral observation, which engage with social, cultural and religious practices in eighteenth-century England. In a letter entitled ‘The Behaviour of the Congregation in St Paul’s Church at Prayers’, Lien Chi describes his first experience at a Christian communal service in England. Lien Chi points out the ‘remissness’ of behaviour among almost all of the worshippers he has observed in the service, and shows his disappointment at the want of sincerity in the religious practice:

I now looked round me as directed, but saw nothing of that fervent devotion [...] one of the worshippers appeared to be ogling the company through a glass; another was fervent, not in addresses to Heaven, but to his mistress; a third whispered; a fourth took snuff; and the priest himself, in a drowsy tone, read over the duties of the day.²¹

A stranger to the culture he now experiences, Lien Chi, in a way, is able to observe things around him more sharply and clearly than English people whose views are limited or constrained by the very culture of which they are part.

Treated as a kind of cultural ‘other’ outside of his native land, Goldsmith identifies with Lien Chi in observing a culture other than his own. The problems and

²⁰ Goldsmith, Letter CVIII, *Citizen of the World*, 421.

²¹ Goldsmith, Letter XLI, *Citizen of the World*, 175.

misunderstandings faced by Lien Chi in the foreign land mirror Goldsmith's own predicaments as an Irish writer who was making a living in England. While still undertaking his medical studies in Edinburgh in the early 1750s, Goldsmith wrote to his uncle that he was regarded by the Duke of Hamilton, with whom he had dinner for a period, 'more as a *jester* than as a companion'.²² Goldsmith's time in Scotland was one of the first occasions that was to anticipate his role as cultural observer in his later writings. Joseph Lennon argues that, by constructing the character of a Chinese philosopher, Goldsmith is able to 'write back' to England while avoiding the 'uncomfortable persona' of the Irishman.²³ Lennon's postcolonial perspective emphasises the fact that England was expanding its colonial possessions at this time. Goldsmith levels his own critique of England's colonial power in Letter XXV of *The Citizen of the World*. In this letter, Lien Chi tells the story of the history of the kingdom of Lao, and attributes its decline from prosperity to its colonial expansion: 'had they known that extending empire is often diminishing power [...] that there is a wide difference between a conquering and a flourishing empire'.²⁴ In the preface to this work, the editor describes how 'he resemble[s] one of those solitary animals, that has been forced from its forest to gratify human curiosity'.²⁵ The animal-human contrast not only highlights the inferiority and wildness of the 'colonized', but also demonstrates a barrier between barbarity and civilization. Goldsmith identifies himself with the powerless (i.e. the 'colonized'), but in the meantime is also critical about (and dissatisfied with) his own position. By constructing and speaking through a Chinese protagonist, Goldsmith creates further distance – both culturally and geographically – between England and himself, which enables him to observe and comment sharply on English culture with even less restraint.

22 James Watt, "'The Indigent Philosopher': Oliver Goldsmith", *A Companion to Irish Literature*, ed. Julia M. Wright, 212.

23 Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History*, 130.

24 Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World*, 108.

25 *Ibid.*, 15.

Goldsmith criticizes the shallow and distorted English understanding of China supposedly caused by the cult of Chinoiserie, and seeks to demonstrate through this work the need for a more balanced relationship between England and China and an objective view of Chinese civilization and culture. In the preface to this work, the fictional editor (Goldsmith) describes that when his Chinese philosopher Lien Chi first arrives in England, he is received by the local people with astonishment and confusion, as they see him ‘talk and reason just as [they] do’.²⁶ Also in the preface, Goldsmith presents his cosmopolitan view of human community by suggesting that the ‘distinctions among mankind’ should not be defined by geographical locations but by virtue and knowledge: ‘*savages* of the most opposite climates have all but one character of improvidence and rapacity; and *tutored nations*, however separate, make use of the very same methods to procure refined enjoyment’.²⁷

However, even in Goldsmith, there is a tendency to revert to Chinoiserie stereotypes, like a number of later Romantic-period writers who wrote about China, such as Robert Southey, Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt. In the letter entitled ‘Happiness Lost, by Seeking after Refinement. The Chinese Philosopher’s Disgraces’ (Letter VI), Goldsmith presents a despot through the image of the Chinese emperor who, offended by Lien Chi’s leaving China, has seized his wife and daughter and appropriated them to his use. The image of the despot is one of the central motifs in eighteenth-century oriental literature. For example, the collection of widely disseminated oriental tales – *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* – represents in the character of the Persian King [Shahryār](#) a merciless ruler who marries a wife each night only to execute her the next morning (until he meets Scheherazade, the storyteller of the tales).²⁸ By expressing a critique of despotism through various kinds of oppression and confinement

²⁶ Ibid., 13.

²⁷ Ibid., 14.

²⁸ Mack, Robert (ed.), *Arabian Nights Entertainments*, World’s Classics.

in oriental cultures, these works often seek to demonstrate a contrast between oriental authoritarianism and a supposed occidental liberty. The extent of oriental despotism is sometimes exaggerated in order to highlight this contrast.

For example, in James Gillray's satire, *The Reception of the Diplomatique and his Suite at the court of Peking* (1792), the Chinese Qianlong emperor is portrayed as a despot who is indolent, proud and unsympathetic.²⁹ Historical sources show that this fictional representation of the emperor is only partly true, however. Gillray in his work expresses his (and many Britons') anger at the Chinese imperial ceremony of prostration ('kowtowing'), and at the demand made by the Chinese court that foreign visitors should carry out the full ceremony of kowtowing in front of the emperor. Historically, the two Chinese emperors who were successively on the throne during the period of the Macartney and Amherst embassies (British embassies to China led respectively by George Macartney and William Amherst, in 1792-94 and 1816) were willing to make compromises with the British ambassadors on adjusting the manner of the ceremony, such as allowing the ambassadors to kneel upon one knee only.³⁰ Kitson observes that 'Gillray's satire of the British embassy presents no new meaningful knowledge about China but rather propagates an established oriental stereotyping far removed from [...] aspirations to a new form of ethnographical precision'.³¹ Gillray's representation of the Qianlong emperor as a stereotypical oriental despot heavily generalizes the emperor's rule: the satire chooses to focus just on the emperor's authoritarian qualities and leave out all the other dimensions. Despite certain authoritarian policies imposed by the emperor, Qianlong's reign as a whole contributed hugely to the military, cultural and political development of Qing China.

²⁹ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 158.

³⁰ Ibid., 156-157.

³¹ Ibid., 158.

In *Forging Romantic China*, Kitson points out a British Romantic paradox of China, in which knowledge about China as represented in works written by English writers is at once ubiquitous and indirect. He identifies the ‘surprising forgettings, avoidances, and evasions of Romantic-period writing when related to Chinese subjects’.³² Kitson observes that there were many ‘other documents’ available about China in the eighteenth century, such as the substantial archive about China formed from two hundred years of Jesuit scholarship and the numerous first-hand accounts generated by the Macartney and Amherst embassies. He argues that despite the existence of such sources about Chinese history, English writers of the British Romantic period (which is demarcated generously by Kitson in his study as c.1760 – c.1840) persist in the chinoiserie trope of the reading of China.³³ For example, Kitson suggests that Thomas Manning, a pre-eminent expert on China in the Romantic period, treats China as more of a ‘psychological obsession’ than ‘a field of learning’.³⁴ The ‘evasion and forgetting’ of the ‘real’ China derived from a complex anxiety from the British perspective, which was both rooted in Britain’s self-claimed cultural sovereignty and the result of political and commercial communication between the two nations. Just as the British ambassadors resisted the ceremony of kowtowing in the Chinese imperial court, and the nation at once welcomed Chinese imported objects and feared China’s growing imperial power, English writers in this period struggled between attraction and uncertainty in their attitudes towards this nation.

Despite his concluding *The Citizen of the World* with the marriage of Hingpo (Lien Chi’s son) and Zelis (niece of Lien Chi’s best English friend), thus closing the story on a point of hopeful anticipation of the cultural harmony between China and England, Goldsmith, at times, also expresses uncertainty about his own ideal of the ‘world citizen’. For example,

³² Ibid., 153.

³³ Ibid., 153, 169.

³⁴ Ibid., 176.

the Man in Black's name is never formally revealed in this story despite him being the best English friend of Lien Chi. In this respect, the Man In Black does not seem to be treated as an individual, but as a symbol, or representation, of a desired English attitude towards the Chinese. The choice of name in itself signals a lack of real balance and understanding between the two cultures, as the individual is not treated as an independent being, but generalized as a kind of cultural association. In the light of Goldsmith's use of reverse ethnography, this example also demonstrates the fact that China was yet for most English people in the eighteenth century an ambiguous culture. Although Goldsmith might be trying to make the argument that there is such a thing as a universal code of values, he might himself have encountered doubts about that, or felt the necessity to explore this topic further, in the process of making that claim. In this way, the author is just like the fictional editor personified in the preface to this work, who hesitates upon the riverbank and wonders whether he should walk on the frozen river to the literature fair with his works about 'Chinese morality'.³⁵

35 Goldsmith, *Citizen of the World*, 15.

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