The first major cultural study to focus exclusively on this decisive period in modern British–Chinese relations. Based on extensive archival investigations, Peter J. Kitson shows how British knowledge of China was constructed from the writings and translations of a diverse range of missionaries, diplomats, travelers, traders, and literary men and women during the Romantic period. The new perceptions of China that it gave rise to were mediated via a dynamic print culture to a diverse range of poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists, and reviewers, including Jane Austen, Thomas Percy, William Jones, S. T. Coleridge, George Colman, Robert Southey, Charles Lamb, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, and others, informing new British understandings and imaginings of China on the eve of the Opium War of 1839–42. Kitson aims to restore China to its true global presence in our understandings of the culture and literature of Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Peter J. Kitson is Professor of English at the University of East Anglia. He is the author of Romantic Literature, Race and Colonial Encounter (2007).
This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those “great national events” that were “almost daily taking place”: the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion, and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of comment or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of “literature” and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

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FORGING ROMANTIC CHINA

Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760–1840

PETER J. KITSON

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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I would like to thank the Trustees of the Leverhulme Trust for their generous support in awarding me a major research fellowship for two years to allow me to undertake the researching and writing of this book. The University of Dundee also granted me generous research leave to see this book through to completion. I would also like to thank both the British Academy and the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland for a series of Fellowships allowing me to undertake the primary research for this book. The Academy and the Huntington Library also provided me with generous support to spend a month in the Huntington researching the Larpent Collection of play scripts for Chapter 8 of this study. I would like to thank the staff of the following libraries for allowing me to use their collections and assisting me in my researches: the British Library; the National Library of Scotland; the Huntington Library; the library of SOAS, University of London; the Angus Library, Oxford; the Linnaean Society; St. Andrews University Library; and the University of Dundee. I would also like to thank the following colleagues who have read parts of this book or contributed in other ways to its completion with their generous help and advice: Nicholas Roe, Michael O’Neill, Tim Fulford, Michael Franklin, Marilyn Gaull, Neil Chambers, Peter Cochran, David Worrall, Bruce Graver, Frederick Burwick, Jeff Cox, Daniel White, and Zeng Li. The manuscript was improved considerably thanks to the thoughtful comments of the two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press, and Jim Chandler the Series Editor. I would like to thank Linda Bree for her continued encouragement and support, and Anna Bond for seeing this work through the press. Earlier versions of parts of two chapters of this book appeared in *The Wordsworth Circle*, Cian Duffy, ed., *Romantic Adaptations* (Ashgate, 2013), and Seamus Perry, David Vallins, and Kaz Oishi, eds., *Coleridge, Romanticism, and the Orient* (Continuum, 2013). I am grateful to the publishers for permission to use this material.
Forging Romantic China is a cultural study focusing on one of the most decisive periods in the history of modern British and Chinese relations. It argues that Qing China was a central, though problematic, referent in the culture and literature of what we know of as the British Romantic period, demarcated generously in this study as c. 1760–c. 1840, and that this crucial presence has been oddly evaded in much of the literary writing of the period and its criticism. The idea of China, as Eric Hayot, David Porter, and Chi-ming Yang have reminded us, was central to the making of modernity and the formation of the modern Western human self. A. O. Lovejoy, many years ago, put forward the thesis that one of the key origins of Romanticism signified a Chinese source, the preference for a form of wildness and irregularity in the eighteenth-century British landscape garden. Other scholars of British literature and culture in the long eighteenth century, such as Robert Markley and Ros Ballaster, have addressed such issues placing British cultural responses to China in the context of a sinocentric global economy up until around 1800. Such criticism has demonstrated the sustained allure that Chinese commodities, tea, silk, porcelain, furniture, lacquerware, and Chinese designs in gardening and interior decoration held throughout the long eighteenth century. Yet this British desire for Chinese forms and products was always balanced with either anxiety or an ambivalence for what David Porter describes as “an aesthetic monstrosity” underpinning this allure. This study argues that the Chinese contribution to “Romanticism” or the literature of the British Romantic period was in fact substantial and just as important as the later, more discussed, nineteenth-century influence of Chinese aesthetics on European aestheticism and modernism.

This study is cognate with such recent exemplary scholarship, but it attempts to address the specific question of how British knowledge of
China, its cultures, products, and its peoples, was constructed or forged from the writings and translations of a diverse range of missionaries, diplomats, travelers, East India Company employees, and literary personalities in certain key sites, notably Bengal, Canton (Guangzhou), and Malacca. Such knowledge was constructed from texts, cultural commodities, and physical artifacts, including Chinese export art and porcelain as well as plants and flowers, governed by long-established (and some newer) global flows of trade and existing networks of collaboration. The new perceptions and understandings of China that this body of knowledge gave rise to were mediated via a dynamic print and visual culture to a diverse range of poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists, and reviewers, including Jane Austen, S. T. Coleridge, Charles Lamb, the Wordsworths, and others, and subsequently informed British understandings and imaginings of China on the eve of the first Opium War of 1839–42. Forging Romantic China thus aims to restore China as a topos as well as a geographical place to its truly global presence in our understandings of the culture and literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to speculate about the kind of cultural landscape this assertion presents.

China is predicted to overtake the US and become the world’s leading economy by 2016. In recent years, commentators and scholars in the West have become increasingly engaged in a whole range of enquiry, historical, political, economic, linguistic, and cultural, relating to China’s global presence and its relationship with the West. China looms large in the consciousness of the twenty-first century but it also loomed quite as large in the minds of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Political scientists such as Martin Jacques and William A. Callahan have persuasively argued for the crucial importance of the period of what is known by the Chinese as “the Century of National Humiliation” (bainian guochi) (1840–1940) to their understandings of their history and their proper role and place in the modern world. \(^6\) The period prior to this century, c. 1760–1842, is thus the crucial watershed in which many modern British attitudes to China were established and explored. It was during this time that a new view of China was established in the anglophone world by the development of a body of work, that I provisionally describe as a “Romantic Sinology,” which provided the underpinning for Britain’s policies towards China and for the imaginings of Romantic period writers and artists about China, prior to the Opium Wars. This book explores this crucial process, examining a substantial number of textual and cultural artifacts that created a form of new British knowledge about China that enabled (and sometimes critiqued) British power in the “Far East.”
**Forging Romantic China** thus seeks to write a new study of the cultural history of Romantic-period anglophone representation of, and exchange with, the Qing empire, informed by those changes in our understanding occasioned by current historical and postcolonial scholarship on the “East,” that has adopting a “China-centered” approach. This school of historical enquiry has rejected the conventional historical notion of a rich but stationary and largely unchanging Qing China confronted by a dynamic and modern Britain, a narrative largely inspired by a partial reading and misunderstanding of the economic analysis of Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) as mediated by the key accounts of the British Macartney embassy to China of 1792–94 and later developed by J. S. Mill, Hegel, Marx, and Weber. I will thus attempt to bring together several strands of recent scholarship combining literary studies of Romantic-period colonialism and imperialism with new research on the history and culture of the late Qing empire. Combining Linda Colley’s influential use of “forge” in the context of the creation of national identity to symbolize a process of both construction and fabrication, and Lionel Jensen’s notion of “manufacturing,” this study seeks to demonstrate the processes by which Britons and their collaborators constructed a “new” idea of China in the period and the ways in which this process was inflected by their own increasingly national concerns. This book also argues that such knowledge was a part of a process of “co-constitution” and intercultural encounter by which both Georgian Britain and Qing China, mirrors and inversions of each other, were formed in an already “globalized” eighteenth-century world order. Rather than imposing a fully formed notion of British science and modernity on Southeast Asia, Britain was at this crucial time forging its own sense of national identity informed by its encounters with other cultures such as China’s. This study argues that Qing China is an under-explored and crucial, possibly the crucial, informing context for this process of identity formation.

I am thus primarily concerned with the cultural transmission of knowledge about China to Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Adapting Mary Louise Pratt’s concept of “transculturation” by which Europeans transmit indigenous non-European knowledge from the “contact zone” and produce “European knowledge infiltrated by non-European ones,” this study argues that such European understandings were never simply a colonial mirror or inversion of the Western self, but neither were they the objective empirical enquiries that they claimed. In this regard the new body of translations of key Chinese texts assumes a major significance. Though still largely ignored in recent influential
theorizations of world literature, Chinese writings exerted a substantial cultural impact in the nineteenth century. Such translations are usually dismissed by modern sinologists because they lack scholarly accuracy and were arrived at before the Chinese language was professionally mastered. Conventionally, the major British Sinologist and first professor of Chinese at Oxford in 1876, James Legge, is perceived as the first such person to deserve serious and extensive critical scrutiny. Yet there was a range of Britons in the period, including Thomas Percy, William Jones, George Thomas Staunton, Robert Morrison, William Milne, John Francis Davis, and Walter Henry Medhurst, who were involved in producing key translations of Chinese writings and accounts of Chinese customs. My study is not concerned with the accuracy or authenticity of these translated texts per se, but rather with the “knowledge” that they contained about China, and the ways in which that knowledge was acquired, constructed, framed, and then mediated and transmitted to early nineteenth-century Britain in both orientalist institutional and more popular forms.

Translation studies have, in recent years, moved markedly in the direction of emphasizing the complex processes of the transmission of texts and ideas from one culture to another, rather than focusing on the formal importance of accurate translation. Translation, in this context, becomes less of a linguistic activity, and more of a cultural practice. Lydia H. Liu, for instance, poses the crucial questions about how “signs and meaning travel from place to place in global circulations,” and whether or not “translatability” is a value in itself “or a product of repeated exchange and negotiation in the translation process.” Translation from and into Chinese involves extra levels of complexity due to the ideogrammatic and non-alphabetical nature of the language. The essays recently collected in *Sinographies: Writing China* (2008) have explored such issues, identifying the “distortions wrought by translation,” but not presuming to correct such “misperceptions by asserting that their own perceptions are authentic.” The editors conclude that “the intricacies of the relationship between various written Chinas—the texts—and the nation/culture known simply as ‘China’—their main shared context—are so complex as to be nearly unspeakable.” The vexed question as to whether there is something known as a “Chinese aesthetic” that resists translation is also a complicating factor. Although the visual aesthetic properties of the Chinese character are not, to my knowledge, exploited by Romantic-period writers and translators in the ways that they would later be by Ezra Pound and other modernist writers, the status of the character as picture and word
was often commented upon. Yet, by and large, the period’s concern with Chinese aesthetics is confined to the visual, to paintings, ceramic designs, architecture, and landscapes, rather than the aesthetic properties of the Chinese character. Mindful of the extraordinary complexity of this linguistic intercultural encounter, the conclusions I draw regarding the knowledge transmitted by the translations of Romantic Sinology remain hesitant, provisional, but I hope suggestive for other enquirers.

From the perspective of Said’s powerful theorization of orientalism, all such translations would be viewed as a merely a “textual attitude” and part of a colonialist discourse by which source texts are appropriated and anything authentically Chinese lost. We know that the English East India Company in Bengal was able to facilitate and reinforce its rule by translating and interpreting classical Indian texts, and that the orientalist William Jones, a Bengal judge, was the leading figure in this process. Yet like Liu, Lawrence Venuti has shown how problematic the act of translation can be, arguing that at least two forms of translation strategy exist, one that seeks to “domesticate” the translated text and the other to “foreignize it.” The intercultural encounter between Britain and China in the nineteenth century is thus extremely complex and sophisticated, incapable of being constrained within conventional orientalist boundaries of “East” and “West” and “self” and “other.” Increasingly, Chinese cultural critics are moving beyond such horizons. Wang Ning, in a series of publications, has argued that there is no longer any need to decry the contemporary Western impact on Chinese culture, or to accentuate those familiar, well-recorded orientalist misunderstandings perpetuated by Western sinology. He argues that such phenomena constitute the necessary stages in the process of the integration of Chinese culture into a global culture, in which Chinese literature and philosophy will become more accessible around the globe. Wang’s insight is that, as “Oriental culture and Occidental culture usually influence each other, when one of these is in the state of temporary forcefulness, it might well influence the other, but even so, such influence is mutual and largely depends on the other’s dynamic and creative reception.” Similarly Xiaomei Chen, in her challenging study of Occidentalism in post-Mao China, argues that this appropriation of Western discourse – what she calls “Occidentalism” – can have a politically and ideologically liberating effect on contemporary non-Western cultures. Chen refutes the connections that Said established between European power and orientalism, claiming that European representations of China mean very different things in different contexts. She argues that an official form of “occidentalism” has been used as a
justification for political repression in China, whereas an anti-official version can be used to validate resistance against such oppression.

Wang and Chen are both largely concerned with modern China and the impact of contemporary Western culture and ideas, yet their differing critiques of orientalism in a twenty-first-century global context indicate that what is important are the ways in which Chinese and British ideas have been received in different historical and political contexts, and that their reception was never singular or homogenous. This is especially so if we are discussing the response of a mixed and large audience to a nineteenth-century play about China as I do in the final chapter of this study. I will attempt to negotiate the complex cross-cultural encounter between Qing China and Georgian Britain in a way that respects the shifting allegiances of power and authority (economic, military, and cultural) between the two empires in the period restoring, I hope, a sense of the complexity to that fascinating cultural encounter, fashioned as it was from multiple poles of engagement and recognition produced from on-the-ground collaborations and negotiations between Chinese, British, and other peoples in the multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan cities of Southeast Asia: Canton, Calcutta, Malacca, Penang, and Singapore.

**Sinicizing Romantic-period writing**

According to the OED the term “sinology” was not coined until 1816, and scholars often date the birth of the modern academic discipline to the establishment of Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat as the first professor of Chinese at the Collège de France in 1814 and the subsequent publication of his *Elémens de la grammaire chinoise* of 1822. Abel-Rémusat and his successor, Stanislas Julien, were both sophisticated academics. This book, however, argues that British or Romantic Sinology begins at least as early as the 1760s, a decade marked by the publication of Thomas Percy’s key writings on China and the direct translation of the first Chinese novel form (*xiaoshuo*) into English or any other European language. It thus covers roughly eighty years, to the abolition of the East India Company’s monopoly at Canton of the China trade in 1833 (in many ways the crucial date) and the eve of the Opium Wars in 1839. In this respect it is coincident with the Romantic period in British letters and culture, especially if one accepts Percy as an important precursor of Romantic literary concerns. The period includes the arrival of the Macartney embassy to China in 1793 and its important successor led by Lord Amherst in 1816, as well as of the first British Protestant missionary, Robert Morrison, in Canton.
in 1807. It contains the establishment of the first institution dedicated to the study and teaching of the Chinese language, the Anglo-Chinese College, at Malacca in 1818, as well as the founding of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1823. The first English chairs in Chinese were established at the new University of London in 1837 (Samuel Kidd) and at King’s College London in 1845 (Samuel Turner Fearon). During this period key translations of Chinese writings appeared, including the first direct translation of the Confucian *Lunyu* or *Analects* (1809) and the first complete translation of the classic Four Books (*Sishu*) (1828).

One of the key historical events during this period was the ending of the Company’s monopoly of the China trade in 1833, which marked a watershed in British attitudes to a China that henceforth resisted newly invigorated attempts to impose Western ideologies of free trade and national sovereignty upon it. The Treaty of Nanjing (1842), which concluded the first Opium War, marked an end of the old “Canton system” where that city was the only and crucial point of contact with mainland China, and the removal, by the second-generation missionary James Legge, of the Anglo-Chinese College from Malacca to Hong Kong Island, one of five new treaty ports granted in 1843. In 1841 the American Nathan Dunn’s “Ten Thousand Chinese Things,” the first major exhibition about China, opened in London. Post-1840 the study and representation of China would change significantly and attitudes would harden in the run-up to the second Opium War, and the notorious looting of the Summer Palace in 1860. Probably, the most significant event in this period occurred in 1792–94 when the British government sent its first diplomatic embassy to Qing China in an attempt to open formal relations between the two world empires, and regularize the substantially expanding trade in tea, porcelain, and other commodities. Famously, the Chinese required payment in silver bullion for their desirable teas, occasioning a substantial specie crisis for the Company. This flow of silver bullion from the West to the East was later reversed when the Company began to harvest opium in Bengal and sell this on to independent, private traders (“country traders”) with China. Brief though its acquaintance with China was, the Macartney embassy generated a mass of textual commentary that signaled a definitive move away from the earlier, Jesuit-inspired writing on China to a new British or “Romantic Sinology.”

Though extremely prominent in historical scholarship, Britain’s problematic relationship with the China of the Qing empire in the early nineteenth century itself has received comparatively little recent attention in studies of British literature and culture, certainly in the comparison with
the masses of scholarship and enquiry devoted to the cultural impact of the British in India, their participation in the transatlantic slave trade and plantation slavery, and their response to Islam at this time. The urgent issue of the expanding presence of China in the global economy now obliges contemporary enquiry to delve back into the historical, intellectual, and cultural origins of the relationship between Britain and China and to reassess the complex ways in which Britain interacted with the Qing empire.\textsuperscript{23}

This book is a contribution to the current critical debate exploring this crucial historical moment and the literary culture of the Romantic period’s engagement with China. Though there are now a series of exemplary publications by Porter, Markley, Ballaster, Yang, Hayot, Keevak, and Chang on Britain’s cultural relationship with China in the longer historical view, the British Romantic period has been somewhat neglected.\textsuperscript{24} Similarly in contrast to the substantial amount of excellent and authoritative scholarship on Jesuit sinology in the early modern period, there is still no authoritative and standard history of sinology in Britain, though several important accounts exist, notably T. H. Barrett’s \textit{Singular Listlessness: A Short History of Chinese Books and British Scholars} (1989). There are still no major studies of Britain’s early sinologists, prior to Legge, and though Robert Morrison has attracted the attentions of a recent biographer, it is largely his religious and missionary activity in China which remains the focus and rationale of such study.\textsuperscript{25}

Four recent sophisticated studies have defined the field in which \textit{Forging Romantic China} attempts to intervene. Robert Markley’s \textit{The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730} (2006); David Porter’s \textit{The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England} (2010); Chi-ming Yang’s \textit{Performing China, Virtue, Commerce, and Orientalism in Eighteenth-century England 1660–1760} (2010); and Elizabeth Hope Chang’s \textit{Britain’s Chinese Eye} (2010). Markley’s, Porter’s, and Yang’s studies are concerned primarily with the earlier eighteenth century. Markley’s study considers British writing between 1600 and 1730 and places this writing in the context of a world economy dominated by China and India up until around 1800. British writing, notably Defoe’s \textit{Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe}, is thus engaged in a series of compensatory strategies to address European marginalization.\textsuperscript{26} The methodological focus of \textit{Forging Romantic China} is thus cognate with that of Markley but my study examines the crucial later period when British confidence is increasing and Qing power on the wane. Porter’s study also has significant overlaps with \textit{Forging Romantic China} in terms of his pioneering scholarship on Thomas Percy (in many
ways a terminus for his study rather than the beginning of mine). His earlier *Ideographia* (2001) likewise contained a groundbreaking reading of the discourse of sovereignty and economic liberalism relating to the Macartney embassy to China in the 1790s to which all scholars remain indebted. In a major collection of essays “China and the making of Global Modernity” for *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2010), edited by Markley, Porter further argues for the importance of “historical cosmopolitanism” in global early modernity, questioning “deep-seated assumptions of exemplarity,” re-situating England “within an expansively global context,” and counseling against reliance on “sterile orientalist clichés concerning the stagnant traditionalism and uniformity of societies that missed the fast train to modernity.”27

Yang’s major study of the representation of China in literature, theater, and material culture between 1660 and 1760 has contributed much to our understanding of this European construction of the ambivalent idea of China, especially as regards the spectacular performance of China. This crucial work is focused on certain key areas, notably major seventeenth- and eighteenth-century plays by Elkanah Settle and Arthur Murphy, arguing that China functions in this period as a key exemplar for Europeans. Yang argues convincingly that China mediated between conflicting British attitudes to virtue, commerce, and luxury. It was at the same time both a “symbol of imperial excess” and of “Confucian moderation,” alternately a threat and yet also an aspiration.28 A key text for Yang’s thesis is Arthur Murphy’s drama *The Orphan of China* (1756), itself a redacted adaptation of a thirteenth-century Yuan dynasty play *Zhao shi guer*, which I discuss in the final chapter of this book as a crucial intertext for the transmission of the idea of China well into the Romantic period. Murphy’s *Orphan* emerges from such accounts as an important text for the study of China in world literature and one that should be taught and read.29

Yang’s study is informed by Eric Hayot’s brilliant *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (2009). Taking his cue from Adam Smith’s famous use, in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), of the hypothetical example of an earthquake that destroys the empire of China to explore notions of moral distance and the limitations of the European sensibility and sympathy, Hayot demonstrates how China and Chinese people frequently function in Western discourse as philosophical or literary examples or anecdotes. Smith argued that such an event would produce little disturbance in the European sympathetic imagination, as China was geographically too distant to arouse empathy with its people’s
plight. China is thus at the very heart of the construction of the modern, liberal, and humane European self, as an exemplar, a limit case, or horizon of otherness against which to measure the borders of “human” sympathy. This otherness has a peculiar quality distinct from the “generic Oriental otherness under whose aegis it sometimes appears.” Hayot, like Markley and Porter, convincingly links this particular Chinese otherness to the pronounced economic and technological advantages that China held over Europe well into the nineteenth century, especially in the manufacture of porcelain, production of tea, and other desirable commodities: the dismissal of Chinese legitimacy and the forgetting of its massive impact is at least partly an effect of the dramatic rise of European power after Waterloo. Crucially, he argues, the “sympathetic exchange,” which can to be generated between British readers of the sufferings of the Chinese, can also be understood within the parameters of the literal exchange of goods and commodities between Britain and China; “a kind of aggressive affective response … in which British impotence at the level of the material good was assuaged by Chinese impotence at the level of the emotional one.”³⁰ Hayot reminds us that the exchanges between Britain and China are wide ranging and that an affective and aesthetic economy is as of fundamental an importance as the literal one of goods and commodities.

This forgetting or evasion of China is a major theme of this book. In The Chinese Taste, Porter, like Markley and Hayot, explores this “instrumental amnesia” that deliberately occludes “rival claimants to exemplarity” and the memory of “a more truly cosmopolitan early modern past.”³¹ For example, a common trope of the Romantic-period literary response to China, witnessed in Baillie, Southey, Leigh Hunt, and Lamb, is that Britons knew very little about this isolated and exclusive empire, apart from what they could glean from visual representations on teacups and porcelain ware. Yet a substantial archive about China existed, formed from two hundred years of sophisticated Jesuit scholarship in several English translations. In addition, the Macartney and Amherst embassies generated numerous new “first-hand” accounts. Missionaries and traders were now resident in China, sending back narratives of their experiences of the country and translations of its literature and philosophy. Yet some Britons persisted in reading China through an older chinoiserie-inspired aesthetic with Leigh Hunt, for example, decrying the “Chinese deformities” and monstrosities of the newly designed Grand Salon of Drury Lane Theatre as late as 1817.

China was not remote for many Romantic-period writers in the simple sense that they had family and friends closely involved in trade with the
empire who visited, worked there, and came back. Canton was as much a “Romantic” as an Enlightenment city, encountered by many Britons in the service of the Navy or the East India Company. Jane Austen’s brother, Frank, served in the Royal Navy and acted as an agent for the Company as captain of the *St. Albans* in 1809–10 at Canton. Charles Lamb worked, as did Thomas Love Peacock, for the Company in London for some thirty-three years, and Lamb’s friend and correspondent, Thomas Manning, traveled to Canton in 1807, becoming the first Briton to visit the Tibetan capital of Lhasa in 1811. Along with Morrison and Davis, Manning accompanied Amherst’s embassy to China in 1816–17. William and Dorothy Wordsworth’s elder brother John traded at Canton on several voyages on the *Earl of Abergavenny* as midshipman, then captain. Thomas De Quincey’s son, Horace, died aged twenty-two of a fever contracted during the Opium Wars with China in 1842. In different ways the literary activities of the Wordsworths, Lamb, and, more marginally, Jane Austen, were materially benefited by connections with the China trade.

The reasons that many such writers have a tendency to evade or forget China in their writings are extremely complex and not reducible to an easy summary. Porter’s notion of “instrumental amnesia” argues that Britons effaced the rival Chinese claim to exemplarity. The construction of “Englishness” that emerges from this encounter with China “is neither pure nor hybrid in any straightforward sense, but rather is constituted paradoxically through a simultaneous appropriation of and denial of ‘Chineseness’ and an instrumental amnesia with respect to some of the decidedly non-English origins of British aesthetic culture.”32 Both he and Chang focus on material objects and consumer cultures, while Liu tracks this process through an extended discussion of the Chinese garden on British culture. As Markley has argued, about the earlier period, when faced with the economic power of China and the superiority of its products, Britons adopted compensatory strategies to obviate such anxieties, thus focusing on an economic analysis of Far Eastern trade and its effects on Swift, Milton, and Defoe.

By the 1820s, however, the British had substantially reversed their unfavorable trade deficit with China by the expedient of boosting the export of opium and selling it to the country traders who illegally exported it to China in return for silver. This historical process has been wonderfully evoked in Amitav Ghosh’s *Ibis* trilogy of novels, set in Bengal and Canton in the lead-up to the first Opium War, which brings alive the key networks between Bengal, Canton, and Britain, and the trades in tea, opium, and Chinese plants that are a key feature of this book.33 In
many ways both our works are responding to a shared set of contemporary cultural interests and imperatives. As discussed in Chapter 5, the British could not discover any legitimate item of trade or product that was sufficiently attractive to the Chinese to exchange in large quantities for tea. Though increasingly convinced of the quality of their products and frustrated by Chinese indifference to them, it was only the expedient of enabling and prosecuting an illegal opium trade with China that allowed the British to trade on favorable terms. Ultimately, in 1839, it was military force with modern artillery and fast and mobile steam warships that opened China to European trade, not the quality or cheapness of Britain’s commodities or the universality of its science. Certainly, the superiority of Chinese products, China’s long-standing cultural prestige, and the dirty business of the opium trade and subsequent war must have coalesced in British minds to render China a hard topos to face directly. As the former Superintendent of Trade at Canton and a future governor of Hong Kong, Sir John Francis Davis, put it, “the pernicious drug, sold to the Chinese, has exceeded in market value the wholesome leaf that has been purchased from them; and the balance of the trade has been paid to us in silver” (my italics). Such conflicted positions are common in Romantic Sinology. Combined with the pragmatic difficulty of mastering the Chinese language, China’s complex and multiple religious systems, and the universalist claims of Confucian thinking, the ambivalent view of China encouraged a sideways approach in addressing the subject.

Forging Romantic China thus seeks to explore those evasions and forgettings in addition to the very real presence of China in the writing of this crucial period. It seeks to counter the conventional paradigm of the diffusion of European modernity from the center to the periphery across a range of discourses, including that of the scientific. As will be explained below, the conceptual model that this study engages with is that of the global flows of commodities, goods, artifacts, and texts in which post-colonial notions of a European center and Asian periphery do not operate in any meaningful way.

My study covers, in eight chapters, the subjects of British Romantic-period missionary writing, accounts of travelers and diplomats, histories and general descriptions, and the growth of British sinology, political satire, popular drama, literary representations, English-language translations of Chinese literature, and scientific knowledge and exchange. Although I attempt to discuss the major areas of cultural production, this study does not aspire to be comprehensive cultural history, and familiar areas, such as De Quincey’s unrepresentative imaginative encounter with China in
the Confessions of an English Opium Eater (1821), already heavily discussed (perhaps fetishized), is eschewed in favor of less familiar, more engaging, and more representative meetings. De Quincey’s evocation of China in the opium dreams passages of his Confessions (1821) has been unfairly adduced as metonymic of Romantic-period attitudes to China, and his succeeding bellicose essays on China and the Opium Wars primarily relate to a later set of attitudes beyond those of Romantic Sinology.35

ROMANTIC SINOLOGY

My thesis accepts the conventional view that the representation of the Qing empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suffered a staggering reversal of fortune from admiration to degradation, largely as a result of the combined onslaught of missionary writing, economic theory, Oriental scholarship, and colonial conflict, as well as from an increasingly racialized conception of human difference.36 I argue that in the period roughly from the 1760s to the 1830s, a distinct body or form of Oriental scholarship, differentiated from early modern Jesuit writing on China, is “manufactured” from the writings of a diverse assortment of British China experts. I provisionally describe this body of knowledge as “Romantic Sinology,” a wide-ranging, often conflicting, body of writing created by a group of contemporary British commentators on China, that claims validation by a personal knowledge of China and Southeast Asia through participation in the Macartney and Amherst embassies, the British East India Company trade at Canton, and Baptist and London Missionary Society activity. I use the term “sinology” loosely to describe the work of those Britons who are considered as “China experts” by their contemporaries and who devote serious attention and time to the study of China and its culture, and who publish texts which are believed to be authoritative by some in the period, however they may be viewed later. I am not, however, using the term in its modern acceptance exclusively to designate an institutionalized body of professional academics with excellent levels of proficiency in written and spoken Chinese. Nor am I concerned with the accuracy or authenticity of these commentators on China, but more with the kinds of knowledge transferred to Britain and the processes of cultural transmission.

I thus argue that this British sinology originates in the late eighteenth century with Thomas Percy and William Jones, rather than at the more usually affirmed starting point, the establishment of James Legge as the first chair of Chinese at Oxford University in 1876. Arthur Murphy’s The
Orphan of China also represents a key transitional text. I do wish, however, to maintain distinction between Britons who could read and translate Chinese texts with some degree of accuracy, and the “China expert,” who was a commentator and critic of China rather than a “sinologist.” This diverse, frequently conflicted, and ambivalent body of work is created in what is known as the “Romantic period.” It is a historically based category, but also has some ideational coherence. It rejects the idealizing tendencies of its early modern Jesuit predecessor as well as the more recent work of contemporary French or French-based, “sinologues,” Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat and Julius Klaproth, sophisticated academics who never visited China. British Romantic-period sinology is composed of an array of expertise and texts including travel accounts (the Macartney and Amherst embassies), commentaries on Chinese customs, manners and mores (including religions), and translations, literary commentaries, and a new style of visual art deriving from British artists resident in China, like William Alexander, Clarkson Stanfield, and George Chinnery, as well as Chinese export artists, such as Pu Qua and Lam Qua. Romantic Sinology leads to a new style of “Romantic chinoiserie,” differing from that of the eighteenth century as discussed by Porter and exemplified in the Regent’s Royal Pavilion at Brighton from 1815 or so onward. This sinology and its corresponding Chinese taste is characterized above all by its insistence that it is a new and “objective” study of China based on a first-hand encounter and conducted according to empirical and scientific assumptions. It rejects the Jesuit-inspired focus on the Chinese classics as biased and self-interested; a classicizing discourse intended to convince its audience that the Chinese really are sophisticated monotheists tractable to rapid conversion to Catholic Christianity. This sinology is also ideationally “Romantic” in that it loosely shares in certain aspects of Romantic-period aesthetics or “Romanticism,” from Percy’s and Jones’s concern with ancient and original poetry to John Francis Davis’s expansion of the purview of sinology from Confucian classic books to take into account China’s belles lettres, especially popular novels and drama, journalism (the Peking Gazette), and Chinese scientific and horticultural writing. Informed by Romantic canons of taste, including Wordsworthian notions of simplicity and feeling, the translations it produced were frequently aimed, especially in its earlier manifestations, at a general and non-specialist audience.

This sinology, in its missionary version, is distinctively underpinned by an iconoclastic Protestant theology that stressed the importance of individual salvation, and rejected Chinese civilization and the Manchu
imperial court of which the Catholic missionaries were so enamored. Obsessed with a personal relationship with deity, this theology equated Confucianism, Buddhism, and popular oral religion as well as Catholicism and Islam (all forms of Chinese religion) with idolatry. This Romantic Sinology was first “institutionalized” at Serampore (Srirampur) in Bengal, then at Canton and Malacca (and later Hong Kong after the first Opium War), before entering the metropolitan “center” with the establishment of the Royal Asiatic Society (1823) and then a series of university chairs, first at University College (1837), then at King’s College (1845), London. The impact of Romantic Sinology on Romantic-period poets, novelists, and dramatists has still not as yet been explored in much detail. My study I thus hope is especially valuable in discussing under-researched areas such as the role of British Protestant missionary writing, Chinese science, and, especially, popular drama on the London stage.

Romantic Sinology sought to reverse the process described by Porter in which, some time around the middle of the eighteenth century, a form of chinoiserie, with its “flow of unmeaning Eastern signs,” had been substituted for an earlier idea of China that was ancient, authentic, monotheistic, legitimate, and moral. Romantic Sinology, paradoxically, sought to substitute this chinoiserie fantasy with another “real” China that was both knowable and substantial, but increasingly the locus of illegitimacy and stagnation, capable of being understood and controlled. In this sense the Romantic period is a moment of historical watershed or transformational change in which competing views of China begin the uneven process of hardening and homogenizing. Yet even as this process takes place, moments of genuine intercultural encounter and exchange occur and are as significant as those which anticipate the brutal militarism and economic instrumentalism deployed by the British against the Chinese in 1839.

CHINA AND GLOBAL ROMANTICISM

The major research context for this book is the vibrant field of the global long eighteenth century established by a number of scholars who have traced the connections between literary sensibility and British encounters with those persons, ideas, and territories that lay uneasily beyond the national border. Such studies have developed a revisionist reading of the period of British Enlightenment and Romanticism (or long eighteenth century), an age during which Britain was most aggressively but also hesitantly building its overseas empire. This criticism often argues that the
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Romantic imaginative self is founded on a sense of difference, exoticism, or alterity created by an anxiety or fear of what is foreign. For many, otherness or xenophobia is the underpinning not only of nineteenth-century organic nationalism and imperialism but also of the Romantic subject itself. Forging Romantic China, while accepting that this may often be the case, seeks to problematize such readings by returning to the historical and cultural complexities of Sino-British cultural exchange.

By and large somewhat neglected by cultural studies of the Romantic period, the British encounter with the Qinq empire is usually portrayed as that of a modern, technological, and industrial power confronting an older and now stagnating polity whose glories were firmly in the past. This view of late Qing China is itself one effect of the narrativizing tendency of Romantic Sinology to represent China as oppositional to the current modernizing trends of early nineteenth-century Britain. While accepting Edward Said’s equation of knowledge and power in orientalist and colonial discourse and employing many of Said’s crucial critical insights, this study is cognate with those that seek to problematize any simple and straightforward binaries between colonial self and colonized others by stressing instead the complexities and multipolarity of exchange between Britain and China in an already globalized world. 39

Humberto Garcia has excitingly transformed our understanding of orientalism, in his Islam and the English Enlightenment, 1670–1840 (2012) by examining the sympathetic and, at times, enthusiastic, response of Britons to Islamic culture, stressing the importance of intercultural exchange between Islam and Britain. Similarly, Srinivas Aravamudan has brilliantly argued that “a transcultural, cosmopolitan, and Enlightenment-inflected orientalism existed at least as an alternative strain before ‘Saidian’ Orientalism came about.” Aravamudan argues for the importance of an “Enlightenment Orientalism” that existed outside of the traditional account of the “Whiggish” rise of the novel. Pace Said, he claims that Enlightenment orientalism was “a Western style for translating, anatomizing, and desiring the Orient.” Aravamudan shows how the translational and transcultural oriental tale was effectively written out of traditional accounts of the rise of the British novel that stressed the national and the domestic within the mode of literary realism. In part, this is the result of increasing “Romantic nationalism and xenophobia” that I discuss, especially in Chapter 7 of this study. For Aravamudan the separation of East and West occurs after the 1780s “with the institutionalization of Europe’s national literatures through the steady rise of print capitalism, followed by the subsequent wave of Romanticism and the establishment of imperial
bureaucracies.” Thus the Romantic orientalism that succeeds Oriental Enlightenment “furthered an antiquarian knowledge of Asia as Europe’s demonic Other, rather than its previous status as Christendom’s originary source, old rival, and living contemporary.” It is clear that increasing nationalism and xenophobia do play a part in Romantic Sinology, yet there are still strong transcultural and hybrid elements in the Romantic-period understanding of China, and other cultures. While the story of the former has oft been told, the latter remains to be discussed. While De Quincey may have demonized all things Chinese and Asiatic in his Confessions, others, such as John Francis Davis, maintained a genuine interest in Chinese culture, even despite his participation in a growing colonial bureaucracy. Though Forging Romantic China might seem simply to be pushing the moment of the arrival of a more recognizable mode of Saidian orientalism further forward into the mid nineteenth century, post the first Opium War, Romantic Sinology displays many of the characteristics of Aravamudan’s Enlightenment orientalism, and represents as much a continuum with it as a clear fracture.

Recent historical scholarship of the later Qing has stressed the field of global exchange in which Britain and China are, arguably, the period’s two most significant multi-ethnic imperial formations. Throughout, this study emphasizes the importance of the transfer and exchange between the two world historical empires and their impact on the knowledge-making process, in an attempt to negotiate a terrain beyond established postcolonial binaries, such as “West” and “East” and “Occidentalism” and “Orientalism.” Since the mid 1970s a number of developments inside and outside China studies have called into question the older, functionalist, social science models used to analyze historical and contemporary non-Western societies. Within the China field, the primary challenge to these earlier forms of analysis came from “China-centered” history. A substantial number of historical and postcolonial criticisms of the mid and late Qing have transformed our historical understandings of the empire which now emerges as a much more modern, dynamic, and expansionist polity in the eighteenth century. This study is also indebted to this new and invigorated historical scholarship featuring the encounter between Britain and China in the period and the crucial Southeast Asian contact zones and networks between China and Britain that generated Romantic Sinology.

This book aims to add the exchange of cultural information as part of this flow of commodities and information. The underlying model for the exchange is that of global flows of trade. That this concept of a global
world economy was understood in the period itself is evidenced by the insight of the great Swedish Botanist, Linnaeus, who somewhat acerbically summed up the process. He grumbled that “some people consider us happier because we have discovered the silver treasures of Potosis [Bolivia], which we pry loose from the innards of the earth with great efforts, ship to Europe with great danger, and then, with no lesser risk, export to the barbaric countries of the distant East Indies and waste them there, bringing home in exchange dry leaves of bushes and thin threads, spun by caterpillars.”43 Many scholars have noted the role of China’s demand for New World silver and Britain’s prodigious thirst for tea in the emergence of the modern world economy, claimed by Lin Man-houng as the real and material cause of nineteenth-century Qing vulnerability and its subsequent inability to resist Western encroachment.44 Such studies stress the internal, economic Chinese causes of the Qing’s weakness in the nineteenth century rather than the pressures brought to bear from outside. They have altered our understanding of the global economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the relative positions of Britain, Europe, and Asia.

In particular, the work of world systems theorists André Gunder Frank and Kenneth Pomeranz postulates the existence of a global network of trade in the eighteenth century dominated by China and India in which Britain and northern Europe more widely are, until after 1800 or so, merely bit players and latecomers. Frank claimed that China and India functioned as the core of a single “global world economy with a worldwide division of labour and multilateral trade from 1500 onward.” European desire for superior Asian products created an expanding world trade whose net balance was easily in China’s favor.45 Frank estimates that between 1600 and 1800, China bought as much as half of the world’s total production, including vast quantities of New World silver from European colonizers. It has been calculated that China’s GDP as late as 1820 was still a staggering 29 percent of global production, and much larger than that of all Europe, including industrial Britain, combined. This economic strength was fully understood by Europeans. The Jesuit Du Halde judged, in 1735, that trade within China was vastly greater than that of all Europe combined, and Adam Smith famously declared in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that China was “a country richer than any part of Europe.”46

Smith’s economic analysis of China and global commerce is complex and still being argued over. He certainly criticized the Qing empire for the restrictions it imposed on foreign trade, yet he also foretold the future
equalization of power between Europe and Asia due to the workings of international commerce. Giovanni Arrighi, in his influential *Adam Smith in Beijing* (2008), has argued that Frank’s prediction of the resurgence of Southeast Asia and the return to a sinocentric world economy was anticipated in Smith’s writings. Arrighi points out that Smith knew very well that throughout the eighteenth century “the largest market was to be found not in Europe but in China.” He claims that Smith’s depiction of China’s economy as “stationary” does not imply, as often assumed, stagnation but the achievement of an optimum size for the geographic and demographic limits of its empire. Smith, he demonstrates, distinguished between “natural” and “unnatural” paths of economic development. China had followed the internally oriented or “natural” path of market society, focusing on labor-intensive forms of development and on improving its domestic economy, whereas European nations had undertaken an “unnatural” path of intensive capital development fueled by extensive foreign trade, drawing raw materials from distant colonies and making profit by providing financial services to the larger world economy. Smith exemplifies the Chinese economy as an example of a “natural” economic development. His point is that this distinction is not simply in favor of the unnatural economies, such as Britain and Holland, as what distinguishes them is that they allow capitalists greater power to impose their individual class interest on the national interest. What defines the European developmental path as properly capitalist (as opposed to market based) is the “sequence of endless accumulation of capital and power” manifested in the creation of ever more powerful nation states that can impose their will on others through military might, be it through the Opium Wars or US military hegemony. Contrary to Frank, Arrighi argues that Eastern and Western geopolitics and statecraft did not become integrated into a single political-military interaction network until the European states surrounded and tried to penetrate China in the nineteenth century. Capital accumulation allowed Europeans to develop superior military forces and it was this military strength that enabled them to “appropriate the benefits of the greater integration of the global community at the expense of non-European nations.” Arrighi concludes that Smith “upheld China rather than Europeans as a model of the kind of market-based economic development that was most advisable for governments to pursue” and argues that the contemporary failure of the US to forge a world state through coercive means has created unprecedented opportunities for the global South, led by China, to achieve social and economic empowerment.47 However, Britons would later invoke Smith’s criticisms of China’s
restriction of foreign trade to portray the empire as isolationist and stagnant; he did not view eighteenth-century China in this way.

John M. Hobson concludes that China before 1839 was still powerful enough to manage Europeans and “militarily defeat any European challengers who were not granted access.” 48 Certainly China’s prosperity was legendary, leading Robert Markley to describe its enormous riches and revenues as representing to the eighteenth-century European imagination “a kind of socioeconomic sublime.” 49 With this vast economic strength came a cultural prestige that fueled the enormous consumer demand for Asian products in the West. Other scholars and historians have reinforced our understanding of a largely sinocentric world order, prior to 1800 or so. 50 Such historical claims underpin a number of contemporary theoretical perspectives, which have questioned Eurocentric interpretive norms. Dipresh Chakrabarty, for example, argues that the notion of Europe as the original site of modernity is a largely mythical invention and yet it “remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories,” constituting the “silent referent in historical knowledge.” 51 Similarly, Bruno Latour’s seminal works *Science in Action* (1987) and *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) make the case for the near equivalence of European and “local knowledge,” pointing to the minimal differences between human “collectives” and questioning European scientific notions of modernity and the famous chasm of the “Great Divide” between a technological and industrial West and a pre-modern Asia, paralleling the “great divergence” of Western and Asian economies. 52 My study also seeks to problematize any straightforward Eurocentric understandings of a stationary China and a progressive technological Britain in the context of knowledge and culture.

My work has benefited enormously from the critical endeavors in the field of cultural translation and transformation that seek to utilize theoretical models based on a nuanced understanding of the many sites of the process of knowledge formation in sinology, and to draw attention to the collaborations which produced such knowledge. In the context of the Indian subcontinent Kapil Raj and Rajani Sudan have stressed the collaborative processes by which scientific knowledge of the region was produced. 53 This recuperative strategy has already been applied to Qing China, notably by Laura Hostetler with regard to Qing cartography and ethnology, and by Fa-ti Fan in his crucial study of British naturalists in China and their encounters with Chinese horticulture and horticulturalists. 54 Hostetler shows how Qing China actively participated within, and helped to shape and determine, the new emphasis that Romantic Sinology later exploits on empirical science and evidential research.
Whereas, writing about the period after the first Opium War, James L. Hevia has powerfully argued that before the British and other powers dismantled the Qing polity in the later nineteenth century, they had already destroyed it textually, this study generally discovers a less confident, often conflicting, and confused series of cultural strategies by which “expert” British knowledge of China was constructed, manufactured, or “forged” in the crucial transformative period of the early nineteenth century. Pedagogically, the British were still learning from the Chinese and trade, not instruction, was what they wanted to foster in China. Mary Louise Pratt argued that some Europeans were “transculturators” who transported to Europe indigenous knowledge, thus producing a body of knowledge infiltrated by non-European presences. I attempt to build on Pratt’s influential understanding of “transculturation,” applying it to cultural relations and understanding between Britain and China. But rather than view the site of encounter as “contact zones” where the asymmetries of power were pretty much always in favor of the British, I draw attention to the self-understood, comparative disempowerment and weakness of the missionaries, merchants, and diplomats in the period leading up to the Opium Wars. There is also a mirroring and inversion at work here in this reciprocal encounter. The fashion for “chinoiserie” in the West, for instance, had provoked its counterpart, a Chinese interest in European goods known as “Euraserie.” Styles and commodities circulated and shuttled back and forth around the globe as British designs were sent to Canton to be transferred to Chinese porcelain manufactured at Jingdezhen and then exported back to Britain. This cultural exchange was obvious from the sophisticated “sing-song” trade at Canton and the British clock owned by the Qianlong emperor that chimed tunes from John Gay’s Beggar’s Opera on the hour. This study thus situates within this field of enquiry cultural and literary artifacts and commodities, such as the first British translations of Confucian writings and of Chinese novels and Chinese dramas by the Romantic Sinologists, Robert Morrison, George Thomas Staunton, and John Francis Davis.

Although this book is primarily a study of anglophone writing about China, its perspective is informed by recent comparative studies of Chinese and Western writing. Notably, Zhang Longxi’s seminal criticism argues that the tendency of Western writing to view China as the cultural opposite of the West in literature, art, and theory has led to a distortion of social and historical reality in China. Zhang promotes the importance of the lived experience in this cross-cultural encounter and argues for the importance of recognizing common ground between
cultures rather than emphatically insisting on their difference and alterity: “when China and the West are set up in rigid and mutually exclusive dichotomy, it is then absolutely necessary to point out the many similarities, what is shared and common in language, literature and cultures of the East and West.” My study emphasizes, wherever possible, this sharing and commonality and finds it in often unexpected places. Zhang has pursued this argument in a series of publications reappraising the thematic and conceptual similarities, or “unexpected affinities,” that unite literary and cultural traditions in the East and West, arguing against the trope (shared by “East” and “West”) of the incommensurability of cultures. Similar arguments have been made in the crucial work of Haun Saussy, who has rightly demanded a new model of comparative or world literature, one that includes China within its remit. He argues that binaries such as “China” and “the West,” “us” and “them,” the “subject” and the “non-subject” provide a ready-made set of definitions external to historical and social reality. Instead, he seeks to restore the interpretation of China to the complexity and impurity of the historical situations in which it was always imbricated.

Informed by such powerful critical insights, my study attempts to negotiate the highly complex terrain of the cross-cultural encounter between Qing China and Georgian Britain in a way that tries to respect the shifting allegiances of power and authority (both military, economic, and cultural) between two powerful empires in the period, and which restores a sense of the complexity of that encounter, fashioned as it was from multiple poles of engagement and recognition, and often produced from on-the-ground collaborations between Chinese, British, and other peoples in the multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan cities of Guangzhou, Calcutta, and Southeast Asia generally. British Romantic-period and mid-Qing thinkers, politicians, and writers were all bound up in the same global networks sharing common and modern thoughts, concerns, and ideas.

This study falls roughly into two parts. The first five chapters set out the process of the construction of the body of writing I provisionally describe as a “Romantic Sinology” from its antecedents in the Chinese publications and studies of two major late eighteenth-century or “pre-Romantic” British literary scholars, editors, and translators, Thomas Percy and William Jones; from the accounts of the Macartney embassy; and from the work of missionaries and Company traders in Bengal, Malacca, and Canton: Joshua Marshman, Robert Morrison, George Thomas Staunton, and John Francis Davis. In particular, Percy’s remarkable edition of the early Qing novel the Haoqiu zhuan entitled the Hau Kiou Choann; or the
Pleasing History (1761), and his compendium Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to China (1762), are viewed as crucial to the development of British sinology. Crucially, both Percy and Jones are interested in the belles lettres of China, not simply its Confucian classics. The contribution of “Chinese assistants” to Jones’s, Marshman’s, and Morrison’s sinology is highlighted in my account, especially the important presence of Jones’s friend Huang Ya Dong, one of the few Chinese visitors to London. This section concludes with a chapter discussing the crucial and formative encounter between the Macartney embassy and the Qing court in 1793 and the body of work that resulted from it. The allegation that Qing China was politically and economically stagnant, ossified by an inflexible ceremonialism, especially regarding its relations with foreign powers, was apparently confirmed by the accounts of the first two embassies to China which occurred during the Romantic period. I argue that these embassies should be regarded as a crucial part of the knowledge exchange and cultural translation processes between Britain and China, and major events in the formation of Romantic Sinology. From British discussions of Chinese technology and science, this study suggests that instead of a unique Western and modern science, there were national and local knowledge traditions and dynamics and that modernity and science are not simple emanations from a pre-existing European center, diffused to the East. The case of Joseph Banks and the British attempt to transplant and cultivate tea from China to Bengal (along with many other Chinese plants) in the early nineteenth century is representative of this.

Part Two of this study is more, though not exclusively, concerned with British cultural representations of China that I argue both participate in an intercultural encounter and sometimes resist it. Throughout these chapters I argue that China is an important, though often under-acknowledged, presence in British Romantic-period writing and that Chinese ideas and texts are partially constitutive of British Romanticism, though frequently through unexpected affinities and fugitive resemblances. Chapter 6 shows that the complex diplomatic encounter between Macartney and the Qianlong emperor is taken up and fetishized in the British Romantic imagination as a traumatic primal scene. In this encounter the imperial ceremony of the kowtow (sangui jiukou) functions as metonymic. The chapter discusses this topos in a series of texts relating it to the depiction of China derived from the chinoiserie depictions of porcelain. In writings by Southey, Lamb, Leigh Hunt, and others, I argue that the subject of China is evaded and displaced, despite the presence of the new knowledge produced by Romantic Sinology, and speculate on the