

**Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 312. £60. ISBN 9781107045613.**

**David Vallins, Kaz Oishi and Seamus Perry, eds., *Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient: Cultural Negotiations*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013. Pp. 227. £60. ISBN 9781441149879.**

Two new books show us the latest developments in the study of ‘Romantic Orientalism’: Peter Kitson’s *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange 1760-1840* and David Vallins, Kaz Oishi and Seamus Perry’s edited collection *Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient: Cultural Negotiations*. Kitson analyses the Chinese connection in Romantic period culture with an emphasis on the actors on the ground, such as the ‘Serampore School’ of Joshua Marshman, the ‘Malacca school’ of Robert Morrison and the ‘Canton school’ of George Thomas Staunton, William Milne and John Francis Davis. He examines the expedition of Lord George Macartney to the Qing Emperor Qianlong in 1792-4 and the proliferation of chinoiserie in landscape gardening, ceramics and, perhaps most unexpectedly, British popular theatre. *Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient* began as a series of papers from a conference held at Kobe, Japan, in 2011. The book is divided into three parts, Coleridge, Romanticism and Oriental Cultures; Coleridge, Philosophy and the Orient; and ‘Kubla Khan’ and Romantic Orientalism, with some overlap between them. In his introduction, Vallins identifies the differentiation between historicist and ‘literary and philosophical’ (6) approaches to Coleridge taken by the contributors, the ramifications of which will be discussed below.

Kitson’s challenge is that, by his own admission, China appears so infrequently in Romantic writing despite an evident enthusiasm for the cultures of other Eastern countries, notably India and Arabia. Yet the Macartney expedition and the outbreak of the First Opium War in 1839, which concluded with the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, were historical watersheds and, moreover, Britain derived a growing proportion of its trade from China (although Kitson reminds us that in 1820 China’s gross domestic product was 20% of the world total). Global trade patterns provide Kitson’s theoretical model for understanding how Chinese texts were circulated and re-circulated, showing how initial appreciation could often curl back as prejudice or indifference. For example, the inadequacy of Thomas Percy’s 1761 translation of the Chinese story *Haoqiu zhuan* as *Hau Kiou Choann; or, the Pleasing History* (possibly the first published direct translation of a Chinese text into English) prompted the Canton-based Davis to create a more accurate translation in situ, published as *The Fortunate Union* in 1829. Marshman’s plodding 1809 translation of Confucius, denounced by John Barrow in the *Quarterly Review* (1814) as a ‘dull passive morality’ (70), encouraged those such as Charles Lamb who considered the ‘azure-tinctured grotesques’ (171) on his porcelain teacups as proof of Chinese cultural stasis.

The roots of this indifference, Kitson suggests, lay in the primal scene of Macartney’s humiliation by the Emperor, who demanded that the British delegation kow-tow to him (the evidence suggests they eventually reached a compromise) and dismissed the scientific instruments presented to him as idle playthings. Incidentally, I do not agree with Kitson that in the Gillray print of the expedition the Emperor is holding out his hand for a bribe; with his hand on his hip and smoke puffing from his mouth, he is surely intended to resemble a malevolent Chinese teapot. The national trauma this engendered led to a series of evasions and suppressions such as Robert Southey’s apparent refusal to complete a Chinese epic, despite reading widely on the subject, which Kitson describes as ‘an evasion that is

symptomatic of Romantic writing' (166). Hence also Lamb's inability to engage with the reality of China 'is a simple anxiety about how to deal with a subject whose presence is everywhere' (181). Wordsworth's grief for his brother John, who drowned en route to Bengal and China in the shipwreck of the *Earl of Abergavenny* in 1805, resurfaced in the Chinese antiparadise of Book 8 of *The Prelude*, with its 'Palaces and Domes / Of Pleasure spangled over, shady Dells / For Eastern Monasteries, sunny Mounds / With Temples Crested, Bridges, Gondolas, Rocks, Dens, and Groves of foliage taught to melt / Into each other their obsequious hues'. Wordsworth had been reading Barrow's *Travels in China* (1804) and this had seemingly stimulated his memory.

What Kitson dubs 'Romantic Sinology' (2) is full of might-have-beens, missed opportunities and roads not taken. The overwhelming mood of the book is subjunctive. Perhaps the most interesting imaginative response to Macartney's offended dignity was the Romantic trope of refusal to bow down before tyrannical authority, which Kitson sees at work in the scene in Arimanes' court in Byron's *Manfred*, in Don Juan's refusal to kiss the Sultana's foot and Fanny Price's growing determination in *Mansfield Park* not to submit to arbitrary treatment. The book uncovers a great deal of new material and is bound to become a standard reference point for the increasing amount of literary scholarship on China. It is a pity that the Cambridge editors did not pick up on some moments of repetition; for example, the translation of Chinese names for palaces and the details of Wordsworth's trauma at the death of his brother (which leads to a duplicated reference in the endnotes).

*Coleridge, Romanticism and the Orient* opens with Kitson's chapter on the Macartney embassy and George Colman the younger's popular play *The Laws of Java* (1822). The first section of the collection is much given to source-hunting in the spirit of John Livingston Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu* (1927) and expends a good deal of energy trying to locate the 'real' Kubla Khan (as the paradigmatic Romantic Orientalist poem, it naturally features prominently here). The various contenders for this honour include the Tartary of Sir William Jones (Kitson), the British India of William Hodges (Deirdre Coleman) and the Chinese landscape gardens of Staunton and William Chambers (Kuri Katsuyama). The most intriguing use of source material comes in Dometa Wiegand Brothers' chapter, which traces the influence of Euclidian geometry and Newtonian calculus on the poem's modulation from static, geometric forms ('so twice five miles of fertile ground / With walls and towers were girdled round') to dynamic, fluid ones ('and mid these dancing rocks at once and ever / It flung up momentarily the sacred river. Five miles meandering with a mazy motion / Through wood and dale the sacred river ran'). The thorny question of 'Kubla Khan's' composition date is also much discussed with reference to which Eastern texts Coleridge was reading at which time.

A second group of chapters looks at the reception of Coleridge in nineteenth and twentieth-century Japan (Oishi), Empson's 'Buddhist' reading of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* based on his spell in Tokyo between 1931-4 (Perry) and the resemblances between Coleridge, Schopenhauer and Esoteric Buddhism (Setsuko Wake-Naota). Most intellectually stimulating are those contributors (Tim Fulford, Seamus Perry, Andrew Warren, Vallins, Heidi Thomson and Brothers) who argue that, for Coleridge, the East acted as a free-floating imaginative laboratory in which abstract ideas could be explored precisely because the setting was not locospecific. Fulford's excellent chapter, which offers parallel scenarios for the composition of 'Kubla Khan' and Southey's Arabian epic *Thalaba*, rightly describes Coleridge's Orient as 'a zone of dream, spells, magic and enchantment, where strange relationships of mind and world could be played out' (59). Warren's chapter explains Coleridge's proto-Hegelian take on Eastern philosophy as a system that was incapable of achieving a separation between nature and human will and thus of seeking a reconciliation between them, a key aspiration of Coleridge's aesthetic and moral philosophy. Harries'

valuable chapter sees a shift in Coleridge's thinking about the East over his lifetime as he became progressively more hostile towards the meditative disposition which he had earlier regarded as conducive to 'splendid speculation' but which he eventually dismissed as 'a garish mist'. Thomson's chapter on the 1816 preface offers a complex reading of 'Kubla Khan' grounded in Coleridge's circular myth of the 'the snake with it's Tail in it's Mouth' [*sic*].

But, as Vallins warns in his introduction, examining Coleridge's work as an Orientalist (in the sense of a scholar of Eastern culture) risks reigniting the charge of him as an Orientalist in Edward Said's sense. It poses a dilemma: do scholars interpret Coleridge on his own terms (the work of a lifetime) as if postcolonialism never really happened, or risk getting so bogged down in the immediate context that they cannot see the wood of Coleridge's thought for the historical and geopolitical trees? The answer must lie in an analytical fusion of the two approaches and the best chapters here lead in that direction.

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