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Abstract

This article examines satire's role in representing and shaping emergent diplomatic relations between the British and Chinese empires in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Romantic-era satires typically stereotype the Chinese imperial court to bolster Britons' national self-image and to critique (and attend to) British foibles, particularly within Parliament and the monarchy. Thus, derogatory representations of China serve twofold to augment Britain by either affirming cultural superiority or constructively criticizing government policies. The satiric verses of John Wolcot (pseudonym Peter Pindar) are unique, offering more sympathetic representations of China reminiscent of early to mid-eighteenth-century laudatory perceptions of the Qing Empire as the embodiment of cultural sophistication, as well as political and economic stability. Pindar specifically satirizes Britain's aspirational moments of diplomatic exchange with the Chinese. Using Pindar's verse, this article illustrates Romantic satire's potential to challenge Britain's imperial aspirations by highlighting diplomatic insufficiencies and depicting an alternative global order.

Introduction: Emerging Sinophilic Satire

Dear Kien Long,
At length an opportunity presents itself for conversing with the second Potentate upon earth, George the Third being most undoubtedly the fi\rst, although he never made verses. Thy praises of Moukden, thy beautiful little Ode to Tea, &c. have afforded me infinite delight;

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and to gain my plaudit, who am rather difficult to please, will, I assure thee, be a feather in thy imperial cap.[1]

Writing on the eve of George, Lord Macartney's embassy to China, satirist John Wolcot—better known by his pseudonym Peter Pindar—dedicates a series of poems to the Qianlong emperor.[2] Yet, as the epistolary opening of *Odes to Kien Long, The Present Emperor of China* (1792) makes evident, Pindar obscures the directionality of his satire. While readers familiar with Pindar's satirical depictions of George III might safely assume a sarcastic description of the monarch as "most undoubtedly the *first*," the characterization of China's emperor is less legible.[3] Pindar's assertion that his praise of Qianlong "will ... be a feather in thy imperial cap" must be facetious, yet his earlier admiration for the emperor's translated verse reads as authentic.[4] Alongside George III's non-existent poetic endeavours, Qianlong's verse, however meagre, is suggestive of the emperor's intellectual capabilities. Pindar's affirmation of Qianlong might read as either genuine literary admiration or faux praise deployed to denigrate the British monarch. Deciphering Pindar's satire demands a triangulation of contexts: eighteenth-century satirical representations of China, Romantic-era farcical depictions of China, and Pindar's repeated poetic reflections on China between 1792 and 1817.

1 Peter Pindar, *Odes to Kien Long, The Present Emperor of China; with The Quakers, a Tale; To a Fly, Drowned in a Bowl of Punch; Ode to Macmanus, Townsend, and Jealous, the Thief-Takers; To Cœlia.—To a Pretty Milliner.—To the Fleas of Teneriffe.—To Sir William Hamilton.—To my Candle, &c. &c. &c.* (London, 1792), 1. References are to this edition and are cited parenthetically as *Odes*.

2 Except for his final publications on Anglo-Chinese relations in 1817—by which point other satirists had co-opted his pseudonym—Wolcot published using his pseudonym. For the purposes of this article, I refer to the satirist as Pindar rather than Wolcot. Similarly, I use currently accepted pinyin for Chinese names and locations while maintaining archaic forms in quoted material only.

3 Vincent Carreta notes Pindar's representation of George III "not [as] dangerous; he is instead embarrassing because he is not large enough to fill the role that fate has given him," an interpretation that aligns with Pindar's maligning the monarch by praising the Chinese emperor. (*George III and the Satirists from Hogarth to Byron* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 270).

4 Pindar refers to poems authored by Qianlong that had been translated within William Chambers, *A Dissertation on Oriental Gardening*, 2nd ed. with additions (London, 1773), 118–21n. Thomas James Mathias makes use of these same poems, thereby demonstrating general British knowledge of Qianlong's status as a poet.

Reading Pindar's verse as inflected with these diverse historical, cultural, and aesthetic contexts reveals an image of the Qing Empire evocative of early eighteenth-century laudatory accounts of China rather than aligned with early nineteenth-century desires for China's subjugation by the British Empire. Pindar's verse illustrates Romantic satire's coupled potential to highlight Britain's diplomatic insufficiencies and to elevate competing global orders.

Travel writing and satire were natural bedfellows by the early eighteenth century. In his delineation of traditions and extant associations with travel writing across the seventeenth century, Daniel Carey observes that increasingly, "the entire premise of travel—to acquire political wisdom—depended on diminishing the mother country," so the development of fictional travel writing for the purpose of satirization seems a logical extension.[5] Carey focuses on Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) as paradigmatic of satiric travel writing, a paradigm upon which texts considering Anglo-Chinese relations capitalize. China appears repeatedly within eighteenth-century satires as a culture to which Britain might aspire, not the seat of despotism often depicted in Romantic satires. Robert Markley asserts that throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, "the Middle Kingdom symbolized the very principles of sociopolitical stability and transcultural value on which European elites depended," owing to the "continuity of China's culture, language, and Confucian precepts through millennia."[6] The Chinese language exemplified stability since, according to David Porter, the

> characters of the script ... rather than depicting a merely arbitrary sequence of sounds as in alphabetic writing, bore an intrinsic and logical, if still somewhat mysterious, relationship to the ideas they represented.[7]

At a time when John Locke disparaged the proliferation of English words' connotations, the Chinese language evinced not only stability

5 Daniel Carey, "Swift, Gulliver, and Travel Satire," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eighteenth-Century Satire*, ed. Paddy Bullard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 200.

6 Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600–1730* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

7 David Porter, *Ideographia: The Chinese Cipher in Early Modern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 17–18.

in its fidelity to original ideas but also transparency in communication that impacted political governance.[8] Connections between the Chinese language, governance, and morality may be seen across several eighteenth-century fictional texts. In her political satire *The Adventures of Eovaai* (1736), Eliza Haywood claims Chinese source material that espouses political standards and ideals that comparatively demonstrate the corrupted nature of Walpole's government.[9] Oliver Goldsmith's letters from the Chinese philosopher Lien Chi Altangi—collected as *Citizen of the World* (1761)—establish British immorality through the lens of Confucian wisdom.[10] Both Haywood and Goldsmith establish China as a seat of virtue against which British corruption in language, politics, and culture may be established and critiqued. The satiric exposure of British faults is not accomplished at China's expense; the cultural superiority of the Qing Empire remains intact, even affirmed. While not all eighteenth-century representations of China are commendatory—see, for example, Daniel Defoe's *The Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and William Hatchett's *A Chinese Tale* (1740)—it is not until the 1790s that satiric works routinely evince less flattering attitudes towards the Chinese that transcend jealousy and reflect growing British nationalism.

Despite the understandably extensive scholarship on eighteenth-century satire and its cultural prominence, the idea that satire was a declining genre in the Romantic era has been refuted over the last three decades. Gary Dyer accuses extant narratives of satire's death in the Romantic era as "insidious" in their "insisting on understanding literary history teleologically, inspecting a genre that will soon be dead for the signs of its fatal illness."[11] Steven E. Jones

8 See chapter 22, book 2, and all of book 3 in John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

9 For more on Haywood's political critique of Walpole's government through a Chinese lens, see Jennifer L. Hargrave, "'To the Glory of the Chinese': Sinocentric Political Reform in Eliza Haywood's *The Adventures of Eovaai*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 49, no. 1 (2015): 31–50.

10 For more on Goldsmith's use of Altangi's fictional newspaper correspondence as a tool for thinking through and assessing British cultural practices, see chapter 4, "Oliver Goldsmith's Serial Chinaman," in Eun Kyung Min, *China and the Writing of English Literary Modernity, 1690–1770* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

11 Gary Dyer, *British Satire and the Politics of Style, 1789–1832* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12.

examines satiric traditions across the Romantic period alongside emerging poetic forms, thereby establishing the dynamic "interrelations of these conventionally oppositional modes."[12] Ian Haywood's exclusive focus on graphic satire not only elevates caricature's status within Romantic studies by taking seriously caricature's "conspicuous investment in the transformative powers of the imagination" but also reveals how "any political caricature can be approached as a valuable and illuminating historical and aesthetic document."[13] Much of this scholarship focuses on political satires that scrutinize domestic affairs: the monarchy, parliament, and military. Yet, despite "the deep unease" that many Britons felt upon witnessing the empire's "morally and politically dangerous" impacts on England, the links between Orientalism and satire within the Romantic period remain underexplored.[14] Tim Fulford and Laurence Williams have noted how stereotypical depictions of the Orient writ large—despotic, sexualized, immoral—are used to critique British consumptive indulgences from tea to opium to sex. Fulford identifies ephemeral satiric prints produced by caricaturists such as the Cruikshank family and James Gillray as particularly adept in illustrating how the British consumption of foreign products and practices corrupted the very metropole that professed a moral impetus undergirding colonial conquest and governance. Williams focuses specifically on the use of China within Romantic satire to illuminate similar British scepticism of expanding globalism, especially as tensions with France increased throughout the 1790s. Williams traces resistance "towards a more imperialist vision of China" that discounted a growing perception of the "irrelevance of Far Eastern trade—which focused on luxury goods such as tea, silk, and porcelain—to the majority of the British population."[15] In both these studies, Fulford and Williams present satires that rely on overwhelmingly negative depictions of the Orient.

12 Steven E. Jones, *Satire and Romanticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 1.

13 Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6, 9.

14 Tim Fulford, "'Getting and Spending': The Orientalization of Satire in Romantic London," in *The Satiric Eye: Forms of Satire in the Romantic Period*, ed. Steven E. Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 11.

15 Laurence Williams, "British Government under the Qianlong Emperor's Gaze: Satire, Imperialism, and the Macartney Embassy to China, 1792–1804," *Lumen: Selected Proceedings from the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32 (2013): 88, 91.

These Romantic texts disparage both the vehicle (China) and the subject (Britain) of the satire. Indeed, much Romantic satire does not question, and instead promulgates, stereotypical Orientalist images in stark contrast to much eighteenth-century satire.

When it comes to England and China's inter-imperial relations during the Romantic era, there is no shortage of satiric representations. These representations generally fall into two categories: satires directed at the Chinese to establish their cultural inferiority and satires directed at the British that use China as a tool for critique. Regardless of China's position as a satiric vehicle or subject, derogatory cultural representations emerge. These satiric forms should not be surprising; they are textbook examples of Edward Said's idea that Orientalism "does not simply represent" but rather is largely constitutive of "modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world."[16] What is surprising are moments of slippage wherein sardonic representations of China morph into moments of seeming admiration. These moments highlight Romantic Britain's ambiguous relationship with China that haltingly transitioned from early eighteenth-century laudatory perceptions of the Qing Empire as the embodiment of political and economic stability towards the Victorian understanding of China under the aegis of Western imperialism. While ephemeral visual prints or graphic satires effectively fit China within a narrative of Oriental despotism, sustained textual satires of Anglo-Chinese exchanges reveal fissures within British attempts to imagine China contributing subserviently to the empire. The poetic satire of Peter Pindar demonstrates the legitimate threat that China posed to both Britain's colonial holdings in India and Britain's aspirational imperial superiority. A cultured, politically stable, economically self-sufficient Eastern empire emerges within Pindar's satire. It is this image of China that provides a pointed satirization of British foibles.

In the following pages, I reveal Pindar's satiric counter-narrative, a narrative that challenges increasingly prevalent Chinese stereotypes. I begin with an overview of Romantic satires that contribute to a public understanding of China's inferiority—culturally, intellectually, and politically. I highlight satires that consider Anglo-Chinese diplomatic exchanges in which China's refusal to acquiesce

16 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 12.

to Western diplomatic practices was made manifest. By describing the satires that typify our understanding of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations, I establish a baseline against which Pindar's less prominent satires may be evaluated. Unlike more popular visual satires, Pindar's poems evince unease with British attempts to refashion Orientalist narratives of despotism and intellectual vacuity for a Chinese context. Although entirely fictional, Pindar provides space within his later poems for Chinese voices to be heard, voices that undermine Britons' negative cultural assumptions and identify Britons' diplomatic shortcomings. Through this exploration of Pindar's Anglo-Chinese poetic reflections, I reveal the degree to which Romantic satire undermines Britain's global aspirations rather than reifies Orientalism's normative power dynamic.

The Orientalization of China in Popular Romantic Satire

Romantic satirization of Anglo-Chinese relations focuses obsessively on the first British embassy to China from 1792 to 1794. The primary purpose of the embassy—largely dictated by Henry Dundas and the East India Company—was twofold: to open additional trading ports beyond Canton and to establish a permanent embassy in Beijing. Neither proposal was accepted but rather summarily rejected by the Qianlong emperor via imperial mandate in September 1793.[17] While Qianlong's letter to George III—itemizing the reasons for the proposals' rejection—was not translated until the late nineteenth century, news of the embassy's failure was made public in the *London Chronicle* in July 1794, two months prior to the embassy's return:

> On the day of departure, the Ambassador had an interview with the Minister, and received an answer to the propositions he had made

17 The complexity of this first Anglo-Chinese diplomatic exchange cannot be overstated, yet addressing these complexities does not fall within the scope of this article. For more detailed historical accounts of the Macartney embassy's multifarious nature, see Alain Peyrefitte, *The Collision of Two Civilisations: The British Expedition to China 1792–4*, trans. Jon Rothschild (London: Harvill-HarperCollins, 1993); and James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995). Henrietta Harrison's more recent study addresses the particular complexities of translation within both the 1793 and 1817 embassies in *The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators between Qing China and the British Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

> on the 3d. [September 1793]—They were all refused:—And the embassy left Pekin, very much mortified at their want of success.[18]

The article speculates reasons for the embassy's failure from the potential vindictiveness of Chinese officials who did not receive ambassadorial gifts to "some evil impression made upon the Chinese Court, by some of the native Princes of India telling them to beware how they allowed the English to abtain [*sic*] a footing among them."[19] Neither the Qianlong emperor nor Ambassador Macartney are held responsible for the embassy's failure. Although this could be interpreted as British refusal to accept responsibility—preferring to assume foreign officials' interference—the article concludes on a hopeful note:

> we are happy however to add, that some arrangements had taken place which indicated a more friendly disposition on the part of the Chinese; and that some hopes had begun to be entertained, that it was yet possible to obtain the object of the voyage; though not perhaps without considerable trouble.[20]

While acknowledging tension and some degree of embarrassment within current Anglo-Chinese affairs, the *London Chronicle* refrains from discrediting the legitimacy or respectability of either the Chinese imperial court or the Macartney embassy. The writer anticipates further intercourse and consequent development of Anglo-Chinese trade and diplomacy.

Yet, the narrative that emerges within embassy accounts and popular satires could not be more different. The travel narratives emerging from the embassy attempt to mitigate the embassy's failed negotiations by focusing on the infamous *koutou* incident in which the ambassador refused to prostrate himself in subservience to the emperor as was expected of China's foreign tributaries. Such a refusal, embassy members argue, maintained British honour, although it sacrificed diplomatic and economic favour. This moment of inter-imperial (mis)communication functions as the satirical focal point

18 "Embassy to China," *The London Chronicle*, July 29–31, 1794, *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection*, accessed February 4, 2024, 111.

19 "Embassy to China," 111.

20 "Embassy to China," 111.

not only for decades following the embassy's return but also, ironically, in the year preceding the embassy's departure in 1792.[21]

The most iconic representations of this inter-imperial meeting are the most denigrating, providing a grotesque satirization of the emperor to denote Chinese despotism. The Chinese emperor becomes the newest in a series of oriental despots, who were, as John Barrell describes,

> all individualised by the different ferocities imputed to them, but more or less identical to each other in their power to thrill the nursery and the theatre, and to enrage the drawing-room and the club.[22]

This homogenizing of oriental despots appears in James Gillray's print of *The Reception of the Diplomatique & his Suite at the Court of Pekin* (1792), which juxtaposes the gluttonous figure of the Qianlong emperor surrounded by sycophantic courtiers with the refined representation of the British ambassador and his diplomatic entourage presenting gifts (see figure 1).[23] While Gillray's image grossly exaggerates Chinese physical features, the caricature also inserts elements foreign to Chinese cultural practices from floor pillows to curled shoes to Turkish rugs. In so doing, Gillray situates China within the British-constructed monolithic culture of the Orient.

Yet, Gillray's image is hardly unidirectional as a secondary narrative plays out amongst the background characters that speaks to the second mode of satiric representation: China as a rhetorical tool through which to satirize Britain. The print speaks directly to Haywood's observation that "no person or object depicted is immune from the satirical gaze" thereby "permitting the full pleasures of spectatorship for a diverse audience."[24] Here, the grotesque opulence of

21 For historical interpretations of the *koutou*, see Peyrefitte, 102–6 and 223–31; Hevia, 167–84; and Harrison, 114–22. Peyrefitte and Harrison question whether Macartney succumbed to Chinese demands to perform the koutou. I am examining satiric representations of these events, regardless of factuality.

22 John Barrell, *The Infection of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 7.

23 Detailed descriptions of both satirical prints may be found through the British Museum's online collection (britishmuseum.org/collection). These descriptions draw primarily from the eleven volumes of BM Satires/Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum compiled between 1870 and 1954.

24 Haywood, 8–9.

Figure 1 James Gillray, *The Reception of the Diplomatique & his Suite at the Court of Pekin* (1792). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

the Qing court serves as the parodic vehicle to satirize George III and William Pitt's desire to treat with the Chinese. Although it is Macartney's kneeling figure in the foreground, the initials of the monarch (GR) and the prime minister (WP) feature prominently on the letter of introduction, at which the emperor sneers. While Macartney is positioned in seeming obeisance to the emperor, the other embassy members illustrate the vulgarity of the embassy. Two rows of embassy members prostrate, their posteriors notably elevated. Identifiable members of the embassy, including minister plenipotentiary Sir George Leonard Staunton, bear gifts meant to appease the emperor and to demonstrate the ingenuity of British manufacturing. The actual embassy presented elaborate gifts, including clocks, an orrery, and an English coach. Yet Gillray depicts mere models, items that appear toylike. In fact, the young Chinese boy in the background appears most entertained by this proceeding. The illustrated embassy members appear farcical as they present caged birds, model carriages, and rocking horses. The facial expressions on the gift bearers range from curiosity to fear. Yet, the image of Qianlong that Gillray provides generates little fear. By crafting a laughable image of Qianlong, Gillray mocks British intentions to placate the emperor with gifts; in

replacing any authoritative image of the emperor, Gillray establishes Britain's cultural superiority while simultaneously critiquing the British embassy's supplications. For Williams, such satirical images

> relate this folly on the far side of the world to domestic politics, by suggesting that the qualities that have led British elites to misjudge China make them unfit to manage the political crisis at home.[25]

In fact, Gillray's focus on British governance becomes undeniable when we realize that his representation of this diplomatic exchange is entirely imagined.

Printed in early 1792, Gillray's print predates the embassy's departure as well as the monumental 1797 publication of Staunton's *Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China*. This "official" account includes a folio of engravings by the embassy's draughtsman William Alexander that present considerably different images of Macartney's presentation to the Qianlong emperor (see figure 2). As Peter J. Kitson aptly notes,

> Gillray's satire of the British embassy presents no new meaningful knowledge about China but rather propagates an established oriental stereotyping far removed from the visual style of the embassy illustrations with their aspirations to a new form of ethnographical precision.[26]

Grounded in experiential knowledge, Alexander's representation maintains Chinese dignity and sequesters the British diplomatic entourage to the bottom right corner, appropriately dwarfed by the commanding Qianlong emperor and his vast imperial court.[27]

If Gillray's caricature does little to provide viewers with insight into China, George Cruikshank's 1816 satiric print *The Court at Brighton a la Chinese!!* (see figure 3) does even less, relying entirely

25 Williams, 90.

26 Peter J. Kitson, *Forging Romantic China: Sino-British Cultural Exchange, 1760–1840* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 158.

27 As I have discussed elsewhere, Alexander did not witness the imperial audience. He did witness the emperor's entry into Beijing after returning from his summer residence. So, Alexander's visual details stem from personal observation, even if displaced temporally and geographically. See Jennifer L. Hargrave, "Subversive Sketching: Intratextual Debate in British Accounts of China, 1797–1805," *Global Nineteenth-Century Studies* 3, no. 2 (2024): 147–69.

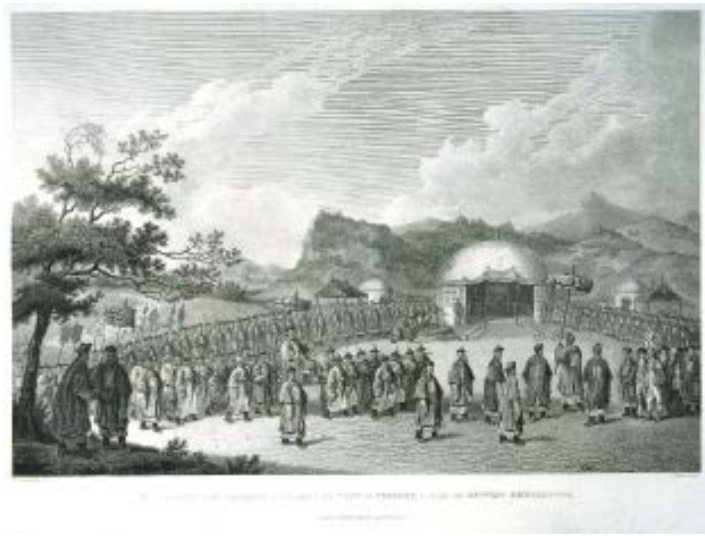

Figure 2 William Alexander, "The Approach of the Emperor of China to his Tent in Tartary, to receive the British Embassador," in George Staunton, *An Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China: Views, Charts, Plans* (London: W. Bulmer & Co. for G. Nicol, 1797), RB 137504 Atlas, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Figure 3 George Cruikshank, *The Court at Brighton a la Chinese!!* (1797). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

on Chinese stereotypes circulated in the two decades following the Macartney embassy. Although used for the purpose of deriding the Prince Regent, Cruikshank revives Gillray's deleterious image, a revival that depends on a widespread assumption of Chinese corruption, particularly under the new Jiaqing emperor. Cruikshank's representation of the Prince Regent is nearly identical to Gillray's depiction of Qianlong: a corpulent figure smoking and lounging on a divan, surrounded by seemingly sycophantic members of the royal court and government. Replacing Macartney is William, Lord Amherst, who led the second abortive embassy to China from 1816 to 1817. Like the Macartney embassy, the Amherst embassy sought to ameliorate and expand commercial exchanges between the British and Chinese empires. This is represented in Cruikshank's illustrated directions that the Prince Regent hands to Amherst: "Instructions for Ld Amherst to get fresh Patterns of Chinese deformities to finish the decorations of ye Pavilion—GPR." Cruikshank echoes decades-old critiques of the Macartney embassy for its costly expenditure on a diplomatic mission that did not serve the greater British public but rather satiated the materialistic desires of the economic elite. Moreover, the objects of chinoiserie, which enamour the Prince Regent, are now perceived as grotesque "Chinese deformities." In short, the embassy acquires commodities that fail to be beneficial to the nation.

Many details within the print critique the Prince Regent and the monarchy writ large—from Princess Charlotte's asking for "a China Man instead of getting me a Husband among our German Cousins" while Prince Leopold stands behind her, to Queen Charlotte's emptying the royal savings into the Regent's privy purse. Yet, the characterization of the impending diplomatic exchange between Amherst and the Jiaqing emperor interests me most. As in Gillray's print, Cruikshank illustrates the gifts to be presented to the emperor. The gifts are chaotically gathered in boxes and baskets and consist of portraits of the Prince Regent, books (such as *The Art of Making Punch* in two volumes), art prints, bottles of various cordials, wigs and whiskers, and hair-styling tools—all gifts that reflect the vanity and gluttony of the Prince Regent and assume Jiaqing's shared interest.[28] Just as the lavish Macartney embassy gifts infamously failed to appease

28 Amongst the sprawl of papers in front of the Prince Regent is *Royal Rantipoles, or the Humours of Brighton* (1815), a satiric poem by Peter Pindar. Although this poem is not relevant to my argument, it does demonstrate Cruikshank's

Qianlong, the pittance of gifts for Jiaqing evinces Britain's continued misapprehension of China's socio-economic standing. Moreover, the Chinese dress of the Prince Regent and Lord Amherst suggests an embassy already tainted by its infatuation with China. This insatiable desire for Chinese goods situates Britain in the inferior position of currying Chinese favour. The consumption of Chinese goods—literal and metaphorical—injures Britain's national and global persona. The life-like statues prominently displayed above the Prince Regent represent an African body evocative of Saartje Baartman alongside the similarly shaped "British Adonis" or the Prince Regent. This juxtaposition amplifies the notion that Britain is increasingly defined by its global entanglements rather than effectively asserting its authority within these global spaces.

Thomas James Mathias's translation of Qianlong's epistolary verse to George III—*The Imperial Epistle from Kien Long. Emperor of China, to George the Third, King of Great Britain* (1796)—exhibits the most direct attempt to deny China's superior global power.[29] In the early twentieth-century translation of his actual letter, Qianlong acerbically notes Britain's insignificance to the Chinese. Qianlong states repeatedly his understanding of Great Britain's geographic situation: "the lonely remoteness of your island, cut off from the world by intervening wastes of sea."[30] For this reason, he decides to gift the Macartney embassy generously while simultaneously refusing to expand Anglo-Chinese trade: "As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufactures."[31] The emperor's words make evident what subsequent British accounts of the embassy conceal: Britain's failure to establish an equal inter-imperial trade stems from the nascent empire's deficiencies, not China's. While the aforementioned *London Chronicle* alludes to this

awareness of Pindar's role in satirizing the Prince Regent, as well as his contributions to Anglo-Chinese discourse.

29 For a discussion of how literary translation practices—including those of Mathias—complemented popular British reconstructions of the Qing Empire as socially, culturally, and politically inferior, see Jennifer L. Hargrave, "Silencing China's Poetic Voice," *The Wordsworth Circle* 51, no. 2 (2020): 184–204.

30 Edmund Trelawney Backhouse and John Otway Percy Bland, *Annals and Memoirs of the Court of Peking (from the 16th to the 20th Century)* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 326.

31 Backhouse and Bland, 325.

imperial edict, Mathias would not have had access to Qianlong's letter. Instead, he fabricates a translation that claims authenticity and authority to which it has no right. The title page provides two descriptions intended to shape reception. First, Mathias seemingly recollects the Chinese text's physical traits:

> Transmitted from his Imperial Majesty in a box made of beautiful black wood, carved curiously and of great value, and presented to his Britannic Majesty by his Excellency the Right Honourable George Earl Macartney.[32]

Mathias's description claims first-hand knowledge of the epistle, intimating the veracity of an entirely invented translation. But Mathias goes further. He stipulates the physical parameters of his printed text:

> Though the Poem has very little relation to the Embassy, yet it is thought proper to print it in the same size with the Narrative of the Embassy for the convenience of such persons as may wish to bind together all writings which have any reference to the grand Imperial Diplomatic Mission into the East. (*Imperial Epistle* n.p.)

Mathias alludes to Staunton's forthcoming *Authentic Account of an Embassy* compiled from the materials of numerous embassy members to create an ostensibly objective account of the embassy. In short, the "translated" verses that Mathias presents stand in opposition to Staunton's account. As even Mathias acknowledges—despite his feigned protestations—"the Poem has very little relation to the Embassy." So how does Mathias's text function as a satiric representation of China?

Mathias's verses provide no insight into Chinese culture. Rather than acknowledging that Britain's failures during the 1793 embassy reflect the nation's insignificance to the Qing Empire, Mathias uses his fictional epistle to invent an Anglocentric narrative in which Qianlong appears consumed by Britain's domestic interests. Only within his preface does Mathias—styled as translator—speak to Chinese culture. While Mathias's verses contain stereotypical allusions to Chinese culture—dragons, pagodas, and so on—they serve primarily

32 Thomas James Mathias, *The Imperial Epistle from Kien Long. Emperor of China, to George the Third, King of Great Britain, &c. &c &c. in the Year 1794* (London, 1796), n.p. References are to this edition and are cited parenthetically as *Imperial Epistle*.

to lambast members of Pitt's government. As Mathias confesses in closing his prefatory comments,

> *this translation of it* [Qianlong's letter] is now presented to the public, in the spirit of strong affection and loyalty to the person of George the Third, and of reverence for the constitution and government of England. (*Imperial Epistle* ix)

There is nothing here about augmenting British understanding of China or a desire to further Anglo-Chinese relations. In this spirit, much of Mathias's preface not only makes evident his deficient knowledge of China, particularly the Chinese language, but also approaches the entire subject flippantly. Mathias opens by proclaiming the extensive research necessary to produce his translation. However, as he details his research methodology, notable gaps emerge. He speaks to his careful consultation of extant accounts of China, while confessing to his inability to acquire the eminent translator, Sinologist, and Jesuit missionary Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac Mailla's tome on China. A valued member of the Kangxi emperor's court as well as a respected source of Chinese insight within the Jesuit community, Mailla provides considerable explication of Chinese culture and language illustrating his appreciation of cultural differences, in stark contrast with Mathias's text.[33] In addition to omitting Mailla, Mathias admits that his conversations with members of the first British embassy excluded the interpreter. These gaps speak directly to his inadequate translation skills.

Mathias then spends several pages of his preface justifying any translation errors; this justification lays blame on the perceived peculiarity of—rather than Mathias's ignorance of—the Chinese language. Although versed in Latin and Italian, Mathias did not study Chinese—a fact well demonstrated within his preface. Mathias discusses the tonal nature of Chinese, one of the most difficult aspects of the Chinese language for English speakers. Mathias fails to understand that tones are relevant only to spoken, not written, Chinese. Each word in Chinese consists of a unique character or combination of characters, completely dissociated from tonal pronunciation. From Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's *General History of China* (first translated from French into English in 1736), Mathias cites a passage

33 Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac Mailla, *Histoire générale de la Chine, ou Annales de cet empire; traduites du Tong-Kien-Kang-Mou*, 12 vols. (Paris, 1780).

that attends to the idea that the same phonetic sounds with different tones can convey completely different words. He uses this passage to excuse mistranslations within his work:

> Under circumstances like these I really think it impossible, and rather unkind, not to make some allowances for my errors, as I certainly have not the opportunity of hearing the pronunciation and of conversing so frequently in Chinese as I could wish. (*Imperial Epistle* iii)

Yet, reading Chinese requires no knowledge of pronunciation and the associated tones. Despite Mathias's deficient knowledge of Chinese, he blames any translational errors on the language's incompatibility with English: "it is impossible to do full justice to the imperial Chinese phrases and expressions, which are not always intelligible to an European" (*Imperial Epistle* ii). For these reasons, Mathias justifies "supplying many passages of conjecture" (*Imperial Epistle* ii). Despite his misperception of English and Chinese linguistic incompatibilities, this misinformation justifies his fear that the British government has already been undermined by the Chinese and that the British were "by degrees to be reduced not to a French (God forbid!) but to a Chinese Province" (*Imperial Epistle* iv). According to Mathias, "there appears to be a dangerous intimacy and reciprocation of interest between Mr. Pitt and the Emperor of China" (*Imperial Epistle* iv). This intimacy would effectively subvert British sovereignty. What emerges in Mathias's fictional verses from Qianlong is a litany of British weaknesses—perceived even from afar—to which Pitt's government needs to attend so as to protect British interests. Mathias's China serves as the conduit through which he conveys his political critiques.

These satiric (mis)representations of China—Gillray's, Cruikshank's, Mathias's—emerge within the works of prominent, well-regarded satirists of the Romantic period. Dyer argues that earlier studies of Romantic satire "failed to interpret material within a context of contemporary satirical traditions," a failure that often elevates the more playfully progressive satires of Lord Byron or Percy Bysshe Shelley when, in fact, their verses were "in large part a *reaction* against the dominant trend of the 1790s, exemplified by the efforts of the conservative poets William Gifford and Thomas James Mathias."[34] Pindar, although situated ideologically amongst the less popular radical

34 Dyer, 2.

satirists of the 1790s, was a voice with which royal sympathizers such as Mathias had to contend. In fact, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* asserts that Mathias's translated epistle capitalized on the "idea of Peter Pindar, offer[ing] a mock invitation to Pitt in a general satire on the state of Europe."[35] Mathias, I argue, not only borrowed the styling of Pindar's invitation to the Qianlong emperor but also sought to undermine Pindar's elevation of Chinese culture and a Chinese global order throughout his Chinese-inflected verses.

Poems to Qianlong: Pindaric Foresight into the Macartney Embassy

The sustained popularity of Qianlong's degraded image across decades—from Gillray's 1792 etching to Mathias's 1796 poem to Cruikshank's 1816 print—suggests a general state of animosity towards the Chinese that teleologically culminates in the first Anglo-Chinese War (1839–1842). I argue that these satiric images are bombastic in nature; they seek to obscure Britain's diplomatic failures during the Macartney and Amherst embassies. They effectively silence China, suppressing the emperor's legitimate reasons for refusing British demands and his assertions of Chinese sovereignty. It is here that a third, less common, form of satire emerges: satire that elevates rather than simply denigrates China to affect political and cultural critiques of Britain. In satiric verses inspired by the Macartney and Amherst embassies, Peter Pindar surprisingly revisits and even perpetuates eighteenth-century representations of the Qing Empire as a site of cultural admiration. Through his four embassy-inspired publications—*Odes to Kien Long, The Present Emperor of China* (1792); *A Pair of Lyric Epistles to Lord Macartney and His Ship* (1792); *The Contest of Legs, or Diplomatics in China* (1817); and *A Most Solemn and Important Epistle to the Emperor of China* (1817)—Pindar provides pointed satirization of the British monarchy, thus appearing to use China as a rhetorical tool. But unlike either Gillray's or Cruikshank's caricatures or Mathias's casual dismissal of China, Pindar does not satirize Britain at China's expense.

Let's return to the text with which I opened this article: *Odes to Kien Long*. At first glance, Pindar appears consumed with the economic dimension of the Macartney embassy that Gillray illustrates.

35 Paul Baines, "Mathias, Thomas James (1753/4–1835), Satirist and Italian scholar," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), September 23, 2004; last updated May 26, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18334.

Pindar acknowledges the first embassy's purpose "to open a trade with thee [Qianlong], in the various articles of tin, blankets, woolen in general &c. &c. in favour of the two Kingdoms" (*Odes* 3). However, he quickly pivots to propose an intellectual exchange, "a *literary commerce* ... between the Great Kien Long, and the no less celebrated Peter Pindar" (*Odes* 3). While such a proposal seems preposterous, Pindar argues that his proposal is less audacious than the embassy's attempts to establish trade of Britain's inferior goods for Chinese silk, tea, and porcelain. Pindar asserts his intellectual compatibility with Qianlong, perceiving both emperor and poet to be in possession of "genius of uncommon versatility" (*Odes* 3). In presenting his book of poetry prior to receiving any response from Qianlong, Pindar means "to shew thee that I am not a literary swindler, unable to repay thee for goods I may receive from thy Imperial Majesty" (*Odes* 3–4). Pindar's assertion simultaneously implies that Macartney does not act in good faith. The five odes dedicated to Qianlong, which open Pindar's poetry collection, proceed to identify other ways in which the British and Qing empires are fundamentally incompatible. Pindar itemizes European monarchs' deficient intellect, European governments' tendency to take economic advantage of the general population, and the French Revolution's effective dissolution of religious institutions. Throughout these poems, Pindar's examples ostensibly demonstrate superior European governance to which the Chinese should aspire. This is tongue-in-cheek. Pindar accomplishes the exact opposite, establishing the emperor as a powerful Atlas-like figure "supporting half th' unwieldy globe," whose generosity with his subjects serves as a "beacon to inform a world" (*Odes* 8 and 24). Pindar's crafted image of the Qing Empire harkens back to early eighteenth-century perceptions of China as the imperial example to which Britain should aspire. It is the British government that fails to acknowledge China's global preeminence, a failure that Pindar anticipates will doom the embassy.

While Pindar's *Odes to Kien Long* functions as an intellectual replacement for Macartney's material gifts, his *Pair of Lyric Epistles to Lord Macartney and His Ship* focuses more explicitly on the geopolitical assumptions undergirding the embassy. While both the *Odes* and *Lyric Epistles* question Britain's imperial and socioeconomic position vis-à-vis the Qing Empire, the *Lyric Epistles* elaborates on British audacity, prophetically anticipating a "horrid picture of the future

disappointment of our Ambassador and his Suite at Pekin, with disgracefully attendant circumstances."[36] As the title indicates, Pindar's second publication on Anglo-Chinese relations addresses the British embassy and its ship.[37] In the first poem—"A Lyric Epistle to Lord Macartney, Ambassador to the Court of China"—Pindar imagines Macartney's presentation of Britain and her monarch to Qianlong. He imagines those "wonders" of which Macartney should "tell Kien Long— / Delicious subjects for the Epic song" (*Lyric Epistles* 2). Yet the entirety of the poem focuses on the spectacle of military exercises performed on Bagshot Heath and witnessed by George III. The poem initially reads as an acclamation of the British military, which might be invoked to sway Anglo-Chinese diplomacy. The poem might read as loosely veiled militaristic threats should the Chinese fail to acquiesce to Britain's demands. Yet the military exercises led by the Duke of Richmond are anything but awe-inspiring. The following is Pindar's opening description:

> Forget not *thou* the *Camp* on Bagshot Heath,
> Where met the grimly regiments of death;
> Where not the Dev'l their rage sublime could damp—
> Though Heav'n, as if it meant to *mock* the matter,
> Pour'd on their powder'd heads huge tubs of water,
> And made the mighty heath a dirty swamp. (*Lyric Epistles* 1–2)

The image of destroyed powdered wigs in a field-come-swamp is laughable, but there are details that further mock the scene. These are no "regiments of death," as battle is merely imitated months prior to Britain's instigating war with France in 1793. Pindar does not describe real military drills as there are no enlisted soldiers present;

36 Peter Pindar, *A Pair of Lyric Epistles to Lord Macartney and his Ship* (London, 1792), n.p. References are to this edition and are cited parenthetically as *Lyric Epistles*. The *Monthly Review* speaks dismissively of Pindar's prophetic writings: "The poet now turns prophet, and predicts a most disastrous issue to this grand eastern mission. The Emperor, it is foretold, will take offence at the British Ambassador's throwing out a hint of *presents* to be sent to England." "Art. 34. A Pair of Lyric Epistles to Lord Macartney and His Ship," *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal* 9 (October 1792): 214.

37 It is unclear which ship Pindar invokes. Upon its September 1792 departure from Portsmouth, the embassy consisted of the warship HMS *Lion*, the East India Company merchant ship *Hindostan*, and the brig *Jackal*. Although two more ships joined en route, Pindar likely refers to the *Lion* or the *Hindostan* as these were the ships carrying the gifts to be presented to the Qianlong emperor.

only officers wore powdered hairstyles as a sign of authority. If Pindar's mockery of the military is not immediately apparent, he invokes the voice of Parliament which

> May growl, and swear it was an idle thing,
> This game of soldiers, such a *childish* play—
> But let *me* answer Parliament, and say,
> It was not *childish*, FOR IT PLEAS'D THE KING—. (*Lyric Epistles* 9)

Pindar implies that the very despotic nature associated with foreign monarchs similarly motivates the British king. While Pindar urges Macartney to share an image of the British military that "may unto thine embassy give weight, / By putting great Kien Long into a fright," the image represented within the poem subverts any notion of British military supremacy (*Lyric Epistles* 13).

This first poem in *Lyric Epistles* does little to enlighten British readers' understanding of China. However, Pindar closes the poem by imagining Qianlong's response:

> For troops like RICHMOND, that on valour feast,
> May, like wild meteors, pour into mine East,
> And leave my palace neither stick nor stone;
>
> Like roaring lions rush to eat me up—
> In Britain breakfast, and in China sup. (*Lyric Epistles* 13)

When read in conjunction with "To the Ship," Pindar's intentions behind the emperor's words become evident. Pindar does not suggest that Qianlong fears British military incursions; instead, Pindar identifies British disingenuity within the embassy's stated mission to establish inter-imperial diplomacy, a deceit perceived by the emperor. Pindar furthers this idea as "To the Ship" critiques the embassy's assumption that copious gifts would appease the Qianlong emperor, thereby securing expanded coastal trading despite decades of imperial edicts to the contrary. The British, he argues, are motivated solely by material greed and are willing to satisfy this greed through military force. In his opening lines to the ship, Pindar caustically mocks everything contained therein, from the supposedly lavish gifts to the embassy members' personal presentation to the very purpose undergirding the journey:

O THOU, so nicely painted, and so trim,
Success attend our COURT's delightful whim;
And all thy gaudy gentlemen on board;
With coaches just like gingerbread, so fine,
Amid the Asiatic world to shine,
And greet of CHINA the Imperial Lord. (*Lyric Epistles* 14)

The "Court's delightful whim" in sending a delegation to China mirrors the whim of the military exercises witnessed in the preceding poem. George III appears equally ill equipped to handle either national or international concerns. The "gaudy gentlemen" prove, later in the poem, similarly disadvantaged. Against the undisputed authority of the Chinese sovereign,

Ah! what avails the coat of scarlet dye,
And collar blue, around their pretty necks?
Ah! what the *epaulettes*, that roast the eye,
And loyal buttons blazing with *George Rex*? (*Lyric Epistles* 18)

This external finery masks the paltry nature of the embassy, which Pindar anticipates will ineffectually persuade the emperor or conceal Britain's true intentions. Just as he indicated in the *Odes*' preface, Pindar reiterates Britain's attempts to affect trade disadvantageous to the Chinese. Pindar imagines Macartney naively confessing,

EMP'ROR, my COURT, inform'd that you were rich,
Sublimely feeling a strong money-itch,
Across the eastern ocean bade me fly;

With tin, and blankets, O great King, to barter ...
Some pretty diamonds to *our gracious* QUEEN. (*Lyric Epistles* 16–17)

In response to this insulting proposition, Pindar envisions a whipping of Macartney and his embassy "stripp'd, schoolboy like" before being summarily dismissed: "'Tis thus we Kings of China *folly* pay; / Now, children, ye may all go home agen" (*Lyric Epistles* 18 and 19). The military strength displayed in the first lyric epistle proves ineffectual as Pindar situates all power with the Chinese emperor. Across his *Lyric Epistles*, Pindar imagines lines spoken by the Qianlong emperor. The brevity of these moments—twelve lines across the volume—does little to disrupt the poems' narrative voice; the emperor's voice assumes a sarcastic tone indistinguishable from Pindar's to reprimand the British.

However, this similarity itself is significant. Pindar does not mock Qianlong's speech, proving the emperor to be "a man of rhymes ... a genius of uncommon versatility ... an enthusiast to the muses ... a lover of novelty" (*Odes* 3). When Pindar returns to Anglo-Chinese discourse in his 1817 verses, he affords Chinese voices greater space on the page, thereby enacting satiric slippage in favour of just—rather than uniformly negative or positive—representations of Chinese perspectives.

Recourse to Military Might: The Incompatibility of Anglo-Chinese Diplomacy

Published prior to the return of the second British embassy to China, *The Contest of Legs; or, Diplomatics in China* anticipates diplomatic exchanges at cross-purposes. The thirty-five pages of alternating quatrains read initially as a satirization of Anglo-Chinese diplomacy, particularly Chinese political naïveté. Composed in the voice of Zephaniah Bull—brother to fictional persona John Bull and thus similarly personified as jingoistic—the poem opens with a recitation of popularized derogatory characterizations of the Chinese, a seeming shift away from Pindar's 1792 poems. Zephaniah synecdochically names China the "land of tea, / And other aromatics," thereby reducing the nation to its British-desired commodities.[38] Zephaniah refers to the Chinese through numerous denigratory labels from "long-tail'd natives" to "strange creatures" to "ancient bald-heads" to "cunning knave[s]" (*Contest* 6–7). The Chinese language, "which to pronounce would crack one's jaws, / Or write, would baulk one's spelling," poses an effrontery to Zephaniah and the very appearance of carved images of Buddhist deities "set[s] nature at defiance" (*Contest* 8–10). Despite the British desire for Chinese silks and porcelains, Chinese aesthetics—represented through language and religion—are disparaged in a seeming echo of Mathias's sentiments of two decades prior. The only aspect of the Chinese landscape that Zephaniah praises is that which might appeal to the Prince Regent:

> The town with obelisks is grac'd,
> Which rise in countless ridges,
> And just to suit our R—t's taste,
> Are all the Chinese bridges. (*Contest* 7)

38 Peter Pindar, *The Contest of Legs; or Diplomatics in China. In a Letter from Zephaniah Bull at Canton to John Bull at Home* (London, 1817), 6. References are to this edition and are cited parenthetically as *Contest*.

In deprecating China and her people and mocking their assumed cultural superiority, Pindar implicitly derides the Regent's penchant for Orientalist architecture. The first third of Pindar's poem reads as a gentle critique of Britain's dogged pursuit of Chinese trade and diplomatic relations despite China's illustrated inferiority. Although Pindar satirizes both nations, China's reputation comes under more persistent critique.

Yet the voice that critiques China is decidedly not Pindar but rather the narrator Zephaniah Bull. The quintessential English gentleman and member of Amherst's embassy, Zephaniah unsurprisingly espouses British imperial ideology. His biases may be assumed based on his eager participation in Amherst's feigned diplomacy as well as his self-fashioning as a travel writer. By the early nineteenth century, readers would be sceptical of travel narratives, given the tendency for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century travel writers to hyperbolize. Zephaniah's claim that

> The perils I have witness'd since
> Our long sea-trip was over,
> Would make an Alexander wince,
> And cure the wildest rover. (*Contest* 6)

If the voice of Zephaniah cannot be objectively trusted, then his stereotypical representations of China are similarly suspect. If this logic is lost on readers, Pindar challenges Zephaniah's assumptions by giving the Chinese a voice. If the traveller's voice is dubious, then the voice of a native inhabitant transforms into the only reliable source of cultural insight. Satiric slippage comes when Pindar switches from the narrative voice of Zephaniah to stanzas quoted from a Chinese legate, Ching-Chang. While Pindar does not possess experiential knowledge of the Chinese people, he persists in constructing snippets of persona poetry.

Dialogue between Amherst and Ching-Chang follows an imaginary foot race—the eponymous contest of legs. As British and Chinese officials process towards a marquee built for the embassy's official reception, the highest-ranking Chinese official finds himself racing ahead "with patriotism warm ... to swell his master's glory" (*Contest* 11). In the first instance of explicit cultural misunderstanding, Amherst follows Ching-Chang's example "with a view to share the joke" of racing to the marquee (*Contest* 12). Amherst erroneously

believes that Ching-Chang has instigated a jovial foot race; he does not understand Ching-Chang's actions as reflective of the legate's patriotism or the honour of welcoming the ambassador on the emperor's behalf. Amherst wins the race, effectively humiliating the legate and materially changing the embassy's welcome to China. Against this backdrop, Pindar switches from Zephaniah's interpretation of the officials' actions to Ching-Chang's quoted words to Amherst. Ching-Chang resituates Britain as inconsequential, echoing Zephaniah's earlier disapproval of China:

> But you who live beyond the waves,
> A little spot pervading,
> Are but a set of wretched knaves,
> Who get your bread by trading ...
>
> Now that such knaves as you should come
> Into this land delicious,
> And not stay quietly at home,
> To me is most suspicious. ...
>
> But of his [the emperor's] vast imperial grace
> And kindness without measure,
> He'll suffer you to see his face ...
>
> Not that he needs your scurvy trade,
> Or values your alliance;
> For he might give, without your aid,
> To all the world defiance. (*Contest* 15–17)[39]

Using a Chinese voice, Pindar identifies British hypocrisy in masking their primarily economic endeavours with a veil of diplomacy. Pindar unequivocally establishes China as a self-reliant empire whose emperor humours the British embassies despite their clear economic inferiority. Although Ching-Chang praises the emperor's

39 Ching-Chang's verse seemingly echoes the Qianlong emperor's 1793 response to Britain's first embassy to China. However, as Henrietta Harrison has documented, "the Qianlong emperor's letter to George III was largely unknown. ... The first modern translation into English was made ... in 1896 by Edward Harper Parker." Henrietta Harrison, ("The Qianlong Emperor's Letter to George III and the Early-Twentieth-Century Origins of Ideas about Traditional China's Foreign Relations," *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 3 (June 2017): 690). The similarities between Pindar's verse and Qianlong's letter are purely coincidental.

magnanimity in accepting the embassy to his court, he makes clear that Britain's true intentions are not successfully hidden.

Rather than promptly giving space to Amherst's response, Pindar describes Zephaniah's initial shock, unable fully to comprehend a foreign entity's articulate rejection of British "diplomacy." Zephaniah confesses to his brother,

> Lord—all this while we sat like fools,
> And look'd so 'pon my conscience,
> To hear this first of kingly tools
> Insult us with his nonsense. (*Contest* 17)

The immediate response, captured in the first two lines, recognizes the embassy's foolishness, perhaps a reflection of Amherst's earlier ignorance of the foot race's possible ramifications. Yet by the last two lines, as Zephaniah transitions into Amherst's response, he attempts to reassert British superiority. The phrase "kingly tools" reads two-fold. When read with the preceding lines, this reflects the legate's monarchical power over the embassy as a representative of the Jiaqing emperor. When read with the subsequent line, the emphasis lands on "tool," signifying Ching-Chang's complete subservience to a despotic ruler. Zephaniah effectively translates Ching-Chang's speech into "nonsense," thereby maintaining Britain's desired imperial image, an image effectively described through Pindar's fictionalized Amherst.

Unlike Zephaniah, Amherst responds to Ching-Chang's accusations through economic, moral, and militaristic self-aggrandizement. Amherst's response makes evident an unwillingness to acknowledge British demand for Chinese commodities. Instead, he flips the narrative, asserting Chinese indebtedness to Britain for enlightened thought:

> You are oblig'd to us, forsooth,
> For coming to abolish
> Your gloomy ignorance of truth,
> And giving you a polish. (*Contest* 20)

This equivocally worded benefit implies that the British have saved the Chinese, but from what remains unclear. "Truth" could suggest moral instruction, yet the Canton-limited British presence prior to 1839 precluded any sustained educational or religious engagement with the Chinese population. Specificity is ultimately unnecessary given the veiled threat of military action against the Chinese should

British economic demands be denied. Amherst tellingly asserts a global recognition of British power—still nascent though growing post-Napoleonic wars:

> Our power is known to all; our trade
> By every realm is courted;
> It gives us wealth; and by wealth's aid,
> Our influence is supported. (*Contest* 19)

Trade is notably contingent upon power. And yet, this trade is not mutually beneficial, adding only to Britain's wealth. Pindar voices British imperial values through Amherst's response. Such values do not take into consideration others' national interests. Even within this fictional context, Amherst fails to address Ching-Chang's voiced suspicions, which Ching-Chang recognizes immediately.

Needing no time to process Amherst's words, Ching-Chang recognizes the fiction being perpetuated by British officials in dogged pursuit of imperial influence in East Asia. The legate interrupts Amherst's narrative:

> No more! no more! 'tis nonsense, stuff—
> In fables you have read it!
> Of this false trash we've had enough,
> And far too much to credit. (*Contest* 20)

Although Ching-Chang consents to transport the British embassy to Beijing, he first makes evident that Amherst's assumptions fail to be grounded in reality. Not only are the ambassador's words "nonsense," but they also stem from "fables." Pindar points to the unacknowledged role of literature in framing this inter-imperial relationship. In arguing that the false narratives perpetuated by literature are "far too much to credit," Pindar alludes to the diverse body of sinological literature extant by 1817—from dramas to travel narratives to political cartoons to philological studies. As the poem turns to the embassy's travel from Canton to Beijing, Pindar leaves readers questioning the factors contributing to the increasingly volatile geopolitical relationship between Britain and China.

Such volatility characterizes the last third of the poem. If the first British embassy to China was unsatisfactory, the second British embassy ended catastrophically, with real Amherst being denied an

imperial audience. The Jiaqing emperor's rejection of the embassy followed incomplete communication that demanded an immediate audience with the British ambassador, an audience that Amherst found himself unable to attend. Pindar, composing his verses prior to the embassy's return to England, perceptively imagines a similarly catastrophic end. However, Pindar imagines failure stemming from Amherst's refusal to *koutou*, the same offence that the British erroneously heralded as the reason for Macartney's failure. After the fictional Amherst's dismissal from the Chinese imperial court, Pindar imagines subsequent Chinese mockery of the disgraced embassy upon their return to Canton. At this point, Pindar elevates a minor incident at Bocca Tigris (today the Port of Humen) into a full-scale military altercation that closed the Amherst embassy's time in China. Upon the embassy's return to Canton, they witness the Chinese firing upon the *Alceste* "to strike a desp'rate blow, / That should from home seclude us" (*Contest* 27). Surprisingly, Zephaniah does not express shock, as he did upon hearing Ching-Chang's diatribe, but rather welcomes the opportunity as "some pleasant news ... which made us reparation" (*Contest* 26). The *Alceste* promptly returns fire:

> One shout the British sailors gave,
> Which struck their foes with wonder,
> And then across the trembling wave,
> Pour'd forth their native thunder.
>
> Never in China till that hour,
> Was heard a sound so horrid;
> It frighten'd all the Chinese power,
> And shook the region torrid. (*Contest* 27–28)

The "power" to which Amherst earlier alludes manifests as military might. While this moment could read as a celebration of British military prowess, Pindar offers an alternative reading. The Chinese captain Tsing-hoo observes, "These knaves have valour then, tis true, / To make themselves respected," a sentiment that reflects on Amherst's earlier claim "to abolish / [China's] gloomy ignorance of truth" (*Contest* 28 and 20).

Yet "valour" is used here not as a synonym for strength of character but rather for strength of arms. The British do indeed gain respect

but through force, and by poem's end, Zephaniah believes the Chinese have become subservient to British rule:

> The uncouth natives of the town
> Once surly as the devil,
> Are now, at our new visit, grown
> As oppositely civil. (*Contest* 32)

What has been lost, as evident in these lines, is the directionality of the satire. Is the poem still satiric?

John Wolcot, writing as Peter Pindar, would be expected to produce satire, and the opening lines of *The Contest of Legs* satisfy this expectation. Yet the concluding pages of the poem fail to mock either Chinese or British culture. In fact, the concluding pages are decidedly humourless as Pindar anticipates productive Anglo-Chinese relations achieved through "horrid" military force. If any sardonic comments are to be identified, they might be found in Zephaniah's desire that his brother John "abroad must roam / Before you gain much knowledge" at college. The fear of intellectual capital echoes Ching-Chang's earlier accusation that British knowledge of China stems from fables, from literary fictions. The "knowledge" that Zephaniah bemoans is that which challenges Britain's self-perception, namely, assumed cultural superiority that justifies further imperial incursions.

Conclusion: Lifting the Satiric Veil

In his final satiric verses on China—*A Most Solemn and Important Epistle to the Emperor of China*—Pindar drops his pseudonym, a decision that confuses contemporary reception.[40] While the *Critical Review* immediately perceives Wolcot's thinly veiled satirizations of the Prince Regent, the anonymous reviewer simultaneously takes seriously and at face value Wolcot's characterization of the Jiaqing emperor:

> Dr. Wolcot is in a great rage against the Emperor of China for his haughty demeanour to, and dismissal of, the British ambassador,

40 In analysing *A Most Solemn and Important Epistle*, I quit using the pseudonym Pindar to foreground the loss of a satiric layer within this text.

> and threatens summary vengeance—*facit indignatio versus* [*sic*] is our author's motto.[41]

Using his full title, the reviewer gives additional weight to the supposed poetic vindictiveness as one not masked by the satiric voice. There is no doubt in the reviewer's mind that Wolcot speaks derisively of the Chinese, an assumption that demonstrates the degree to which Britain's position vis-à-vis China has changed in the two decades since Wolcot's first satiric reflections on Anglo-Chinese affairs. The reviewer ostensibly projects their derogatory understanding of China upon Wolcot. Further reflective of China's diminished place in the British imaginary—culturally devalued though still relevant economically—the *Critical* reviewer critiques Wolcot for returning to a subject matter irrelevant to contemporary British concerns. The poet has lost his edge as

> the topics formerly chosen by Dr. Wolcot were generally immediate, both as to place and time. Now, though the disappointment of the late embassy to China is a recent event, it has happened at the distance of six thousand miles, which, according to the ratio of the French tragedian, is the same as two thousand years ago.[42]

In a clear application of Enlightenment notions of cultural stadial theory, the reviewer situates the Qing Empire in Britain's historical past, thereby insinuating Chinese cultural stagnation. Yet, Wolcot's verses, in demonstrating Britain's continued fascination with and dependence on Chinese manufactures, paints a picture that challenges the *Critical* reviewer's perception of China as no longer "immediate, both as to place and time."

Wolcot uses the *Solemn and Important Epistle* to reverse the Orientalist narrative, demonstrating that knowledge of Chinese stereotypes remains immediate not, ironically, to Anglo-Chinese relations but rather to an understanding of the British aristocracy. Although purportedly critiquing the Chinese emperor for his perfunctory dismissal of the Amherst embassy from Beijing, the exoticized verses

41 "Art. IV. – A most Solemn and Important Epistle to the Emperor of China, on His Uncourtly and Impolitic Behaviour to the Sublime Ambassadors of Great Britain," *The Critical Review, Or, Annals of Literature*. 5, no. 5 (May 1817): 481.

42 "Art. IV. – A most Solemn," 479.

within Wolcot's poem describe British, not Chinese, locales. It is St. James's Park—not the gardens of Yuanming Yuan—where

> From trees huge monkies by their tails would swing—
> Cats play their gambols—parrots squall—
> Toads, frogs, and snakes, and lizards crawl.[43]

Wolcot uses these scenes not to demonstrate the Jiaqing emperor's rashness in relinquishing a profitable market but to illustrate the magnitude of British obsession with anything foreign. Wolcot focuses primarily on aristocratic obsession—as he describes the Prince Regent's architectural demands for "Oriental style" and royal parks ornamented with "Pagodas to the sky"—but he also recognizes that this mania has consumed the average citizen:

> Our rivers had been fill'd with junks,
> Our groves with Drury's playful punks,
> Inviting shepherds to their secret shades. (*Solemn* 8)

Yet, it is not the objects themselves that have contaminated Britain but rather the excessive consumption of material goods that evinces an inherent immorality.

By 1817, when even parliamentary debates considered the ethical imperative of subduing the Chinese, the very word *Chinese* had come to be synonymous with immorality. Yet it is the British who, according to Wolcot, "were growing all *Chinese*" (*Solemn* 7). Wolcot identifies the British rather than the objects that they are consuming as Chinese in nature. By poem's end, Wolcot makes evident that it will be the British, not the Chinese, who are shamed by the embassy's precipitous end:

> Returning with the blush of shame
> For England's darken'd sun of fame
> How sadly will this tale in Hist'ry sound? (*Solemn* 14)

The failures of the embassy are less catastrophic economically—the dominant narrative that emerges from the Amherst embassy—but

43 John Wolcot, *A Most Solemn and Important Epistle to the Emperor of China; On His Uncourtly and Impolitic Behaviour to the Sublime Ambassadors of Great Britain* (London, 1817), 7. References are to this edition and are cited parenthetically as *Solemn*.

highly detrimental to Britain's emerging sense of self-importance in global affairs. In flipping the anticipated cultural narrative, Wolcot effectively exposes the very insecurities that Gillray's and Cruikshank's illustrations and Mathias's faux translation attempted to conceal. But even if we credit Wolcot's *Solemn and Important Epistle*—or his Anglo-Chinese poetic oeuvre more generally—with a less subversive message, his poems' vacillation between commendatory and satiric representations of Anglo-Chinese encounters is significant. The varied textual and visual representations of Anglo-Chinese relations—within poetry, travel narratives, essays, Chinese–English literary translations, and parliamentary debates—make manifest the volatility of Britain's incipient imperial narrative within the Romantic era, thereby elevating the stakes of such artistic and literary contributions to geopolitical discourse.