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**Lineage and Legacy:
Thomas Manning
and the Early British Study of
China, 1800-1830**

Edward Weech

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF PHD

2020

CENTRE OF CULTURAL, LITERARY AND POST-COLONIAL STUDIES
SOAS, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Declaration for SOAS PhD Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis provides the first full-length academic study of Thomas Manning (1772-1840), one of Britain's first scholars of Chinese, using recently rediscovered archival materials to shed new light on his career and underlying motives and objectives. The reasons Manning gave for studying Chinese were comparatively disinterested – not concerned with trade, Empire, or spreading Christianity – and he resists easy categorization. His approach betokens Romantic sensibility and Enlightenment rationalism. He was a patriot and a pluralist; a sceptic with mystical inclinations. Now, the interactions between Manning's scholarly enterprise, personal beliefs, and the literary, political, and religious culture of late-Georgian England, can be much better understood.

This project builds upon recent work addressing Manning's friendship with the Romantic essayist Charles Lamb (1775-1834) and his place within Anglo-Chinese relations and Regency Sinology during the important interlude between the Macartney Embassy (1792-3) and the First Opium War (1839-42). Manning's connections to prominent literary and political figures mean the new findings should hold much of interest for scholars working on Romantic sociability and Sino-British history. But they also pertain to late-Georgian English intellectual culture more broadly.

New evidence regarding Manning's aims and ideas affords an original perspective on British engagement with China in the early nineteenth century. This speaks to the history of "Oriental studies", and to theories promising to explain the nineteenth-century encounter between Britain and China or, indeed, between "West" and "East" in general. But it also has implications for the wider public understanding of how and why British people have studied other cultures.

This case study is primarily a work of history, but it takes as much interest in the history of ideas as in historical events. Insofar as the approach draws on history, literary studies, religious studies, and philosophy, it is broadly interdisciplinary; but this is a response to the problem being investigated, not an end-in-itself.

Acknowledgements

This project could not have come to fruition without the support, aid, and advice of countless people. I am most grateful to Bernhard Fuehrer, my main supervisor, and to Lars Laamann and Felicity James, for their wisdom, kindness, generosity, and good humour. I thank my examiners for their feedback and for investing their time to assess my thesis.

I am indebted to the support, forbearance, and advice of my colleagues and friends at the Royal Asiatic Society, especially Nancy Charley, Alison Ohta, Gordon Johnson, and Tony Stockwell. I count myself extremely lucky to have benefited from the generosity of Tim Barrett and Lawrence Wong, who shared with me their knowledge and discoveries about Thomas Manning. Anne Lonsdale, William Wilkins, Matthew Mosca, David Chandler, David Stifler, Jim Watt, and many others generously answered questions as my project developed. I benefited from the expertise and diligence of numerous librarians and archivists, notably Sarah Sworder at the Natural History Museum, James Cox at Caius College, Megan Mummey at the University of Kentucky, Tabitha Driver at the Library of the Society of Friends, and Frank Bowles and Louise Clark at the University of Cambridge.

I have been honoured to present parts of my research over the past several years in London, Cambridge, Paris, and Hong Kong, thanks to the generosity of the Royal Asiatic Society, the Charles Lamb Society, the Friends of Coleridge, the Courtauld Institute, the UCL Institute of Archaeology, the London-Paris Romanticism Seminar, and the Department of Translation at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. My thanks in this respect are due especially to Alison Ohta, Lawrence Wong, Nicholas and Cecilia Powell, Felicity James, Justin Shepherd, Tim Fulford, Kerri Andrews, David Park, Amara Thornton, David Duff, and Marc Poree. It has been a great honour to see the resulting papers published, and I am forever thankful to my editors, Peter Newbon, Graham Davidson, and David Duff and Marc Poree.

One of the great joys of the past four years has been the opportunity to participate in the genial exchange of knowledge and ideas in academic and literary networks in London, Britain, Europe, and beyond. It has been an incredibly humbling,

enlightening, and inspiring period, and whatever intellectual creativity I have enjoyed owes much to the talks, seminars, lectures, conferences, and surrounding conversations where I was privileged to be an eager participant. I have met countless people whose vast learning and erudition has been exceeded only by their humour and good nature. I owe my thanks to more people than it is possible to record here; and the omission of any one in particular is not a token of ingratitude. As I write this, in April 2020, the sociable side of our intellectual culture has been suspended almost completely due to the ongoing pandemic. I look forward to the resumption of this vital activity and, I hope, of participating in it once again, with renewed gratitude and humility.

Thomas Manning's family has done more than anyone else to keep alive the memory of their illustrious ancestor. I have been honoured and privileged to get to know Robert Manning, Mike Manning, and Deborah Manning, family historians who each trusted me with precious information and family archives. I am truly sorry that Robert and Mike are no longer with us to see the result of a project with which they were both closely interested. I hope it lives up to their expectations, and that Deborah, Julian, Byron, and other members of the Manning family are likewise pleased when they have the chance to read it.

This project has ruled me for several years: a daily reality not only for me, but for my family. Much has befallen my family and close friends during that time – much of happiness and joy, and much else of dreadful sadness. I could not have completed this thesis without the love, compassion, humour, and understanding of those close to me. More than anything, my patient, insightful, brilliant wife, Trinity, ensured my soul remained calm and my mind focused. This work is dedicated to her. Its flaws and errors are mine alone.

Finally, I hope this thesis does some kind of justice to the memory of a remarkable man.

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Introduction

This thesis comprises an intellectual biography of Thomas Manning (1772-1840), one of the first British people to study Chinese language and culture. It reveals that Manning's research was part of a wider project of cultural reform. Using new archival sources, the thesis provides new information about Manning's social circle, connections to British Romanticism, and ideas about language, society, religion, and philosophy. This permits original insights into the aims of his research, with significant implications for our understanding of how ideas about China, and Asia more broadly, factored into British intellectual culture at the dawn of the nineteenth century.

Manning has long been understood as an unusual figure in late-Georgian England. His sympathetic attitude towards China – and foreign cultures generally – means he confounds categorization by theoretical models that interpret every European effort to understand Asian cultures as contributions towards cultural hegemony. This study reveals just how little Manning's Chinese studies had to do with advancing his country's political, economic, or cultural interests; and, at the same time, just how sweeping his ambitions were. Manning's project was animated by the conviction that the study of Chinese language and society could provide new philosophical insights into the nature of the mind and the nature of morality. Yet this was no mystical search for the font of Eastern wisdom. Manning's studies were based on principles of Enlightenment rationalism and British empiricism. His linguistic research comprised the comparative analysis of language particles in Chinese and ancient Greek; and he projected an empirical study of modern Chinese manners and customs, intended to supply raw material to promote moral reform in his own country. Manning neither idealized nor denigrated Chinese society. He believed that its real merits deserved to be learned and understood, and that cultural and linguistic practices alike should be appreciated on their own terms, with respect to specific considerations of place, history, and patterns of development.

The ambitious scope of this thesis reflects the extraordinary range of Manning's learning and the wide implications of his studies. Manning was a polymath who, at one time or another, could have made a justifiable claim on being one of Europe's most

knowledgeable figures in such diverse fields as Chinese, mathematics, and ancient Greek. The complexity of the subjects discussed, and the large amount of archival material still needing close examination, means this study, while providing a more complete account of Manning's life than was available hitherto, does not seek to be "the last word" on its subject; and certain issues are set aside. For example, Manning's first career as a mathematician is addressed chiefly with respect to his broader engagement in learned society, and taste for cultural renewal. His mathematical notebooks, containing vast reams on algebra, geometry, and Newtonian fluxions,¹ are beyond the scope of this project. So, too, are the dozens of notebooks stuffed with the riddles and poems Manning composed throughout his lifetime for his own enjoyment and that of his friends.² These sometimes emerged in his correspondence, and no doubt also informed his conversation. Manning's sense of humour is key to understanding his personality, and his wit and intellectual playfulness did much to shape his famous friendship with Charles Lamb (1775-1834). The same goes for his love of poetry and literature, also attested by his archive. These sources might hold much of interest about Manning's involvement with Lamb and his circle, thus yielding new insights about his literary sources and inspirations. But the present project, while fully supporting Felicity James's observation that Manning "deserves to be appreciated more fully in Romantic studies",³ is not primarily concerned with Manning's friendship with Lamb, or about English Romantic literature more broadly. Similarly, unpicking the specific etymological ideas which Manning explored would require sophisticated knowledge of Chinese and ancient Greek; and this remains a matter for further study.

The present dissertation is, instead, dedicated to Manning's intellectual vision, and the place of China within it. In the early 1800s, most of those few British people who undertook the study of China did so for practical and self-oriented reasons:

¹ RAS TM 9/9.

² RAS TM 9/8.

³ James, "Thomas Manning", 21.

furthering their career, religious beliefs, or Britain's diplomatic and commercial relations. Manning was exceptional among Britain's first generation of "China experts" because his interest was intellectually motivated.⁴ In his seminal account of British Sinology, *Singular Listlessness*, T. H. Barrett described Manning as "a man of the highest intellectual calibre, motivated neither by commercial nor religious interests, but by a profound spirit of intellectual enquiry", and argued that "he was one of the most farsighted men of his age".⁵ In 1935, Edith Johnson dedicated a chapter to Manning in *Lamb Always Elia*, her biography of Charles Lamb, following this in 1946 with an impassioned plea that Manning's "achievement in his own right gives him a place in English history".⁶ Susan Stifler described Manning as "a brilliant student from Cambridge", "whose boundless curiosity had led him to the study of Chinese".⁷ Joseph Needham placed Manning among those students of Caius College known for their "unprejudiced generous acceptance of all human culture as their own", a man "romantically strange in destiny".⁸ More recently, Felicity James described Manning as "a remarkable figure", although the "full scope of his achievements is lost to us [...] because Manning never published at length on his experiences".⁹

Sources, Structure, and Research Focus

Recent years have seen renewed interest in Manning's life and legacy. A comparative abundance of academic publications include a biographical essay by Lawrence Wang-chi Wong furnishing much previously unknown information,¹⁰ and a forthcoming paper

⁴ Manning studied Chinese before Sinology was established as an academic discipline in Continental Europe. As such, this thesis tends not to designate Manning or his British contemporaries as "Sinologists".

⁵ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 58-59.

⁶ Edith Johnson, "Lamb and Manning", 416.

⁷ Stifler, "Language Students", 56.

⁸ Needham, *Within the Four Seas*, 137.

⁹ James, "Thomas Manning", 21.

¹⁰ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 85-136.

by T. H. Barrett updating his earlier remarks on the basis of new archival sources.¹¹ The present author also published papers addressing specific aspects of Manning's career.¹² James Watt's comments on Manning in *British Orientalisms* anticipated a forthcoming treatment dedicated to his correspondence with Charles Lamb.¹³ Yun-fang Dai has discussed Manning's correspondence with Lamb with a view to the Chinese reception of Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807), a singular work in the history of Shakespeare in China.¹⁴ There were also positive notices on Manning in high-profile works by Stephen Platt, Jürgen Osterhammel, and, slightly earlier, Peter Kitson.¹⁵ Collectively, this body of work goes some way to compensating for the absence of a full-length scholarly case study of Manning's career. In 2006, Mary Bellhouse self-published a short biography of Manning, replete with human insight and significant observations on his character and intellectual environment. However, it also reflects the dearth of primary material available at that time, while the author does not list the sources used.¹⁶ Now, this thesis makes up some of the remaining gaps in our knowledge. In doing so, it also casts new light on, *inter alia*, the role of "Orientalism", Romanticism, and Enlightenment thinking in the British view of China in the early nineteenth century – a crucial period for understanding Britain's relationship with the wider world.

This new case study was made possible by the re-discovery in 2014 of a large collection of Manning's letters and notebooks, now available at the Royal Asiatic

¹¹ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", forthcoming. I am grateful to T. H. Barrett for permission to refer to this paper, and for sharing previous conference papers earlier in my research.

¹² Weech, "All the Beauties of the Road", 7-17; "Thomas Manning and the Coleridge Circle", 27-34; "Paris to a Stranger Is a Desert Full of Knaves & Whores – Like London", 75-90.

¹³ Watt, *British Orientalisms*, 213-217; "What Stories I Shall Have to Tell!": Mediating China in the Writings of Charles Lamb and Thomas Manning", forthcoming. I am grateful to James Watt for sharing this paper.

¹⁴ Dai, "I Should Like to Have My Name Talked of in China".

¹⁵ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, passim; Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 149-152; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 173-178. Only Platt had access to the new archival sources.

¹⁶ Bellhouse, *My Friend M.*

Society of Great Britain and Ireland. This archive complements Manning's published letters to Lamb and Charles Lloyd (1775-1839), available in libraries in the United States. Together, the studies by Wong, Barrett, and Platt make extensive use of this archive, adding greatly to our knowledge of Manning's Chinese studies and activities in Asia.¹⁷ This project builds upon their insights, and examines how Manning's project was shaped by changing ideas about history, society, and religion in late-Georgian England. Manning thus assumes new and wider significance in British intellectual history.

Manning was reluctant to discuss his private motivations for studying China before a wider public. Only rarely did he divulge such information, in letters to family and friends. These sources are discussed here for the first time and, juxtaposed with his private notebooks, help explain his hidden purpose. This purpose is explored with reference to the historical, philosophical, and religious environment which helped shape Manning's values and interests. Yet, while it is concerned with cause-and-effect and change across time, this approach eschews a single chronological narrative. Rather than charting a process of linear development, it addresses specific problems which are necessary to understanding Manning's intellectual biography.

Chapter one provides a new overview of the formative part of Manning's career, introducing original information from the new archive. It explores the significance of his social and educational background, and his most important relationships and life events. Christopher Daily's case study of the missionary Robert Morrison (1782-1834) made similar use of archival sources to shed light on the relationship between Morrison's intellectual framework and his missionary training and practical activities in Canton.¹⁸ The first chapter of this thesis highlights the sociable networks in which Manning operated, helping explain his access to people, places, and ideas; while new

¹⁷ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses"; Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, passim; Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes".

¹⁸ Daily, *Robert Morrison*.

information about his cultural milieus tells us more about his intellectual referents, enabling a new understanding of his orientation to foreign cultures and interactions with local people. It also casts dramatic new light on Manning's only known love affair – a possible factor in his decision to leave England for China.

Chapter two contains the first in-depth analysis of Manning's travels in Britain and Continental Europe, conducted between 1799 and 1805 before he left for China. Previously unstudied correspondence reveals the extent to which Manning was self-consciously participating in a genre of Romantic travel. Manning's aesthetic and emotional responses to these travels reflect his immersion in circles of Romantic sociability, inflected by some of the same motifs and geographical locales shaping the contemporaneous work of his acquaintances, William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). Moreover, during this critical period Manning engaged closely – albeit critically – with the groundbreaking poetry of these two men. The chapter further reveals Manning's persistent interest in observing social life and customs, the central purpose he hoped to undertake in China. These factors – Romantic sensibility, and the empirical, disinterested observation of social life – now emerge as essential context for understanding his travels in Asia.

Chapter three tries to understand Manning's time in Asia between 1807 and 1817, and how his experiences in Canton, Lhasa, and elsewhere affected his self-perception and ideas about domestic and foreign cultures. It examines how Manning sought to realize his aims and objectives, and how his priorities realigned in response to the success or, more often, failure of his plans. The most substantial text Manning ever produced – the account of his travels in Tibet – is also discussed. While this has already attracted considerable scholarly attention (and some controversy), the new analysis benefits from the fresh perspective offered by new archival sources and the preceding discussion of Manning's interest in Romantic aesthetics and social observation. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the overall significance of Manning's time in Asia, and his Oriental studies more broadly, in relation to Edward Said's influential theory of "Orientalism", according to which Europeans who studied

Asiatic cultures were necessarily complicit in colonial agendas and corresponding narratives of racism and cultural aggression.

Chapter four refers to previously unstudied primary sources that show Manning's underlying purposes in studying Chinese language and culture in a startling new light. The implications of his project are explored in relation to the philosophical culture of late-Enlightenment Europe, whose influence is discernible in Manning's extensive notebooks. These document his wide reading in history and philosophy, and his views about social, political, and religious reform. This discussion explains the theoretical basis for Manning's secular humanist orientation towards the study of human societies, including China. But any close engagement with Manning's thought must also account for the central significance of his spiritual and religious views. This approach is inspired by the work of Urs App, whose examination of Oriental studies in the Enlightenment period emphasizes the extent to which European study of Asian cultures was intertwined, even then, with Europe's internal religious controversies.¹⁹ Manning's own interests in Deism, Christianity, and Neoplatonism may help explain why he dedicated the best years of his life to the study of Chinese language and culture.

Barrett notes that historians of China have (relatively speaking) neglected the early nineteenth century, which falls between the heyday of the Qing and the "modern" era heralded by the First Opium War. Manning's career provides a unique vantage point on this period, and this project seeks to follow Barrett's injunction:

[L]ooking at the period again without seeing it as a mere coda to something else and also – which is more difficult – without introducing the element of hindsight which makes the arrival of Western imperialism the *only* topic of interest does raise the possibility of rethinking the course of history in quite interesting ways.²⁰

¹⁹ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, passim.

²⁰ Barrett, "Bicentenary", 709.

This period loosely corresponds to most of Manning's public activity, bookended in December 1799 when he enters the stage of history after meeting Charles Lamb, and in 1826 when he published his translation of "Chinese Jests". Observing that Manning sought "to challenge any notion that China was somehow especially difficult for Europeans to apprehend", James Watt points out that "what he did write about China arguably invites us now to think about the lost possibilities of the decades between the Macartney embassy and the First Opium War (1839-42), during and after which British representations of China became increasingly and more consistently adversarial."²¹ This was a time when "there were 'stories ... to tell' about China other than those that were premised on antagonism and the expectation of future conflict".²² This thesis suggests some of those "lost possibilities" had striking implications.

China and Georgian England's Literary Culture

Manning gave British, French, and Chinese authorities various reasons for his desire to explore China, often using high-flown terms about the improvement of human knowledge. But certain generalized motives also applied to Manning's project. First was the pragmatic desire to bolster scholarship with reliable information acquired at first-hand. "In the eighteenth century, the superiority of eyewitness evidence over hearsay and book learning stood beyond dispute",²³ but Britain's parlous ignorance about China conflicted with this principle. Barrett observes there was an "evident willingness to rely on second-hand information, or even hearsay, rather than venture on any form of research into things Chinese".²⁴ In this context, fashionable *chinoiserie* stood as an ersatz representation for Chinese art; and it was largely thanks to Jesuit accounts that English observers were able to read about China at all. Some came to

²¹ Watt, "Mediating China", 2-3.

²² Watt, "Mediating China", 23.

²³ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 182.

²⁴ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 41.

think favourably about Confucianism and the Chinese system of government. Thus, Edmund Leites argues, “China appealed to those who were opposed to the rule of money in English politics; in China, they saw a better way, where men were chosen for government office on the basis of moral merit, through strict examinations of their moral knowledge”.²⁵ Even Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) praised the missionary accounts compiled by Jean Baptiste Du Halde (1674-1743), lauding China as a place where “Nobility and Knowledge are the same, where Men advance in rank as they advance in learning, and Promotion is the Effect of virtuous Industry”.²⁶

Johnson provided the introduction to William Chambers’ *Designs of Chinese Buildings* (1757);²⁷ and his exclusive Literary Club boasted among its members Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) and Bishop Thomas Percy (1729-1811), who were responsible for two of Georgian England’s most interesting acknowledgements of China. In 1760, Goldsmith began a series of satirical letters titled *Citizen of the World, or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher*. Inspired by Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes*, these employed the device of a fictional Chinese traveller to satirize British social conventions. The following year, Thomas Percy completed the first translation of a Chinese novel into English (also the first complete translation of a popular Chinese imaginative work into a European language).²⁸ Another member of Johnson’s Club, Sir William Jones (1746-1794), was Britain’s foremost philologist of the eighteenth century, and one of few British scholars before Manning who dabbled in the study of Chinese. At the onset of the Romantic period, therefore, China was beginning to loom at the fringes of British elite culture. Even if British knowledge about China remained unsophisticated, this period marks the beginning of a different kind of intellectual engagement with China, which Peter Kitson summarizes as the origins of British “Romantic Sinology”.²⁹

²⁵ Leites, “Confucianism in Eighteenth-Century England”, 143.

²⁶ Leites, “Confucianism in Eighteenth-Century England”, 149.

²⁷ Fan, *Dr Johnson and Chinese Culture*, 11, 15-16.

²⁸ Ch’en, “Thomas Percy and his Chinese Studies”, 202.

²⁹ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 6.

Yet despite these beginnings, and a growing volume of written material culled from Continental sources, China's culture and history remained poorly understood in Britain, its ancient intellectual traditions apprehended vaguely and often erroneously. The untapped potential of this extraordinarily rich field of learning may therefore have drawn Manning towards Chinese studies. Manning often claimed to have no love for fame; but he was only human, and the prospect of making new discoveries must have held some appeal. Moreover, Protestant Englishmen might be inclined to doubt the veracity of those Jesuit accounts which had come to hand.³⁰ If Manning leaned on this kind of scepticism, the better to garner support for his project, he in turn relied heavily on Du Halde for information about China, something he acknowledged in public and in private. Ultimately, even if Manning's ambition to conduct a cultural survey of China was partly inspired on conventional grounds, he also had more ambitious, philosophical motivations.

Chinese Language Study in Georgian England

Through the East India Company, Britain conducted a large and lucrative trade with China throughout the eighteenth century. But by the 1780s, most British traders were discouraged and apathetic about the practical prospects of learning the Chinese language. Trading arrangements were such that the English did not need to converse in Chinese at all, and Chinese people were explicitly prohibited from teaching them. When the young George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859) arrived in Canton in 1798, most British traders thought his Chinese studies were a waste of time. Staunton himself realized speaking Chinese would not help with trade, while another Englishman, who was fluent in Cantonese, derived no advantage from it.³¹ Earlier generations of British traders were more sanguine about the future prospects for language acquisition,³² and a

³⁰ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 6.

³¹ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 74, 77.

³² Stifler, "Language Students", 47.

few individuals, notably James Flint (?1720-?), acquired a reasonable level of competence in Chinese during the 1740s and 1750s. But Flint's arrest in 1759 and exile in 1762 ushered in a period of fear and despondency among British traders about Chinese language acquisition,³³ and this atmosphere prevailed until the last years of the eighteenth century.

If English traders in Canton made little headway with spoken Chinese, matters were hardly better back in Britain itself, where Sir William Jones and Thomas Percy were most associated with Chinese literature. Jones studied Chinese radicals and characters, and completed a Latin translation of an ode from the *Shijing*; his opinion of Chinese civilization – especially Confucianism – was very positive, and he regarded Confucius as equal to the greatest philosophers of ancient Greece.³⁴ Percy, while more critical of Chinese culture, nevertheless admired its knowledge of morality.³⁵ Peter Kitson identifies Percy and Jones as the progenitors of “Romantic Sinology”,³⁶ but neither was fluent in reading or writing Chinese, distinguishing them from subsequent generations of British “China experts” and academic Sinologists. Barrett thus describes the circumstances in which Manning started to study Chinese in the early 1800s as constituting “profound ignorance”,³⁷ notwithstanding the humble but high-minded amateur tradition of Chinese learning, concerned mainly with questions of religion and morality.

With the Macartney Embassy of 1792-3, the “inadequacies of this struggling tradition of Chinese language studies fostered purely by commercial considerations became cruelly exposed”.³⁸ Nobody within Britain was competent to act as an interpreter, and the Embassy had to scour Europe for qualified individuals, eventually

³³ Stifler, “Language Students”, 50.

³⁴ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 47, 58.

³⁵ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 42.

³⁶ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 37.

³⁷ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 42.

³⁸ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 56.

recruiting Chinese interpreters from a Catholic college in Naples. There was a dawning realization among literary and political elites that the old, haphazard way of doing things was inadequate. Thus, around 1800 some of those involved in the Macartney Embassy, and at least one former member of the Company's Canton Select Committee, explored the possibility of setting up a Chinese language school in London.³⁹ Matthew Mosca also highlights the growing Protestant missionary interest in translating the Bible into Chinese and other Asian languages in the wake of the Macartney Embassy.⁴⁰ This emerging sense of the importance of learning Chinese, and improving the state of knowledge about China, therefore formed part of the wider context in which Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) asked the East India Company to allow Manning to reside in their Factory in Canton. The Select Committee expressed reservations about Manning's intention to explore China's interior, but also noted that "we conceive, from the knowledge and disposition he possesses, the consequence might be rather favourable than otherwise to the public service".⁴¹

Thomas Manning's Study of China

Manning's personal reasons for learning Chinese were loftier than the pursuit of commerce or diplomacy, but he was not blind to possible practical benefits. Indeed, he was prepared to be pragmatic in the hope of gaining official support, lending his limited medical and linguistic skills to the Company in Canton as required. It has therefore been suggested that Manning was "an employee of the East India Company" and enjoyed an "imperial career".⁴² This, however, is an overstatement which elides the important distinction between Manning and acquaintances like Sir George Thomas Staunton and Sir John Francis Davis (1795-1890), who really were imperial employees. Even an

³⁹ Stifler, "Language Students", 55.

⁴⁰ Mosca, "Comprehending the Qing Empire", 1061.

⁴¹ Stifler, "Language Students", 57.

⁴² Fang, "Empire, Coleridge, and Charles Lamb's Consumer Imagination", 826-827.

arm's-length association with the East India Company is, today, liable to make some readers balk, but it is anachronistic to apply modern sensitivities to the period in question. Manning's case is reminiscent of the artisan printer Peter Perring Thoms (1791-1855), who Patricia Sieber has shown occupied a humble place in the colonial structure but also "opened himself up to humanistic solidarities with his Chinese interlocutors and embraced an intercultural aesthetic in response to Chinese literature".⁴³ For his part, Manning was "willing to use the colonial apparatus" whenever it could aid him in his travels, but he showed "no desire to uphold the values of the EIC. Indeed [...] he tries to distance himself from colonial culture".⁴⁴ In fact, Manning wrote to his father in 1809 that he would only help further the interests of the Company if he could do so "without acting hostilely to the real interests of other nations [...] too many gentlemen in the King's Council, think it sufficient if England gains".⁴⁵

In 1810, Manning expressed his frustration at the Company's refusal to give him an official remit for his journey into Tibet:

I cannot help exclaiming, in my mind (as I often do), what fools the Company are to give me no commission, no authority, no instructions. What use are their embassies when their ambassador cannot speak to a soul, and can only make ordinary phrases pass through a stupid interpreter? No *finesse*, no *tourneur*, no compliments. Fools, fools, fools to neglect an opportunity they may never have again!⁴⁶

Considering these remarks, Barrett suggests that "the notion that diplomats might do well to speak Chinese in China was still only a visionary eccentricity".⁴⁷ But Manning did not see Chinese language study primarily as a means to improve Anglo-Chinese relations: for him, it was a key to China's intellectual and social life, and therefore its

⁴³ Sieber, "Universal Brotherhood", 48.

⁴⁴ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 67.

⁴⁵ RAS TM 1/1/49.

⁴⁶ Manning, "Journey", 218.

⁴⁷ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 60.

moral culture. Narrating his journey in Tibet, Manning stated that his purpose in studying China was to uncover:

[A] moral view of China; its manners; the actual degree of happiness the people enjoy; their sentiments and opinions, so far as they influence life; their literature; their history; the causes for their stability and vast population; their minor arts and contrivances; what there might be in China worthy to serve as a model for imitation, and what to serve as a beacon to avoid.⁴⁸

Manning's perspective had elements in common with England's minor tradition of eighteenth-century Sinophilia. Edmund Leites observes that classically-educated rural English gentry, disillusioned with the rapid growth of commerce and finance and their concomitant influence over government policy, were particularly inclined to look fondly upon the high status of learning and morality in Chinese culture.⁴⁹ It is not difficult to see how Confucian ideas about public service and meritocratic promotion might appeal to British reformers tired of the financial and administrative malfeasance that were notorious during the epoch of the "Old Corruption." This period, it has been claimed, was one where:

Rewards did not accord with effort or duty; promotion did not occur according to merit or seniority even in a nominal sense; the highest and most lucrative places had the fewest duties and, often, the least *raison d'être*. Indeed, the most lucrative and impressive offices frequently had no duties at all, and their holders no objective qualifications for holding them.⁵⁰

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Yet this was also a time when Dissenters and other religious minorities suffered systemic discrimination under the Test and Corporation Acts, which prevented religious minorities from playing a role in public life commensurate with their education and accomplishments. English society, in other

⁴⁸ Manning, "Journey", 280.

⁴⁹ Leites, "Confucianism in Eighteenth-Century England", 150.

⁵⁰ Rubinstein, "The End of 'Old Corruption' in Britain 1780-1860", 65.

words, was very far indeed from being a meritocracy; and it needed reform. Manning did not idealize China as a model for this reformation: he thought the country's mode of life was "no better than 20 others".⁵¹ But he did think that the study of Chinese social life could provide material to help improve conditions in Britain itself, and Barrett notes that Manning's "Chinese Jests" draw attention to questions of meritocracy in the examination system and the military.⁵²

That article, comprising a translation of Chinese jokes with explanatory commentary, was the closest Manning ever came to the survey of Chinese society projected in his youth. Translating jokes may seem like an eccentric decision, but for Manning, humour was more than a diversion: it implied common human feeling and was therefore key to inter-cultural understanding. He noted, "Among all the lighter productions of a literary people, there is nothing from which we can with such certainty gather their real opinions, humours, habitual feelings, and popular manners, as from a current jest-book."⁵³ While the reader of a novel or play could never be certain whether the sentiments and views expressed were those of the author alone, "The *jest*s that are in circulation in a country, are in a great measure exempt from this uncertainty. When a jest implies a notion to be current among the people, it really is so, or there would be no jest at all."⁵⁴ Chapter four examines Manning's commentary and its significance for his evolving, proto-sociological interest in the observation of human behaviour. It also explores Manning's unpublished continuation of this work, and his scathing remarks on the attitude of his countrymen abroad.

⁵¹ RAS TM 1/1/52.

⁵² Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 21.

⁵³ Manning, "Chinese Jests", 280.

⁵⁴ Manning, "Chinese Jests", 281.

Manning and the Romantic View of China

Manning's correspondence with Charles Lamb attracted interest from Lamb enthusiasts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in recent years it has been examined by scholars including Peter Kitson, David Higgins, Felicity James, and James Watt.⁵⁵ Lamb prized Manning's letters and esteemed his writing style, which has also attracted modern plaudits. Reginald Watters observed that passages of Manning's letters live "as vividly as better-known pieces of Romantic letter-writing";⁵⁶ while his account of Lhasa "is a lively, personal, Romantic view [...] often touched with the washes of introspection, like the writing of his better-known friends".⁵⁷ Early readers focused more narrowly on the aesthetic and literary qualities of this correspondence, but recent scholarship has engaged critically with Manning's career and the ways China figured in the Romantic imagination. Kitson has described Manning as a "crucial figure" in the development of Romantic Sinology who can be seen at the trend's "very centre".⁵⁸ Manning's approach to China has been contrasted with Lamb, whose comments on *chinoiserie*, according to David Porter, amount to a "comforting assurance that our own thoroughly rationalized, post-Renaissance visual world has advanced to the next level".⁵⁹ Kitson highlights a common trope in the writings of Lamb and others "that Britons knew very little about this isolated and exclusive empire [...] Yet a substantial archive about China existed",⁶⁰ encompassing the writings of the Jesuits and the mass of textual material resulting from the Macartney and Amherst embassies, which they chose to ignore.

⁵⁵ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 170-178; Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 147-156; James, "Thomas Manning"; Watt, "Mediating China".

⁵⁶ Watters, "Thomas Manning", 11.

⁵⁷ Watters, "Thomas Manning", 15.

⁵⁸ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 174.

⁵⁹ Porter, *Chinese Taste*, 3.

⁶⁰ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 10.

Lamb was also deliberately evading the fact of his intimate friend's dedication to Chinese learning. Lamb wrote to Manning throughout his time in Asia while, Kitson observes, avoiding any serious discussion of China: instead his "register and tone remain at the level of gossip, whimsy, and often melancholy".⁶¹ Higgins remarks that Lamb's letters, full of anxiety about death and distance, "reflect obsessively on spatial and temporal dislocation and the breakdown of 'snug relations' with friends and family".⁶² He concludes that, ultimately, Lamb's letters to Manning reveal how "The distinction between European self and exotic Other becomes untenable",⁶³ in spite of Lamb's ostensible obsession with a localized and domesticated version of Englishness. Kitson suggests that Lamb's famous "Dissertation on Roast Pig", whose inspiration Lamb credited to Manning, "reverts to the orientalized version of China deployed through a stylized narrative in the manner of the contemporary tales and pantomimes of Aladdin".⁶⁴ James offers a more equivocal reading of Lamb's essay: while Lamb's "Elia" persona is an imperial being, he is also "a double-voiced entity" capable of critiquing imperial narrative tropes.⁶⁵ Thus, while Kitson concludes that Manning's influence on Lamb cannot be said to have increased the flow of cross-cultural knowledge,⁶⁶ James is more open to the idea that the "equivocal, relativist" Manning had a positive influence on Lamb and others in promoting cross-cultural sympathy.⁶⁷

It is impossible to discern the precise degree to which Manning's more open outlook rubbed off on Lamb, or indeed anyone else. But most authors agree that Manning himself was capable of cross-cultural understanding and sympathy. Noting that Manning's writings were "devoid of any obvious racial stereotyping", Kitson emphasizes his penchant for adopting local dress and immersing himself in local

⁶¹ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 173.

⁶² Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 133.

⁶³ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 156.

⁶⁴ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 169.

⁶⁵ James, "Thomas Manning", 28.

⁶⁶ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 178.

⁶⁷ James, "Thomas Manning", 22.

cultures, and observes he was “Aware of the imperial pretensions of Britain in India and China in Tibet, and dismissive of all forms of colonial bureaucracy, Chinese or British”.⁶⁸ Indeed, Manning was perturbed upon discovering the imperial attitude of the Chinese towards the Tibetans and their assumption of racial superiority. Manning continued to admire Chinese culture but became more sympathetic towards the Tibetan people, forming a critical view of the imperial Qing administration, which he likened to what he had seen in Calcutta: “The Chinese lord it here like the English in India”.⁶⁹ In Watt’s view, “it seems reasonable to suggest that Manning may have been critical of the way in which the EIC betrayed its origins as a trading corporation to assume sovereign power in India and to assert its authority elsewhere”.⁷⁰ James concludes that Manning’s “readiness to engage with other cultures should be remembered in our discussions of Oriental encounters in the period”.⁷¹ Chapter three examines the sometimes conflicting evidence of Manning’s “cross-cultural sympathy”, concluding that this might be understood as a form of “value pluralism”, opposed both to national chauvinism and cultural relativism.

The most substantial literary work ever published under Manning’s name was the account of his Tibetan travels of 1811-12, released in 1876 by Sir Clements Markham (1830-1916). Markham criticized the work, and Manning himself as “quick-tempered and imprudent”.⁷² James points out that Markham was frustrated precisely because Manning’s account is deeply personal and introspective. This is perhaps best evidenced by his evocative description of meeting the child Dalai Lama, which ends: “I was extremely affected by this interview with the Lama. I could have wept through strangeness of sensation.”⁷³ Q.S. Tong suggests that Manning’s sentimental account of

⁶⁸ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 177-178.

⁶⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 217.

⁷⁰ Watt, “Mediating China”, 19.

⁷¹ James, “Thomas Manning”, 33.

⁷² Markham, “Introduction”, lxxx.

⁷³ Manning, “Journey”, 265-266.

meeting the Dalai Lama “would no doubt lend support to the idealization and mythologization of Tibet”,⁷⁴ a process considered in relation to “Orientalist” discourse and, ultimately, a Nazi expedition to Tibet on the eve of World War Two.⁷⁵ Chapter three considers the implications of such an approach, not just for our reading of Manning’s Tibetan experience, but for shared memories of East-West cultural encounters more broadly.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework and Considerations

As Q.S. Tong’s essay suggests, much recent debate about the Sino-British cultural encounter of the early nineteenth century has been informed by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), which argued:

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [...] in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.⁷⁶

Elsewhere in the same work, Said suggested that “the demarcation between Orient and the West [...] already seems bold by the time of the *Iliad*” – implying that the roots of Western culture were themselves “Orientalist”.⁷⁷ Regarding the nineteenth century, Said suggested “It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.”⁷⁸ Said’s interpretation of European Oriental studies received a multiplicity of academic rebuttals, which Daniel Martin Varisco notes “have not been refuted, nor are they likely to be”.⁷⁹ But *Orientalism*’s polemical strength helped establish it as “a stifling

⁷⁴ Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 178.

⁷⁵ Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 181.

⁷⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁷⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 56.

⁷⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 204.

⁷⁹ Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, xviii.

orthodoxy, all the more infuriating thanks to having permeated into countless fields”.⁸⁰ According to Robert Irwin, “Said was canonized by the Western intelligentsia and acclaimed as a leading proponent of post-colonial studies”;⁸¹ postcolonial critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak described *Orientalism* as “the source book in our discipline”.⁸² Its influence can now be discerned further afield, in literary criticism, history, and anthropology. In recent years, ideas propagated in *Orientalism* have helped inspire debates inside and outside the academy about “cultural appropriation” and the “decolonization” of institutions hitherto thought benign – including universities, museums, and galleries – or even for “decolonizing” curricula, knowledge, and the mind itself.⁸³

This wider context, in which some of Said’s more extreme assumptions have become imbricated in pressing cultural conversations, adds a certain poignancy and, indeed, urgency to Manning’s case study. The present approach might therefore be considered as another example of what James Watt describes as the “identification of various kinds of seemingly ‘good’ Orientalisms [...] the antithesis of the irreducible antagonism between opposing camps presupposed by the rhetoric of a ‘clash of civilizations’”.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, in this author’s experience, “Orientalism” is now commonly understood according to Said’s battery of usages, especially among younger scholars; and so the term is used here to refer to the “discourse” posited by Said. When referring to Oriental scholarship in the traditional sense, terms such as “Oriental studies” or “Asiatic studies” have been preferred.

Within academia, *Orientalism* elicited a range of responses from historians based in China, the West, and elsewhere exploring the extent to which the Sino-British

⁸⁰ Joffe, “For Lust of Knowing” [review], 78.

⁸¹ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 300.

⁸² Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 56.

⁸³ The phrase “Decolonizing the Mind” was coined by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (b. 1938). For an example of how it is now applied in the Western academy, see the “Echoes” project, funded by the European Union: Andersen, “Decolonizing the Mind”.

⁸⁴ Watt, *British Orientalisms*, 5.

encounter of the early 1800s adheres to Said's model. Xiaomei Chen applauded Western cultural critics who critiqued "Orientalist" precursors from "a desire to address problems in one's own social and political environment",⁸⁵ but argued against "a new orthodoxy that could be easily applied to all countries and all historical periods".⁸⁶ Wang Ning observed that although Said's perspective "opened up [...] a new theoretic horizon", its applicability was limited geographically to the Near and Middle East; and suggested that it "also has its ideological and cultural limitations".⁸⁷

Clearly, Manning's Chinese studies took place at a time when Britain had profound commercial interests in trading with China, conditioned in one important respect by the growing, illegal trade in opium. However, this project resists attempts to read back from Britain's later imperial relationship with China to explain all intellectual engagement in the decades before the Opium Wars. Stephen Platt argues that the violent turn taken by Anglo-Chinese relations in the 1830s was a break, not a continuation, with historical precedent:

The Opium War was not part of some long-term British imperial plan for China, but rather a sudden departure from decades, if not centuries, of generally peaceful and respectful precedent. Neither did it result from some inevitable clash of civilizations.⁸⁸

But a favourable opinion of Anglo-Chinese relations is not required in order to find unsettling the Saidian implication which Aijaz Ahmad characterized as meaning that "Europeans were *ontologically* incapable of producing any true knowledge about non-Europe".⁸⁹ Ahmad highlights the invidious morality of this approach: "These ways of dismissing entire civilisations as diseased formations are unfortunately far too familiar to us, who live on the other side of the colonial divide, from the history of imperialism

⁸⁵ Chen, *Occidentalism*, 10.

⁸⁶ Chen, *Occidentalism*, 13.

⁸⁷ Wang, "Orientalism versus Occidentalism?", 61.

⁸⁸ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 427.

⁸⁹ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 178.

itself.”⁹⁰ Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud further points out how this perspective denudes imperialism of those characteristics conventionally thought to be most abhorrent: “representation *tout court* becomes colonial, stripping empire of its material history in military violence and economic expropriation”.⁹¹ On the contrary, Ahmad emphasizes, what gave Orientalist prejudices their force was not a “transhistorical process of ontological obsession and falsity [...] but, quite specifically, the power of colonial capitalism, which then gave rise to other sorts of powers.”⁹²

Arif Dirlik observed that “orientalized” Europeans like Sir William Jones could become marginalized and fall under suspicion within their “own” culture, and also that orientalist visions of Asia could be used to indict European modernity. Thus “orientalism, itself a product of Eurocentrism, may even find service in the critique of Eurocentrism”.⁹³ Cohen-Vrignaud takes this argument further in making the case for “Radical Orientalism”, whereby reformist writers in the Romantic period deployed Orientalist tropes to portray their own rulers as “barbarously foreign”, while motivating reform of the parliamentary system, taxation, and penal law.⁹⁴ This, he argues, was a significant trend in Romantic writing into the 1820s, and cultural sympathy with Asian peoples was not limited to a few genius writers: “marginalized Britons recognized their own lot in the oppression suffered by their Eastern neighbours [...] Solidarity with distant and tyrannized subjects runs through much of radical Orientalism”.⁹⁵

In her case studies of P.P. Thoms, Patricia Sieber challenges “an uncomplicated alignment between individual aspirations and state interests”, showing that Thoms “represented the dispersed beginnings of a Chinacentric sinology that can only now be understood as a radical departure from the social pressures and monetary seductions of

⁹⁰ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 182.

⁹¹ Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism*, 8.

⁹² Ahmad, *In Theory*, 184.

⁹³ Dirlik, “Chinese History”, 102.

⁹⁴ Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism*, 1.

⁹⁵ Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism*, 4-5.

an imperially oriented Orientalism”.⁹⁶ Thoms was a professional printer, existing on the interstices between manual and intellectual labour, who forged close working relations with Chinese printers in Canton; they introduced him to Chinese *belles lettres*.⁹⁷ Sieber criticizes the Saidian conception of Orientalism for becoming “a catch-all epithet to fix the ideological location of all scholars engaged with ‘oriental texts’ by virtue of their ‘textual attitude’”.⁹⁸ Sieber situates Thoms’ engagement with Chinese literature within the traditions of artisan radicalism and Romanticism,⁹⁹ not as part of the instrumentalization of knowledge by the imperialist state.

Manning, like Thoms, has already been considered as “a somewhat awkward case for an imperial reading”.¹⁰⁰ His response to Tibet has been fruitfully compared to that of George Bogle (1746-1781), a diplomatic envoy sent some forty years earlier. Gordon Stewart argues that Bogle “represent[s] the Enlightenment at its best”.¹⁰¹

[Bogle] was tolerant, curious and open-minded. He viewed Bhutanese and Tibetan cultures as interesting examples of human achievement. He avoided thinking in terms of superior or inferior, backward or advanced [...] Tibetan and Bhutanese cultures presented new ways (for the British) of understanding the universal human condition.¹⁰²

For Laurie McMillin, Bogle was both “a fair-minded child of the Enlightenment and servant to the English East India Company”.¹⁰³ Like Manning, Bogle possessed a level of intellectual independence which meant he could “take up different and contradictory positions with self-reflectiveness and ease. Because of the heterogeneity of colonial discourse, Bogle did not have to be consistent”.¹⁰⁴ He was not a monolithic author but

⁹⁶ Sieber, “Universal Brotherhood”, 49.

⁹⁷ Sieber, “Location”, 129.

⁹⁸ Sieber, “Location”, 128.

⁹⁹ Sieber, “Universal Brotherhood”, 29.

¹⁰⁰ James, “Thomas Manning”, 27.

¹⁰¹ Stewart, *Journeys to Empire*, 13.

¹⁰² Stewart, *Journeys to Empire*, 13.

¹⁰³ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 8.

¹⁰⁴ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 14.

a “complex, almost quixotic figure”.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Manning’s Tibetan narrative “shows him in a variety of seemingly quickly changing moods, contradictory positions that are never resolved within the body of the manuscript”.¹⁰⁶

Manning continues to defy traditional labels, and Felicity James describes him as “odd, hard to grasp, self-deprecating, fascinated by the exotic and the strange, without a clear, fixed identity”.¹⁰⁷ John Francis Davis, who knew Manning in Canton, remarked that he was “seldom serious, and did not argue any matter gravely, but in a tone of banter in which he maintained the most monstrous paradoxes, his illustrations often being highly laughable [...] he did everything in his own odd and eccentric way”.¹⁰⁸ Kitson suggests Davis’s comments support the idea Manning was “simply odd”,¹⁰⁹ and from his youth, Manning exhibited a penchant for idiosyncrasy and contrariness that later matured into genuine eccentricity. In this sense, Manning was like other lonely and obscure European scholars of Asia who worked independently in the days before the founding of modern universities: “dabblers, obsessives, evangelists, freethinkers, madmen, charlatans, pedants, romantics.”¹¹⁰ But a proclivity for paradox and contradiction regarding the relative merits of European and foreign cultures might also be interpreted as characteristic of Enlightenment travel writing. Thus, according to McMillin, both Manning and Bogle were “adventurous not only in their physical exploits but also in their thinking”.¹¹¹ Like Bogle and Sir William Jones, Manning reached intellectual maturity at a time before the cultural and educational apparatus of the colonial bureaucracy had fully emerged. He therefore enjoyed relative freedom to develop, and express, equivocal views about British and Asian cultures. McMillin suggests that in the late eighteenth century:

¹⁰⁵ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 14.

¹⁰⁶ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 57.

¹⁰⁷ James, “Thomas Manning”, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Markham, “Introduction”, clxiv.

¹⁰⁹ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 176.

¹¹⁰ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 7.

¹¹¹ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 56.

[T]he notion of a solid British self, supported by the Orientalist dichotomies of East and West, black and white, backward and advanced, female and male, et cetera, had not yet become hegemonic. Indeed, Britons of the late eighteenth century came to India with intellectual and humanistic aspirations and assumptions that were often at odds with their administrative and commercial commitments.¹¹²

Britain had significant commercial interests in China in the early 1800s, and an intermittent military presence; but this was quite different even to the relatively underdeveloped colonial apparatus in India. Manning shows that British people could, and did, display intellectual autonomy and resist the emerging “hegemonic” colonial discourse. Manning was not entirely free from the prejudices of his day – who can ever claim as much? – but his ideas about Chinese language and culture were largely free from the trappings of imperialism, racism, and Orientalism. The present study demonstrates how a humane engagement with Manning’s motives and thinking can provide fresh insights, with far-reaching implications fittingly commensurate to his original ambitions.

¹¹² McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 14.

Chapter 1

Thomas Manning and his Circle

Introduction

Building upon existing scholarship, this chapter examines new archival sources to provide a new summary of some of the most important episodes in Thomas Manning's career. This prepares for a renewed understanding of its overall significance and meaning. In the process, this chapter generates new insights into Manning's social and educational background and the sociable circles in which he was embedded. Manning's specific ambition – to study Chinese civilization – was highly unusual in late eighteenth century Britain, but he pursued it amidst a vibrant social, political, religious, and intellectual culture where he was an active, if sometimes sceptical, participant. This overview frames the analysis of Manning's travels, research, and publication contained in later chapters, and begins to situate his intellectual concerns in dialogue with one another, rather than as they conform to the priorities of modern scholarship.

Thomas Manning was the second son of a respected Anglican clergyman, Rev William Manning (1733-1810), and his gentlemanly status endowed the leisure and respectability crucial to pursuing his ambitious plans. William Manning was a liberal-minded man and apparently a kind and generous father; having lost his wife at a young age, he seems to have invested his remaining love and affection into his children. His modest private wealth, intellectual sympathy, and paternal forbearance meant that Manning enjoyed the modicum of independence that helped launch the career of many another eccentric English scholar. The Manning family was well-represented in the Norfolk Anglican hierarchy, and Thomas enjoyed a classical education leading to the study of Greek and Mathematics at Caius College, Cambridge. But he was not born into a climate of unthinking orthodoxy. One of England's largest counties by area, in the late eighteenth century Norfolk boasted significant political and religious diversity, and was a primary centre of Rational Dissent and Whig Radicalism: both movements to which Manning's father was sympathetic. Raised in the language, manners, and values of the liberal gentry, in his youth Manning would have been exposed to arguments for

the American and French Revolutions, the abolition of the slave trade, and the rights of religious minorities. Moreover, through his father, Manning from childhood had personal knowledge of public figures known for their efforts to reform British society, and who were working to push down artistic, social, and legal barriers, notably the Test and Corporation Acts.

This respectable, liberal background helps explain why Manning conceived his project, and also why people with cultural influence were inclined to receive and listen to him. His classical education gave him the confidence, and at least some of the intellectual tools, to prepare for the study of Chinese. Moreover, the temperament to cross borders separating people and ideas was essential to his entire project. But an appetite for cultural exchange did not mean that he was rootless, or without a sense of home. His inner life was bound up with his Norfolk origins, and throughout his adulthood, Manning's mind returned to his home county, which served as a fixed point of reference during his travels in Europe and Asia. If his mind often turned homewards in a figurative sense, his ideas also returned there literally, contained in the letters he sent regularly to friends and family. And, though Manning never lived in Norfolk permanently after leaving for Cambridge University, he visited at regular intervals.

Manning's friends and acquaintances helped shape his ideas, his access to information, and the social opportunities available to him. Insofar as previous studies have investigated Manning's social network, they have focused overwhelmingly on his friendship with Charles Lamb (1775-1834). This is inevitable considering Lamb's literary standing and central role in Romantic networks; it was also unavoidable because, until recently, the only letters by Manning known to have survived were those to Lamb and Charles Lloyd (1775-1839), another Romantic author and (for a time) member of Lamb's coterie. While it is not the aim of this study to downplay the significance of Lamb's friendship, it does aim to balance the view of Manning's career by highlighting the independent social networks, centred on Cambridge and Norfolk, in which he was enmeshed before they met. These networks endured throughout Manning's life, and the very fact that Manning had a certain "social independence" helped him retain an outsider's perspective on the affairs of the Coleridge-Wordsworth

Circle, insofar as these were shared with him by Lamb. Moreover, to the extent that this chapter revisits Manning's connection to Romantic authors, it does so not to recapitulate information already available via other sources, but to explore how access to the ideas of Romantic authors like Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), and William Wordsworth (1770-1850) influenced his own ideas and thinking.

This new analysis of archival material should allow a more rounded account of Manning's career to emerge. It goes some way towards solving one of the great mysteries of Manning's life: the identity of the woman mentioned by Sophia Lloyd in July 1800, to whom Manning is said to have had a romantic attachment.¹¹³ In January 1801, Charles Lloyd alluded to the apparent failure of Manning's overtures towards this lady;¹¹⁴ eight months later, the first statement linking Manning with China appears, in a letter from Charles Lamb.¹¹⁵ In addition to identifying the lady in question – a sister of the architect William Wilkins (1778-1839) – this chapter therefore provides a new perspective on the psychological factors involved in Manning's decision to remove himself from England for many years.

Norfolk Ancestry

Thomas Manning was born in Broome, Norfolk on 8 November 1772. He was the second son, and third child, of William and Elizabeth Manning (1747?-1782). William Manning served successively as Rector of the Norfolk towns of Broome and Diss, while Elizabeth was the only child of Rev William Adams, Rector of Rollesby, Norfolk. Elizabeth died just a few months after giving birth to her last child.¹¹⁶ One of eight siblings, Thomas was nine years old when his mother died; two of his five sisters would

¹¹³ Beaty, *Letters*, 54.

¹¹⁴ Beaty, *Letters*, 61.

¹¹⁵ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 223.

¹¹⁶ Baigent, "Manning, Thomas (1772–1840), Traveller and Writer on China."

also die in childhood. The youngest, Amelia, died in 1786, and Elizabeth, named after their mother, followed a year later, aged thirteen.

William and Elizabeth Manning relocated from Broome to Diss in 1778. This was a significant move from a remote coastal village to an important inland town with which William's ancestors had connections going back several generations. Indeed, according to family information, members of the Manning family were in Diss at least as far back as the sixteenth century, when they served as churchwardens.¹¹⁷ Barrett observes this was "a far from cosmopolitan ancestry",¹¹⁸ and sons, often named after their fathers, would even replace them as the spiritual leaders of the parish: four generations of Manning clergymen held the living of Diss continuously for 138 years. The wider Manning family included senior clergy in nearby parishes, and they maintained a distinguished place in the local community, playing a leading role in the dissemination of both religious and secular knowledge. In the century following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, it suggests stability, continuity, and familiarity. But this was not an intellectually closed world. Thomas's uncle, also called Thomas Manning (1724-1787), was a keen antiquarian, and his daughter Frances – Thomas's cousin – married Thomas Jenkinson Woodward (1745-1820), a Fellow of the Linnaean Society. In 1812, Thomas's older brother, William, married Elizabeth Donne, daughter of the Rector of Colton, Norfolk, and granddaughter of a first cousin of the poet, William Cowper (1731-1800).¹¹⁹

Thomas's father, William Manning, was a classically educated and progressive-minded man whose liberal views made him popular among local Dissenters. In 1790, he published *Three Sermons Preached at the Norfolk Assizes*, prompting the nonconformist *Monthly Review* to note that he "appears to be a man of sense and

¹¹⁷ I am grateful to Mike Manning, Robert Manning, and Deborah Manning for sharing information about their family history.

¹¹⁸ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 3.

¹¹⁹ Burke, *Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary*, II, 970.

learning, a friend to liberty and free inquiry, to order and civil government, to piety, to humanity, and to all the true comforts and best interests of mankind.”¹²⁰ The *New Annual Register* – founded by the nonconformist Andrew Kippis (1725-1795) – described the sermons as “the productions of a man of learning, piety, and candour [...] delivered in plain and impressive language”.¹²¹ In *Three Sermons*, William Manning criticized the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England,¹²² describing them as a mere outdated “set of opinions”: “that these articles, as they are called, of religion, were the opinions of times far less enlightened than the present, and can ill sustain the test of just and accurate enquiry, may be very truly asserted”.¹²³ This liberal critique of the Thirty-Nine Articles helps explain Thomas’s own decision not to subscribe when it came time for him to graduate from Cambridge, even though this meant leaving university without a degree. William Manning went on to condemn the slave trade (“this abominable traffic in human blood”), calling for gradual emancipation. He also looked forward to the extension of the rights of religious liberty to Dissenters (and potentially even to Roman Catholics), with “an *unlimited* toleration be granted to *all*, except those (and I conceive it will be the exception of few, if any) who, by mixing and uniting political with their religious tenets, may endanger the peace and security of the state”.¹²⁴ In 1790, the same year he published *Three Sermons*, William Manning enabled John Wesley (1713-1791), the founder of Methodism, to preach in Diss during a tour of East Anglia, and the elderly preacher delivered one of his last sermons in the parish church, St Mary’s. Wesley addressed a packed crowd, observing with satisfaction that “I think this church is one of the largest in this county. I suppose it has not been so filled these hundred years.”¹²⁵

¹²⁰ “Three Sermons”, *Monthly Review*, 156.

¹²¹ “Domestic Literature of the Year 1790”, *New Annual Register*, 199.

¹²² Part of the Church of England’s *Book of Common Prayer*, the Articles contain founding doctrines and practices of the Anglican faith.

¹²³ “Three Sermons”, *Monthly Review*, 157.

¹²⁴ “Three Sermons”, *Monthly Review*, 158.

¹²⁵ Wesley, *The Heart of John Wesley’s Journal*, 484-485.

Norfolk was the most populous English county before the industrial revolution, and its capital, Norwich, was home to some well-known Dissenters and radicals.¹²⁶ William Manning's *Three Sermons*, published in the aftermath of the French Revolution, contributed to an ongoing public conversation; and his views on the important issues of the day were a major influence on Thomas's own. They were also conducive to friendly ties with local Dissenters. Indeed, noting the Unitarian thrust of William Manning's beliefs, Felicity James suggests that he, "while remaining Anglican, was a Dissenter at heart".¹²⁷ In 1785, in a letter to twelve-year-old Thomas, William Manning described a visit from Rochemont Barbauld (1749-1808), the husband of Anna Letitia Barbauld (1743-1825), prominent members of the nonconformist Aikin-Barbauld literary circle. Rochemont and Anna Letitia were just about to leave Suffolk, where they had overseen the Dissenting school, Palgrave Academy, for over a decade. William informed Thomas that he had proudly read to Rochemont his son's letter: "which you may be certain I should not have done, had I not been confident it would do you credit; and it appeared to have that effect, by the handsome manner in which he spoke of it."¹²⁸

In later life, nonconformist intellectuals from Norfolk formed a major part of Thomas Manning's circle of acquaintance, influencing his ideas and the sources of information he could access. Exposed to a liberal interpretation of Anglicanism from a young age, and raised in sympathy towards Dissenters and their ideas, Manning would always feel at ease in such company.

¹²⁶ Jewson, *Jacobin City*, passim. As Chandler explains, however, Norwich was *not* a majority Dissenter town – Dissenters were never more than perhaps one third of its population (*Norwich Literature*, 4).

¹²⁷ James, "Thomas Manning", 22.

¹²⁸ RAS TM 1/1/1.

Early Life and Education

Manning studied for a year at the Free Grammar School of King Edward VI at Bury St Edmund's, under a teacher named Mr Laurentz, but for the next six years was educated at home by his father. It is unclear when exactly Manning attended Bury School but, judging by the fact he started at Cambridge in 1790, and that he was home schooled for six years, we might infer that he attended Bury between 1783 and 1784. Two letters from William Manning, dated July and August 1785, reveal Thomas was visiting Yarmouth for the sea-bathing treatment, suggesting he had already suffered an episode of poor health. These letters also mention Bury School, and Mr Laurentz, as if Thomas was already familiar with them.¹²⁹

Throughout his life, Manning's letters and diaries refer to periodic illnesses, which he would cite as a reason for keeping to his rooms, and shunning company. He rarely described his physical symptoms, dwelling instead on bad spirits and low mood. During long spells in France, Canton, Rangpur, and Lhasa, Manning was socially isolated, and no doubt suffered from loneliness. Moreover, the mental challenge Manning faced in learning Chinese was considerable, and may have exacerbated depressive tendencies.¹³⁰ While in Lhasa, at the age of thirty-nine, he described suffering from "acute rheumatism" and "rheumatic fits", whose symptoms he could relieve using camphor and opium pills, resorting as well to antimony (a purgative) and Dover's powders, which also included opium.¹³¹ Opium addiction could of course cause serious physical and psychological symptoms, but there is little evidence that Manning's use of opium was habitual.

There is no question, however, that Manning was a regular drinker. Zhao Jinxiu, Manning's Chinese assistant in Tibet, noted they met in Calcutta at a tavern where his

¹²⁹ RAS TM 1/1/1.

¹³⁰ I am grateful to Anne Lonsdale for pointing out that Chinese studies can cause low spirits even in the most able students.

¹³¹ Manning, "Journey", 283.

future employer was “a frequent customer”.¹³² But if Manning’s drinking ever exacted a toll on his health, his health issues started in childhood and were probably at least partly congenital. In the eighteenth century, death was a constant presence, which could befall loved ones of any age, at all stages of life; and being from a higher social class was no surety against the perils of childbirth or sudden illness. Manning, always an introverted character, would have just turned nine when his mother died in 1782, and it is not hard to imagine that this event may have caused psychological trauma. While it is futile to speculate about the specific nature of Manning’s periodic ill health, we might surmise that early childhood experiences of loss, combined with melancholic and introspective tendencies, created a propensity for depression, which could be triggered by extreme stress, social isolation, or events which threatened to undermine his sense of purpose. Alcohol might have helped him cope, while personal experience may have helped Manning sympathize with the travails of friends, not only Charles Lloyd but also Charles Lamb and his sister Mary (1764-1847).

Mary Bellhouse suggests Manning’s first acquaintance with China may have been Bury School’s 1784 performance of the play *Orphan of China*. Set in early-Qing China, the play had been written in 1756 by the Irish playwright Arthur Murphy (1727-1805), heavily resembling *L’Orphelin de la Chine* by Voltaire (1694-1778), itself inspired by the Yuan-era Chinese play *The Orphan of Zhao*. The *Bury Post* reported that the school staged the play “for the benefit of the poor”, raising the sum of forty pounds.¹³³ While Manning may not have been enrolled at Bury School at that time, his older brother certainly was, ensuring Thomas would have known about the production. Noting that Lamb’s famous essay, “A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig” (1822), is a tribute to Manning, Felicity James remarks upon Lamb’s reference (in the guise of his persona, Elia) to his fictional days as a student at the college of St Omer’s. James points out that

¹³² Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 172.

¹³³ Bellhouse, *My friend M.*, 1.

St Omer's was not Lamb's *alma mater*, but Arthur Murphy's.¹³⁴ This was perhaps a coded reference which Manning, and few others, could have understood.

In keeping with educational priorities at the time, Manning's schooling would have centered on mathematics, Latin, and Greek. One notice after his death recorded that his "sickly childhood, disabling him from boyish sports, matured his mind while it enfeebled his body", and that, as a teenager, Manning took up the study of metaphysics, reading Plato and David Hume: foremost proponents, respectively, of classical idealist and modern empirical philosophy.¹³⁵ Manning was clearly an able student and followed his father and older brother by studying at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He was admitted as "Pensioner" (fee-paying student) on 22 October 1790, and was enrolled at Cambridge for almost five years, from Michaelmas term 1790, until Lady Day (around 25 March) 1795.¹³⁶ His older brother, William, had enrolled two years earlier, after spending a full eight years at Bury. A model student, William, who like Thomas received financial support as a Caius Scholar, graduated ninth in his year in 1793, becoming a College Fellow and lecturer in Greek. Ordained in the Church of England in 1794, William succeeded his father as Rector of Diss. Thomas would have no such conventional career.

Cambridge

When Manning was at Cambridge the curriculum was dominated, as it had been since the early eighteenth century, by mathematics, for which written exams had only just been introduced; other subjects – Greek, Divinity, and Philosophy – were still tested orally. Notwithstanding the subject's high status, the teaching of mathematics at Cambridge was some way behind Continental Europe, relying on the outdated system of Newtonian fluxions. This was in keeping with a university culture that remained

¹³⁴ James, "Thomas Manning", 32.

¹³⁵ Donne, "Memoir", 228.

¹³⁶ Gonville and Caius Archives.

politically and intellectually conservative. But Cambridge was “not intellectually somnolent”,¹³⁷ and nor was it untouched by the tumultuous debates that followed the American and French Revolutions. Unitarian thinking was gaining ground at Cambridge in the 1770s and 1780s, and in 1793, William Frend (1757-1851) was subjected to a trial by the Master and Fellows of Jesus College for publishing *Peace and Union*, which condemned much of the Anglican liturgy. Frend was targeted by the administration in the hope of stifling the spread of radicalism through the university,¹³⁸ but the trial provoked young firebrands including Coleridge, then an undergraduate at Jesus College. Wordsworth, an undergraduate at St John’s, spent a substantial spell in France in the early 1790s, becoming an ardent supporter of the Revolution.¹³⁹

In a climate where a Unitarian could be persecuted for his religious beliefs, the discriminatory nature of the Thirty-Nine Articles was hard to ignore, and Manning found it impossible to subscribe to them in good faith. Moreover, although leaving Cambridge without a degree disbarred him from entering the Church or a College Fellowship, it was otherwise, at that time, no cause for shame. Thus Manning’s enrolment record notes he was “An excellent mathematician, but from scruples to the tests did not graduate”.¹⁴⁰ There are no records to indicate that, as a student, Manning was active in politics, but an obituary notice after his death, over forty years later, claimed that while in Cambridge he wore “the plain dress of the Quakers”.¹⁴¹ Manning lacked the temperament of a political activist, but his liberal education, Whig background, and progressive views would indicate a natural affinity with the Quakers; while his refusal to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles placed him in solidarity with all those Dissenters prevented by the Test and Corporation Acts from taking degrees or participating fully in public life. One of Manning’s most auspicious Cambridge

¹³⁷ Gill, *William Wordsworth*, 430, n19.

¹³⁸ Sisman, *The Friendship*, 38.

¹³⁹ Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre, and English Romanticism*, 163-165.

¹⁴⁰ Gonville and Caius Archives.

¹⁴¹ “Deaths: May”, *Annual Register*, 163.

friendships was with a Quaker, the young poet Charles Lloyd, eldest son of the banker and antiquarian Charles Lloyd of Birmingham (1748-1828). Although Manning never became a Quaker, it was occasionally convenient for him to pose as a sort of “Fellow Traveller” to extricate himself from irksome responsibilities. As he jokingly alluded to his father in 1808: “But you know I am not particularly fond of attaching myself to institutions. I always plead I am a Quaker.”¹⁴²

During the late 1790s, Manning lived in rooms above Mr Crisp’s shop in St Mary’s Lane, near Caius College, supporting himself by tutoring undergraduates in mathematics. Charles Lloyd was one such pupil, and through him Manning later made the acquaintance of Charles Lamb. Posterity has remembered Manning largely as a result of this connection, but Manning was not to meet these young Romantics until the end of the decade. Some of the friends and acquaintances Manning earlier made in Cambridge were equally important to him, figuring prominently in letters from France and China. Friendship with reputable academics clearly boosted Manning’s self-esteem, but it also had a practical use: he could refer to them for character statements in a manner that would have been less convincing with a more humble figure like Lamb, employed as a clerk in East India House.

Martin Davy (1763-1839)

The friends Manning made at Caius College in the early 1790s formed part of a social network that remained significant throughout his life. Indeed, while Manning became a largely overlooked figure in the mainstream of British history, his College magazine proves that his memory was kept alive at his own institution.¹⁴³ This no doubt owes much to Manning’s enduring friendship with Dr Martin Davy (1763-1839), Master of

¹⁴² RAS TM 1/1/44.

¹⁴³ *The Caian* mentioned Manning in 1904, 1907, 1909, 1910, 1911, and 1925. *The Caian*, Vol. XVIII, 1909, 206, reports that the explorer Sven Hedin, at a lunch held in his honour, observed, “He felt more especially at home in Caius with its Manning, who preceded him nearly a century, and who actually got to L’hasa”.

Caius College from 1803. Davy was originally from Norfolk, attending school in Norwich before studying medicine at Edinburgh. As Master of Caius, and Vice-Chancellor in 1803-4, Martin Davy was a man of some standing, and Manning's letters mention him regularly during the 1800s. The earliest mention of Davy appears to date from December 1799, when Manning reports going to "a most sumptuous dinner today at Dr Davy's [...]"¹⁴⁴ In 1804, while stranded in France, Manning told his father to ask William, his older brother, "Does the college go on upon the old footing now Davy is master? Remember me to him particularly [...]"¹⁴⁵ Manning wrote to Davy on the way to China in the Summer of 1806,¹⁴⁶ and in Penang that November told his father, "I have found no time to write a single line – but hope to write this afternoon to Davy at least."¹⁴⁷ He wrote to Davy again in January 1808,¹⁴⁸ and in Calcutta in 1810, listed Davy first among those correspondents to whom he owed a letter: "Davy, Tuthill, Lloyd, Lamb &c &c must all go unanswered till I have seen L[or]d Minto". Davy had provided an introduction in Calcutta, and Manning reports "I have not yet seen Mr Smith the Advocate General, Davy's intimate friend."¹⁴⁹

Davy was more than just Manning's main contact with Caius, or even a respected friend whose name facilitated introduction to polite society. Slightly older than Manning, but sharing his political and religious sympathies, Davy was also an intellectual confidant. On 20 December 1810, Manning wrote to his father from Rangpur, Bengal, anticipating his imminent departure for Tibet. Eager to prove to his elderly parent that "I am not wandering at random, without a real object",¹⁵⁰ Manning confided his secret ambition to publish a comparative analysis of prepositions and particles in the ancient Greek dialects, drawing on his knowledge of Chinese. This, in

¹⁴⁴ RAS TM 1/1/5.

¹⁴⁵ RAS TM 1/1/32.

¹⁴⁶ RAS TM 1/1/37.

¹⁴⁷ RAS TM 1/1/38.

¹⁴⁸ RAS TM 1/1/43.

¹⁴⁹ RAS TM 1/1/51.

¹⁵⁰ RAS TM 1/1/52. Chapter four examines this letter in detail.

turn, he conceived as a contribution to the philosophy of language, and thus to the philosophy of mind.¹⁵¹ This, Manning confessed, was only the second time he had ever divulged his secret; the first was to Martin Davy. Sadly, there is no recourse to Davy's archive for further information: his papers were destroyed at his own request, boiled in the large copper kettle of the Caius kitchen.¹⁵²

Sir George Lemman Tuthill (1772-1835)

Sir George Lemman Tuthill (1772-1835) was another close friend from Manning's days at Caius, and Manning was appointed an executor of Tuthill's will after his death. Like Davy, Tuthill was a physician, elected Fellow of the Royal Society in 1810, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians in 1817, and knighted in 1820. Tuthill's letters reveal him to have been a man of extraordinary intellectual openness and capacious learning, interested in a variety of scientific, philosophical, and literary topics. During a tour of Germany with his wife Maria in 1798, Tuthill informed Manning that he had become acquainted with the philologist Johann Christoph Adelung (1732-1806) and the geologist Abraham Gottlob Werner (1749-1817), from whom he was enjoying a course of lectures. Tuthill was also studying chemistry with Wilhelm August Lampadius (1772-1842), yet somehow found time to ensure that "the literature of [Germ]any is not neglected and I entertain myself with Wi[e]land, Goethe, Herder, &c."¹⁵³

Tuthill later expounded to Manning his idea for a literary-philosophical commune on the bank of the Thames which would be "inhabited by eight or ten young people of superior minds". Manning was the only person Tuthill knew personally who he deemed suitable to join him, though he also imagined that Coleridge "would be a desirable member and pleased with the proposal".¹⁵⁴ Tuthill's Rousseauvian scheme,

¹⁵¹ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁵² Bettany, "Davy, Martin (1763–1839), Physician and College Head".

¹⁵³ RAS TM 2/3/2.

¹⁵⁴ RAS TM 2/3/3.

indeed, superficially resembles Coleridge's abandoned utopian vision of "Pantisocracy", conceived in 1794 with Robert Southey (1774-1843). While Tuthill's plan came to nought, he and Manning did find time to conduct a tour through the south of England and Wales in April 1801,¹⁵⁵ and they were reunited the following year, when Tuthill, Maria, and Manning all took advantage of the Peace of Amiens to visit France. When Manning was beginning his journey into Tibet in late 1811, he wrote to Sir Joseph Banks that Tuthill would be a worthy addition to any future Embassy to China.¹⁵⁶

Tuthill's learning, voracious appetite for knowledge, and outgoing personality made him a useful friend. Manning was to rely on his friendship when they were trapped in France after the outbreak of war in 1803. While Manning received special permission to leave the country and pursue his survey of China, the Tuthills were not allowed to return to England until 1806, by which time Manning had left for China. Lamb wrote to Manning later that year:

There's your friend Tuthill has got away from France – you remember France? And Tuthill? [...] Know then that he has found means to obtain leave from Bonaparte without making use of any incredible romantic pretences as some have done, who never meant to fulfil them, to come home [...] An't you glad about Tuthill?¹⁵⁷

Richard Porson (1759-1808)

The notice of Manning's death in the *Gentleman's Magazine* observed that he "numbered as his friends some of the most celebrated men of the time", listing, in addition to Martin Davy and Charles Lamb, Richard Porson (1759-1808). Porson was not from Caius – he attended Trinity College – but, like most of Manning's social circle, he was from Norfolk. Porson was noted for his genius from a young age and achieved

¹⁵⁵ RAS TM 1/1/7.

¹⁵⁶ SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 20.40.

¹⁵⁷ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 365.

fame as one of the most brilliant classical scholars of his time. While Porson does not figure in any of Manning's extant correspondence, Manning was familiar with his work, and his notebooks favourably cite Porson's *Letters to Archdeacon Travis* (1790),¹⁵⁸ as well as his writings on Greek.¹⁵⁹

In an 1804 letter to his father, towards the end of his time in France, Manning remarked light-heartedly:

Hitherto my residence here has repaid me very well – not in money,
but in what we ragged philosophers vaunt to be richer than gold –
“For when your money's gone & spent” – what then? Why “Then
learning is most excellent”.¹⁶⁰

This draws on an old proverb, “When house and land are gone and spent, then learning is most excellent”, which was in currency by the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁶¹ Thomas Allsop (1795-1880) attributed a variation of the rhyme to Porson, on a night when he was drinking late with the printer, Thomas Curson Hansard (1776-1833). Running out of drink, Porson remarked: “When wine and gin are gone and spent / Then is small beer most excellent”.¹⁶² The phrase may be a memento of the two men's friendship, and it is easy to imagine Manning and Porson bonding over a mutual love of Greek and alcohol. Manning liked to drink, while Porson was as notorious for his sottish behaviour as he was renowned for his scholarship.¹⁶³ They also had similar political views, and in 1792 Porson was forced to relinquish his university fellowship, and financial security, because he would not take holy orders¹⁶⁴ – bringing to mind Manning's own refusal to

¹⁵⁸ RAS TM 9/1/3. Edward Gibbon considered the book to be “the most acute and accurate piece of criticism since the days of Bentley” (Ward, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, 324).

¹⁵⁹ RAS TM 9/1/4.

¹⁶⁰ RAS TM 1/1/33.

¹⁶¹ The *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* notes it is “similar in sentiment” to the aphorism “Learning is better than house and land”, which occurs in the works of Oliver Goldsmith and Maria Edgeworth. Manning's version also occurs in the writings of William Cowper in 1786 (*Correspondence*, III, 78), and Sir Walter Scott in 1826 (*Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, 121).

¹⁶² Allsop, *Letters*, 113. A variation of the rhyme is also recorded in Clarke, *Richard Porson*, 56.

¹⁶³ See Clarke, *Richard Porson*, 12-13.

¹⁶⁴ Clarke, *Richard Porson*, 32-33.

subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Manning's serious interest in the study of ancient Greek is well-documented, while one of his posthumous notices recorded his "idea that in the structure of the Chinese language many analogies might be traced in elucidation of his own views respecting the Greek prepositions and particles".¹⁶⁵ Few interlocutors in 1790s England were better placed to discuss Greek particles than Richard Porson, famed for his learning and prodigious memory, and the discoverer of the Greek metrical phenomenon known as "Porson's Law".

The Daughters of William Wilkins (1749-1836)

Another figure associated with Cambridge and Norfolk who recurs in Manning's correspondence is someone he addressed as "Mr Wilkins". This is William Wilkins (1749-1836), architect, antiquarian, and father of the more famous architect of the same name, William Wilkins (1778-1839), who entered Caius in 1796. William Wilkins senior lived at Newnham Cottage in Cambridge, and had six children (Hannah, William, Willette, Emma, Harriet, and George),¹⁶⁶ all of whom but Hannah are mentioned in his extant letter to Manning, addressed from Newnham Cottage.¹⁶⁷ Before moving to Cambridge, Wilkins senior was based in Norwich, and an official history of Cambridge University describes him as a "self-taught" artisan whose interest in medieval architecture "led to acquaintanceship with East Anglian virtuosi, commissions to restore ancient structures, and membership of the Society of Antiquaries; in so many ways, his career seems to prefigure his son's".¹⁶⁸ The Wilkins, father and son, were also major players in the East Anglian theatre business, operating

¹⁶⁵ Williams-Wynn, "Annual Report of the Council", vi.

¹⁶⁶ Hannah (1777-1852), Willette (1779-?) and Emma (1782-1841) did not marry. Harriet (1786-1826) married Manning's friend Robert Woodhouse. I am grateful to the artist William Wilkins for this family information.

¹⁶⁷ RAS TM 5/9.

¹⁶⁸ Searby, *History*, III, 19.

theatres in Norwich, Cambridge, Bury, Colchester, Yarmouth, Ipswich, and Lynn.¹⁶⁹ Manning may have been employed as a maths tutor to the younger William who, like Manning, was an enthusiastic Philhellene, later known as one of the “Cambridge Hellenists”.¹⁷⁰

But Manning’s friendship appears not to have been with the son, but with his father, a man over twenty years his senior. The origins of this friendship probably lie in Manning’s affection for one of Wilkins’s daughters. In a letter to his own father, probably dating from 1799, Manning mentions attending a ball held by Wilkins, and that in spite of ill health “I have been tempted in such a manner to go to these places, that I have not been able to resist”.¹⁷¹ He later informed his father that he had attended Wilkins’s housewarming dinner in December 1799, among a party of twenty, where he “play[e]d with the young ladies in the evening (at music I mean) & staid till ½ after 1”.¹⁷² Such occasions would naturally suggest the possibility of romantic involvement; and the course of this affair may have had significant implications for Manning’s plans to visit China.

The published literature on Manning makes no reference to any romantic attachment, with one important exception. This is the 1959 edition of Manning’s correspondence with Charles and Sophia Lloyd, where the editor, Frederick Beaty, remarks while emphasising the value of Sophia’s letters:

In her chatty letters are preserved many intimate details that otherwise might not have been recorded. Twice, for example, she mentioned the only woman, a Miss Williams, in whom Manning is known to have taken a serious interest.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Searby, *History*, III, 701.

¹⁷⁰ Searby, *History*, III, 20.

¹⁷¹ RAS TM 1/1/3. The letter is undated, but forms part of a series of correspondence that otherwise starts in 1799. The letter refers to the University’s Commencement Ball, which would have taken place in early Summer.

¹⁷² RAS TM 1/1/5.

¹⁷³ Beaty, *Letters*, 6.

The Lloyds appear to have taken a close interest in Manning's romantic affairs. In the hope of luring Manning to visit during his honeymoon in 1799, Charles Lloyd added an "inducement in an unmarried sister of Sophia's who will be with us next week – & who though not handsome is I believe nearly perfect in her dispositions".¹⁷⁴ Perhaps Lloyd imagined Manning one day marrying his wife's sister, in the manner of Coleridge and Southey marrying Sarah and Edith Fricker. But if this were a serious attempt to set up Manning with Sophia's sister, it evidently failed: in January 1800, Sophia relates that "Rebecca returns your cool comp[limen]ts & sends you as much love as you may suppose she has at her disposal".¹⁷⁵ Another woman was on the scene, and on 6 July 1800, Sophia wrote to Manning to say (according to Beaty's transcription), "I shall thank you to assure Miss Williams of my remembrance in whatever terms you think proper".¹⁷⁶ The Lloyds must therefore have met this woman in Cambridge. Six months later, on 13 December, Sophia returned to the subject: "It savours of the old haven, female curiosity, or I would ask a question about Miss W & Mr M, but for the sake of shewing my superiority to common minds I will not make any enquiry on the subject."¹⁷⁷ Manning evidently took the opportunity to bring his friends up to date with some disappointing news, which Charles acknowledged in his letter of 25 January 1801: "I am rather surprised to hear of the obduracy of Miss W – I hope it will not last."¹⁷⁸

The Lloyds never use this woman's first name. Beaty was unable to identify her, suggesting she may have been a relative of William Henry Williams (1771-1841), an acquaintance of Lloyd's at Caius.¹⁷⁹ However, examination of the original letter suggests that Beaty's transcription was wrong, and that Sophia did not write "Miss Williams", but "Miss Wilkins".¹⁸⁰ This implies that Manning was romantically

¹⁷⁴ Beaty, *Letters*, 36.

¹⁷⁵ Beaty, *Letters*, 42.

¹⁷⁶ Beaty, *Letters*, 54.

¹⁷⁷ Beaty, *Letters*, 59.

¹⁷⁸ Beaty, *Letters*, 61.

¹⁷⁹ Beaty, *Letters*, 54.

¹⁸⁰ Cornell William Wordsworth Collection, #4621.

interested in one of the daughters of William Wilkins. Lloyd's reference to "the obduracy of Miss W" suggests that Manning entertained hopes of marriage but was let down in late 1800. Perhaps his affection was not reciprocated; or perhaps he was not considered a suitable match. After all, in 1800 Manning made his living by tutoring students, and lacked a formal career or clear prospects. And if he broached the idea of exploring China, that would certainly have seemed an unconventional plan for married life. But Manning's correspondence contains no reference to China until August 1801; and from a psychological point of view, it is easy to imagine that the idea of moving there may have crystallized in response to romantic disappointment.

Manning clearly remained on good terms with the Wilkins family after these events, writing from Paris in 1802 that he had put Wilkins down as a subscriber to "Mr Denon's book on Egypt".¹⁸¹ The letter Manning sent to Wilkins in April 1807, shortly after arriving in China, evidences enduring affection:

Indeed Mr Wilkins I cannot recall your excellent & amiable daughters to my mind without having my heart moved. I am very affectionate by disposition, & banished man as I am, can you wonder if my recollection now as I write overpowers me? If I was their brother I could not feel stronger affection for them.¹⁸²

Of course, had Manning married one of the sisters, he would have been "brother" to the rest. Manning received a reply, dated one year later. Indicating their circle of common acquaintance, Wilkins mentions "our mutual friend Davy [who] still resides in the lodge an old bachelor & would perhaps be in danger of fainting if he saw a petticoat in the chambers of his house"; and also John Drew Borton (1769-1847), who had just fathered a child. Wilkins's other son, George, has just been appointed to the parish next to Borton, "a poor curate next [to] a fat rector but the country is fertile & will perhaps suit them both." In a scene that would require Jane Austen to do it justice, Wilkins gave

¹⁸¹ RAS TM 1/1/14. *Voyage dans la Basse et la Haute Egypte* (1802) by Vivant Denon (1747-1825).

¹⁸² RAS TM 5/4.

over most of his writing paper to three daughters – Emma, Willette, and Harriet – to compose their own messages to Manning. This piquant letter assumes still greater poignancy considering that, at one time, Manning probably hoped to marry one of these women. Emma, who wrote the first, longest, and most flirtatious message, is perhaps the likeliest candidate for that position. No doubt, passages like the following would have had a strong effect on the “banished” man in Canton:

You know my dear sir how much we value anything that comes from you, but your letters, we prize & esteem, more than if you sent us all the Rubies from the East, & when they fail, we shall attribute it to the winds & waves, or to anything but forgetfulness because our motto is “Do not fear” [...]¹⁸³

Manning’s archive contains another curious document mentioning the Wilkins sisters. This is a short story relating a conversation with “James”, which has the Poe-like air of a Gothic novella. The narrator – the Ancient Mariner-esque “Tom” – describes how long ago, in 1801, he enjoyed a walk in Cambridge with “Miss W” and “Miss H.W.”, who “lived without the walls of the town”.¹⁸⁴ just as the Wilkins sisters lived at Newnham Cottage. “Miss H.W.”, therefore, must either be Hannah, who would have been about 24, or Harriet, who would have been about 15. Thus “Miss W” probably refers to Willette, aged about 22, or Emma, aged around 19. James remarks this must have been pleasant company, Tom replying, “I’m afraid I shall meet with but few walks till I have walkd thro the Valley of Death that will bear comparison with it in that respect.”¹⁸⁵ Tom asks, “You have heard me speak of Miss H.W.? [...] Ay she was a very nice girl indeed. But before I go on any further we’ll drink to her health”. The walk led to the grounds behind King’s College, where Tom narrates a strange incident involving H.W.’s recovery of a lost trinket. This seemingly inexplicable event threatens to become a Jungian “synchronicity”, until Tom relates a series of mundane coincidences

¹⁸³ RAS TM 5/9.

¹⁸⁴ RAS TM 9/1/18.

¹⁸⁵ RAS TM 9/1/18.

that collectively account for its apparently supernatural character. The story concludes abruptly, followed by two more pages of largely illegible notes, including at least one reference to “Miss W”, and a drawing of three people walking through a field, a hanged man in the distance.¹⁸⁶

If Manning’s relationship with “Miss Wilkins” had worked out differently, perhaps he would never have visited China at all. Evidently, in later life his thoughts were still drawn back to this youthful episode. As Harriet Wilkins would have been only 14 or so in 1800, Manning’s interest must have been in one of the older sisters – none of whom, it seems, ever married. While Emma’s note in 1809 suggests a close relationship, it is also possible that the identification of “Miss W” by one initial alone, is a clue that she was Willette Wilkins. Then we also have to consider Manning’s reference to “Miss H.W.” – surely Hannah – as “a very nice girl indeed [...] we’ll drink to her health”.¹⁸⁷ A short manuscript account, providing a fictionalized version of his own death on 11 November 1795, reveals that earlier in that decade Manning entertained passionate feelings about a young woman, whose name is not revealed: “Tell her I remembered her in my last moments, & bless’d her with my dying.”¹⁸⁸ This may be a further reference to Miss Wilkins, and if so, the timeline suggests it would have to be the oldest, Hannah; but it may refer to another woman entirely.

While the precise identity of “Miss Wilkins” remains mysterious – for now – we know that Manning never married, and that loneliness and regret affected him in later life. Indeed, his letters and notebooks are peppered with hints about women he admired. In France in 1802, Manning described friendships with glamorous aristocratic women in terms that had a notable frisson of excitement. During the winter of 1811-12, when Manning was offering medical treatments in Lhasa, he was pleased by a visit from two “handsome, well-dressed, clean-washed lasses”. Finding nothing the matter

¹⁸⁶ RAS TM 9/1/18.

¹⁸⁷ RAS TM 9/1/18.

¹⁸⁸ RAS TM 9/8/8.

with them except a “superabundance of health and spirits”, he admitted that “It was so long since I had seen female charms of this order that feeling their pulses rather disordered my own”. When they returned a few days later to present a gift of mutton, Manning reflected that they were welcome to visit whenever they liked, without bringing anything “but their own pretty faces”.¹⁸⁹

Soon after his return to India, Manning composed a poem, dated 15 October 1812, describing his infatuation with “a silly singing girl whom twice I’ve scarcely seen”: he was “A travelling philosopher beguiled by love to song.”¹⁹⁰ There are further romantic poems addressed to “Mrs B” in Macao,¹⁹¹ which must also date from Manning’s occasional residence on that island between 1807 and 1816. But Manning was never happy in love, and as late as 1829 he composed a poem lamenting:

Oh God, nip off this bitter blossom
Ere, set to fruit it weighs me down
Infuse forgiveness in her bosom
Or pour oblivion o’er my own.¹⁹²

Maths and Mathematicians in Cambridge

Manning did not take up Chinese studies until the early 1800s, and his public profile until then (such as it was) pertained to mathematics. His main achievement during this time was the publication of *An Introduction to Arithmetic and Algebra* in two volumes between 1796 and 1798. The list of subscribers attached to the first volume contained 233 names, with an additional fourteen for the second, the vast majority from Cambridge and Norfolk. There were fifty-two subscribers from Trinity College and Trinity Hall, forty from Caius, thirty-one from St John’s, sixteen from Emanuel, and thirteen from Christ’s. At least sixteen Anglican clergy subscribed, as well as nine

¹⁸⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 286.

¹⁹⁰ RAS TM 9/5.

¹⁹¹ RAS TM 9/8/14-15.

¹⁹² RAS TM 9/1/6.

Dubliners, the Masters of Christ's, Peterhouse, Pembroke, and St Catharine's colleges, and the President of Caius. There was just one subscriber from Oxford, the culprit based at Worcester College. Reflecting the geographic distribution of the subscription, and thus the author's reputation, the work was sold in Cambridge, Norwich, and London.

In exceptional instances, people subscribed for more than one copy. Examples include close friends like Davy and Borton, as well as the mathematician Robert Woodhouse (1773-1827), who was from Norwich and, like Manning, attended Caius. Woodhouse and Manning were probably friends and rivals, and an 1802 letter from William Taylor of Norwich (1765-1836) identified Manning as "a friend of Robert Woodhouse".¹⁹³ British mathematics was regarded as something of a backwater in the late-eighteenth century and, in later years, Woodhouse was credited with a key role in bringing the British study of maths up-to-date with Continental systems.¹⁹⁴ In 1823, Woodhouse married Harriet Wilkins, one of Manning's correspondents from Newnham Cottage.¹⁹⁵

Manning was also well-acquainted with Francis Maseres (1731-1824). A former lawyer and senior British official in North America, in later life Maseres took a close interest in mathematical research and publication, serving as a patron to young mathematicians and collaborating with William Frend. Manning acknowledged Maseres's influence in the preface to his own work on algebra and arithmetic: Maseres was "no less distinguished by the profoundness of his reasoning, than by the accuracy and perspicuity of his method".¹⁹⁶ Maseres did not subscribe to Manning's book, but they were evidently acquainted, and Manning wrote to Maseres soliciting feedback on his proof of a theorem on curved lines.¹⁹⁷ In 1807, Maseres published an article in

¹⁹³ Robberds, *Memoir*, I, 409.

¹⁹⁴ Phillips, "Robert Woodhouse and the Evolution of Cambridge Mathematics". This is discussed further in chapter four.

¹⁹⁵ Becher, "Woodhouse, Robert (1773–1827), Mathematician."

¹⁹⁶ Manning, *Introduction to Arithmetic and Algebra*, v.

¹⁹⁷ CUL MS Add. 7886/177. This probably dates from 1801, being addressed to Maseres at the Inner Temple. Lamb lived nearby and mentioned Maseres to Manning in April 1801. Requesting an

Scriptores Logarithmici, noting it was communicated to him by Manning (“a young gentleman of great skill in the Mathematicks”) in December 1801.¹⁹⁸

There is no evidence that Manning knew William Frend during the 1790s, but they had similar religious and political leanings and, sharing an interest in mathematics, were certainly acquainted in later life. In 1825, Manning mentioned to Frend a possible patent for a pair of folding pincers (“it was at Macao I first thought of it”) and, more importantly, responded to a suggestion about translating a work on Chinese mathematics: “Surely the printing of a translation of a Chinese treatise on arithmetic could never answer! The number of the curious is too few.” Manning nevertheless offered to work on the translation if Frend could frame it by way of a preface “& so push the book on in the world”.¹⁹⁹

Charles Lloyd and Romantic Sociability

In August 1798, Manning began tutoring Charles Lloyd, who had just enrolled at Caius College. This marked the beginning of a vital period which drew Manning towards figures at the heart of English Romanticism, and he formed several attachments of crucial importance for his later life.

Lloyd came from a wealthy Quaker family, but was temperamentally unsuited for his father’s banking business. His real interests were literary, and having published a volume of poems in 1795, he met Coleridge the following year. Even though Coleridge was just two and a half years’ his senior, an arrangement was struck so that Lloyd was to board with Coleridge and receive tutoring.²⁰⁰ Lloyd was wracked by mental illness throughout his adult life, eventually requiring long periods of incarceration in asylums. Lloyd suffered an occurrence of his symptoms during his

introduction, Lamb jokes that while he and Maseres differ in age, means, and taste, “The very antithesis of our characters would make up a harmony” (Lamb, *Works*, VI, 217-218).

¹⁹⁸ “Mr Manning’s Investigation of the Differential Series”, *Scriptores Logarithmici*, 47-62.

¹⁹⁹ CUL MS Add. 7886/176.

²⁰⁰ Taussig, *Coleridge and the Idea of Friendship*, 222.

residence with Coleridge, which quickly rendered the arrangement untenable. Nevertheless, Coleridge remained a major influence on Lloyd, both in literary terms and in expanding his circle of acquaintance.

In 1797, Coleridge included some of Lloyd's poems, along with Lamb's, in a new edition of his own work; a kindness he soon undid by satirizing the poems in the periodical press. Lloyd's philosophical novel, *Edmund Oliver* (1798), quickly became a source of further ill-feeling between the two men. While it elegantly explored philosophical, moral, and religious ideas that reveal Coleridge's influence, the novel also contained scenes that Coleridge felt resembled embarrassing events in his own life that he did not want to become public knowledge.²⁰¹ *Edmund Oliver* was published a few months before Lloyd enrolled at Caius, and its author rapidly attached himself to Manning in a style recalling his earlier infatuation with Coleridge. In a letter of 23 September 1798 – sent when Manning had gone on a visit to Diss – Lloyd melodramatically complained:

The first thing which occurs to me to express is the want which I am hourly feeling of your society [...] when I enter'd the University, I bade farewell in idea to all that might be most suitable to my nature – Manning you seem'd, (the moment I knew you it so seem'd), to form a new link in the series of objects which I might peculiarly rest upon.²⁰²

At Christmas, Lloyd described a visit to his family in rapturous terms: “I feel myself in the very bosom of affection – My brothers & sisters, nine of them, all crowd around me with glistening eyes & extended hands”.²⁰³ Lloyd was reluctant to quit this affectionate scene, and his return to Cambridge was delayed by family illnesses. Lloyd also mentioned that his Greek tutor – Wordsworth's youngest brother, Christopher (1774-1846) – was staying with them, and soon informed Manning that Christopher had

²⁰¹ Sisman, *The Friendship*, 237-238.

²⁰² Beaty, *Letters*, 13.

²⁰³ Beaty, *Letters*, 17.

confided his affections for Charles's sister, Priscilla (1781-1815).²⁰⁴ The Lloyd family came to hold "Kit" Wordsworth in high regard, valuing his steadiness, intellectual abilities, "and what appealed to his father-in-law, the good order of his domestic life: 'I feel the advantage of Wordsworth's example myself'".²⁰⁵

In a statement that is hard to credit, Lloyd described Christopher's "invincible jealousy of your attachment to me – & I know [he] never will bear to see us closely & locally united – at least so his letters intimate [...] I cannot explain to you the excessiveness, & even soreness of W's regard for me – it will brook no rival".²⁰⁶ More than anything, this seems to indicate Lloyd's predilection for gossip. It is, to say the least, hard to reconcile this image with the picture of Christopher Wordsworth that emerges elsewhere, including Lloyd's statement that he was "a good man – a man as you formerly styled him of unfathomable goodness – but he wants enthusiasm – & has about him somewhat of a hardness, & caution of a bigot".²⁰⁷

Lloyd had evidently tired of Cambridge already: being well-connected in literary circles, and enjoying a minor reputation in his own right, he seemed determined to do anything except study. He informed Manning:

[Y]ou think too much of proprieties – decencies, & the opinion of a small circle – what is the World of Cambridge, but the stirring & turmoil of an ants nest – he that would be accountable to everyone, yea a priori, to anyone, never will rise to any dignity & mighty singleness of character. I am more and more an aristocrat as far as concerns mankind – but more & more determined on an insulated path of moral virtue.²⁰⁸

This echoes the morality of *Edmund Oliver*, whose eponymous hero strives to follow a path of Christian virtue at odds with the materialist cynicism thought fashionable

²⁰⁴ Beaty, *Letters*, 22.

²⁰⁵ Lloyd, *Quaker Lloyds in the Industrial Revolution*, 229.

²⁰⁶ Beaty, *Letters*, 30.

²⁰⁷ Beaty, *Letters*, 29.

²⁰⁸ Beaty, *Letters*, 26.

among 1790s English *literati*. Manning, however, was not likely to be swayed by Lloyd's posturing, and indeed Lloyd's subsequent letters reveal his irritation at Manning's "reproving criticism" and repeated entreaties that Lloyd return to his studies.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, Lloyd introduced Manning to a new circle of acquaintance, including Lamb, Robert Southey, and Coleridge himself, therefore providing major new sources of intellectual stimulation.

Robert and Sophia Lloyd

Manning visited Charles Lloyd and his new wife, Sophia (1778-1830), during their honeymoon in the Lake District in July 1799. After that visit, Manning also began a correspondence with Charles's younger brother, Robert Lloyd (1778-1811). Robert shared his brother's literary tastes as well as his extreme sensitivity; he endured periods of severe depression, and his youthful rebellion against the Quaker lifestyle contributed to his troubles at home. Robert now found in Manning "the ideal confidant for whom he had been seeking".²¹⁰ Robert already knew Lamb, going to stay with him in London in January 1799 after running away from home, an episode which Lloyd blamed on "the improper treatment of my Parents".²¹¹ Lamb would later describe Robert to Manning as "a good fellow, with the best heart, but his feelings are shockingly unsane."²¹² Lamb's play *John Woodvil* (originally titled *Pride's Cure*) was partly inspired by Robert's conduct, and the role of pride in causing his depression. This, Lamb believed, could be redeemed through penitence, humility, and courage, and by turning to his fellow man in a spirit of friendship and religion.²¹³

Despite his eloquence, Robert Lloyd's maudlin letters to Manning make for depressing reading. Yet he emerged from his bad spirits, and by March 1800, Robert

²⁰⁹ Beaty, *Letters*, 27-28.

²¹⁰ Lucas, *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, 100.

²¹¹ Beaty, *Letters*, 21.

²¹² Lucas, *Works*, VI, 161.

²¹³ Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb*, 215.

was fully reconciled to his parents. He even acknowledged to Manning their kindness and the “affectionate solicitude” of his father – who, perhaps reflecting the contemporary popularity of Rousseauvian views about parenting, seems to have been rather unfairly blamed for the difficulties endured by his children. Robert suggested he would attend Quaker Meetings again – something Lamb had advised him to do two years earlier.²¹⁴ When his correspondence with Manning ended in 1801, Robert was basically recovered, set up in business and considering marriage.

Health permitting, Charles Lloyd maintained his own correspondence with Manning until the latter left for China in 1806. But Manning also came to correspond with Lloyd’s wife. At first, Sophia wrote in Charles’s place during his illnesses; but eventually this segued into a separate correspondence, initiated by her.

Do you wish to hear from me independently of Charles? [...] I value your regard very highly, but woman as I am, flattery even from you would not gratify me, if you please therefore to answer me in a plain, & gentlemanlike style.²¹⁵

Sophia was an active and conscientious correspondent until the pressures of her growing family, and Manning’s increasingly ambitious travels, rendered communication unfeasible. Sometimes she wrote complete letters; at others, she shared her husband’s paper, or dictated on his behalf. Her lively and engaging letters lack her husband’s philosophical expansiveness, but they are improved by their freedom from self-dramatization. They reveal a highly educated, funny, and intellectually curious woman; but they are also warm and homely, radiating domestic charm, full of family news and earnest enquiries after Manning’s health. Sophia repeatedly asks about Manning’s dog, Presto, who stayed with the Lloyds in Cambridge while Manning was in London in January 1800: “Presto never leaves us – he pleases us by this seeming to acknowledge us as your friends – he has plenty of food & exercise & a bed by the

²¹⁴ RAS TM 2/1/6.

²¹⁵ Beaty, *Letters*, 52.

kitchen fire.”²¹⁶ Sophia stuffed subsequent letters with requests for updates about Presto, fearful speculations that he had forgotten them, and beseeching Manning to send Presto for a visit. In March 1801, having heard that Manning was considering leaving the country, Sophia wrote:

[D]o promise that you will come & then as a secondary but still a very important thing I shall request you to bring Presto if you care to leave him with us – you do not know how I should value him – or let me have him till you are married & then if your wife can love him as well as I should it shall still be your property.²¹⁷

Presto was a real dog. But, in Sophia’s letters, he also stands for the youthful and domestic sides of Manning’s personality that naturally imply possibilities of romance and marriage. Sophia’s incessant fretting about Presto might be interpreted as anxiety at the very real prospect that Manning would sacrifice this part of his future on the altar of his scholarly pursuits.

Charles Lamb (1775-1834)

Through Lloyd, Manning made perhaps the most important friendship of his life – that of Charles Lamb. Indeed, E.V. Lucas suggests:

This bringing together of two such complementary natures as Lamb and Manning was Charles Lloyd’s most conspicuous achievement. Had he not done so, by how much good fun and good sense should we be the poorer! – for Lamb was never in better pin than in his letters to the mathematician-traveller.²¹⁸

Lamb and Manning met in Cambridge, during a visit which must have taken place during the first week of December 1799.²¹⁹ Lamb wrote to Manning upon his return to London, and Manning promised to visit him in about five weeks. He also shared

²¹⁶ Beaty, *Letters*, 41.

²¹⁷ Beaty, *Letters*, 65.

²¹⁸ Lucas, *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, 105.

²¹⁹ Anderson, *Letters*, 20.

feedback on *John Woodvil* which he had developed with Sophia Lloyd. Hinting at the sense of humour which Lamb so admired, Manning concluded his letter by asking God to “keep you from all evil things, that walk upon the face of the Earth – I mean Nightmares, Hobgoblins, & Spectres”, including a page full of crude drawings of fantastic beasts: “I wish I could draw. It will not do.”²²⁰

In his next letter, Lamb alludes to another peculiar skill of Manning’s – mimicry and pulling faces:

Do your night parties still flourish? And do you continue to bewilder your company with your thousand faces running through all the keys of idiotism (like Lloyd over his perpetual harpsichord), from the smile and the glimmer of half-sense and quarter-sense to the grin and hanging lip of Betty Foy’s own Johnny?²²¹

Lamb’s irreverent reference to “Betty Foy’s own Johnny” lampooned and subverted the sympathetic message of Wordsworth’s poem “The Idiot Boy, which had been included in the 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Similar nods to Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the *Lyrical Ballads* abound in Lamb and Manning’s letters between 1800 and 1802. Though the early stages of their friendship were often light-hearted, and their correspondence full of jokes, Lamb also sought to recruit Manning as a literary confidant who might help him process his response to the radical new poetic vision.

Manning visited Lamb in Chapel Street, London, for three days from 23 January 1800. Lamb wrote to Coleridge, “I expect Manning of Cambridge in town to-night – will you fulfil your promise of meeting him at my house? He is a man of a thousand.”²²² Afterwards, Lamb informed Manning that Coleridge had “conceived a most high [...] opinion of you, most illustrious Archimedes”.²²³ Manning, for his part, wrote immediately to the Lloyds that he was “dazzled” by Coleridge.²²⁴ To Robert Lloyd, he

²²⁰ Anderson, *Letters*, 22.

²²¹ Anderson, *Letters*, 23.

²²² Lamb, *Works*, VI, 154.

²²³ Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb*, 252.

²²⁴ Beaty, *Letters*, 41.

wrote that meeting Coleridge was “a great gratification to me. I think him a man of very splendid abilities and animated feelings.”²²⁵ But, while Manning and Lamb would form a lifelong friendship, Coleridge would never figure more intimately in Manning’s life than during this brief period in 1800.

The Lloyd-Hays Controversy

In February 1800, Manning and Lamb corresponded about Lloyd’s pre-marital controversy with Mary Hays (1759-1843). In 1796, Hays had published the “unapologetically autobiographical” novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, drawing on her romance with William Frennd.²²⁶ Hays had been a proponent of Godwinian philosophy, which Lloyd critiqued in *Edmund Oliver*, and his novel also contained a character, Gertrude Sinclair, said to be an unflattering depiction of Hays herself. Nevertheless, Lloyd was still friendly with Hays, who was fifteen years his senior, and became embroiled in an ill-judged correspondence after an episode where Lloyd claimed Hays made sexual advances towards him. Lloyd subsequently prepared a letter to Hays, which Lamb decried as one “I could not have sent to my Enemy’s Bitch”:

My whole moral sense is up in arms against the letter. To my apprehension, it is shockingly and nauseously indelicate [...] I will sum up the controversy in the words of Coleridge, all he has since said to me: “Miss Hays has acted like a fool, & Charles Lloyd not very wisely”.²²⁷

Lloyd’s misconduct was thought to have been exacerbated by asking his younger sister, Olivia, to transcribe his letter. Consulted by Lamb for his views, Manning agreed that Lloyd had acted unwisely, but sought to defend him from unwarranted criticism.²²⁸

²²⁵ Lucas, *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, 110.

²²⁶ Brooks, “Hays, Mary (1759–1843), Writer.”

²²⁷ Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb*, 255.

²²⁸ Like Lamb, Southey, and Henry Crabb Robinson, most modern critics take Hays’s side in the controversy: for example, Whelan, “Mary Hays and Henry Crabb Robinson”.

Manning observed that parts of Lloyd's letter were "positively wrong", and "I think the excessive frankness & sincerity of the letter improper". Nevertheless, Manning argued that Lloyd could not be blamed for *having* unkind sentiments about Mary Hays, if they were sincerely felt. Indeed, they were not exclusive to him: "The picture of her, drawn by a friend of yours in my presence, would, I am sure, give her much more offence than what L says".²²⁹ Lloyd's folly was to air his opinions: "we ought not always to give our opinions of people to their faces", even if "such a line of conduct comes recommended by a simplicity & an appearance of strict adherence to 1st principles that plead strongly for it".²³⁰ As for the "indiscretion" of asking his sister to copy the letter, Manning observed that Olivia was "not a tattling pert minx, but a good girl"; though his suggestion that she "would copy the letter at her Brother's request, & think no more about the matter", seems psychologically improbable.²³¹

Manning accused Hays of hypocrisy, and also Southey, reported to be decrying Lloyd's character in private while maintaining the face of friendship. "What business has Miss H to go about exhibiting a private correspondence of this kind? L does not go round to his friends & acquaintances babbling forth her follies".²³² In short, Lloyd's conduct was erroneous, yet "such as to produce in me towards him no diminution of respect of honour or of love".²³³ Manning's refusal to condemn Lloyd might be considered unchivalrous towards Hays, but it also demonstrated loyalty; while his willingness to proffer controversial opinions shows he took seriously the responsibility of telling the truth as he saw it. Nevertheless, Manning admitted that "there is not that complete identity of sympathy between me & L as to make me blind to his faults."²³⁴ Lloyd's reputation as a gossip was well-earned, and its troublesome potential was

²²⁹ Anderson, *Letters*, 26. Anderson suggests the "friend" was Coleridge.

²³⁰ Anderson, *Letters*, 26.

²³¹ Anderson, *Letters*, 28.

²³² Anderson, *Letters*, 27-28.

²³³ Anderson, *Letters*, 29.

²³⁴ Anderson, *Letters*, 28.

evidenced in a comparatively trivial episode where Lloyd told Lamb that George Caldwell (1773-1848) had been told by Coleridge that he had no engagements with the press:

You recollect, I suppose the story about Coleridge's humming Caldwell of Jesus College concerning his newspaper engagements – well, it is turned out to be all a mistake – Caldwell has never imputed any such declaration to Coleridge – 'twould waste both your time & my own to explain such nonsense.²³⁵

Considering such episodes, we might wonder whether Manning was too quick to assume Lloyd's actions were entirely innocent.

The Coleridge Circle

Manning entered Lamb's life at a time when the latter was contending with Wordsworth's growing psychological influence on his old friend, Coleridge. Lamb complained to Manning in April 1800 that "Coleridge has left us, to go into the north, on a visit to his god Wordsworth."²³⁶ But Lamb was also processing his response to Wordsworth's poetic mission, and in 1800 Lamb "took up the gauntlet" in response to Wordsworth's attack on urban living in the introduction to the *Lyrical Ballads*.²³⁷ In August, Lamb asked Coleridge for a copy of Wordsworth's play *The Borderers*, "for I have got Manning with me, and should like to read it *with him* [...] Manning has read it, so has Lloyd, and all Lloyd's family".²³⁸ In December, Lamb sent Manning all his letters from Coleridge, followed by more in February 1801 from Coleridge and Wordsworth. "In Coleridge's letters you will find a good deal of amusement, to see genuine talent struggling against a pompous display of it".²³⁹

²³⁵ Anderson, *Letters*, 32-33.

²³⁶ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 160.

²³⁷ Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, 143.

²³⁸ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 184. Manning read *The Borderers* in manuscript in 1798, courtesy of Charles Lloyd, apparently taking a dim view (Lloyd: "I cannot agree with you in opinion about it", Beaty, *Letters*, 21).

²³⁹ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 205.

In this way, Lamb was involving Manning in his friendship with Wordsworth and Coleridge, but at arm's length. Manning's intellectual independence meant Lamb could freely discuss works like the *Lyrical Ballads* in a way that was impossible with the poets themselves. When Lamb offered a few critical remarks to Wordsworth, he received lengthy retorts first from Wordsworth and then from Coleridge, who "starts up from his bed of sickness to reprove me for my hardy presumption: four long pages, equally sweaty and more tedious".²⁴⁰ Smarting from his "northern castigation", Lamb acknowledged that Manning was more critical of the *Lyrical Ballads* even than him: "So, you don't think there's a Word's-worth of good poetry in the great L.B.!"²⁴¹ Mary Lamb would later describe Manning as a "ventilator" for her and her brother,²⁴² and Manning undoubtedly helped Lamb develop his response to this new poetic vision. But Manning's own opinion of Wordsworth was scathing indeed:

I perused the Colerigian & Wordsworthian letters. Sheer nonsense, by God. I wonder Coleridge (who I know is a poet – I don't know that W. is not, but I'll be damned if that be poetry he has passed [?] upon us in the 2d Vol.) – I say I wonder Coleridge can be taken in by such foolish stuff. By habit one may learn to be excited by anything – one may live so long with sheep & silly shepperds as to take the Baaing of a Lamb for poetry – [...] would Shakespear have taken it for poetry? Oh! But he's no judge perhaps – would Milton then? To gravely, mind that, gravely tell us of a sheep drawn out of a hole, & chronicle the beggar's twopenny mishap [...]²⁴³

Manning's verdict on the poems was in keeping with much contemporary criticism which, seizing on the more sentimental passages to dismiss the underlying philosophy, was blinded to merits which were laudable even by conventional standards.²⁴⁴ His extreme views, and unimaginative rejection of the idea that the "beggar's twopenny

²⁴⁰ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 213.

²⁴¹ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 216.

²⁴² Lamb, *Works*, VI, 349.

²⁴³ Anderson, *Letters*, 54-55.

²⁴⁴ Coleridge took this phenomenon to task: *Biographia Literaria*, I, 74.

mishap” was suitable matter for poetry may, paradoxically, have made it easier for Lamb to see the poems’ merit, especially in light of the lengthy explanations received from the “Lakers” themselves.

Manning’s distinction between the poets’ credentials was perhaps a tactful acknowledgement of Lamb’s affection for Coleridge. But it is equally possible that Manning genuinely preferred some of Coleridge’s earlier poems to those presented in the second volume of “the great L.B.” Manning certainly had a taste for poetry, expressing to Lamb his admiration of George Dyer (1755-1841), and requesting that Lamb put him down as a subscriber to Dyer’s *Poems* (1801), “which I *purr’d* thro – I think his translations very good indeed”.²⁴⁵ Manning also copied out a lengthy extract from “The Vernal Walk”, by the young Ebenezer Elliott (1781-1849), later known for his radical political activism. Manning believed the poem “possesses considerable beauty – it abounds in imitations of Thompson [sic], but is still original”.²⁴⁶

Lamb reported on his dealings with William Godwin, observing in February 1800:

Godwin I am a good deal pleased with. He is a very well-behaved, decent man, nothing very brilliant about him, or imposing, as you may suppose: quite another sort of gentleman from what your Anti-Jacobin Christians imagine him. I was well pleased to find he has neither horns nor claws; quite a tame creature, I assure you. [...] I begin to think you Atheists not quite so tall a species.²⁴⁷

Lamb expanded upon his joke, suggesting that he and Manning would part ways when they died. Lamb would join Coleridge with the Apostles, Martyrs, and Popes; but the Goat would take Godwin and Manning along the left-hand path. Manning was unamused:

²⁴⁵ Anderson, *Letters*, 38, 54.

²⁴⁶ James Thomson’s *The Seasons*. Anderson, *Letters*, 44.

²⁴⁷ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 156.

One thing, tho, I must beg of you – that is, not to call me Atheist in your letters – for tho it be mere raillery in you, & not meant as a serious imputation on my Faith, yet, if the Catholic or any other intolerant religion should h[appen] to become established in England [...] & if the Post-people should happen to open & read your letters, (which, considering the sometimes quaintness of their form, they may possibly be incited to do) such names might send me to Smithfield on a hurdle – & nothing, upon earth, is more discordant to my wishes, than to become one of the Smithfield Illuminati.²⁴⁸

Smithfield was one of the oldest execution sites in London, famous as a place where those convicted with heresy or treason met their end. Manning’s anxiety on this matter verges on the pusillanimous, but it also hints that his private views really were those of a committed liberal and “freethinker”. Manning’s own poetic efforts included “Revolutionary Song of Freedom”, a private manuscript extolling human progress and concluding with a paean to the French Revolution:

But the genius of France from her fetters unbound
The cause still maintains ’gainst the nations around
& in vain mighty monarchs attempt to erase
The fabrics that raised on equality’s base.²⁴⁹

Manning rejected Wordsworth’s poetry, but in the 1790s and early 1800s he appears to have shared his democratic impulses and at least some of his youthful revolutionary ardour. Manning later recanted his enthusiasm, adding in 1830 a comment to the fair draft of his poem: “Foolish.”²⁵⁰ But even in his youth – again, somewhat like Wordsworth – Manning kept his political and religious views relatively private. He had no desire to be publicly identified as a revolutionary firebrand.

²⁴⁸ Anderson, *Letters*, 32.

²⁴⁹ RAS TM 9/1/22, a fair copy of RAS TM 9/1/21, lacking the title.

²⁵⁰ RAS TM 9/1/22.

Romantic Paris

The Coleridge Circle introduced Manning to ideas at the leading edge of English Romanticism. While he flatly dismissed the *Lyrical Ballads* as serious poetry, the letters charting his travels in England and Europe over the next few years reveal that he was nevertheless thinking about issues similar to those explored in Wordsworth's poems.²⁵¹ If his friendship with Lloyd and Lamb broadened Manning's literary horizons, then his journey to Paris in 1802 promised to bring him into close proximity with some of Europe's leading mathematicians and scientific thinkers. Paris was also the likeliest place where Manning could find someone to teach him the rudiments of Chinese, and this was a major motivation for his visit. The first allusion to Manning's interest in China appears in a letter from Charles Lamb, dated 31 August 1801, where he quips about hearing that Manning was going to China "with a commission from the Wedgewoods to collect hints for their pottery, and to teach the Chinese perspective".²⁵² This may have been a jocular allusion to something Manning had said previously; alternatively, if Lamb had received news, then the Lloyds were his likeliest source. The timing of Lamb's statement – coming six months after Lloyd's reference to Manning's frustrated pursuit of Miss Wilkins – suggests a possible relationship between Manning's romantic disappointment and thoughts of removing himself to the other side of the world. Otherwise, China is not mentioned until 1802, in Manning's letters from France to his father and the Lloyds.²⁵³

Manning had good reason for thinking it would be impossible to start learning Chinese in England. There were no teachers or teaching materials; and to the extent there was any access to scholarly information about China at all, this was mainly communicated via France, through the published reports of Jesuit missionaries who had lived in China. But it would not be straightforward to find someone who knew Chinese

²⁵¹ This is explored further in chapter two.

²⁵² Lamb, *Works*, VI, 223.

²⁵³ RAS TM 1/1/13; Beaty, *Letters*, 76.

even in Paris. Ten years earlier, the organizers of the Macartney Embassy had tried the same thing, searching Paris unsuccessfully for someone to act as an interpreter.²⁵⁴ But even if his Chinese project proved in vain, Manning had some other projects in mind, too. Learning Chinese seems to have been part of a wider, though vaguely defined agenda of cultural renewal, also incorporating mathematics, literature, and sociology. Moreover, the allure of seeing Napoleonic Paris, the scene of the Revolution, with its famed literary culture and fashionable *salons*, was undeniable; and Manning was seized by the same eagerness that possessed droves of British travellers who took the opportunity provided by the Peace of Amiens to speed across the English Channel in early 1802.

The development of Manning's project was shaped by a series of serendipitous personal encounters, recorded in his correspondence, that show the extent to which he was moving in circles of Romantic sociability.²⁵⁵ It took time to establish contacts in Paris who could help with Chinese matters, and in the meantime, Manning enjoyed circulating in literary circles. Paris was a major hub for intellectual and cultural activity, also boasting a significant British émigré population, recently swelled by the Peace of Amiens. The social and cultural opportunities the city presented were intrinsically appealing, but they also promised to expand Manning's circle of acquaintance, thereby improving the odds of meeting someone who could aid his project to study China. With his liberal sympathies, social standing, handsome mien, and genteel manners, it was inevitable that Manning would be drawn into Paris's salon culture.

Manning initially seems to have hoped to stay in France for a year or eighteen months, but with the likely length of the Peace uncertain, his plans had an indefinite quality. After arriving in Paris, Manning was "mortified" by the failure of his first

²⁵⁴ Platt, *Imperial China*, 20-22.

²⁵⁵ See Weech, "Paris to a Stranger [...]", 75-90.

introduction, to the botanist Étienne Pierre Ventenat (1757-1808).²⁵⁶ When Manning called upon him, Ventenat was “very civil”, but no more, and the introduction “did not produce the effects which so warm & recommendatory a letter of introduction naturally ought.”²⁵⁷ He was also nervous about the inferior quality of his French and, in a state of emotional agitation, was relieved to find that his friend George Leman Tuthill had just arrived in Paris with his wife. Manning was also pleased to see Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809), the radical playwright and friend of Godwin, “whom I both like & esteem”.²⁵⁸ Manning also met two young Whigs who were soon to be returned to the House of Commons, Lord Henry Petty (1780-1863) and Henry Parnell (1776-1842).²⁵⁹

After the failure of his introduction to Ventenat, it was understandable that Manning should lean heavily on pre-existing acquaintances during those first days in Paris. But it was also vital to make himself known in Paris society, and in this regard Tuthill, with his more outgoing personality, was great help. Manning assured his father that “I have full confidence in being able to accomplish all the objects I reckon important.” He had “the best of introductions” to François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), “which is the same as to be introduced to all the persons of belles lettres in Paris.” Manning observed that Chateaubriand was presently “so occupied in printing a large work on the poetical & moral beauties of the Xtian religion, that he has no time for anybody – but it will be out in about a fortnight.”²⁶⁰ Manning reported that Chateaubriand had already introduced Tuthill to Madame de Staël (1766-1817), who “is considered here as a very great woman, & receives all the literati at her house”: “all the known world goes there, & some besides.”²⁶¹ Manning, too, was due to be introduced to her.

²⁵⁶ Anderson, *Letters*, 66. The introduction was provided by a man named Martinet, with an address on London’s Strand (RAS TM 3/2/1).

²⁵⁷ RAS TM 1/1/12.

²⁵⁸ Anderson, *Letters*, 62.

²⁵⁹ RAS TM 1/1/12.

²⁶⁰ RAS TM 1/1/12. This must be *Génie du Christianisme* (1802).

²⁶¹ RAS TM 1/1/12.

Notwithstanding Manning's diffidence, his French must have been good enough for him to be received in polite society. His youthful good looks may also have made him a desirable guest. Manning acknowledged as much in a letter to his father in December 1802, shortly after his thirtieth birthday: "What you report to me from Mrs Opie, would absolutely make me vain, were I not aware that some of my friends are partial to me, & my beauty too!"²⁶² The letters and memoirs of his friends are littered with suggestions that Manning was considered to be handsome and physically appealing, and his surviving portraits tend to endorse this idea.²⁶³ This would have added to his charisma, perhaps helping explain the ease with which he made glamorous friends during his time on the Continent.

An early highlight of Manning's time in Paris was a sighting of Thomas Paine (1737-1809) at Holcroft's. While the Peace of Amiens allowed Manning to visit France, it also enabled Paine to leave, and he was about to return to the United States.

The only great man I have seen in private at least that I consider as at all great, is Tom Paine! Him I consider as by no means occupying so high a situation in the Temple of Fame as he deserves, & will, I think attain.²⁶⁴

Manning's enthusiasm denotes his liberal sympathies. There may be further evidence of this admiration in Manning's archive, in the guise of a manuscript copy of Paine's poem, "What is Love?", presumably made by a lady-friend.²⁶⁵ Manning had no opportunity to talk with Paine, but Holcroft described his conversation as "impregnated with the same masculine sense that so eminently distinguishes his writings." Manning observed that Paine's "manner & appearance is that of a gentleman of the old school, which I did not expect," discreetly omitting the well-documented impact of Paine's

²⁶² RAS TM 1/1/22. Amelia Opie (1769-1853), author and abolitionist.

²⁶³ For example, Davis, "Half-length portrait of Thomas Manning (1772-1840)", RAS 01.006.

²⁶⁴ RAS TM 1/1/12.

²⁶⁵ RAS TM 9/8/20.

notorious drinking on his complexion. “It was towards evening, & I could scarcely distinguish his face.”²⁶⁶

Manning’s encounter with Paine has the ring of a fan seeing his hero for the first time, but Holcroft’s was also the venue for a more important meeting: with the critic and linguist William Taylor of Norwich. Taylor was a Unitarian and erstwhile political radical; he had supported the French Revolution and in the early 1790s was a member of the Norwich Revolution Society. His father (also called William Taylor) had been the Society’s Secretary, but “his son of the same name seems to have been the power behind the throne”.²⁶⁷ With the demise of the Norwich Revolution Society in 1794, Taylor’s active political career came to an end, but “as a famed controversialist he continued to espouse provocative deistical and democratic views that made him unacceptable to many sections of Norwich society.”²⁶⁸ Taylor was a prolific translator and reviewer, and one of the main conduits by which English audiences became acquainted with German Romantic literature. Indeed, Manning identified Taylor to his father as the “Translator of *Lenora*”, describing him as “a pleasant man, of considerable talents, & a very cultivated mind. He has been very friendly to me.”²⁶⁹ For his part, Taylor wrote to his cousin:

I dined at Holcroft’s with Tom Paine, and met there a Mr. Manning, a friend of Robert Woodhouse, with whom I soon became – I may now say, I think – intimate. In power of mind and amiableness of temper he has few equals; he is a superior mathematician and Grecian, and is learning Chinese.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ RAS TM 1/1/12.

²⁶⁷ Jewson, *Jacobin City*, 17.

²⁶⁸ Chandler, *Norwich Literature*, 270.

²⁶⁹ RAS TM 1/1/15. This was *Lenore*, by Gottfried August Bürger (1747-1794). Taylor’s was the first English translation.

²⁷⁰ Robberds, *Memoir*, I, 409. The letter is dated 25 May 1802, several months after Manning saw Paine for the first time. It is unclear whether Taylor is referring to that time, or a subsequent occasion.

Manning's knowledge of mathematics and Greek marked him as an educated man, but his interest in Chinese truly set him apart. It would certainly have provided a ready topic for conversation in Parisian *salons*.

Taylor continued: "We have found out that we both know every tree on Diss Common, and consider the water-lilies of the Waveney as 'redolent of joy and youth'."²⁷¹ This was no mere coincidence, as both men had spent their youth in that vicinity. Taylor studied at Palgrave Academy, a stone's throw away from the town of Diss, where Manning grew up; and his teachers, Rochemont and Anna Letitia Barbauld, were known to Manning's father. Manning's ease in the company of Whigs and Dissenters in his native Norfolk thus eased his way in Paris, where he soon also met Maria Cosway (1760-1838), Helen Maria Williams (1759-1827), and Amelia Opie (1769-1853).²⁷² In several cases, the Norfolk connection was especially meaningful; Taylor and Opie were both from Norwich, while Paine himself, whose father was a Quaker, came from Thetford, near Diss. As David Chandler notes, the idea of Norwich as a literary center "still tends to provoke surprise", but between 1780 and 1800 the city had "experienced an extraordinary cultural efflorescence", becoming one of the main literary centers in Britain outside London.²⁷³ Manning's Norfolk Whig background helped shape the sociable circles and sources of information he could access. It is worth noting that it was Taylor who provided Manning's introduction to Joseph Hager (1757-1819), Keeper of Oriental manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale, with whom Manning first began to study Chinese. Manning's project to study China thus appears in relation to a broader movement to invigorate and reform British culture, which included drawing inspiration from foreign traditions. Manning was not, by

²⁷¹ Robberds, *Memoir*, I, 409.

²⁷² RAS TM 1/1/13, 1/1/14, 1/1/22.

²⁷³ Chandler, "The Athens of England", 173-174. However, Chandler also notes that the picture of Norwich as a hotbed of Jacobinism can be overdrawn. While the city's literary culture, with its Dissenting tendencies, skewed to the left, Norwich as a whole was "in a much larger sense, a centre of 'anti-Jacobinism'" (*Norwich Literature*, 5).

temperament, a political animal, and he did not share the explicitly political goals of some of his friends and acquaintances. But the wider context within which his project took shape was characterized by a desire for cultural renewal and social reform.

Forays in the Chinese Language

Manning met Joseph Hager shortly after he published a short work on Chinese, and while he was trying to publish, under government patronage, a Chinese dictionary that had been taken from the Vatican.²⁷⁴ Hager was an experienced linguist, but his claims as a Chinese expert were modest at best, and his work would later be roundly denounced by Antonio Montucci (1762-1829) and Julius Klaproth (1783-1835). William Huttmann noted drily, “Of Dr Hager’s learning and talents few will entertain a doubt, but the propriety of his first deciding on the publication of a Chinese dictionary, and then commencing the study of the language, will be doubted by many.”²⁷⁵ Manning, however, had no yardstick for measuring Hager’s Chinese erudition. Innocent of the controversies among European “China experts”, Manning wrote to his father in June 1802 to report that he had met Hager, predicting that “the Dr & I shall probably become intimate, as I am learning the Chinese tongue, & so curious a language is a greater bond of union among men, than even free-masonry.”²⁷⁶ Manning’s phrasing might imply he was *already* “learning the Chinese tongue” when he was introduced to Hager. This corresponds to Taylor’s statement to his cousin on 25 May, where he states that Manning “is learning Chinese”.²⁷⁷ Unless Manning had found some other Chinese teacher who he never mentions – which seems unlikely – the best explanation is perhaps that he was working from books acquired from a Paris bookstore.

²⁷⁴ Mosca, “Comprehending the Qing Empire”, 1061.

²⁷⁵ Huttmann, “A Notice of Several Chinese-European Dictionaries”, 242.

²⁷⁶ RAS TM 1/1/15.

²⁷⁷ Robberds, *Memoir*, I, 409.

Manning had previously been offered an introduction to “a man who has travelled in the interior of China, & who is acquainted with Chinese manners – a subject that much interests me.”²⁷⁸ Manning’s intermediary in that case was an Englishman, “Mr Gillet”, who apparently ran a workhouse near Brussels.²⁷⁹ This gentleman’s identity remains unclear, though apparently a Mr Gillett from Brussels purchased the Blue Nuns’ convent at auction in 1799;²⁸⁰ perhaps he later operated this property as a workhouse. Gillet probably intended to introduce Manning to Hager, and simply had his wires crossed about Hager having travelled in China. While Gillet might have known someone else with China-related expertise (for example, a returned missionary), Manning would surely have sought out such an individual after Gillet left, and makes no mention of doing so. If there were someone in Paris who had visited the interior of China, Manning would have found them, with or without an introduction, especially if he thought they were “acquainted with Chinese manners.”²⁸¹

Lawrence Wong suggests that Manning’s optimistic view of his new acquaintance with Hager shows his “peculiar understanding of the role the Chinese language played in the relations of European people”, alluding to Hager’s rivalry with Montucci to evidence the bad blood that could be generated between Europeans competing for status and prestige.²⁸² However, at this time Manning was a young idealist excited at the prospect of learning from someone he believed to be an expert. Largely ignorant of the contending claims and vanities of Europe’s Chinese authorities, his hope for enthusiastic, disinterested collaboration may have been naive; but it was not inherently peculiar.

Summer found Manning still in the first flush of excitement about learning Chinese. Perhaps invigorated by meeting Hager, Manning’s next letter to his father, in

²⁷⁸ RAS TM 1/1/13.

²⁷⁹ RAS TM 1/1/14.

²⁸⁰ Moutray, *Refugee Nuns*, 97.

²⁸¹ RAS TM 1/1/14.

²⁸² Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 90.

July 1802, saw him describe plans to visit China. The letter was written in haste, apparently in an agitated state, which would account for the short sentences and unclear handwriting:

I shall never be happy till I am settled, but I have many things to do first. I certainly mean if possible to penetrate into the interior of China. The voyage is very important. [...] You must not think the undertaking desperate. Tis [?] difficult but not dangerous. Nor will it [?] very long term. I trust to have the satisfaction to you of recounting my adventures to you in the parlour at Diss, after I am returned from China, & of shewing you that I have not misspent my time.²⁸³

Exploring Parisian Intellectual Culture

Manning did not seriously apply himself to the study of Chinese until the end of 1802, and Paris contained no shortage of intellectual distractions in the meantime. Manning was zealous for absorbing new knowledge across the arts and sciences, and he was at pains to tell his father that he attended lectures at the Lyceum, delivered by the critic Jean-François de La Harpe (1739-1803), the chemist Antoine François, comte de Fourcroy (1755-1809), and Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), the paleontologist.²⁸⁴ But one lecturer in particular caught his interest: Joseph de Maimieux (1753-1820), a French nobleman “who has invented a new language, which he calls Pasigraphie.” Manning and Tuthill attended one of de Maimieux’s lectures, after which they called on him “& had some conversation with him, the result of which was that he offered to give us a private lecture, *en ami*, which we accepted.” Manning continued: “This morning I sent him a short letter, written in Pasigraphie, tho I have studied it not more than 8 or 9 hours altogether, & the manner of writing is not by letter & syllables, nor has any connection with the alphabet.”²⁸⁵ Manning undertook a brief study of pasigraphy, even lodging

²⁸³ RAS TM 1/1/16.

²⁸⁴ RAS TM 1/1/12.

²⁸⁵ RAS TM 1/1/13.

with de Maimieux for a time.²⁸⁶ de Maimieux's pasigraphy was an attempt to develop a universal writing system, using symbols to represent concepts, instead of an alphabet; the idea being to help people communicate without knowing each other's language. Manning found this intriguing, perhaps struck by superficial similarities between pasigraphy and Chinese characters – a writing system that was itself shared (whether Manning knew it or not) between certain mutually unintelligible languages. Manning informed his father that de Maimieux is “very intimate with the Abbé Sicard, the famous teacher of the deaf & dumb”²⁸⁷ – further invoking the translatability of language through systems of signs.

Manning tried to keep up with developments in literature and the natural sciences, but more importantly, he sought to make new connections with French mathematicians. Insofar as Manning, in 1802, could claim any public reputation, it was in mathematics, and one of his priorities upon arriving in Paris was to write to the famed mathematician Joseph-Louis Lagrange (1736-1813) concerning a mathematical theorem. Manning wanted to know:

[W]hence I might find the demonstration of a certain theorem, to which [Lagrange] has never sent any answer – & the question is important to me – as, I believe, no one has ever demonstrated the theorem satisfactorily, & I possess in my mind a genuine demonstration.²⁸⁸

Clearly, being ignored caused Manning offence. He does not specify what theorem he had in mind, but an undated letter to Francis Maseres – probably sent in 1801 – contains a demonstration of a theorem on curves (“not one of the moderns can I find, that treats the subject of curve lines in a logical manner”).²⁸⁹ He also sent Maseres a paper in December 1801 which was later published as “Mr Manning's Investigation of the

²⁸⁶ RAS TM 1/1/14.

²⁸⁷ RAS TM 1/1/13. Abbé Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard (1742-1822).

²⁸⁸ RAS TM 1/1/12.

²⁸⁹ CUL MS Add. 7886/177.

Differential Series”.²⁹⁰ Manning was probably soliciting further feedback on one of these topics. He had more luck with Lazare Carnot (1753-1823), writing to Lamb that “I have formed a little acquaintance with the great Carnot, whom I find very pleasant.”²⁹¹ Manning paints an affectionate, respectful portrait of Carnot, “one of the 1st rate mathematicians both in reality & by estimation”.²⁹² Manning was trying to finish “a little mathematical work which I intend to send to Carnot in manuscript.”²⁹³ Carnot had recently published a work on geometry,²⁹⁴ and Manning may have been pursuing the same problem to which he earlier alluded to Lagrange. Manning visited Carnot on at least two occasions, in May and June 1802, observing that the statesman was exceptional in his readiness to stand up to Napoleon: “I know but of one man’s voting against B[onaparte] wh[ich] is my friend Carnot, & he was afterwards persuaded to rescind his name & give no vote at all [...] a very disinterested man, he is much looked up to here.”²⁹⁵ In Manning’s depiction, Carnot seems far removed from the “sanguinary tyrant” described by Edmund Burke in 1796.²⁹⁶

Napoleon

Catching a glimpse of Napoleon was one of Manning’s chief objects in Paris, as for so many other British tourists. “Bonaparte” recurred across Manning’s correspondence during early 1802, his name often occasioning breathless admiration. No doubt Wordsworth would have included Manning among “Ye men of prostrate mind”:

Lords, lawyers, statesmen, squires of low degree,
Men known, and men unknown, sick, lame, and blind,

²⁹⁰ *Scriptores Logarithmici*, 47-62.

²⁹¹ Anderson, *Letters*, 77

²⁹² RAS TM 1/1/14.

²⁹³ RAS TM 1/1/15.

²⁹⁴ *De la Corrélation des Figures de Géométrie* (1801).

²⁹⁵ RAS TM 1/1/15.

²⁹⁶ Burke, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, 83. Other versions of the text apply this epithet instead to Jean-François Rewbell (1747-1807): see *Thoughts on the Prospect of a Regicide Peace* (London: J. Owen, 1796), 11.

Post forward all, like creatures of one kind,
With first-fruit offerings crowd to bend the knee
In France, before the new-born Majesty.²⁹⁷

In early February, Manning saw Napoleon reviewing the troops at the Tuileries Palace, and it “brought such a flood of sensations & reflections into my mind as almost overpowered me.”²⁹⁸ A month later, he had a closer view:

I had a ticket for the last review to be admitted into the antichambers, where Bonaparte passes [...] what a God like countenance he has! His demeanour to the spectators was very affable & unaffected – I have so exalted an idea of him as a great man, that when he passed & turned his face to the party where I stood, I had a violent emotion even to tears. Much is said against him here – somethings perhaps justly – others certainly not – & this in justice works such a counteraction in my mind, as breeds in me a most violent attachment to him.²⁹⁹

Lamb envied Manning his “access to this great man, much more than your seances and conversaciones, which I have a shrewd suspicion must be something dull.”³⁰⁰ But he also ribbed Manning about his gushing effusions, and wanted to know, “What god does he most resemble? Mars, Bacchus, or Apollo?”³⁰¹ By invoking the Roman pantheon, Lamb’s joke refers to a pre-Christian world where religion rested, not on the assumption of moral equality, but on natural inequality.³⁰² Was this, then, more than mere raillery of Manning’s “violent attachment”, but polite criticism of his enthusiasm for a tyrant? Certainly, while Manning’s favorable opinion of Napoleon was not, in early 1802, that unusual among British Whigs, it would soon be abandoned by most British liberals,

²⁹⁷ Wordsworth, “Calais, August 1802”, *Complete Poetical Works*, 211.

²⁹⁸ RAS TM 1/1/12.

²⁹⁹ RAS TM 1/1/13.

³⁰⁰ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 240.

³⁰¹ Anderson, *Letters*, 75.

³⁰² For the contrast between the morality of early Christianity and ancient rationalism, see Siedentop, *Inventing the Individual*, 60-63.

including Manning himself.³⁰³ Manning was aware that some were already dissatisfied with Napoleon's rule, and he commented on the repression carried out by the Bonapartist regime. There had been "a great many banishments", including La Harpe, "one of the best lecturers at the Lycée".³⁰⁴ Recalling disappointed idealists in other contexts, Manning apologized that "these precautions are very far from being needless".³⁰⁵

Manning's admiration for "Bonaparte" waned during the Napoleonic Wars. But an invisible thread seemed to connect their careers. With the abrupt end of the Peace of Amiens in 1803, Manning would be detained in France as a *prisonnier de guerre*, and for the next eighteen months he sent a series of petitions beseeching the French administration to allow him to leave the country and prepare his trip to China. It has been stated – including, allegedly, by Manning himself³⁰⁶ – that Napoleon actively supported Manning's plan, which was why he granted a passport for Manning to leave France. But it seems more likely that Manning had other patrons within the French administration, notably Carnot and Talleyrand (1754-1838), who interceded on his behalf.³⁰⁷

In Summer 1817, when Lord Amherst's ship, the *Caesar*, stopped at St Helena on its way to England, Manning was granted an interview with the incarcerated Napoleon. According to Napoleon's doctor, Barry O'Meara, "the prisoner of Longwood" expressed an interest in hearing about Manning's encounter with the Dalai Lama in Lhasa. Manning was duly received on 7 June and enjoyed a cordial interview, answering Napoleon's questions about the manners and customs of Tibet. Napoleon also asked "several questions about the Chinese language, the late embassy, if the

³⁰³ For changing views on Napoleon among British radicals, see Semmel, "British Radicals and 'Legitimacy'".

³⁰⁴ RAS TM 1/1/13.

³⁰⁵ RAS TM 1/1/13.

³⁰⁶ O'Meara, *Napoleon in Exile*, II, 90.

³⁰⁷ Dunkin, "Thomas Manning, Esq.", 98.

Russians had ever penetrated in that direction, and whether he intended to publish an account of his travels”.³⁰⁸ Napoleon was reportedly pleased that Manning addressed him using the term “l’Empereur”, which was forbidden by Sir Hudson Lowe, Governor of St Helena. O’Meara does not confirm the suggestion, contained in one of Manning’s obituaries, that “Napoleon’s face was immediately suffused with the deepest crimson” at this “delicate allusion to his lost power”;³⁰⁹ but he did apparently accept some “trifling presents” with good grace.³¹⁰ Manning paid attention to public discussion of Napoleon in later years, making extensive notes on O’Meara’s *Napoleon in Exile* (1822), and Emmanuel Las Cases’ *Memorial of Saint Helena* (1823).³¹¹

Manning’s European Tour

Manning stayed in Paris for six months, leaving on 14 July 1802 to conduct a trip to the Swiss Alps and South of France. The tour occupied him for several months, and chapter two examines his aesthetic reflections. Manning met a variety of people along the way, but the most striking new acquaintances were two aristocratic women in their early thirties. The first belonged to a Swiss noble family who Manning encountered early in his trip, at an inn near Schaffhausen. He never identifies the family, but they were probably the von Diesbach’s, who owned Liebegg Castle in 1802, which would mean the lady he befriended was Katharina von Diesbach (1767-1817). She happened to sit next to him at an inn and, “finding I was an Englishman & travelling alone, invited me to accompany her & her sister & brother the next day to Constantz”. This was in the opposite direction to where Manning planned to travel, but he was persuaded to accompany them, also promising to visit their chateau.³¹² There, Manning “was received most kindly – most affectionately. I have left it with a regret that has been

³⁰⁸ O’Meara, *Napoleon in Exile*, II, 92.

³⁰⁹ Dunkin, “Thomas Manning, Esq.”, 99.

³¹⁰ O’Meara, *Napoleon in Exile*, II, 98.

³¹¹ RAS TM 9/1/9, 9/1/2.

³¹² RAS TM 1/1/17.

upon me most heavily.” His host explained that the castle properly belonged to her older brother, who had emigrated with his own family due to the uncertainty caused by the Napoleonic wars. Manning boasted that his hosts “are quite *comme il faut*, & are, I believe, one of the Noble families in Switzerland.”³¹³

Continuing his tour through Switzerland, Manning re-entered France via northern Italy, staying briefly at Marseille before reaching Toulouse. There he made the acquaintance of a young Englishman, “Mr Darby”, who offered introductions to literary men in England and France, including the renowned scholar, Volney (1757-1820). Manning, however, was provoked by certain displays of Darby’s poor manners, and so felt obliged to distance himself, reluctantly turning down the letters of recommendation.³¹⁴ This must, indeed, have caused him some regret, but Manning may have had later opportunities to meet Volney during his detention. Manning had two other letters of introduction, one from Joseph de Maimieux (“in that I am painted in very bright colours”), “& what is extraordinary, they are both of them to Demoiselles”.³¹⁵ Indeed, Manning seems to have enjoyed a near-constant introduction to glamorous female society throughout 1802, perhaps making up somewhat for the disappointment he suffered with Miss Wilkins.

In Toulouse, Manning befriended another noblewoman: Madame Serrant, Louise Charlotte Rigaud of Vaudreuil (1770-1831), daughter of Louis-Philippe Rigaud (1724-1802), second in command of the French Navy during the American Revolutionary War. Manning bragged, “she is acquainted with all the people *comme il faut* at Toulouse”:

She leaves Toulouse day after tomorrow, & I am to escort her to Serrant 5 days journey where I shall meet all her family, I expect she has no cavalier with her which makes my company very acceptable [...] Madame is a very pleasant woman, handsome, apparently 25,

³¹³ RAS TM 1/1/18.

³¹⁴ RAS TM 1/1/20.

³¹⁵ RAS TM 1/1/20.

but she says 32, of good family, & princely connexions, & very sensible.³¹⁶

Manning found the Serrant chateau much to his liking: “by peculiar circumstances & by a peculiar transfer of property before the emigration, [it] has almost escaped the ravages which every other chateau in France has experienced during the revolution.”³¹⁷ Judging by Sophia Lloyd’s teasing remark, word of Manning’s skill in befriending European noblewomen got around back home: “At first I heard nothing of your going from chateau to chateau & expected nothing less than that you would meet with some fair enchantress & remain thus spellbound captive.”³¹⁸ As her title suggests, Madame Serrant was a married woman, and there is no suggestion that Manning’s dalliances went beyond pleasant flirtation. In any case, Manning’s first stay at the Chateau Serrant lasted only a few days; perhaps he felt guilty for neglecting his studies so long. Nevertheless, Madame Serrant, and her rather older husband, Antoine Walsh (1744?-1817), were important friends to Manning during the rest of his stay in France, which, due to the outbreak of war with Britain, lasted rather longer than he expected.

In the months after his return to Paris in late 1802, Manning became immersed in research and sent few letters. To his father, he attributed his silence to “a peculiar state of mind, & the circumstance that I have been so much at home engaged in reading”.³¹⁹ But he was more candid with Lamb: “I have been so occupied & am still with plans of facilitating my entrance into China, that my ideas refuse any other channel”.³²⁰ Much of Manning’s Paris correspondence suggests the tension between Romantic sociability, with its genial circulation of ideas, information, and people, and the scholarly compulsion to retreat and pursue his intellectual vocation. It is also possible that Manning experienced a period of lonely despondency after the exciting

³¹⁶ RAS TM 1/1/21.

³¹⁷ RAS TM 1/1/22.

³¹⁸ Beaty, *Letters*, 77.

³¹⁹ RAS TM 1/1/23.

³²⁰ Anderson, *Letters*, 90. This period is closely examined in chapter two.

stimulation of his travels. If so, it was exacerbated by news that the death of Madame Serrant's father meant she had cancelled plans to visit Paris, thereby depriving Manning both of agreeable company and a new round of advantageous introductions.³²¹

Manning told his father that he was ready to leave Paris in March 1803 and would visit the Serrants before returning to England.³²² Manning envisaged a short stay in England, followed by a trip to St Petersburg, perhaps to join a Russian embassy to China planned for Winter 1803 or Spring 1804. He had a grand time at the chateau, helping the ladies with their English and playing billiards with the Comte. The Serrants, Manning reported, "have considerable fears" about a new war, but Manning "uniformly prophesied peace, & still continue to do so."³²³ But the outbreak of war in May 1803 meant that Manning could not return to England until 1805, delaying his departure for China until Spring 1806.³²⁴

English Interval

The most substantial part of Manning's correspondence surviving from his sojourn in England in 1805-6 is correspondence with Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820). There are allusions to a bout of ill health shortly after Manning's return, and it would be no surprise if the stress of detention had taken a toll. But he promptly resumed contact with his friends, and letters from Lloyd and Lamb indicate how things had changed during Manning's absence. The family of Charles and Sophia Lloyd had grown, Sophia's health becoming "very delicate" due to the "expense to her constitution, which the frequent recurrence of her maternal situation occasions".³²⁵ Southey and Wordsworth now lived in the Lake District, but Coleridge was still in the Mediterranean, having decamped to Malta in 1804. Manning would not see Coleridge again until after his

³²¹ RAS TM 1/1/23.

³²² RAS TM 1/1/24-25.

³²³ RAS TM 1/1/25.

³²⁴ Manning's detention is addressed in chapter two.

³²⁵ Beaty, *Letters*, 79.

return from China in 1817. Lloyd also informed Manning of an evil omen: Wordsworth's brother, John, had recently drowned after his ship, the *Abergavenny*, sank off the coast of Weymouth, in one of the worst commercial maritime disasters in British history.³²⁶ The ship had been bound for China.

Charles and Sophia pressed Manning to visit, and a letter from Lloyd's father, remembering "thy late kind visit to us", suggests he did.³²⁷ Manning met Lamb several times,³²⁸ and Lamb wrote to William Hazlitt in November that Manning "is come to town in spectacles, and studies physic; is melancholy, and seems to have something in his head, that he don't impart."³²⁹ Lamb referred to Manning's attendance at medical lectures at Westminster Hospital, while the spectacles were perhaps occasioned by eye strain from reading and studying Chinese. The nervous excitement of his imminent departure for China, and all that entailed, probably explains his melancholy.

In March and April 1806, Manning was in regular contact with Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society and Britain's foremost patron of scientific expeditions.³³⁰ Banks had participated in Captain Cook's first great voyage between 1768 and 1771, and his active support was key to Manning's plans. It was on Banks's recommendation that the East India Company's Court of Directors consented to Manning's request to reside in their Factory in Canton while he studied Chinese.³³¹ Banks and Manning appear to have considered the initial permission received to be unsatisfactory: Manning was permitted to travel to Canton "free of expense to the Company" – presumably, therefore at his own expense. Perhaps more seriously, the Company declared that Manning must enter "covenants" to acknowledge that while in China he would be under the "control" of their Canton President and Select

³²⁶ Beaty, *Letters*, 81.

³²⁷ Beaty, *Letters*, 83. Lloyd Senior solicited Manning's help discovering the fate of some expensive clocks, sent to Canton.

³²⁸ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 302, 328-329.

³²⁹ Lamb, *Letters of Charles Lamb*, 267.

³³⁰ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 189. For a draft of Manning's letter to Banks, see RAS TM 4/5.

³³¹ Stifler, "Language Students", 57.

Committee.³³² But in the end, Manning travelled to Canton on terms he considered satisfactory, the cost of a basic passage being covered by the Company, and without any additional undertakings on Manning's behalf.³³³

Manning's intellectual ambition seems to have genuinely inspired Banks. But his Norfolk background, which served so well amid circles of Romantic sociability in Paris, may also have aided him now. Norfolk antiquarians and botanists, like Sir James Edward Smith (1759-1828) and Dawson Turner (1775-1858), coordinated their activities within the Royal Society to such an extent that it has been suggested they constituted their own "Norfolk network". Manning's cousin Frances, who lived in Diss, was married to the botanist Thomas Jenkinson Woodward (1745-1820), a Fellow of the Linnaean Society after whom Smith named the fern genus *Woodwardia*.³³⁴ This "Norfolk network" gave rise, among other things, to patronage:

Professional links were only one way in which people became known to each other [...] family ties, shared schooling or simple accident of birth in a particular town brought people into a proximity that was later developed and exploited in and by the wider scientific world.³³⁵

Banks's patronage meant the pieces were now in place for Manning to embark on his trip to China. One of the last accounts of Manning before he left was given by Robert Southey, writing to William Taylor; and their exchange includes interesting observations balancing the categorical praise lavished on Manning elsewhere. Having spoken with Manning the night before he set sail, Southey observed:

He has not made himself acquainted with all that has been written about China, as he ought to have done: I mentioned several books, some of them in my own possession, of which he had not heard. This

³³² NHM BC, 91. All references in this format are to archives at the Natural History Museum. Quotes reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London.

³³³ Auber, *China*, 221.

³³⁴ Woodward and McConnell. "Woodward, Thomas Jenkinson (1744–1820), botanist." In 1802, soon after arriving in Paris, Manning asked his father, "Remember me affectionately to Mr & Mrs Woodward" (RAS TM 1/1/12).

³³⁵ Richardson, "A Norfolk Network Within the Royal Society", 37.

is unlucky: he should have known what other people had communicated, to save himself trouble and direct his own inquiries profitably.³³⁶

Southey, a known bibliophile, was better placed than most Englishmen to judge the state of knowledge about China.³³⁷ It is curious that Manning, for all the efforts he had made to study Chinese, did not carry out a thorough study of the available literature. Southey's statement may reflect his bookish prejudices, but Taylor's reply is revealing:

I am glad you saw Manning, and glad you served him: he is near-sighted. Such men are mostly negligent of contiguous observations, literally and morally; they are moved in everything by a radiation from within, not by reflections from without; they do not see enough of what is beyond their circle of ken to be aware of its existence or value. Manning, with great talent, requires twice the time of another man to make a given quantity of observation: he is fit for a mathematician, for a metaphysician, or for an archaeologist.³³⁸

Manning, Taylor suggests, was a philosophical introvert, guided less by sensory observation, than by ideas emanating from within. This made him well-suited for mathematics and metaphysics – fields in which he certainly excelled. But if we are to believe Southey and Taylor, then it boded less well for his plans to study Chinese manners and customs.

Sociability in Canton

Manning sailed for Canton in April 1806, on board the *Thames*.³³⁹ He finally arrived in Canton on 13 January 1807, and wrote to his father immediately, having been advised by Sir George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859) that an American ship which would take English letters was about to leave Canton.³⁴⁰ Banks gave Manning a generous

³³⁶ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 132.

³³⁷ For Southey's knowledge of China, see Kitson, "Robert Southey and the Romantic Failure of China".

³³⁸ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 137-138.

³³⁹ Manning's journey to China is discussed in chapter three.

³⁴⁰ RAS TM 1/1/39.

introduction to Staunton,³⁴¹ who at the time was supercargo of the East India Company in Canton, and would later be appointed Chair of its Select Committee. Staunton's association with China dated back to his role as page to the Macartney Embassy of 1792-3, his father Sir George Leonard Staunton (1737-1801) being Lord Macartney's principal secretary. On the way to China, the young Staunton had studied Chinese with the Embassy's interpreters, demonstrating unusual proficiency, and continued to study Chinese so that, by the time Manning arrived in China, Staunton was his country's foremost expert in the language. Though only in his mid-twenties, Staunton had already published a work in Chinese, an 1805 translation of an English treatise on vaccination by George Pearson, and a few years later would publish his English translation of the Great Qing Legal Code. This was not only the first time the Code had been translated into a European language: it was also claimed to be the first substantial work translated directly from Chinese into English.³⁴² With his commercial and diplomatic responsibilities, the emphasis of Staunton's Chinese studies differed from Manning's, but he had his own interests in the Chinese cultural tradition. Manning was grateful for his company, telling Banks that Staunton "has a very cultivated mind, & great delicacy of sentiment; & I shall certainly feel his loss very much when he leaves Canton".³⁴³

Another new acquaintance was Samuel Ball (1781?-1874), the Company's Inspector of Tea in Canton. Lamb had directed Manning to seek out Ball, a "very good fellow",³⁴⁴ and Manning came to consider him "my excellent friend".³⁴⁵ Ball was to spend over twenty years in China as Inspector of Teas, later publishing *Account of the Cultivation and Manufacture of Tea in China* (1848). Back in England, Ball served on Council for the Royal Asiatic Society, and after Manning's death, Ball offered to

³⁴¹ Smith, *Life of Sir Joseph Banks*, 271.

³⁴² Ong, "Jurisdictional Politics", 148.

³⁴³ NHM DTC 17, 43.

³⁴⁴ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 349.

³⁴⁵ RAS TM 9/1/33.

prepare a catalogue of the Chinese books Manning bequeathed to the Society.³⁴⁶ Meanwhile, in September 1807 Robert Morrison (1782-1834), the first Protestant missionary in China, arrived in Macao; and there were now three British men locally engaged in the study of Chinese, albeit for different reasons. There was a cultural gap between Manning and Morrison, a devout Presbyterian of relatively humble background, but their relations must have been at least civil. A dinner invitation from Morrison to Manning still survives,³⁴⁷ and Morrison helped Manning recruit a Chinese teacher to return with him to England in 1817.³⁴⁸

During this first spell in Canton, Manning took every opportunity to send letters to his father and siblings, and to friends including Lamb, Davy, and Wilkins. The vagaries of maritime travel meant it could take a year or more before letters reached their destination; sometimes they languished in India for months before being forwarded, or would go on even longer voyages via the Pacific Ocean and North America. Sometimes they were lost completely, and Manning would come to express bitter disappointment at the long gaps between news from home. Manning did not hear at all from his family for over eighteen months after leaving England: a letter from Lamb in Summer 1807 was the only one that arrived all year.³⁴⁹ If a ship came from England with no letters for him, it caused pain and embarrassment, as in June 1807 when a ship “brought every Englishman here lots of letters from his friends & family, except to me – why am I excepted? [...] I am much vext & mortified.”³⁵⁰ His vexation only increased when further ships, arriving in October and December, were likewise barren of correspondence.³⁵¹ The absence of letters at Christmas put Manning in such bad temper that he refused to join the English party; though news of an incoming parcel

³⁴⁶ Williams-Wynn, “Annual Report of the Council”, vi.

³⁴⁷ RAS TM 5/39.

³⁴⁸ RAS TM 5/25.

³⁴⁹ Anderson, *Letters*, 99.

³⁵⁰ RAS TM 1/1/42.

³⁵¹ RAS TM 1/1/43.

of letters ensured better spirits by new year.³⁵² The long intervals between hearing from home, and the continual raising and dashing of hopes of letters, were a great frustration. So too were the frequent gaps in correspondence, with exasperating references to news and events related in other letters not received. But Manning was also guilty of laxity in maintaining his side of the communication. In early 1810 he sent few letters, while waiting to see Lord Minto, Governor-General of India, in the anxious hope of receiving support for his journey to China; he was unable even to look at the pile of letters demanding replies. “I am in a state of absolute suspense. I have a sort of tetanus comes over my mind when I think of writing to England, which absolutely shuts up my faculties.”³⁵³

Aside from letters, Manning sent a few objects of interest back for family and friends, including Chinese pencils, ink, silk, and tea. Thanks to his education and genteel background, Manning was comfortable around rich British traders, even if he found most of them relatively uncultured. He described attending lavish Company dinners and, more rarely, feasts held by Chinese merchants, such as one held by the wealthy merchant “Ponkequa,” who Manning estimated was “worth above a million sterling”.³⁵⁴ This must have been Puankhequa II, son of the famous merchant Puankhequa (1714-1788), who inherited his father’s position as the principal Hong merchant in Canton and sometimes held lavish banquets to which foreign traders were invited.³⁵⁵ Puankhequa II was clearly interested in the world his guests came from. He had corresponded with Sir Joseph Banks, sending him plants from his garden,³⁵⁶ and during his long dinners, which might last six or seven hours, Puankhequa II would ask guests about their journeys to China and the other countries they had visited.³⁵⁷ In

³⁵² RAS TM 1/1/43.

³⁵³ RAS TM 1/1/51.

³⁵⁴ RAS TM 1/1/41.

³⁵⁵ See Ching, “Chopsticks or Cutlery?”, 103-105.

³⁵⁶ Clunas, *Chinese Painting and its Audiences*, 134. Puankhequa II’s banqueting hall, garden, and aviary were mentioned, with an illustration, in Loudon’s 1824 *Encyclopaedia of Gardening*, 104.

³⁵⁷ Ching, “Chopsticks or Cutlery?”, 106.

addition to a party of English, “Ponkequa” invited two Chinese mandarins, including one who had been involved in the recent trial of an English sailor (“We were all vastly civil & complimentary”), and representatives of the local Swedish, Danish, and Spanish trading communities. The mandarins’ presence was a great honour: “It is very unusual to meet mandarins, as they never visit persons in trade.” Manning felt it was opportune to arrive at a time when relations with the Chinese were disrupted: “I see the Chinese & their affairs in views & positions that I might have long waited for in ordinary times [...] these troubled waters are excellent for me to fish in”.³⁵⁸

The British were obliged to spend their summers on the island of Macao, and Manning travelled there with Staunton aboard a “large commodious junk”. Considering the opportunities of his situation, Manning might be expected to prioritize Chinese studies to the exclusion of other interests. Instead, he “plunged over head & ears in the mathematics”. Following an “unlucky train of thoughts”, Manning became absorbed “in a most incredible manner”, mistaking the passage of time and keeping to his room for days on end.³⁵⁹ He describes having had five or six of these “fits” previously; this time, it was all he could do to tear himself away and write a letter to catch a ship bound for Bombay. Episodes like this support William Taylor’s opinion that Manning’s preoccupations were motivated by “a radiation from within, not by reflections from without”.³⁶⁰ Manning admitted that such behaviour “might seem affectation to any person that did not know me, & who never experienced so entire an absorption, but I cannot help it.”³⁶¹

Writing to Charles Lloyd in 1808, Manning noted that he was situated “in the most advantageous manner; & on the best terms with all the European merchants”. But he remained isolated from the local population: “I have the greatest trouble in effecting

³⁵⁸ RAS TM 1/1/41.

³⁵⁹ RAS TM 1/1/42.

³⁶⁰ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 137-138.

³⁶¹ RAS TM 1/1/42.

points of communication so that you must not expect anything interesting from me as yet.”³⁶² This seems to suggest that significant discoveries would require contact with Chinese people. But, unlike Robert Morrison, Manning never learned Cantonese. While a preference for Mandarin may have reflected an intellectual orientation towards the scholarly and bureaucratic elites,³⁶³ the practical availability of teachers may also have had something to do with it.

Manning was not regularly engaged as a Company employee, but neither was he averse to taking occasional paid work. His main concern, he told his father, was to avoid becoming entangled in such a way that he might be expected to carry out tasks which did not suit his conscience; and so he refused any formal commitment or position.³⁶⁴ Manning’s objection was explicitly conscientious, and he would only promote the Company’s interests if he could do so “without acting hostilely to the real interests of other nations [...] too many gentlemen in the King’s Council, think it sufficient if England gains”.³⁶⁵ Still, Manning did so much work for the Company between 1808-10 – translating, as he put it, “edicts &c” – that Susan Stifler describes him as the Company’s main translator during Staunton’s absence,³⁶⁶ until he handed things over to Morrison, who was appointed on a formal basis. Manning must, therefore, have attained some rudimentary competence in written Chinese by 1808-9. He probably owed much of his progress to the Chinese teacher Abel Yen. Originally from Shanxi, Abel Yen was a Latin-speaking Catholic who Staunton also recommended as the teacher of Robert Morrison.³⁶⁷ According to Morrison, Abel Yen knew Mandarin, but not Cantonese;³⁶⁸ if he were Manning’s Chinese teacher, this would help explain

³⁶² RAS TM 1/1/45. Lloyd seems to have copied out the letter in order to forward it to Manning’s father, naturally assuming it would be of interest to the family.

³⁶³ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 127.

³⁶⁴ RAS TM 1/1/49.

³⁶⁵ RAS TM 1/1/49.

³⁶⁶ Stifler, “Language Students”, 56.

³⁶⁷ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 98-99.

³⁶⁸ Eliza Morrison, *Memoirs of Robert Morrison*, I, 163.

why Manning was “accustomed only to the Peking pronunciation”.³⁶⁹ Manning preserved several Latin missives from Abel Yen, including one mentioning the loan of a Chinese dictionary,³⁷⁰ and Barrett suggests Abel Yen acted as a “general cultural informant”.³⁷¹ Manning could therefore report, “I make some progress in the language, & I have been so happy as to investigate & analyse many things concerning it that are very obscurely, or rather not at all known, in Europe, even by those who are considered as Chinese scholars.”³⁷² To his father, he explained that “The veiled mysteries of the Chinese language gradually open upon my view”,³⁷³ and in September 1809 he enthused to his sister about his understanding of the tones, which “is in my opinion a full recompense for the journey the labor & expense, & is what ought & will hereafter justify me in the eyes of all”.³⁷⁴

Orientalists and Missionaries in India

Frustrated in his efforts to enter the interior of China from Canton, in 1810 Manning travelled to India to make a new attempt from that direction.³⁷⁵ He was delayed in Calcutta, waiting in vain for official support for his journey. But at least there he could enjoy more extensive British society than in Canton, and Manning was “introduced to all the world”, attending a succession of dinner engagements and balls held by scions of Calcutta society including the banker John Palmer (1767–1836), the judge Sir William Burroughs (ca. 1753-1829), and Sir John Hayes (1768–1831).³⁷⁶ Manning befriended the Scottish Oriental scholar John Leyden (1775-1811), forming part of a learned circle which also included the young Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), soon to

³⁶⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 260.

³⁷⁰ RAS TM 5/13/2.

³⁷¹ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 8.

³⁷² RAS TM 1/1/45.

³⁷³ RAS TM 1/1/46.

³⁷⁴ RAS TM 1/2/3.

³⁷⁵ Manning’s efforts to enter the Qing Empire are discussed in chapter three.

³⁷⁶ RAS TM 1/1/51.

achieve fame as a colonial administrator and historian.³⁷⁷ Raffles had literary connections of his own: he was friends with the Irish poet Thomas Moore (1779-1852), having been introduced by his wife Olivia, said to be the inspiration for the “Nona” of Moore’s love poetry.³⁷⁸ This “was the most intellectual and interesting little coterie in Calcutta”, their conversation often extending beyond midnight:

Leyden was a literary colossus, and had applied, with incredible diligence, to the cultivation of every branch of Oriental literature. Manning was one of the most accomplished scholars in India. Raffles may almost be said to have appropriated to himself the languages and the literature of the Eastern Archipelago; and Dr Hare, another of the party, was one of the most eminent physicians in the city, and a man of cultivated taste.³⁷⁹

It was to James Macadam Hare (1775-1831) that Manning entrusted his Chinese-Latin dictionary while away in Tibet.³⁸⁰ The Baptist missionary Joshua Marshman (1768-1837), who like Manning was studying Chinese, also formed part of this group. With William Carey and William Ward, Marshman was one of the “Serampore Trio” operating from the nearby Danish colony of Serampore owing to the East India Company’s prohibition on missionary activity. Marshman was learning Chinese under the tutelage of Johannes Lassar (also known as Hovhannes Ghazarian), a Macao-born Armenian, while preparing Biblical translations into Chinese which eventually appeared in 1817. Marshman considered Manning “his friend, who to the most exquisite classical taste unites the delicacy and the incorruptible integrity which characterise the scholar and the gentleman”, and “a man of singular erudition and penetration, and certainly one of the first in the list of Chinese scholars of the present day”.³⁸¹ Manning was less flattering about Marshman’s knowledge of Chinese, telling

³⁷⁷ NLS MS ACC 759 [115].

³⁷⁸ Bastin and Weizenegger, *The Family of Sir Stamford Raffles*, 86-90.

³⁷⁹ Marshman, *Life and Times*, I, 438.

³⁸⁰ RAS Chinese Manuscripts.

³⁸¹ Marshman, *Life and Times*, I, 437.

his father that the missionaries with whom he had dealings “fancy they know something of the Chinese language & have written most consummate nonsense about it”. They were “good sort of folks”, but “a little weak in the upper story, & no linguists”. Manning tried to explain that their translations were “a mess of mistakes from beginning to end”, but “they are too ignorant to comprehend their own ignorance”.³⁸² Before he left Calcutta for Rangpur, on his long journey into Tibet, Manning sent some Chinese translations to one of his friends (probably Leyden or Hare), accompanied by a note criticizing Marshman, which suggests Manning wished the missionaries had “let me alone”: “I have given them as broad hints as possible almost to rudeness but their zeal & simplicity admits of no check”.³⁸³

Indeed, Marshman wrote Manning a series of letters throughout 1810, seeking help with his translations. On 20 May, Marshman sent his published translation of the Gospel of Matthew, “almost wet from the binders”, soliciting Manning’s criticisms: “I shall esteem them more than gold”. Marshman particularly wanted to know, “Is Mr Lassar’s stile anything like the Chinese stile?”³⁸⁴ But the relationship was not entirely one-way, as Manning sought assistance with his trip into China. Manning informed Marshman that he had hoped to recruit Leyden as a travel companion, styling himself Leyden’s assistant or “Chinese Moonshee”.³⁸⁵ Having been discouraged from this scheme, however, Manning asked whether Lassar might come as his own assistant, instead. Manning could not afford to pay much, but he hoped to enlist Marshman’s support by suggesting that “whatever difference there may be in our opinions and views [...] I am equally an instrument in the hands of Providence, and may equally be the means of opening China to the real and eternal goods of the western world.”³⁸⁶ Manning was no evangelist, but later that same year he wrote to his father that “I cons[ider]

³⁸² RAS TM 1/1/51.

³⁸³ RAS TM 9/1/36.

³⁸⁴ RAS TM 5/19/2.

³⁸⁵ Marshman, *Life and Times*, I, 438.

³⁸⁶ Marshman, *Life and Times*, I, 439.

mys[elf] to be in the hands of Prov[idence] & to be an instrument”³⁸⁷ – so his statement was not entirely disingenuous. Marshman, however, demurred, since Lassar was employed as a sort of public servant on behalf of the “Christian public”, which deserved to see a proper return on its investment: the Armenian had been well-compensated, and the translation work remained unfinished. Moreover, whatever benefit Lassar could render Manning would be slight. He could neither secure Manning’s legal passage into China, nor guarantee his safety. Finally, in Marshman’s view, Lassar was poorly suited to such an ambitious undertaking: “He is the most timid creature living”.³⁸⁸

Dated 28 August 1810, Marshman’s letter reveals that Manning was not set on the Tibetan route to China even at this late stage: he was also considering an approach via Burma. He had informed Marshman of his “resolution of going to Sylhet, and to Munipore” (Manipur), hoping to strike off eastward from there “for you know what empire.”³⁸⁹ Marshman suggested Rangoon would be the best place to start: but Manning must avoid the jungle, for its tigers “discover no partiality to literary men”.³⁹⁰ Marshman’s next letter (14 September) specifically mentions Lhasa, suggesting that Manning settled upon this route in the first half of that month.³⁹¹ Marshman noted that “every step you take there is likely to be as useful to us as pleasing to you”: the Serampore Trio hoped that in a year or two they might be able to send missionaries along the same route. As such, “While therefore [?] you are treading the path of science, you may be making the footsteps in which religion may follow.”³⁹²

Manning never received the official support he hoped for. Lord Minto had initially promised to provide “very practicable assistance”, but he was reluctant to associate himself with a project whose outcome was uncertain and which might

³⁸⁷ RAS TM 1/1/52.

³⁸⁸ RAS TM 5/19/4.

³⁸⁹ Marshman, *Life and Times*, I, 438.

³⁹⁰ RAS TM 5/19/4.

³⁹¹ RAS TM 5/19/5.

³⁹² RAS TM 5/19/6.

provoke controversy or unrest. As a final gambit, Manning appealed once more to his patron, Sir Joseph Banks, submitting a petition for an Embassy to China to be forwarded to King George III. This, too, was in vain; and before he even left Canton, Banks had, unbeknownst to Manning, sent a letter praising his efforts but encouraging him “to abandon your enterprise if you do not by this time see a considerable probability of success in your perseverance.” Banks suggested Manning should return to England, where men were needed who excelled “in the higher parts of mathematics & geometry”, subjects where the country still trailed France.³⁹³

Summary and Implications

In December 1810, Manning wrote to his father from Rangpur, in northern India, near the border with Bhutan, where he was trying to arrange legal permission to travel to Lhasa, capital of Tibet. Manning was unaware that his father had recently died. In his letter, he sought to explain the real reason why he had committed himself to the study of China: “The example of a reform on the conduct of life is my object, & has been ever since I was 18 or sooner”.³⁹⁴ In pursuit of this aim, Manning intended to study Chinese manners and customs, which were presumably to be compared with social behaviour in England itself. Meanwhile, his Chinese language studies would, he hoped, enhance his planned work on ancient Greek, through the comparison of Greek and Chinese language particles. This, in turn, would help explain “the Metaphy[sics] of Lang[uage], ie the Metaphy[sics] of the H[uma]n mind”.³⁹⁵

Posterity would remember Manning’s journey to Lhasa as his most noteworthy achievement, but for him it was an incidental event during a much wider project with lofty and rarefied goals. Those goals are explored in subsequent chapters. The preceding discussion has tried to provide biographical background to illuminate

³⁹³ NHM BC, 118.

³⁹⁴ RAS TM 1/1/52.

³⁹⁵ RAS TM 1/1/52.

Manning's travels and studies, and it has shown how Manning's educational background and social connections helped his project develop. Even so, background and social opportunities can only account for so much. Very few people from Manning's social class decided to study China in the 1790s – and none did so for the same reasons he did. His project was deeply personal, and the next chapters will explore the aesthetic, philosophical, and moral ideas that inspired him.

The new information about Manning and his circle embellishes our understanding of Romantic sociability in Cambridge, Norfolk, London, and Paris in the early 1800s; while the discussion of Manning's time overseas throws new light on the activities of British scholars abroad at a time of great significance to the development of Oriental studies in Europe. Archival sources reveal Manning's expanded social circle, extending beyond his connection to Charles Lamb and the Coleridge Circle. We can better understand how Manning participated in regional and international information networks, centred especially on Cambridge and Norfolk. Manning's first year in France, and his shorter time in Calcutta in 1810, now stand alongside the first flush of his friendship with Charles Lamb in 1800 as intellectually productive episodes which brought him into creative contact with some of Europe's leading thinkers. Some of those he worked with, like Joseph Hager and Joseph de Maimieux, are largely forgotten figures today, their ideas and research – somewhat like Manning's own – being quickly superseded. But the wider significance of even such eccentric endeavours as theirs is not to be taken lightly. Even today, with the benefits of modern science, we can rarely say with total confidence which lines of research will prove to be most productive. Great discoveries sometimes arise as unintended consequences of discarded hypotheses. In the early 1800s, polymaths still sought hidden connections between disparate subjects, and this chapter starts to prepare an "intellectual biography" of Manning that does not bifurcate his scholarly pursuits into modern academic disciplines.

The timeline established here invites a tentative suggestion that the romantic disappointment Manning suffered in late 1800 factored into his decision to leave England for China. The identity of this woman remains uncertain, but she can now at

least be identified as one of the daughters of the architect William Wilkins (1749-1836), and a sister of the more famous architect of the same name. Manning never married, and his private archive documents intermittent loneliness, frustration, and romantic nostalgia, adding a poignant new dimension to his biography.

T. H. Barrett has previously surmised that Manning “was one of the most farsighted men of the age”.³⁹⁶ The new archival sources explored in this chapter suggest that Manning was embarked on a project of cultural reform, one aspect of which was to diminish the vast cultural gulf separating Britain and China in the early nineteenth century. Subsequent chapters will consider the significance of Manning’s travels, research, and writings, allowing a fresh assessment of his career’s meaning in the intellectual history of his country and its engagement with the wider world.

³⁹⁶ Barrett, *Singular Listlessness*, 59.

Chapter 2

Thomas Manning's Romantic Vision: European Travel and Exploration, 1799-1805

Introduction

Why did Thomas Manning travel? For the first thirty years of his life, he seems hardly to have strayed beyond his native East Anglia and the nearby university town of Cambridge. As a child, he only attended school, in Bury St Edmund's, for one year: afterwards, due to ill health, he was taught at home by his father. Throughout the 1790s, he resided in Cambridge, first as a student, then as a mathematics tutor. But between 1802 and 1817, he embarked on a series of journeys that took him to France, Switzerland, and Italy, and then onward to China, Vietnam, India, and finally Tibet, one of the most remote inhabited places on Earth. Moreover, he did this despite being a man of strong domestic affections, enjoying good relationships with his father and siblings, and a circle of devoted friends, of whom Charles Lamb (1775-1834) is now the best known. Manning was acutely aware of the social bonds he forsook, and on board the *Thames* en route to China in 1806, he wrote to his father:

I have begun this letter; to say that all is well – that the sea agrees with me – that after every reflection made (& I have now full opportunities for such) I entirely approve of the steps I have taken. And to confess the truth without this approbation I should be miserable – for I have such painful sensations & recollections come over me very often, that I am like a child – particularly upon rummaging my papers & old letters. It has fallen strangely to my lot to make a number of friendly attachments with persons who have given me indubitable proofs of their real & strong affection – people who would make great sacrifices to me, if I needed it. & I run away

from them to potter about among the damned Chinese & Tartarians!³⁹⁷

Manning not only left behind ties of friendship and kinship, but also, at the age of 33, whatever realistic opportunities remained for youthful romance. Just before setting sail, Manning joked to Lamb that when he returned, “you must leave room for my little Chinese wife, because poor pipsey’s feet are so small she can’t walk, you know!”³⁹⁸ His flippant reference to foot-binding touched on the fact that while there were, obviously, women and sexual opportunities in Asia, interactions would be subject to different conventions. Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud observes that “a long line of alienated Western writers looked East to articulate their sexual nonconformity”.³⁹⁹ Manning’s archive reveals heterosexual interest in women, but after his disappointment with “Miss Wilkins”, he appears to have remained celibate – perhaps its own kind of “sexual nonconformity”. If, after his failed courtship of Miss Wilkins, Manning resolved not to marry, then perhaps his decision to move to the other side of the world, pursuing a scholarly ideal, contained an element of making virtue out of necessity.

Manning’s decision to go to China might, therefore, have a complicated relationship with his romantic experiences. But we can largely rule out some of the other factors that commonly drew his compatriots to Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: notably commerce, missionary work, diplomacy, and war. Manning did not conceive of China as a place to make his fortune. He did not go there to propagate Christianity. He did not seek to further Britain’s commercial or diplomatic interests. And, unlike untold thousands of his compatriots, he was not a member of the armed forces or press-ganged into maritime service. Indeed, it is scarcely possible to explain Manning’s decision in terms of conventional self-interest. This made it harder for Manning to placate his elderly father, who was saddened by his son’s eccentric

³⁹⁷ RAS TM 1/1/37.

³⁹⁸ Anderson, *Letters*, 95.

³⁹⁹ Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism*, 8.

ambitions and realized that Manning's Asiatic odyssey tended, if anything, to undermine his prospects for social advancement. Manning was a capable mathematician and classical scholar, not without literary talent; there were much clearer paths to fame and fortune than the uncharted, uncertain labyrinth of Chinese. Moreover, Manning's personal idiosyncrasies, and ambivalent attitude towards institutions of British power abroad, limited his capacity to take advantage even when opportunities for applying his knowledge of Chinese did arise.

Manning's goals were scholarly in nature, and the next two chapters explore how his travels and cognate experiences relate to his objectives. They make detailed use of Manning's letters to his two main correspondents – his father and Charles Lamb – where he describes his aesthetic and emotional responses to new environments. The organisation of these chapters reflects the chronological and geographic divide separating Manning's travels in Europe, between 1799 and 1805, from his travels in Asia, between 1806 and 1817. For while Manning's travels began in earnest when he set sail for China in April 1806, it is also important to consider his prior travels within Europe. Significant journeys Manning undertook before he left for Asia include a visit to the Lake District, to see Charles and Sophia Lloyd, in the Summer of 1799; a tour of south-west England and south Wales with George Leman Tuthill in Spring 1801; a solo tour of the Rhine and the south of France in late Summer 1802; and long periods of residence in Paris and the Loire Valley in early 1802 and throughout 1803-4. During these five years he exhibits growing self-awareness as a Romantic traveller, with aesthetic interest in rural landscapes and curiosity about the physical and psychological effects of travel. But Manning was also keen to learn how ordinary people lived in different social and economic contexts, and this points to that enduring preoccupation with manners and customs which informed his later orientation towards the study of Chinese culture. In each of these matters – the significance of natural beauty and the meaning of awe; sympathetic curiosity about the lives of the rural poor – Manning was responding to Romantic motifs that also informed the work of more famous peers such as Wordsworth and Coleridge. Notwithstanding his scathing rejection of Wordsworth's poems in the second volume of the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, Manning appears to have

shared some of the fundamental assumptions behind Wordsworth's philosophical vision. Attempts to examine Manning's later voyages in Asia will thus appear inadequate unless they are alive to the significance of these earlier experiences and concerns; and exploring that significance is a key task of this chapter.

During his travels, Manning regularly alluded to the centripetal force of his domestic context, particularly Diss, his Norfolk hometown. It was a literal and psychological centre, and until his father died in 1810, Manning routinely recorded his impressions and observations in letters which he sent to Diss. Cambridge was another important locale, and both places would remain defining contexts, fixed points of geographic reference providing a sense of belonging. Manning respected other countries and cultures and was open to learning from them; but he loved his home.

Gregory Dart, commenting on Leigh Hunt's essay "A Day by the Fire" (1811), observes the connection between liberty and domesticity: "English liberty, like English comfort, is something that has had to be cultivated against the hard season", with the blazing domestic fire "being at once the spiritual symbol and practical breeding-ground" of liberal principles such as freedom of speech.⁴⁰⁰ The same two ideas were totally intertwined within Manning's own psyche. Even so, his ideas about England were complicated by his experiences overseas and the behaviour of his countrymen and national institutions abroad. The next two chapters therefore touch upon issues of English identity in the Romantic period that have also been explored by David Higgins.⁴⁰¹ Manning certainly reflected on his Englishness in a way that invites comparison to better-known Romantic figures such as Wordsworth and Robert Southey (1774-1843). The ensuing interpretation of Manning's writings tends to support Higgins's argument that, for the Romantics, "to invoke Englishness did not necessarily entail a narrowing of cultural focus".⁴⁰² Manning's most expansive discussions of

⁴⁰⁰ Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, 3.

⁴⁰¹ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, passim.

⁴⁰² Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 11.

English identity occurred when he was in China, where his very purpose – the investigation of Chinese culture – presumed a broadening of civilizational horizons. What was significant, exceptional, or unique about England seemed most apparent when juxtaposed with something utterly foreign. Manning is an unusual and extreme case among English Romantics, but his career nevertheless supports Higgins’s conclusion that Englishness was both an important form of identity in the Romantic period and a “heterogeneous and unstable category [...] always inflected by alterity”.⁴⁰³

Lake District, 1799

The earliest glimpse of Manning as a Romantic traveller dates from July 1799, during his visit to Charles and Sophia Lloyd in the Lake District. The newlyweds were on their honeymoon, from where Lloyd sent Manning a series of increasingly urgent letters decrying his mental state, predicting a relapse of his chronic illness, and begging Manning to visit.⁴⁰⁴ Manning eventually went to see the couple during their stay in Penrith, and described his visit in a candid letter to his father:

I am here among people of excessive & morbid sensibility – That of my friend Lloyd is both from nature & education, the restraints & peculiarities of a Quaker life having given it an unnatural strength. He is of a most ardent, warm & generous disposition, & attached to me in a manner you have no idea of, & of which I cannot give you an adequate idea in a letter. His sister is a most amiable young woman injured in the same manner by restrained feeling, not so impetuous as her brother, but with a very masterly understanding, & great simplicity. – She is engaged to a very worthy man, whom I reckon among my friends at Cambridge, his name is Wordsworth.⁴⁰⁵ (I ought to tell you that she is handsome, I think very handsome.)⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 9.

⁴⁰⁴ Beaty, *Letters*, 36.

⁴⁰⁵ Christopher Wordsworth (1774-1846), youngest brother of William Wordsworth.

⁴⁰⁶ RAS TM 1/1/4.

Lloyd's wife, Sophia, "is very amiable & I believe sensible", and the company was completed by her sister, Rebecca Pemberton ("a very good girl") and "Miss Twells", governess to Lloyd's teenaged sister, Priscilla (1781-1815). The group sallied forth on "a sort of tour of the lakes":

From Keswick I accompanied Miss L⁴⁰⁷ at four o'clock in the morning to the lofty top in Skiddaw; we did not get back till 10, tho it lies close by the town – in fact tis a great thing for a lady to undertake on foot [...] Miss L performed it with considerable difficulty. I had the pleasure of giving her that support, without which I believe she could not have accomplished it.⁴⁰⁸

Manning also mentioned that the Lloyds would visit the Clarksons, Quaker friends of the family known for their prominent role in the movement to abolish the slave trade. Manning's recounting of iconic Lake District landmarks thus emphasises sociability, female companionship, and physical exertion, rather than isolation or quietude. He obviously enjoyed the chivalric responsibility of providing the young Priscilla Lloyd with "support", and there is more than a hint of flirtation.

The walks and scenery provided spiritual and bodily stimulation, and being with friends made it an intellectually creative episode. Still, the visit had its darker side, symbolized by Lloyd's excessive ardour and the disruption caused by bouts of mania among the party, which meant Manning had little time for rest. The commotion meant that "when I do get to bed [I] am greatly agitated by visions".⁴⁰⁹

Wordsworth had grown up in the Lake District, and moved back there in December 1799, followed the year after by Coleridge and then Southey. The three men were regarded as forming an intellectual coterie, known collectively as the "Lake poets". The Lake District was central to Wordsworth's philosophical vision and, largely as a result of his work, it became synonymous with English Romanticism and assumed

⁴⁰⁷ Priscilla Lloyd.

⁴⁰⁸ RAS TM 1/1/4.

⁴⁰⁹ RAS TM 1/1/4.

a central role in the English identity more broadly. Manning recorded his impressions of sights and places that would come to epitomise the Lakes in the popular imaginary; for him, they were the quintessence of natural beauty.

From Keswick we made excursions & saw several beautiful scenes & lakes & then walk[e]d on to Ambleside by Windermere. This was a delightful walk part of the way, but dreary at last for we were in the rain, enveloped with mountains & clouds which sometimes descended & blew across us. But at last (between 9 & 10 at night) the sky cleared & it became a beautiful evening – & we walked considerably out of our way (late as it was) to take [a] peep at Grasmere Lake (4 miles from Ambleside) [...] At Ambleside we found Mrs L⁴¹⁰ ill from her apprehensions about us. She is not sufficiently romantic perhaps for such strangely acting people as we are.⁴¹¹

Manning's generic description of the "delightful walk" and the Lake District's "beautiful scenes" lacks poetry compared to better-known reflections of the era. But the image of the young party alone on a summer evening, "enveloped with mountains & clouds which sometimes descended & blew across us", is certainly striking, and one Manning might have recalled in later years, while ranging through the Swiss Alps or Himalayas. His self-aware reference to the "strangely acting" and "romantic" group is peculiarly evocative in the context of the mist-enshrouded walk to Ambleside by Windermere; and it proved too much for Lloyd's "sensible" wife. In later years, Manning would reflect on what he saw and felt in other mountain ranges in more eloquent terms. But this early foray into the art of travel writing shows he was already alive to his physical and emotional response to the natural world, revealing how he began to consciously situate himself within the genre of Romanticism and its mountain-walking "special interest group".

⁴¹⁰ This probably refers to Sophia Lloyd, not Lloyd's mother Mary (1751?-1821), contrary to my suggestion in "All the Beauties of the Road", 8.

⁴¹¹ RAS TM 1/1/4.

Manning's archive contains little pre-dating his friendship with Charles Lloyd, making it harder to gauge the extent to which this visit to the Lakes heralded a new aesthetic departure. Yet it remains essential background for Manning's reactions when exploring the Rhine and Swiss Alps in 1802, and the Himalayas a decade later. Manning had been inspired by one of the most important landscapes in literary history; six months later, he would meet Lamb and Coleridge, thus being introduced to radical new ideas about literature, nature, and psychology. If Manning's response to the Lake District shows he was already sensitive to "romantic" ideas, then direct exposure to such luminaries of the literary scene could hardly fail to inspire new lines of thinking.

South England and Wales, 1801

In May 1801, Manning went on a fortnight's tour of south-west England with his friend George Leman Tuthill (1772-1835), who had arranged to view some land. It is tempting to wonder whether the trip had any connection with Tuthill's 1799 scheme for an intellectual commune "inhabited by eight or ten young people of superior minds";⁴¹² but the objectives were probably more mundane. Manning appears not to have had any immediate object in accompanying Tuthill, breezily suggesting to his father that "If I ever settle in England, it will, I believe be on some 10 or 20 acres in one of those southern counties. So that my coming with him is by no means without a reference to my own future life."⁴¹³

The two men visited the Isle of Wight before traversing England's southern counties. Sticking close by the coast and travelling by coach, boat, and on foot, they enjoyed areas of outstanding natural beauty and visited Southampton, Salisbury, Lyme Regis, Brixham, Torbay, Torquay, Exmouth, Exeter, Bideford, Swansea, and Bristol.⁴¹⁴ The West Country was another key locale in the genealogy of British Romanticism: in

⁴¹² RAS TM 2/3/3.

⁴¹³ RAS TM 1/1/7.

⁴¹⁴ RAS TM 1/1/8.

1801, Wordsworth and Coleridge were ensconced in the Lakes, but just a few years earlier, Somerset had provided the scene for the first flowering of their creative friendship, when Coleridge lived in Nether Stowey and Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, at Alfoxden House. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", one of the most celebrated poems in the *Lyrical Ballads*, was set slightly further north, in Monmouthshire, south Wales; while the yet more remote landscapes and ancient ruins of northern Wales conjured associations with druids and ancient bards.⁴¹⁵ Manning had recently read the *Lyrical Ballads*, and was thus intimately familiar with this aesthetic context. He found himself "absolutely enchanted"⁴¹⁶ by parts of the Isle of Wight, and described arriving late one evening:

So we proceeded up to the village, & were pleasingly surprised to hear the Nightengales warbling by the side of the road – we came to a public house kept by a widow lady & three beautiful daughters which together with the nightengales (not to forget a glass of punch), made it quite romantic.⁴¹⁷

The female-run public house has a dreamlike and vaguely "weird" air, with its widow and her trinity of daughters, and the pleasant but intoxicating effects of the alcohol. The nightingale had long been a familiar motif in English poetry, recently taking centre stage in Coleridge's 1798 poem *The Nightingale*. Manning would have encountered the poem in *Lyrical Ballads*, whose second volume of 1800 he had recently decried to Lamb.⁴¹⁸ Coleridge's poem sought to reclaim the bird from its "melancholy" reputation ("In Nature there is nothing melancholy"), pointing instead to the human tendency to project our emotions onto natural phenomena.⁴¹⁹ In like manner, the agreeable sensations enjoyed by Manning and Tuthill embellished the "warbling" of the nightingales and the Spring charms of the Isle of Wight.

⁴¹⁵ Watson, "Wordsworth, North Wales and the Celtic Landscape", 92-93.

⁴¹⁶ RAS TM 1/1/8.

⁴¹⁷ RAS TM 1/1/7.

⁴¹⁸ Anderson, *Letters*, 52, 54.

⁴¹⁹ Coleridge, "The Nightingale", in Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 64-65.

In contrast, Manning disliked Devon, owing to his aesthetic and physical response to the climate and topography:

[It] is not a county I should at all like to live in. From the peculiar appearance of the trees there I guess that the sea air is more injurious to vegetation in Devonshire than in most other maritime counties – The country is very beautiful to see – but, I think, too hilly to live in – tis a collection of hills disposed in every direction – so that you cannot stir a mile from a place without climbing – the southern coast is very beautiful & picturesque.⁴²⁰

The “peculiar appearance of the trees” threatens gothic or even supernatural connotations, which are quickly cancelled by Manning’s assurance that it must be due to the saline or other “injurious” quality of the air. Moreover, being used to the relatively flat land of East Anglia, Manning was peculiarly sensitive to hilly terrain. Not only would it make walking more onerous, it also diminished the beauty of the countryside: there was nothing majestic or sublime about a “collection of hills disposed in every direction”. It would also lack expansive, panoramic views like those witnessed in the Lake District. Nevertheless, Manning was pleased with the tour, especially its opportunities for first-hand observation: “I have received information which I could not have had, but by ocular inspection”.⁴²¹ Indeed, the superiority of information acquired directly, by personal contact, was implicit in Manning’s whole scheme of study, and remained an enduring motive for travel.

The route taken by the two men led into south Wales, which Manning considered to be “deliciously beautiful”.⁴²² Manning and Tuthill landed in a “little village in Glamorganshire, where they land vessels with lime”, whose name he renders as Pool-Dye. This is probably Pwll Du Bay on the south Gower Peninsula, from where they walked to nearby Swansea. Here, Manning heard the Welsh language spoken, with

⁴²⁰ RAS TM 1/1/8.

⁴²¹ RAS TM 1/1/8.

⁴²² RAS TM 1/1/8.

“between 20 & 30 market women” having an argument in Welsh with a boatman. Far from finding the scene coarse or unedifying, Manning described it as having “a very pleasant sound”. Indeed, his dismissal of Wordsworth’s poetry notwithstanding, Manning’s sympathy with the life of local people in what was then a remote part of Britain evokes the central message of the *Lyrical Ballads*. This, in turn, perhaps speaks to the underlying influence of Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), who saw virtue in local habits and customs that was missing in the main current of French Enlightenment philosophy; and this enabled “English fellow-travellers like Wordsworth and Robert Southey to reinvent the commonwealth tradition [...] in uniquely democratic and universal terms.”⁴²³

Life in remotest south Wales may have been hard, and the people unsophisticated, but for Manning they did not lack charm or dignity. Describing the arrangements in one remote public house where the inhabitants “live in a very curious manner”, Manning adopts a strikingly Wordsworthian register, evincing sympathetic interest in the lives of the people who reside there, and a polite eagerness to understand their ways and manners. He learns that “all summer long the female part (Mrs Jenkins & her pretty daughter Nancy) seldom or never go to bed”. Instead they snatch a few hours’ rest when they can, “& hang their cloaths on a Sunday”. This gruelling schedule was necessary because merchant vessels calling at the nearby lime quarries “[a]re loading, & turning from different parts at all hours – & the mariners refresh themselves at this house – so that there must always be somebody up”. Manning was in awe of the women’s workload. He also sympathised with the “hard life” of the mariners, though he regretted that they should wear themselves out “all for the sake of money!”⁴²⁴

⁴²³ Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre, and English Romanticism*, 168-170.

⁴²⁴ RAS TM 1/1/8.

The scene was unfamiliar, and potentially uncouth. But Manning remained respectful and full of admiration, particularly where Mrs Jenkins and her daughter were concerned:

I must not dismiss Nancy, without observing that tho she is as it were a waiter at a public house, yet her manners are as strict as those of the most secluded English girl – yet with an agreeable freedom, the result of seeing a variety of different people.⁴²⁵

Manning and Tuthill were slightly older than the undergraduates and young clergy usually found on walking holidays, but their tour does appear to have been conducted in the sort of “intrinsicly egalitarian – almost democratic” spirit which animated so many idealistic contemporaries.⁴²⁶ While part of their journey was completed by coach, Manning was obviously impressed by coming into such close contact with common people. Tuthill, for his part, had his own interests in social reform, and Coleridge would later cite him as an “eminent medical authority” in support of his campaign for legislation against child labour.⁴²⁷ When describing the lives of ordinary people, Manning’s statements were characterised by sympathy and empathy, and his curiosity about manners and customs complemented a sincere desire to learn and understand. He also avoids the temptation to idealize or prettify genuinely difficult conditions. But his lament that the boatmen are willing to wear themselves out “all for the sake of money!” reveals the difficulty of fully sympathizing with those who did not share his financial independence and security.

Manning’s response to the Lake District in 1799 reveals evidence of a “Romantic” response; and this is yet more evident two years later. In the interim, Manning had been introduced to Lamb and Coleridge, engaging in critical reading of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth’s verse play *The Borderers*, and Lamb’s

⁴²⁵ RAS TM 1/1/8.

⁴²⁶ Sisman, *The Friendship*, 6.

⁴²⁷ Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections*, 477.

correspondence from Coleridge and Wordsworth.⁴²⁸ Manning dismissed, in no uncertain terms, the poetic principles Wordsworth outlined in the *Lyrical Ballads*. But Manning's account of the public house amid the lime quarries of south Wales speaks to the same basic belief in an expanded moral horizon that valued the humble ways, labours, and concerns of people obscure to the eye of history. These could be represented in poetry; but they could be recorded in other ways, too.

Arriving in France, 1802

In January 1802, Manning travelled to Paris, one of the droves of Britons who took advantage of the Peace of Amiens. He described his night-time arrival at Boulogne in a vivid letter to Charles Lamb, which the latter praised as being “exactly in that minute style which strong impressions *inspire*”.⁴²⁹ Reginald Watters observes that Manning's rich description reads “as vividly as better-known pieces of Romantic letter-writing”,⁴³⁰ and having a correspondent with Lamb's literary taste helped elicit the best from Manning's pen. His “minute style” was a richer variety of that employed in his letters the previous Spring, detailing his tour across south England and Wales. But now, despite the confidence and bold imagery of his letters, Manning's status as an English traveller abroad made him self-conscious and sometimes diffident.

His boat landed in Boulogne in chaotic fashion:

[A] strange landing it seemed to me. The boat rowed towards the nearest shore till it ran aground, which happened in the midst of the breakers – in an instant the boat's head was surrounded by a throng of Women up to their middles & over, who were there to carry us on shore.⁴³¹

⁴²⁸ Anderson, *Letters*, 52-55.

⁴²⁹ Fitzgerald, *Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb*, II, 214.

⁴³⁰ Watters, “Thomas Manning”, 11.

⁴³¹ Anderson, *Letters*, 60.

Manning's first experience of France was of physically confident and strong working women, recalling those he encountered in Swansea arguing in Welsh; or the tireless mother and daughter who looked after the lime traders in their remote public house. Manning and the other passengers were expected to throw themselves overboard into the embrace of these "sea-nymphs". For his part, Manning "very quickly understood the clamour of the mer-maids" and, diving among them, was carried safely to dry land, while another fellow was dropped into the sea.⁴³² Even allowing the possibility that Manning exaggerated the oddness of the circumstances, the alacrity with which he claims to have participated in this curious process speaks to an uninhibitedness which would serve him well during his travels.

After his cold, wet disembarkation, the traveller was understandably pleased to arrive at a warm and cosy hotel: "Oh the delights of a blazing woodfire! A hot supper & generous Burgundy, after the chilling blasts of a winter sea!" It was not only the physical comfort, but the setting's familiarity that appealed: "Oh the exquisite delight of the inside of an Inn, where every object, every utensil recalls to your mind the picture of former times!"⁴³³ Manning's thoughts roved naturally from nearby objects to ideas of family, friends, and home; the sight of "a Dresser on which fish flesh bread & vegetables are spread in careless abundance" evoked ideas of security and satiety.⁴³⁴ Meanwhile, Manning basked in the "undulating blaze of a fire that laughs at Count Rumfort & his God-damned Economy!"⁴³⁵ This denunciation of the utilitarian innovations in fireplace design of Sir Benjamin Thompson (1753-1814) was guaranteed to receive Lamb's approval. But Manning keenly felt the absence of anyone with whom to share the scene, and it thus retained an incomplete quality. Lamb, for instance,

⁴³² Anderson, *Letters*, 60-61.

⁴³³ Anderson, *Letters*, 61.

⁴³⁴ Anderson, *Letters*, 61.

⁴³⁵ Anderson, *Letters*, 61-62.

“would have enjoyed the domestic scenery I was witness to & partaker in more than any man I know”.⁴³⁶

English forces had occupied Boulogne several times between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, and for Manning, it felt close to home, the inn’s comfortable domesticity offering reassurance. But as he moved further into the French interior, agreeable visions faded, abating totally when he reached Paris: “But adieu to these scenes when I arrived at Paris [...] Paris to a stranger is a desert full of knaves & whores – like London”.⁴³⁷ If Boulogne elicited positive feelings of rural domesticity, reminiscent of the English countryside, then Paris reminded Manning of England’s capital. There, one could be surrounded by people; but absent ties of family and friendship, it seemed devoid of warmth or kindness. On the contrary, predators, offering counterfeit friendship and love, could exploit desire for the communion of human contact. In this hostile environment, Manning found himself “out of spirits”⁴³⁸ and was slow to make his first forays into Parisian society, lamenting that his poor command of French meant he was “desirous of standing aloof for a short time.”⁴³⁹ Lamb was indignant: suffering from a lifelong stutter, he was unsympathetic to Manning’s trepidation, complaining, “your damn’d philosophical indolence or indifference stung me. You cannot stir from your rooms till you know the language! What the devil! – are men nothing but word-trumpets? Are men all tongue and ear?”⁴⁴⁰

Manning’s time in Paris was significant for the development of his friendship with Lamb. Besides his father, Lamb emerges as Manning’s chief interlocutor and correspondent. Manning asked Lamb to keep his letters so he could use them to recall some ideas when he returned to England.⁴⁴¹ He sought news about literary goings-on,

⁴³⁶ Anderson, *Letters*, 62.

⁴³⁷ Anderson, *Letters*, 62.

⁴³⁸ Anderson, *Letters*, 59.

⁴³⁹ Anderson, *Letters*, 62.

⁴⁴⁰ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 234.

⁴⁴¹ Anderson, *Letters*, 59.

and was particularly curious about the critical response to Lamb's tragedy, *John Woodvil*. He had been provoked by some of Coleridge's observations on that subject,⁴⁴² and strove to exert himself on its behalf, showing it to Thomas Holcroft, "who had taste enough to discover that tis full of poetry, but the plot he condemns *in toto*".⁴⁴³ It was perhaps with one eye on Lamb's literary career that Manning sought to study the Parisian stage, informing him that "I will give you some account of the French theatres & other interesting matters", a taste being his remark that the French comic actors were superior to the English.⁴⁴⁴ Manning also told his father that a comparison of the French theatre with the English was one of his objects in Paris.⁴⁴⁵ In addition to Lamb's play, Manning might have hoped to impress William Wilkins and his daughters, with their family connection to the theatre business. Manning's theatrical studies seem to have been quickly overtaken by other interests, but he continued to offer Lamb his services as a literary critic. Anticipating Lamb's later fame as an essayist under the "Elia" persona, Manning commented favourably on his *Morning Post* epistle from "A Londoner", part of Lamb's response to Wordsworth's attack on urban life in the *Lyrical Ballads*.⁴⁴⁶ "[I]f you would write a volume of Essays in the same stile you might be sure of its succeeding".⁴⁴⁷

Tour of the Rhine and Swiss Alps, 1802

Manning's initial sojourn in Paris ended in July 1802. He left Paris on Bastille Day, observing how people remarked on the oddness of his leaving at a time when so many came expressly to see the festivities. His departure occasioned emotional conflict: "I am always entangling my affections in such a manner as to make it painful to me to

⁴⁴² Anderson, *Letters*, 46-47.

⁴⁴³ Anderson, *Letters*, 63.

⁴⁴⁴ Anderson, *Letters*, 74

⁴⁴⁵ RAS TM 1/1/12.

⁴⁴⁶ Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature*, 143.

⁴⁴⁷ Anderson, *Letters*, 74.

quit a place.”⁴⁴⁸ He informed Lamb that his plan was to leave for China “next Spring”, but he would first embark on a trip to the Alps and southern France before returning to England. Manning’s projected European itinerary was a sort of truncated, low-budget interpretation of the Grand Tour, during which he planned to visit some of the most important sights on what was a common tourist route for British travelers, including places that would inspire Lord Byron (1788-1824), August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845), and the young Turner (1775-1851). Indeed, Turner, fresh from his election to the Royal Academy, left Paris less than a fortnight after Manning and followed a similar route, completing a series of drawings of the Rhine and Swiss Alps along the way.⁴⁴⁹

Manning’s French period suggests the youthful influence of Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). This influence may not have been direct: Manning and Lamb scarcely mentioned Rousseau. But Dart observes that Rousseau retained “a subterranean presence in [Lamb’s] work”, characteristic of the way Rousseau’s “literary influence is at once everywhere and nowhere, pervasive and yet difficult to pinpoint, a parasite in the blood”.⁴⁵⁰ Manning later came to understand political liberty in terms taken unequivocally from the English tradition, but this was the product of long reflection after disillusionment with France and the course of the Napoleonic Wars. In the 1790s and early 1800s, on the other hand, Manning’s idealist sensibility betrays Rousseau’s parallel influence. Manning’s early enthusiasm for observing ways of life in obscure rural locales betrays a certain Rousseauvian primitivism, which ironically complements his later Burkean trajectory. Indeed, noting this very analogy between Rousseau and Burke, Dart observes that Rousseau’s “intellectual legacy to the French Revolution was thus profoundly at odds with that supplied by the central philosophical tradition of the French Enlightenment, which was

⁴⁴⁸ RAS TM 1/1/16.

⁴⁴⁹ Shanes, *Young Mr Turner*, 228.

⁴⁵⁰ Dart, “Rousseau and the Romantic Essayists”, 211.

far more enthusiastically ‘modern’ in nature”.⁴⁵¹ Meanwhile, Manning’s approach to mountain walking also points to Rousseau’s seminal role in re-shaping that genre, so that “to climb a mountain in the Romantic period no longer involved the risk of encountering a dragon [...] Rather, it involved a confrontation with ideas about politics, religion, selfhood and nation”.⁴⁵²

The Grand Tour conventionally included Italy, but Manning returned to France after a short detour to Milan. Having been advised to do so by Helen Maria Williams (1759-1827), Manning made a special trip to see the Fall of the Rhine at Schaffhausen. He was underwhelmed: “I have been disappointed, utterly”.⁴⁵³ This set the tone for his trip where, time and again, Manning was overtaken with the feeling that the Alps were inferior to the Lake District. In Basel, Manning saw “what they call Holbeins Dance of Death,” apparently sceptical about the (now rejected) attribution of the since-destroyed fresco. From Basel, he set off on foot along the Rhine:

I was agreeably disappointed in finding the road very beautiful & picturesque [...] the view is bounded on each side by hills which assume various forms as you proceed along, cloaked to the top & richly wooded, & the whole vally is smilingly interspersed with cornfields, vinyards, pasturage, houses & villages. Now & then you have a rocky eminence, and the ruins of an ancient castle – but my paper will never hold me out if I describe to you all the beauties of the road.⁴⁵⁴

Manning’s descriptive powers had improved since his time in the Lakes. Now it was the physical limitations of his writing material which forced him to check his effusions about the landscape. Though he could not help making unfavourable comparisons with England, Manning was susceptible to the charms of the Rhine, taking umbrage when he heard it disparaged by another English traveller: this “was an unpardonable affront

⁴⁵¹ Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre, and English Romanticism*, 4.

⁴⁵² Bainbridge, “‘The Columbus of the Alps’”, 53.

⁴⁵³ RAS TM 1/1/17.

⁴⁵⁴ RAS TM 1/1/17.

to the glorious majesty of the Rhine, embellished as it then was by the evening sun, & presenting a picture which I was well aware no future scenes could ever render uninteresting.”⁴⁵⁵ He soon made acquaintances which were more to his liking, befriending a Swiss noblewoman, accompanied by her brother and sister, who he accompanied to Constantz and later visited at their chateau.⁴⁵⁶ From here, Manning travelled to the Lake of Lucerne, and the St Gotthard Pass, which he did “alone without a guide, spite of the frightful stories some of the innkeepers told me of deserters & thieves, & the poor woman found with her throat cut & the pedlar murdered.” As with the “peculiar appearance of the trees” in Dorset,⁴⁵⁷ there are hints of the Gothic and macabre at the margins of Manning’s account; but these are made as if for the pleasure of furnishing a rational rebuttal.

Mount St Gotthard is nothing [...] I would engage to pass it safely in the darkest night – Devil’s bridge,⁴⁵⁸ of which I have heard so much said, is on a very curious spot & highly romantic, but as for the wonderfulness of its construction – I would engage to rebuild it myself (with the help of an undermason) any day.⁴⁵⁹

His scepticism and mathematical training help Manning divest the scenery of its mystique and the “Devil’s bridge” of any supernatural connotations. Indeed, this vision of the Alps “no longer involved the risk of encountering a dragon”.⁴⁶⁰ Yet Manning remained sensitive to the location’s attractions – even if, in the end, “The views in Switzerland are far inferior, I think, to those in the North of England”.⁴⁶¹ Charles and Mary Lamb had just visited Coleridge in the Lake District, and this news elicited from Manning a direct comparison:

⁴⁵⁵ RAS TM 1/1/17.

⁴⁵⁶ See chapter one.

⁴⁵⁷ RAS TM 1/1/8.

⁴⁵⁸ The Teufelsbrücke, providing access to the St Gotthard Pass across Schöllenen Gorge. As with many ancient European bridges, a legend emerged that it owed its origins to the Devil.

⁴⁵⁹ RAS TM 1/1/18.

⁴⁶⁰ Bainbridge, ““The Columbus of the Alps””, 53.

⁴⁶¹ Anderson, *Letters*, 80.

So you have really visited the Lakes! Your Eye has reposed on the silent forms of the Mountains & on the limpid bosom of Derwentwater. You have done well – you have seen the choicest spot in Europe, compared with which the scenery in Switzerland is clumsy & graceless.⁴⁶²

Manning suggests you must go out of your way to see the best Switzerland has to offer, unlike the Lakes. This may have been consistent with the fashionable idea that “Walking provided access to picturesque vistas otherwise inaccessible;”⁴⁶³ but for Manning, it was simply inconvenient. He described how, in the “wildest” parts of Switzerland, “you have precipices & rocks in your path, a deep deep hollow beneath you, along which a torrent falls with ungovernable fury, dashing from rock to rock with the wildest uproar”. Meanwhile, “looking up among the Clouds, & above them, your eye is struck with the cold dazzling of the never-melting snows”. Such views are not found in the Lakes, and even in Switzerland they are only available to the intrepid adventurer. But on the whole, “the north of E[ngland] is far more interesting”.⁴⁶⁴ The Alpine scenery was dramatic, but relatively crude, lacking the serenity and harmony discovered in the Lake District.

Social Observation

Manning’s decision to complete his journey independently, for much of the time on foot, set him at some remove from conventions of elite travel. He informed Lamb:

I have been all over Switzerland, & down to Milan, & thro Savoy, & by Valence thro Avignon to Marseilles, where I am at present. I have met abundance of adventures [...] I have been a great deal on foot among the mountains – I have been lost & benighted – I have slept in outhouses & stables & beds of straw.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶² Anderson, *Letters*, 84.

⁴⁶³ Sisman, *The Friendship*, 5.

⁴⁶⁴ Anderson, *Letters*, 84.

⁴⁶⁵ Anderson, *Letters*, 79

Clearly, this was not a tour in high style. On the contrary, Manning was keen to see at first-hand how the rural poor lived in those parts of the country he traversed. He told his father that “I have travelled very quick, yet with great anxiety to make every possible observation on the manners of the country.”⁴⁶⁶ This was the same as when he and Tuthill explored south Wales and arrived at the remote public house run by Mrs Jenkins and her daughter. In his relaxed way, Manning was getting a sense of how ordinary people lived in this part of the world, and these experiences of observing peasant life are important background for Manning’s desire to explore China. It seems likely that he envisaged – somewhat naively – repeating this kind of innocent ranging about amid ordinary people once he entered the Qing Empire. In a letter to his father sent just a few months earlier, Manning had described “Chinese manners” as “a subject that much interests me”.⁴⁶⁷ In later years he summarized the purpose of his Chinese studies as to provide “a moral view of China; its manners; the actual degree of happiness the people enjoy; their sentiments and opinions [...]”⁴⁶⁸ Manning included the literature and history of China in his ambitious survey, but he prioritized the manners, happiness, and sentiments and opinions of “the people”. He had condemned the *Lyrical Ballads*’ second volume for comprising “uninteresting accounts of uninteresting things”,⁴⁶⁹ but Manning shared a similar conviction that the ways of the masses were worth investigating and documenting. Indeed, Manning’s “Grand Tour” invites comparison with Wordsworth’s own European journey in 1790, which Adam Sisman describes as “a poor man’s Grand Tour, directed towards natural rather than cultural wonders”.⁴⁷⁰ Certain shared Rousseauvian assumptions might underlie the discernible affinity between Manning’s social observation project and Wordsworth’s poetic vision, considering that Manning, who loathed the poems, is unlikely to have been inspired by

⁴⁶⁶ RAS TM 1/1/19.

⁴⁶⁷ RAS TM 1/1/13.

⁴⁶⁸ Manning, “Journey”, 280

⁴⁶⁹ Anderson, *Letters*, 52.

⁴⁷⁰ Sisman, *The Friendship*, 5.

the works themselves.⁴⁷¹ Regardless, his desire to experience at first-hand the famous natural beauties of the Rhine and the Alps, his comparison of the new sights with those in the Lake District, and his prevailing interest in rural walking and country life, all help us situate his journey in the genre of Romantic travel. They also point to Rousseau's overarching influence in re-casting the experience of mountain walking in terms of modern sensibility, with broadened aesthetic and cultural horizons.

Considering his interest in manners and customs, it is no surprise that Manning was curious to observe the religious rites of French peasants. A few months earlier, his friend William Taylor (1765-1836), another astute observer, had recorded that both Protestantism and Catholicism were on the rise in France, and "Popery is returning with all its trumpery".⁴⁷² Though more sympathetically inclined to the rights of Catholics than many of his countrymen, Manning still shared the conventional Whig suspicion of the Roman Church. Napoleon's Concordat with the Vatican had recently passed, prompting from Manning an indignant response: "My God, what a farce! In these times after the complete exposure that priestcraft has had – & in this country!"⁴⁷³

While staying in Languedoc, near Toulouse, Manning witnessed the observance of Catholic funeral rites, "where the superstitious peasants sung forth Latin in most doleful discordancy."⁴⁷⁴ Manning had an Anglican background, but his youthful ideas about religion had a decidedly rationalist bent and, friendly with Quakers and other nonconformists, he was personally inclined towards atheism and Deism.⁴⁷⁵ As such, he had a strong prejudice against forms of rural Catholic devotion that would have appeared highly irrational and unrefined next to an English Protestantism relatively denuded of religious mystery:

⁴⁷¹ For Wordsworth and Rousseau, see Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre, and English Romanticism*, 165.

⁴⁷² Robberds, *Memoir*, I, 420.

⁴⁷³ Anderson, *Letters*, 73-74.

⁴⁷⁴ Anderson, *Letters*, 89.

⁴⁷⁵ RAS TM 1/1/52.

But the number of mummerys during this service, the crossings, the genuflexions, the lighting of candles & distributing them to the spectators, the putting out the candles, the kissing the cross, the ringing of a little handbell, &c, was beyond anything I had an idea of.⁴⁷⁶

This description of unfamiliar forms of Christian devotion should be borne in mind when considering Manning's reaction to other alien spectacles in China, Tibet, or India. Surprise, confusion, or distaste might be understood not as the result of participation in an "Orientalist" discourse, but of simple cultural difference.

Accustomed since childhood to the rhythms of country life, Manning was well placed to debunk pastoral idealizations of the life of the rural poor. His description of the Languedoc countryside has a georgic quality: the peasants have a life of *labor*, with relatively little time for *otium*.

We talk much in England, you know, of the dances among the peasantry here – but to tell you the truth, that's all a hum. Tis among the gentry you must look for mirth & ease. Tis the gentry that have got all the good wine (for the vin du pays that the poor people drink, is detestable) – tis they that have got all the choice fruit – tis they that have meat in abundance & everything good to eat – tis they alone that can find a room to dance in or music to dance to.

Just as their quality of food and drink would differ, so does it make intuitive sense that the labouring poor would have less time for "mirth & ease". Despite the trauma and upheaval that wracked France after the Revolution, Manning's observations suggest that, with the prevalence of Catholicism, and enduring inequality, the "natural order" still prevailed. The life of the peasantry was far from idyllic:

Where do you think the peasants dance? On the greens? There are very few greens or meadows in Languedoc, & what there are, they carefully preserve for the cattle. No, they dance on the naked brown soil. And at what time of day do you think? In the evening? Oh no, they are much too tired with their day's work [...] Tis in the middle

⁴⁷⁶ Anderson, *Letters*, 89.

of the day, in the burning sunshine, but they very seldom dance at all (& never in winter) except on the day of their village feasts.⁴⁷⁷

The Revolution had not relieved the poor of their ancient burdens, toil and poor food. What's more, Manning suspects that under the new regime, "mirth is on the decline", while "Industry, damned industry, is promoted more than formerly".⁴⁷⁸ Further north, the French peasantry seemed relatively well-off and, indeed, "better fed in that part of France than in England – meat every day, & no meal upon bread alone."⁴⁷⁹ Yet even there, "I found the people little disposed to own that they had gained anything by the Revolution". This, Manning suggests, resulted from unrealistic expectations.

At the commencement of the Revolution, every tax & every imposition was taken off, & the peasantry took their diversion in shooting & chateau-burning without paying anything. At present these frolics are over, & they are obliged to pay somewhat towards the support of church & state; & tho tis considerably less than formerly, they are disappointed in having to pay anything at all.⁴⁸⁰

Manning's impressions of daily life bear comparison to those of other British observers, including William Taylor, whose letters contain finer detail about wages and other socioeconomic matters.⁴⁸¹ Manning implies that he had investigated these subjects, but was reluctant to discuss them more fully, as if that would be impolite. Describing to Lamb the process of wine-making and "all the 25 *per cent* part of the business", he abruptly breaks off from the utilitarian discourse ("I am growing querulous – let us change the subject").⁴⁸² Manning perhaps preferred to avoid such matters with Lamb, aware his friend's days were occupied with "all the 25 *per cent* part of the business" amid the ledgers of East India House. Instead, Manning described being feasted and treated at the nearby chateau, which had been stripped "unfortunately like the rest of

⁴⁷⁷ Anderson, *Letters*, 87.

⁴⁷⁸ Anderson, *Letters*, 87.

⁴⁷⁹ RAS TM 1/1/17.

⁴⁸⁰ RAS TM 1/1/17.

⁴⁸¹ See Taylor's letters to Southey and Thomas Dyson: Robberds, *Memoir*, I, 408, 413-415.

⁴⁸² Anderson, *Letters*, 88.

the chateaus in France [...] even the Weathercock pulled down; for a weathercock was a mark of the Seignury”.⁴⁸³ The image of a harmless weathercock being pulled down as a symbol of privilege might help to explain why mirth was “on the decline”. But it was also well calculated to appeal to Lamb, whose affinity for the vestiges of former times was captured by William Hazlitt:

He evades the present; he mocks the future. His affections revert to, and settle on the past; but then even this must have something personal and local in it to interest him deeply and thoroughly.⁴⁸⁴

Two Romantic Views of China

When he finally returned to Paris in late 1802, Manning became engrossed in Chinese studies. Perhaps his recent travels stimulated mental energies that now craved creative application. For over three months during Winter 1802-3, he sent just one letter back to England, later explaining to his father that his long silence was due to “a peculiar state of mind, & the circumstance that I have been so much at home engaged in reading.”⁴⁸⁵ This must have been a productive period in intellectual terms: if not in practical progress with Chinese writing, at least in the formation of general ideas and plans. Indeed, Manning explained to Lamb that “I have been so occupied & am still with plans of facilitating my entrance into China, that my ideas refuse any other channel [...] I am actually thinking of Independent Tartary as I write this.”⁴⁸⁶ Manning’s obsession made it impossible to think about anything else. A subliminal impulse kept returning him to the subject of China: “the moment I set myself down quietly to anything, in comes Independent Tartary. For example, I attend Chiminal lectures, but every drug that Mr

⁴⁸³ Anderson, *Letters*, 88.

⁴⁸⁴ Hazlitt, *Spirit of the Age*, 288.

⁴⁸⁵ RAS TM 1/1/23.

⁴⁸⁶ Anderson, *Letters*, 90.

Vauquelin presents to me tastes of Cream of Tartar – in short I am become good for nothing for a time [...]"⁴⁸⁷

The literary style of Manning's correspondence with Lamb makes it inherently readable. But it has also been fruitfully examined with regard to ideas about "Romantic Englishness", and the contrasting efforts of the two men to integrate (or not) the idea of China into English identity.⁴⁸⁸ Their letters reveal competing modes of Romantic Englishness, reacting to the idea of China in different ways. While Manning sought a more sophisticated appreciation of Chinese civilization which might enhance British culture, Lamb's self-satirizing parochialism reveals "a wilful – if obviously affected – lack of awareness of or of interest in the world outside of Europe".⁴⁸⁹ Yet Lamb's affectation could encompass not only China, but also France. When Manning arrived in France, Lamb wanted to know "have you seen a man guillotined yet? Is it as good as a hanging? Are the women *all* painted, and the men *all* monkeys?"⁴⁹⁰ When Manning asked for distraction from incessant thoughts about China and "Independent Tartary", Lamb's tone was similar: "The Tatars, really, are a cold, insipid, smouchey set. You'll be sadly moped (if you are not eaten) among them."⁴⁹¹

Lamb tried to put off Manning's Chinese obsession by using fanciful humour. Felicity James observes how Lamb's comedy "undercuts Manning's Oriental explorations",⁴⁹² and the seemingly light-hearted remarks in Lamb's 1803 correspondence contain a more serious subtext – that Manning would do better to relinquish thoughts of China and Inner Asia for once and all. This persisted until Manning's eventual return from the Far East. Yun-fang Dai notes that "Lamb's sarcasm actually indicates his intensified anxiety towards Manning's preoccupation with

⁴⁸⁷ Anderson, *Letters*, 91.

⁴⁸⁸ See Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 146-56; James, "Thomas Manning"; Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 169-78; Watt, "Mediating China".

⁴⁸⁹ Watt, *British Orientalisms*, 214.

⁴⁹⁰ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 234.

⁴⁹¹ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 259.

⁴⁹² James, "Thomas Manning", 31.

Chinese culture, so much so that he has to constantly remind him to look back to Europe.”⁴⁹³

Lamb’s anxiety helps explain the curious mixture noted by Peter Kitson, whereby “Lamb’s register and tone remain at the level of gossip, whimsy, and often melancholy”.⁴⁹⁴ Clearly, the thought of Manning’s leaving for China caused Lamb real pain, and from 1803 onwards, Lamb’s letters gradually assume a tragi-comic character, lurching between moods even within the same paragraph. Meanwhile, Lamb’s whimsical passages, although self-aware, are pervaded with the “intense localism” observed by David Higgins, with the “obsessively localised self that is uneasy to the point of morbidity in its apprehension of the exotic”.⁴⁹⁵

Lamb wrote to Manning in February 1803: “For God’s sake don’t think any more of ‘Independent Tartary’. What have you to do among such Ethiopians? Is there no *lineal descendant* of Prester John?”⁴⁹⁶ The conflation of “Independent Tartary” with “Ethiopians” was probably a deliberate send-up of Lamb’s purported ignorance. Years later, writing as Elia, Lamb claimed not to know where “Ethiopia” was: “I know less geography than a school-boy of six week’s standing [...] I do not know whereabouts Africa merges into Asia; whether Ethiopia lie in one or other of those great divisions”.⁴⁹⁷ But Lamb was familiar with travel writing about Abyssinia, having been fond of James Bruce’s accounts of the region since childhood.⁴⁹⁸ He may also have had in mind the ancient Greek usage of *Aethiopia*, which referred generally to the dark-skinned peoples of north Africa; or even Coleridge’s famous poem “Kubla Khan” which, though not published until 1816, was composed in 1797. The Greek novel *Aethiopica*, by Heliodorus, has been suggested as one source for Coleridge’s poem,⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹³ Dai, “I Should Like to Have My Name Talked of in China”, 88.

⁴⁹⁴ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 173.

⁴⁹⁵ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 130.

⁴⁹⁶ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 258.

⁴⁹⁷ Lamb, *Essays of Elia*, 30.

⁴⁹⁸ James, “Thomas Manning”, 31.

⁴⁹⁹ Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, 237.

whose main figures are the eponymous “Tatar” ruler – the Mongol founder of the Chinese Yuan dynasty – and a mysterious “Abyssinian maid”. “Kubla Khan” therefore commits its own strange amalgamation of “Ethiopia” (or Abyssinia) with China and Chinese Inner Asia (“Independent Tartary”). Years later, Lamb would again refer to Ethiopia (as Abyssinia) in relation to China, in his famous essay on the origins of roast pig, suggesting that contemporary Ethiopians devoured meat clumsily, as did the Chinese in days of yore,⁵⁰⁰ thereby preserving a specimen of manners that had become extinct in China.

Abyssinia figured prominently in the speculative “historical” works that remained popular in Enlightenment Europe, and which often invoked the legendary figure of Prester John. Some wondered whether the “elusive troglodytes of Abyssinia might be guardians of traditions which were otherwise lost”.⁵⁰¹ Lamb’s reference to Prester John’s “*lineal descendant*” self-deprecatingly implies his own credulity about such notions, but it also indicts Manning for appropriating to himself a task that properly belonged to another. Lamb expanded upon this image of Manning as an interloper invading a foreign cultural domain, this time deploying references from the English literary tradition, starting with Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: “Is the chair empty? Is the sword unswayed? — depend upon’t they’ll never make you their king, as long as any branch of that great stock is remaining.” The insincere suggestion that Manning aspired to reign over a foreign land perpetuates Lamb’s self-parodic posture of misunderstanding Manning’s motives. He claims to fear for his friend’s soul, his masculinity, and his physical safety: “I tremble for your Christianity. They’ll certainly circumcise you.”⁵⁰² Lamb would return to the first idea years later when, during Manning’s residence in China, he referred to a practice commonly used when forcing

⁵⁰⁰ James, “Thomas Manning”, 31.

⁵⁰¹ Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, 63.

⁵⁰² Lamb, *Works*, VI, 258.

Christian converts or missionaries to disavow their beliefs: “Have you trampled on the cross yet?”⁵⁰³

To recover, Lamb recommends that Manning should immerse himself in his own culture, either through literary engagement or a bodily return to his own country. “Read Sir John Maundevil’s travels to cure you, or come over to England.” This is another joke, as the fourteenth-century *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* blended topographical data, gleaned from secondary sources, with fantastical “information” about Tatars, cannibalistic “Anthropophagi”, and men whose heads grew beneath their shoulders.⁵⁰⁴ These last were favourite images of Lamb’s, to which he would return in 1806, after Manning had left for China. Such imagery certainly supports the idea that Lamb was refusing even “to pay lip service to Enlightenment cosmopolitanism”.⁵⁰⁵ But it also contains another allusion to Coleridge’s poem, as Mandeville’s travel writings were a chief source for Samuel Purchas (1577?-1626), whose account of Xanadu was claimed by Coleridge as the inspiration of “Kubla Khan”.⁵⁰⁶ Lamb directed Manning to visit the “Tatar-man now exhibiting at Exeter Exchange. Come and talk with him, and hear what he says first. Indeed, he is no very favourable specimen of his countrymen!”⁵⁰⁷ Of course, the sensational spectacle of ethnographic exhibition was far removed from the sort of sympathetic study Manning envisaged.

Lamb suggested another method of getting the idea of “Independent Tartary” out of Manning’s head: that his friend repeat those words to himself before going to bed, while associating them with the idea of “oblivion”.⁵⁰⁸ Lamb credits this “remedy” to the philosopher David Hartley (1705-1757), and it would of course do more harm than good. It lampoons the excessive, impractical abstractions of philosophers, perhaps

⁵⁰³ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 409.

⁵⁰⁴ See Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 50-53.

⁵⁰⁵ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 132.

⁵⁰⁶ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 62.

⁵⁰⁷ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 258.

⁵⁰⁸ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 258.

echoing Coleridge's old interests in Hartley's psychological "Associationism". Lamb then returns to his favourite theme: bodily dismemberment, and the cannibalistic habits of the Tatars.

My dear friend, think what a sad pity it would be to bury such parts in heathen countries, among nasty, unconvertible, horse-belching, Tartar people! Some say they are cannibals; and then conceive a Tatar-fellow eating my friend, and adding the cool malignity of mustard and vinegar!⁵⁰⁹

Lamb's imagery ("bury such parts") suggests both emasculation and sexual intercourse, while the violation of Manning's English body evokes the spectre of cultural contamination among uncivilised, "unconvertible" people. Felicity James has noted how Lamb anticipates the "cannibalistic undertones" of his later essay, "Dissertation on the Origins of Roast Pig", while his "interest in 'invention' and 'foolish stories' about the Orient" likewise reminds us of that essay, which is also "informed by the idea of travellers' tales and tall stories".⁵¹⁰ Meanwhile, the juxtaposition of cannibalism – the ultimate uncivilised horror – with staples of English cuisine, for all its absurdist comedy, also threatens to elide the difference between civilised and savage behaviour.⁵¹¹ Such passages get to the heart of what troubled Lamb. It was not only that his friend might depart for the other side of the world. It was also that, as David Higgins says, "Manning's liminality, his potential incorporation into Tartary or China, represents the collapse of boundaries".⁵¹² His friend's determination to cross cultural boundaries provoked Lamb to emphasise, through comedy, the potential dangers involved in such undertakings, including the potential assimilation if not physical obliteration of the cultural transgressor.

⁵⁰⁹ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 258.

⁵¹⁰ James, "Thomas Manning", 31.

⁵¹¹ James, "Thomas Manning", 32.

⁵¹² Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 156.

Many Europeans incorporated elements of sexual fantasy when writing about Asia, and this was a notable motif in “Orientalist” art. But this has also been alleged to be a general, if not universal, trope among nineteenth-century Europeans: “Every one of them kept intact the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, its backwardness, its silent indifference, its feminine penetrability, its supine malleability”.⁵¹³ Manning himself often described his intention to “penetrate into the interior of China”,⁵¹⁴ which can obviously be interpreted in sexual terms. But it was also convenient shorthand for his plan to cross a protected border and venture into an unknown land. Manning soon discovered that the Chinese authorities were anything but “indifferent” or “supine” when it came to foreigners entering their country; and China appeared to him as neither “eccentric” nor “backward”. Manning’s obsession with China in early 1803 was a psychological infatuation, and the kindred phenomenon of intense preoccupation will be familiar to poets, philosophers, artists, inventors, and anyone who has developed any passionate, consuming interest whatsoever. Elsewhere, Manning described the same sensation of complete absorption in connection with mathematical problems; now, it was the idea of Asia, or more specifically China and Tartary, that consumed him. Manning’s obsession was driving him inexorably towards first-hand experience of the object of his fascination, and Lamb invested this process with metaphorical life when imagining Manning being eaten by Tatars. “Have a care, my dear friend, of Anthropophagi! Their stomachs are always craving.”⁵¹⁵

Golovkin’s Embassy

Manning was prepared to try and explore China on his own if necessary. But he knew that his best chance was to enter the country in the train of an official Embassy, and to that end he lobbied for an Embassy from India in 1810, and in 1816 joined the Amherst

⁵¹³ Said, *Orientalism*, 206.

⁵¹⁴ RAS TM 1/1/16.

⁵¹⁵ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 259.

Embassy.⁵¹⁶ But in 1802-3, Manning also appears to have seriously entertained the idea of participating in the planned Russian Embassy to China which eventually took place in 1805 under Yuri Golovkin (1762-1846). Though the achievements of the Macartney Embassy were equivocal, its example still helped concentrate Russian thoughts towards sending an Embassy of their own; and Napoleon's control of Central Europe was further reason to look east in search of trading opportunities. The strategic expansion of Russian interests across Siberia also suggested the future importance of trading ties with China; while the gradual pacification of Central Asia's nomadic populations promised to make trade routes more secure.

It might seem strange for an English scholar, who specialized in mathematics and ancient Greek, to sign up with a Russian Embassy and cross Siberia and Tartary to get to China; but it was not entirely without precedent. Manning would have been following in the footsteps of John Bell (1691-1780), the Scottish physician who served on the Embassy sent by Peter the Great to the Kangxi Emperor between 1719 and 1722. Bell had published an account of his travels in 1763, and the second volume of his *Journey from St. Petersburg to Peking* addressed the Embassy's reception and return journey. Barrett suggests this work may have inspired Manning to undertake medical training before leaving for China.⁵¹⁷ That Manning would consider joining a foreign embassy shows he was prepared to propitiate, and co-operate with, foreign states in the pursuit of his goals, and this flexibility was also apparent in the petitions he sent to the French authorities when seeking permission to leave that country in 1803-4.

Manning would have learned of the Golovkin Embassy's preparations during his time in France. Writing to his father in April 1803, Manning conveyed his plan to engage a pupil and travel to St Petersburg "either next winter or very early next spring but the winter is best on every account".⁵¹⁸ Three years later, in early 1806, Manning

⁵¹⁶ Wong, "'We Are as Babies Under Nurses'", 101, 111.

⁵¹⁷ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 7.

⁵¹⁸ RAS TM 1/1/25.

wrote to Sir Joseph Banks that he had once thought to try and enter China from the north, via Russia, but gave up the idea because his command of the language was inadequate.⁵¹⁹ Around the same time, William Taylor suggested to Robert Southey that Manning ought to join the Russian Embassy “which is setting off over land for China, and which has been gutting the German universities of enterprising men of science”.⁵²⁰ Southey, however, had seen Manning several times in the preceding months, and reported Manning’s opinion that “to have joined the Russian embassy till he had acquired the [Chinese] language he thought of little use”.⁵²¹ Indeed, what contribution Manning could have made to the Embassy must be uncertain. At that time, Southey himself was one of the best-read Englishmen on the subject of China, familiar not only with Thomas Percy’s translation of the *Hau Kiou Chooan, or, The Pleasing History* (1761) but also with the seven-volume English translation of Jean Frederic Bernard’s *Cérémonies et Coûtumes Religieuses*, which contained copious information on the religions of China.⁵²² Southey quizzed Manning about his own reading, lamenting to Taylor that he had failed to acquaint himself “with all that has been written about China, as he ought to have done”. Southey still tried to secure, from his uncle, introductions for Manning to Portuguese in Canton, and Catholic missionaries in Peking.⁵²³

If Manning’s unfamiliarity with certain texts was unfortunate, Golovkin’s strategic ignorance about China was downright negligent:

Having deliberately kept himself in the dark about China in order to experience the country free of any preconceptions, he promptly fell into a series of traps regarding questions of protocol from which even his learned advisers were powerless to extricate him. Golovkin’s

⁵¹⁹ RAS TM 4/5.

⁵²⁰ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 128.

⁵²¹ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 132. This must mean Chinese – there are no references to Manning learning Russian.

⁵²² Kitson, “Robert Southey and the Romantic Failure of China”, 77.

⁵²³ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 132.

wilful refusal to do his homework was one of the main reasons why his diplomatic mission ended in failure.⁵²⁴

Manning could speak French, so probably met the minimum qualification for joining the Russian Embassy. But if we consider his inability to speak either Chinese or Russian; his general ignorance about China; his lack of any official or scholarly rank; and his status as a foreigner; it seems unlikely that he could have contributed much to the Embassy. While the Embassy's failure to enter China or secure trading terms might suggest Manning missed out on little, he would surely have found the route through Siberia and Central Asia to have been interesting, particularly those parts comprising "Independent Tartary". He would also have made the acquaintance of other men of letters, including the young German linguist Julius Klaproth (1783-1835).

Prisonnier de Guerre, 1803-1804

In Spring 1803, Manning's plans, vague as they were, were upset by renewed hostilities between Britain and France. This meant that he was detained in France as a "prisonnier de guerre" through to the end of 1804. Manning was in Serrant when war broke out and interned in the nearby town of Angers. From there, he was allowed to visit his friends at their chateau in the Loire valley:

I was just about to leave Serrant when the order for detention arrived. I am fortunate in not having set off a few days sooner, for in that case I should have been detained prisoner at Paris, & I had much rather be here. – I am not at all pleased for I have other things to do.⁵²⁵

Manning tried to use his time productively. Though he was grateful for the "asylum" presented to him at the Chateau Serrant, he sought to study in Paris when possible. He was in Paris during the late Summer of 1803, then spent two months at Serrant before receiving permission to return to Paris to study at the Bibliothèque nationale. He

⁵²⁴ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 180.

⁵²⁵ RAS TM 1/1/26.

remained there at least until April, and perhaps throughout the Summer too, sending his father a letter addressed from Paris in September 1804.⁵²⁶ That Manning endeavoured to study Chinese during this time is evidenced by a letter from the Minister of the Interior, dated 1 February 1804, concerning a request to stay in Paris to study “La Grammaire Chinoise”.⁵²⁷ Another internee, the Sanskritist Alexander Hamilton (1762-1824), was allowed similar permission to continue his research, thanks to the intervention of the influential Orientalist, Volney (1757-1820). Manning probably knew Alexander Hamilton, judging by his request, in 1806, that Sir Joseph Banks intervene to procure the release of “Hamilton, the Oriental scholar”.⁵²⁸ But whatever opportunities there were for studying Chinese in Paris remained slim, and it is clear from his letters that Manning found his detention extremely frustrating. As such, he petitioned the authorities for permission to return to England and prepare his voyage to China. But rather than merely throwing himself upon the mercy of the French government, he sought to recruit them as supporters, appealing to their self-interest by motivating the possible benefits that would redound from his journey.

In a petition from December 1803, Manning explained that he came to France to study, part of his goal of adding to the sum of scientific knowledge. Now, having formed a plan to explore the interior of China, he trusted to the wisdom and enlightenment of the French authorities to support a scheme which he had not divulged even to his own government.⁵²⁹ He therefore sought permission to leave France so he could arrange his affairs in England before setting off for China, and that “et de me toujours considerer (si votre excellence le juge convenable) comme prisonnier de

⁵²⁶ RAS TM 1/1/28-33.

⁵²⁷ RAS TM 3/1/9.

⁵²⁸ Dawson, *Banks Letters*, 516. The reference gives “[William Richard] Hamilton”, but William Richard Hamilton (1777-1859) was then living safely in England. Manning must have been referring to Alexander Hamilton.

⁵²⁹ RAS TM 3/1/10.

guerre.”⁵³⁰ He also complimented the collection of Chinese manuscripts at the Bibliothèque nationale, referring the authorities to Joseph Hager for evidence of his diligence in consulting these materials.⁵³¹

After a year of such petitions, Manning began to feel hopeful about his prospects. He thus wrote cheerfully to his father in September 1804:

Hitherto my residence here has repaid me very well – not in money, but in what we ragged philosophers vaunt to be richer than gold – “For when your money’s gone & spent” – what then? Why “Then learning is most excellent”. – And I have learned a great many things during this last year – not out of books – but out of crawling things called men. – When I have seen the interior of China, I shall be a consummate politician [...]⁵³²

That Manning saw himself as a sort of “philosopher” is no surprise; but it is curious that seeing “the interior of China” should make him “a consummate politician”. This, perhaps, is a clue regarding the object he outlined in 1810, whereby the study of the Chinese “mode of life” was intended to “elicit moral truths”, thus furnishing material for “The example of a reform on the conduct of life”.⁵³³ Manning does not seem to have gone into detail about any of this with the French authorities, but some figures in the French administration were clearly sympathetic enough that he was issued a passport in time to leave France at the beginning of 1805.⁵³⁴

This was exceptionally favourable treatment. Manning later claimed to Sir Joseph Banks that the passport was awarded due to “the notoriety of my pursuits as a man who had destined himself to voyages of discovery”.⁵³⁵ The passport did not in fact allow Manning to return to England, suggesting instead he was somehow supposed to

⁵³⁰ RAS TM 3/1/14. Roughly, “and always consider me (if your excellency thinks fit) as a prisoner of war.”

⁵³¹ RAS TM 3/1/10.

⁵³² RAS TM 1/1/33.

⁵³³ RAS TM 1/1/52.

⁵³⁴ RAS TM 3/1/16.

⁵³⁵ RAS TM 4/5.

leave Europe for China via Berlin. According to one obituary, Manning intended to quibble about this, but was dissuaded from doing so by Talleyrand (1754-1838). Worried that Napoleon, rather than amend the passport, would irascibly withdraw it altogether, Talleyrand “represented the ill grace with which even the obnoxious document had just been signed”, persuading Manning to leave France forthwith.⁵³⁶ Manning later asked Banks to solicit written permission from the French authorities that he would be released were his ship intercepted by a French vessel; but Banks reassured him this would not be necessary, as “the Conduct of the Emperor himself in ordering your Liberation from among the detain’d English, solely on account of the interest taken by himself & the Learned men of France in your hazardous & most Laudable Enterprise, holds out an Example [...]”⁵³⁷ But it seems more likely to have been the patronage of Talleyrand, and perhaps Lazare Carnot (1753-1823), rather than the personal interest of Napoleon, that facilitated Manning’s escape from France. This is also supported by a Manning “family tradition”, reported by John Goldworth Alger in 1904, according to which Manning owed his release to the influence of Talleyrand and Carnot.⁵³⁸

Securing Patronage, 1805-1806

Manning returned to England in January 1805, after an absence of three years, and spent the next fifteen months preparing for his trip to China. He understood that to live in that country without any official patronage or protection would involve great difficulties, and he therefore approached Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society, widely known for his patronage of travellers and explorers. Manning wrote to Banks on at least six occasions in March and April 1806,⁵³⁹ sending him an outline of the “motives and

⁵³⁶ Dunkin, “Thomas Manning, Esq.”, 98.

⁵³⁷ Chambers, *Letters of Joseph Banks*, 274.

⁵³⁸ Alger, *Napoleon’s British Visitors*, 230.

⁵³⁹ Dawson, *Banks Letters*, 575-576.

nature” of his projected journey.⁵⁴⁰ In this significant document Manning explained, in terms he thought would appeal to Banks, the reasons for his proposed trip, its background and his preparations, and the advantages that might accrue as a result. He explained:

Having long, both from books & conversations, been struck with the want of conformity in the opinions of men (even the best informed) relative to the ancient history, manners, & language of China, arising partly from the meagreness of information, & partly from want of confidence in the relations of missionaries & others, I did many years ago form the design of attempting to explore the country myself, & by my own observations & researches on these & other curious objects, to dissipate some of the obscurity & doubt which hangs over its moral & civil history.⁵⁴¹

With the important exception of Du Halde, Manning rarely confessed what exactly he had read about China, so it is hard to know for sure what he is referring to. But he likely had in mind the several works published in the aftermath of the Macartney Embassy, notable among which were Sir George Leonard Staunton’s *An Authentic Account of the Earl of Macartney’s Embassy* (1797) and Sir John Barrow’s *Travels in China* (1804). Manning referred to Barrow’s *Voyage to Cochinchina* (1806) in a notebook entry the following year.⁵⁴² Manning also made notes on *Mémoires Concernant les Chinois*, by the French Jesuit missionary Jean Joseph Marie Amiot (1718-1793), indicating particular interest in literary works, manners and customs, and religious matters: “To a reflecting mind the Mem. Chin. are highly highly highly important.”⁵⁴³ Manning appears to have read part of this work as early as 1807 – perhaps on the way to China – prompting the following reflection:

Is the true art of living discovered? If so, where? The inconstancy &c of the Eur[opea]ns their curious researches &c may not be so great a

⁵⁴⁰ RAS TM 4/5.

⁵⁴¹ RAS TM 4/5.

⁵⁴² RAS TM 9/1/39.

⁵⁴³ RAS TM 9/1/38.

folly as the Mem. Chin. pretend. But Mem. Chin. is right, if the best state is already known & understood.⁵⁴⁴

There was certainly a “want of conformity” in opinions about Chinese culture in late eighteenth-century Europe. Accurate information about China was scarce, and the reliability of available sources could be uncertain, as they were generally contained in religious or political polemics. This helps explain the “want of confidence in the relations of missionaries & others”. Manning would have encountered occasional opinions about China’s laws and government in the works of Enlightenment *philosophes*; but the references to China in the work of authors like Montesquieu or Voltaire were not neutral, either. Voltaire, for example, was himself complicit in cynically editing texts for anti-clerical purposes.⁵⁴⁵ Amidst this disorderly field, Manning presented himself as a scholarly ombudsman whose disinterest might help “dissipate some of the obscurity & doubt which hangs over its moral & civil history”.⁵⁴⁶

Manning’s reference to “the ancient history, manners, & language of China”, meanwhile, invoked three subjects of special interest in late-eighteenth century England. The classical world was understood to have made a fundamental contribution to European art and science; and, at a time when Deists and Enlightenment philosophers were open to discussing sources of morality from outside the Christian tradition, ancient wisdom had a special appeal. Thanks to the work of Jesuit missionaries, the reputed antiquity and cultural authority of Confucius and other Chinese sages was now familiar, but the nature of the ideas attributed to them, not to mention their actual historicity, still demanded attention. Furthermore, the theme of “manners”, which recurred across Manning’s writings on China, reflected a prevalent motif in English literary culture. In the second half of the eighteenth century, British historians influenced by Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment placed a new emphasis on social intercourse and forms

⁵⁴⁴ RAS TM 9/1/39.

⁵⁴⁵ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 61.

⁵⁴⁶ RAS TM 4/5.

of social organization, an approach encapsulated in Edward Gibbon's seminal *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1789). In accordance with the new mode of writing history, the study of manners could help unlock the secrets of Chinese social life. As for the Chinese language, the Macartney Embassy revealed its potential significance for the future of trade and diplomacy. But the early history and subsequent development of that language had been a subject of controversy in Europe since the Renaissance, generally bound up with sectarian religious disputes. The founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 ushered in new hopes for the potential of "secular" philological studies;⁵⁴⁷ and in that context, the implications of an "objective" analysis of the Chinese language for European philosophy were great indeed.

To demonstrate his suitability for this daunting task, Manning informed Banks about his Chinese studies in France, noting that during his three years' residence he "devoted a considerable portion of my time to the attainment of an elementary knowledge of the Chinese language".⁵⁴⁸ For his wider intellectual attainments, he referred to his mathematical achievements, while also claiming to have been "long conversant with the theory of medicine". This was a stretch, but Manning could at least declare, "for the last six months [I] have been attending to its practise both in the Westminster hospital & otherwise".⁵⁴⁹ For a character reference, Manning referred to Martin Davy, "the present learned & worthy master of Caius College, Cambridge". As final proof of his seriousness, he alluded to the obsolete plan of entering China via Russia, abandoned for purely practical reasons. Perhaps wanting to avoid sounding unpatriotic, he did not mention Golovkin's Embassy.

Manning informed Banks that he had been "persuaded" – whether by his own counsel, or another, is unclear – to give up the idea of an independent journey in China without improving his language ability. To do otherwise would render him a "fugitive".

⁵⁴⁷ App, "William Jones's Ancient Theology", 77.

⁵⁴⁸ RAS TM 4/5.

⁵⁴⁹ RAS TM 4/5.

He confessed that, when he left France, his Chinese language skills were still rudimentary: and after returning to England he did not find “any of the opportunities I had expected of improving myself in the Chinese language”. This implies Manning believed there were now better opportunities for studying Chinese in England than in 1801. It is unclear what he had in mind, but Peter Kitson suggests Yong Sam-Tak, a Chinese youth who taught Robert Morrison in London, probably tutored Manning during this period.⁵⁵⁰ Regardless, Manning’s central objective was to press upon Banks that he was “anxiously desirous of first residing such time at Canton, under the protection of the Company as may be necessary for acquiring the requisite information”.⁵⁵¹ Manning hoped Banks would intercede on his behalf with the Directors of the East India Company; he was probably correct to think that a direct approach would have come to nought. Manning explained that in Canton he hoped to improve his acquaintance with “the language & customs of China” and would look for an opportunity to explore the country. But “in case no opportunity should offer during my stay at Canton, for my obtaining permission to enter the country from thence, I propose upon leaving Canton to proceed to such part of the Chinese frontier as I shall then judge most eligible for my purpose.”⁵⁵² To allay concerns that his actions might cause problems with the Chinese authorities, Manning promised not to attempt to enter China “clandestinely”, and that he would only attempt to enter from Canton, Macao, or anywhere else, with the “express permission” of the Company’s local agents.⁵⁵³

Banks was sympathetic, describing Manning’s plan as “in itself so very worthy of protection, & so extremely interesting to the inhabitants of all Civilisid nations”.⁵⁵⁴ On 31 March 1806, he wrote to the Chairman of the Court of Directors to explain Manning’s mission and the importance of residing in Canton to learn the manners,

⁵⁵⁰ Kitson, ““The Kindness of My Friends in England””, 64-65.

⁵⁵¹ RAS TM 4/5.

⁵⁵² RAS TM 4/5.

⁵⁵³ NHM BC, 87.

⁵⁵⁴ Chambers, *Letters of Joseph Banks*, 274.

dress, language, and pronunciation of the Chinese.⁵⁵⁵ These, we should infer, were understood to be essential if Manning were to explore the interior of China. Banks noted, “I take a deep interest in the fate of this very amiable young man, both on account of his mild character and the energies of his mind”.⁵⁵⁶ Banks’s intervention was decisive in securing the Company’s support, and Auber reports they went so far as to pay his passage to China, in addition to allowing him to reside in their Factory in Canton.⁵⁵⁷ Banks entrusted Manning with looking after some plants which were to be transported to Canton for the horticulturalist William Kerr (?-1814).⁵⁵⁸ True to his word, he maintained an interest in Manning’s project for several years.⁵⁵⁹

Leaving England

In 1805, John Wordsworth – brother of William and Christopher – was made captain of the East Indiaman *Earl of Abergavenny*, destined for China via India. He had secured a lucrative passage: his ship was scheduled to call at Bengal, where he would collect a private cargo of opium, before moving on to Canton. East India Company captains were allowed to transport their own goods, and Wordsworth stood to make a fortune by selling the opium once he arrived in China.⁵⁶⁰ Due to their protracted and dangerous nature, such voyages were best suited to young men with relatively few responsibilities. Born in December 1772, John Wordsworth was the same age as Manning, but most of his crew were young men in their early 20s, and there was a solitary officer of the older generation, aged 54.⁵⁶¹ The peril such journeys involved was brought into stark relief by the fate of the *Earl of Abergavenny* itself, which was wrecked while still in British

⁵⁵⁵ Markham, “Introduction”, clvi.

⁵⁵⁶ Markham, “Introduction”, clvii.

⁵⁵⁷ Auber, *China*, 220-221.

⁵⁵⁸ Smith, *Life of Sir Joseph Banks*, 269.

⁵⁵⁹ Dawson, *Banks Letters*, 576-577.

⁵⁶⁰ Hayter, *Wreck of the Abergavenny*, 35.

⁵⁶¹ Hayter, *Wreck of the Abergavenny*, 44.

waters: two thirds of the 400 people on board lost their lives, including John Wordsworth.

Manning set sail for China just over a year after this disaster, and his correspondence reveals it was a gut-wrenching time for him, just as it was for family and friends. He wrote to his father on board the *Thames* on 29 May 1806, just after leaving England:

It seems that I “like the base Indian throw my pearls away &c”⁵⁶² – If I was 5 years younger, I should not have one serious regret – I should feel confident of coming home to England a young man. I mean young in constitution & health. I do hope I shall, as it is – I mean to be very careful in my diet, & way of living; & to study to shorten my absense as much as possible consistent with my plans.⁵⁶³

Citing Othello’s cruel treatment of Desdemona, Manning shows his full cognizance of the friendly attachments he left behind. There may even be an echo of his affection for “Miss Wilkins”, with whom he appears to have remained in contact.⁵⁶⁴ Considering the distances and travails that lay in store, there is a pathetic air to Manning’s vague hope of shortening his absence “as much as possible”. What that absence meant to Manning’s friends in England was well captured by Charles Lamb, who later remembered saying goodbye:

I didn’t know what your going was till I shook a last fist with you, and then ’twas just like having shaken hands with a wretch on the fatal scaffold, and when you are down the ladder, you can never stretch out to him again. Mary says you are dead, and there’s nothing to do but to leave it to time to do for us in the end what it always does for those who mourn for people in such a case. But she’ll see by your letter you are not quite dead. A little kicking and agony, and then ---
.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶² Othello “like the base Indian threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe.” *Othello*, Act V Scene II, lines 363-4.

⁵⁶³ RAS TM 1/1/37.

⁵⁶⁴ Three daughters of William Wilkins wrote to Manning in Canton: RAS TM 5/9.

⁵⁶⁵ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 348.

Watt suggests Manning's reply, which compared China with Yorkshire, shows him "gently challenging his friend's hyperbolic sense of the distance and strangeness of China".⁵⁶⁶ But Manning had his own psychological reasons for downplaying the enormous times and distances his trip involved. Considering John Wordsworth's recent fate, and the high mortality of European travellers in Asia generally, Lamb's fears were not unfounded. He knew that even in the best-case scenario, it would be years before he might see Manning again; while the distance meant there was no chance of maintaining even the most rudimentary correspondence.

Trying to lighten the mood, Lamb revisits the theme explored with such gusto in his 1803 letters. Having expressed his concern about Manning's likely capture and imprisonment by the "Kalmuks",⁵⁶⁷ Lamb mentions that he and Mary had been engaged by William Godwin to fashion Shakespeare's plays into children's stories. This became their famous *Tales from Shakespeare*, which Yun-fang Dai points out would eventually play an important role in the Bard's reception in China.⁵⁶⁸

These are the humble amusements we propose, while you are gone to plant the cross of Christ among barbarous Pagan anthropophagi! Quam homo homini praestat! But then, perhaps, you'll get murder'd, and we shall die in our beds with a fair literary reputation. Be sure, if you see any of those people whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders, that you make a draught of them. It will be very curious.⁵⁶⁹

Lamb knew, of course, that Manning was not aiming to "plant the cross of Christ"; and he also knew that he was not going to live among "barbarous Pagan anthropophagi". But it was comforting to return to these fabulous medieval imaginings of remotest Inner Asia, which distracted Lamb from real mental anguish. Whenever the mask of comedy slipped, Lamb's letter lurched once again into utmost despondency:

⁵⁶⁶ Watt, "Mediating China", 8.

⁵⁶⁷ The Kalmyks, a Mongol people living in the North Caucasus.

⁵⁶⁸ Dai, "I Should Like to Have My Name Talked of in China". It is a stretch, however, to imagine Manning hoped to translate parts of the *Tales* into Chinese (Dai, 92).

⁵⁶⁹ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 348-349.

O Manning, I am serious to sinking almost, when I think that all those evenings, which you have made so pleasant, are gone perhaps forever [...] indeed we die many deaths before we die, and I am almost sick when I think that such a hold as I had of you is gone. I have friends, but some of 'em are changed. Marriage, or some circumstance, rises up to make them not the same. But I felt sure of you.⁵⁷⁰

Coleridge, Lamb's best friend, had famously undergone tragic changes in the last decade. Though yet to return from the Mediterranean a full-fledged opium addict, even before leaving he was sadly depleted by health issues, marital and romantic difficulties, and his falling-out with Wordsworth. Earlier, Lamb had fallen out with Godwin ("the Professor") after his re-marriage, complaining to Manning:

The Professor's Rib has come out to be a damn'd disagreeable woman, so much as to drive me & some more old Cronies from his House. If a man will keep Snakes in his House, he must not wonder if People are shy of coming to see him because of the Snakes.⁵⁷¹

Serious changes in the health, social situation, or geographic location of our friends profoundly effects close relationships, and Lamb's insight that "we die many deaths before we die" aptly summarizes the emotional or psychological loss this can involve. Lamb was confident he could rely on Manning's steady friendship, in contrast to Godwin and Coleridge, making his departure for China all the more traumatizing. This, indeed, was one of Manning's qualities which Lamb most cherished: "I will nurse the remembrance of your steadiness and quiet, which used to infuse something like itself into our nervous minds. Mary called you our ventilator."⁵⁷² Lamb's gaiety and good humour compensated for melancholy and depressive tendencies, while his close and loving relationship with his sister Mary was complicated by her own mental illness and tragic killing of their mother in 1796. When Manning left, Charles and Mary not only lost the pleasure of his company: they lost an important source of psychological relief.

⁵⁷⁰ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 349.

⁵⁷¹ Marrs, *Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, II, 55.

⁵⁷² Lamb, *Works*, VI, 349.

Summary and Implications

Manning's experiences between 1799 and 1805 were vital preparation for his travels and researches in China. When Manning arrived in Canton in January 1807, he was not a "blank slate", and his personality, values, education, and prior experiences primed him to perceive and respond to his new environment in particular ways. The trips Manning conducted between 1799 and 1802, to the Lake District, southern England and Wales, and France and Switzerland, speak to his growing self-awareness as a Romantic traveler, and the consciousness of his physical and emotional response that infused his later accounts of travel in China and Tibet. Moreover, his aesthetic experience of the Lakes and Alps helps explain his reaction while trekking through the Himalayas.

Manning's activities in the years before his journey to China speak to his lack of national chauvinism and his pluralist outlook. When he visited south Wales in 1801, he enjoyed hearing the Welsh language spoken and was impressed and intrigued by the humble dignity of rural life. He arrived in France in 1802 as a confirmed Francophile, and an admirer of Napoleon; he sympathized with the lot of the ordinary people, especially the rural poor, but was not yet willing to relinquish his faith in the merits of the Revolution. He considered enlisting in a Russian Embassy to China; while his correspondence with Lamb reveals the contrast between his own conceptions of that country and the gothic mock-medievalism affected by his friend. All this background helps explain Manning's activities and changing ideas during the ensuing decade, spent in various parts of Asia.

The letters Manning sent while ranging about south Wales and the south of France speak to his sensitivity to the social life and customs of the rural poor. It seems likely that he hoped to undertake the same kind of activity in the interior of China. His plans to learn the Chinese language and familiarize himself with Chinese dress and manners were thus, in part, intended as preparation for these explorations. Although he never sketched it in detail, the plan to study Chinese "manners" through observing the life of ordinary Chinese could therefore have been a primitive sociological or anthropological survey: and its potential significance is discussed in chapter four.

Manning's interest in social reform pre-dated his introduction to the Coleridge Circle; indeed, he claimed to have been concerned with this question since the age of eighteen.⁵⁷³ But, under the influence of Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb, he engaged in a close reading of Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1800 and 1801, especially the *Lyrical Ballads*. Notwithstanding his criticisms of the new poetic vision, this reading may have embellished his existing curiosity about the ways of ordinary people, especially in rural locales, providing new impetus to the democratic instincts which Manning derived from both French and English sources. Manning dismissed Wordsworth's poetry, but he undoubtedly shared his underlying faith in spiritual and moral equality.

Manning's project to study China was deeply personal and idiosyncratic, but the wider environment was receptive to ideas about political, religious, and social reform. Throughout the 1790s, Manning was steeped in academic circles sympathetic to the founding principles of the American and French Revolutions and which overlapped with literary radicalism. Manning associated with English radicals in France during the Peace of Amiens, and it was one of these radicals, William Taylor of Norwich, who introduced him to Joseph Hager at the Bibliothèque nationale. Manning arrived in Paris with a basket of personal and cultural objectives, and his "intellectual" plans – to begin the study of Chinese, and get advice about his mathematical research – were complemented by a vague wish to study the theatre and a celebrity-spotting enthusiasm for seeing Napoleon. His mathematical projects fared little better than his theatrical pursuits, but Manning did at least succeed in making a first acquaintance with the Chinese language.

The Chinese studies Manning conducted with Joseph Hager must have been introductory and superficial. Yet it would be a mistake to assess his time in France strictly on the grounds of individually delineated intellectual gambits. Manning was

⁵⁷³ RAS TM 1/1/52.

participating in a wider movement that was committed to invigorating European cultures by exploring new ideas. The shape of the future – including the future relationship between European and Asiatic empires – was still uncertain. To furnish his countrymen with a reliable and impartial study of Chinese civilization, benefiting from the historiographical innovations of late-eighteenth century Britain, was a credible objective, which caught the imagination of Sir Joseph Banks in London and may have done the same for Talleyrand and Carnot in Paris. Meanwhile, Manning's interest in observing peasant life may have been unsophisticated: but it spoke to the same concerns motivating more famous contemporaries like Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were trying to develop a more democratic and inclusive conception of culture. Manning was engaged in a project of cultural reform, which needs to be understood holistically.

To understand Manning's frame of mind when he arrived in China, it is also important to consider the family and friends he left behind in England: and his own letters and those of Charles Lamb demonstrate the strength of those attachments. This emotional sacrifice was compounded by the fact that Manning was relinquishing whatever chance remained for youthful romance. The psychological need to accomplish his purposes in China received extra force from the obligation to make discoveries commensurate with the value of what he had cast aside. Wasted time in Asia was doubly painful: days, weeks, or months spent idle was time stolen from loved ones back home. It is important to remember this human dimension of Manning's long stay in Asia, when the vagaries of international mail meant there were long silences in family communication. Moreover, although he rarely if ever recalled the experience, Manning's long detention in France – which lasted for just over eighteen months – is also important context for his years in China. When Manning left Europe, he already felt behind schedule, and feared he would not return to England a young man. He was poorly disposed towards further delays once he arrived in China. Unfortunately for him, the muse of history was indifferent to such human concerns.

Chapter 3

Asiatic Travels and Exploration, 1806-1817

Introduction

Exploring Thomas Manning's experiences of travel before he arrived in Asia, chapter two revealed how his identity as a Romantic traveller emerged between his Lake District trip of 1799 and his journeys in the south of France and the Swiss Alps in late 1802. It also explored Manning's interest in observing social life, which informed his decision to attempt a survey of Chinese manners and customs. We might therefore expect Manning's responses to China to show the influence of Romantic sensibility and Enlightenment philosophy. But chapter two concluded by considering two other factors that contributed in important ways to shaping his conduct in Canton. The first was Manning's approach to Sir Joseph Banks in early 1806, and the ensuing agreement with the East India Company, which set the public terms for his project and established a benchmark against which its success or failure might be measured. Manning remained a private individual, rather than a Company employee, but his project was now a matter of public record. Secondly, the emotional cost of Manning's departure for China, memorably captured in the correspondence of Charles Lamb (1775-1834), establishes the psychological context for his arrival in Canton, and indeed his entire sojourn in Asia. When he left England, with the realization of his plans a distinct possibility, Manning had reasons for excitement and anticipation. But those feelings were complicated by remorse at relinquished attachments to friends, and guilt at abandoned duties to family. This helps explain the frustration, irascibility, despondency, and hyperactivity sometimes evident in Manning's actions and pronouncements during his years abroad.

To better understand how Manning pursued his aims and objectives in China, this chapter engages closely with those letters and accounts discussing the strange, confusing, and sometimes comical episodes that comprise his efforts to enter the country's interior. Starting with official requests to serve the Emperor as a physician in Peking, these efforts became increasingly clandestine, culminating with Manning's

extraordinary *incognito* trek through Tibet in 1811-12; before coming full circle with his official participation in the Amherst Embassy in 1816. In addition to his letters and notebooks, Manning's account of his journey to Lhasa is a vital source and peculiar blend of Enlightenment travel writing, Romantic sensibility, and dry English humour. Perhaps the most substantial text Manning ever produced, this narrative occupies an important place in Manning's intellectual biography and is accordingly examined in some detail. Manning's involvement in the Amherst Embassy, meanwhile, receives only brief consideration, due to the dearth of sources documenting Manning's thoughts or actions. Manning's role in this otherwise important episode has been addressed by Lawrence Wong,⁵⁷⁴ and this chapter is likewise indebted to the same author for Manning's efforts to study Chinese in Canton.⁵⁷⁵ The present discussion is less concerned with Manning's practical work or involvement in Anglo-Chinese diplomacy, however, than how his language studies pertained to his wider scholarly project and underlying intellectual objectives. This, in turn, helps prepare the discussion in chapter four.

Manning never imagined that he could conduct his survey of Chinese culture within the borders of Europe, using second-hand sources alone; and this very fact reveals the abiding influence of the Enlightenment travelogue. He took it for granted that accurate information about a foreign culture necessitated direct observation. Furthermore, Manning's determination, not only to study Chinese texts in Canton, but to explore the interior of the country and observe its people, spoke to a quasi-anthropological goal. It promised to revolutionize the understanding of China in 1800s Britain, when the learned community otherwise relied almost completely on a few key works by participants in the Macartney Embassy, or the writings of Jesuit missionaries.

⁵⁷⁴ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 111-115.

⁵⁷⁵ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 98-102.

Thomas Manning and “Orientalism”

The enduring influence of arguments advanced in Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) means that work remains an important part of the thematic context for anyone seeking to explain how, or why, a European might study Asian histories or cultures in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. It also has implications for how we understand the consequences of those studies. Said’s several definitions of “Orientalism” included “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident’”, which he described as a schema which “can accommodate Aeschylus, say, and Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx.”⁵⁷⁶ Said also argued that from the late eighteenth century onwards, “Orientalism” became “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”:

Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism.⁵⁷⁷

Said’s most expansive definitions of his theory thus incorporated every European thought or utterance about Asia, and Robert Irwin argues that Said’s text “has been surprisingly effective in discrediting and demoralizing an entire tradition of scholarship.”⁵⁷⁸ Both *Orientalism* and Said’s later *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) remain highly influential in postcolonial studies despite repeated suggestions that Said’s “account of Orientalist scholarship is shallow and one-sided and his literary acumen at times succumbs to his polemical purpose.”⁵⁷⁹ Even among academics who largely accept Said’s analysis of nineteenth-century Orientalism, some question

⁵⁷⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 2-3.

⁵⁷⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁵⁷⁸ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 276.

⁵⁷⁹ Varisco, *Reading Orientalism*, xvii-xviii.

whether the model is helpful for understanding the work of “Orientalists” in the eighteenth century. For example, Saree Makdisi argues against charting Orientalist discourse back through the Romantic period, seeing this as a “transitional moment” before the arrival of “modern” Orientalism from the 1820s and 1830s.⁵⁸⁰ Meanwhile, Srinivas Aravamudan argued that “a transcultural, cosmopolitan, and Enlightenment-inflected Orientalism existed at least as an alternative strain before ‘Saidian’ Orientalism came about”.⁵⁸¹ There is also a broad consensus that European interactions with China and East Asia are more poorly-adapted to the “Orientalist” model than those with India and the Middle East. Thus Peter Kitson argues not only for pushing the date of Britain’s “Saidian” encounter with China from the eighteenth later into the nineteenth century, but that the genre of “Romantic Sinology” itself displayed elements of Aravamudan’s “Enlightenment Orientalism”, “and represents as much a continuum with it as a clear fracture”.⁵⁸² In *Forging Romantic China*, Kitson therefore sought 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”.⁵⁸³

The case of Thomas Manning is an important study which helps shed light on the “complexities” of exchange at the turn of the nineteenth century. Until that time, China was acknowledged by Europeans as the most populous and prosperous empire in the world, distinguished by its extraordinary political, religious, and cultural unity. In the 1700s, the standard of living and life expectancy in China’s major cities was comparable to that in Europe.⁵⁸⁴ Europeans had a ravenous appetite for the productions of China – chiefly tea, silk, and ceramics – and a vast and mutually beneficial trade was conducted between European traders and the Qing Empire. Meanwhile, Enlightenment

⁵⁸⁰ Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism*, 116.

⁵⁸¹ Aravamudan, *Enlightenment Orientalism*, 3.

⁵⁸² Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 17.

⁵⁸³ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 16.

⁵⁸⁴ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 10.

philosophers like Voltaire and Leibniz wrote glowingly about China and its system of government. In the early 1800s, China thus remained for Europeans, generally speaking, an object of respect and admiration. Relations between China and Britain were not perfect, and asymmetric priorities, expectations and values ensured that foreign traders and Chinese authorities frequently irritated and disappointed one another. In retrospect, the seeds of future conflict between the two empires could be discerned: the experience of the Macartney Embassy of 1792-3 led some British observers to cast doubt on the stability and future prospects of the Qing Empire; while the rogue trade in opium, although still relatively small-scale in 1800, was a presage of future disasters. But it is anachronistic to read backwards from the future course of Sino-British relations into the minds and motivations of people who lived when circumstances differed significantly.

Manning's activities in Asia between 1807 and 1817 have attracted the attention of scholars seeking to document and explain his curious place in the history of Anglo-Chinese exchange. Accordingly, this period of his career is somewhat better-known than the years before his arrival in China – which also reflects the fact that official records furnish extra sources for his deeds and whereabouts. The recent rediscovery of new archival material means there are now several new documents providing fresh insight into his life in China, and some of these have been examined by Lawrence Wong in order to provide a comprehensive new overview of Manning's Chinese studies and other activities in Canton, in particular.⁵⁸⁵ Meanwhile, Manning's narrative of his journey in Tibet has also received serious attention. In 1876, it was published by Sir Clements Markham as one of the main sources of information about Tibet then available to a British audience. This text has latterly proved of interest as a Romantic

⁵⁸⁵ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 93-102. Also Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, passim. Manning's years in Canton are covered in Stifler, “Language Students”, 56, 65.

response to the Himalayas,⁵⁸⁶ and has also been considered in relation to ideas about “Orientalism” in the British attitude towards Tibet.⁵⁸⁷

The purpose of this chapter is not to recapitulate existing accounts of Manning’s time in Asia. Instead, it approaches this critical stage in the overall context of Manning’s intellectual biography, examining published sources and original archives to better understand how his activities pertained to his aims and objectives: both the public ones he explained to Sir Joseph Banks,⁵⁸⁸ and the private ones he tried to reveal to his father.⁵⁸⁹ This shows how Manning’s engagement with Asian environments arose from his values, aesthetic ideas, and intellectual priorities – thus countering assumptions that his thoughts and actions were determined merely by embroilment in an “Orientalist” discourse. The chapter also highlights where and how his thinking changed in consequence of his experiences in Asia. This helps prepare the discussion in the final chapter, which investigates the philosophical, religious, and moral underpinnings of Manning’s intellectual concerns, and the ultimate purpose of his project to study Chinese society.

China and “Independent Tartary”

Previous work on Manning has largely focussed on his journey in Tibet, labours in Canton, and studies of Chinese culture – that is to say, the culture of the Han Chinese. But between 1803 and 1806, Manning often spoke about “Tartary” on an equal footing with China. In Manning’s day, “Tartary” was a somewhat vague term which, depending on the context, might encompass Scythians, Huns, Turks, Mongols, and Manchus. Barrett points out the term “Independent Tartary” featured prominently in the maps

⁵⁸⁶ Watters, “Thomas Manning”, 13-16.

⁵⁸⁷ See contrasting interpretations in McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 56-67, and Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 177-181.

⁵⁸⁸ RAS TM 4/5.

⁵⁸⁹ RAS TM 1/1/52.

included with John Bell's *Journey from St. Petersburg to Peking* (1763).⁵⁹⁰ It commonly referred to the vast expanses of Central Asia populated by nomadic peoples, about whom little was known in Georgian England, and "the very indeterminacy of this space allowed exotic fantasy to take flight".⁵⁹¹ From the beginning of the eighteenth century, first-hand observation did much to "normalize" the image of the Tatars, but even so, "achieving greater ethnographic clarity was a slow process": and both Tibet and Manchu-ruled China might be included under the more expansive definitions of "Tartary".⁵⁹²

Since the dawn of recorded history, settled civilisations across the Eurasian land mass had been ravaged by periodic invasions from nomadic peoples originating in Central Asia. This meant that, until these vast territories were pacified by the Tsarist and Qing empires in the eighteenth century, "European dreams about Central Asia had taken the form of nightmares".⁵⁹³ As recently as 1670, the cartographer Richard Blome (1635-1705) wrote that the Tatars were "very rude, barbarous and revengeful, not sparing their enemies, who in revenge they eat, first letting out their Blood, which they keep, using it as Wine at their Feasts".⁵⁹⁴ In his letters to Manning, Charles Lamb drew upon this long European tradition concerning the fantastical nature of the denizens of the remote parts of the world, which dated back to the fourteenth-century writings of "Sir John Mandeville" and even earlier.⁵⁹⁵ But in Enlightenment Europe, some observers floated the idea that the barbarous tribes of Central Asia could "revitalize a civilization that had been debilitated by luxury and lethargy, infusing it with previously untapped primal energies". The German philosopher Georg Hegel (1770-1831), for

⁵⁹⁰ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 7.

⁵⁹¹ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 304.

⁵⁹² Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 305.

⁵⁹³ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 259.

⁵⁹⁴ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 305.

⁵⁹⁵ See the C11th-12th manuscript, *Computistical, Historical and Astronomical Miscellany*.

example, considered the nomadic hordes to be an “elemental-historical” force. Jürgen Osterhammel explains:

The barbarian was both the destroyer of refinement and the enemy of overrefinement. In the best case scenario, where the barbarian invaders proved willing and able to adapt to the vanquished culture, new syntheses could emerge. That explains the fascination with China, where it was precisely the ‘barbarian’ Manchus under the Kangxi emperor who ushered in a renaissance of Chinese civilization.⁵⁹⁶

Manning’s comparative lack of interest in Tibet in 1811-12 suggests that, at least by that time, his focus was on the culture of the Han Chinese, rather than the broader expanses of “Tartary” or Chinese Inner Asia. In 1810, Manning wrote to his father that China and Japan were the only countries “worth inquiring about” where the real state of society remained unknown.⁵⁹⁷ This schematization implied that China and Japan were advanced civilisations, their cultural sophistication rendering them suitable for serious study. “Tartary”, on the other hand, would appear relatively underdeveloped, as Tibet did to Manning. His early references to “Tatars” likely reflect awareness of the historical distinction between the ruling Manchu elite and the Han people; and, at various times, the idea of “Independent Tartary” fired Manning’s imagination, also serving a rhetorical purpose to goad, thrill, or captivate his friends. But so far as his practical project was concerned, “Tartary” in the end held little significance.

Voyage to China, 1806

Manning sailed for Canton on board the *Thames* in April 1806. His educational attainments worked in his favour: the ship’s owner, a Mr Chapman, was thrilled to learn he was “a scholar & a mathematician” and hoped to recruit him as an instructor to his young son, who was also on board. Manning was thus bribed with “a cabin, & servants,

⁵⁹⁶ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 289.

⁵⁹⁷ RAS TM 1/1/52.

& everything I want. Tis the luckiest thing for me in the world. For I was in great danger of having no berth but my length & brea[d]th.”⁵⁹⁸ There was a significant difference between the quality of accommodation and food available to wealthy passengers and those of more modest means. Nevertheless, Manning soon began to weary of his scholarly reputation, perhaps exposed to the raillery of crew members as well as other passengers who had paid handsomely for privileges he received on his reputation alone. In a letter to Banks posted from Cape Town in August 1806, Manning noted:

I am exceedingly comfortably situated, and treated with great respect and even distinction. My greatest want is good society. I am among a set of grossly ignorant people. The rogues soon found out my superiority of acquirements, and they now will give me credit for knowing what I am really ignorant of.⁵⁹⁹

At sea for months on end, such voyages inevitably had their share of discomforts. Passengers contended with noisy seamen and livestock, and the stench of animal and human waste, which would have projected out from the ship’s side into adjacent waters.⁶⁰⁰ In his letters, Manning recorded the hazards of the journey. These included a “terrible gale” encountered after leaving False Bay in South Africa, which ripped to pieces a new set of sails and kept the passengers up all night in a state of suspense: “the deck was thunder & howling bouncing pitching & rocking, & the sea showed walls of silver in every direction”: “none of the passengers could close their eyes”.⁶⁰¹ Besides vulgar inconveniences, bad weather, and the risk of shipwreck, there was the additional anxiety of interception by the French Navy. This last possibility felt quite real, and Manning described an episode where the fleet caught sight of what appeared to be French vessels:

⁵⁹⁸ RAS TM 1/1/36.

⁵⁹⁹ Smith, *Life of Sir Joseph Banks*, 269.

⁶⁰⁰ Hayter, *Wreck of the Abergavenny*, 50.

⁶⁰¹ RAS TM 1/1/38.

All bustle. Long faces. [...] Spite of French colors, &c &c, they turn out English. We are all glad I believe. I am very very glad. [...] Muskets, ammunition &c putting up again. Cabins rebuilding. For the gundeck was cleared, & all its cabins knocked down. In short we had the signal for forming in order of battle, & were persuaded it was [...] Bonaparte's squadron.⁶⁰²

One of Manning's consolations on the journey was his project to grow a beard. This became a staple feature of his appearance in coming years. "I have begun to let my beard grow, & am a perfect fright." Two months later it was "of a respectable length & is said to become me".⁶⁰³ This was not done on a whim: Manning seems to have believed that a long beard, allied to appropriate dress, would help him blend in with the locals once he arrived in China. But he was fond and even vain of his beard. After arriving in Canton, he wrote to Banks that "I had rather go & live in the Bonze house over the water, & see no Europeans at all, than part with my dear beard."⁶⁰⁴

The ship reached Île Saint-Paul in the Indian Ocean on 11 September, stopping in the British colony of Penang for a month between October and November 1806. Manning had evidently been looking forward to this: "it will be Penang, pineapples, & how does your excellency do, Madame Dundas!"⁶⁰⁵ Manning was excited because he had a letter of introduction to Margaret Dundas, the fashionable wife of Philip Dundas (ca. 1763-1807), Governor of Penang, which he had received from Sydney Smith (1771-1845). To Manning's great chagrin, upon arrival he found that "unluckily she is gone to Bengal. This was a sad loss for me, I understand she is a charming woman."⁶⁰⁶ In fact, in an early warning of the fate awaiting many Europeans in Asia, Margaret Dundas died of a tropical illness around the time Manning arrived in Penang; she was followed by her husband Philip the next year. Manning was however received politely,

⁶⁰² RAS TM 1/1/37.

⁶⁰³ RAS TM 1/1/37.

⁶⁰⁴ NHM DTC 17, 43. "Bonze" refers to East Asian Buddhist monks

⁶⁰⁵ RAS TM 1/1/38.

⁶⁰⁶ RAS TM 1/1/38.

and received an introduction to the King of Kedah, which he did not use. In Penang, Manning stayed with a Chinese baker whose name he transliterated as “Low Ammees”, “a very excellent fellow, & from whom I have picked up some useful information”.⁶⁰⁷ This information might have pertained to the tonal nature of the Chinese language: later, when alluding to that subject, Manning observed that “all I yet know, I found out at Penang, & have but confirmed here the discoveries I suspected I had made there”.⁶⁰⁸ This man must have known English, for the following year he sent Manning a letter thanking him for some small favours, wishing “success in all your undertakings & shall conclude with my best wishes for your welfare & happiness”.⁶⁰⁹ Manning appears to have seen him again in Penang in 1813.⁶¹⁰

Penang was a remarkable sight for arriving passengers. A century later, Sir Frank Swettenham (1850-1946) described how its steep, luscious green hills came into view “with almost startling suddenness.”⁶¹¹ Manning was struck by the strange and exotic landscape:

This is the most enchanting island in views & scenery that the heart can conceive – luxuriance of vegetation – pineapples like cabbages [...] The first sight of the palm-trees & plantains & other monstrous leaved vegetables I found peculiarly striking, the effect still continues very strong.

But the most interesting phenomenon was the island’s people: “then the inhabitants! Tis most curious. This is an epitome of all India.” A maritime trading centre, Penang was a cosmopolitan port, and Manning described the segregated living areas. “One part of the town is inhabited by Malays – one by Bengalese, one by Malabors – here from the Coromandel coast – there from Siam & Pegu”. The prevailing presence, however, was that there were “everywhere throngs of Chinese”. Manning continued:

⁶⁰⁷ RAS TM 1/1/38.

⁶⁰⁸ NHM DTC 17, 92.

⁶⁰⁹ RAS TM 5/5.

⁶¹⁰ RAS TM 9/4.

⁶¹¹ Glendinning, *Raffles and the Golden Opportunity*, 30.

[A]ll these people living after the fashion of their country – roosting about like hens in their sheds, huts & wigwams – all colors, all degrees of nakedness. If the scene could be transplanted to London for one day; or to Frogmore fete!⁶¹²

Manning did not regard the denizens of Penang as an undifferentiated mass, but was alive to their diversity, which originated in their different national cultures (“the fashion of their country”). The scene’s exoticism evokes amazement, and Manning’s thoughts turn sympathetically to his countrymen who he imagines sharing that same emotion could they but witness the scene “transplanted” to England. Manning is not imagining the transportation of individuals or groups to be exhibited in the manner of a nineteenth-century ethnological “human zoo”, but the movement of an entire *scene*, with its attendant social dynamics. He also observed unfamiliar cultural practices:

I have seen the religious rites of ½ India. I have seen the frantic Siamese drag along the cumbrous gaudy car of their silver deity to the clanging of brazen instruments & rude notes [...] I have seen the Hindoo god or devil trumpeted & drummed & fluted & his temple hung-round with the various fruits & productions of this hothouse island [...]⁶¹³

Manning’s aesthetic sense is at odds with “the clanging of brazen instruments & rude notes”; while the sight of “the cumbrous gaudy car of their silver deity” was unlikely to impress one inclined towards religious rationalism. Indeed, the religious culture is so unfamiliar that Manning cannot even tell whether the Hindu entity so honoured was a “god or devil”. But he does not seem particularly unnerved by his lack of knowledge and remains content to observe the alien environment. His curiosity harks back to the observation of Catholic funeral rites in Languedoc, when he was amazed by “the number of mummerys [...] the crossings, the genuflexions, the lighting of candles &

⁶¹² RAS TM 1/1/38.

⁶¹³ RAS TM 1/1/38.

distributing them to the spectators, the putting out the candles, the kissing the cross, the ringing of a little handbell, &c”.⁶¹⁴

In Penang, his ignorance extends from cultural practices to the natural world, and he is unaware what to call the local fruits which “the earth pours forth in such monstrous abundance”. There is something lurid and unseemly about the “monstrous” vegetation, which the earth “pours forth” too freely. The northern European constitution was not built for such places, and the heat and humidity render Penang “not healthy”. A “strange place”, Manning is sceptical about its strategic value, and (alluding to the preponderance of Scottish men serving in the East India Company), observes, “I cannot find that this island is of any other use to the Company than that of providing for indigent Scotchmen”.⁶¹⁵

The most disagreeable thing about Penang was, in fact, an encounter with another British resident. Manning became embroiled in a minor confrontation with a man named Dickens, apparently in connection with his introduction to Dundas. Manning complained to Dundas that Dickens “treated me in the most haughty overbearing disrespectful contemptuous (& what I call insolent & brutal) manner possible”.⁶¹⁶ The man in question may have been John Dickens, a local magistrate who Olivia Mariamne Devenish (1771-1814), wife of Manning’s future friend Sir Stamford Raffles, separately excoriated as “the most impudent, ignorant, affected, envious ungrateful old Jay I ever heard of”. The magistrate left Penang in 1808 with a fortune of £40,000, most of it, according to Mrs Raffles, “torn from the poor Malays, Chinese &c.”⁶¹⁷ Dundas’s conciliatory reply referred to “the mistake of a servant”, perhaps suggesting a third party who inadvertently caused the row between Manning and Dickens.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁴ Anderson, *Letters*, 89.

⁶¹⁵ RAS TM 1/1/38.

⁶¹⁶ RAS TM 5/2.

⁶¹⁷ Bastin and Weizenegger, *The Family of Sir Stamford Raffles*, 84-85.

⁶¹⁸ RAS TM 5/1.

Arrival in Canton, 1807

Manning arrived in Canton in January 1807. His first task was to assist a Chinese servant who hurt his arm after falling from a horse, but this sanguinary scene was soon forgotten once Manning enjoyed his first meal at the Company's Factory: "a splendid table in a splendid room – excellent roast beef – the 1st mouthful of it operated like a charm, the potatoes & the gravy; it recalled the ideas of old England, & a thousand floating fancies".⁶¹⁹ England's national dish possessed a transcendent imaginative power, eliciting associations that transport Manning in mind and spirit to his home environment. Every traveller learns food is a key marker of cultural and geographic distance, something Manning clearly conveys in his next letter, where he tries and fails to describe a lavish dinner put on by the Chinese merchant, Puankhequa II. "I wish I could give you an account of the dinner, but 'tis beyond me. – I began upon a basin of birds nest soup – then shark's fins – then fishes row [...] – ah I am lost".⁶²⁰ The smorgasbord of strange new foods verbally disorients Manning: an example of the phenomenon David Higgins identifies elsewhere in the Lamb-Manning correspondence, where encounters with the exotic could affect the ability of a supposedly civilised and articulate English self to communicate.⁶²¹

What was it like for an Englishman to live in Canton in 1807? Foreigners were not allowed into the walled city itself, confined instead to the factory district at the edge of the Pearl River. Here a row of European-style buildings provided living quarters, storage areas, and workspaces for European traders. From a material point of view, life was comfortable, and the Europeans were looked after by Chinese servants. But the whole extent of the factory district was a few hundred yards long by two hundred yards wide, and the only opportunity to range further afield was the privilege every ten days

⁶¹⁹ RAS TM 1/1/39.

⁶²⁰ RAS TM 1/1/40.

⁶²¹ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 147.

for a small group to visit a nearby garden.⁶²² The comings and goings of Europeans like Manning were closely monitored, and any attempt to explore the city was liable to be discovered, and potentially punished; while Chinese people were prohibited from giving lessons in Chinese. Nevertheless, at first, Manning was sanguine about the prospects of making discoveries in the vicinity of the factory district:

A deal more may be learned at Canton than I was aware of. The Europeans here know nothing of what is every day before their eyes, for want of speaking the language, which is so difficult as to weary the patience of all those, who do not come here purposely to study it.⁶²³

Manning made serious efforts to keep in contact with his family, especially his father, and the letters he sent before his father's death in late 1810 document his activities and the development of his thinking during these first years in Asia. They also reveal the size of the "culture shock" Manning received after arriving in Canton. With a fiercely independent disposition, and nurturing the ambitious objective of exploring China, he expressed feelings of frustration and humiliation once the severity of the restrictions imposed on European residents came home to him. He was provoked by the fact that European residents "are in a very degraded & disgraceful situation here. All the merchants, that visit China are aware of it, & I never heard one but what allowed it – but you good people of England have no notion of the excess of our humiliation".⁶²⁴ Manning compared their status to that of a helpless and dependent child, lamenting that they must always put themselves and their affairs in "the hands of the Chinese." Such powerlessness was unfamiliar to Englishmen who took pride in their reputation for independence. "We are as babies under nurses, we can't stir a step without asking leave."⁶²⁵

⁶²² Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, xx-xxii.

⁶²³ RAS TM 1/1/40.

⁶²⁴ RAS TM 1/1/40.

⁶²⁵ RAS TM 1/1/40.

The situation in Canton was therefore an affront to English national pride. In emotional terms, Manning tells his father:

To be sure we have as great a contempt for the Chinese, as they have for us, we have our revenge there. But they are the masters, nobody can deny that. What is become of the pride & domineering spirit we show everywhere else? (except in Japan). These are not my observations alone, but those of every purser & officer in the fleet.⁶²⁶

Considering later British depredations, references to “contempt for the Chinese” and Britain’s “domineering spirit” make for uneasy reading. But in 1807, the Opium Wars, Unequal Treaties, and China’s “Century of Humiliation” were all a distant prospect. Devoid of context, Manning’s intemperate language could be construed as evidence of a desire for “dominating, restructuring, or having authority” over China.⁶²⁷ But his aspiration was, on the contrary, that the British be treated in Canton on the basis of equality, with a dignity commensurate with their cultural achievements and international standing. Manning’s irritation and displeasure are best explained, not as a yearning for conquest – which is attested nowhere else in his archive – but from the tension between the prideful self-image of the English and the Qing government’s determination to tightly control potential contacts between Westerners and Chinese subjects.⁶²⁸ Furthermore, the two-way nature of the “contempt”, and the undeniable “mastery” of the Chinese, argue against a straightforward “Orientalist” reading.

Manning’s private notes from 1807 reveal the complexity of his self-positioning. He reflected: “That the European residents of Canton should universally dislike & consider all their manners & customs as absurd or at least much inferior to the corresponding European ones, proves nothing at all! Nothing!”⁶²⁹ Manning suggested that people of all nations find it difficult to appreciate “complicated &

⁶²⁶ RAS TM 1/1/40.

⁶²⁷ The phrase is from Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁶²⁸ See Chen, *Merchants of War and Peace*, 47, for tightening restrictions on European traders.

⁶²⁹ RAS TM 9/1/39.

ingenious” manners from other cultures, precisely because they lack the specific knowledge which makes these pleasing; therefore only the crudest manners, “of wandering tribes or the like”, might please easily.⁶³⁰ Manning also drew a distinction between “Civilization & discoveries in science”, which “may be progressive”, and “intellect & wisdom”, which he implies are not. This suggests that national characteristics, once established, take much longer to develop or change than the technological level of society. Manning thus proceeds to the debatable suggestion that Europeans of a thousand years ago had similar tastes, sensibilities, and judgements to the present day; they were just more backward in “civilization”. Elizabethan England, for example, was “at least equal” to the present day in learning, wit, and eloquence. He concludes with a “Hypothesis”: “The Chinese are by nature inferior to the Europeans in power of mind – Are before them in civilization & behind them in science.”⁶³¹

Tis not the tranquility of the Chinese, their freedom from wars & tumult that makes me say they are before us in civ[ilizatio]n but their well regulated customs & contrivements in social life.⁶³²

Notwithstanding its unfortunate implications regarding the Chinese “power of mind”, Manning’s “hypothesis” held that Chinese manners and customs were superior to those in Europe. He also believed that China’s “arbitrary” system of government led to abuses of power, even if the totality of social wickedness was more or less the same. “So in China the thievery & corruption is in the Mandarins. Yet perhaps there is not more wickedness in China than in England, only the forms are different.”⁶³³

Manning expressed curiosity and admiration for Chinese cultural practices, but this sympathy did not translate into reflexive support for the Chinese authorities; and where cultural values and expectations diverged, there was potential for mutual disdain

⁶³⁰ RAS TM 9/1/39.

⁶³¹ RAS TM 9/1/39.

⁶³² RAS TM 9/1/39.

⁶³³ RAS TM 9/1/39.

and hostility. Lawrence Wong suggests Manning may have been affected by the riot he witnessed in April 1807 between British sailors of the *Neptune* and some local Chinese.⁶³⁴ A Chinese man died afterwards, and during the ensuing legal wrangling the British furnished, in Manning's words, a "mock-culprit" by the name of Edward Sheen; the charge of accidental homicide that was eventually agreed meant only an indemnity had to be paid. Manning drafted several accounts of the *Neptune* incident, sending copies to his father and Sir Joseph Banks, where he described the sailors of the *Neptune* as "a bad crew – & not entitled to the name of English sailors".⁶³⁵ In his opinion, however, the local Company hierarchy handled matters "in a judicious & honorable manner".⁶³⁶ Elsewhere, he criticized the East India Company, as well as the parochialism of the English merchants. But he still identified more closely with his fellow Englishmen than he did with the Chinese. Considering the linguistic, cultural, and social gulf separating him from local people, it could hardly have been otherwise.

Manning was predisposed to be suspicious of the British sailors, having been warned about their notorious proclivity for drunkenness. But on arriving in Canton, he found that "Tis not true that brutal intoxication is their immediate object & that they continue permanently to keep up that state all the while they remain here. Tis not true that they insult [...] the Chinese indiscriminately & at random." Manning did observe, however, that "they are strange devils" who "choose to be masters" and who "cannot brook accidental opposition where they habitually see quiet complaisance, or cringing or insinuating knavery [...] They love a little fun."⁶³⁷ In notes dated 22 February 1807 – two days before the affray that led to the trial of Edward Sheen – Manning perhaps refer to an altercation that helped precipitate those events. Manning describes his pride at seeing English sailors ("Johnny") "trounce" the "jackanapes, the impertinent":

⁶³⁴ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 94.

⁶³⁵ RAS TM 1/1/40.

⁶³⁶ NHM DTC 17, 41. Wong details Manning's views on the incident: "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 94-95. For a contrasting perspective, see Chen, *Chinese Law in Imperial Eyes*, 83-88.

⁶³⁷ RAS TM 9/1/39.

The rascally unfeeling pickpockets & hustlers & cheats & swindlers that form a part of this as well as of every other well peopled & civilised city take advantage of his [“Johnny’s”] natural carelessness & of his intoxication & set him in a fury of rage [...] Blows produce blows & it sometimes I am told & can easily believe, comes to homicide.⁶³⁸

Referring to the Company’s reluctance to hand over the accused British sailors to local authorities, purportedly for fear they might be tortured, Manning reports that he was brought up to consider torture “damnable, & imagined that all Englishmen agreed in that sentiment”.⁶³⁹ Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud observes that “the sanctification of the human body and its freedom from arbitrary violence” was central to the English liberal tradition,⁶⁴⁰ and this horror of physical submission to degrading and arbitrary treatment cut to the core of Manning’s moral intuitions. While stuck in Lhasa in early 1812, Manning worried that he might be executed on suspicion of being a spy or missionary, and reflected that he could never “submit to an execution with firmness and manliness”.⁶⁴¹ If he were wrongly accused in England, a “kind judge” might “take my part”. But he felt different principles of justice applied in China: “The sight of the despotic pomp of mandarins at Canton, where I was perfectly secure, has almost turned me sick. What I read of their absolute power, not only in China, but in various Asiatic countries, has always appalled me.”⁶⁴² This contains a nod to the theme of “Oriental Despotism” which pervaded the work of many European historians after Montesquieu.⁶⁴³ But there is no question that Manning, like many English liberals, sincerely believed in freedom of conscience, and had not entirely unfounded grounds

⁶³⁸ RAS TM 9/1/39.

⁶³⁹ RAS TM 1/1/40.

⁶⁴⁰ Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism*, 24.

⁶⁴¹ Manning, “Journey”, 278.

⁶⁴² Manning, “Journey”, 278.

⁶⁴³ Chapter four highlights Manning’s indictment of Montesquieu’s “impudence” for his one-sided views on government and despotism (RAS TM 9/7/4).

for imagining the concept received unusual emphasis within the English political tradition.

Manning's response to life in Canton was further complicated by the emotional price he paid when leaving England. In April 1807, Manning described to William Wilkins the isolation he felt after arriving in China. The complete absence of English femininity amid the masculine environment of the Company Factory brought home that he had relinquished hopes of marriage and domestic repose. Manning had once made romantic overtures to one of Wilkins's daughters. Now he wrote to say, "I cannot recall your excellent & amiable daughters to my mind without having my heart moved. I am very affectionate by disposition, & banished man as I am, can you wonder if my recollection now as I write overpowers me?"⁶⁴⁴ Manning felt a cruel irony in the fact that "I with the most domestic turn of disposition am always a wanderer!" Recalling the episodes when he was consumed by diverse subjects, from geometry to "Independent Tartary", Manning lamented, "I have a strange power of thought & sentiments that impels me unresistingly to strange things." Keenly aware that observers might attribute his endeavours to eccentricity, Manning took pains to impress upon Wilkins (and, by extension, his daughters) that there was nothing unsound about his faculties. "I think I have nothing, absolutely nothing in my constitution of what is called crack-brained & if so at the end I shall be able to justify myself & my undertakings."⁶⁴⁵

He evocatively portrayed his lonely situation:

You must consider me sitting alone in a room at the very extremity of the earth in the evening having nothing but the tones of a Chinese string instrument played on by a Chinese servant belonging to the factory – surrounded on all sides by people whose manner, thoughts, words, actions, dress & affections have nothing in common with Europe.⁶⁴⁶

⁶⁴⁴ RAS TM 5/4.

⁶⁴⁵ RAS TM 5/4.

⁶⁴⁶ RAS TM 5/4.

This lonely state, calculated to inspire sympathy, shows that Manning's heart remained in England. Only from England could China seem "at the very extremity of the earth"; to the Chinese, it was of course the centre of the world. Meanwhile, the Chinese servant, whose musical attainments were such scant consolation to Manning, presumably had a family of his own, who were sparing him for these futile efforts to cheer up the gloomy Englishman. Matters were made worse by the fact that, in Canton, the only people with whom Manning could converse were:

[A] few men drawn here by commerce, who are waiting the fulfilment of their fortune, with their eyes turned towards their own country, ready to take wing the moment their honey bags are filled, & who instead of forming a sort of arch of communication between me & the inhabitants of the country, gather themselves up in a round knot which seems to admit of no point of contact with the natives. Like water on a cabbage leaf they drop off in succession, leaving no traces.⁶⁴⁷

This may fairly describe most of the British merchants in Canton; but overall, it is an uncharitable summary which makes no allowance for the presence of men like Sir George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859), Robert Morrison (1782-1834), and Samuel Ball (1781?-1874), each of whom shared, in his own way, Manning's interest in Chinese culture. Moreover, Manning had, of course, gone to China entirely of his own free will, and he acknowledged to Sir Joseph Banks, "If I had not learned to sacrifice, unrelentingly, my personal pleasures & attachments, I should never have come to China, God knows!"⁶⁴⁸ To Wilkins, Manning finally pulled himself together, adopting a masculine posture of self-reliance: "Yet for all that you are not to suppose me unhappy – quite the contrary. I have not undertaken what is above my strength."⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁷ RAS TM 5/4.

⁶⁴⁸ NHM DTC 17, 43.

⁶⁴⁹ RAS TM 5/4.

Escape from Canton

Manning came to Canton to prepare for entering the Chinese interior. Naturally enough, he tried the direct route first and, optimistic about getting permission to reside in the imperial capital, told Lamb in November 1807 that he had been “petitioning Mandarins for leave to go up to Peking as ASTRONOMER and PHYSICIAN!”⁶⁵⁰ In Matthew Mosca’s pithy description, Manning was offering his services “as a sort of secular Jesuit”.⁶⁵¹ Barrett points out that Qing policy was moving towards the active suppression of Catholicism,⁶⁵² which had negative implications for Manning’s strategy. Mosca suggests that opportunities for language study in China in 1807 were even worse than they had been a century earlier: Peking was now closed to all but a handful of Europeans, and by 1790, “knowledge of literary Chinese was virtually extinct among Europeans at Canton”.⁶⁵³ Lawrence Wong has summarized Manning’s efforts to petition the authorities for employment in Peking during 1807 and 1808,⁶⁵⁴ and in a good-humored letter to his father, Manning reported on their failure. This he attributed to his nationality and Qing sensitivities about the growth of English power in India:

I have given petitions to the Mandarins here begging leave to go up to Peking to feel the Emperor’s pulse, & teach him to calculate eclipses. But I believe they had rather not have his pulse felt by anybody belonging to the English nation, whose fame spreads in India rather faster than is agreeable to any of the Asiatic potentates. As for the other business, they answer that he is in no want of ’stronomy folks just at present. Well I have done my duty in trying, & the sin now rests upon the heads of the Mandarins of Canton if the Great Dragon should lay hold of the moon before the kettledrums are ready to frighten him off.⁶⁵⁵

⁶⁵⁰ Anderson, *Letters*, 101.

⁶⁵¹ Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 171.

⁶⁵² Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 1.

⁶⁵³ Mosca, “Comprehending the Qing Empire”, 1063.

⁶⁵⁴ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 95-96.

⁶⁵⁵ RAS TM 1/1/44.

Manning's good cheer probably owed something to the fact his next plan was already afoot. He hoped to join a Company expedition to Cochinchina (Vietnam), and enter China from its southeastern border. Manning's uncharitable view of that country ("I think them a set of ½ civilised vagabonds") was typical among the British in Canton, as evidenced by a letter from J.F. Elphinstone, a Company supercargo, who described the Emperor of Cochinchina, Gia Long (1762-1820), as "no better than a semi barbarian, very despotic & very sanguinary".⁶⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Manning was interested in comparing the Vietnamese and Chinese languages, as well as "spying for a weak place on the Chinese frontiers" from which he could enter the country.⁶⁵⁷ He also entertained further hopes of joining an Embassy from Cochinchina to Peking as a physician.⁶⁵⁸

Manning told Banks that the trip to Cochinchina would be "with the Company's cruisers, who are engaged to survey the Paracels this season."⁶⁵⁹ Manning hoped he might get lucky and be allowed to reside on shore for a month or two while the cruisers completed their survey. According to Hosea Ballou Morse, Manning completed the trip in the suite of French naval officer Jean-Marie Dayot (1759-1809),⁶⁶⁰ who formerly served Gia Long and acted as an emissary for the Company. Alistair Lamb describes Dayot as a senior commander in Cochinchina whose "ability was of the highest order", but he left for Manila in the 1790s.⁶⁶¹ Dayot is mentioned in a letter from a M. Letondal dated 26 June 1808, which attempted to dissuade Manning from the trip;⁶⁶² while Dayot left an undated note with Manning in Canton, asking whether he would write a report on the habits of the Cochinchinese.⁶⁶³ Perhaps it would have been better for Manning

⁶⁵⁶ RAS TM 5/12.

⁶⁵⁷ NHM DTC 17, 93.

⁶⁵⁸ RAS TM 1/1/44.

⁶⁵⁹ NHM DTC 17, 93.

⁶⁶⁰ Morse, *Chronicles*, III, 71.

⁶⁶¹ Alistair Lamb, "British Missions", 151.

⁶⁶² This letter is from the Manning Family Archive, courtesy of Deborah Manning.

⁶⁶³ RAS TM 5/41.

to be dissuaded: forbidden from going ashore, he had to accompany the surveying team on their “Paracel-exploring cruise”. “A grievous bore, to say no worse of it. We found the Paracels in all their hideous deformity.”⁶⁶⁴

But the coat-tails of an official voyage remained the likeliest way to enter China, and a year later, in September 1809, Manning joked to his sister that he had made overtures to another dignitary from South-East Asia: “I came to take a peep at the Siamese ambassador, & to try if I can’t creep into his train”.

He is just arrived in his junk from Siam, & I have entered into a negotiation – to dine in his company - which I expect will take place in a few days. It would please me above all things to succeed in this business (not the dinner but the trip to Peking) but this cursed quarrel between the English & the Chinese makes it almost hopeless. When the fleet sails, I hope to be able to tell you my final plans. At present I drop the subject; for the more I think of it, the less I feel pleased.⁶⁶⁵

Manning’s frustration drove him to consider schemes bordering on the naive. He informed Banks that the legal wrangling after the *Neptune* incident in April 1807 “was very near giving me an opportunity of visiting two or three ports to the northward”, as he was asked to take several petitions which were to be delivered to officials up and down the coast.⁶⁶⁶ Similar episodes in the past had triggered untold horror and consternation in Peking, and Manning should have counted himself lucky that Staunton handled matters in Canton “so ably & gently” that the plot was aborted.⁶⁶⁷

Another, perhaps apocryphal story related after Manning’s death claimed he once snuck out of the English Factory in Canton to explore the surrounding country on foot, trusting to his linguistic proficiency and Chinese costume to pass as a local. According to this account, he was captured and returned to Canton within two days, carried back in a hamper slung on a pole by two porters who observed that ““Cucullus

⁶⁶⁴ RAS TM 1/1/46. The cruisers also rescued 561 people from a shipwreck.

⁶⁶⁵ RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁶⁶⁶ NHM DTC 17, 42.

⁶⁶⁷ NHM DTC 17, 42.

non facit monachum⁶⁶⁸ – beard and chopsticks do not make a Chinese – and that next time he would be packed up ‘heel to point’, but without a head”.⁶⁶⁹ There is no corroboration for this story, but we do know that in late 1809 or early 1810 Manning made a shady deal with a Chinese agent who agreed to help him masquerade as a Chinese merchant sailing from Canton to Peking. Manning balked once he realized he would have to go inside the boat as a virtual prisoner; and, becoming increasingly suspicious of his Chinese associate, “who had a most villainous aspect”,⁶⁷⁰ he pulled out of the business and reclaimed his investment. Two members of the Canton Select Committee knew his “exact plan”, but Manning knew that the Company would be powerless to intercede on his behalf if he were taken as a spy.⁶⁷¹

Manning’s desire to learn about China at first-hand did not abate, but the seriousness of the restrictions against Europeans traveling in China gradually dawned on him. While he was initially pleased to arrive in Canton at a time when disputes between the British and Qing authorities promised to reveal insights into the Chinese administration, Manning eventually blamed their fractious relationship for the fact he was not permitted to explore China. Each new falling-out between Britain and China occasioned new fears: “I don’t like to have come so far, & at last not enter the country!”⁶⁷² The most serious source of tension was not the April 1807 riot involving the sailors of the *Neptune*, but the landing in late 1808 of British troops in Macao, part of a strategy to prevent Portuguese territories falling into the hands of Napoleonic France.⁶⁷³ Manning took a dim view of this “senseless expedition”, which he disdained to describe “with the epithets I think it deserves”.⁶⁷⁴ But Manning probably overestimated the relevance of such diplomatic vicissitudes for his own plans, while

⁶⁶⁸ “The cowl does not make the monk.”

⁶⁶⁹ Donne, “Memoir”, 229.

⁶⁷⁰ SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 20.39.

⁶⁷¹ RAS TM 1/1/51.

⁶⁷² RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁶⁷³ RAS TM 1/1/48.

⁶⁷⁴ Manning, “Journey”, 238, n1.

underestimating the extent to which the foreign travel ban remained a guiding light of Qing policy. Even if trade had been conducted with perfect equanimity between 1807 and 1810, it would probably not have significantly eased Manning's goal of exploring China's interior.

Romantic England

David Higgins highlights Englishness as an important theme in Romantic writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,⁶⁷⁵ and Manning's Chinese correspondence supports the notion of a specifically English sense of identity at that time. It was during his years in China that Manning most clearly expressed romanticized, patriotic views about England and the English character. Manning's patriotism was inflected by a particular locale – his hometown, Diss, in Norfolk – and it was concerned with notions of masculinity, independence, and liberty. In England, his sense of patriotism would have sat easily with Whiggish radicalism, but in Asia it was complicated by Britain's imperial status. Yet Manning remained critical of the East India Company, and chauvinist prejudices in general; and his ambivalent attitude, and complicated sense of identity, supports the claim that “Englishness was a heterogeneous and unstable category [...] and always inflected by alterity”.⁶⁷⁶

England's war with France was a political touchstone which Manning regularly mentioned in letters from Canton. In 1802, he was something of a Francophile and an admirer of Napoleon, but in China, Manning described his joy at news of British and allied victories against France. Indeed, his letters reveal deep-seated patriotism which Manning was wont to express in highly emotional, romantic terms. If there was yet a hint of revolutionary idealism in Manning's support for French liberty in the early 1800s, then by the time of the Napoleonic Wars he seems to have consciously embraced

⁶⁷⁵ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, passim.

⁶⁷⁶ Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 9.

the familiar Anglo-Saxon definition of freedom that traced its roots through common law and seventeenth century liberalism. He explained to his father in February 1808 that he believed England would successfully defend itself against any French invasion, because “millions of my countrymen would feel the same scorn & indignation at the proposal to submit to a foreign yoke, that now, now at this instant burns in my cheeks, & the same enthusiasm & unquenchable love of independence, that now fills my eyes with tears”.⁶⁷⁷ To doubt that the English people could defend themselves against an invasion would be “to doubt whether an Eng[lish]m[an] be as good as a F[rench]m[an], in courage, in talents, in independence of spirit, in zeal for his country, in civilisation, state of arts, sciences &c”. Manning stressed that it was this “spirit of freedom & independence” which would cause him to dread conquest by France. If his countrymen did not have such a spirit, “I should not care 6 pence whether E[n]glan[d] was a province of France or not.”⁶⁷⁸

This special quality of the English character thus gave rise to Manning’s love for his country. The idea there was something special about the English “spirit of freedom & independence” was not uncommon among Englishmen of Manning’s generation, and even former Francophiles might come to understand this “spirit” in contradistinction to the degeneration latterly thought to have befallen French liberty after the Revolution. Wordsworth, for example, at one time an ardent enthusiast for the Revolution, abandoned his former views under the march of events and the expansionist policies of the Bonapartist regime, until at last England, for all its imperfections, came to “be hailed as the friend of liberty for want of a better”.⁶⁷⁹ Stephen Gill observes, “Wordsworth deplores his country’s ‘trespasses’, recognizes its selfish territorial and commercial designs, and concludes, ‘Oh grief! That Earth’s best hopes rest all with

⁶⁷⁷ RAS TM 1/1/44.

⁶⁷⁸ RAS TM 1/1/44.

⁶⁷⁹ Gill, *William Wordsworth*, 209.

Thee!”⁶⁸⁰ Similarly, Manning’s love for his country did not blind him to its flaws, and he resisted the temptation to elide his admiration of English virtues into a jingoistic denigration of other countries. “I cannot bear the degrading doubts I so often hear thrown out by people who the next minute betray their exclusive high opinion of England & their insufferably supercilious contempt for all other nations.”⁶⁸¹

Europe was geographically remote from China, but the implications of the Napoleonic Wars were global, and their progress was a topic of abiding concern for Canton’s British residents. In December 1808, Manning described for his father the landing of British troops in Macao “to protect the place from the French”, which was done without the consent of the Chinese authorities.⁶⁸² A “war of words” ensued, “with threatening appearances of more active hostilities”. Both sides tried to intimidate the other, but Manning felt the Chinese could be confident the British would not risk losing the China trade for the sake of a principle. Thus, even if the dispute were settled, it would be “not much to our honour I’m afraid”; while all the other foreign traders in China “are looking eagerly for the pleasure of seeing us worsted”.⁶⁸³

In March 1809, Manning returned to this “scurvy business”, which occasioned several “menaces” and minor skirmishes before the British troops withdrew.⁶⁸⁴ On the other hand, he approved of the British seizure of the Danish fleet at Copenhagen in September 1807 as “a bold & manly measure”, further declaring his belief that the “noble blood of Spain will shew itself” and help defeat the “abominable & damnable machinations of the French”.⁶⁸⁵ In September 1809 Manning told his sister that, besides news of his friends, nothing interested him “except the sacred cause of the Spaniards,

⁶⁸⁰ Gill, *William Wordsworth*, 209.

⁶⁸¹ RAS TM 1/1/44.

⁶⁸² RAS TM 1/1/48.

⁶⁸³ RAS TM 1/1/48.

⁶⁸⁴ RAS TM 1/1/49.

⁶⁸⁵ RAS TM 1/1/49. France and Spain invaded Portugal in 1807, hostilities breaking out between the invaders in 1808. Afterwards, Britain, Spain and Portugal allied against Napoleonic forces in the Peninsular War, lasting until 1814.

whom God preserve”.⁶⁸⁶ The actions of Spanish forces against France led to “great rejoicing“ among the British and Spanish in Macao, and Manning even composed several songs which were sung at table and “prodigiously applauded”. “The subject did very much animate & rouse me”.⁶⁸⁷

Life in Canton and Macao

The English were only allowed to reside in Canton for six months a year, spending the other half in Macao. The island echoed with European influences, and Manning reflected upon these in a February 1808 letter to Charles Lloyd, which Lloyd copied for Manning’s father. Manning argued that Macao’s charms – including the legacy of the Jesuits – were underappreciated, his description deploying the mode of interpretation he once applied to the Lake District and Swiss Alps. It was likely to appeal to Lloyd’s aesthetic sensibilities:

We spend the summer at Macao, a romantic, tho’ barren, spot of ground near 100 miles south of Canton. I find nobody that takes any delight in it but myself – I hear it vilified twenty times in a day – it is a dull place, I grant that – but the sea-breeze – the reposing bay screened by lofty hills & mountain tops, the ocean opening at a distance; the contrast between real repose, & ideal tumult & traffic upon the sight of passing ships, the luxurious heat [...] the religious buildings, solidly handsome, tho’ plain; the Portuguese superstitions; the memory & marks of their former activity of mind & body; the memory of the Jesuits excited by the organs, the bells &c, with which those active, learned & extraordinary men have endowed this place. These and other little bundles of delight are sufficient for me.⁶⁸⁸

Distinguished from the Jesuits by his religious creed, Manning nevertheless shared their desire to learn about China, appreciating their energy and “activity” as well as their scholarly devotion.

⁶⁸⁶ RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁶⁸⁷ RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁶⁸⁸ RAS TM 1/1/45.

The conditions under which Manning laboured in Canton were, however, less favourable than those the Jesuits enjoyed during their heyday. Initially despondent about the “humiliating” conditions mandated by the Qing authorities, and depressed by the lack of intellectual sympathy among British merchants, Manning gradually adjusted to his new surroundings. By the end of 1808, he had even taken the unusual step of adopting Chinese dress – or rather, a fusion of Chinese and Cochinchinese styles: “Vastly comfortable in the hot weather & so becoming with my long beard!”⁶⁸⁹ Several months later, Manning referred again to his “Cochinchinese” clothing, reporting that his beard was now a foot long. “I don’t find tis much admired among the English!”⁶⁹⁰ He explained that the local costume was better suited to the climate – not because it was thinner than the thick European dress, but because it was looser.⁶⁹¹

Manning knew that learning Chinese was essential if he hoped to develop anything beyond a superficial understanding of Chinese culture, and his major occupation in Canton (besides scheming to enter the interior) was studying the language. Initial progress was slow: three months after arriving, he told Banks that “I cry out for help, & no one comes near me”.⁶⁹² A year later, he reported that “I go on very slowly with the Chinese language”.⁶⁹³ His subsequent improvement was facilitated by “the regular attendance of a Chinese scholar”,⁶⁹⁴ and in September 1809 he explained to his sister that his “great progress” with the language was consolation for his thwarted efforts to explore China: “I have made acquisitions here (not in money) wh[ich] fully compensate my labour.”⁶⁹⁵ Manning stressed that he had made strides in understanding one aspect of Chinese most likely to frustrate Europeans:

⁶⁸⁹ RAS TM 1/1/48.

⁶⁹⁰ RAS TM 1/1/49. Chapter four suggests this eccentric hybrid costume had psychological significance.

⁶⁹¹ Manning, “Journey”, 229.

⁶⁹² NHM DTC 17, 43.

⁶⁹³ NHM DTC 17, 93.

⁶⁹⁴ RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁶⁹⁵ RAS TM 1/2/3.

Even the discovery of the tones, wh[ich] had baffled ‘em all, is in my opinion a full recompense for the journey, the labour & the expense, & is what ought & will hereafter justify me in the eyes of all. (Except perhaps my partial friends, who would rather hear the tones of my voice, than read my accounts of other people’s).⁶⁹⁶

Apparently, as late as 1810 the tonal nature of Chinese remained somewhat obscure to English students. A year after arriving in Canton, Manning told Banks that “I hope soon to be able to give some account of the tones (as they are called)”:

I believe they have nothing to do with music, with high & low, but (as I hinted, I believe, to Mr Wilkins once) are more of the nature of consonants & vowels. I have such trouble in getting any Chinese about me, that I have not yet been able to make certain experiments that I have in mind, & that would settle several of my doubts; so, for want of being sure throughout, I say nothing at present about the matter.⁶⁹⁷

Joshua Marshman later credited Manning with having enlightened him regarding “many ideas respecting the [Chinese] language, particularly its Tones, which, but for these discussions, had perhaps forever escaped his research.”⁶⁹⁸ Manning observed to his sister that “the philological remarks, that a knowledge of this strange language gives rise to, these are what I hold most dear.”⁶⁹⁹

In 1811, Manning tried to submit, via Banks, a royal petition for a new British Embassy to China. Here, he opined that he had “acquired such a critical knowledge of the Chinese Idioms, both oral & written, as, he believes, no European before ever reached to”.⁷⁰⁰ Barrett suggests that Manning was not boasting about his practical ability in the language, but “the nuances of usage that Manning teased out with his Greek, Latin and French comparisons”:

⁶⁹⁶ RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁶⁹⁷ NHM DTC 17, 92.

⁶⁹⁸ Marshman, *Elements of Chinese Grammar*, iii.

⁶⁹⁹ RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁷⁰⁰ SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 20.39.

Given that the work of Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare (1666-1736), the most linguistically able and erudite of the Catholic missionaries, lay at this point as yet in unpublished manuscript form, and so was probably unknown to him, this was not a stupid boast, and the archive shows the substance upon which it was based.⁷⁰¹

Manning's reference to "philological remarks" might be considered in relation to this "critical knowledge of the Chinese Idioms" as further evidence of how his Chinese language studies differed from those of Staunton and Morrison. Manning was engaged in the scholarly examination of Chinese words and usages *per se*, and the implications of his philological interests are discussed in chapter four.

Alive to the objective obstacles to entering China, Manning seems to have recalibrated his plans to include the possibility of preparing a protégé or disciple to continue his project. In January 1808, one year after reaching Canton, Manning told Banks that he feared the Chinese language was so difficult that he could do "little more than point out to my successor the way in which it may be surely mastered".⁷⁰² Indeed, he claimed, this had always been part of his plan, and "rather than spend the afternoon of my life in ungrateful toils in a foreign country, I would be content to leave my unaccomplished plans as a heritage to some younger man". Still, he remained "determined as ever to do my utmost in propria persona".⁷⁰³ The following year, he told his sister that "I have entirely given up the plan of finishing the work myself in propria persona, & mean in England to look out for, & instruct some well disposed young gentleman, whom I will put in the way of travelling in China, without any difficulty."⁷⁰⁴ In 1810, he again told Banks that "I'll gladly instruct any ingenious sensible young man in the Chinese language [...] If I get into China I shall not stay long there, very very little time indeed, unless I find great opportunities".⁷⁰⁵ As his future trips to Tibet and

⁷⁰¹ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 10-11.

⁷⁰² NHM DTC 17, 92.

⁷⁰³ NHM DTC 17, 93.

⁷⁰⁴ RAS TM 1/2/3.

⁷⁰⁵ SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 20.39.

Peking reveal, Manning was still determined to explore China if possible. But he also placed more intrinsic value on his philological and linguistic acquirements. This reflected the course his studies took in response to the available opportunities, but there may also have been an element of “face-saving” as he tried to show that his efforts had not been for nothing.

The East India Company

Writing to his father in 1808 about his plans to visit Cochinchina, Manning mysteriously alludes to something he was reluctant to set down in writing (“least said is soonest mended”):

I shall only say that if it were not for a trick I have of acting in a manner that some folks would call quarrelling with my bread & butter I might, I believe, have gone there with a good salary. But you know I am not particularly fond of attaching myself to institutions. I always plead I am a Quaker. However I always declare at the same time that I shall be on all occasions equally zealous for the interests of my country as if I was engaged & certainly if I can perform any honorable services for the Honorable Company (& other than honourable I shall certainly not undertake) I shall permit the Honble Company to pay the expenses of my trip.⁷⁰⁶

Manning physically accompanied the Company’s cruisers to Cochinchina, but the reference to “quarrelling with my bread & butter” suggests he had qualms which made him decline a salaried position. Although the reference to being a “Quaker” was not made in earnest, Manning did have an affinity for that group, and he seems to have deployed this idea as a diversionary tactic. In 1811, when canvassing for an Embassy to China, Manning pre-empted suspicions that he was angling for a lucrative position himself: “my Quaker principles render me repugnant to that.”⁷⁰⁷ When Manning was in Calcutta in 1810, his friend John Leyden (1775-1811) alluded to Manning’s

⁷⁰⁶ RAS TM 1/1/44.

⁷⁰⁷ SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 20.39.

identification as a Quaker;⁷⁰⁸ while the Baptist missionary, Joshua Marshman, also referred to Manning's "Quakerism".⁷⁰⁹ Manning's semi-serious posturing as a Quaker helped deflect from the equivocal nature of his attitude towards the "Honorable Company". Stressing to his father that he will use them where he can, he notes that he would only perform honorable services in line with his own values – implying that the Company might have dishonorable purposes in mind, as well.

Manning was not fundamentally averse to benefiting from the Company's activities. His very presence in Canton depended on the Company's forbearance; and he did undertake some paid work on their behalf. In March 1809, he let his father into a "secret": "I have been of some use lately in translating Chinese edicts &c, relative to the Company's business".⁷¹⁰ Lawrence Wong has shown that Manning was involved in translating edicts for the Company in relation to the Macao controversy in 1808-9,⁷¹¹ and Susan Stifler suggests Manning was at one time the Company's *de facto* chief translator in Canton.⁷¹² If true, this helps explain why the Company was keen to "fix" him in a position at a "handsome salary". But Manning explained, "I do not chuse to belong to the Hon. Company, tis not consistent with my way of thinking."⁷¹³ His statement that "I must be unfettered" suggests there was an element of convenience in this. But principle was involved, too. Manning was wary of any "entanglement" which "would not suit my conscience", and from which he could not be extricated without accusations of "absurd whims of conscience".⁷¹⁴ The late controversy occasioned by the landing of British troops in Macao perhaps hints at the kind of issue which Manning would prefer to avoid being associated with. Manning did eventually accept a paid

⁷⁰⁸ NLS ACC 759 [126-127].

⁷⁰⁹ RAS TM 5/19/5.

⁷¹⁰ RAS TM 1/1/49.

⁷¹¹ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 97.

⁷¹² Stifler, "Language Students", 56.

⁷¹³ RAS TM 1/1/49.

⁷¹⁴ RAS TM 1/1/49.

position on the Amherst Embassy in 1816, but the chance of a paid trip to Peking was too good to refuse.

India and Bhutan, 1810-1811

The failure of his attempts to enter China via Canton or CochinChina encouraged Manning to try something else entirely – an approach from India, by way of Burma or Tibet. He had evidently considered this direction before even arriving in China: in 1806, Robert Southey, explaining to William Taylor that Manning had given up the idea of joining the Russian Embassy, described his intention as “to learn the [Chinese] language at Canton, and then, if he cannot enter at that quarter, to try on the side of Tartary”.⁷¹⁵ Writing to his father from Calcutta in April 1810, Manning described a plan to enter China “thro Tibet or other feasible point”.⁷¹⁶ He received moral support for this plan from the Canton Select Committee, but lingered in Calcutta for some time in a state of “absolute suspense”, anticipating an interview with Lord Minto, Governor-General of India.⁷¹⁷ Manning waited in vain for official patronage, and he bitterly described his disappointment to Sir Joseph Banks in August 1811, in a letter intended to stave off any allegations that the delay in Calcutta was of his own making.⁷¹⁸ For Manning was feted during his brief stay, his eccentric costume catching the eye of the fashionable world such that “If I wish to go on the corso, some lady takes me by her side in her carriage & shews me to all the world & all the world to me”.⁷¹⁹ Manning rented a spacious house in Calcutta, “an extravagantly handsome house for me & larger than any house in the parish of Diss or the adjoining parishes!”⁷²⁰ He justified this on the grounds that an unpleasant house might ruin his health and end up costing him more;

⁷¹⁵ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 132.

⁷¹⁶ RAS TM 1/1/51.

⁷¹⁷ RAS TM 1/1/51.

⁷¹⁸ SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 20.39.

⁷¹⁹ RAS TM 1/1/51. Corso: a social promenade.

⁷²⁰ RAS TM 1/1/51.

convenient reasoning, perhaps, but the prevalence of illness among British residents was poorly understood and not to be taken lightly.

Manning's letters comment infrequently on the local culture, reflecting his view of Bengal as a staging-post on his journey rather than somewhere he was interested in for its own sake. He was, however, at least somewhat interested in Indian philosophy, as indicated by his request to borrow Leyden's copy of Henry Colebrooke's *Essay on the Vedas* (1805).⁷²¹ Nevertheless, Manning was struck by some lurid scenes, unlike anything he saw in China or Tibet, which he related to his father:

I was present at the festival where a live man swings round like a joint of meat suspended by hooks thro his flesh! & other run spears thro their tongues &c &c. Horrid sights & I am invited to see a widow burned alive! The superstitions of this country are dreadful. There are many besides these combining blood, victims, charnel house scenes & ceremonies that may not be named!!⁷²²

Despite the vaguely sensational tone, there are no grounds for suspecting that Manning was writing in bad faith: he never resorted to such language when describing anything he saw in Canton, Lhasa, or elsewhere on his travels. The "horrid sights", "charnel house scenes" and unnameable ceremonies which he saw in the vicinity of Calcutta seem to have genuinely shocked him.

Manning left Calcutta on 11 October 1810, informing Lamb that he was about to leave "for God knows where!"⁷²³ This turned out to be Rangpur, Bengal, about three-hundred miles north of Calcutta. Rangpur was a base from which Manning sought legal permission to proceed through Bhutan to Tibet, as far as Lhasa; he dreamed that, once there, he might venture onwards to Peking and Nanking, before returning to Canton.⁷²⁴ Using Chinese archival sources, Matthew Mosca and Liu Shengqi both demonstrate

⁷²¹ NLS ACC 759 [117].

⁷²² RAS TM 1/1/51.

⁷²³ Anderson, *Letters*, 114. A receipt records a boat hired from Calcutta to Rangpur, 11 October 1810 (RAS TM 5/20/1).

⁷²⁴ SAFE/Banks Papers/Series 20.39.

that Manning sought to follow official channels for permission to visit Lhasa and pay respects to the Dalai Lama, taking advantage of a “loophole” to travel under the assumed identity of a Buddhist pilgrim.⁷²⁵ Manning likely alludes to this permission when saying “I travelled by authority”, thus explaining the “imperious” attitude of his Chinese interpreter, Zhao Jinxiu, recruited from a Calcutta wine shop.⁷²⁶ This formal permission also helps explain why Qing officials in Lhasa went to some lengths to ensure Manning’s comfort and security, and why he was allowed to visit the Dalai Lama no fewer than six times, despite growing suspicions that he was a Catholic missionary.⁷²⁷ Liu suggests that Manning and Zhao’s scheme to follow a land route from Calcutta to Lhasa was bold but not outlandish, given that an overland route had been followed by Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries before (and, in part, by the British diplomats, Bogle and Turner). Manning believed that to arrive at Lhasa with the design of entering China “was not altogether a hopeless errand”, although it did hinge on the sheer luck of receiving favour, or permission to join a Tibetan merchant caravan to Xining.⁷²⁸ Liu agrees that, if they reached Xining with a caravan, Manning and Zhao’s plan to journey onwards to Peking might have proved relatively straightforward.⁷²⁹

Permission to travel to Lhasa was, however, slow in arriving, and Manning complained to Tuthill that “I gasp & breathe hard when I think how I waste my time here & yet the waste is not my fault”.⁷³⁰ Manning had been told that a great fair would be held at Rangpur in February, at which he could meet Bhutanese people who might facilitate his journey onward; but the fair did not take place until the end of May. Eventually, he was able to recruit a Bhutanese man to act on his behalf and secure a passport for travel to Lhasa. Manning finally left Rangpur on 28 August 1811, writing

⁷²⁵ Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 172; Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”, 52-3.

⁷²⁶ Manning, “Journey”, 213. Zhao’s background is discussed in Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”, 55-56, and Wong, “We Are as Babies Under Nurses”, 107-109.

⁷²⁷ Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”, 54.

⁷²⁸ Manning, “Journey”, 278.

⁷²⁹ See Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”, 50.

⁷³⁰ RAS TM 2/3/7.

to Tuthill the day before, “Hey for the Grand Lama. I set off tomorrow”.⁷³¹ He had been delayed in Rangpur for almost an entire year.

Manning concluded his letter to Tuthill with a postscript about a paper which he had meant to send to Lamb: “Communicate it, Tis my guess who wrote the nonsenses in that little book of child’s poetry”.⁷³² This refers to *Poetry for Children*, by Charles and Mary Lamb, which Charles had sent him at the beginning of 1810, teasing that “the best you may suppose mine, the next best are my coadjutor’s. You may amuse yourself by guessing them out, but I must tell you mine are but one third in quantity of the whole.”⁷³³ Manning lists twenty of the poems, half of which he ascribes to Lamb, dividing the remainder between Wordsworth and Coleridge.⁷³⁴ It seems not to have occurred to him that Lamb’s “coadjutor” was, in fact, his sister. On the brink of crossing into Bhutan, Manning’s thoughts thus turned to Lamb’s humble, domestic literary endeavour – a striking reminder of the ideas and influences acting on his mind while travelling in foreign lands.

Manning’s Tibetan Narrative

Manning recorded much of his Tibetan journey in a manuscript diary, later written up into a fair draft for his family and published posthumously in 1876 by Sir Clements Markham.⁷³⁵ That version corresponds largely to the manuscript account, though it lacks much incidental detail embellishing the original commentary. As Stephen Platt observes, “Markham’s publication [...] differs little from the original (entailing mainly minor changes in wording and the elimination of some of Manning’s constant judgements on the wine he drank)”.⁷³⁶ This was clearly important to Manning, and the

⁷³¹ RAS TM 2/3/7.

⁷³² RAS TM 2/3/7.

⁷³³ Lamb, *Works*, V, 430.

⁷³⁴ RAS TM 2/3/7.

⁷³⁵ For manuscript versions of this text, see RAS TM 9/1-5, TM 10.

⁷³⁶ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 452, n45.

following entry is typical: “The wine now is never good. Tis weak & sour. At Cuttlebary it had a sweet, malty taste & was very strong, & a pint of it made the world look gay, even in the midst of the rain.”⁷³⁷ Despite a preponderance of such references, a critical edition of Manning’s narrative, comparing the manuscript and published versions, would surely be of value. However, such a comparative analysis is beyond the scope of this project, which seeks instead to place Manning’s trip within his intellectual biography. It relies chiefly on the published version of the text, drawing occasionally on the unpublished version for important details absent from the published account.

The aesthetic qualities of Manning’s text were shown to good advantage when performed on BBC radio by Sir John Gielgud (1904-2000).⁷³⁸ But Manning’s journal is also important for documenting how an English Romantic scholar engaged with Tibet at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, it has drawn interest from Romanticists and historians of travel. Reginald Watters concluded that Manning’s narrative “deserves to be better known. It is the highly personal record of a Romantic sensibility moving, in an eccentric, English way, among Eastern caravans hitherto measureless to Western Man.”⁷³⁹ Manning’s narrative also received detailed treatment by Peter Bishop,⁷⁴⁰ Laurie Hovell McMillin,⁷⁴¹ and Felicity James,⁷⁴² and an analysis in the Russian language by Eugeny Besprozvannykh, who notes that Manning’s success in reaching Lhasa paradoxically ensured the border became closed to future European travelers.⁷⁴³ As well as considering the literary responses to Manning’s narrative, the present discussion benefits from the aforementioned efforts of Mosca and Liu Shengqi, whose examination of archival sources shed new light on Manning’s time in Tibet.⁷⁴⁴

⁷³⁷ RAS TM 9/2.

⁷³⁸ *Travellers’ Tales*, “‘Tibetan Journey, 1811’” (radio episode, 1966).

⁷³⁹ Watters, “Thomas Manning”, 13.

⁷⁴⁰ Bishop, *Myth of Shangri-La*, 72-95.

⁷⁴¹ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 56-67.

⁷⁴² James, “Thomas Manning”, 23-27.

⁷⁴³ Besprozvannykh, “Thomas Manning’s Observations”, 93-102.

⁷⁴⁴ Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 171-174; Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”.

Besides observations on the local wine, Manning found little of interest in Bhutan upon which to comment; while the subjects that captured his attention in Tibet were somewhat desultory. He made notes on Tibetan vocabulary and reminded himself to seek out a work on the subject that might be found in France.⁷⁴⁵ Barrett points out that “there was almost nothing published that Manning could have read to prepare himself for this newly determined objective”.⁷⁴⁶ The Tibetan account of George Bogle (1746-1781) was only published in 1876 alongside his own, but Manning was evidently acquainted with *Account of an Embassy to the Court of the Teshoo Lama in Tibet* (1800), by the diplomat Samuel Turner (1759-1802). What Manning might have gleaned from Turner’s account is hard to tell from such quaint remarks as his disagreement with Turner about Tibet’s capacity to support large flocks of birds.⁷⁴⁷ He thus entered Tibet with relatively few preconceptions about the country, but Markham, Manning’s reluctant editor, had little time for his unsystematic approach, disparaging his narrative and concluding that he was “quick-tempered and imprudent”.⁷⁴⁸ Recent treatments, however, have generally been more sympathetic, and James points out that Manning’s narrative frustrated Markham precisely because it was a highly emotional, personal, and self-aware document in which he “refuses to take a racial, national, or geographical overview”.⁷⁴⁹ James suggests that Manning’s Tibetan account “reveals a relativist narrative”, and observes that “national pride is largely lacking from the journal”.⁷⁵⁰ In contrast to Markham’s practical, imperially-oriented perspective, “the idiosyncratic nature of Manning’s approach offers a rich insight into Romantic approaches to the Orient”.⁷⁵¹ Similarly, Watters considered Manning’s account of

⁷⁴⁵ RAS TM 9/5.

⁷⁴⁶ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 12.

⁷⁴⁷ Manning, “Journey”, 248.

⁷⁴⁸ Markham, “Introduction”, lxxx.

⁷⁴⁹ James, “Thomas Manning”, 27.

⁷⁵⁰ James, “Thomas Manning”, 25.

⁷⁵¹ James, “Thomas Manning”, 27.

Lhasa to be “a lively, personal, Romantic view [...] often touched with the washes of introspection, like the writing of his better-known friends”.⁷⁵²

Considering Manning’s familiarity with the work of his friends and contemporaries, his account’s “Romantic sensibility” should be no surprise. But the re-discovered letters from Manning to his father, especially those describing his travels in the Lakes and the Rhine, provide vital new context informing our view of his Tibetan narrative as a Romantic text. The introspective, tactile style is instantly familiar:

We are lodged in a loft, open shed-like, but a snuggish place to sleep in. Snow-fall in sight. Charming weather. Strange sensation coming along: warm and comfortable. Horse walking in a lane between two stone walls. The snow! Where am I? How can I be come here? Not a soul to speak to. I wept almost through excess of sensation, not from grief.⁷⁵³

Much to Markham’s frustration, Manning’s account, originally composed for his family, did not present Tibet in terms to satisfy a cartographer or surveyor. What Markham dismissed as “chaff”⁷⁵⁴ – the psychological effects of the journey, and the imaginative associations it inspired – was in fact the heart of the account. Thus, Manning evinced a curious tendency, when alighting upon a potentially significant scene, to make apparently trivial (but often humorous) digressions. Arriving at a massive castle in the heart of Tibet, overseen by a female magistrate with a reputation as a capricious tyrant, Manning describes neither the castle nor the magistrate. Instead, he dilates at length upon the flocks of ravens frolicking about the castle and adjoining lake, who emit a peculiar, “metallic” sound, “like the pronunciation of the word *poing*, or *scroong*, with the lips protruded, and with a certain musical accent.”⁷⁵⁵ This, indeed, was hardly the sort of information to inform geopolitical strategy. Similarly, when

⁷⁵² Watters, “Thomas Manning”, 15.

⁷⁵³ Manning, “Journey”, 216.

⁷⁵⁴ Markham, “Introduction”, lxxx.

⁷⁵⁵ Manning, “Journey”, 248-249.

Manning arrived in Lhasa with his Chinese assistant, he was the first Englishman to do so. But the sense of occasion appeared lost on him: “Our first care was to provide ourselves with proper hats”.⁷⁵⁶ Watters notes of Manning’s account, “the minute style of an English Romantic had at last returned”.⁷⁵⁷ Manning’s understated use of humour may also have been a deliberate device to aid the imaginative transportation of his readers.

Cultural and Aesthetic Observations on Tibet

When Manning arrived in India in early 1810, delay upon delay intruded upon his plans. His early travels in Bhutan conformed to this pattern. He arrived in Wharai (“that d[amne]d place”)⁷⁵⁸ around 21 September, and was seemingly detained for some time, before reaching Paro on 3 October. Here he was lodged in a guardhouse with no window for a further two weeks, leaving on 16 October. While his published narrative reveals little about what passed during this month, his notes suggest he considered himself a “prisoner”, that he suffered from sickness, and that he was coerced into parting with some valuable cloth for significantly less than it was worth.⁷⁵⁹ Crossing Bhutan, Manning and Zhao reached the frontier of Qing territories at “Pari-jong” (Pagri, or Palizhen, in the Chumbi valley) on 21 October 1811, remaining until 5 November. Here, Manning was able to use his medical training to administer some small treatments to Chinese soldiers, and his success meant he received special permission which expedited his journey onward to Lhasa in the company of a General and his troops.⁷⁶⁰ It was at this time that a convivial conversation with a Chinese magistrate, hinting at the possibility of commercial relations with Britain through Bhutan, prompted

⁷⁵⁶ Manning, “Journey”, 258.

⁷⁵⁷ Watters, “Thomas Manning”, 13.

⁷⁵⁸ RAS TM 10, [3].

⁷⁵⁹ RAS TM 10, [3].

⁷⁶⁰ Manning, “Journey”, 218. Manning identifies the General as a Sichuan native, “and by the mother’s side a Tatar” (230) – presumably therefore of Manchu heritage.

Manning's well-known lament at the failure of the East India Company to support his trip:

What use are their embassies when their ambassador cannot speak to a soul, and can only make ordinary phrases pass through a stupid interpreter? No *finesse*, no *tournure*, no compliments. Fools, fools, fools to neglect an opportunity they may never have again!⁷⁶¹

Compared to China, Manning considered Tibet as somewhat barbarous. Nevertheless, just as when travelling in Wales or France, Manning was curious about the ways of the people he encountered, and how they were influenced by their environment and living conditions. He took notice of regional manners, commenting whenever officials behaved in a "civil" manner towards him, and contrasted the politeness of the Chinese – even common soldiers – with the local "barbarians".⁷⁶² The soldiers had the polite manners of tradesmen, but Manning observed that it made sense they would "be among the best of the Chinese soldiers": for they were tasked with guarding the border, and had occasional skirmishes with the Nepalese and Bhutanese.⁷⁶³

Manning was sensitive to evidence of Chinese customs and practices in Tibet. Reaching the town of Gyantse, he noted the familiar look of the Chinese residences, and was "struck with the appearance of everything being perfectly Chinese", transplanted, as it were, into the middle of Tibet.⁷⁶⁴ The Chinese, in contrast to the Tibetans, "are really civilized, and do not live like cattle"; and in the homes of Chinese "you are sure of urbanity and cleanliness at least".⁷⁶⁵ Most of the people with whom he had friendly intercourse were Chinese, and it was not until he had travelled most of the way to Lhasa that Manning met any Tibetans "that I at all wished to be acquainted with".⁷⁶⁶ But his inclination towards cleanliness and good manners did not mean he was

⁷⁶¹ Manning, "Journey", 218.

⁷⁶² Manning, "Journey", 217.

⁷⁶³ Manning, "Journey", 241, n1.

⁷⁶⁴ Manning, "Journey", 227.

⁷⁶⁵ Manning, "Journey", 242.

⁷⁶⁶ Manning, "Journey", 247.

blind to injustice, and Manning alludes more than once to tensions between the Tibetan people, Qing authorities, and Han Chinese residents. These were most obvious in his account of a political scandal that unfolded before his arrival, involving the murder of a Tibetan lama and the lynching of a Chinese shopkeeper.⁷⁶⁷ Whereas he deduced that Chinese soldiers in Tibet were of a good calibre, Manning speculated that almost all the Manchu officials posted to this undesirable station would have been guilty of some misdemeanour elsewhere. “Lhasa being a miserable place to live in, for a great mandarin to be sent there is considered a sort of banishment, and there seldom come any except culprits.”⁷⁶⁸ This meant Tibet was badly managed, and the affections of the Tibetans were alienated from the Chinese Empire. “It is very bad policy thus perpetually to send men of bad character to govern Tibet”.⁷⁶⁹

Manning saw a parallel between the overbearing attitude of the Chinese in Tibet, and the conduct of his countrymen in India: “The Chinese lord it here like the English in India. The Tibetans stand before them.”⁷⁷⁰ Manning was sensitive to the injustices committed by his own country, but also saw that the overweening confidence that accompanied imperial domination was not uniquely European. Manning claimed to detect something of this attitude in his own servant. As a Han Chinese in Tibet, Zhao began “to think himself a man of consequence”, affecting a prideful and haughty demeanour towards the Tibetans.⁷⁷¹ Manning, keen as he was to propitiate anyone in a position of influence, bowed with alacrity before any dignitaries, Chinese and Tibetan; but Zhao disliked it when Manning knelt before Tibetan officials, as he “wished this mark of respect to be paid only to Chinamen”.⁷⁷² Liu Shengqi has observed that Zhao “was thoroughly disgusted with Manning’s obsequiousness towards Tibetan officials,

⁷⁶⁷ Manning, “Journey”, 271-273.

⁷⁶⁸ Manning, “Journey”, 273.

⁷⁶⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 274.

⁷⁷⁰ Manning, “Journey”, 217.

⁷⁷¹ Manning, “Journey”, 231.

⁷⁷² Manning, “Journey”, 259.

which behaviour he deemed dishonourable for him as a Han Chinese.”⁷⁷³ Zhao’s Chinese identity and tendencies towards ethnic chauvinism were complicated by his Catholic faith, which later proved to be an additional obstacle to maintaining the façade that Manning was a Buddhist devotee.

Manning identified another parallel between the English and Chinese in their insistence on maintaining their own form of dress when overseas – although at least the Chinese costume was somewhat adaptable.⁷⁷⁴ He was struck by the efficacy of Chinese and Tibetan cold-weather clothing, which was akin to “a moving bed”; and this occasioned a lengthy discursion to his narrative whereby Manning explained why Chinese clothing was better adapted to a variety of climates, with European costume only having the advantage when “taking exercise in moderate weather or in cold weather”. He also criticised the conceit of Europeans who were unwilling to vary their dress in different parts of the world.⁷⁷⁵ Costume was therefore a marker of difference, but it also provided opportunities for crossing boundaries. Enjoying a joke with some Chinese soldiers, Manning offered one his Cochinchinese bamboo hat as a gift. It being unthinkable for a Chinese man to wear the garment, Manning urged him not to wear it out through overuse. The joke “was so good that, with slight variations, it bore repeating three or four times”.⁷⁷⁶ The effectiveness of such intercultural jokes relies upon an implicit, but unuttered, mutual awareness, and as Felicity James notes, they have a special power “to unsettle the boundaries between self and other, English traveller and Chinese soldier”.⁷⁷⁷

It was not just Chinese costume that Manning admired: Chinese music, “though rather meagre to a European”, was not without its beauties. It had a “peculiar expression, of which our musical notation, which we vainly imagine so perfect, conveys

⁷⁷³ Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”, 56.

⁷⁷⁴ Manning, “Journey”, 228.

⁷⁷⁵ Manning, “Journey”, 228-229.

⁷⁷⁶ Manning, “Journey”, 241.

⁷⁷⁷ James, “Thomas Manning”, 28.

no idea whatever.”⁷⁷⁸ Manning, indeed, had a taste for cultural diversity, and he was alive to cultural difference in Tibet. In the manner of eighteenth-century rationalism, he generally related different styles of behaviour to functional aspects of the natural environment, rather than seeing it as a manifestation of some hidden essence. But neither was he averse to generalization. He was irritated that Zhao, despite “Being younger and, like all Asiatics, able to stoop and crouch without pain or difficulty”, would not carry out various small offices for him.⁷⁷⁹ In contrast, a servant he recruited at Gyantse saved Manning a deal of trouble by drying and folding his linen, and he observed the “Chinese are all expert at little domestic offices”, attributing this to their being taught such things during early childhood.⁷⁸⁰

Many of the Chinese people Manning encountered in Tibet were Muslims from Sichuan, and he was chagrined to discover widespread ignorance about the ways of the religion they professed (including by one of his own servants).⁷⁸¹ At the same time, he was moved by the rampant poverty, with parts of the country having been afflicted by bad harvests for several years, compounded by “a cruel, killing, latter frost, with hail, [which] desolated their fields, and blighted a great portion of their corn”.⁷⁸² Manning remarked on the poverty and grime prevailing across most of the scattered villages, where he stayed in poorly ventilated houses filled with smoke which eventually affected his breathing and stained his face and hands.⁷⁸³ He also found the topography strange and unappealing: winding his way through the mountains and their few patches of brown grass, he saw few trees or shrubs. “A pot of young growing onions at one corner of the room was the greenest thing I had seen for a long time.”⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁷⁸ Manning, “Journey”, 237.

⁷⁷⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 217.

⁷⁸⁰ Manning, “Journey”, 235.

⁷⁸¹ Manning, “Journey”, 242, n2.

⁷⁸² Manning, “Journey”, 247.

⁷⁸³ Manning, “Journey”, 228.

⁷⁸⁴ Manning, “Journey”, 224.

With few exceptions, the journey to Lhasa did not reward him in its views or other pleasures:

We continued along the barren valley, seeing no diversity, but the ever-varying shapes of the still more barren mountains, whose colour, where it was not actually sand, slate, or granite, was a melancholy pale mouldy green, produced no doubt by the scaly covering of dried stems and withered herbage [...]⁷⁸⁵

Manning's aesthetic vocabulary, derived from a Romantic register, is applied to an unfamiliar landscape; and the linguistic style enlivens a vista that, to a British observer, would likely prove somewhat dreary. But some sights did afford pleasure. These included Lake Palti at sunset, and the valley of Paro, which Manning describes in terms inviting comparison to the Swiss Alps:

The living crystal stream purely flowing and sparkling through the valley as far as the eye could reach; the cornfields and pasturages; the sunbeams checked by the branches of trees; the houses, here collected into villages, there scattered into single farms; the wooded hills, with cattle grazing on their brows; the bold spires and cliffs; blue tops of distant mountains [...] this was a charming sight after the dreary forests and mountains we had passed enveloped in mist and rain.⁷⁸⁶

The picturesque charm was no doubt enhanced by the impression of cornfields, pasturages, and grazing cattle which, at least from a distance, suggest pleasing abundance and material comforts which the territories through which Manning had passed sorely lacked. The theme continued as they approached Lhasa, which stood in the most impressive part of the country. Here, a "lively stream" flowed through the wide valley, and on the farther side was "a large white town, pleasantly situated, and affording an agreeable prospect." Unlike other parts of the country, "The place was not destitute of trees nor of arable land, and an air of gaiety was spread over the whole, and,

⁷⁸⁵ Manning, "Journey", 224.

⁷⁸⁶ Manning, "Journey", 245.

I thought, on the faces of the people.”⁷⁸⁷ Almost a century later, this part of the country had the same impression on the members of the Younghusband Expedition, who noted that it was “a valley far lusher than anything they had looked for in Tibet”, equivalent to crossing the desert and finding Arcadia.⁷⁸⁸

First Englishman in Lhasa

Manning described the topography of the approach to Lhasa much as he would pleasant scenes in England or Europe. Because it too lay above marshland, the palace of the Dalai Lama “brought to my mind the Pope, Rome, and what I had read of the Pontine Marshes”.⁷⁸⁹ The proliferation of monks and beggars in the vicinity of Lhasa also reminded Manning of what he had read of Rome. But there was deeper significance to the association, and Rome, with its ancient traditions, shares something profound with Lhasa, and the roots of Tibetan religion. Nevertheless, Manning did not idealize Lhasa, and up-close he was put off by its “begrimed” appearance, and the profusion of starving, dying, and dead dogs in its streets, some gnawing bits of hide or emitting a “charnel-house smell”.

In short, everything seems mean and gloomy, and excites the idea of something unreal. Even the mirth and laughter of the inhabitants I thought dreamy and ghostly. The dreariness no doubt was in my mind, but I never could get rid of the idea; it strengthened upon me afterwards.⁷⁹⁰

The Younghusband Expedition found Lhasa in similar condition:

It was in fact an insanitary slum. In the pitted streets pools of rainwater and piles of refuse disrupted the march-discipline of the Fusiliers. The houses were mean and filthy, the stench pervasive. Pigs and ravens competed for nameless delicacies in open sewers. There

⁷⁸⁷ Manning, “Journey”, 251.

⁷⁸⁸ Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa*, 223.

⁷⁸⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 255.

⁷⁹⁰ Manning, “Journey”, 256-257.

were no riders to add to Manning's verdict, delivered ninety-odd years earlier.⁷⁹¹

On the morning of 17 December 1811, Manning paid his first visit to the young Dalai Lama, Lungtok Gyatso (1805-1815). Few of the gifts he hoped to present had survived the journey to Lhasa, and a bottle of lavender water was broken in the palace itself.⁷⁹² This interview was the highlight of Manning's stay in Lhasa, and it had a peculiar effect on him, perhaps owing to the ritual nature of the encounter, and the child Lama's personal charm. Manning appears to have shaved his head in anticipation of the meeting, presenting it to the Lama "to lay his hands upon". Manning found that "The Lama's beautiful and interesting face and manner engrossed almost all my attention":

He was at that time about seven years old: had the simple and unaffected manners of a well-educated princely child. His face was, I thought, poetically and affectingly beautiful. He was of a gay and cheerful disposition; his beautiful mouth perpetually unbending into a graceful smile, which illuminated his whole countenance.⁷⁹³

Manning surmised that the boy found his own "grim beard and spectacles" somewhat amusing. They had a conversation by way of double translation, the Lama speaking in Tibetan to his Chinese interpreter, who relayed in Chinese to Zhao, who spoke to Manning in Latin. Afterwards, Manning found that he was "extremely affected by this interview with the Lama. I could have wept through strangeness of sensation."⁷⁹⁴ When he got back to his room, Manning made an entry in his notebook in large letters:

This day I saluted the Grand Lama!! Beautiful youth. Face poetically affecting; could have wept. Very happy to have seen him and his blessed smile. Hope often to see him again.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹¹ Fleming, *Bayonets to Lhasa*, 233.

⁷⁹² Manning, "Journey", 265.

⁷⁹³ Manning, "Journey", 265.

⁷⁹⁴ Manning, "Journey", 266.

⁷⁹⁵ RAS TM 9/2.

Manning made a sketch of the child, which he considered “beautiful”, but a poor likeness. Attempting another, Manning considered it less handsome, “yet there was in some respects a likeness in it which the other wanted.”⁷⁹⁶ As McMillin points out, it was not the Lama’s “position as ‘god-king’ that impresses Manning; instead, he emphasizes the young lama’s inspiring human qualities – his graciousness, his beauty, his smile”.⁷⁹⁷ Nevertheless, the spirit of religion that infused the interview, and the humble act of presenting his bald scalp to the small child, could not but have affected Manning.

Before reaching Lhasa, Manning was dismayed to learn that the chief mandarin in residence was Yangcun, a Manchu official dismissed from his official responsibilities in Canton after failing to resolve the stand-off with the British over Macao in 1808. Manning had translated documents for the Company during that dispute, and he anticipated trouble, considering Yangcun “a man of a particular suspicious temper”.⁷⁹⁸ He feared “lest the Tatar mandarin should recollect my name, or remember having heard of an Englishman of my description, strangely residing at Canton, and suspected of wanting to get into the country”.⁷⁹⁹ Manning claimed that, once in Lhasa, he felt inclined “to speak the whole truth from the first”, proclaiming that he was an Englishman, “for I had been guilty of no offence”.⁸⁰⁰ Such a rash course of action would certainly have been unwise, and he was dissuaded by Zhao, who better understood the likely repercussions and had his own reasons for wanting to avoid trouble. Yangcun did not in fact recognize Manning (“the old dog was purblind”)⁸⁰¹ but he had had enough dealings with Westerners to see through Manning’s pretense of being a Buddhist pilgrim.

⁷⁹⁶ Manning, “Journey”, 267. For the sketches, RAS TM 9/3.

⁷⁹⁷ McMillin, *English in Tibet*, 63.

⁷⁹⁸ Manning, “Journey”, 238.

⁷⁹⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 258.

⁸⁰⁰ Manning, “Journey”, 262.

⁸⁰¹ Manning, “Journey”, 259.

Manning blundered badly in his reluctance to offer homage at Jokhang, the most revered temple in Lhasa where any Buddhist pilgrim would naturally pay respects.⁸⁰² Zhao repeatedly entreated him to do this – both Chinese and Tibetan officials wanted to know whether Manning had paid the proper respects – but he demurred, stating that while he was desirous of visiting the temples, he had nobody to accompany him and explain what to do. Zhao’s religious scruples would not allow him to assist, but he was anxious that Manning, who was restricted by no such considerations, should alleviate suspicions that he was a missionary. But Manning’s stubborn nature meant he became even more determined not to visit the temples, ensuring Zhao’s entreaties had the “contrary effect” to those intended.⁸⁰³ When Manning eventually relented, he took with him his Tibetan servant, a Muslim who was “utterly ignorant even of his own religion”: irritated by his servant’s inability to explain the rituals, Manning lost his temper in the presence of the images of the saints.⁸⁰⁴ This was truly profane behaviour, and Manning’s “irreverent manner” astonished the other worshippers, gathered in their hundreds. Proceeding to visit other, Chinese temples indiscriminately, Manning – still purporting to be a holy man from Central Asia – caused further perplexity by failing to make any offerings or perform appropriate ceremonies.⁸⁰⁵ It must also have seemed odd that Manning asked the Dalai Lama for books regarding the local religion and its history, subjects with which one in his assumed position should have been familiar.⁸⁰⁶

The Prisoner of Lhasa

In December, around the time of Manning’s first meeting with the Dalai Lama, Yangcun reported to the Imperial Court that Manning was probably a Catholic missionary. Manning knew that Yangcun “detested the Europeans”, who he blamed for

⁸⁰² Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”, 55.

⁸⁰³ Manning, “Journey”, 289.

⁸⁰⁴ Manning, “Journey”, 290.

⁸⁰⁵ Manning, “Journey”, 290.

⁸⁰⁶ Manning, “Journey”, 266.

his previous misfortunes, and that he “frequently betrayed his apprehensions of me”; both Manning and Zhao were visited in their rooms by “spies”.⁸⁰⁷ Zhao was interviewed and made to confirm his responses before they were forwarded to the Emperor – a turn of events which, unsurprisingly, made him “very uneasy”.⁸⁰⁸ Zhao was worried that he would be executed, while Manning believed that Yangcun “would have seen me executed with the greatest pleasure”, and heard rumors that he was to be tortured.⁸⁰⁹ At one point, he recorded in his diary, “Strange fever & cough. I think I am poisoned.”⁸¹⁰ Manning thought it would be strange to be executed, having ventured to Lhasa by permission (though under false pretenses) and having since committed no crimes: but, ruminating on the hostility of Yangcun, anything seemed possible.

Even in Canton, where Manning was perfectly safe, the “despotic pomp” of Chinese mandarins had “almost turned me sick”, and he criticized the “absolute power” wielded by government officials in China and other parts of Asia, contrasting this with the English legal system.⁸¹¹ Manning’s feverish imaginings of “florid, high-cheeked, busy, grinning, dull-hearted men”⁸¹² cater to racial stereotypes that became common later in the nineteenth century. But the idea that an Englishman had rights which the government was bound to respect was an important part of his national identity, and it was an idea which, by helping to shape the course of the American Revolution, had recently invested English liberalism with renewed vigor. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 was the pivotal event which Manning credited with enshrining liberty as a sacred value in English politics, and henceforth it was a country where “We may act & speak each as he thinks fit, so long as he invades not the rights of others, & if we transgress, we are not condemned unheard.”⁸¹³ Manning’s contrasting description of the special

⁸⁰⁷ Manning, “Journey”, 275.

⁸⁰⁸ Manning, “Journey”, 276, 278.

⁸⁰⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 276, 278.

⁸¹⁰ RAS TM 9/3.

⁸¹¹ Manning, “Journey”, 279.

⁸¹² Manning, “Journey”, 279.

⁸¹³ RAS TM 9/1/27.

suffering of a helpless man who is aware of his own innocence, recalls Adam Smith's observation that an innocent man bears the additional pain of being "tormented by his own indignation at the injustice which has been done to him."⁸¹⁴ Meanwhile, Manning's psychological description of "this friendlessness, this nothingness of the prisoner" who finds himself at the mercy of "evil-minded men", anticipates Prince Myshkin's famous reflections on capital punishment in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* (1869).⁸¹⁵

Manning had entertained hopes that, even if he were arrested, he would be conveyed through Sichuan and the interior of China before returning to England.⁸¹⁶ But two months after Yangcun reported his suspicions, a reply arrived from the Jiaqing Emperor that Manning was to be expelled from Tibet in the Spring, as soon as the snows melted, returning by the way he came.⁸¹⁷ Manning eventually left Lhasa on 9 April 1812, having said goodbye to the Dalai Lama on 6 April "with a sorrowful heart."⁸¹⁸ He reached Cooch Behar in India on 10 June. While Manning, an illegal alien, was merely deported, Zhao Jinxiu was arrested and interrogated for some time. Considering that he assisted Manning on the way to Lhasa and during his residence there – even acting as a co-conspirator – it is perhaps no surprise he was treated so severely. Manning was aware that it was an offence for Zhao to leave China for a foreign kingdom, but he believed it could be treated more or less seriously depending on the inclinations of the mandarins.⁸¹⁹ Manning reported that Zhao bribed a treasurer, which perhaps ensured he was not executed,⁸²⁰ while Lawrence Wong explains that Zhao, despite being a Roman Catholic, convinced his interrogators that Manning's mission had nothing to do with Christianity; and the fact he knew Latin was omitted from the report on his case. In the end, Zhao was held to account "not because of any unlawful activities in Lhasa, but for

⁸¹⁴ Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 120.

⁸¹⁵ Dostoyevsky, *The Idiot*, 27.

⁸¹⁶ Manning, "Journey", 277.

⁸¹⁷ See Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 173-174; Liu, "Thomas Manning's Journey to Lhasa", 53-55.

⁸¹⁸ Manning, "Journey", 294.

⁸¹⁹ Manning, "Journey", 276.

⁸²⁰ Manning, "Journey", 293.

his leaving China without permission and undertaking employment with a foreigner.”⁸²¹ Zhao was banished to Ili, deep in North-West Xinjiang, a grim fate for an educated and well-travelled Chinese Catholic who had lived in Sichuan, Peking, Canton, and Calcutta before visiting Lhasa with Manning. Liu Shengqi’s account of Zhao’s role in Manning’s expedition concludes poignantly: “That ends our discussion of Zhao, the self-respecting interpreter of Manning, punished for an offence which he did not seem to have fully understood.”⁸²²

Tibetan Legacy

Manning’s Tibetan narrative is an unusual and often eccentric text. Nevertheless, attempts have been made to fit the narrative within wider genres of European travel writing in Tibet. For example, Peter Bishop suggests:

It would be easy to isolate Manning and consider his travel diary as an oddity, an aberration; but in reality his text belongs firmly within a tradition of Himalayan travellers and travel writing which presents the ‘inside story’ of Tibet. This tradition is concerned less with big views, or with scientific and geographic exactitude, than with the journey itself as an experience, a series of daily events.⁸²³

Bishop compares this to, among others, the anthropologist Fosco Maraini (1912-2004) who published detailed accounts of his travels in Tibet. But Manning made no claims whatsoever about having the “inside story” on Tibet and did not attempt to capitalize publicly on his travels. His narrative can only be included in this “tradition” if it is expanded to incorporate all those Europeans who visited Tibet and made any record of “daily events” or personal “experience”; at which point the “tradition” becomes indistinguishable from that of Europeans who visited Tibet. Bishop nevertheless praises

⁸²¹ Wong, “‘We Are as Babies Under Nurses’”, 109.

⁸²² Liu, “Thomas Manning’s Journey to Lhasa”, 56.

⁸²³ Bishop, *Myth of Shangri-La*, 78.

the “poignant dignity”⁸²⁴ of Manning’s narrative and concludes that, in his open-minded attitude towards the Tibetan environment, he was the “last representative of a bygone age”,⁸²⁵ sharing the same basic attitude as his predecessor George Bogle.

A more critical view of Manning’s account has been put forward by Q.S. Tong, who adopts an explicitly Saidian approach: “the British empire played a singular role in the constituting of an official structure of knowledge about Tibet, of what Edward Said has called a ‘corporate institution.’”⁸²⁶ To understand this historical process of “Orientalist romanticization”, Tong examines Manning’s narrative as one of several “textual moments that document its genealogical mutations and conceptual changes.”⁸²⁷ Tong claims that Manning “had served in British India”, which gives a potentially misleading impression of his relationship to British imperial power.⁸²⁸ But his more serious indictment begins as follows:

Manning’s trip to Lhasa and his description of the Dalai Lama would no doubt lend support to the idealization and mythologization of Tibet, which, though tenuous and intermittent in formulation, had played a significant part in the long tradition of conjectural history of the world that began to develop in the eighteenth century.⁸²⁹

Tong does not show how Manning’s “description of the Dalai Lama” did in fact contribute “to the idealization and mythologization of Tibet”. Instead, because they each deal with Tibet, Manning’s account is associated with Immanuel Kant’s speculations about Tibet’s place in the “conjectural history of the world”, as well as the occult theosophy of Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891), for whom Tibet served as “a world-centre of spirituality and homeland of unalienated humanity”.⁸³⁰ Neither

⁸²⁴ Bishop, *Myth of Shangri-La*, 80.

⁸²⁵ Bishop, *Myth of Shangri-La*, 95.

⁸²⁶ Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 168.

⁸²⁷ Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 168.

⁸²⁸ Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 178.

⁸²⁹ Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 178.

⁸³⁰ Tong, ““Lost Horizon””, 180.

Blavatsky nor anyone else needed Manning's help to "idealize and mythologize" Tibet, and Tong provides no evidence that Manning's narrative had any influence upon this tradition.

Tong also suggests it is "Worth noting [...] the link between the spiritualization of Tibet and the German National Socialist or Nazi movement".⁸³¹ This brings the discussion, by way of Kant and Blavatsky, to the 1939 Tibetan expedition of ornithologist Ernst Schäfer (1910-1992), a member of the Nazi SS. Schäfer's expedition received support from Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), who was interested in Tibet from the point of view of Nazi cosmology and racial theories.⁸³² According to Tong, "This connection between Tibet and the Aryans serves as a grim reminder of the dangerous potentialities of mythologizing Tibet".⁸³³ This seems to imply that Manning's heartfelt account of meeting the child Dalai Lama contained "dangerous potential" later realized in German National Socialism. Even if we accept the debatable premise that Manning "mythologized" Tibet, it is – to say the least – uncharitable to discuss his innocent reflections on meeting the holy child in the same vein as the lurid fantasies of some of the twentieth century's worst monsters. Such an approach vitiates historical sympathy and should warn of the dangers that await if we read every human interaction in the worst possible light.

Thoughts of Home: Interlude, 1812-1816

His trip was an independent enterprise, and Manning seems not to have left a full account with the East India Company. Matthew Mosca suggests he "begrudged them a full account of his travels" because he received no official support.⁸³⁴ Markham records that Manning wrote from Lhasa "a long and interesting account of his expedition to Dr

⁸³¹ Tong, "Lost Horizon", 181.

⁸³² Halper and Halper, *Tibet*, 25.

⁸³³ Tong, "Lost Horizon", 181.

⁸³⁴ Mosca, *From Frontier Policy*, 172.

Marshman, which unfortunately does not appear to have been preserved”.⁸³⁵ Barrett notes a reference that Marshman spoiled some of Manning’s Chinese books by dropping them in water, suggesting this perhaps included the “great book” of Tibetan notes described in one of Manning’s footnotes.⁸³⁶ This “great book”, however, is probably the surviving diary where Manning documented his journey and which served as the basis for the published account.⁸³⁷

There are comparatively few details about Manning’s life during the four years between his return to India in June 1812, and his appointment to the Amherst Embassy in 1816. Manning had not quite exhausted every possible point of entry on the Chinese frontier – there was still Burma – but he had surely depleted his reserves of money and energy. He probably felt anxiety, if not outright guilt, about the fate of Zhao; and if Manning had not heard of the recent deaths of his father and John Leyden before he left Rangpur in 1811, then this also awaited him upon his return to British India, making extra cause for despondency. Before entering Bhutan, Manning had promised Tuthill that “if I cannot get in from Lassa, I shall return to England immediately”.⁸³⁸ But he did not, seeming instead to have returned slowly to Canton. That this took some time is revealed by the testimony of the missionary William Milne (1785-1822), who saw Manning in Malacca, recording in June 1813 that, “almost a China man”, he was talking of returning to England.⁸³⁹ There is also a receipt, dated 23 February 1813, placing Manning in Penang earlier that year.⁸⁴⁰ Manning was definitely back in Canton by December 1814, when he wrote to Zhao in exile, replying to a letter of March that year; and there is an English translation of a Chinese prescription, dated 22 September 1815, which was probably completed in Canton or Macao.⁸⁴¹

⁸³⁵ Markham, “Introduction”, clviii.

⁸³⁶ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 11.

⁸³⁷ RAS TM 9/2.

⁸³⁸ RAS TM 2/3/7.

⁸³⁹ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 111.

⁸⁴⁰ RAS TM 9/4.

⁸⁴¹ RAS TM 9/6/1.

From a psychological point of view, it would have been easier for Manning to return home if he knew definitively that there was no chance of ever getting into the interior of China. But a nagging hope remained that Britain would send another Embassy to Peking; and this was probably enough to keep him hanging on. Throughout this time, Manning's personal life, and relations with family and friends in England, remained in limbo. Manning's father, one of his chief correspondents, had died in 1810: and there are comparatively few letters from this period, when his plans, like his personal life, seem to be on hold. It would be no surprise if he suffered from poor health or depression for at least part of this time. Charles Lamb's letters to Manning, probably the most complete series of correspondence from these years, give some idea of Manning's intentions, even though Manning's letters to Lamb have not survived. Lamb's letters reveal the intellectual and psychic challenge posed by Manning's long absence in Asia, which even acted upon Lamb's apprehension of space and time. David Higgins explores the centrality of this issue in Lamb's letters, which "reflect obsessively on spatial and temporal dislocation and the breakdown of 'snug relations' with friends and family".⁸⁴² Writing on 2 January 1810, Lamb observed that "The distance you are at, cuts up tenses by the root,"⁸⁴³ and he later reflected: "This is Christmas-Day 1815 with us: what it may be with you I don't know, the 12th of June next year perhaps."⁸⁴⁴ Lamb proceeded with a long hoax suggesting that all Manning's friends were dead or changed, and that this occurred while Manning had:

consumed in voluntary exile that time which might have gladdened your friends – benefited your country; but reproaches are useless. Gather up the wretched reliques, my friend, as fast as you can, and come to your old home. I will rub my eyes and try to recognise you. We will shake our withered hands together, and talk of old things.⁸⁴⁵

⁸⁴² Higgins, *Romantic Englishness*, 133.

⁸⁴³ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 409.

⁸⁴⁴ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 480.

⁸⁴⁵ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 482.

The next day, Lamb sent another letter directed to St Helena, which suggests that Manning had already floated the possibility of returning home. Lamb claims that St Helena being but a “halfway house” to China, he can now write more sensibly:

Your friends, then, are not all dead or grown forgetful of you through old age, as that lying letter asserted, anticipating rather what must happen if you kept tarrying on for ever on the skirts of creation, as there seemed a danger of you doing – but they are all tolerably well and in full and perfect comprehension of what is meant by Manning’s coming home again.⁸⁴⁶

Amherst Embassy, 1816

Manning’s participation in the Amherst Embassy was “a timely capstone” on his time in Canton.⁸⁴⁷ Lawrence Wong corrects a statement of Morse, since repeated elsewhere, that Manning travelled to China from India to join the Amherst Embassy: Manning was in fact already in China at this time.⁸⁴⁸ Manning was recruited as a translator and paid two-thousand Chinese dollars. The handsome fee was double that paid to the other translators,⁸⁴⁹ which suggests an acknowledgement of Manning’s linguistic attainments and scholarly stature; but in fact his appointment was far from straightforward.⁸⁵⁰ A formal letter from the Company’s Canton Select Committee took it as read that Sir George Thomas Staunton, Francis Toone, and John Francis Davis would each join the Embassy; and it also recommended that Robert Morrison, Alexander Pearson, and Manning be added as well.⁸⁵¹ Amherst, however, cavilled at Manning’s presence, for two reasons. First, Manning’s flowing beard and Chinese costume contradicted the image Amherst wanted to project. Facial hair in this style was out of fashion among the English: Manning told Sir Joseph Banks that when he first arrived in Canton in 1807,

⁸⁴⁶ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 483.

⁸⁴⁷ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 154.

⁸⁴⁸ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 127, n28.

⁸⁴⁹ Stifler, “Language Students”, 65.

⁸⁵⁰ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 110-115.

⁸⁵¹ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 112.

it “gave a little umbrage”. He suspected it was “the damned Jewish appearance of it that, at the bottom, set them against it”.⁸⁵² Secondly, Amherst was concerned that Manning’s previous efforts to explore China may have “rendered himself obnoxious to the Chinese government”.⁸⁵³ Staunton intervened on Manning’s behalf, noting that while the Select Committee “regretted that Mr Manning’s peculiar views did not permit him to conform entirely to the English costume”, he had engaged to relinquish it; furthermore, he was a man who from “his general talents, as well as peculiar qualifications in respect to the Chinese language, was capable of being extremely useful on the present Embassy.”⁸⁵⁴ Staunton also claimed that “during the whole of his residence at Canton, as well before as after his visit to Lassa, not the slightest notice had ever been taken of him by the Chinese government, in any way whatever.”⁸⁵⁵ This was untrue, but Platt notes that “the Manchu amban in Lhasa, and the handlers of the Amherst mission, rendered Manning’s English name into Chinese using different characters”.⁸⁵⁶

Staunton also referred to the agreement made ten years earlier, informing Amherst that Manning was “originally permitted to proceed to China, with an express view to his availing himself of the first lawful opportunity that might offer itself, for visiting the interior of the country.”⁸⁵⁷ Amherst was not personally bound by this agreement, nor by any of the other grounds which Staunton advanced for Manning’s inclusion; but he relented under the weight of Staunton’s reassurance. After all, the matter was not of the first importance, and Amherst was generally content to defer to Staunton’s expertise. The success of Staunton’s campaign for Manning is ironic

⁸⁵² NHM DTC 17, 42-43.

⁸⁵³ Staunton, *Notes of Proceedings*, 9.

⁸⁵⁴ Staunton, *Notes of Proceedings*, 9.

⁸⁵⁵ Staunton, *Notes of Proceedings*, 9.

⁸⁵⁶ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 155.

⁸⁵⁷ Staunton, *Notes of Proceedings*, 10.

considering that the Emperor personally considered Staunton himself to be a cunning troublemaker and all-round objectionable figure.⁸⁵⁸

The presence of so many interpreters spoke to the advances that a handful of British people had made in Chinese studies since the Macartney Embassy a generation earlier; but it is doubtful whether so many interpreters were really necessary. Manning's generous remuneration implied seniority, but there was very little for him to do, and the bulk of the translation was performed by Robert Morrison.⁸⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the Embassy was at least an opportunity to see more of China's interior, even if the brevity of their stay in Peking limited Manning's opportunities for observation. Indeed, there are no records of Manning's reflections during the Embassy. None of the extant archival sources pertain to this period, and there are relatively few notices about Manning in the accounts of other participants. We only know that he tried to purchase Chinese books and discuss Chinese medicine with some locals.⁸⁶⁰ It is impossible to disagree with the verdict of Lawrence Wong and Reginald Watters, that "the story of the Amherst Embassy, interesting though it is, is not Manning's story".⁸⁶¹

One important topic where Manning was invited to contribute, was the controversy surrounding whether Amherst should kowtow to the Emperor. This was a complicated question of protocol and etiquette upon which the entire success of the Embassy might, ultimately, come to depend. Aware that the Jiaqing Emperor believed Macartney to have performed the kowtow, Amherst was inclined to perform it himself. But Staunton, to whom Amherst appealed for advice, was reluctant to support this course of action, and referred to the other Canton "China experts" – Manning, Morrison, and the three Company men – for their views.⁸⁶² While the Company men endorsed Staunton's position, Manning held a more qualified view. As far as he was

⁸⁵⁸ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 152.

⁸⁵⁹ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 114.

⁸⁶⁰ Wong, "We Are as Babies Under Nurses", 114.

⁸⁶¹ Watters, "Thomas Manning", 17.

⁸⁶² Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 163.

concerned, Manning was more than happy to prostrate himself before officials and dignitaries if politeness dictated, or if it could help him secure their favour: “I prostrate myself without fear”.⁸⁶³ In Tibet, the alacrity with which Manning performed such prostrations annoyed his Chinese assistant, who felt that only Chinese officials should be honoured in such fashion.⁸⁶⁴ Manning was clearly not opposed to the kowtow as a point of principle. But it was one thing for Manning, as a private individual, to perform the kowtow. For Amherst, a representative of the British sovereign, it was quite another.

Platt observes that Manning “came to agree with Staunton that under the circumstances, with such uncivil pressure from their hosts, it might not be best for Amherst to give in”.⁸⁶⁵ The significance of the “uncivil pressure” speaks to Manning’s national pride, and harks back to his initial objections to the inferior position in which the British found themselves when he first arrived in Canton. A flexible attitude to the observance of ceremony and ritual could be rightly considered a mark of good manners: but it was another matter to be bullied into it. One of the limits of Manning’s open-mindedness was his self-image as an English patriot, and it was important to avoid any course of action which might dishonour the British character. Yet it is also worth noting that Staunton and Manning, who were opposed to performing the kowtow, were among the most pro-Chinese members of the Embassy. Amherst and his secretary, Henry Ellis, who did not share their admiration of Chinese culture, were more inclined to observe the ceremony; while British advocates of “free trade” thought that allowing the Embassy to fail on a matter of prestige was sheer madness, and further proof why the Company monopoly on trade with China must come to an end.⁸⁶⁶ Staunton and Manning both sought to engage sincerely with the cultural norms of Chinese diplomacy, and the trajectory of their careers suggests that they hoped these could be reconciled

⁸⁶³ RAS TM 9/5.

⁸⁶⁴ Manning, “Journey”, 259.

⁸⁶⁵ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 164. Ultimately, only Robert Morrison said he saw no harm in it.

⁸⁶⁶ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 172.

with English notions of sovereignty and independence in an egalitarian fashion. As such, their opposition to the kowtow was in its own way more respectful to the Chinese than the attitude of cynical expediency espoused by the new generation of “free traders” who argued for performing such ceremonies as empty gestures.

Summary and Implications

The Amherst Embassy left Peking on 29 August, taking several months to return overland to Canton, arriving on New Year’s Day 1817. After ten years in Asia, Manning took the opportunity to return to England, leaving China with the Amherst Embassy on the *Alceste* in January 1817. No records survive recording his thoughts at that time, or his reflections on leaving China. The journey back to England was eventful: the *Alceste* was shipwrecked in the Java Sea, and Manning probably lost some possessions and personal papers as a result. The replacement vessel, the *Caesar*, called at St Helena, where Manning enjoyed his interview with Napoleon (discussed in chapter two). This was a poignant note upon which to conclude his Asiatic travels, and a curious bookend to the fifteen-year China project that began when Manning arrived in Napoleonic France during the Peace of Amiens. Then, as a young man, he had described to his father how the sight of Napoleon reviewing the troops at the Tuileries Palace almost caused him to break down in tears.⁸⁶⁷ Now, middle-aged and with his health depleted by long years overseas, Manning was one of Europe’s foremost China experts; and, Barrett points out, the only person to meet both Napoleon and the Dalai Lama.⁸⁶⁸

When Manning first arrived in China, he envisaged a scholarly project that, by exploring the country’s interior and surveying the manners and customs of its people, could provide a better picture of Chinese civilization. Despite every effort, including trips to Cochinchina and Tibet, this goal remained largely unfulfilled – although his

⁸⁶⁷ RAS TM 1/1/12.

⁸⁶⁸ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 2.

participation in the Amherst Embassy must have been a consolation. The political reality in China meant that the empirical study he imagined was simply impossible; and in his core objective, Manning was largely frustrated. But his years in China were by no means a dead loss, and his studies and travels provided linguistic materials and other observations – for example, on Tibet and Lhasa – which might have been fashioned into literary works leading to minor fame and fortune. Indeed, Manning appears to have intended, upon his return, to produce at least one such work.⁸⁶⁹ But, even though he brought a Chinese assistant back with him specifically to help with his linguistic studies,⁸⁷⁰ no major work ever materialized.

One of only a handful of people in late-Georgian England to seriously attempt to study Chinese language and culture, Manning is an important case in the pre-history of British Sinology and the wider reception of China in the English intellectual tradition. This chapter has therefore tried to use new archival sources to understand how Manning encountered Asian cultures; and how his response to China related to his ideas and values, and the values of his own country as he understood them. The chapter has suggested strong elements of continuity in Manning's ways of thinking and seeing when he was in Europe, and when he was in Asia. In other words, Manning did not adopt a new "mode" or "style" when travelling in Asia: he approached Asian environments in the same ways as European ones, with the same combination of humanism, rationalism, scepticism, and Romanticism. He remained the same open-minded, pluralist English eccentric, who was prone to confusion, irritation, or anger when his experiences, or the treatment he received, conflicted with his values and self-image.

Manning did not attribute essential or unchanging characteristics to Chinese or Asian peoples but saw social behaviour as the product of culture. Neither was his

⁸⁶⁹ Eliza Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, I, 523.

⁸⁷⁰ RAS TM 6/1/2.

project intended to promote British interests above those of China or anywhere else. Because of the great weight Manning placed on the moral foundations of liberty and fairness – which became intertwined (rightly or wrongly) with his English identity – he became angry and frustrated when first encountering the restrictions imposed on Europeans in Canton. The same values combined with his personal psychology to cause fear and panic when he apprehended the possibility of arbitrary imprisonment, or worse, in Lhasa. Rather than manifesting an imperialist desire for domination, or “Orientalist” discourse, this merely reflects cultural difference. Moreover, while Manning occasionally lampooned or decried Qing bureaucrats, his attitude towards British rulers and institutions was far from uncritical. Some of his actions or statements during his time in Asia were intemperate and vituperative, and he was occasionally rude or ungrateful. His apparent celibacy notwithstanding, he was not a saint. But his flaws and failings are readily explicable with reference to everyday human weakness, and do not require recourse to outré academic theories.

Analysis of new sources therefore supports the earlier findings of other scholars who posit a tension between Manning’s Asiatic career and postcolonial models of Anglo-Chinese relations derived from Saidian assumptions. But Manning’s career in fact offers a rebuttal of that entire theoretical edifice. For the all-encompassing pretensions of Saidian Orientalism are not simply a major part of its appeal: they are intrinsic to its claims for validity. Robert Irwin observes, “If all that Said was arguing was that Orientalists have not always been objective, then the argument would be merely banal. Orientalists themselves would be the first to assent to such a proposition.”⁸⁷¹ The effectiveness of Said’s polemic derived partly from the astonishing boldness of its central claim: “Moreover, so authoritative a position did Orientalism have that I believe no one writing, thinking, or acting on the Orient could do so without

⁸⁷¹ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 288.

taking account of the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism.”⁸⁷² There was no escape from this “Orientalist” discourse, and Said took the argument even further when speaking about the nineteenth century: “It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.”⁸⁷³ In this way, “Said libelled generations of scholars who were for the most part good and honourable men.”⁸⁷⁴ Such an approach is not only unedifying from an academic point of view. It also poisons the public understanding of Britain’s historical encounter with Asia, which includes sufficient grounds for acrimony without inventing new ones.

Thomas Manning was an Englishman, a Romantic, and a patriot; but he was not a racist, an imperialist, or a prisoner of Orientalist discourse. His name can now be added to the already lengthy register of European scholars whose complex and contradictory responses to Asia prove the Saidian view of history to be empirically and morally unsustainable. It is high time that it was put to rest.

⁸⁷² Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

⁸⁷³ Said, *Orientalism*, 204.

⁸⁷⁴ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 295.

Chapter 4

The Mind of Thomas Manning

Introduction

The rediscovery of new archival material allows fresh insights into Thomas Manning's thoughts and ideas, and this chapter assesses the significance of those new sources for Manning's intellectual biography. Archival sources are especially important in Manning's case due to the paucity of his published work. His most substantial publication was a textbook on mathematics, published in two volumes in 1796 and 1798, which was followed over the ensuing decade by several minor articles. Twenty years after he first left for China, he published an article on Chinese jokes: the only work on Asia he published during his lifetime. Otherwise, he wrote several anonymous letters to newspapers on contemporary British politics and current affairs. In 1817, he sent a manuscript account of the tea trade in Bhutan and Tibet to the East India Company; and he composed a private narrative of his Tibetan journey for the benefit of his family, eventually published thirty-six years after his death by Sir Clements Markham. These literary offerings, though not without merit, are rather humble considering the vast expenditure of time, money, and energy on his wide-ranging studies. Manning's letters and research notes reveal more about what he knew, read, and believed than we can discern from these published sources; and they offer new information indicating his ideas about mathematics, sociology, and religion. They also reveal the extent to which Manning delved into linguistics, philology, philosophy, and literary and historical studies. This all helps us better understand what Manning hoped to achieve; and, perhaps, his surprising silence after returning to England.

It is important to emphasize that, in his public statements and published writings, Manning did not provide a full and candid account of his aims and objectives. His statements to British, French, and Chinese authorities were crafted in terms that Manning thought were likely to propitiate them – or at the very least, were unlikely to antagonize them. These statements helped set the public terms against which his activities in Asia would be judged. But they tell just part of the story and are here

considered alongside other sources. For example, Manning's rich and extremely dense notebooks, hitherto almost completely unstudied, reveal (among other things) the breadth of his reading and interest in topics ranging from philosophy, theology, and church history, to the development and theory of language. They also show the influence of a variety of Enlightenment authors, and literary figures from medieval and classical traditions. The disorderly and sometimes abstruse nature of these notebooks means an exhaustive analysis of their contents is beyond the scope of this project, and at least one subject demands further study. This is Manning's comparative study of Chinese and ancient Greek, which became a central preoccupation.

This chapter situates Manning's diverse interests in the wider intellectual context of late-Georgian England. It considers the genealogy of the philosophical assumptions underlying Manning's approach to the study of society, with reference to previous attempts by European thinkers to understand Asian religions and societies; and the new approaches to writing history pioneered in Britain and France, especially, in the eighteenth century. Chapter three showed that Manning was not trapped within an "Orientalist" discursive framework, and this chapter explores how his approach to the study of man and society was, in fact, constituted. It explores what Manning meant by saying that his Chinese studies were intended to contribute towards a "reform on the conduct of life", and that the study of the Chinese "mode of life [...] may elicit moral truths."⁸⁷⁵ It also explores the significance of his statement that the study of Chinese language might help elucidate the metaphysics of the human mind.⁸⁷⁶ Therefore, while revealing Manning's abiding intentions in studying Chinese language and culture, this chapter also explores the philosophical and religious underpinnings of a quintessential late-Enlightenment vision: one which certainly resists interpretation as an epiphenomenon of British political or economic interests in Asia.

⁸⁷⁵ RAS TM 1/1/52.

⁸⁷⁶ RAS TM 1/1/52.

Modern, industrialized economies are characterized by the hyper-specialized organization of knowledge, meaning the fields of study that concerned Manning are now separate academic disciplines. This separation resulted from a historical process, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, which helped accelerate cultural, scientific, and technological innovation. That process was still in its first stages in the early 1800s: and so Manning lived towards the end of an era when “it was still possible for a creative individual to make original discoveries in several different disciplines”.⁸⁷⁷ Thus, determined scholars could reasonably aspire to a level of mastery in multiple subjects, something which became much more difficult over the course of the nineteenth century, with the rapid accumulation of specialized knowledge and the accompanying proliferation of technical, subject-specific vocabularies, or jargon. One benefit of specialization is that the human race collectively knows more than before; but at the individual level, specialization “narrows the mind and makes it more and more difficult for individuals to see even their own discipline as a whole, let alone the really big picture of human knowledge.”⁸⁷⁸

Reflecting on the difference between “superior” and “inferior” intellects, Manning once observed that people of inferior capabilities sometimes appear “superior” in conversation, because “an inferior when he is going to speak, is not drawn back by the sense of the connexion of all things.”⁸⁷⁹ The true polymath was better placed to see connections between subjects – although the lower overall condition of knowledge meant he might also waste his time tracing connections that did not exist. For example, schemes for the creation of universal languages were a matter of recurring interest in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, demanding the integration of linguistic knowledge with mathematics, philosophy, and religion. Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), believing that religious unity was a prerequisite for general peace in a

⁸⁷⁷ Peter Burke, *Social History of Knowledge*, II, 161.

⁸⁷⁸ Peter Burke, *Social History of Knowledge*, II, 160.

⁸⁷⁹ RAS TM 9/2.

Europe ravaged by wars of religion, “postulated a philosophical algebra that would resolve theological disputes with mathematical certainty, by providing a ‘language [that] will make argument and calculation the same thing’”.⁸⁸⁰ Among Manning’s contemporaries, visionary artists like William Blake (1757-1827) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) pursued knowledge from various fields, and Coleridge hoped to incorporate new scientific discoveries within a unified vision of the world that was still rooted in Christianity. But by the time Manning returned from China in 1817, philosophically expansive schemes were apt to be measured against the new standards of utilitarianism, considered as over-ambitious, and received with scepticism, cynicism, or even ridicule. Thus, in Thomas Love Peacock’s satire *Headlong Hall* (1815), Coleridge was “Mr Panscope”, “who had run through all the whole circle of the sciences, and understood them all equally well”.⁸⁸¹

This chapter argues that Manning’s several scholarly pursuits, although superficially unrelated, contributed to an overarching intellectual vision, sharing an underlying preoccupation with ideas about reform and renewal. In his mathematical work, Manning appears to have been interested in updating British mathematics by the application of Continental methods – a process in which his friend and fellow Caiian, Robert Woodhouse (1773-1827), eventually played the pivotal role. In his work on the Chinese language, Manning was concerned with metaphysical questions which might have significant implications for the understanding of human mind: universal principles of language construction would demonstrate empirically that human nature was shared across cultures and religions. Finally, Manning’s interest in studying Chinese society stemmed from his interest in morality and desire for moral reform in Britain itself.

Two complementary themes were thus interwoven across Manning’s Chinese research. The first concerned manners and customs, seen not only as a topic of intrinsic

⁸⁸⁰ Porter, *Ideografia*, 17.

⁸⁸¹ Peter Burke, *Social History of Knowledge*, II, 162.

interest, but as a key to social morality. To that extent, Manning's approach can be understood as broadly anthropological, or sociological, notwithstanding that those disciplines had yet to formally emerge. Indeed, just as Manning's Chinese language studies precede the founding of European academic "Sinology", so was the term "sociology" not coined until later in the nineteenth century, by Auguste Comte (1798-1857); and Manning never articulated a systematic philosophy of life or social observation. Nevertheless, his reflections during travels in Wales and France, detailing the conditions and habits of rural people, indicate his appetite for proto-anthropological social observation; while his translation of "Chinese Jests", and accompanying commentary, speak to the interest in "social philosophy" later documented by his friend Samuel Ball (1781?-1874).⁸⁸²

The work on Chinese manners and customs which Manning projected may have been something like Edward William Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836). This was a slightly later attempt by another independent enthusiast "to make some of my countrymen better acquainted with the domiciliated classes of one of the most interesting nations of the world, by drawing a detailed picture of the inhabitants of the largest Arab city".⁸⁸³ To compile the information needed for his work, Lane lived in Old Cairo, dressing as a member of Egypt's ruling Turkish caste to ease his acceptance in local society.⁸⁸⁴ Lane cited as an influence Alexander Russell's *Natural History of Aleppo* (1756);⁸⁸⁵ and the same genre of eighteenth-century Enlightenment travel writing was important background for Manning's own project. His approach also showed the fingerprints of "philosophical history", or the manner of studying history and society pioneered earlier in the eighteenth century by Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Edward Gibbon (1737-1794). When Manning expounded to the

⁸⁸² RAS TM 15/1.

⁸⁸³ Lane, *Manners and Customs*, xvi.

⁸⁸⁴ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 164.

⁸⁸⁵ Lane, *Manners and Customs*, xvii.

English and French authorities the potential benefits that might arise from a study of Chinese manners and customs, he was giving voice to ideas whose basic assumptions were contained in the works of Gibbon and the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776).

The second factor motivating Manning's interest in China was equally rarefied but pertained to an altogether different field of study: philology. Although Manning did not disdain Chinese literature, or conversation with Chinese people, his language studies were not conducted solely to read, write, or speak the language. Manning's language studies were "critical", directed towards the comparative study of Chinese with ancient Greek, which he pursued, at least in part, with a view to its implications for philosophy and metaphysics. Manning rarely referred to this esoteric purpose, and the most thorough account is contained in a December 1810 letter to his father, sent from Rangpur, India, where Manning lingered waiting for a passport to proceed to Lhasa.⁸⁸⁶ The surviving version of this letter is Manning's rough draft, which makes liberal use of abbreviations, and the bad handwriting renders some words unclear. Yet it remains a crucial document shedding new light on his whole career. As such, a close examination of this letter, and its implications for Manning's intellectual biography, is a central task of this chapter.

The two factors driving Manning's study of Chinese – manners and morality on the one hand, and linguistic metaphysics on the other – still do not quite explain the "psychological obsession"⁸⁸⁷ which continually re-emerges in his letters and diaries. This chapter therefore explores Manning's religious and spiritual ideas, suggesting that China ultimately became central to his vision of mankind. This vision, in turn, helps explain his philological and sociological pursuits, which held out the promise of empirical evidence upon which certain universalist intuitions, derived from Christianity

⁸⁸⁶ RAS TM 1/1/52.

⁸⁸⁷ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 176.

and Neoplatonism, might firmly rest. The chapter must therefore briefly consider the religious background of eighteenth-century England. This approach is influenced by the work of Urs App, who revisited the role of religious belief in motivating the extensive study of Asian histories and religions in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.⁸⁸⁸ European conversations about religion and the good society have more to offer our understanding of Manning's Oriental studies than Britain's economic or territorial dealings in China and Asia.

Mathematics

Thomas Manning did not establish his scholarly reputation as an expert in Chinese, but as a mathematician. At first, the disciplines may seem to be completely unrelated, in intellectual terms and in their respective status in eighteenth-century England. Mathematics was perhaps the most respected field of academic study in the country, and its longevity as a scholarly discipline could hardly contrast more strongly with Chinese, insofar as that comprised a discipline at all. It is therefore understandable that most accounts of Manning's career gloss over his mathematical background, pausing only to acknowledge his attainments in this field as proof of his intellectual capabilities. However, a closer look at Manning's mathematical interests pays dividends, for two main reasons. First, Manning's approach to studying maths might be usefully compared to his approach to the study of Chinese. Both became lifelong passions, and he described occasional fits of obsessive study that absorbed him to the exclusion of all else. The similarity of his psychological response to such divergent fields is worth noting. Secondly, Manning's response to the state of mathematical knowledge in the 1790s reveals both his intellectual openness and his taste for cultural renewal. At that time, mathematical education in England lagged behind France; and Manning reached out to French mathematicians for help with his own research. National culture was

⁸⁸⁸ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, passim.

relevant even in a “pure” field like mathematics, and Manning displayed a readiness to benefit from foreign wisdom.

Studying at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, between 1790 and 1795, Manning’s gift for mathematics was such that he was expected to graduate second (“Second Wrangler”) in his year. His religious scruples, however, prevented this: he refused to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England, which was a condition of taking a degree. As this convention suggests, Cambridge remained a conservative environment – in its institutions, traditions and curriculum – but it was slowly changing. Tradition dictated that exam questions be provided orally, but in 1790, when Manning matriculated, they were printed for the first time: “Thus was born the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos, the grandparent of every university examination in the world.”⁸⁸⁹ In China, of course, Manning became familiar with an examination system that was more august and ancient even than this.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw extraordinary local advances in mathematical understanding across Europe, but these advances were unevenly integrated into the way maths was taught in different countries. In England, the field had been revolutionized by Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1726/7), who laid the foundations of classical mechanics in *Principia Mathematica* (1687) and developed modern calculus (discovered independently around the same time by Leibniz). Newtonian fluxions and mechanics remained the core of mathematical education at Cambridge until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when more powerful and abstract calculus from Continental mathematics was introduced. Robert Woodhouse was an important figure in this process: and Woodhouse was in fact the student who graduated first (“Senior Wrangler”) in Manning’s year at Caius. But even if aspects of mathematical education at Cambridge were outdated, it remained a prestigious field of study, and Euclidean geometry and Newtonian mechanics were considered central to the training

⁸⁸⁹ “A History of Mathematics in Cambridge”. University of Cambridge, Faculty of Mathematics.

of a liberal mind.⁸⁹⁰ Mathematics was also related to the study of philosophy, metaphysics and, thanks to classical influences, ancient Greek. Samuel Taylor Coleridge acknowledged the lofty status of mathematics in a letter to his brother, noting that it was “the quintessence of Truth”, and including a poem about Euclidean geometry.⁸⁹¹

After leaving university, Manning supported himself in Cambridge by working as a mathematical tutor. He clearly harboured some ambitions as a mathematician and, in 1796, published the first volume of *Introduction to Arithmetic and Algebra*. Its purpose was to demonstrate and explain basic arithmetic and algebraic propositions, so that a novice could understand them without recourse to other books or, crucially, personal instruction by a teacher. One publication suggested that Manning hoped his work might be adopted as a university textbook;⁸⁹² and it seems likely that, in addition to establishing his reputation, he would have hoped for commercial success. Manning acknowledged his debt to the publications of Francis Maseres (1731-1824), who in turn later praised it as “a learned work”.⁸⁹³ The first volume received a positive review in the *Monthly Review*, which identified Manning as an “ingenious author”, and regarded the book’s purpose as having been achieved, recommending it to those who sought to learn arithmetic and algebra without the aid of a tutor or other manuals.⁸⁹⁴ The second volume, published in 1798, received a more critical, though still favourable, review in the same publication, this time describing as “ingenious” Manning’s use of a technique derived from a recent work by the French-Italian mathematician Joseph-Louis Lagrange (1736-1813).⁸⁹⁵

⁸⁹⁰ Becher, “Woodhouse, Robert (1773–1827), Mathematician”.

⁸⁹¹ Glaz, “Poetry Inspired by Mathematics”, 172.

⁸⁹² *Literary Memoirs of Living Authors of Great Britain*, II, 21.

⁸⁹³ Manning, “Mr Manning’s Investigation of the Differential Series”, 52.

⁸⁹⁴ *Monthly Review*, Vol. 22, 1797, 210.

⁸⁹⁵ *Monthly Review*, Vol. 28, 1799, 444-446.

Despite favourable reviews, the textbook does not appear to have been a great success, probably because it was somewhat redundant. One critic complained the volume “cast no new light or beauty on the branch of science” and, damningly, said it was simply unnecessary considering the recent textbooks of James Wood (1760-1839).⁸⁹⁶ Manning’s decision to compete against a well-established rival may have been ill-advised, but perhaps, too, it testifies to the stubborn determination which set him on the path to learning Chinese. It may also anticipate the observations of Robert Southey (1774-1843) and William Taylor (1765-1836), that Manning had a weakness for not acquainting himself sufficiently with existing literature on his favourite subjects: and that he was stirred more by inner intuitions than by sober reflection.⁸⁹⁷ His textbook’s equivocal success may have coloured Manning’s future plans, even deterring him from going to print where he entertained doubts about his work’s distinctiveness or originality.

Manning’s textbook did little to propel his career as a mathematician, but he did not abandon the field. In December 1801, just before he went to Paris, Manning sent Maseres a paper which was eventually published in 1807 as “Mr Manning’s Investigation of the Differential Series”, in *Scriptores Logarithmici*. After arriving in Paris, Manning contacted Lagrange, who ignored him, but he did form an acquaintance with Lazare Carnot (1753-1823).⁸⁹⁸ He later prepared a paper on logarithms which Sir Joseph Banks (1743-1820) read before the Royal Society in June 1806, shortly after Manning departed for China.⁸⁹⁹ Manning’s method, complemented in the *British Critic* as “extremely easy, and commodious”,⁹⁰⁰ has been identified as an example of the so-

⁸⁹⁶ *Literary Memoirs of Living Authors of Great Britain*, II, 21.

⁸⁹⁷ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 132, 137-138.

⁸⁹⁸ See chapter one.

⁸⁹⁹ Manning, “New Method of Computing Logarithms”, 327-341.

⁹⁰⁰ *The British Critic*, Vol. 30, 1807, 474.

called “radix method”, which was independently discovered on several occasions going back to the early seventeenth century.⁹⁰¹

Manning’s mathematical research did not bring lasting fame, and the *Dictionary of National Biography* caustically remarks that “Manning’s scientific and mathematical work is now judged of little importance”.⁹⁰² This may be true, but the same verdict might be applied with equal justice upon the overwhelming majority of scholarship produced across all ages. The merit of introducing the wider British mathematical community to the Lagrangian school ultimately fell to Manning’s friend, Robert Woodhouse, who was later appointed to prestigious positions at Cambridge. Ironically, by the time Woodhouse’s efforts to reform British mathematics bore fruit, his favoured system was on the decline on the Continent, and so it was “perhaps unfortunate that so many British mathematicians followed Woodhouse in imitating the Lagrangian school.”⁹⁰³ This, too, was part of the uneven advance of human understanding. Regardless, Manning himself was soon to move forward to new terrain: Chinese.

Chinese Jests

A consideration of Manning’s Chinese studies might naturally begin with an examination of the only work he published on China during his lifetime. This was an anonymous article, “Chinese Jests”, which comprised an introductory preface, English translation of forty Chinese jokes, and explanatory notes. It appeared in 1826 in three parts in the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*. Founded in 1814, the magazine featured contributions from prominent writers like Mary Shelley (1797-1851) and William Hazlitt (1778-1830), and so might ensure his work reached a wide audience. But Manning’s decision was probably also a matter of convenience, as his friend Charles Lamb (1775-1834) was a frequent contributor, and it was through Lamb

⁹⁰¹ Cajori, *History of Mathematics*, 155.

⁹⁰² Baigent, “Manning, Thomas (1772–1840), Traveller and Writer on China.”

⁹⁰³ Guicciardini, *Development of Newtonian Calculus in Britain*, 129.

that Manning made his approach to the publisher, Henry Colburn (1784-1855). In a letter to Colburn's literary adviser Charles Ollier (1788-1859), Lamb reported that an anonymous friend "wishes to offer thro' me to Mr Colburn for his magazine a selection of Chinese jests", providing five as a specimen, along with a preface. This specimen was published as the first of three instalments. To allay any suspicions that the enterprise was a hoax, Lamb reported that he had personally witnessed his friend, who had lived in Canton for many years, conversing with a Chinese man. Barrett points out this must have been Manning's teacher, Mr Li.⁹⁰⁴ Lamb's faith in Manning was clear: "if encouraged, he would communicate curious matter."⁹⁰⁵ The second instalment contained a further twenty-six jokes, and the third, nine more.

By the time his translations were published, Manning had been studying Chinese for a quarter century. Very few works had been directly translated from Chinese into English by this point, and Manning's decision to offer the public a translation of some jokes, rather than a novel or other literary work, testifies both to his idiosyncratic personality and his love for humour. But he also had a serious point, his introduction emphasising how the study of jokes provides special insights:

Among all the lighter productions of a literary people, there is nothing from which we can with such certainty gather their real opinions, humours, habitual feelings, and popular manners, as from a current jest-book.⁹⁰⁶

Manning suggests the opinions or ideas implied within a novel or drama might mislead: they might reflect the views of the author alone, being at odds with those current in society. As such, only an exhaustive survey of literature could provide an accurate sense of the true opinions of the great mass of people. Jokes, on the other hand, provide a short-cut to popular sentiment: jokes that circulate widely are effective only because

⁹⁰⁴ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 13.

⁹⁰⁵ Perkins Autograph Letter Collection, Claremont College. Thanks to T. H. Barrett for this reference.

⁹⁰⁶ Manning, "Chinese Jest", 280.

the notions they imply are, in fact, commonly held. English jokes about the scarcity of honest lawyers, for example, proliferate because “the opinion has been, and probably still is, that the law does preeminently nurture and develop a man’s knavish propensities.”⁹⁰⁷ The plethora of jokes about the Court of Chancery – famously ridiculed in Charles Dickens’ novel *Bleak House* (1853) – show that “the body of the people have the same feeling with respect to them as I have myself”.⁹⁰⁸ Indeed, the legal historian Sir William Holdsworth suggests that *Bleak House* was set “in or about 1827”, the year after Manning published his translation. This was “the very worst period of the Court of Chancery”, the Chancery Commission reporting in 1826 “a monstrous state of affairs”.⁹⁰⁹

Manning also asserts that “The opinions and humours of a people are in themselves a curious object of inquiry”.⁹¹⁰ This is a signal observation, revealing the democratic intuition that the ideas of the common people are a worthy object for study. But it also suggests an important insight that would later become a central tenet of sociology. Manning argues that opinions are “a matter of fact: a branch of the history of the human mind.”⁹¹¹ By following the opinions prevalent in society, it might be possible to trace the facts on which they are founded. If the majority of people believe something to be a social phenomenon, then there must be some reason for the belief: and understanding this reason will provide an insight into the society. To demonstrate, Manning suggests that if a theme in Chinese humour is the “too particular attentions” paid by fathers towards their daughters-in-law, then “I know that that irregularity of morals does, in the opinion of the Chinese, often take place among them.”⁹¹² Likewise, if jokes about lecherous monks and other celibates abound in Christian countries, it

⁹⁰⁷ Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 281.

⁹⁰⁸ Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 282.

⁹⁰⁹ Holdsworth, *Charles Dickens as a Legal Historian*, 79.

⁹¹⁰ Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 282.

⁹¹¹ Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 282.

⁹¹² Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 282.

“persuades one that in fact there has been a ridiculous discrepancy between their professions and their practices.”⁹¹³ Manning’s appreciation of the social meaning of humour anticipates the understanding of “social facts” conveyed by French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who defined such a fact as any idea “which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations”.⁹¹⁴ Manning’s exposition of the sociological significance of jokes hints at the later understanding that “The existence of a large set of jokes with a common theme is a social fact, and it needs to be explained in terms of other social facts.”⁹¹⁵

Manning does not, however, suggest that you can learn all you need to know about a culture from jokes alone. On the contrary, the reading of jokes should be complemented by the examination of novels and other literary productions. Manning himself studied Chinese literature: his notebooks contain references to word usages in the *Hong Lou Meng (Dream of the Red Chamber)*,⁹¹⁶ indicating his familiarity with that work; while he also made private translations from the Tang-era poet Du Fu (712-770).⁹¹⁷ Barrett observes, “Had Manning persisted in these endeavours [...] he might perhaps have anticipated by at least thirty years the first publication of a book of translations of classic Chinese poetry into French, to say nothing of any such volume in English”.⁹¹⁸ Manning also alluded to his reading of Chinese novels in the account of his journey to Lhasa. He loaned “a little Chinese novel to a Chinaman at Giansu”, who refused to return it:

This was a great vexation to me, as it was a book which had been recommended to me. I brought it with me on purpose to read it at Lhasa. It would have amused me, and improved me in the Chinese

⁹¹³ Manning, “Chinese Jest”, 282.

⁹¹⁴ Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, 59.

⁹¹⁵ Davies, *Jokes and Targets*, 7.

⁹¹⁶ RAS TM 9/1/3.

⁹¹⁷ RAS TM 9/1/11.

⁹¹⁸ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 16.

idiom. I had no other familiar work with me but what I had read over and over again.⁹¹⁹

The collection of books which Manning bequeathed to the Royal Asiatic Society further evidenced his fondness for Chinese novels.⁹²⁰ He understood novels to provide a more rounded, less cynical view of life than jokes, the latter tending to “fasten upon men’s follies and aberrations”, leaving “untouched the incidents and speeches arising from honourable feelings and kindly affections.”⁹²¹ Moreover, while jokes are informative about public opinion, novels are better suited to “exhibit the innate propensities of the race, modified by the forms of society established among them”:

[C]lear the tales of the effects of this modification, and of partialities; and what remains will tend to show in what degree these innate propensities of the animal called man are different in different races.⁹²²

Manning thus leaves open, as a subject for empirical investigation, the extent to which different races had different “innate propensities”, while broadly allowing for the influence of culture and environment (“the forms of society”).⁹²³ The later history of “racial science” means such ideas sit uneasily with modern sensibilities. But Robert Irwin points out that, in nineteenth-century Europe, “in the absence of any serious prior research, it seemed possible that there might be a scientific basis to racial differences. There was no reason to rule this out a priori.”⁹²⁴

High literature and sacred writings could provide even deeper knowledge than jokes and novels, and judicious study of these textual works could reveal a distinctive idea of a people’s character. If properly conducted, the results would be “far more

⁹¹⁹ Manning, “Journey”, 261.

⁹²⁰ RAS TM 17/1.

⁹²¹ Manning, “Chinese Jest”, 282.

⁹²² Manning, “Chinese Jest”, 283.

⁹²³ For different Enlightenment views on national character and imagined effects of climate and race, see Sebastiani, “Hume versus Montesquieu,” 23-43.

⁹²⁴ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 173-174.

accurate than can be traced out from the reveries of superficial travellers.”⁹²⁵ One might expect Manning to privilege the views of travellers more highly, considering the lengths to which he went to explore China. But he clearly distinguished between “superficial travellers” and those (like him) who made a sincere effort to get to know a foreign people through “personal intercourse”. Ultimately, sympathetic contact with living people, not book-learning, was the key to the “profoundest of all” knowledge.⁹²⁶

Translation and Transcultural Understanding

Manning announced his intention “to preserve the substance and spirit of the jests”, and provide the most literal translation possible while still preserving “an unrestrained and natural diction”: a task, he says, presenting “extreme difficulty”.⁹²⁷ Although no joke book appears to have survived in Manning’s Chinese library, Barrett has identified the probable source from which Manning selected his material, remarking that Manning’s translation provides valuable clues about his command of the language. While he seems to have been “stumped” by one or two Chinese terms, Barrett concludes that such errors were “very rare”, and that “he usually had a good grasp of the meaning of his original source”.⁹²⁸ Manning’s translation thus shows he could read Chinese, comparing favourably with the attempt, a century later, of Herbert Giles (1845-1935).⁹²⁹

Manning annotated his translation, providing extra information to help his audience understand obscure ideas or sayings. He therefore explained aspects of Chinese culture which English readers might find opaque, such as the profound importance of the examination system.⁹³⁰ Another note contrasted Chinese ideas about decorum with those in England, where manners were “less restrained, particularly

⁹²⁵ Manning, “Chinese Jest”, 283.

⁹²⁶ Manning, “Chinese Jest”, 283.

⁹²⁷ Manning, “Chinese Jest”, 283.

⁹²⁸ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 24-25.

⁹²⁹ Giles, *Quips from a Chinese Jest-Book*.

⁹³⁰ Manning, “Chinese Jest”, 387.

among the common people.”⁹³¹ This brings Manning to one of the shaping insights for his presentation: that if a reader is assured that a joke is considered funny in its original context, but it appears less so abroad, then “the greater the information it conveys”.⁹³² The most useful jokes from a sociological point of view are those where the humour seems most inscrutable: this points the reader towards a social fact which does not exist in their own society.

Manning’s annotations also contain clues about his own values and opinions. His attitude to Jean-Baptiste Du Halde’s *Description du Chine* (1736) is summarized in a pithy footnote describing it as “a book abounding with dry-drawn-up, unreadable, accurate information”.⁹³³ Barrett highlights the significance of Manning’s (equivocal) endorsement of Du Halde’s work, considering the prejudice of influential figures like Adam Smith (1723-1790) towards the work of Catholic missionaries.⁹³⁴ Manning’s admiration for the intellectual pursuits of Jesuit missionaries in China is evidenced elsewhere when he refers to “those active learned & extraordinary men”.⁹³⁵ Similarly, Barrett suggests that Manning’s footnotes may be “smuggling in” more than they at first appear: for example, his advocacy of Chinese boats and water travel explicitly challenges British assumptions of maritime superiority.⁹³⁶

Manning clearly had an intellectual objective in translating these jokes, drawing attention to aspects of Chinese society he considered interesting and important. But he also had cultural, and perhaps even political purposes. Watt observes that the version of China represented in Manning’s “Chinese Jests” “is not particularly mysterious or even exotic [...] he emphatically rejected any idea of an essential Chinese inscrutability of the kind that is evident in De Quincey’s opium nightmares, and which would harden

⁹³¹ Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 575.

⁹³² Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 575.

⁹³³ Manning, “Chinese Jests”, 386.

⁹³⁴ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 22.

⁹³⁵ RAS TM 1/1/45.

⁹³⁶ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 23.

as the century progressed.”⁹³⁷ Barrett suggests that Manning “could quite possibly discern a future conflict on the horizon in the rising tide of impatience towards China in Britain”.⁹³⁸ At such a juncture, publishing a sympathetic work in a periodical with a wide circulation might help stem the anti-Chinese “tide”. Barrett also suggests that a lack of response to his article may have discouraged Manning who, concluding that his efforts were in vain, became resigned to the fact that “his singlehanded efforts at sustaining an image of a China more cultured than Britain were doomed to failure”.⁹³⁹ If true, this would imply Manning had excessive expectations for what must have seemed to his readers a curious but rather eccentric piece. Moreover, Manning’s patriotic temperament should warn us against the idea that he believed China to be, on balance, “more cultured than Britain”. Indeed, Manning wrote to his father that he hoped his Chinese studies might elicit moral truths even though China’s mode of life was “no better than 20 others”.⁹⁴⁰ Manning sought to inform his readers about Chinese social practices, demonstrate their coherence and internal logic, and perhaps advocate certain practices which he thought were superior. But he was not trying to prove that China was, on the whole, more cultured than Britain, which would have caused general offence among his readers.

That said, his countrymen’s indifferent attitude to Chinese culture was undoubtedly a source of frustration, and Manning was provoked when those in perfect ignorance made hostile or dismissive remarks. His reflections on this theme are contained in an extraordinary letter which shows he intended to continue the series of jokes with at least one more instalment. The remains of this letter, apparently sent to Charles Lamb,⁹⁴¹ include several additional jokes and further lengthy annotations. This

⁹³⁷ Watt, “Mediating China”, 22.

⁹³⁸ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 25.

⁹³⁹ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 25.

⁹⁴⁰ RAS TM 1/1/52.

⁹⁴¹ RAS TM 9/1/7. The letter is postmarked, and the last letters of Lamb’s name and address are discernible.

is one of two apparently unpublished drafts, which would have added many more jokes, the highest numbered being 68.⁹⁴² In this extended commentary, Manning declaims at length against his fellow Englishmen abroad. While not arguing for the merits of Chinese cultural practices per se, Manning does denounce the arrogant and supercilious attitude adopted by many Europeans towards the study of other cultures. Manning's strident criticisms are occasioned by notes appended to jokes numbered 49 and 50, where he explains the excessive self-regard shown by Chinese fathers whose sons found success in the imperial exams. Referring to his central argument that jokes cannot casually imply facts unless they really are of common occurrence, Manning says there is a "harvest" of such data to be made which might explain the morals, manners, and opinions of Asian peoples. But to see this, those who travel abroad would have to learn to "uncase themselves a little, & not go wrapped up in their European ideas and habits, in such an exclusive manner as to see nothing but what jostles disagreeably against them".⁹⁴³

Manning laments that so many educated and well-informed men who travel abroad "won't submit to the tabula rasation of their minds, on any subject".⁹⁴⁴ Manning implies it would be best to encounter other cultures after making a clean slate of one's prejudices and preconceptions. Instead, his countrymen cling to pre-existing conceits and opinions formed in a different context:

They travel with the chambers of their brain ready furnished; so as to be able to dispense with much assistance from the natives, & yet be never at a loss. They have their resources of all kinds within themselves, and avoid as much as possible taking up with the forms and methods of the countries they visit. They cannot admit a new-shaped idea, till they have pummelled, and squeezed, and broken it down so as to fit one of the ready-made cases they carry with them; and then – Oh wonderful! – they find everything foreign to be

⁹⁴² RAS TM 9/1/5, 9/1/7.

⁹⁴³ RAS TM 9/1/7.

⁹⁴⁴ RAS TM 9/1/7.

misshapen, disjointed and unfit for its place: they find nothing arranged comfortably and conformably to the rational purposes of human life, ie their to [sic] own packing cases.⁹⁴⁵

Manning objects to that “domestication” of new ideas which demands they be distorted to fit a pre-existing system of thought. Once an idea has been suitably “misshapen”, it is of course easy to show why it does not correspond to the requirements of a new context: and it may be safely discarded, regardless of how fitting it was in its original state and situation. Here, Manning might be understood to argue for a *pluralist* approach to the study of other cultures: that is to say, that there might be more than one valid way to live, and that beliefs and practices should be understood in their own context. The philosopher Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) defined pluralism as the understanding that there are “a plurality of values which men can and do seek, and that these values differ,” and he identified a new taste for variety emerging in the early Romantic period.⁹⁴⁶ When Manning criticises the arrogance of those moral monists who would “test everything new by their own formulas”, he seems to evince something of this new open-mindedness about the multiplicity of human values: “what they cannot find by these tests, they deny to exist, and do really disbelieve to exist”.⁹⁴⁷

Whenever something is found to conflict with preconceived assumptions, Manning says, it is condemned, because it is not easily accommodated within an existing system of knowledge. People generally find what they expect to find. Manning thus demonstrates his belief in the contingent nature of human knowledge, criticising those who assume, a priori, that other cultures cannot be “rightly compounded” if they are not constituted according to the beliefs and assumptions of “their own tribe, of their own market, of their own den.” Manning attributes this last phrase to Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who coined the idea of the “idola specus”, or the prejudices causing

⁹⁴⁵ RAS TM 9/1/7.

⁹⁴⁶ Berlin, “My Intellectual Path”.

⁹⁴⁷ RAS TM 9/1/7.

individuals to inappropriately extend norms derived from their own group. Travellers who develop a confirmed attitude of superiority necessarily lack cultural sympathy, and they “float on, isolated and alone”, failing to come into genuine intercourse with the people and culture surrounding them.⁹⁴⁸ Accordingly, “A man of this sort skims along the surface, and comes off again clean and smooth, & without any smack of foreign sapience”.⁹⁴⁹

This last image recalls a simile Manning employed in April 1807, shortly after arriving in Canton. Then, he complained about the inward-looking British merchants who made no effort to engage with Chinese culture; when they leave the country, “Like water on a cabbage leaf they drop off in succession, leaving no traces”.⁹⁵⁰ Most of the merchants focussed squarely on trade, showing little inclination to learn about China; and the restrictions on Europeans that prohibited free movement or the study of the Chinese language meant only the most highly motivated could learn much about their environment. Moreover, by the time Manning left China in 1817, ideas about the degeneracy of Chinese civilization were becoming more commonplace among British diplomats and merchants. On the Amherst Embassy of 1816, senior officials like Sir Henry Ellis (1788-1855) held disparaging views about China;⁹⁵¹ while the increasingly arrogant and contemptuous tenor of British views about Indian and Chinese civilisation were encapsulated by James Mill’s infamous *History of British India* (1817). Manning’s comments should be understood in this context. But Manning was also familiar with the likes of Sir George Thomas Staunton (1781-1859) and Robert Morrison (1782-1834), both of whom went to strenuous efforts to understand Chinese society, albeit for reasons that contrasted with his own. Staunton, in particular, admired

⁹⁴⁸ Manning deploys a Latin verse from Horace, “In seipso totus teres atque rotundus / Externi ne quid valeat per laeve morari”, possibly taken from Gilbert Wakefield’s edition of 1794. The verse is translated in Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* (1749): “Firm in himself, who on himself relies, Polish’d and round, who runs his proper course”.

⁹⁴⁹ RAS TM 9/1/7.

⁹⁵⁰ RAS TM 5/4.

⁹⁵¹ Platt, *Imperial Twilight*, 156.

the accomplishments of Chinese civilization. And while, in his day, the wider British community in Canton and Macao devoted little energy to studying Chinese culture, Manning encountered a more vibrant intellectual climate during his stay in Calcutta in 1810. There, his brief friendship with John Leyden (1775-1811) brought him close to one who shared his sympathetic interest in learning about other cultures.

Manning's advocacy of approaching foreign cultures on their own terms, and opposing Eurocentric biases, would now be thought quite commendable. But in Regency England, it was atypical, and he knew that the views he espoused were unpublishable in a popular magazine, especially considering his invective against the English abroad. Whether or not the editors of the *New Monthly Magazine* ever had a chance to read these lines is unclear, for Manning himself crossed out the entire section, with a single line drawn vertically through the page. And he brought himself to a verbal halt:

“Gently gently!” exclaims the reader; “where are you travelling to, so far out of the record, Mr Purveyor of foreign jests? Why you seem to be quite in earnest?” “So I am, Sir.” “Well, but you ought to be joking.” “Oh aye; true; I had forgot that – Pardon!”⁹⁵²

Philosophical Study of Society

Of course, it was not Manning's ambition, when first setting out to study Chinese society, to publish an article on Chinese jokes. So, what was its relationship to his original vision? The subjects were not totally unconnected, as Manning's approach to humour reflects his overarching interest in “manners and customs”, which recurs across his correspondence in the early 1800s and which was central to his overall project. To study “manners” was one of Manning's objectives in exploring China, something to which he alluded not only to his father but also to Sir Joseph Banks, President of the

⁹⁵² RAS TM 9/1/7.

Royal Society, when enlisting his support.⁹⁵³ In the summary of objectives contained in his Tibetan narrative, Manning ranked “manners” second in importance, behind morals but ahead of opinions, literature, and history.⁹⁵⁴ That Manning’s interest in “manners” was common knowledge is implied by an 1808 letter from Charles Lamb, which refers to a new opera, *Kais, or, Love in the Deserts*: “‘Tis all about Eastern manners: it would just suit you [...] You needn’t ha’ gone so far to see what you see, if you saw it as I do every night at Drury-Lane Theatre.”⁹⁵⁵

In the unpublished addendum to his Chinese jokes, Manning argued that sympathetic contact with local people was pivotal to genuine understanding of foreign cultures.⁹⁵⁶ If Manning’s practice was consistent with this approach, then we should expect him to have tried to understand China not only through the examination of its written works, but through contact with a variety of people from different walks of life. Indeed, if his goal was just to study Chinese literature and philosophy, he could have accomplished a certain amount without ever setting foot on Chinese soil; his contemporary James Mill (1773-1836) conducted his scathing critique of Indian civilization without ever visiting that country. But Manning understood lived experience as a vital part of culture, and the stress he placed on manners, as a matter of sociological and cultural importance, shows the influence of eighteenth-century philosophers such as Montesquieu, David Hume and, especially, Edmund Burke (1729-1797). In his philosophy of society, Burke elevated manners above even laws, writing after the French Revolution:

Manners are of more importance than laws. The Law touches us but here and there, and now and then. Manners are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize or refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we

⁹⁵³ RAS TM 1/1/13, TM 4/5.

⁹⁵⁴ Manning, “Journey”, 280.

⁹⁵⁵ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 383.

⁹⁵⁶ RAS TM 9/1/7.

breathe in. They give their whole form and color to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them.⁹⁵⁷

Manning's interest in manners, far from being a genteel eccentricity, should be understood in relation to the writings of prominent eighteenth-century historians and philosophers.

Even so, why should Manning want to study *Chinese* manners? Writing to his father in December 1810, Manning explained that “Chi[na] & Japan being the only countries (worth inquiring about) where the real state of society is unknown, I do much wish to see one of those coun[tries]”.⁹⁵⁸ Japan had enforced a policy of national isolation after 1639, following the expulsion of foreign missionaries and the suppression of domestic Christianity; Dutch traders, the only foreigners allowed contact with the country, were confined to the artificial island of Dejima in the port city of Nagasaki and kept under virtual house arrest.⁹⁵⁹ In 1800, the “real state of society” in Japan was, relatively speaking, therefore “unknown” to Europeans. The situation in China was more complicated, thanks to the long history of Jesuit residence in Canton and Peking and the voluminous missionary reports on China produced in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Manning thus casts indirect doubt on the reliability or usefulness of this knowledge, which might at least require corroboration or updating. Meanwhile, his statement that Japan and China were the only countries “worth inquiring about” reflects their relatively high status in the eyes of late-Georgian England. Presumably Manning chose to focus on China, rather than Japan, because of the utter impracticality of even attempting to explore the latter country in the early 1800s, given that Britain did not have even the rudimentary relations enjoyed with

⁹⁵⁷ Edmund Burke, *Letters on a Regicide Peace*, 126.

⁹⁵⁸ RAS TM 1/1/52.

⁹⁵⁹ Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 24.

China. But one wonders where Manning's research might have led him, had he instead studied the manners and customs of the Japanese.

The mere fact that Manning was at all curious about the "real state of society" in China and Japan reflects the profound relativization that the European self-image underwent between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This process was influenced by a number of factors – including the discovery of the Americas, the Reformation, and new information about ancient Asiatic religions purveyed by European missionaries – which challenged the traditional Christian worldview, which had to be refined and adapted accordingly. From the late seventeenth century, some authors, including Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), even began to apply standards of historical criticism to the Bible itself; and the slow decline of Biblical authority gradually opened spaces for alternative ways of understanding human societies. By the latter stages of the Enlightenment, historians such as Voltaire (1694-1778) in France, Edward Gibbon in England, and William Robertson (1721-1793) in Scotland, had introduced new understandings of historical change, premised on the belief that mankind was "everywhere essentially the same, subject to the same laws, and capable of comparative treatment, even in religion".⁹⁶⁰ Similar principles began to be applied to moral philosophy. Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), widely regarded as a founding father of the Scottish Enlightenment, held that the human mind was guided by a "moral sense", which was "directed differently at different times under different social pressures".⁹⁶¹

The scientific revolution set in motion in the early seventeenth century by Sir Francis Bacon meant the natural world gradually came under the lens of observation and experimentation. By the early eighteenth-century, scientific reasoning came to be applied more and more in the study of the humanities. In 1739, David Hume published *A Treatise of Human Nature*, whose subtitle ("Being an Attempt to Introduce the

⁹⁶⁰ Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment*, 4.

⁹⁶¹ Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment*, 20.

Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects”) revealed his intention to apply empirical methods to the study of man’s own nature. In 1748, Montesquieu published *The Spirit of the Laws*, an influential work of secular political theory helping shape systems of government from Russia to the United States of America, founded in 1776. That same year saw the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, by Scottish philosopher Adam Smith, which perhaps did more than any other work to establish the foundations of modern economic theory and heralded a revolution in the understanding of human society. But 1776 also witnessed the appearance of the first volume in Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This significantly enriched the writing of history, not only through its attention to sociological factors, but through the new importance it attributed to Asiatic cultures, and the historical role of Persians, Arabs, Tatars, and Turks. Gibbon thereby drew the gaze of European readers to “the structure and fortunes of societies hitherto thought eccentric or obscure”.⁹⁶² Manning affected to employ the same secular, intellectually disinterested approach to his study of Chinese society. Underneath it lay the same basic assumptions: that the study of human society was a noble enterprise which could contribute to the store of human knowledge and tend to the improvement of mankind.

The *Decline and Fall* was widely read in Manning’s circle, albeit not universally admired. Manning discussed Gibbon with Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd, telling Lamb in March 1800 that he shared his poor opinion of Hume and Gibbon “so far as usefulness goes”, adding the qualification that he liked their style.⁹⁶³ Lloyd, a year later, shared precisely the contrary opinion, claiming not to admire Gibbon’s style: “but the accumulated information which it contains renders it a valuable work”.⁹⁶⁴ Lloyd perhaps betrayed the influence of Coleridge, who detested Gibbon’s style, in keeping

⁹⁶² Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment*, 69-70.

⁹⁶³ Anderson, *Letters*, 31.

⁹⁶⁴ Beaty, *Letters*, 64.

with a widespread view that held it to be emotionless.⁹⁶⁵ But its influence was beyond question. The Grecian Richard Porson (1759-1808), also claimed as a friend of Manning,⁹⁶⁶ considered *Decline and Fall* to be the most important literary production of the eighteenth century, notwithstanding his own criticisms.⁹⁶⁷

Montesquieu influenced Gibbon by explaining laws, customs, and civil behaviour with “reference not only to a generalised human psychology and the moral law accompanying it, but to the mind's operations under conditions to be reconstructed by late-humanist erudition”.⁹⁶⁸ Manning’s 1832 almanac contains notes on Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, which are particularly interesting for the allusions to China.⁹⁶⁹ Manning copied a number of passages from the original French, taken from Books 23, 26, and 28, singling out for praise (“very good”) Book 29, Chapter 18, “Of the Ideas of Uniformity”. This argues against the notion that laws should always and everywhere be the same. Specifically, Montesquieu observes that the Chinese and “Tartars” are governed by their own laws, and that there is “no nation in the world that aims so much at tranquillity. If the people observe the laws, what signifies it whether these laws are the same?”⁹⁷⁰ Manning also expressed interest in Montesquieu’s Book 19, Chapter 27, “How the Laws contribute to form the Manners, Customs, and Character of a Nation”, observing: “admirable remarks on England scattered thro’ this chapter”.⁹⁷¹ He particularly noted the observation that “Men are less esteemed for

⁹⁶⁵ Trevor-Roper, *History and the Enlightenment*, 131.

⁹⁶⁶ Dunkin, “Thomas Manning, Esq.”, 97.

⁹⁶⁷ Clarke, *Richard Porson*, 28.

⁹⁶⁸ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, I, 88.

⁹⁶⁹ RAS TM 9/7/4.

⁹⁷⁰ “À la Chine, les Chinois sont gouvernés par le cérémonial Chinois, et les Tartares par le cérémonial Tartare: c’est pourtant le peuple du monde qui a le plus la tranquillité pour objet. Lorsque les citoyens suivent les lois, qu’importe qu’ils suivent la même?” Manning copied out just the beginning of the chapter, indicating Montesquieu’s example with an ampersand. RAS TM 9/7/4; Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, II, 269.

⁹⁷¹ RAS TM 9/7/4.

frivolous talents and attainments than for essential qualities; and of this kind there are but two, riches, and personal merit”.⁹⁷²

Manning’s curiosity about Chinese “manners” makes his reading of Montesquieu especially salient. In Canton in 1807, Manning observed that “A people contains a certain portion of wickedness & disorder.” Liberal governments leave this “on the outside”, punishing it when discovered; but “arbitrary” governments, which “meddle with everything, & leave nothing free, include it in their own forms, as it were.”⁹⁷³ This suggests the influence of Montesquieu’s theory of “Oriental despotism”, but Manning also challenged Montesquieu on China, taking issue with Book 19, Chapters 12 and 13, “Of Custom and Manners in a Despotic State” and “Of the Behaviour of the Chinese”. Here, Montesquieu argues that as a despotic state, China has no laws, just manners and customs; and that these, like the country’s morality, can never be changed.⁹⁷⁴ Manning averred that “the Chinese are not so wrong about politics as we think”.⁹⁷⁵ Further, Manning regarded as “hocus pocus” Montesquieu’s assessment in Book 11, Chapter 19, that only a monarchy can divide its officers between military and civil power, without bringing about despotism. Why could Montesquieu’s other systems of government – despotism and republicanism – not do the same? “Montesquieu full of such impudence for the sake of his theory.”⁹⁷⁶

Manning’s almanac for 1826 – the year in which he published “Chinese Jests” – evidences his reading of William Robertson, with extensive notes from *History of Scotland* (1759).⁹⁷⁷ Manning highlighted Robertson’s account of how the Scottish aristocracy annexed the offices of state and made them hereditary;⁹⁷⁸ as well as the

⁹⁷² “On n’y estimeroit gueres les hommes par des talens ou des attributs frivoles, mais par des qualités réelles; & de ce genre, il n’y en a que deux, les richesses & le mérite personnel.” Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, I, 407.

⁹⁷³ RAS TM 9/1/39.

⁹⁷⁴ Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, I, 386-387.

⁹⁷⁵ RAS TM 9/7/4.

⁹⁷⁶ RAS TM 9/7/4.

⁹⁷⁷ RAS TM 9/7/2.

⁹⁷⁸ Robertson, *History of Scotland*, I, 23.

historical basis for the ascendancy of the Scottish lowlanders.⁹⁷⁹ These exemplify how social factors shape economic and political systems, signifying interest in the sociological content of history. Manning was also struck by Robertson's observation that the nobility was inspired to a spirit of revenge by any injuries to their interests. This was accomplished partly through established manners and customs, but also (in Robertson's words) "what is more remarkable, by the laws of those ages". Robertson remarked upon the similarity between this and the Anglo-Saxon institution of the *Sodalitium*, which he explained was a voluntary association between men, binding its members to a kind of mutual aid, arising from the weakness of government.⁹⁸⁰ Robertson quoted George Hickee (1642-1715), who David Hume also cited as an authority on the same matter in *History of England* (1754-62).⁹⁸¹ Robertson's account of the *Sodalitium* elicited from Manning a comparison: "forgiveness infamous among the Anglo-Saxons in certain cases as among the Chinese."⁹⁸² This perhaps reflected the inability or disinclination of the Chinese government to act at certain times or places, just as the individual had limited recourse to the state for legal protection in medieval England. On a further note discussing the "natural & proper" desire for revenge when there was no legal remedy, Manning compared historical cases in France with the customs of the Malays and Chinese.⁹⁸³ James Watt suggests another possible echo of Robertson in Manning's use of the phrase "commercial intercourse between the Chinese and English through Bhutan", which was consistent with Robertson's use of "commercial intercourse" in *Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India* (1791).⁹⁸⁴

⁹⁷⁹ Robertson, *History of Scotland*, I, 33.

⁹⁸⁰ Robertson, *History of Scotland*, I, 41, n12.

⁹⁸¹ Hume, *History of England*, I, 271.

⁹⁸² RAS TM 9/7/2.

⁹⁸³ RAS TM 9/5.

⁹⁸⁴ Watt, "Mediating China", 10.

Manning's defence of Hume's style to Lamb indicates he was already familiar with his work by 1800.⁹⁸⁵ Childhood ill-health meant Manning was educated at home by his father, and an obituary noted that by the age of 16, "Plato and Hume were the companions of his 'enforced leisure', and too often of his pillow."⁹⁸⁶ Peter Johnson emphasises that civility and good manners were intrinsic to Hume's moral philosophy, and "the connection between the social character of human life and the need for moderation within it."⁹⁸⁷ Good manners helped mediate between people, and Hume therefore viewed manners as a subject of first importance. In *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), Hume argued that politeness and good manners were essential to combat man's tendency to pride and self-conceit, and thus "to facilitate the intercourse of minds, and an undisturb'd commerce and conversation."⁹⁸⁸

Amongst well-bred people, a mutual deference is affected: Contempt of others disguis'd: Authority conceal'd: Attention given to each in his turn: And an easy stream of conversation maintain'd, without vehemence, without mutual interruption, without eagerness for victory, and without any airs of superiority. These attentions and regards are immediately agreeable to others, abstracted from any consideration of utility or beneficial tendencies. They conciliate affection, promote esteem, and enhance extremely the merit of the person, who regulates his behaviour by them.⁹⁸⁹

Hume commented on how manners differed between nations, and the significance of such variations, in a style likely to provoke the reader's interest. Hume may have done more than any other author to fire Manning's interest in this subject. After Manning's death, his friend Samuel Ball, writing in 1850, observed that he was interested in "what now may be called social philosophy" – which we can consider as a reference to the emerging field of sociology. Ball observed that Manning was familiar with Adam

⁹⁸⁵ Anderson, *Letters*, 31.

⁹⁸⁶ Donne, "Memoir", 228.

⁹⁸⁷ Peter Johnson, "Hume on Manners and the Civil Condition", 209.

⁹⁸⁸ Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 161.

⁹⁸⁹ Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 161-162.

Smith's political economy, but noted that "he did not much respect that science, because the moral state or condition of man forms no part of it;" and that his "object in visiting China was to study the languages, law, and social state of that vast empire".⁹⁹⁰ Manning sought to apply Enlightenment principles to the study of Chinese society, and his article on Chinese jokes can now be seen as an attempt to apply the "experimental" approach to the study of humour, itself a window on social life.

Enlightenment Scholars and China

Late eighteenth-century European historiography therefore provides the context explaining Manning's empiricist approach to Chinese culture, and his preoccupation with manners and social observation. But it does not explain the consuming nature of Manning's obsession, which led him to devote his best years to a project which flew in the face of familial and social expectation and prospects for a conventional academic career. What clues do Manning's other chief interests – including mathematics, linguistics, literature, and religion – hold as to why he went to such lengths to pursue his Chinese researches?

One might ask whether mathematics, Manning's original area of expertise, helped stimulate his interest in Chinese. Barrett suggests "it is at least conceivable" that Manning's mathematical studies "could have drawn him to the Chinese writing system as a possible embodiment of a form of notation beyond the realm of numbers alone that was not constrained by the specificities of natural languages".⁹⁹¹ There was, as well, some precedent for European scholars dabbling in Chinese mathematics. Gottfried Leibniz exchanged letters with Jesuit missionaries who had introduced Western mathematics to China and (much to Leibniz's delight) portrayed the Kangxi Emperor as a devotee of mathematics and philosophy.⁹⁹² Leibniz hoped for a mutually beneficial

⁹⁹⁰ RAS TM 15/1.

⁹⁹¹ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 4.

⁹⁹² Lach, "Leibniz and China", 438-439.

cultural exchange between Europe and China, with Western science complementing Chinese moral philosophy. Leibniz was interested in the *Yijing*, an ancient divinatory work conventionally attributed to the legendary first ruler of China, Fuxi. Leibniz corresponded with the missionary Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730), who believed the *Yijing*'s hexagrams contained evidence of profound insights into the true nature of science.⁹⁹³ In 1679, Leibniz invented the system of binary notation, and he noted when studying the trigrams of the *Yijing* that there was “an astounding relationship between the Chinese figures and his binary arithmetic.”⁹⁹⁴ Through his analysis, Leibniz hoped to support Bouvet's theory that the *Yijing* “was a key to all the sciences.”⁹⁹⁵

However, Leibniz's belief that he had “rediscovered” Fuxi's mathematical principles received scant attention,⁹⁹⁶ and there is no evidence that Manning was aware of this or, indeed, much interested in Chinese mathematics generally. In December 1825, Manning replied to the suggestion of William Friend (1757-1841) that they collaborate on a volume of Chinese mathematics: “Surely the printing of a translation of a Chinese treatise on arithmetic could never answer! The number of the curious is too few.”⁹⁹⁷ Manning could only support the idea if Friend had “any ingenious thought” to work into a preface which could motivate the book to the reading public, and thereby generate an audience. The fact he couched his opposition in terms of expediency (the lack of demand) implies that Manning did not consider the subject intrinsically valuable. If it were, then presumably he would have sought to bring it to wider attention, regardless of its commercial prospects – just like his article on Chinese jokes.

Manning periodically returned to mathematical problems throughout his life, including while in Asia; and his long residences in Canton and Macao provided ample opportunity for investigating Chinese maths, were he so inclined. Clearly, his studies

⁹⁹³ Lach, “Leibniz and China”, 444.

⁹⁹⁴ Lach, “Leibniz and China”, 445.

⁹⁹⁵ Lach, “Leibniz and China”, 446.

⁹⁹⁶ Lach, “Leibniz and China”, 446.

⁹⁹⁷ CUL MS Add. 7886/176.

did not lead him to consider this a matter of great importance for Regency Britain. There was another relationship between Manning's academic background and his interest in China: but this was through linguistics and philology, rather than mathematics. As well as being a mathematician, Manning was a good classical scholar, and his knowledge of ancient Greek is key to understanding his approach to the study of Chinese. It is hard to follow the esoteric line of enquiry Manning pursued in his language studies, but this very obscurity reflects an intellectual tradition. Despite the generally low state of knowledge about China in eighteenth-century Britain, there was nevertheless a history of speculative interest in the Chinese language, especially its unusual writing system, encompassing some of the best-known figures in Britain's intellectual life. Sir Francis Bacon, for example, who had a "complex and erudite impression of the Chinese", "acknowledged the necessity of integrating Chinese inventions and technologies into the grand history of learning that he proposed to construct".⁹⁹⁸ Bacon shared the ideographic belief that Chinese used "Characters reall", expressing things or ideas, rather than letters or words.⁹⁹⁹ As such, Bacon compared Chinese to the sign language of the deaf and mute; both, in his view, being systems that expressed meanings directly, bypassing the intermediary stages relied on by most languages.¹⁰⁰⁰ David Porter suggests that Bacon's interpretation of the Chinese script held the promise of an antidote to the four "idols of the mind" identified in *Novum Organum* (1620), which undermine perception and communication.¹⁰⁰¹

Indeed, Chinese was a subject of recurring interest for those concerned with systems of language reform in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. The Chinese system of characters helped drive this interest, with a widespread assumption that the characters were ideograms, bearing an "intrinsic and logical, if still somewhat

⁹⁹⁸ Lux, "'Characters Reall'", 184.

⁹⁹⁹ Lux, "'Characters Reall'", 184.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Porter, *Ideographia*, 40.

¹⁰⁰¹ Porter, *Ideographia*, 40.

mysterious, relationship to the ideas they represented.”¹⁰⁰² Leibniz thought the study of Chinese would prove useful for projected plans towards a universal language, which might allow the transmission of ideas between cultures: “a means of communication through which philosophers from all parts of the world could transmit abstract ideas, precisely and accurately, despite cultural and linguistic differences.”¹⁰⁰³ At one time, Leibniz was interested in Chinese itself as a potential mode for such universal communication, partly due to the proposition that Chinese may have been the primitive language from which others evolved.¹⁰⁰⁴ As Porter points out, the abiding sense that Chinese had universalizing potential was understandable given that Chinese characters did, in fact, attain a regional universality, serving as a written lingua franca across the Qing Empire and surrounding countries: including among Chinese and non-Chinese people whose spoken languages were mutually unintelligible.¹⁰⁰⁵

Such schemes were part of the backdrop for Manning’s Chinese studies. That Manning might be susceptible to their allure is suggested by his interest in the system of “pasigraphy” designed by Joseph de Maimieux (1753-1820), which he encountered in Paris in 1802. A pasigraphy is a quasi-mathematical writing system using symbols to represent ideas, instead of words or sounds; and Manning discovered de Maimieux’s system around the same time he began to learn Chinese with Joseph Hager (1757-1819). Hager had eccentric ideas of his own about the history of the Chinese language, suggesting in 1801, among other things, that the ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras (ca. 570-495 BC) had visited China, from where he brought back the abacus as well as his system of musical notation.¹⁰⁰⁶ Referring to this “long tradition of intellectual speculation in Europe prompted by the unfamiliar non-alphabetic nature of the Chinese script and its possible significance for the creation of a universal language”, Barrett

¹⁰⁰² Porter, *Ideographia*, 17-18.

¹⁰⁰³ Lach, “Leibniz and China”, 437.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Lach, “Leibniz and China”, 437.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Porter, *Ideografia*, 18.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Hager, *Explanation of the Elementary Characters of the Chinese*, xiv-xvi.

points out that similar speculations are, however, completely absent from Manning's archive.¹⁰⁰⁷ Indeed, there is no evidence that Manning's interest in Chinese relied upon such imaginative histories, or that he subscribed to the "ideographic" tradition, whereby Chinese characters were studied as figures symbolizing ideas, rather than words. But he certainly was interested in the structure and history of language, and its relationship to the human mind. At a higher level of abstraction, this shared an affinity with the creative theories of Hager and de Maimieux.

Linguistics and the Metaphysics of Mind

Manning was not temperamentally inclined towards speculative history. His empirical approach to understanding human societies was, instead, influenced by sober-minded British historians such as Hume and Gibbon, and there is no suggestion that he dreamed up ancient points of contact between Greece and China. Nevertheless, he was deeply concerned with word usages in ancient Greek and Chinese; and the comparative study of language was one of his main pursuits. Manning wrote to his father in December 1810 and, after describing his living arrangements in Rangpur, where he lingered while waiting for permission to journey to Lhasa, he alluded to this facet of his linguistic studies.

I pursue my studies chiefly upon lang[uage] & the Metaphy[sics] of Lang[uage], ie the Metaphy[sics] of the H[uma]n mind & have unravelled a g[rea]t many very curious things. You must not be surprised if you find me shortly publishing an account of the Greek tongues. I know more upon that subject & upon the G[reek] prep[ositions] & particles than is to be met with in any book. I had many new trains of ideas upon this & a variety of other subjects before I left England. I scarcely ever ment[i]one[d] them to anyone. Having no vanity of that sort but rather a contrary feeling so that I am not ranked in England in the place that is my due. The study of the

¹⁰⁰⁷ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 4.

Chin[ese] has been of infinite service to me in these speculations & vice versa.¹⁰⁰⁸

This is Manning's first and only reference to the "Metaphysics of Language". What he means is not explicit, but he is likely referring to the underlying structure of language and its governing rules, to be elucidated through the study of words and elements of grammar. These rules might, in turn, offer clues about latent mental systems – the "Metaphysics of the Human Mind". Manning's notebooks are filled with notes on this subject, a typical example being an analysis of the English phrase "even one will do": "here even = just = still = tho' = the same. I say the adverbial meaning of all these words is the same. Yet their usage is different. How can that be?"¹⁰⁰⁹ This segues to an analysis of adverbs in Latin and Greek, and the suggestion that custom, and the natural tendency of languages towards brevity, gradually eliminates prepositions:

Hence it happens (& particularly in long cultivated tongues) that certain verbs that are perpetually occurring with an accident in the same relation expressed by a preposition do after a while leave out that preposition when no equivocation can arise. So, "I wrote to you by the last post" becomes "I wrote you" &c.¹⁰¹⁰

Manning believed, "This principle will explain & make easy to our minds many strange things in Chinese, & may be pushed further. We may depend upon it, 'whatever construction is clear is also logical'".¹⁰¹¹

It is significant that Manning chose to compare ancient Greek and Chinese, as this implies that the governing "metaphysical" principles might be operative across cultures. If true, this would imply that the mind shared a common basic pattern across disparate cultures and ethnicities, providing an empirical basis for intuitions about the

¹⁰⁰⁸ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁰⁹ RAS TM 9/4.

¹⁰¹⁰ RAS TM 9/4.

¹⁰¹¹ RAS TM 9/4.

universality of human nature that did not rely on the Biblical narration of man's descent from Noah.

Manning refers to “the Greek tongues”¹⁰¹² in plural, alluding to the fact that different dialects were used in ancient Greece. Attic Greek became the dominant form of the classical language and was used in the compositions of most of the Athenian tragedians and historians, as well as the philosopher, Plato. It has been suggested that the growing influence and geographic range of Attic Greek caused its “purity” to decline, a trend already discernible in the work of Aristotle (384-322 BC).¹⁰¹³ Manning may have been compiling usages from different dialects (“tongues”) which he hoped would shed light on the relationship between these different versions of ancient Greek. Nevertheless, his claim to know more about the Greek “tongues”, and prepositions and particles, “than is to be met with in any book”, seems strange, considering that ancient Greek was a relatively crowded field and that Manning also devoted so much time to maths and Chinese. But rules governing the use of ancient Greek prepositions and particles remained somewhat uncertain in early nineteenth century Europe, and Manning's statement might therefore be taken to mean that he had developed an original theory on this quite specific subject, enabling original insights that were unavailable to other scholars. His interest in the historical construction of ancient Greek, and contemporary scholarship on the subject, is indicated by his criticism of the philosopher Samuel Clarke (1675-1729). Clarke's explanation of Greek tenses, according to Manning, “plays off the old hum, ‘This is more easily understood than explained’. He asserts that the *ratio temporum* is but little understood in the Catari tongue, & scarce at all in the Greek.”¹⁰¹⁴

¹⁰¹² RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰¹³ Smyth, *Greek Grammar for Schools and Colleges*, 3.

¹⁰¹⁴ RAS TM 9/5, which also contains additional cases where Manning's opinion diverged from Clarke. Andrew Dalzel (1742-1806) described Clarke as “one of the most acute and elegant of all critics” (*Substance of Lectures on the Ancient Greeks*, 335.) Dalzel attributed the concept of *ratio temporum* to Clarke. The Catari were a tribe in ancient Illyria.

One thing China and Greece had in common in the early nineteenth century was their “diglossia”: both cultures had evolved a modern vernacular language alongside an exceptionally old, venerable, and influential literary language dating back thousands of years. A desire to compare the classical forms of Greek and Chinese would guide Manning towards the study of literary Chinese (*wenyan*) over the modern, vernacular form. Continuity with tradition was a “cardinal linguistic virtue” in the taste of Georgian England, and the antiquity of Chinese was well-known: by the mid-seventeenth century, “any number of writers had commented admiringly on the remarkable historical continuity of the Chinese language and speculated that it predated those of the Egyptians and Phoenicians”.¹⁰¹⁵ Chinese was therefore sufficiently august and sophisticated to be compared with Greek, even though Manning considered it to be “no better a lan[guage] than the E[nGLISH] (& I assure you I never in my life thought it better)”.¹⁰¹⁶ The classical scholar David Stifler has observed that, although the “gross dissimilarities” between Attic Greek and Chinese might render any comparison “a linguistic cul-de-sac”, they did have one significant feature in common: “the use of utterance particles to express meaning in a fashion unrelated to affixation or modification”.¹⁰¹⁷ This is potentially significant because, “if such fundamentally different languages as Greek and Chinese show the same utterance particle behavior, then it is likely the case that all languages have some version of the same kind of particles.”¹⁰¹⁸ This, in turn, might suggest the existence of “a class of words that are similar across a number of languages, more so than such relatively broad categories of ‘preposition’ or ‘verb’”.¹⁰¹⁹ Perhaps this is the kind of “very curious thing” Manning

¹⁰¹⁵ Porter, *Ideographia*, 43.

¹⁰¹⁶ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰¹⁷ Stifler, “Greek and Mandarin Utterance Particles”, 14.

¹⁰¹⁸ Stifler, “Greek and Mandarin Utterance Particles”, 15.

¹⁰¹⁹ Stifler, “Greek and Mandarin Utterance Particles”, 43-44.

“unravelling” in the course of his studies upon “the Metaphy[sics] of Lang[uage], ie the Metaphy[sics] of the H[uma]n mind”.¹⁰²⁰

Manning’s notebooks support his claim to have been closely occupied with the examination of ancient Greek words and particles, and of Chinese particles. He made extensive notes on the Chinese character 也, exclaiming:

I say that a man looking in the common tonic dictionaries & seeing some phrases ended with 也 & some without, & that in a very curious manner, & in a work where conciseness was the great aim, & no place for expletives, I say, this man still saying, Oh 也 is nothing, was one of the winkers!!! I do hold that this is one of the great evils in science, in things of taste &c that men will not confess their ignorance, their want of discrimination.¹⁰²¹

Manning returned to this particle elsewhere, comparing its usages with that of other particles, observing “There is great connection between this 也 and the participle in ing.”¹⁰²² A separate note, apparently about the same particle, provides more context explaining Manning’s frustration: “do such thing ye is very bad! ie doing such things is very bad; or, the doing such.”¹⁰²³ Manning suggests that “This usage of ye I suppose has quite escaped the missionaries. It is closely connected with the primary usage, viz., the usage in such sentences as x y ye”, where there is an equivalence between x and y.¹⁰²⁴ Manning’s derogatory reference to “the missionaries” is probably a reference to Joshua Marshman, the Baptist missionary of Serampore whose knowledge of Chinese he derided elsewhere.

Manning devoted much attention to the problem of idiom, and our lack of precision in using words. He was fascinated by the phenomenon whereby people understand us to mean something other than what we actually say – a habit that quickly

¹⁰²⁰ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰²¹ RAS TM 9/1/14. Winker: a horse’s blinder.

¹⁰²² RAS TM 9/5.

¹⁰²³ RAS TM 9/4. The character 也 is third-tone, but Manning transliterates it in the fourth tone.

¹⁰²⁴ RAS TM 9/4.

stumps outsiders: “How should nations full of law, civilisation, methods, order &c abound in this kind of technical shorthand stile, & the meaning of the sentences cannot always be detected (by a stranger) from the direct meaning of the words. Witness Chinese.”¹⁰²⁵ This can lead to misunderstandings which, though sometimes tragic, are also a mainstay of comedy, as in the Irish television series *Father Ted*:

You know the phrase “to take care of something”? Well, I realise now that you meant that in a sort of Al Pacino way. Whereas I was thinking more along the lines of Julie Andrews.¹⁰²⁶

Manning’s Greek studies attest his wide reading of ancient texts, evidenced by lists of terminology and their documented uses in classical literature. There are also attempts to relate ancient Greek terms to words and ideas taken from Chinese, one case being the Greek word *meta* (μετά), to which he returned on multiple occasions.¹⁰²⁷ Silvia Luraghi observes this term is peculiar because, from the very beginning of written records, it displays two different sets of meanings (between/among, behind/after);¹⁰²⁸ while its use later developed so that it could be used as an adverb as well as a preposition, and mean various things including “with”. According to Luraghi, the original meaning of μετά was “between”, the extension of this idea to “among” being easily explained: “‘between’ can be thought of as a special case of ‘among’, since a trajector that is located among an indefinite number of entities must necessarily be located between two of the entities of the set.”¹⁰²⁹ For his part, Manning, to help understand the concepts behind the term’s usage, sought to make overt these implicit relational assumptions:

So to beef you may choose what garnish you like. I go to horseradish
– I look into all the divisions of garnish & choose that. Beef μετα

¹⁰²⁵ RAS TM 9/1/1.

¹⁰²⁶ *Father Ted*, “The Plague” (TV episode, 1996).

¹⁰²⁷ See for example, RAS TM 9/1/2, 9/1/4, 9/1/13.

¹⁰²⁸ Luraghi, “The History of the Greek Preposition μετά”, 134.

¹⁰²⁹ Luraghi, “The History of the Greek Preposition μετά”, 134.

horseradish ie beef with horseradish. So Iliad B[ook] 13 v[erse] 300.
Mars chooses his people whom he will assist, or whom he will go
against [...]¹⁰³⁰

Manning proceeds from his notes on *μετά* to discuss the relationship between Chinese words and their meanings, and the use of “with” in Chinese: “has sent a man with a note, see here the Chinese instead of with use a word signifying bearing, holding &c & so in other cases (consider)”.¹⁰³¹ His next note refers to a quotation from the *Hecyra* of the Roman author Terence, “[Adolescens,] Dic dum quaeso, es tu Myconius?”,¹⁰³² wondering whether “This Dum is like ㄩ[qiě]?”¹⁰³³ Manning found another echo of Chinese in Terence’s play *Phormio*, observing upon the line “[Ut] Cum uno aetatem degere[t]”: “Marriage. Similar expressions in Chinese.”¹⁰³⁴

It is not straightforward to follow the connections Manning apparently saw between these ideas, and the appalling obscurity of this line of thinking helps explain his reluctance to share it even with friends and family. Clearly, Manning’s interest in the metaphysics of language, and the usages of Greek prepositions and particles, had been a well-kept secret:

I once said this to Davy when I for the first time in my life open to him my intention of comparing[?] a lang[uage] & I mention it now for the 2d time in my life not out of vanity, or to raise myself in y[ou]r opin[ion] but to shew you that I am not wandering at random, without a real object.¹⁰³⁵

If Manning is remembering correctly, then he had only ever brought one other person into his confidence on this subject: his old friend from Cambridge, Martin Davy (1763-

¹⁰³⁰ RAS TM 9/1/2.

¹⁰³¹ RAS TM 9/1/2.

¹⁰³² “Young man, just tell me, pray, are you a Myconian?” *Hecyra*, Act V, Scene I.

¹⁰³³ RAS TM 9/1/2.

¹⁰³⁴ RAS TM 9/1/2.

¹⁰³⁵ RAS TM 1/1/52. The handwriting in Manning’s letter to his father is unclear, and for “comparing” we might read “composing”. But the copious notes in Manning’s archive, comparing Chinese word meanings with examples from ancient Greek, Latin, English, and French, support “comparing”. There is no evidence Manning ever attempted to compose a new language.

1839). Eight months later – the day before he left Rangpur for Lhasa – Manning wrote to George Leman Tuthill, providing further evidence that the study of Greek figured in his philological plans:

So when I heard you talk of publishing a Greek Dic[tionar]y, I wanted to commemorate the result of my contemplations on that language. I know a great deal about the particles & prepositions & their force in compounds, & about the tenses that never has been published. Tis a subject I shall certainly write on by & by.¹⁰³⁶

One of Manning’s obituaries refers to this ambition, confirming that “Mr Manning entertained an idea that in the structure of the Chinese language many analogies might be traced in elucidation of his own views respecting the Greek prepositions and particles.”¹⁰³⁷ Manning claims that the “study of the Chin[ese] has been of infinite service to me in these speculations & vice versa,” before continuing:

Having verified my preconception & having now the materials for a treatise on the G.L. I can speak on the subject. Perhaps tis a sort of pride. What I have in my mind is so much beyond what I could persuade people to expect, that I wont mention it.¹⁰³⁸

This “treatise on the G.L.” is probably a work on ancient Greek, which presumably evolved into the work he projected to the East India Company in 1818 as an analysis of Chinese “and a comparison of it with other tongues, ancient and modern”.¹⁰³⁹

In trying to understand what Manning meant by the “Metaphysics of Language” and the “Metaphysics of the Human Mind”, we should consider prevailing ideas about

¹⁰³⁶ RAS TM 2/3/7.

¹⁰³⁷ Williams-Wynn, “Annual Report of the Council”, 1841, vi. The notice is included within the remarks of Charles Williams-Wynn, President of the Royal Asiatic Society. But the information on Manning was probably provided by Ball. The reference to Greek prepositions and particles, and the description of Manning as “An ardent investigator of the philosophy of the human mind”, suggest Ball had read this letter (RAS TM 1/1/52). Ball had custody of Manning’s books and papers after his death.

¹⁰³⁸ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰³⁹ RAS TM 6/1/2. Instead of “G.L.”, we might read “E.L.”, suggesting a treatise on the English language. But Manning’s letter to Tuthill specifically mentions he “shall certainly write on” Greek prepositions and particles, “by & by” (RAS TM 2/3/7).

the philosophy of mind in English literary culture of the early 1800s. Manning was mainly shaped in the British empirical tradition of John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume. But another point of reference in the wider intellectual culture were the ideas of German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), which received serious attention from certain among Manning's acquaintances in the 1790s, notably Coleridge and William Taylor. Coleridge's complex relationship with Kant is well-known, but not all of Kant's readers were enamoured either by his ideas or his complicated style, which Taylor regarded as "very abstruse philosophy and pedantic phraseology".¹⁰⁴⁰ Kantian ideas about mental abilities, cognitive functioning, and forms of knowledge were percolating in Manning's milieu when he developed his project. But Manning himself never learned German,¹⁰⁴¹ and does not seem to have engaged directly with Kant's ideas. On the other hand, Manning was aware of recent debates in English linguistics prompted by the work of the political radical John Horne Tooke (1736-1812), and these may have helped spark his interest in the "Metaphysics of Language". Horne Tooke was an etymological as well as a political radical, and in 1786 he published *Epea Pteroenta, or, The Diversions of Purley*, "an attempt to democratize language" which influenced subsequent literary innovators including Hazlitt and William Cobbett (1763-1835).¹⁰⁴² Horne Tooke believed language initially comprised verbs and nouns, with other parts of speech serving as abbreviations for underlying noun and verb sequences. If prepositions and particles were examined closely enough, they could be paraphrased into underlying ideas. Horne Tooke's views were influential in England during his own lifetime, but they did not go unopposed: for example, the Scottish philosopher Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) condemned such radical reductionism as "etymological metaphysics".¹⁰⁴³ Manning must have been aware of this debate: in the course of his

¹⁰⁴⁰ Class, *Coleridge and Kantian Ideas in England*, 13.

¹⁰⁴¹ RAS TM 15/1.

¹⁰⁴² Davis, "Tooke, John Horne [formerly John Horne] (1736–1812), Radical and Philologist."

¹⁰⁴³ Rendall, "Scottish Orientalism", 51.

philological speculations in Asia, he made a note to enquire after *Illustrations of English Philology* (1815), “& Remarks on Mr Dugald Stewart’s Essay,”¹⁰⁴⁴ by Charles Richardson, one of Horne Tooke’s followers. Manning’s notebooks also refer to etymological works by Alexander Crombie (1762-1840) and Henry Butter.

Manning was familiar with Horne Tooke’s work, but may also have known him personally. Horne Tooke knew Manning’s friend Richard Porson,¹⁰⁴⁵ as well as Charles Lamb, to whom Manning wrote in January 1802: “I beg you’ll not be misled by Etymology, tho you *do* occasionally dine with Horne Tooke”.¹⁰⁴⁶ Two weeks later, Manning again mentioned Horne Tooke, this time to his father. Describing the cost of living in France, Manning observed that he “could easily have obtained Mr Tooke’s franck, while in England”.¹⁰⁴⁷ This may refer to an offer to act as a political or academic client for the older man. Manning’s Whig politics were just as likely as philology to place him within Horne Tooke’s orbit, which could even help explain why Manning secured the patronage of Talleyrand: Horne Tooke had met Talleyrand during his diplomatic visits to London in the early 1790s.¹⁰⁴⁸

Manning understood Horne Tooke’s etymological approach, but he was no disciple. Manning drafted an essay “On the Particle ‘par’”, noting:

The wit, acuteness, irony, & hocus-pocus of Horne Tooke have misled many. He has shewn great ingenuity in his etymologies; but there is more deep sense and knowledge of the nature of the enquiry into the meaning of particles in a passage of Locke that H.T. has quoted & ridiculed, than in any thing he has ever advanced himself.¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰⁴⁴ RAS TM 9/5.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Clarke, *Richard Porson*, 42.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Anderson, *Letters*, 57.

¹⁰⁴⁷ RAS TM 1/1/12.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Davis, “Tooke, John Horne.”

¹⁰⁴⁹ RAS TM 9/1/29.

Manning asserts nevertheless that the etymological method is the best way to understand the “force” of particles when their meaning is different from the word originally borrowed. To demonstrate this, he uses the hypothetical example of a heavenly body situated between two others, whose name came to represent the idea “between”. The innovators of such usages were following “a natural course: by tracing that course we in some measure put ourselves in their place, & what they meant arises in our minds”.¹⁰⁵⁰ The specific purpose of Manning’s essay is “to shew that in all the usages of par as a particle there may be traced a connexion with the idea of parity”, and he produces pages of examples in English, French, and Italian. Though full of ingenious observations, “On the Particle ‘par’” is more than anything a speculative research document, petering out with no conclusion. It does, however, point where Manning’s “philological” research was leading.

Manning’s interest in the metaphysics of language, and the metaphysics of mind, had several echoes in Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe. In 1751, James Harris (1709-1780) published *Hermes, or, A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Universal Grammar*, which interpreted any statement as giving voice to the Soul’s “Energie or Motion”, and comprising either Perception (Intellect) or Volition (Will).¹⁰⁵¹ Manning himself actually used the phrase “universal grammar” in one of his Tibetan notebooks, when a reference to Rev R. Patrick’s *A Chart of Ten Numerals in Two Hundred Tongues* (1812) prompted a note on German philology: “Adelung on monosyllabic languages. Vater on the principals. Eichhorn on universal grammar.”¹⁰⁵² But “universal grammar” also has parallels in modern linguistics, most famously associated with philosopher Noam Chomsky (b. 1928). Chomsky observed that even the most wildly varying languages use verbs, objects, and pre- or post-positions; and

¹⁰⁵⁰ RAS TM 9/1/29.

¹⁰⁵¹ Harris, *Hermes*, 15.

¹⁰⁵² RAS TM 9/3. Johann Adelung (1732-1806), grammarian; Johann Vater (1771-1826) and Johann Eichhorn (1752-1827), Biblical scholars. In general, Manning hardly engaged with the advances German philologists made during his lifetime.

that unrelated languages build their phrases using a head (verb or preposition) and a complement (such as a noun phrase). Steven Pinker explains that the existence of “universal grammar” would mean that “Something in the head must be capable of generating not just any combinations of words but highly systematic ones”.¹⁰⁵³ This “generative grammar” or “battery of rules” could then give rise to an infinite number of thoughts and intentions through a combinatorial process. In this way, “*Universal mental mechanisms can underlie superficial variation across cultures*”.¹⁰⁵⁴ Using methods of analysis and comparison that were not available two centuries ago, modern linguistics can therefore posit the “metaphysics” of language and their potential significance for, in Pinker’s words, the “innate circuitry that makes learning possible”¹⁰⁵⁵ – or, to use Manning’s phrase, the metaphysics of mind.

“The Example of a Reform on the Conduct of Life is My Object”

Manning’s projected treatise on ancient Greek, a contribution to the metaphysics of language and mind, was ambitious enough. Yet, incredibly, he suggests this was merely a secondary project:

For after all this business of l[anguage] & metaphy[sics] is only my 2ry obj[ect] – & what is my 1st[?] Why I cant speak of the 1st any more than I could speak of the other 10 years ago. I cant yet prove my pretensions. The example of a reform on the conduct of life is my object, & has been ever since I was 18 or sooner & Chi[na] & Japan being the only countries (worth inquiring about) where the real state of society is unknown, I do much wish to see one of those coun[tries] [...]¹⁰⁵⁶

Here, in a nutshell, is the reason Manning devoted himself to the study of Chinese. From the age of eighteen, or even earlier, Manning’s object was “the example of a

¹⁰⁵³ Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 36.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 37. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Pinker, *The Blank Slate*, 38.

¹⁰⁵⁶ RAS TM 1/1/52.

reform on the conduct of life”. The high level of civilisation attained in Japan and China made these countries worthy objects for study; and the relative lack of information about them available in Europe meant new work might prove fruitful. Manning does not explain why he chose to study China over Japan, but it seems reasonable to assume this was a matter of expediency: in 1800, Japan was even more inaccessible to Englishmen than China. This objective is consistent with Manning’s public declarations describing his intention to document the state of Chinese society. But he is now more candid about his deeper motive: a “reform on the conduct of life” in Britain itself, to be informed by a better understanding of the culture of China, one of only two countries “worth inquiring about” where the state of society was unknown.¹⁰⁵⁷

If the study of language could provide ultimate insights into the human mind, then the study of culture might reveal truths about the human heart:

For as their lan[guage] tho no better a lan[guage] than the E[nGLISH] (& I assure you I never in my life thought it better) may elicit metaphy[sical] truth so their mode of life, tho no better than 20 others, may elicit moral truths.¹⁰⁵⁸

Manning sought to understand the manners and customs of China to elicit moral truths. He confessed he already held “many new trains of ideas upon this & a variety of other subjects before I left England”, but that he “scarcely ever ment[ione]d them to anyone”. This he attributed to diffidence, regretting that as a result “I am not ranked in England in the place that is my due.”¹⁰⁵⁹

In order to “elicit moral truths”, Manning’s analysis of the Chinese “mode of life” would presumably have involved some comparative treatment with British manners and customs, the conclusions tending towards the raising of British moral standards. Manning clearly aspired to improve his home country, and he said, “I expect

¹⁰⁵⁷ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁵⁸ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁵⁹ RAS TM 1/1/52.

to ret[urn] to E[n]gland] & to be of use & for that reason I will not prosecute my Ch[in]ese] plans beyond a certain point of difficulty, & this I have always said”.¹⁰⁶⁰ Another idea of what Manning might have meant by “The example of a reform on the conduct of life” is contained in *The Conduct of Life* (1860) by the American transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882). This comprised nine essays under headings such as “Culture” and “Beauty”, centred around the question, “How Shall I Live?” The section on “Behaviour” occasioned an essay on “manners”: “What are they but thought entering the hands and feet, controlling the movements of the body, the speech and behaviour?”¹⁰⁶¹ Manning perhaps had something similar in mind, and his article on “Chinese Jests” seems to have embodied, in a modest way, the same basic idea.

The moral framework within which Manning saw himself operating was shaped, albeit indirectly, by religion. “I cons[ider] mys[elf] to be in the hands of Prov[idence] & to be an instrument”:

If I should add a mean & unw[orthy] ins[trument] in using those words in their religious sense, I should speak from the bottom of my soul, for this is one of the p[oin]ts in wh[ich] I differ from many who are called rational X[Christia]ns or others [...]¹⁰⁶²

Manning’s suggestion that Providence guides his efforts reveals his conscious identification with Christianity. His beliefs differed from “rational” Christians because, while he considers himself a tool in the hands of divine Providence, they “don’t lay stress enough upon humility”. Here, Manning has in mind those – including some Protestant Dissenters – who trusted human reason as a sufficient guide to action. On the contrary, Manning’s basically Augustinian belief is that humility, and the faith in

¹⁰⁶⁰ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁶¹ Emerson, *Conduct of Life*, 104.

¹⁰⁶² RAS TM 1/1/52.

Providence which it implies, “distinguishes religion from irreligion or Deism. They think too highly of man & the powers of man & his capabilities.”¹⁰⁶³

The adequacy of human reason as a principle by which to understand God’s creation or organize human society was, of course, a central theme in eighteenth-century European philosophy, especially in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The “Reign of Terror” of 1793-4, and the subsequent rise of Napoleonic imperialism, disillusioned many in Manning’s generation who once subscribed to William Godwin’s idea that mankind was “perfectible” or could be “continually made better and receiving perpetual improvement.”¹⁰⁶⁴ Providence was key to the conservative vision of government set out by Edmund Burke in the 1790s; and in 1807, Manning noted with approval Burke’s condemnation of the expropriation of church property during the French Revolution, “when those who will come into the abundance they possessed, will make not so good a use of it”, also quoting Burke’s maxim, “Wisdom is not the most severe corrector of folly.”¹⁰⁶⁵ Manning’s religious and political trajectory was therefore consistent with the general trend of that first generation of British Romantics, who gradually came to terms with the established order after the radical disillusionment of the late 1790s and early 1800s. Gregory Dart observes this process “may have been more eccentric and unstable than the orthodox account will allow”, and Manning’s intense emotional involvement with French politics certainly supports the suggestion of a “deeper investment in the political psychology of revolutionary republicanism than has been generally recognised by literary history.”¹⁰⁶⁶ Indeed, the tempering of Manning’s political and religious radicalism was not a slide into unthinking orthodoxy. His faith in the potential for human improvement survived, but now relied upon humility and prudence, instead of human reason alone. Manning still evinced optimism

¹⁰⁶³ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, I, 44.

¹⁰⁶⁵ RAS TM 9/1/39.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Dart, *Rousseau, Robespierre, and English Romanticism*, 18.

about the prospect of progress, believing that mankind is “capable of living after a much better plan than he has yet pleased to hit upon”.¹⁰⁶⁷ This perspective remained consistent with basic Enlightenment principles, Manning tending towards the Burkean conclusion that, within limits, society can and should be improved:

The same as I think that such a garden might be improved tho it could not be made a paradise – See – I call men a garden. I don’t consider him a waste & a deformity but on the whole a good thing – a garden that has & always will have weeds.¹⁰⁶⁸

In earlier correspondence, Manning often joked about being a Quaker, albeit in a tone that seemed calculated to avert serious discussion of religion. As seen in a testy reply to Charles Lamb in 1800, he was sensitive to accusations of atheism: “One thing, tho, I must beg of you – that is, not to call me Atheist in your letters”.¹⁰⁶⁹ Now, however, at the age of thirty-eight, Manning candidly admits he was once a freethinker: “I at one time called myself in my heart a deist sometimes an atheist now I lay my hand upon my heart & call myself a X[Christia]n”.¹⁰⁷⁰ Still, he acknowledged that others might consider his Christianity unconventional. True to his rationalist inclinations, Manning relates his sceptical attitude towards miracles, which “I cannot but consider as exaggerations, proofs of human frailty”. At the same time, “my spirit of humility makes me open on every subject to better information”. Manning proceeds to list the cardinal virtues in order of priority (Courage, Truth, Kindness, and Humility) and assures his father that, if Providence allows him to return to England, once there he will “have no reserve”.¹⁰⁷¹

Manning’s Chinese project thus appears to have been informed, at a deep level, by his religious beliefs. It was as an “instrument” of Providence that he conducted his

¹⁰⁶⁷ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁶⁸ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Anderson, *Letters*, 32.

¹⁰⁷⁰ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁷¹ RAS TM 1/1/52.

work on the study of manners and morality; and he accepted that the full significance of the journey he undertook might remain beyond his understanding. Perhaps this made it easier to endure the inevitable setbacks. But his plan to learn about Chinese culture was also premised on the belief that mankind was “capable of living after a much better plan than he has yet pleased to hit upon”: an optimistic, but not utopian, view premised on the belief that men could become more civilized. Moreover, the Chinese mode of life, “tho no better than 20 others”,¹⁰⁷² was a suitable case study for such a comparative treatment.

Reform, Civil and Religious

Manning’s letter supports three significant conclusions. The first is that he was engaged in serious, long-term historical studies of ancient Greek, which he compared with Chinese and which was conducted with regard to the philosophy of language and mind. Secondly, Manning hoped that the study of Chinese society might “elicit moral truths”, which could be applied as part of “the example of a reform on the conduct of life”. Thirdly, Manning in his late thirties had adopted a sceptical brand of Anglican Christianity, exalting humility before “the powers of man & his capabilities” and consciously rejecting the atheism and Deism between which he had vacillated in his youth.¹⁰⁷³ This was a far cry from his days in Cambridge, when his aversion to subscribing to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England meant he could not graduate with a degree. Yet his youthful sympathy for the Quakers and Rational Dissent never entirely dissipated; and in later life, Manning compiled detailed, complimentary notes on William Sewel’s *History of the Quakers* (1722).¹⁰⁷⁴ If Manning became temperamentally inclined towards Anglicanism, he maintained intellectual reservations about Anglican orthodoxy, especially on the core doctrine of the Trinity – that God is

¹⁰⁷² RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁷³ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹⁰⁷⁴ RAS TM 9/1/35.

three co-eternal, consubstantial persons. He was passionately engaged with the history of religious thought across the British Isles, and the study of religions more broadly, and his notebooks reveal the depth of his reading across a wide variety of theologians, philosophers, and freethinkers.

The religious situation in England was relatively stable for most of the eighteenth century, at least compared to the enormous upheavals, and periodic mass bloodshed, of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The British Civil Wars of 1640s – which paralleled the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) in Continental Europe that led to millions of deaths – were followed by a century of comparative toleration during which English Catholics and Protestant non-conformists were generally able to practice their religion without active persecution. However, both groups were excluded, by the Corporation Act of 1661 and the Test Act of 1673, from holding public office, which was conditional on receiving communion in the Church of England. This legal discrimination became a source of much bitterness: notably among Roman Catholics in Ireland, and in England among religious Dissenters who were barred from playing a full role in public life.

By the late eighteenth century, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was a core aim for political radicals and social reformers. In England, reforming opinion gradually proliferated alongside the religion of Deism, and both tendencies had troubling implications for the status of the apostolic Church of England. For the established Church considered itself part of an unbroken continuity going back to the early Church of the apostles: and the spread of Dissenting ideas threatened to upset its ascendancy and reduce its authority to that of a civil association. Doctrinal matters, especially the anti-Trinitarianism associated with some Protestant groups, were thus bound up with politically subversive ideas, including not only the abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts, but even the disestablishment of the Church of England itself.

While some Christian sects had espoused anti-Trinitarian views since the early years of the Church, the more immediate context for their proliferation was the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Sir Isaac Newton, for example, viewed the Reformation as the latest of several efforts to reform a church that had degenerated

under the influence of the Trinity and general Catholic idolatry.¹⁰⁷⁵ Newton maintained an orthodox position in public, and was sensitive to accusations of sectarian beliefs such as Arianism.¹⁰⁷⁶ However, the wider social trend of reforming Protestantism in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England, and the spread of Socinianism in particular,¹⁰⁷⁷ was part of a “general impulse to subordinate spiritual to civil authority by means that could involve a diminution of the divine nature of Christ”.¹⁰⁷⁸ Protestant Dissenters were central to periodic social upheavals between the 1770s and 1790s, when the American and French Revolutions periodically boosted anti-establishment sentiment in England. In such turbulent times, otherwise moderate and seemingly reasonable measures for religious toleration could assume a more threatening appearance. They therefore alarmed even liberal Whigs like Edward Gibbon, who “perceived the enthusiastic potential in rational Dissent, and might share Burke's fear of this movement's sympathy with [the] American and French revolutions”.¹⁰⁷⁹

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion formed the core doctrines and practices of the Church of England; finalised in 1571 and incorporated into the Book of Common Prayer, they ultimately served to define Anglicanism against the rival traditions of Calvinism and Roman Catholicism. Opposition to the Articles was a touchstone of reform, and they became imbued with symbolic significance:

However moderate its intentions, the movement for relief from subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles had a strong potential for subversion in the years of the American Revolution; it queried the

¹⁰⁷⁵ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 266.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Named after Arius (ca. 256-336), Arianism is a nontrinitarian doctrine based on the belief that Christ is the Son of God who was begotten at a point in time, and therefore did not always exist.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Named after Italian theologians Lelio (1525-1562) and Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604), Socinianism was a nontrinitarian Protestant doctrine at the centre of a controversy in the Church of England in the late seventeenth century.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, I, 295.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, I, 252.

foundations of the regime and looked as far as separation of church and state.¹⁰⁸⁰

Manning himself had an abiding concern with the Thirty-Nine Articles, which was the proximate reason why he left Cambridge without a degree. While the University of Oxford required students to subscribe to the Articles in order to matriculate, Cambridge only required that students subscribe in order to take their degree. This meant the student body could contain a wider body of non-conformist thought, and it was the reason why someone with Manning's views could benefit from a complete university education. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Cambridge had seen a succession of unorthodox theologians and supporters of Dissenting doctrines such as Arianism, Socinianism, and Unitarianism, who opposed the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁰⁸¹ Manning himself appears to have been a lifelong sceptic on that subject, judging by Henry Crabb Robinson's diary note in 1824 that Manning spoke "against the Trinity, which he thinks by a mere mistake has been adopted from Oriental philosophy under a notion that it was necessary to the Atonement".¹⁰⁸²

Felicity James has noted the liberal views of William Manning (1733-1810), Thomas Manning's father, suggesting he was "a Dissenter at heart" and sympathetic to Unitarianism.¹⁰⁸³ William Manning was a senior Anglican clergyman of some repute in local Norfolk, itself an interesting political and religious ecosystem. The county capital, Norwich, was particularly associated with radical Dissent and democratic politics.¹⁰⁸⁴ Protestant Dissenters were among the most vocal English supporters of the French and American Revolutions, with some prominent Unitarians, notably Joseph

¹⁰⁸⁰ Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, I, 297.

¹⁰⁸¹ Clarke, *Richard Porson*, 51.

¹⁰⁸² Morley, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 302. Crabb Robinson refers to Manning as "M." This is potentially confusing because Thomas Monkhouse was also present. However, it has generally been assumed (including by Morley) that "M." refers to Manning, because of his reputation as an Oriental traveller and scholar. This is also consistent with other evidence about Manning's beliefs.

¹⁰⁸³ James, "Thomas Manning", 22.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Jewson, *Jacobin City*, passim.

Priestley (1733-1804), “imprisoned or hounded out” of Britain during the French Revolution.¹⁰⁸⁵ Unitarians were also centrally involved in progressive movements to abolish the slave trade, the Test and Corporation Acts, and promoting women’s rights. Familiarity with the discourse and politics of radical Dissent helps explain the ease with which Manning befriended Charles Lloyd, Lamb, and Coleridge, all of whom were associated with the Dissenting movement in the 1790s.¹⁰⁸⁶ It also helps account for his association with prominent radicals and abolitionists, many of whom were Norfolk Dissenters, in Paris in 1802.

Manning’s religious ideas are also relevant to his approach to Chinese culture, notwithstanding the fact that he couched his interest in secular terms. Examining the case of Indian educational reformer Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), Lynn Zastoupil has shown how Unitarian perspectives helped promote inter-cultural sympathy between reformers in Britain, India, and the United States. Roy’s deployment of anti-Trinitarian views in his arguments against the Baptist missionary Joshua Marshman was taken up by Unitarians in Britain advocating liberal reforms, while Roy’s own reformist agenda was partly shaped by the language of Rational Dissent and intellectual exchange with British Unitarians in Calcutta.¹⁰⁸⁷ Although religion could foster division and discord, religious ideas also contained the potential for promoting affinity or even syncretism between different peoples and communities.

Manning’s early religious views and opposition to the Thirty-Nine Articles practically mandated sympathy with radical politics. He was a Whig, and in his youth inclined towards the radical wing of the party led by Charles James Fox (1749-1806) rather than the more conservative tendency associated with Burke and Gibbon. Fox exulted in the French Revolution, which he understood as a French adaptation of the “Glorious Revolution” that solidified parliamentary democracy in 1688. While Fox was

¹⁰⁸⁵ Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy*, 9.

¹⁰⁸⁶ See James, *Charles Lamb, Coleridge and Wordsworth*, chapter one.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy*, 30-31.

horrified by the bloody events that unfolded under the Jacobin regime, he considered these defensive necessities of a revolution besieged by hostile foreign powers; and for the same reason opposed the military campaigns of William Pitt's government against the French Republic. Fox's position changed little once Napoleon began to centralize power;¹⁰⁸⁸ and Manning's admiration for Napoleon in 1802 suggests that his own sympathy for the Revolution, like Fox, lasted into the early 1800s. However, Napoleon's despotic style of government, and the resumption of war between Britain and France after the Peace of Amiens, combined to stir Manning's patriotism; and his letters from China indicate wholehearted support for the war effort against Napoleonic France.

Nevertheless, Manning's interpretation of patriotism did not mandate a disparaging attitude towards other countries, something he emphasised to his father in February 1808. Manning disdained those among his countrymen who held other nations in "supercilious contempt", and was confident that his father thought "in the same stile as I do on this subject, for you are a true Whig".¹⁰⁸⁹ Manning's use of the term "true Whig" evokes the original principles supposedly enshrined in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which were articulated by authors including Robert Molesworth (1656-1725) whose work was re-published in 1775 as *The Principles of a Real Whig* – an edition with which Manning may have been familiar. The same ideals were also associated with Algernon Sidney (1623-1683), a major figure in the English liberal tradition executed for treason during the Restoration Crisis under Charles II; and Manning made extensive notes on Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government*, the work which had precipitated his arrest.¹⁰⁹⁰ Manning associated Fox with these same principles, and upon

¹⁰⁸⁸ Mitchell, "Fox, Charles James (1749–1806), Politician."

¹⁰⁸⁹ RAS TM 1/1/44.

¹⁰⁹⁰ RAS TM 9/1/15.

hearing of Fox's death, wrote to his father that it "was melancholy news to my heart. Without knowing him I loved him very much."¹⁰⁹¹

Manning copied a quote from Fox in one of his notebooks: "Action not principle is the true object of government".¹⁰⁹² Fox made this argument in the course of justifying the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the implication being that the state should concern itself with actions, not matters of conscience: private principles and beliefs are not the government's business. The same argument was later used to support the rights of Catholics, including in the New England Unitarian publication *The Christian Examiner* in 1831.¹⁰⁹³ In the 1820s, Daniel O'Connell's campaigns for Catholic emancipation brought this issue to the front of the political agenda, and it found considerable support from the public as well as the Whig party. Despite his anti-Trinitarian views and leanings towards rational Dissent, Manning was open to the merits of certain Catholic theologians and scholars, noting for example the many positive qualities of Bishop John Fisher (1469-1535), executed by Henry VIII.¹⁰⁹⁴ Manning's studies of church history reflect his desire to trace discussions about the Trinity, as well as the Thirty-Nine Articles, across English religious history; and he was particularly interested in the extent to which traces of Calvinism and Roman Catholicism could still be discerned within Anglican traditions.¹⁰⁹⁵ The mass of notes which he left on this subject testify to his intense interest and wide reading, embodied in the series of seven letters he drafted "On Catholic Restrictions", signed from "An Englishman", apparently dating from 1825.¹⁰⁹⁶ These began with the observation that Catholicism was similar to, and compatible with, the Church of England in the "general

¹⁰⁹¹ RAS TM 1/1/42. Fox died in September 1806, after Manning had left for China. He mentions Fox's death in a June 1807 letter from Macao.

¹⁰⁹² RAS TM 9/1/16. Fox made the statement to his Catholic friend, Charles Butler, in connection with the necessity of expanding the rights of British Catholics. See Butler, *Reminiscences of Charles Butler*, 81.

¹⁰⁹³ *Christian Examiner and General Review* (1831), Vol. 10, 98-99.

¹⁰⁹⁴ RAS TM 9/1/1.

¹⁰⁹⁵ See for example Manning's almanac for 1825: RAS TM 9/7/1.

¹⁰⁹⁶ RAS TM 9/10/1-6.

spirit” of its discipline and ordinances.¹⁰⁹⁷ This similarity was obscure to most English people because few now paid attention to the content and doctrines of Catholicism: having no fear of the populace converting to Catholicism, the learned felt no more “necessity for studying and discriminating their tenets, than those of the followers of the grand Lama.”¹⁰⁹⁸ After twenty-eight pages of measured argument, Manning came down in favour of removing the “disqualifying statutes” against Catholics. However, he added a prevaricating coda, that this should be done “after we are convinced they are loyal subjects, & that they have really no wish of treacherously subverting our establishments”.¹⁰⁹⁹ This might frustrate some readers, as the question whether Roman Catholics were capable of conscientious loyalty towards Protestant polities was precisely the point at hand.

Religion, Philosophy, and Oriental Studies

The mechanistic philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650), combined with the empirical method advocated by Sir Francis Bacon, gave impetus to the modern scientific revolution which, beginning in Europe in the early seventeenth century, opened new fields of knowledge about the natural world. But it took time for principles of Cartesian rationalism and, later, empiricism to be applied to the study of history and religion. After all, if scientific or mathematical theories about the nature of the cosmos could provoke major controversy, then it is unsurprising that new theories about man, society and the truth of religious texts would also elicit strong resistance. Existing religious and spiritual systems were sometimes adept at integrating new scientific theories and information; and religious faith could be the servant, as well as the opponent, of scientific discovery. For example, Bacon’s scientific project had Christian underpinnings: in a fallen world, the human capacity for knowledge was strictly limited,

¹⁰⁹⁷ RAS TM 9/10/1.

¹⁰⁹⁸ RAS TM 9/10/1.

¹⁰⁹⁹ RAS TM 9/10/1.

but Bacon believed that communal labour and natural philosophy might restore the dominion over nature Adam enjoyed before the Fall.¹¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Europe's deepening knowledge of Asiatic religions had a profoundly relativizing influence on Christian beliefs and the European sense of self. But while knowledge of Asiatic religions might threaten the dominance of Christianity, so too did it hold out the promise of new clues to demonstrate its truth and the errors of religious antagonists. And just as Christians could use evidence from other traditions to support their beliefs, so did supporters of the new religion of Deism – most famously, Voltaire – find evidence in Asiatic religions to buttress their own arguments.

In this way, Urs App argues persuasively that religion, not colonialism, was decisive in shaping the development of Oriental studies in eighteenth century Europe. This religious background paved the way for the institutionalization of Oriental studies in the early nineteenth century:

[T]he role of colonialism (and generally of economic and political interests) in the birth of Orientalism dwindles to insignificance compared to the role of religion. Modern Orientalism is the successor of earlier forms of Orientalism involving the study of Asian languages and texts.¹¹⁰¹

Robert Irwin also highlights that Oriental scholarship “developed in the shade of the much grander discourses of the Bible and of the classics.”¹¹⁰² When Thomas Manning became interested in Oriental studies in the 1790s, there was a long history of British people studying Asiatic texts for Biblical scholarship or other religious reasons, compared to which Britain's imperial interests in Asia remained in their infancy. Manning was not engaged in the study of Chinese for the same reasons as, say, some Jesuits were in the seventeenth century: and his approach to Chinese society clearly shows the influence of secular writers like Montesquieu and Gibbon. But the historical

¹¹⁰⁰ Harrison, *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science*, 179.

¹¹⁰¹ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, xi-xii.

¹¹⁰² Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 2.

context referenced by App and Irwin reminds us that the religious worldview played a vital role in underpinning visions of society in late eighteenth century Europe. Manning's close interest in religious history, and his self-image as an "instrument" in the hands of Providence,¹¹⁰³ suggests the role of religious ideas in his own interest in China.

In 1810, Manning wrote that he had been interested in social reform at least since the age of eighteen, and he retrospectively described his youthful religious views as vacillating between Deism and atheism.¹¹⁰⁴ Such "freethinking" might encourage the idea that Britain could learn from non-Christian countries; and it is likely that the idea for studying either China or Japan gradually took hold over the course of the 1790s, crystalizing into a more definite ambition between the late 1790s and 1801, when China first appeared in Manning's correspondence.¹¹⁰⁵

Before Manning, only a handful of British scholars had carried out any meaningful studies of Chinese, chief among them Bishop Thomas Percy (1729-1811) and Sir William Jones (1746-1794). While Jones is best-known for his study of Sanskrit and Persian, he also made some headway with Chinese, being particularly interested in the *Shijing* and the *Lunyu*.¹¹⁰⁶ Jones's seventh annual address to the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1790) was on the origins of the Han Chinese people: Jones believed the subject "has no concern, indeed, with our political or commercial interests, but a very material connection, if I mistake not, with interests of a higher nature."¹¹⁰⁷ These higher interests concerned the account of man's descent from Noah in the Book of Genesis, attributed to Moses. In his famous essay "On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India" (1785), Jones hinted at the existence of "a general union or affinity between the most distinguished

¹¹⁰³ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹¹⁰⁴ RAS TM 1/1/52.

¹¹⁰⁵ Chapter one suggests a romantic disappointment in 1800 might have been a catalyst for Manning's decision to go to China.

¹¹⁰⁶ Fan, "Sir William Jones's Chinese Studies", 309.

¹¹⁰⁷ Jones, "The Seventh Anniversary Discourse", 367.

inhabitants of the primitive world, at the time when they deviated, as they did too early deviate, from the rational adoration of the only true GOD”.¹¹⁰⁸ Thomas Trautmann suggests that Jones’s “entire project [was] one of forming a rational defense of the Bible out of the materials collected in Oriental scholarship, more specifically a defense of the Mosaic account of human history in its earliest times.”¹¹⁰⁹ Urs App posits a connection, in turn, with the genre of “Ancient Theology”, or *prisca theologia*, which dated back through the theological speculations of Sir Isaac Newton to Renaissance theologians who sought to deploy ancient Asiatic sources to shed light on religion before the Flood.¹¹¹⁰

Jones was widely regarded in his own time and since as a linguistic genius, being cited in one of Manning’s obituaries as a stimulus for his own studies;¹¹¹¹ and James Watt observes that Manning “sometimes signalled a ‘Jonesian’ intellectual ambition”.¹¹¹² Manning and Jones were both Deists when they began to learn Chinese, but Thomas Percy was the Anglican Bishop of Dromore. Though not without sympathy for Chinese culture, his attempt “to develop what he represented as a distinctively British and Protestant perspective on Chinese customs and manners” was informed by scepticism about the limits of non-Christian morality, in explicit contrast to the “accommodationist” approach to Confucianism associated with Catholic missionaries.¹¹¹³ Percy’s translation of a Chinese novel, *Hau Kiou Choaan, or, The Pleasing History* (1761), was perhaps the most significant work on China in mid-eighteenth century England. Percy also issued translations of Runic poetry from Icelandic, and in 1770 published *Northern Antiquities*, a critical edition of *Introduction a l’histoire de Dannemarc* (1755–6) by Genevan historian Paul Henri Mallet (1730-

¹¹⁰⁸ Jones, “On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India”, 221-222.

¹¹⁰⁹ Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, 42.

¹¹¹⁰ App, “William Jones’s Ancient Theology”, 9.

¹¹¹¹ Donne, “Memoir”, 228.

¹¹¹² Watt, “Mediating China”, 2.

¹¹¹³ Watt, “Thomas Percy, China, and the Gothic”, 99.

1807). This inspired Norwich poet Frank Sayers (1763-1817) to write *Dramatic Sketches of Ancient Northern Mythology* (1790), one of East Anglia's most celebrated literary works during its golden decade of the 1790s.¹¹¹⁴ Percy, however, is chiefly known for *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). Drawing on British and European folkloric traditions as well as Asiatic sources, Percy anticipated the efforts of Romantic authors who integrated source material from a variety of European and Asian traditions into their poetry.

One of those Romantics – Samuel Taylor Coleridge – provides a particularly interesting foil for Manning's philosophical pursuits. John Beer placed Coleridge within a tradition of "visionary religion" going back to the late seventeenth century, when the Cambridge Platonists Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) and Henry More (1614-1687), "concerned at the widening gulf between traditional religion and the new scientific outlook, had tried to build a bridge which should link the empiricism of Bacon and Descartes with Platonic speculation."¹¹¹⁵ With a worldview still largely shaped by the Bible, there remained a "hope that all human knowledge might yet be harmonized into one universal pattern, which would be reconcilable with that laid down in the Bible and ancient classical authorities."¹¹¹⁶

Manning's interests mirrored Coleridge's, not just in his wide curiosity about science and religion, but also in his special focus on morality and metaphysics. Yet their temperaments differed, and Coleridge's literary and philosophical ambitions ranged far beyond Manning's, as they did most of his contemporaries. In 1817, Crabb Robinson described a conversation between the two men:

Coleridge was philosophising in his rambling way to Monkhouse, who listened attentively; to Manning, who sometimes smiled as if he

¹¹¹⁴ Chandler, *Norwich Literature*, 67.

¹¹¹⁵ Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, 49.

¹¹¹⁶ Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary*, 50.

thought Coleridge had no right to metaphysicise on chemistry without any knowledge on the subject.¹¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, Manning's research touched upon well-established Coleridgean themes. They shared an interest in Neoplatonist philosophy, the subject perhaps figuring in their conversation when introduced by Charles Lamb in January 1800. Lamb did not quite share their ardour for the topic, but he was still well-versed in Neoplatonism, having "been an enthusiastic auditor of Coleridge's speculative discourses" in the early 1790s.¹¹¹⁸ Lamb's letters, which are replete with "singularly a propos" classical allusions,¹¹¹⁹ also evidence his extensive knowledge of classical literature, which few modern readers will be able to fully appreciate. Lamb clearly enjoyed peppering his letters to Manning with references to ancient texts, and one of his humorous epistolary habits was to address Manning under another name, usually derived from classical authorities. The jovial tone in which Lamb deployed these aliases means we should be careful about burdening them with too much weight. However, it is safe to assume that Lamb did not use these terms mindlessly. When he addressed Manning by another name, this might point to a perceived resemblance, exaggerated for the sake of a joke; alternatively, it might have seemed funny due to the absurdity of the contrast. In either case, when Lamb repeatedly returns to the same idea, it signifies something of interest.

One of Lamb's favourite terms for Manning was "Archimedes", which he used regularly in his early letters of 1800 and 1801. Archimedes of Syracuse (ca. 287–ca. 212 BC) was a Greek mathematician and one of the leading scientists of classical antiquity. By dubbing Manning in this way, Lamb showed respect for his mathematical proficiency, as well as making fun of his own shortcomings: Manning was no Archimedes, but he might well seem like one next to Lamb. Writing to Manning after the meeting with Coleridge, Lamb reported that "Coleridge has conceived a most high

¹¹¹⁷ Morley, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 215.

¹¹¹⁸ Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 96.

¹¹¹⁹ Burriss, "The Classical Culture of Charles Lamb", 1.

[...] opinion of you, most illustrious Archimedes”.¹¹²⁰ Coleridge and Manning attended Cambridge at the same time, in the early 1790s, and it is natural that ancient Greek and mathematics – which then formed the core of a Cambridge education – should figure in their conversation. Lamb’s reference to Manning as “Euclid” can probably be understood in the same way.¹¹²¹ The geometry of ancient Greek mathematician Euclid remained a cornerstone of Cambridge education in 1800, and Lamb was therefore acknowledging both Manning’s mathematical prowess and his own inadequacy. Lamb introduced each authority in a quote from Milton (“Let Euclid rest and Archimedes pause”) when inviting Manning to get drunk with him in London.¹¹²²

Lamb was using these terms as part of a joke, but they also addressed an aspect of Manning’s learning (mathematics) which is well-attested. The joke also suggests the subject came up in their conversation. Indeed, Lamb (as “Elia”) later lamented – again, with a comical air – that Manning “with great pains-taking, got me to think I understood the first proposition in Euclid, but gave me over in despair at the second”.¹¹²³ In another letter to Manning, Lamb designated the poet George Dyer (1755-1841) as “an Archimedes, and an Archimagus, and a Tycho Brahe, and a Copernicus”, when asking for a copy of Manning’s maths textbook. Now, Manning is promoted even higher than this pantheon of human heroes, becoming the “darling of the Nine, and midwife to their wandering babe also!”¹¹²⁴ In another context, the “Nine” might be taken to mean the nine orders of angels in the Cabalist scheme of Pseudo-Dionysus,¹¹²⁵ but here it is more likely a reference to the Nine Muses of Greek mythology, who ruled over the arts and sciences. In this context, the “wandering babe” might stand for truth or knowledge, to whom Manning ministers as a sort of midwife. Lamb might be making a humorous

¹¹²⁰ Guy Pocock ed., *The Letters of Charles Lamb*, I, 125.

¹¹²¹ Fitzgerald ed., *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb*, II, 186.

¹¹²² Fitzgerald ed., *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb*, II, 178. The quotation is from Milton’s Sonnet 21, Cyriack, Whose Grandsire on the Royal Bench.

¹¹²³ Lamb, *Essays of Elia*, 31.

¹¹²⁴ Fitzgerald ed., *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb*, II, 162.

¹¹²⁵ See Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 139-140.

comparison between Manning and Homer, who was identified by Lucretius (ca. 99 – ca. 55 BC) as the “darling of the nine”; an allusion that had appeared just a few years earlier – by way of the translation of Thomas Creech (1659-1700) – in Robert Anderson’s *Works of the British Poets* (1795).¹¹²⁶ Lamb’s hyperbole, of course, was comedic; but it also demonstrates how shared classical symbols and motifs could facilitate the exchange of ideas.

Lamb used another, even more curious term to address Manning on multiple occasions between 1800 and 1802. On 3 November 1800, he began a letter, “*Enquid meditator Archimedes? What is Euclid doing? What hath happened to Trismegistus?*”¹¹²⁷ In early 1802, shortly after Manning arrived in Paris, Lamb promised to keep Manning’s letters so he could use them to recall his ideas after he got back:

Not a sentence, not a syllable of Trismegistus, shall be lost through my neglect. I am his wordbanker, his storekeeper of puns and syllogisms. You cannot conceive (and if Trismegistus cannot, no man can) the strange joy which I felt at the receipt of a letter from Paris.¹¹²⁸

Lamb’s references to Archimedes and Euclid were an exaggeration based on something real: Manning’s expertise in mathematics. What, then, did Lamb mean by calling Manning “Trismegistus” – a figure obscure and unfamiliar to most modern readers?

Whereas Archimedes and Euclid were real people who lived in history, Hermes Trismegistus was an apocryphal sage of the ancient world. But, during the Renaissance, he was widely believed to have been a genuine historical figure, contemporaneous with Moses, who foresaw the arrival of Christianity. “Trismegistus” meant “Thrice-Great”, and he was identified with the Greek god Hermes as well as Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom, and the Roman god Mercury. Trismegistus was purported to be the font of

¹¹²⁶ Anderson, *Works of the British Poets*, Vol. 13, 443.

¹¹²⁷ Fitzgerald ed., *The Life, Letters, and Writings of Charles Lamb*, II, 186.

¹¹²⁸ Lamb, *Works*, VI, 234.

Egyptian religion and science, and because Egypt was thought in the fifteenth century to be the source of Greek learning, he was also considered an original source of European culture at large.¹¹²⁹ Because Thoth was sometimes credited with the invention of hieroglyphics, Trismegistus also had an important relationship to the development of language.¹¹³⁰ The suggestion that Lamb sustained a mental association between Manning and some of this background finds support in his letter to Robert Lloyd in 1801, where he described Manning as “an enchanter almost”, who “can act the wonders of Egypt”.¹¹³¹ When he called Manning “Trismegistus”, Lamb was therefore making a humorous comparison with an ancient magus who was implicated in the creation of religion, science, and language.

In the ancient Mediterranean, a large body of astrological and magical literature in the Greek language developed under the name of Hermes Trismegistus, alongside a parallel body of philosophical literature now dated to the early centuries of the Christian era.¹¹³² During the Renaissance, this literature was generally considered to be significantly older than Christ, partly thanks to statements by early Church Fathers,¹¹³³ and it exerted a great influence in sixteenth-century Europe, where it helped inspire Christian thinkers to develop syncretic Hermetic and Neoplatonist doctrines. The historian Frances Yates even suggested that “the intensive Hermetic training of the imagination towards the world” which this inspired may have helped prepare the way for the Cartesian revolution, and thus the development of modern science.¹¹³⁴ Be that as it may, Hermes Trismegistus undoubtedly held symbolic significance, during and after the Renaissance, for some scholars who hoped to reconcile rationalism with

¹¹²⁹ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 59.

¹¹³⁰ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 30.

¹¹³¹ Lucas, *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, 127

¹¹³² Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 2.

¹¹³³ Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 6.

¹¹³⁴ Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 453.

spiritual and religious intuitions. In his joking reference to “Trismegistus”, Lamb may therefore have drawn attention to an esoteric dimension of Manning’s research.

Hermetism, Neoplatonism, and *Prisca Theologia*

Hermes Trismegistus is relevant to the early European study of China. A central tenet of the Hermetic tradition was *prisca theologia*, or the idea that a single, true theology – an ancient monotheism – was originally revealed to man by God; and that evidence of this survived in different religions. This notion recurred in the thinking of disparate figures across Enlightenment Europe, but it was first used by the Italian Humanist scholar and Catholic priest, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499). Ficino, who translated a collection of Hermetic texts, was pivotal to the Renaissance revival of Neoplatonist philosophy:

[Ficino] saw himself as one member of a venerable sequence of interpreters who added to a store of wisdom that God allowed progressively to unfold. Each of these “prisci theologi,” or “ancient theologians,” had his part to play in discovering, documenting, and elaborating the truth contained in the writings of Plato and other ancient sages, a truth to which these sages may not have been fully privy, acting as they were as vessels of divine truth.¹¹³⁵

Neoplatonism was an influential school of philosophy that emerged in the Greco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean in late antiquity. While prioritizing the work of Plato, the Neoplatonists sought to synthesize the intellectual heritage of the Hellenic world, bringing “the scientific and moral theories of Plato, Aristotle, and the ethics of the Stoics into fruitful dialogue with literature, myth, and religious practice.”¹¹³⁶ Holding that mind was ontologically prior to matter, Neoplatonists believed that reality depended on a unitary essence, an ineffable, divine principle often conceived as “The One”. Neoplatonism was an important influence on early Christianity, discussed for

¹¹³⁵ Celenza, “Marsilio Ficino”.

¹¹³⁶ Wildberg, “Neoplatonism”.

example in the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine (354 – 430), while some early Christians, such as Origen (ca. 184 – ca. 253), identified the Neoplatonic One with the Christian God. Ficino’s desire to syncretize Neoplatonism with Christianity reflected generic enthusiasm for antiquity and the assumption that the ancients lived in a more harmonious manner than later cultures, whose diversity was symptomatic of their degeneration from purer models. The same drive to unify cultural systems in conformity with earlier exemplars was at the root of schemes to reduce Eastern religions to a common pattern corresponding to Christianity.¹¹³⁷ In the context of this universalist aspiration, Hermes Trismegistus “became a quasi-Christian who was capable of solving the perennially perplexing problem of how to bridge pagan philosophy and Christianity.”¹¹³⁸

The notion that all religions contained a germ of true theology saw further elaboration in the work of Jesuit “Figurists”, who held that the ancient Chinese classics, *Yijing* and *Shang Shu*, “contained allegorical vestiges of Christian teachings and [who] even maintained that Christ’s revelation was prophesied in the abstruse symbolism of such texts”.¹¹³⁹ There were attempts to connect Chinese culture with Trismegistus and ancient Egypt, notably by Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680). Kircher studied hieroglyphics for hidden truths about the nature of God and reality, interpreting Chinese culture as a derivation from ancient Egypt.¹¹⁴⁰ Parallel to Kircher’s belief that Thoth created hieroglyphics, Figurist missionary Joachim Bouvet saw Fuxi, China’s legendary founder, as the creator of the Chinese language. Bouvet, however, credited Fuxi’s work as older still, and the *Yijing* as containing “a key to reducing all phenomena of the world into quantitative elements of number, weight and measure”.¹¹⁴¹

¹¹³⁷ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 30.

¹¹³⁸ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 30.

¹¹³⁹ Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*, 117.

¹¹⁴⁰ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 31.

¹¹⁴¹ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 31.

It is extremely unlikely that Lamb had Figurism in mind when calling Manning “Trismegistus”. Manning was interested in Neoplatonism, but there is no evidence this extended to sympathy for Hermetic or Figurist ideas. Neither did he study the Chinese classics to shed light on Biblical chronology. Indeed, the heyday of Hermetism had passed in the early seventeenth century, when Isaac Casaubon showed via textual analysis that the Hermetic texts were younger than had been claimed, being composed after the birth of Christ.¹¹⁴² This was an important corrective to a tradition known for fantastical speculations, but it was still not the end of the matter. The Cambridge Platonists, accepting the *Hermetica* as Christian forgeries, nevertheless argued they contained vestiges of ancient Egyptian philosophy, as well as profound spiritual and aesthetic meaning.¹¹⁴³ In one sense, the Cambridge Platonists may not have pushed back hard enough. Frances Yates suggests the works were not, in fact, Christian forgeries, but were probably composed by unknown Greek authors; far from being crypto-Christian works, they comprised “a mixture of Platonism and Stoicism, combined with some Jewish and probably some Persian influences”.¹¹⁴⁴

Late-Georgian England saw a resurgence of interest in Neoplatonism thanks to the series of popular translations issued by Thomas Taylor (1758-1835), and Trismegistus would thus remain familiar to those versed in classical and Renaissance traditions. Lamb later recalled how Coleridge, in their school days at Christ’s Hospital in London, would unfurl the Neoplatonic mysteries of Iamblichus and Plotinus.¹¹⁴⁵ Coleridge’s youthful readings in this field are relatively well-known, and he wrote to John Thelwall in 1796 that “Metaphysics and poetry and ‘facts of mind’, that is,

¹¹⁴² Mungello, *Curious Land*, 30, 308. In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot used the name ironically for “Edward Casaubon”, an unsympathetic scholar obsessed with scouring ancient texts in the futile search for a syncretic “Key to All Mythologies”.

¹¹⁴³ Toor, *Coleridge’s Chrysopoetics*, 39.

¹¹⁴⁴ Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 3.

¹¹⁴⁵ Beer, *Coleridge’s Poetic Intelligence*, 28.

accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed your philosophy-dreamers from Thoth, the Egyptian to Taylor, the English Pagan, are my darling studies”.¹¹⁴⁶

In his Almanack for 1832, Manning, then in his sixtieth year, made a note about “Ficinus on prolonging life”.¹¹⁴⁷ This was probably a reference to Ficino’s *magnum opus*, *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animae* (1474), which discussed the immortality of the soul. Manning probably knew of Ficino’s efforts to safeguard health by integrating astral magic with practical medicine: “the attraction of divine powers into objects or substances with which those powers are associated, with a view to obtaining a physical result.”¹¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Manning recorded his opinion that “Plotinus, Porphry, Philoponus acute & consequential reasoners, about the soul”.¹¹⁴⁹ Plotinus (ca. 204 – 270) was often considered the founder of Neoplatonism, and his writings, the *Enneads*, were edited by Porphyry of Tyre (ca. 234 – 305). John Philoponus (ca. 490 – 570) was a philologist and Christian theologian who sought to reconcile Christianity with ancient rationalism and was posthumously condemned for his heretical views regarding the Trinity. Coleridge also studied Ficino’s translations of Neoplatonist philosophers, including Porphyry, as well as the works of Cudworth and the Cambridge Platonists.¹¹⁵⁰ Manning made notes on Cudworth’s views about the Trinity and the Athanasian Creed, but he was not an uncritical admirer, observing that Cudworth was “not over wise” for citing with “complacency & approbation” the views of certain Church Fathers concerning sacrifice.¹¹⁵¹

¹¹⁴⁶ E.H. Coleridge ed., *Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, I, 181.

¹¹⁴⁷ RAS TM 9/7/4.

¹¹⁴⁸ Salaman, “Echoes of Egypt in Hermes and Ficino”, 128.

¹¹⁴⁹ RAS TM 9/1/1.

¹¹⁵⁰ Cheshire, *William Gilbert and Esoteric Romanticism*, 72.

¹¹⁵¹ RAS TM 9/1/1. For Cudworth’s views on sacrifice, see Hedley, *Sacrifice Imagined*, 205-208.

Visionary Religion

Manning kept his interest in Neoplatonism close to his chest. But his letters and notebooks, considered alongside his occasional public statements about religion, suggest he maintained an abiding interest in Neoplatonist ideas about transcendence and the soul. His temperamental acceptance of Anglican Christianity accompanied an eirenic philosophy of world religion consistent with Neoplatonist monism. In his account of travelling in Tibet, Manning dismissed as a “vulgar error” the idea that the founders of all religions except Christianity were impostors or frauds, observing, “All religions as they are established have a mixture in them of good and evil, and upon the whole they all perhaps tend to civilize and ameliorate mankind: as such I respect them.”¹¹⁵² A pluralist respect for different religions is not the same as believing they all developed from the same source, or that a fragment of underlying true theology is present in all religions, in the manner of *prisca theologia*. But there is an indelible impression of Neoplatonism in the memorable description of Manning left by Coleridge’s friend, Thomas Allsop (1795-1880). Even allowing for the elements of Orientalist mystique, this extraordinary passage demands careful consideration.

Once, and once only, did I witness an outburst of his unembodied spirit, when such was the effect of his more than magnetic, his magic power (learnt was it in Chaldea, or in that sealed continent to which the superhuman knowledge of Zoroaster was conveyed by Confucius, into which he was the first to penetrate with impunity), that we were all rapt and carried aloft into the seventh heaven. He seemed to see and to convey to us clearly (I had almost said adequately), what was passing in the presence of the Great Disembodied ONE, rather by an intuition or the creation of a new sense than by words. Verily there are more things on earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. I am unwilling to admit the influence this wonderful man had over his auditors, as I cannot at all convey an adequate notion or even image of his extraordinary and very peculiar powers. Passing from a state which was only not of the highest excitement, because the power was

¹¹⁵² Manning, “Journey”, 291.

felt, not shown, he, by an easy, a graceful, and, as it seemed at the time, a natural transition, entered upon the discussion, or, as it rather seemed, the solution of some of the most interesting questions connected with the early pursuits of men. Amongst other matters, the origin of cooking, which it seems was deemed of sufficient importance by older and therefore wiser, nations to form part of their archives.¹¹⁵³

Here, Manning emerges as “Trismegistus”, working the wonders of Egypt. Allsop’s statement, that “once only” did he see Manning hold forth like this, rings true. Manning was an introvert and was chary of speaking candidly before large groups, much preferring individual conversation. While Allsop does not mention the occasion of this incident, it must have occurred at a bibulous gathering in London during the decade after Manning’s return from China in late 1817. Henry Crabb Robinson records seeing Manning at Lamb’s several times in 1817 and 1818, once in the company of Coleridge; while Manning’s comments on cooking imply a connection to Lamb’s essay on the origins of roasting pigs, which would place the meeting around 1822.

Allsop’s reference to Manning’s “unembodied” spirit establishes his account’s mystical tenor. It suggests a transcendent, ethereal force operating independently of material form, which is a motif often associated with spiritual or religious power. Manning’s “power”, indeed, is “more than magnetic”: it is “magic”.¹¹⁵⁴ Magic and magnetism were connected in the late-eighteenth-century imagination, notably through the theory of “animal magnetism”, or mesmerism, propounded by the German doctor Franz Mesmer (1734-1815). This centred on the idea that all living things possessed transferable, invisible energy, which could induce healing and other physical effects. Manning induced a “rapt” state in his audience, akin to hypnotism, and in this palpably euphoric, mesmerized condition, they became receptive to the discussion of profound spiritual questions. One kind of consciousness, or sight, was weakened, but a dormant

¹¹⁵³ Allsop, *Letters*, 114-115.

¹¹⁵⁴ Allsop, *Letters*, 114.

spiritual awareness was simultaneously kindled and attuned. Such mental states were the subject of scientific interest in the early nineteenth century. The famous experiments of Sir Humphry Davy (1778-1829), later President of the Royal Society, centred on the “enthusiastic and sublime” effects of nitrous oxide (laughing gas), leading him, in his euphoria, to exclaim “Nothing exists but thoughts! – the universe is composed of impressions, ideas, pleasures and pains”.¹¹⁵⁵ In the popular imagination, the Enlightenment has become synonymous with scientific rationalism, but it is also true that new discoveries – including about magnetism and human consciousness – “were opening men’s minds again to the mysterious powers of the universe.”¹¹⁵⁶ For some, these promised fundamental explanations of the cosmos which might be reconciled with established spiritual beliefs.

In a Christian context, “rapture” is readily associated with the idea of bodily or spiritual ascent to encounter the deity. The concept of seven celestial tiers, mirroring the seven classical “planets” visible on Earth to the naked eye, figures in many Eurasian religious traditions, with the highest tier sometimes being considered the domain of God.¹¹⁵⁷ When Allsop describes Manning’s listeners “carried aloft into the seventh heaven”, it is as if, in a semi-conscious state, they have been inculcated into another order of reality, which is the proper plane for apprehending matters of spiritual importance. Manning thereby brings his listeners into the presence of divinity, or “the Great Disembodied ONE”. Allsop describes the communication of ideas “rather by an intuition or the creation of a new sense than by words”, as if Manning’s quasi-hypnotism induces a state in his listeners where he can communicate intuitive truths along a dimension operating deeper than the conscious, rational mind. These truths were not understood rationally, but were experienced; and thus was the power “felt, not

¹¹⁵⁵ Beer, *Coleridge’s Poetic Intelligence*, 201.

¹¹⁵⁶ Beer, *Coleridge’s Poetic Intelligence*, 5.

¹¹⁵⁷ Davidson, *Dictionary of Angels*, 193.

shown”.¹¹⁵⁸ Allsop’s description might betray his familiarity with some of Coleridge’s psychological speculations, such as the psychic “primary consciousness” which John Beer suggests Coleridge identified as “the hidden and secret level, in all processes of perception”, most readily apparent in dreams and operative in imaginary creation.¹¹⁵⁹

In Allsop’s description of Manning’s philosophical discourse, psychological and religious questions are completely intertwined, together comprising his “extraordinary and very peculiar powers”. Allsop intimates that this “magic power” was not innate, but learned; and he suggests two possible origins, both geographically and culturally remote. First is the obscure land of “Chaldea”, an ancient Semitic-speaking kingdom now thought to have existed in south-east Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), eventually absorbed into Babylonia. Allsop is likely using the term as an archaic metonym for the kingdom of Babylonia in general, and implying forgotten wisdom that pre-dated the Hellenic world. We might also infer that Allsop was speaking metaphorically: Manning never travelled in either Babylonia or Mesopotamia, and any “Chaldean” knowledge must therefore have been acquired through book-learning, rather than direct observation. A possible “Chaldean” source of magic power would thus be the *Chaldean Oracles*, a set of spiritual and philosophical texts venerated by Neoplatonist philosophers and said to date from the reign of Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-189).¹¹⁶⁰ The *Oracles* were known in Manning’s day thanks to the English translation of Thomas Taylor, Coleridge’s “English pagan”.¹¹⁶¹

“Chaldea” therefore conjures associations with ancient transcendent wisdom enshrined in the traditions of Neoplatonism. But Allsop’s second suggestion is that Manning could have learned his magic power in “that sealed continent” into which he “was the first to penetrate with impunity”. This is probably a reference to Tibet, which

¹¹⁵⁸ Allsop, *Letters*, 115.

¹¹⁵⁹ Beer, *Coleridge’s Poetic Intelligence*, 76.

¹¹⁶⁰ Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, xiii.

¹¹⁶¹ E.H. Coleridge ed., *Letters*, I, 181.

Manning visited in 1811-12, and which was obscure and remote to most Europeans, its topography and political situation rendering it effectively “sealed” to outsiders. Kant had suggested Tibet as a possible cradle of human civilization,¹¹⁶² and the extreme obscurity and alleged antiquity of Tibetan culture helps explain why Allsop might associate it with “magic power”; even if this seems absurd considering the often mundane reflections Manning recorded in his Tibetan notebooks. Further confusion is introduced by Allsop’s suggestion that the “sealed continent” received “the superhuman knowledge of Zoroaster”, which was “conveyed by Confucius”. It seems unlikely that Allsop, if he even conceived of the independent existence of the Zoroastrian religion, could have imagined it was at any time prevalent in Tibet.¹¹⁶³ Allsop may have in mind, instead, the traditional identification of Zoroaster with Ham, son of Noah, who was widely credited as the ancestor of modern Africa and parts of Asia. According to this schema, the Chinese were descendants of Zoroaster/Ham;¹¹⁶⁴ and Confucius could therefore remain the archetypal sage and exponent of Chinese culture, while also being a descendant of Zoroaster.

But Zoroaster was also invoked in the Chaldean Oracles, was sometimes even credited with their authorship, and was generally considered an original source of Hellenic wisdom.¹¹⁶⁵ The Neoplatonist Iamblichus grouped Zoroaster with Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, and Pythagoras as those responsible for interpreting and handing down divine revelation.¹¹⁶⁶ Allsop’s suggestion that Zoroaster’s knowledge was “superhuman” nods towards Renaissance *prisca theologia*, which traced an original divine revelation back to Noah, and where Zoroaster was often name-checked alongside Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Hermes Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Plato, and others, as

¹¹⁶² App, “The Tibet of the Philosophers”, 20.

¹¹⁶³ Possible influence of Zoroastrianism has been discerned in the local practice of sky burial: see Martin, “On the Cultural Ecology of Sky Burial on the Himalayan Plateau”, 353-370. Obviously, this is not what Allsop had in mind.

¹¹⁶⁴ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 7.

¹¹⁶⁵ Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy*, 408.

¹¹⁶⁶ Vigus, *Platonic Coleridge*, 107.

“Ancient Theologians” promulgating religious truth.¹¹⁶⁷ The Figurist missionary, Joachim Bouvet, added to this list Fuxi, the apocryphal founder of the Chinese race. In a 1701 letter to Leibniz, Bouvet claimed not only that Fuxi was not Chinese, but that he had never been in China: and that, in fact, he was the very same human figure identified elsewhere as Zoroaster, Trismegistus, and Enoch.¹¹⁶⁸ Bouvet’s amalgamation of these figures awarded Biblical pedigrees to Egypt and China, and thus, to use Urs App’s phrase, amounted to a “friendly takeover” of the remote antiquity of the world’s oldest nations.¹¹⁶⁹ By identifying Zoroaster with Fuxi, the genre of “Ancient Theology” therefore provides yet another means by which Zoroaster could be regarded as the font of Chinese culture.

Manning’s notebooks contain scattered references to Zoroaster, revealing that he was curious about his historicity: “When did Zoroaster appear?”¹¹⁷⁰ But the tangled net of references evoked by Allsop’s mention of Zoroaster are insufficient to conclude that figure, or *prisca theologia* generally, factored into Manning’s dialogue. Manning’s speech may have simply prompted Allsop’s imagination to blend together a number of literary and mythological associations in a *pot-pourri* of pan-Asian mysticism. Indeed, confusion about Asiatic religious and mythological systems abounded in early nineteenth-century Europe, where the complex historical relationship between overlapping traditions remained poorly determined. Manning surely could have explained the basic differences between Confucianism and Tibetan Buddhism, were this the subject of his discourse. But he seems, on the contrary, to have been communicating a religious idea, rather than historical or social information; and that idea shows the fingerprints of Neoplatonism.

¹¹⁶⁷ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 307.

¹¹⁶⁸ Mungello, *Curious Land*, 321.

¹¹⁶⁹ App, *Birth of Orientalism*, 282.

¹¹⁷⁰ RAS TM 9/1/2.

Manning appears to have tied together his account by solving “some of the most interesting questions connected with the early pursuits of men,” specifically “the origin of cooking.”¹¹⁷¹ This should turn our attention to Charles Lamb’s comedic essay, “Dissertation Upon Roast Pig” (1822), where he thanks “my friend M.” for introducing him to the subject of Chinese cooking. Lamb’s essay has a somewhat complicated genealogy, and another germ of the essay appears in his letter to Coleridge of 9 March 1822, the “Epistola Porcina”.¹¹⁷² But Manning was closely implicated in its development, and Lamb attributed to him the “idea of the discovery for roasting pigs”.¹¹⁷³ Denise Gigante suggests the “most obvious antecedent” for Lamb’s essay was Porphyry’s *Essay on the Abstinence of Animal Food (De Abstinencia)*, which even contains the accidental finger-licking attributed to Lamb’s Bo-bo.¹¹⁷⁴ Gigante observes that Lamb, unlike Porphyry, “represents flesh-eating as an advance in civilization rather than a fall”.¹¹⁷⁵ Manning was obviously familiar with Porphyry’s writings, and so this is probably what Allsop is recalling when he says that cooking was “deemed of sufficient importance by older and therefore wiser, nations to form part of their archives”¹¹⁷⁶. But, as one of the fundamental innovations of human culture, cooking also had an exalted place within the Chinese tradition, where its creation was credited to Fuxi.

The organizing principle of Manning’s discourse seems to be the “Great Disembodied ONE”.¹¹⁷⁷ The idea of divinity as a unifying monad is common to many religious traditions; and in Georgian England, it had an affinity with Unitarian scepticism about the doctrine of the Trinity. But the immediate source of inspiration for ideas about “the One” was likely Manning’s reading of Neoplatonist authors, from

¹¹⁷¹ Allsop, *Letters*, 115.

¹¹⁷² Rydbeck, ““A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig””, 34.

¹¹⁷³ Monsman, *Confessions of a Prosaic Dreamer*, 157 n2.

¹¹⁷⁴ Gigante, *Taste*, 104.

¹¹⁷⁵ Gigante, *Taste*, 104.

¹¹⁷⁶ Allsop, *Letters*, 115.

¹¹⁷⁷ Allsop, *Letters*, 114.

Plotinus to Cudworth, in whose work it took the place of an ineffable, unknowable governing principle of reality. Moreover, allusions to Chaldea, Zoroaster, and possibly Porphyry draw our attention to that corpus of ancient wisdom which Neoplatonist authors in the first centuries after Christ sought to synthesize. “The Great Disembodied ONE” might therefore be understood in relation to the Neoplatonist “One”. Meanwhile, the reference to Manning’s journey to a “sealed continent” suggests he might have embellished his discourse with ideas borrowed from Chinese philosophy. If Manning introduced elements from the Chinese classical tradition – which would have been largely unfamiliar to his audience – this might explain why Allsop could not recognize his ideas as simple Neoplatonism, with which he should have been conversant.

Indeed, in the early nineteenth century, Neoplatonism had a major creative impact on Western thought, from Germany to America, where it helped inspire the Transcendentalist movement that, beginning in 1820s New England, also borrowed from Unitarianism and German Idealism.¹¹⁷⁸ Manning’s interests are peculiarly mirrored by those of Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the leading Transcendentalists, who in 1841 – the year after Manning died – published his essay “The Over-Soul”. Here, he spoke of:

[T]hat Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man’s particular being is contained and made one with all other; that common heart, of which all sincere conversation is the worship, to which all right action is submission [...] Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE.¹¹⁷⁹

Neoplatonism also influenced leading thinkers in contemporary German Idealist philosophy, notably Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) and Johann Fichte (1762-1814). Urs App explains that the Neoplatonists “had reached views like Fichte’s and

¹¹⁷⁸ Howe, “The Cambridge Platonists of Old England and the Cambridge Platonists of New England”, 475.

¹¹⁷⁹ Emerson, *Essays*, 160.

Schelling's through 'the intuitive vision [...] of the One, Supreme, First Original Being'":

Furthermore, according to [Gottlob Ernst] Schulze, Fichte and Schelling posited this One as 'the supreme basis of truth,' claimed that it could exclusively be known 'in the realm of inner feeling,' and regarded it as 'the source of supreme knowledge.' Here, too, Schulze detected a link to Neoplatonism.¹¹⁸⁰

This "One", which could only be known "in the realm of inner feeling", bears an uncanny resemblance to Manning's dialogue: "He seemed to see and to convey to us clearly [...] what was passing in the presence of the Great Disembodied ONE, rather by an intuition or the creation of a new sense than by words."¹¹⁸¹

Neoplatonism's syncretic potential had special significance in the religious encounter between East and West. App observes that Gottlob Schulze's student, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), was influenced by Neoplatonic ideas: not only through Schelling, Fichte, and Christian mystics, but by the *Oupnek'hat* and "the neoplatonic component of the Sufi tradition which had also left its imprint on Prince Dara's works including his interpretation of the Indian Upanishads."¹¹⁸² The *Oupnek'hat* was the title given to a Latin rendering of the Persian translation of the Upanishads that was itself completed for Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), the Mughal heir-apparent renowned for his syncretic passion for religious mystery. As with Coleridge, Emerson, Schopenhauer, and Dara Shikoh, Manning's interest in Neoplatonism was not merely intellectual: it had practical significance for his personal religious vision.

Itself a syncretic tradition, Neoplatonism is well-suited to endeavours seeking points of contact between disparate spiritual systems. For example, the notion of "The One", the cornerstone of Neoplatonist cosmology, might be expanded or re-shaped to accommodate the cosmological views of diverse religions and cultures:

¹¹⁸⁰ App, *Schopenhauer's Compass*, 105.

¹¹⁸¹ Allsop, *Letters*, 114.

¹¹⁸² App, *Schopenhauer's Compass*, 307.

The general philosophical pattern of a single world-essence that initially manifests itself as a multiplicity of abstract essences, that, in turn, manifest themselves as a multiplicity of physical individuals is found throughout the world. It is characteristic of Neoplatonism (c. third century, C.E., as represented by Plotinus [204–270]), as well as the Buddhist Three Body Doctrine [trikaya] of the Buddha's manifestation [...]¹¹⁸³

In the third century after Christ, the syncretic project of the early Neoplatonists was to achieve:

[A] grand synthesis of an intellectual heritage that was by then exceedingly rich and profound. In effect, they absorbed, appropriated, and creatively harmonized almost the entire Hellenic tradition of philosophy, religion, and even literature [...]¹¹⁸⁴

To synthesize an “exceedingly rich and profound” intellectual heritage was also the task assumed by many scholars of Manning's generation. With its classical lineage, and relatively accessible corpus, Neoplatonism was a respectable and convenient choice for someone hoping to reconcile faith with reason. At the very least, it held out the possibility of establishing a firm basis for mutual respect; at most, of integrating distinct religious traditions within a single epistemological framework.

There is no indication that Manning himself attempted to systematically compare or integrate Neoplatonism with Eastern religions, which would indeed be fraught with difficulty.¹¹⁸⁵ But his acquaintance, the Presbyterian missionary Robert Morrison, drew his own surprising parallel between Neoplatonism and Neo-Confucianism in a letter to the *Indo-Chinese Gleaner* in 1819. In his summary of Confucian cosmology, Morrison identified the concept of *taiji* or *li* with “the PLASTIC NATURES of the western philosophers”; by which, Peter Kitson suggests, Morrison meant “the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, the monadology of Leibniz, or even

¹¹⁸³ Wicks, “Arthur Schopenhauer”.

¹¹⁸⁴ Wildberg, “Neoplatonism”.

¹¹⁸⁵ For comparisons between Neoplatonism and Chinese philosophy, see for example Blakeley, “Cultivation of Self in Chu Hsi and Plotinus”, and “The Lure of the Transcendent in Zhu Xi”.

the active force of Joseph Priestley”.¹¹⁸⁶ A response to the atheism and materialism embodied in the work of Descartes and Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Cudworth’s idea of the “Plastick Life of Nature” comprised “a thing that domineers over the substance of the whole corporeal universe, and which, subordinately to the Deity, put both heaven and earth in this frame in which it now is.”¹¹⁸⁷ Morrison was comparing this to the Neo-Confucian idea of the “Supreme Ultimate”, or *Taiji*, the source and sum of Principle (*li*), identified by the Neo-Confucian philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) as the origin of the world.¹¹⁸⁸

Manning’s writings contain no such direct parallels between Neo-Confucianism and Neoplatonism. But his pluralist attitude towards religion implies faith in a common spiritual reality, perhaps mapped onto a Neoplatonist metaphysical structure supporting moral and religious intuitions about the universal humanity shared between cultures. These intuitions, in turn, helped inspire his study of China. His research on the metaphysics of language was intended to furnish linguistic evidence for universalist intuitions about the human mind; while the study of Chinese society was intended to provide raw material for a work of social reform that would have positive consequences for “the conduct of life” in Britain itself. In the end, his inability to properly ground his intuitions in a way that would withstand the imagined criticisms of his contemporaries meant Manning could not complete the major works which he projected, and he was limited to revealing his personal vision on rare occasions in the company of trusted friends and acquaintances. In the absence of any major publications, his Chinese and other researches were destined to languish in obscurity; and what did appear before the reading public was, compared to what he hoped to achieve, rather modest.

¹¹⁸⁶ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 95.

¹¹⁸⁷ Cudworth, *True Intellectual System of the Universe*, I, 355.

¹¹⁸⁸ “The highest knowledge is the knowledge of the oneness of Principle, and the realisation that there is only one Principle in the universe is the finest achievement of learning”. Yao, *Introduction to Confucianism*, 106.

Public Profile Post-China

Manning left China in January 1817, after participating in the Amherst Embassy, on board Lord Amherst's ship the *Alceste*.¹¹⁸⁹ The journey proved eventful, including shipwreck in the Java Sea and a meeting with the captive Napoleon at St Helena, before arriving in England in August, after an absence of over eleven years. Soon after landing, Manning wrote to the East India Company, letting slide that he still envisaged completing a work on the Chinese language.¹¹⁹⁰ This never materialized, however, and the only thing he ever published on China was his 1826 article, "Chinese Jests". So far as his public profile is concerned, Manning appears to have been a relatively obscure figure after returning from China, though he crops up in literary memoirs, chiefly those of Henry Crabb Robinson. On 13 December 1817, Crabb Robinson recorded meeting Manning, "a darling of Miss Lamb's", for an evening of whist. Manning was "a quiet, gentlemanly man who has not the air of a traveller, but he has been in China. The conversation was of the most frivolous kind; but in fact there was little of any kind".¹¹⁹¹ Besides visiting his friends, Manning worked on various projects, literary and otherwise, during his retirement, continuing his linguistic research and in 1822 lodging an enquiry about patents (perhaps for the folding-pincers he later mentioned to William Frend).¹¹⁹²

In 1824, Manning was appointed Honorary Chinese Librarian to the Royal Asiatic Society. Founded the previous year, the Society received a large donation of Chinese books from Sir George Thomas Staunton, a founder and Vice-President, who also recommended Manning for the position. However, with his aversion to public bodies and institutions, it is unclear how Manning contributed to the Society's work or

¹¹⁸⁹ Manning's role in the Amherst Embassy is addressed in chapter three.

¹¹⁹⁰ RAS TM 6/1/2.

¹¹⁹¹ Morley, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 213.

¹¹⁹² RAS TM 6/6.

the arrangement of its Chinese library;¹¹⁹³ he does not even appear to have become a member. His own collection of Chinese books, presumably including many acquired in China itself, was renowned as the best of its kind in Europe and was bequeathed to the Society after his death.¹¹⁹⁴

When Manning returned from China, he brought with him two Chinese men. The first, Mr Lee (Li), was a “literary Chinese” engaged at Manning’s expense for three years to aid his Chinese researches. The second was a servant whose “accurate pronunciation” of Chinese Manning hoped might qualify him to teach men training for Canton at East India Company College.¹¹⁹⁵ Robert Morrison and Samuel Ball had helped select the men, and a March 1817 letter from Morrison indicates the process of assessment, which measured proficiency in Chinese letters as well as general character.¹¹⁹⁶ Manning invited the Company to defray the expenses their employment incurred, estimated at £1000. He also drafted a short essay for the Company titled “Observations on the Consumption of Tea in Bootan, Tibet and Tartary; And on the Practicability of Advantageously Furnishing That Article to Some of Those Countries From Canton Through India”.¹¹⁹⁷ Manning began by noting that much more tea was consumed in Tibet and Bhutan even than in England, because a majority of the population used it as a staple food. It formed the basis of a savoury broth called “Chhah”, which sometimes comprised tea alone, and sometimes tea-soaked parched corn: this was the “principal part of every meal” (“and indeed it is most excellent”). Explaining that the tea consumed in Tibet and Bhutan was transported overland from Sichuan, Manning suggested that tea shipped by sea from Canton could be made available to the Bhutanese at a lower price than that furnished through Tibet. He also suggested that, to prove acceptable to the Bhutanese, the tea would have to be presented

¹¹⁹³ RAS Council Minutes 1823-1827.

¹¹⁹⁴ The collection is now at the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

¹¹⁹⁵ RAS TM 6/1/2.

¹¹⁹⁶ RAS TM 5/25.

¹¹⁹⁷ RAS TM 9/1/33.

in the form to which they were accustomed.¹¹⁹⁸ He concluded that the Bhutanese would be as glad to buy their tea in India as in Tibet, if it came at the same price.

Manning closed the essay on what he must have hoped was a tantalizing note: these observations were “part of the many that I have made in various places and various ways relative to the interests of the Honble Company”.¹¹⁹⁹ This, perhaps, was an attempt to curry favour while demonstrating the practical utility of his knowledge and endeavours. Yet the prospect of taking over the Bhutanese tea trade, enticing though it may have seemed to Manning, seems not to have fired the Company’s imagination. Neither were the Court of Directors moved by Manning’s suggestion that the Chinese servant, with his “accurate pronunciation”, be employed at East India College. On 8 January 1818, Manning received an unequivocal refusal from East India House, to the effect that the Directors would not accede to his request, as they had no need of a Chinese teacher.¹²⁰⁰ Manning’s own assistant, Mr Li, resided with him at least until October 1818.¹²⁰¹ Barrett observes Mr Li made “a certain impact on Regency society”, attending a ball in Manning’s company at which he was “duly staggered at the presumed wealth of the man who could have engaged so many people to dance for him – and yet more staggered to learn that all this activity was purely voluntary”.¹²⁰²

This was not the end of Manning’s official involvement with British policy towards China, as he was called on 17 May 1821 to give evidence before the Select Committee on the Foreign Trade of the Country. The Committee asked Manning in what capacity he lived in Canton, to which he replied that he lived under the Company’s protection, but not in its service. He explained his purpose there as being to penetrate into the interior of China: something that proved impossible owing to “the absolute refusal of the Chinese, their jealousy, and their strict attention to prevent any foreigners

¹¹⁹⁸ RAS TM 9/1/33.

¹¹⁹⁹ RAS TM 9/1/33.

¹²⁰⁰ RAS TM 6/1/3.

¹²⁰¹ RAS TM 1/2/4.

¹²⁰² Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 13.

passing their boundaries.”¹²⁰³ This, he clarified, was “decidedly” the result of government policy, and did not reflect the disposition of the people, who he thought would be “not at all indisposed” to receiving more foreign people and goods into their country if that were permitted.¹²⁰⁴ Most of the questions in Manning’s brief interview focused on the attitude of the Chinese state and people towards foreign trade, the prospects for increased trade, and the likely attitude of the Chinese government towards new shipping and trading initiatives. It was not to furnish such information that Manning had sacrificed so much.

“And So Much Labour Have Been Spent in Vain”

Manning’s Chinese studies did not cease after he left China. When he wrote to request Company support for his two Chinese teachers, Manning prefaced his remarks by noting he had been “assiduously employed in providing materials for an analysis of that language, and a comparison of it with other tongues, ancient and modern”. Indeed, this was one reason he had recruited a Chinese assistant, “the assistance of a person of his qualifications being absolutely necessary in the progress of the work in hand.”¹²⁰⁵ He recruited his teacher for a term of three years: perhaps the time he thought would be required to complete the work; or perhaps the length of time to which Mr Li was prepared to commit. In 1818, Sir George Staunton wrote to Morrison:

Manning promises us some Chinese philological works, and also an account of his journey to Java, but I am not very confident of the public being very soon gratified with the result of his labours. He is, however, much employed, I believe, with his Chinese friend, and is well able to produce a work of enduring interest in its way.¹²⁰⁶

¹²⁰³ *Reports from Committees*, 355.

¹²⁰⁴ *Reports from Committees*, 355.

¹²⁰⁵ RAS TM 6/1/2.

¹²⁰⁶ Eliza Morrison, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Robert Morrison*, I, 523.

Manning had, technically, been to Java, as the February 1817 sinking of the *Alceste* in the Java Sea necessitated a short stay there. However, Staunton was probably committing a phonetic confusion between “Java” and “Lhasa”, the latter place being much less well-known to the British than Java. Britain had administered Java for several years during the Napoleonic wars, during which time Manning’s friend, Sir Stamford Raffles, had compiled the materials for *History of Java* (1817). Regardless, at least as late as 1818, Manning still entertained hopes of completing the linguistic project outlined to his father and Tuthill in 1810.¹²⁰⁷

Manning never published this work on linguistics, however, and it was not until 1826 that he made his first and only attempt to educate the British public about Chinese manners and customs. Indeed, Manning was most active in sharing his ideas in public (albeit anonymously) between 1824 and 1826, as around this time he also sent the letters on Catholic emancipation from “An Englishman”. But his near silence regarding the fruits of his research demands explanation. The most convincing attempt at such an explanation was provided ten years after Manning’s death by his friend Samuel Ball (1781?-1874), who wrote to one of Manning’s sisters in 1850, seemingly in response to a request for information about her brother’s life and character. Ball summarized Manning’s personality and scholarly attainments, suggesting that he was a proficient scholar of Chinese, but a better philologist than linguist. Having “studied the philosophy of language from a boy”, Manning possessed “great philological acumen”. Thus, according to Ball, while “it may be doubted whether language was his forte”, Manning’s knowledge of “the force and import of words, the grammatical construction and genius of the language” was beyond any of his contemporaries.¹²⁰⁸ Ball lamented that Manning never published what he knew:

That so much valuable knowledge should have died with him, and so much labour have been spent in vain, is ever to be regretted. He might

¹²⁰⁷ RAS TM 1/1/52, 2/3/7.

¹²⁰⁸ RAS TM 15/1.

have smoothed a thorny path for others very considerably, but his unhappy fastidiousness, his contempt of anything short of excellence, & his indifference to worldly fame betrayed him into habits of procrastination, which led him to defer too long the committal of his thoughts to paper. He relied too much on his memory, and unhappily miscalculated his length of days.¹²⁰⁹

According to Ball, Manning's perfectionism meant he waited too long to bring his thoughts and speculations together. Staunton similarly attributed Manning's failure to publish to "a fastidious delicacy", which made him "underrate his acquirements." Staunton suggested that Manning aspired to a level of perfection in his knowledge of Chinese beyond what any European at the time could realistically hope to attain, and this "deterred him from giving the results of his learning to the world."¹²¹⁰

In written Chinese, Ball suggested, Manning trailed Robert Morrison: "He had not the same ready command and practical use of the symbols or characters which enables a person to write without the assistance of a Chinese that Dr Morrison had."¹²¹¹ This echoes the assessment of Hosea Ballou Morse about those early years when Manning completed translations for the Company in Canton: these were "bald and are fully intelligible only to one who can see through the English and descry the Chinese original".¹²¹² Manning's spoken Chinese, meanwhile, was good enough that he could converse with "native Chinese" – presumably in Mandarin, as Manning recorded that he "was accustomed only to the Peking pronunciation".¹²¹³ Staunton recalled that during the Amherst Embassy, "he had had many opportunities of witnessing the facility with which he conversed with the natives; and their gratification and astonishment at hearing a European illustrating his arguments by quotations from the works of Confucius and others of their classic authors."¹²¹⁴ Manning must therefore have been

¹²⁰⁹ RAS TM 15/1.

¹²¹⁰ "Proceedings of Societies", *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany*, Vol. 35, 1841, 62.

¹²¹¹ RAS TM 15/1.

¹²¹² Morse, *Chronicles*, III, 103

¹²¹³ Manning, "Journey", 260.

¹²¹⁴ "Proceedings of Societies", *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany*, Vol. 35, 1841, 62.

tolerably well-versed in spoken Chinese, as well as the Chinese classical canon. But his strengths were neither literary, nor in the practical application of the language: they were in understanding its structure and usage. This is consistent with his interest in ancient Greek, and helps explain the remark forty years earlier, when Manning wrote to his sister that “the philological remarks, that a knowledge of this strange language gives rise to, these are what I hold most dear”.¹²¹⁵

Ball’s suggestion that Manning failed to properly record his insights and observations, and relied overly on his memory, is partly borne out by the archival record. Manning’s extensive notes feel haphazard, and their disorganized nature does not help the easy reconstruction of trains of thought. The suggestion that Manning “miscalculated his length of days”¹²¹⁶ perhaps even hints that he entertained thoughts of producing some significant work in the 1830s. But the implication that Manning ran out of time contrasts with the fact that his archive contains little in the way of unfinished manuscripts or work-in-progress. Instead, it testifies to an extraordinarily active and wide-ranging intellect that was pursuing certain key ideas which could not be unified in a coherent way. Still, perhaps more remains to be discovered.

In 1827, the year after publishing his article on Chinese jokes, Manning went to Italy, in the company of Samuel Ball, staying for two years and visiting Naples, Rome and Florence. According to Ball, Manning’s stated reason for the trip was the desire to improve his Italian.¹²¹⁷ Assuming no hidden connection to his old linguistic project, this seems rather frivolous: but perhaps the seasoned traveller wanted to enjoy one last voyage before he became too old and infirm. After returning to England he took obscure lodgings in Kent, first in Bexley, then Dartford, where he would be little disturbed. An obituary described him living alone without furniture in a “hermit-like retreat, buried amid the finest Chinese library in Europe”, and blamed his reclusiveness on the state of

¹²¹⁵ RAS TM 1/2/3.

¹²¹⁶ RAS TM 15/1.

¹²¹⁷ RAS TM 15/1.

his health, “shattered” by the “privations and fatigues incidental to his laborious voyages”.¹²¹⁸ Even in his youth, Manning had hypochondriac tendencies, sometimes shutting himself away and avoiding company due to depressed spirits. But without more specific information, poor health seems an inadequate basis to explain why he spent the last decade of his life in “the obscurity of village lodgings”.¹²¹⁹ Ball, who would surely have known, does not appear to have attributed Manning’s inactivity to poor health.

The changing cultural climate, with popular discourse generally becoming more hostile towards China, may have contributed to Manning’s retreat from public life. In the aftermath of the Amherst Embassy, Manning’s pluralist outlook and sympathetic approach to the study of other cultures were at odds with mainstream opinion which evinced overweening confidence about the superiority of British culture. Manning was never a public controversialist, and the prospect of a hostile reception may have exacerbated his natural “fastidiousness”, discouraging him from publication. With his long white beard, he may even have drawn inspiration from the archetype of the sage who, withdrawing from worldly affairs, accepted his powerlessness in the face of public opinion and devoted his days to learning and contemplation. This persona, after all, would have been familiar from both Greco-Roman and Daoist traditions.¹²²⁰ Manning’s imitation of Tang poetry appears to date from this period.¹²²¹

Barrett suggests that, frustrated by the British cultural climate, Manning may have “turned to French as a better medium for reaching a more sympathetic readership”; and that, even though he did not publish in French, the assistance he rendered in the 1830s to Stanislas Julien (1797-1873) perhaps helped nurture the academic tradition in that country.¹²²² Manning, of course, had a modicum of experience with Continental Chinese studies of a different era, having met Joseph Hager in Paris in 1802. As

¹²¹⁸ Dunkin, “Thomas Manning, Esq.”, 99.

¹²¹⁹ Dunkin, “Thomas Manning, Esq.”, 99.

¹²²⁰ For the sage in Daoism, see Robinet, *Taoism*, 27.

¹²²¹ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 16.

¹²²² Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 25.

Christoph Harbsmeier observes, at that time Hager's amateurish, speculative approach better represented contemporary European "Sinology" than the serious philological scholarship just around the corner.¹²²³ Hager's work on Chinese received brutal rebukes, including Julius Klaproth's *Leichenstein auf dem Grabe der chinesischen Gelehrsamkeit des Herrn Joseph Hager (Tombstone on the Grave of the Chinese Learning of Mr Joseph Hager, 1811)*. Perhaps this sort of thing gave Manning pause, especially once Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832) and, then, Julien himself raised the bar for Chinese scholarship in Europe. Manning's correspondence with Julien in the 1830s implies he was aware of the extent to which his own knowledge had been superseded.¹²²⁴ Fairly or unfairly, a philosophical comparison of Chinese with ancient Greek might now smack of the old Hager school of discredited pseudo-science: easy pickings for any Sinological Young Turk eager to prove his academic chops. Indeed, Barrett observes that the 1831 publication "of the magisterial but long-neglected *Notitia linguae sinicae* of Prémare, the best of the language scholars among the early missionaries, effectively gave as much in the way of grammatical examples of usage as Manning was able to muster in any case."¹²²⁵

Manning's failure, or refusal, to publish any significant works on China in the 1830s meant he missed the opportunity to influence public opinion during the decade before the First Opium War. His silence also made it easier for others to deploy his example for their own ends. For example, Lawrence Wong highlights that Manning's "futile attempts to enter China were reported in relative length in the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published in 1842." There, Manning's frustration was regarded as evidence of "the inviolability of the frontier", the implication being that China "was not only very different from the rest of the world, but in fact hostile to the

¹²²³ Harbsmeier, *Science and Civilisation in China, Vol. 7, Part 1: Language and Logic*, 17.

¹²²⁴ RAS TM 7/1-9.

¹²²⁵ Barrett, "Learning and Outcomes", 17.

outside world.”¹²²⁶ Published at the end of the First Opium War, this passage was not removed until the ninth edition (1888).¹²²⁷ Manning’s aversion to publishing thus did lasting damage to his own legacy, which was used for purposes diametrically opposed to those he intended. Even so, history did not end there; and most studies of Manning have focused instead on the inter-cultural potential of his mission. Manning hoped that his research might serve particular cultural purposes in his own time. It did not. But in a “metaphysical” sense, it may yet serve to advance his original purpose, redounding to the benefit of mankind’s mutual understanding in our own day, if not later still.

One of Manning’s obituaries noted that, even towards the end of his life, “he was visited by the greatest characters of the age, some of Her Majesty’s Ministers, and the most distinguished literati”.¹²²⁸ The last category is easily explained by Manning’s extensive literary contacts, but ministerial visits are harder to explain. Manning is said to have helped revise the proof-sheets of the “Reports on the Poor Laws” (1834),¹²²⁹ which may have involved visits from public officials; but it is unlikely to have required the presence of “Her Majesty’s Ministers”. If government ministers did indeed visit Manning, then it is tempting to imagine they wanted to ask him about China. Staunton, England’s foremost China expert, was a Member of Parliament and acquaintance of Lord Palmerston (1784-1865), who was Foreign Secretary for almost the entire 1830s. Considering Staunton’s high opinion of Manning’s Chinese erudition, he may well have sought his opinion on matters Chinese; and if so, Manning’s name could have been known to Palmerston himself.

Suffering a stroke in 1838, Manning lost the use of his right arm, and moved to Bath for his health. On 27 March 1840, shortly before his death, Manning received a visit from Henry Crabb Robinson and Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864), who was

¹²²⁶ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 121.

¹²²⁷ Wong, ““We Are as Babies Under Nurses””, 121.

¹²²⁸ Dunkin, “Thomas Manning, Esq.”, 99.

¹²²⁹ Markham, “Introduction”, clx.

encouraged to visit by the author Sarah Burney (1772-1844). Crabb Robinson observed that Manning had become “quite the invalid”, evidently suffering from paralysis, and sporting a large and bushy beard. Nevertheless, “His conversation was cheerful and he seemed glad to engage Landor to renew his call. Landor was struck by the beauty of his face. They are likely to relish each other’s conversation.”¹²³⁰ This account, in the last months of his life, strangely evokes the heyday of Manning’s youth, forty years earlier, and the first flush of his friendship with Charles Lamb. After his death, Manning’s contemporaries lamented that he “left no memorial of his rare and extensive erudition”,¹²³¹ but Ball told Manning’s sister that “I can say with great truth, what Fox said of Burke, that I have learned more from him in conversation than from books.”¹²³²

He Discloses Not

In August 1811, before he entered Tibet, Manning explained to his friend Tuthill:

I have a great deal more in me than even my friends suspect. I have no love of fame. I’d gladly transfer all my trouble & fame with it along to another man; & I often amuse myself with seeing people take me for an ordinary man. Besides I am too proud to open my shop merely to shew my goods that’s what they call étaler [spreading out]. If anybody wants at any time to be instructed in any thing I know & will listen patiently & without making captious objections for the sake of disputing I am always ready & zealous & spare no trouble but further than that I go not. The consequence of that is I have 1 store house that no man has entirely & throughout visited.¹²³³

Manning’s disdain for fame, and diffidence about publishing the results of his travels and research, caused endless frustration for his friends and defenders, particularly Charles Lamb. As early as 1801, Lamb described Manning to a mutual friend as:

¹²³⁰ Morley, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 581.

¹²³¹ Donne, “Memoir”, 228.

¹²³² RAS TM 15/1.

¹²³³ RAS TM 2/3/7.

A man of great power – an enchanter almost – far beyond Coleridge or any man in power of impressing – when he gets you alone, he can act the wonders of Egypt. Only he is lazy, and does not always put forth all his strength; if he did, I know no man of genius at all comparable to him.¹²³⁴

Almost a quarter of a century later, in 1824, Crabb Robinson heard an identical refrain:

Lamb spoke with enthusiasm of Manning, declaring that he is the most wonderful man he ever knew, more extraordinary than Wordsworth or Coleridge. Yet this Manning does nothing. He has travelled even in China and has been by land from India through Tibet, yet as far as is known he has written nothing. Lamb says his criticisms are of the very first quality.¹²³⁵

It is easy to imagine Lamb, perhaps under the influence of an inebriate enthusiasm, engaging in hyperbole. But Lamb understood the merits of Wordsworth and Coleridge perfectly well, and the mere suggestion Manning was “more extraordinary” indicates the profundity of Lamb’s respect. Manning’s reluctance to engage his talents for the edification of a wider public must have been proportionately maddening. Indeed, in 1826 Lamb declaimed to Coleridge, “I am glad you esteem Manning, though you see but his husk or his shrine. He discloses not, save to select worshippers, and will leave the world without any one hardly but me knowing how stupendous a creature he is.”¹²³⁶

Lamb’s talk of shrines and worshippers hints at sacred truths. The number of people Manning took into his confidence was “select” indeed; but there was one other, at least, who had grounds for sharing Lamb’s opinion. This was their troubled old friend, Charles Lloyd. When Manning returned from China, Lloyd was in a sadly reduced state, having contended for decades with a mental illness that was exacerbated by the early deaths of several beloved siblings, including Robert and Priscilla – other

¹²³⁴ Lucas, *Charles Lamb and the Lloyds*, 127.

¹²³⁵ Morley, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, 308.

¹²³⁶ Lamb, *Works*, VII, 702.

friends of Manning's youth.¹²³⁷ But during a period of relatively good health around 1820, Charles published several literary works, among them a poem dedicated to Manning. He sent Manning a manuscript copy, and in 1821 it was published in *Desultory Thoughts in London*, as "Stanzas addressed to **." Lloyd revered Manning's intellectual and spiritual powers, noting:

It is a dainty banquet, known to few,
To thy mind's inner shrine to have access;
While choicest stores of intellect endue
That Sanctuary, in marvellous excess.
There lambent glories, ever bright and new,
Those, privileged to be its inmates, bless!
Such as by gods, in tributary rite,
Were hail'd from earth, e'en on their thrones of light!

Yes, there Religion dwells; there, moral worth:
Diffusing round a holy atmosphere;
Cause has that soul to triumph in its birth,
That once is doomed to be admitted there!
Mere human wisdom is a theme for mirth,
To those who intuitions can revere,
As in transfiguring trance they were espied,
That float round thee, by Heaven o'encanopied!¹²³⁸

Like Lamb, Lloyd speaks of a "shrine". Manning's mental powers involve a kind of sanctity, containing a "Sanctuary" (perhaps Manning's "1 store house"?)¹²³⁹ imbued with "choicest stores of intellect [...] in marvellous excess." The abiding themes are "Religion" and "moral worth". Those admitted into the presence of these "lambent glories" will find themselves "blessed" in the manner of ones who have encountered divinity. But they are also "doomed", perhaps because "Mere human wisdom" is a poor tool indeed for understanding the mysteries of religion – and thus "a theme for mirth".

¹²³⁷ Robert was one of three Lloyd siblings to die from typhus during a six-week period in Autumn 1811. Priscilla died in 1815.

¹²³⁸ Lloyd, "Stanzas addressed to **", 35.

¹²³⁹ RAS TM 2/3/7.

In contrast, Lloyd suggests, we must look to spiritual intuition for access to deeper truths; and the “transfiguring trance” in which “they were espied” recalls the “rapt” auditors of Manning’s discourse on the “Great Disembodied ONE”.¹²⁴⁰

Manning’s Personal Myth

Manning was an introvert. Throughout his life, he avoided crowds, preferring either his own company or that of close friends. In later life, his eccentricity became apocryphal. Intuitive psychological processes figure largely in the accounts left by Lloyd and Allsop; while Lamb’s emphasis on Manning’s “power of impressing”, and the observation he could “act” the “wonders of Egypt”, suggest an almost hypnotic ability to convey ideas at a subliminal level without relying on their explicit articulation through language. Perhaps Manning’s work on the structure of language, and the metaphysics of mind, helped him to communicate in this way? But we should also consider the evidence about Manning’s psychology provided by William Taylor:

[Manning] is near-sighted. Such men are mostly negligent of contiguous observations, literally and morally; they are moved in everything by a radiation from within, not by reflections from without; they do not see enough of what is beyond their circle of ken to be aware of its existence or value. Manning, with great talent, requires twice the time of another man to make a given quantity of observation: he is fit for a mathematician, for a metaphysician, or for an archaeologist.¹²⁴¹

Taylor predicted that “A tribe of nativity-casters will at last arise, who, from gaging [sic] during infancy the relative sensibility of our organs, will be able to assign us a probable horoscope”¹²⁴² – indirectly anticipating the dawn of modern psychology. Psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Carl Jung (1875-1961) did in

¹²⁴⁰ Allsop, *Letters*, 114

¹²⁴¹ Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 137-138.

¹²⁴² Robberds, *Memoir*, II, 138.

fact provide new models for understanding human personality. The accounts of Manning's friends might suggest he was an "intuitive introvert", a type described by Jung:

He has intuitions as to the subjective factor, namely the inner world; and, of course, that is very difficult to understand because what he sees are most uncommon things, things which he doesn't like to talk about if he is not a fool. If he did, he would spoil his own game by telling what he sees, because people won't understand it.¹²⁴³

In one of his Tibetan notebooks, among notes on Tibetan vocabulary, Manning lamented that "The words you can employ do not keep pace [...] one word does not sufficiently combine the beautiful dance & changes of ideas! I have just felt how impossible it is to describe them."¹²⁴⁴ His propensity for imaginative insight helps explain Manning's attraction to Neoplatonism and the metaphysics of mind, and may also help explain his reluctance to discuss his ideas in public. In his youth, philological research, combined with the experience of travelling inside China, held out the promise of new empirical evidence which might help systematize Manning's intuitive vision and give rise to a new theory or paradigm of human culture. But in the end, he could not find the terms to adequately articulate his vision of humanity.

Lloyd and Lamb imply that Manning cultivated private beliefs of a sacred character. His intuitions were part of a personal myth, which was never articulated into a system which could be communicated to a wider audience. Peter Kitson has described Manning's interest in China as a "psychological obsession",¹²⁴⁵ and this phrase captures something important about the role that China came to play in completing Manning's vision of human nature – and, indeed, his view of himself. During Manning's time in China, his physical appearance itself hints at the existence of a syncretic vision. On the passage to China, he started to grow what would later become an enormous beard, an

¹²⁴³ Evans, *Conversations with Carl Jung and Reactions from Ernest Jones*, 76.

¹²⁴⁴ RAS TM 9/2.

¹²⁴⁵ Kitson, *Forging Romantic China*, 176.

unconventional fashion choice for an Englishman at the time. Soon after arriving in China, he adopted a sort of hybrid dress including elements from China and Cochinchina: “I wear a long robe; loose drawers; nankin boots & a black fine crape turban”.¹²⁴⁶ When he went to India in 1810, he revelled in the effect his peculiar appearance had on his fellow British, with his “beautiful blue gauzy flowered silk robe” and “beautiful grass cloth vest”.¹²⁴⁷ His appearance was neither one thing nor the other: neither conventionally masculine nor feminine, neither European nor Asiatic. It was something new – and he must have appeared as strange and absurd to the Chinese as he did to the English. It was as if Manning was giving physical expression to an idea within his own mind. This, too, addresses a psychological compulsion described by Jung:

Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as a whole [...] We are a psychic process which we do not control, or only partly direct.¹²⁴⁸

Manning was ultimately unable to exorcise the ideas that possessed him. These never fully emerged from his unconscious, and he remained in their grip. This helps explain Manning’s self-imposed silence, which otherwise seems so strange considering the ambitious plans outlined in his youth. As Barrett observes, “when we look at the passion and commitment that his archive now reveals, it is surely the public silence of Thomas Manning that speaks to us most loudly today.”¹²⁴⁹ Under normal circumstances, this would have been just a personal disappointment. But history dictated that, at the end of Manning’s lifetime, his country entered a conflict with China that brought lasting ignominy, casting a shadow over relations for generations to come. Those events make the miscarriage of Manning’s intercultural mission seem especially dispiriting, and a public more than a private tragedy.

¹²⁴⁶ RAS TM 1/1/48.

¹²⁴⁷ RAS TM 1/1/51.

¹²⁴⁸ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 3-4.

¹²⁴⁹ Barrett, “Learning and Outcomes”, 25.

Summary and Implications

This chapter situates Manning's Chinese research within the context of a wider philosophical project. The survey of Chinese manners and customs to which Manning publicly alluded was just part of a broader commitment to "a reform on the conduct of life"; and in this connection, the study of Chinese society was intended to help "elicit moral truths".¹²⁵⁰ This project was never completed, but the ghost of the idea is discernible in his 1826 translation of Chinese jokes, conceived as an introduction to Chinese social life. After arriving in China, Manning realized that exploring the country would be much harder than he had anticipated. But, while continuing to look for opportunities to enter the interior, he also hit upon the idea that his studies of Chinese language might benefit his analyses of ancient Greek. This in turn held out the prospect of new insights into the metaphysics of language and mind. Manning's interest in this subject is clearly documented at least between 1808 and 1818.

Manning's project had complex underpinnings based upon certain academic, religious, and moral ideas. His academic approach was shaped by the empirical traditions of natural philosophy that prevailed in late-eighteenth century Britain, and the new mode of "philosophical history" that received great development in England and Scotland during Manning's youth. Manning's notebooks clearly indicate his deep involvement with these traditions, which helped define his secular approach to the study of human culture. But the historian must also reckon with Manning's moral intuitions and religious beliefs. Notwithstanding his youthful dalliance with atheism and Deism, Manning was passionately concerned with religious experience; the history of Christianity; and the interplay of faith and reason. By middle age, Manning hit upon his own interpretation of Christianity. Although still sceptical about the doctrine of the Trinity, Manning rejected the rationalist interpretation of Christianity often associated with Protestant Dissent. Instead, he argued for humility before divine Providence, and

¹²⁵⁰ RAS TM 1/1/52.

tolerance towards Roman Catholics. His observations on Eastern religions, meanwhile, were distinguished by curiosity. Revealing instinctive pluralism, they speak to his erstwhile Deist sympathies, and betoken Unitarian or even Transcendental impulses. They help explain Manning's interest in Neoplatonism, with its attendant connotations of spiritual and philosophical syncretism, and the penchant for mysticism conveyed by Thomas Allsop.

Manning was extremely learned, but he also had a vivid imagination, and flashes of intuitive insight helped fire his ambitious projects. His ideas about society, language, religion, and philosophy were complicated – perhaps too complicated. Given the contemporary climate, they might seem controversial, or, even worse, ridiculous. The modern tools of academic sociology, anthropology, and philology, which might have made things easier, were not available; and the extraordinary difficulty and delicacy of the problems with which he was grappling, combined with his retiring, perfectionist nature, meant he delayed too long in presenting his ideas before the reading public. Manning's tendency to procrastinate thus meant his singular ideas slipped away with him.

Conclusion

This project aimed to furnish the first intellectual biography of Thomas Manning. As such, it began with a new biographical overview incorporating a considerable volume of previously unknown material, including vital new information dating from perhaps the most significant time in Manning's life – between the late 1790s and his trip to Tibet in 1811-12. This revealed the extent to which Manning was involved in local, regional, and international networks dedicated to cultural reform and the dissemination of new knowledge. Without downplaying Manning's friendship with Charles Lamb, it also showed the extent of his independent literary contacts. Not all Manning's acquaintances were at the forefront of European knowledge production, but the remote byways pursued by Joseph de Maimieux and Joseph Hager are, in their way, just as revealing about the state of scholarship in the early 1800s as the achievements of more celebrated contemporaries. As Robert Irwin observes, our understanding of cultural development is incomplete if we neglect the historical role of intellectual "cul-de-sacs": "the past importance of grand projects, supported by the best minds and often by copious funding that still went nowhere."¹²⁵¹

Whereas previous studies often focused on discrete aspects of Manning's career – reflecting the priorities of modern scholarship – this thesis tried to place his several interests in conversation with one another. It showed how Manning's intellectual concerns, from mathematics to Chinese and ancient Greek, to philosophy and morality, were shaped by a unifying spirit of reform. It also highlighted the romantic disappointment Manning suffered with "Miss Wilkins" in late 1800, which preceded, by a period of about six months, the first reference to his intention of leaving England for China. The new analysis of Manning's correspondence with the Wilkins family is a dramatic example of how new biographical information can re-cast historical

¹²⁵¹ Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing*, 73.

interpretations. The precise details of this affair – including *which* daughter of William Wilkins (1749-1836) Manning was in love with – are still unclear. But it reminds us of the part human emotion can play in shaping the course of history. Not even scholars of Chinese are immune to the pains of the human heart.

Manning's travels did not begin in 1806, when he sailed for China; or even in 1802, when he landed in France. Manning had significant experiences of travel dating back at least to 1799, when he visited the Lake District, and the letters describing his journeys through rural England and Wales, the Alps, and the south of France, reveal his emerging self-consciousness as a Romantic traveler. This process was influenced, positively and negatively, by his friendship with Charles Lamb, his introduction to the Coleridge Circle, and his reading of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Manning's travels within Europe were aesthetic preparation for the journeys he later undertook in Asia, but they also speak to his interest in observing the manners and customs of the rural poor. This, it seems, is what he hoped to do, in more systematic style, if ever he succeeded in entering the interior of China.

Manning's project to study China was, no doubt, highly unusual, but it was conceived in an atmosphere that was receptive to idealistic schemes for political, religious, and social reform. Throughout the late 1790s and early 1800s, Manning was immersed in literary circles animated by the ideals of the American and French Revolutions: and his own project for social reform was conceived in the aftermath of the latter event. He was at least somewhat familiar with the ambitious ideas of Enlightenment philosophers who sought to explain the fundamental principles of human nature and social organization. China, which the English literary world still regarded in the early 1800s as an important and sophisticated civilization, was a good candidate for comparative studies of language and society which might contribute to these important debates.

The decade Manning spent in Asia is crucial for understanding his intellectual biography. The persistence of his efforts to enter China speaks to his determination, and the sense that he must exert himself to the full to justify the sacrifices he made to get to Canton. But the strict controls which the Qing authorities imposed on Europeans meant

that Manning was thwarted in his ambition to explore China and survey its social life. This caused him immense frustration, but Manning still made significant progress with his linguistic studies, which he hoped one day to fashion into a philological work. Meanwhile, the experience of living overseas, in sometimes challenging conditions, prompted Manning to consider the differences between the cultural traditions and practices he perceived in Asia and those of his home country. Manning's patriotism was stirred by news of heroic exploits of his countrymen in the war against Napoleonic France, and his national pride was also provoked when he endured perceived indignities in China or elsewhere. But his pride did not transition into national chauvinism, and indeed, Manning was always critical of those among his countrymen who disparaged foreign cultures without first seeking to understand them on their own terms. Manning was not a cultural relativist: certain practices shocked and appalled him, and he condemned them. But he was a pluralist, and he did not believe that the English or European way was the only good way to live. Indeed, the desire to furnish original information from the study of Chinese society, to help reform British culture, appears to have been the fundamental goal of his entire project. This discussion therefore complements those existing treatments of Manning's activities in Asia which attest his pluralist, Romantic outlook; and it provides new evidence supporting arguments that Manning is not easily incorporated into the model of Saidian "Orientalism". But it goes further, suggesting that Manning's career has serious implications for that theoretical model, whose alleged universality is central to its appeal.

Manning sought to apply his knowledge of Chinese to his studies of ancient Greek and the comparative analysis of evolving word usages in different languages. This etymological research was motivated by the desire to make discoveries about how language works, which, in turn, would have implications for the philosophy of mind. Manning pursued this research not only during his time in Asia, but also after his return to England; and the work which he claimed to be working on in 1818 must have pertained to this subject. But this, too, was only one of Manning's goals, and his interest in manners and customs stemmed from the desire for "a reform on the conduct of life". To this end he hoped to conduct an empirical survey of Chinese culture. Manning did

not have particularly romantic illusions about China itself: he also considered studying Japan, and the salient denominator between the two countries was that they were both sophisticated civilizations about which the British were largely ignorant. Manning did not mystify or glorify China – he simply wanted to know the facts. Aware of the difficulty of being “objective” in the study of another culture, his essay on Chinese jokes reveals his ingenious method of garnering information about “social facts” through the informed yet dispassionate study of popular opinions. Although Manning never completed his wider plan, this translation and its commentary contain “genetic” evidence of the radical, proto-sociological project he intended.

Manning dedicated the better part of his life to studying Chinese language and culture, in the service of philosophy and social reform. This, indeed, is a far cry from “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”¹²⁵² Manning’s career was, of course, connected to the East India Company, and he lived in Canton under their protection. Moreover, he was not completely disinterested in Anglo-Chinese relations: he hoped that relations between the two empires might aid, not hinder, his research. But he was no cheerleader for British aggrandizement, denouncing the landing of troops in Macao in 1808: “If I was to qualify that senseless expedition with the epithets I think it deserves, I might seem harsh.”¹²⁵³ Manning’s notebooks contain hardly anything about his country’s political or economic relations with China. Instead, they are replete with notes on language, history, philosophy, religion, poetry, riddles, jokes, and mathematics. These were the subjects animating his inner life, not racism, power, trade, or empire.

Certainly, trade with China was a major factor influencing British commercial strategy at that time: it contributed to the sending of two full diplomatic Embassies within twenty-five years, and concerned a growing number of merchants, authors and,

¹²⁵² Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

¹²⁵³ Manning, “Journey”, 238, n1.

eventually, politicians and administrators. But trade and empire were not the only reasons why a British scholar might want to learn about China, and the case of Thomas Manning shows that we must also consider linguistics, philosophy, and religion as major parts of the background. Manning was not a missionary, but even his secular orientation to China had a complicated relationship with his religious views. A Deist or atheist when first conceiving his plan to study China, Manning later reconciled himself with Christianity; but his enduring receptivity to the value of other religions and cultures should be understood with respect to his affinity for unitarian spirituality. This was probably informed by his fondness for Platonic philosophy and the writings of the Neoplatonists, and lives on vividly in Thomas Allsop's record of Manning's discourse on the "Great Disembodied ONE".¹²⁵⁴

Like most aspects of life, the writing of history is better approached in a spirit of humility, sympathy, and understanding, than resentment and recrimination. This case study was not conducted to indict or vindicate its subject, but to try and understand him, and the world in which he lived. Examination of the primary sources revealed some surprising and unexpected results, which seriously challenged some of the author's own preconceptions. The attempt to explain these results led to the investigation of challenging problems with a large intellectual hinterland, stretching back through the Enlightenment into the Renaissance and beyond. It became necessary to critically examine my own assumptions about fundamental, and deceptively simple, concepts like "Englishness" and "Christianity". Not all the subjects that seemed important, at one time or another, now seem to have had a direct bearing upon Manning's project. The literary influence of *prisca theologia*, for example, was only indirect. But to Thomas Manning's generation – the last generation of polymaths – the intellectual horizons of the dawning nineteenth century were broad indeed. Enlightened minds would have recognized the idea that all history or culture should be judged according

¹²⁵⁴ Allsop, *Letters*, 114.

to a single principle, whatever it might be, as the hallmark of religious enthusiasm: a relic of dark days that were better left behind.

At the end of the Victorian era, L.P. Hartley famously declared that “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.”¹²⁵⁵ Thomas Manning believed that foreign cultures should be understood on their own terms, and not dismissed upon an ignorant and biased comparison with the perceived merits of one’s own background. The past being likewise a foreign country, we should extend it that same kindness: seeing the people who lived there in the light of their time, and not judging them by the received, and equally contingent, wisdom of our own.

¹²⁵⁵ Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 9.

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