Commemorating the anonymous:
British imperialist discourse in China and its backlash among the Irish

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Abstract

Sir Herbert Giles, an English Sinologist, glossed *jiā* (家) as 'a pig beneath a roof', and told his British readers that 'our' Irish neighbours would certainly understand this. Giles was a colonial administrator in China. His condescension toward the colonised Irish paralleled his attitude toward the Chinese he wanted to colonise. Giles' discourse demonstrates the effects of attempting to master the colonised 'abroad' on his attitudes toward the colonised 'at home'. Oscar Wilde could detect in aspects of Giles' Sinology a reason to criticise Balfour's policies in Ireland. Roger Casement went from being an agent of imperialism to being an agent of the Easter Rising. His reports on colonisation inspired Joseph Conrad to write *Heart of Darkness* and *Nostromo*. W.G. Sebald, starting from the Casement-Conrad connection, portrayed in *The Rings of Saturn* the decadence in the Home Country provoked by British imperialism abroad. Postcolonial studies tend to concentrate on the experience of the colonised, but not on the impact of imperialism back in the metropole on the colonisers themselves, or on their underclasses. Commemoration of the anonymous agents and victims of British imperialism in Asia and its backlash among the Irish is a challenge for Asian Studies in Ireland.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, discourse analysis, Chinese Studies, Herbert Giles, Roger Casement

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By the strangest of coincidences, the best description of what happens next comes from a restless Irishman, who can barely read or write, and whose name is no longer even known to us.[1]

Our Empire didn't only spread out East, you know![2]

What debris a ruined empire leaves behind it![3]

Caught in the colonial

John Mitchel has been "kidnapped, and carried off from Dublin, in chains, as a convicted 'Felon'."[4] It is 1848. They have taken him on board the *Shearwater*, his immediate transport to Cork prior to being "transported" to the Caribbean and then to Van Diemen's Land. He is received by a Captain Hall who "dared to say I had heard of the unfortunate *Nemesis*," to which Mitchel replies, "Then […] you are the Captain Hall who was in China lately, and wrote a book".[5] Mitchel, an Irish leader of an Irish rebellion who has been caught in the colonial experience, happens to meet William Hutcheon Hall, who had captained the *Nemesis*, Britain's first ironclad ocean-going warship, to great effect in subjecting China to the colonial experience during the First Opium War (1840-1842). Hall published a book on the subject in 1845.[6] Mitchel seems to be up to date on Hall's role in the British imperialist exploits in China. They discuss books written by another Captain, Basil Hall, whose "Account of the Chilean and Peruvian Revolutions" has inspired Mitchel with its portrait of "that splendid fellow, San Martin".[7]

Among the leaders of the Peruvian revolution were Ambrosio O'Higgins from Bellanary in Sligo and his son Bernardo. Mitchel's solidarity with South American revolutionaries in favour of national liberation anticipates Roger Casement's concern for the abuses of colonialism in the Putumayo region of the Amazon that would inspire Joseph Conrad's novel *Nostromo*. On the other hand, Mitchel's revolutionary solidarity did not extend to slaves when he eventually escaped to the United States and became an anti-Abolitionist.[8]

Perhaps the intersection of British imperialism in China and in Ireland epitomised by Mitchel's encounter with Hall is not so much happenstance as an inevitable pattern of colonial intersections. A biographical gloss in the 1913 edition of the *Jail Journal* sets out Hall's imperialist credentials. He would go on to fight in the Crimean War. Mitchel's first stop in exile is Bermuda, whose Governor at the time was Charles Elliott (1801-1875), another veteran of the First Opium War, the man who turned Hong Kong into a colony of the Crown.

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[1] Jonathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son*. *The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (London: Harper Collins *Publishers*, 1996), 237.

[2] Leland Bardwell, *That London Winter* (Dublin: Co-Op Books, 1981), 81.

[3] Ciaran Carson, "7. Sedan," in *Breaking News* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 2003), 56.

[4] John Mitchel, *Jail Journal* (Dublin: M.H. Gill & Son, Ltd., 1913), 1.

[5] Ibid., 2.

[6] William Hutcheon Hall, *Narrative of the Voyages and Services of the Nemesis from 1840 to 1843* (London: Henry Colburn, 1845).

[7] Mitchel, *Jail Journal*, 2-3.

[8] Some Irish people experienced slavery in the Caribbean; some became slave-owners; some became the ancestors of Muhammad Ali or Barack Obama; Irish soldiers fought on both sides in the American Civil War.

> Elliott, carrying out the instructions of his Government, blockaded Canton when the Chinese Government attempted to stop the smuggling of opium by British merchants into China, and exacted a ransom of a million and a quarter from the inhabitants on threat of storming and sacking the city. He was disavowed by his Government, in order to 'save its face' and sent to the West Indies as a 'punishment' but later he was rewarded with a title and made an admiral.[9]

Mitchel is up to date with Elliott's role in the Opium War as well. During a conversation with Dr. Dees, the naval surgeon on board the *Scourge* that took him to Bermuda and Elliott's hospitality, both men comment on the dangers faced by subordinates who carry out their superiors' orders. Mitchel comments that Elliott:

> [A]cted in China according to his plain instructions, and when the transaction was supposed to have turned out unfortunate, and Parliament and the press were raving, he durst never plead those orders, but had to let Ministers make up what story they liked.[10]

Mitchel would have further dealings with Elliott, submitting to him a petition to be transported away from Bermuda for reasons of health.[11]

The Opium War in which Hall and Elliott had been protagonists was the predictable outcome of an earlier imperial enterprise that began under the leadership of an Irishman, George Macartney (1737-1806), who became the 1st Earl Macartney for his services, the man who first said the sun never sets on the British Empire. His was a very distinguished and well-rounded British colonialist career in the latter part of the eighteenth century. From 1769-1772 he was Chief Secretary for Ireland, from 1776-1779 he was Governor of Granada, and from 1781-1785 he worked for the East India Company as Governor of Madras. He is most famous for the Macartney Mission (1792-1794) that brought him to China in 1793 to propose opening the Chinese empire to foreign trade with Great Britain.[12] Although his Embassy proved to be a failure, it prefigured what would later become China's "century of humiliation" at the hands of aggressive European and American imperialist powers. The letter that the Chinese emperor, Qiánlóngdì (乾隆帝, 1711-1799), wrote to King George III to explain his rejection of the British proposal said:

> The Celestial Empire […] does not value rare and precious things. Now you, 0 King, have presented various objects to the throne […] Nevertheless we

[9] Ibid., 440.
[10] Ibid., 143.
[11] Ibid., 110-111.
[12] See Seán Golden, "From the Society of Jesus to the East India Company: A Case Study in the Social History of Translation," in *Beyond the Western Tradition. Translation. Perspectives XI*, edited by Marilyn Gaddis Rose (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 2000), 199-215.

> have never valued ingenious articles, nor do we have the slightest need of your country's manufactures.[13]

This would prove to be a fateful reply because it set in motion more radical British policies in defence of British foreign trade. Macartney's prescient analysis of the Chinese response reflected both an emergent ideology of the Enlightenment that would justify Euro-American imperialism and a prophecy of what soon would happen to China. His confidence in the superiority of Great Britain is supreme.

> For it would now seem that the policy and vanity of the [Chinese] Court equally concurred in endeavouring to keep out of sight whatever can manifest our pre-eminence, which they undoubtedly feel, but have not yet learned to make the proper use of. It is, however, in vain to attempt arresting the progress of human knowledge.[14]

He accurately predicts the coming onslaught on China, its consequences for China and the emergence of Britain as a superpower.

> The breaking-up of the power of China (no very improbable event) would occasion a complete subversion of the commerce, not only of Asia, but a very sensible change in the other quarters of the world. […] Her ports would no longer be barricaded; they would be attempted by all the adventurers of all trading nations, who would search every channel, creek, and cranny of China for a market, and for some time be the cause of much rivalry and disorder. Nevertheless, as Great Britain, from the weight of her riches and the genius and spirits of her people, is become the first political, marine, and commercial Power on the globe, it is reasonable to think that she would prove the greatest gainer by such a revolution as I have alluded to, and rise superior over every competitor.[15]

In order to justify this imperialist aggression he contributes to the deconstruction of China's image as a millennial civilisation.

> When Marco Polo, the Venetian, visited China in the thirteenth century, it was about the time of the conquest of China by the Mongol Tartars, with

[13] Reprinted in George Macartney, *An Embassy to China. Being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney during his Embassy to the Emperor Ch'ien-lung 1793-1794* (London: The Folio Society, 2004), 253-254.
[14] Ibid., 142-143.
[15] Ibid., 165.

> Kublai Khan at their head. A little before that period the Chinese had reached their pitch of civilization; but not having improved, or having rather gone back, at least, for these hundred and fifty years past, whilst we have been rising in arts and sciences, they are actually becoming a semibarbarous people in comparison with the present nations of Europe.[16]

Throughout the seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century, China had ridden high in the *imaginaire* of European intellectuals, thanks to the cross-cultural bridge constructed by Jesuit missionaries in the service of the Chinese empire. *Chinoiserie* reached its height. The suppression of the Jesuits in the mid-eighteenth century and the belligerent emergence of the East India Company (among other trading companies) went hand in hand with ideological revisionism, and China went from being a glorious example for Europe to follow to being described as a semi-barbarous people.[17] Macartney's observations contributed to the construction of an imperialist discourse that would justify the future actions of Hall and Elliott. A Hegelian optimism in "Progress" as the motor of "History" and a Kantian one true faith in a "Universal Reason" that happened to coincide with the current state of European thought in philosophy and religion, meant that any people who refused to partake of "Progress" or to recognise and submit to the one true system of belief or thought was an uncivilized people, deserving of subjection. And this would be especially true in the case of "Trade": no people or nation could be allowed to impede the onward march of foreign trade, especially British foreign trade (a necessary consequence of the industrial revolution's surplus production of goods that the domestic economy could not absorb). "Trade" became a God-given right of the British mercantile class, a self-evident truth. The East India Company and other traders probed constantly for entry into the Chinese market. The British government backed them up.

The next major British embassy to China took place in 1816. William Pitt Amherst, 1st Earl Amherst, (1773-1857) lead the expedition. He would later be Governor General of India for the East India Company (1823-1828). Although he reached China, he was never admitted to Beijing because he refused to honour the protocol that would have required him to kowtow to the emperor. Macartney had also refused, because to have done so would have meant admitting the subordination of the British crown to the Chinese throne, which would have suited the hierarchical Chinese vision of the world order but not the newly emergent post-Westphalian European vision of relations among theoretically equal nation-states (not to mention the superiority complex that was evident in Macartneys observations). The Amherst mission was written up by Henry Ellis (1777-1855). His narrative demonstrates how the revisionist line that consigned Chinese civilization to semi-barbarity had proceeded apace. He admires the landscape:

> The body is perfect, but the soul is wanting. In vain will the patriot look for kindred feelings, in vain will the man of honour look for a friend, and still more in vain would amiable woman look for a companion on the banks of the Yang-tsekiang; what is not mere manner is barbarism, and what is not barbarism is

[16] Ibid., 175-176.

[17] See Sean Golden, "From the Society of Jesus," and "'God's Real Name is God'. The Matteo Ricci-Niccolo Longobardi Debate on Theological Terminology as a Case Study in Intersemiotic Sophistication," *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication*, 15:2 (2009), 375-400.

> deceit: the merest rivulet that flows by the British peasant's hut, may be prouder of its moral situation, than the great river of China.[18]

Ellis' attitude toward "the British peasant" reveals the emergence of a homegrown underclass as a result of overseas imperialism, even though he positions the British underclass above the Chinese people as a whole.

The construction of a British colonialist discourse in China

As a result of the kind of narrative that Macartney helped to construct, by the beginning of the nineteenth century China had come to be described as "the sick man of Asia,"[19] although when Lord Amherst visited him on St Helena's after the failure of that mission, Napoleon is alleged to have warned, "Here lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep, for when he awakes he will shake the world".[20] Macartney said that the Chinese who had been highly civilised at the time of Marco Polo had become a "semi-barbarous" people. The concept of *barbarian* would take on very serious overtones in the British semi-colonisation of China, contributing to the causes and the results of two "Opium Wars."

In 1839 the Imperial Commissioner Lín Zéxú 林則徐 (1785-1850), assigned to put an end to the sale of opium to Chinese subjects by foreign merchants, wrote a letter to Queen Victoria (1819–1901) that she never received --it was secreted away by the Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston (1784-1865).

> We find that your country is sixty or seventy thousand *li* from China. Yet there are barbarian ships that strive to come here for trade for the purpose of making a great profit. The wealth of China is used to profit the barbarians. That is to say, the great profit made by barbarians is all taken from the rightful share of China. By what right do they then in return use the poisonous drug [opium] to injure the Chinese people? Even though the barbarians may not necessarily intend to do us harm, yet in coveting profit to an extreme, they have no regard for injuring others. Let us ask, where is your conscience?[21]

The choice of the term *barbarian* in this translation is questionable in a very significant way. In terms of pragmatics, the original Chinese word simply meant "foreigner." Lin spoke of opium as the immoral cause of a conflict. His discourse remained unknown in Britain. Lin's subsequent destruction of the foreigners' stocks of opium in 1839 sparked the First Opium War. None of the British documents justifying the War ever

[18] Henry Ellis, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Late Embassy to China* (London: John Murray, 1818), Vol. 2, 64-65; cf. Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Displacement. Ethnography, Translation, and Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 57-58.
[19] See Sean Golden, "From the Society of Jesus."
[20] When Mao Zedong proclaimed the creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 he said, "The Chinese people have stood up."
[21] Lin Zexu, "Open letter addressed to the sovereign of England and published in Canton (1839)," in *China's Response to the West*, edited by Teng Ssu-yu and John K. Fairbank (Harvard University Press, 1954), 24–27.

mentioned opium. The war was justified as a defence of British subjects' inalienable right to trade, anywhere in the world they wanted, without regard to the merchandise they traded, nor local law. For Britain the cause of the conflict was Chinese interference in "free trade". Opium merchants like William Jardine (1784-1843) and James Matheson (1796-1878) deliberately created a journalistic discourse to that effect. At the behest of Jardine, Matheson wrote *The Present Position and Prospect of Our Trade with China* with a view to persuading the British government and the public to go to war with China.[22]

One of the chief complaints brought by Matheson against the government of the Qīng dynasty (清,1644-1912) was the ubiquitous presence of the written character *yí* (夷) or *yīngyí* (英夷) in official Chinese documents. He charged that the term *yí* meant "barbarian" and that its usage insulted the British by calling them "barbarians" or "English barbarians".[23] Matheson and the belligerent party in Parliament pointed to the term *yí* as evidence of Chinese xenophobia, of their universal contempt for foreigners, and of their rejection of free trade and Western civilization. This was a clear case of seeing a mote in the eye of the "Other," but not the beam in one's own. Matheson wrote, "This truculent, vain-glorious people have been pleased to consider all other inhabitants of the earth (as already intimated) as BARBARIANS, — destitute of all pretensions to civil, political, or moral excellence".[24]

This philological argument effectively advanced a claim of injury and fired the British demands for reparations. Queen Victoria reiterated the point in her address to Parliament on 26 January 1841 at the close of the first Opium War when she stated that her government had dispatched the naval and military forces to the coast of China in order to "demand reparation and redress for the injuries inflicted upon some of my subjects by the officers of the Emperor of China".[25] The queen is referring not only to the destruction of British opium by the Imperial Commissioner Lin but also to the Chinese government allegedly insulting British subjects on the arrival of Lord William John Napier (1786-1834) in Guangzhou in 1834. Napier's official title, "Chief Superintendent of British Trade in China", had been rendered as *yímù* (夷目) in classical Chinese, and the literal meaning of *yímù* was explained by Napier's interpreter as meaning "the barbarian eye." The experienced English diplomat, George Staunton (1781-1859), who had accompanied his diplomat father on Macartney's mission in 1793, as well as Amherst and Ellis in 1816, had become a noted Sinologist by Napier's time. Staunton disputed the translation "barbarian" and pointed out that *yímù* should be translated as "Foreign Principal." The deliberate and misfortunate translation of the term as "the barbarian eye" led to one of the earliest military confrontations between the British and the Qing, five years before the Opium War.[26]

John Mitchel's revolutionary activities in Ireland came not long after the Opium War and overlapped the Mexican-American War in time. Largely anonymous Irish immigrants enlisted in the US army played an interesting role in that conflict when they switched sides. John Riley from Connemara and Patrick Dalton from near Ballina persuaded fellow Irish

[22] James Matheson, *The Present Position and Prospect of Our Trade with China* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1836).
[23] See Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires. The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Harvard University Press, 2004) and "The Discourse of Injury in Imperial Warfare." Paper for the 11th International Conference on Conceptual History, "Global-Historical Diffusion of Western Concepts and the Transformation of Northeast Asian Regional Order." International Research School in Conceptual History and Political Thought, Seoul, South Korea, September 18-19, 2008.
[24] Matheson, *Present Position*, 15; see also Lydia Liu, "The discourse of injury."
[25] F. Sidney Ensor (ed.), *The Queen's Speeches in Parliament from Her Accession to the Present Time* (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1882), 22; see also Lydia Liu, "The discourse of injury."
[26] See Lydia Liu, *Clash of Empires.*

immigrant soldiers and immigrant soldiers of other nationalities to join the Mexican side, having been asked by Mexicans how they, who had been the victims of colonialist oppression in Catholic Ireland, could aid and abet Protestant American colonial oppression in Mexico, a fellow-Catholic nation. Another motivation would have been the contempt and mistreatment they were subjected to by the anti-Irish and anti-immigrant US army officer corps. They created the *Batallón de San Patricio*, St Patrick's Battalion, and fought in several battles, eventually losing to the American side and suffering the consequences -- many hanged, the rest tortured and branded for deserters.[27] As we will see, desertion becomes a trope in the passage from being a homegrown subaltern acting on behalf of colonialism abroad, although desertion is in the eye of the beholder, as revealed by the fury unleashed on Riley and his men by the Americans versus their commemoration by the Mexicans (as would happen later with the Irish versus the British perception of Roger Casement). There is a monument to the *San Patricios* in Mexico City, and another in Connemara.[28] Some of their names remain, but precious little of their biographies. Traditional Irish songs are full of references to the role of Irish soldiers in British imperialist wars and the traumatic consequences for their loved ones. "Johnny, I Hardly Knew Ye'" refers to a battle in "Sulloon" (Ceylon). The 1916 song "The Foggy Dew" urges Irish soldiers to switch sides in favour of Ireland: "Twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky than at Suvla [Bay] or Sud-El-Bar".[29]

The British imposed the *Treaty of Tianjin* on the Chinese to put an end to the first part of the Second Opium War in 1858. This treaty prohibited the Chinese from using the written character *yí* when referring to the British (and by way of the "most-favoured nation clause", France inserted a similar ban in the treaties they signed with the Qing government). It contains an article, unique in the history of diplomacy, which imposes under international law an (incorrect) English meaning on a Chinese word while at the same time prohibiting its use, becoming the first international legal instrument to outlaw a sovereign power from using a word native to its own lexicon.[30]

> Article 51. It is agreed that, henceforward, the character "[y]i" 夷 (barbarian), shall not be applied to the government or subjects of Her Britannic Majesty in any Chinese official document issued by the Chinese authorities either in the Capital or in the Provinces.

[27] See Robert Ryal Miller, *Shamrock and Sword: The Saint Patrick's Battalion in the U.S.-Mexican War* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), and Michael Hogan, *The Irish Soldiers of Mexico* (Amazon Digital Services LLC, Kindle Edition, 2010).

[28] There is a monument to Ambrosio and Bernardo O'Higgins in Sligo.

[29] My mother's family, Maloneys and MacManuses, provided the Connacht Rangers with a great-grandfather, a grandfather and two grand-uncles, one killed in the first World War, the other surviving the War but buried soon after in India. Theirs was a tradition that depended on securing an army pension in order to guarantee the welfare of the family, an underclass exploited at home who helped exploit similar underclasses abroad. Precious little do we know of their lives.

[30] See Lydia Liu, *Clash of Empires* and "The discourse of injury." See also Seán Golden, "Socio-cultural aspects of the relationship between the EU and East Asia, with particular reference to China," *Asia Europe Journal*, 4:2 (2006), 265-294.

The incidents that would lead to the second Opium War overlapped in time with the Taiping Rebellion (太平天国运动, *Taìpíng Tīanguó Yùndòng*) (1850-1864) that took over much of southern China and nearly toppled the Qing dynasty. A key report on the activities of the Taiping comes from an anonymous Irishman.

> By the strangest of coincidences, the best description of what happens next comes from a restless Irishman, who can barely read or write, and whose name is no longer even known to us. After the months he spends in Zhenjiang and Nanjing during 1856, the Irishman dictates his story that same year to a ship's officer named Reynolds. Reynolds is a man who knows China well and believes in the truth of the Irishman's strange tale.[31]

Reynold's is a man who knows China well indeed. He was an opium trader.

> The following account was taken down by Mr E.A. Reynolds, the "chief officer of a large opium ship" […] at the dictation of a European, said by Macgowan to be an Irishman, who before joining the Taipings had served as a gunner in the government fleet blockading Nanking.[32]

How does an anonymous and perhaps illiterate Irishman (he has to dictate his story) become a mercenary in China in the mid-nineteenth century? He knows no Chinese but is an expert in artillery, perhaps a deserter from the British navy (another deserter). He fought first on the side of the Chinese imperial troops and then switched sides to the Taiping. Eventually he escapes from the Taiping as dissension breaks out among their ranks, and provides the other foreigners resident in China with the only reliable eyewitness account of the goings-on within the Taiping stronghold of Nanjing. Why, then, is he anonymous? From the point of view of the Irish underclass in the British Empire, the question is ironical and rhetorical. His story was recorded in great detail, but neither he nor his name mattered. An American who accompanied him is named, but not the Irishman.

> The daring adventurer […] as he was ever proposing to his fellows that they should come to some "understanding" with the mandarins he received the sobriquet of "Understanding." "Canny," is more expressive and we shall so designate him.[33]

[31] Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 237.
[32] C.A. Curwen, *Taiping Rebel: The Deposition of Li Hsiu-ch'eng* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 198.
[33] J. MacGowan, "Contributions to the History of the Insurrection in China [Part 1]," *The North-China Herald*, 352 (April 25, 1857), 156.

On the same page of *The North-China Herald* where a Dr. MacGowan, an American to judge by the context, summarised his narrative there is an article about the incident involving a British ship called the *Arrow* that would serve as an excuse for starting the second Opium War.

> The British flag was wantonly insulted by the order of a semi-barbarian. The originator of the outrage was called upon to acknowledge his error; but, true to his Tartar nature, had recourse to falsehood and evasion. […] The British Admiral was appealed to, and called upon to vindicate the insulted honour of the country. He complied with the requisition.[34]

This unsigned editorial, in addition to maintaining the discourse that reduced China's civilisation to semi-barbarity, quotes extensively from the Parliamentary debate on the British response, and calls upon Lord Palmerston to respond militarily (as he would indeed do).

> The Celestial Emperor and the insubordinate Cantonese must be taught that the "outside barbarian" is not to be trifled with. They must be made aware of our power, of which they only had a foretaste in 1841-42, and we earnestly hope that vigorous measures will be pursued in order to bring the Chinese to their senses, and that nothing short of a good understanding will be acceptable for the future.[35]

Apparently there are "understandings" and there are "understandings," because MacGowan sneers continuously at the anonymous Irish mercenary's attempts to reach a monetary "understanding" with the Taiping at the same time that the foreign mercantile class in China insists self-righteously on reaching a monetary "understanding" with the Chinese government. The will of the mercantile class is made explicit in an open letter to Lord Palmerston that is published on the same page as the second part of MacGowan's recapitulation of the anonymous Irishman's narrative.

> MY LORD.—We, the undersigned merchants of the City of London, engaged in trade with the East, beg leave to address your lordship to offer the expression of our cordial thanks for the firmness you have displayed in upholding the honour of Great Britain, and in a determination to protect the lives and property of British subjects, peaceably engaged in commercial intercourse with China.[36]

[34] Unsigned, *The North-China Herald*, 352 (April 25, 1857), 156.
[35] Ibid.
[36] James Matheson et al., *The North-China Herald*, 354, (May 9, 1857), 163.

The signature of James Mattheson takes pride of place at the head of an extensive list of trading companies who defended their rights as British subjects to "peaceably" engage in trading opium in China, despite the illegality of this trade under Chinese law.

The British military response was already under way. The missionary and celebrated translator of the Chinese classics, James Legge (1815-1897), recorded the arrival of a British fleet in the summer of 1857.

> On the 2nd July of that year I was walking out on Caine's Road [Hong Kong] in the afternoon with a friend, when we saw a steamer coming through Sulphur Channel. At first we thought it must be the mail, but it proved to be the *Shannon*, with Lord Elgin on board. As she steamed into the harbour […] I said to my companion, "There is the knell of the past of China. It can do nothing against these leviathans."[37]

This was the same James Bruce, Lord Elgin (1811-1863), who would burn down Yuánmíng Yuán (圆明园), the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, during the second Opium War (his father had removed the friezes from the Parthenon for "safekeeping" in British hands).[38]

The deconstruction of the British colonialist discourse

Meanwhile, at another point on the Eurasian continent, another imperialist war was being waged by Britain in the Crimea (1853-1856), a war in which John Mitchel's gaoler Captain Hall participated. This war would inspire the beginning of the deconstruction of Lord Palmerston's colonialist discourse by an Irishman. Born in Dublin, William Howard Russell (1821-1907) became a journalist for *The Times* and is considered to have been the first "war correspondent." His reports from the battlefield on the Crimean War contradicted the official propaganda and helped turn British public opinion against the war. He also wrote first-hand reports of the Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the American Civil War. Irish writers would come to play an increasingly important role in the enterprise of deconstructing the British colonialist discourse, to a large extent because they deserted the metropolitan English literary tradition that was colonising their own.[39]

By the end of the nineteenth century the most powerful foreigner in China was arguably Robert Hart (1835-1911), who was born near Lisburn (County Armagh) and graduated from Queen's University Belfast, where he was recruited to be an Interpreter in China. Prince Gong (恭親王, 1833-1898), founder and Head of the *Zǒnglǐ Yámen* (總理衙門), the earliest version of a modern Chinese Foreign Ministry, referred to him as *wǒmen*

[37] Spence, *God's Chinese Son*, 270-271.

[38] As a historical aside, a forced stopover in 1965 at Shannon airport, near the river that gave Elgin's warship its name, gave Ernesto Guevara de la Serna Lynch, known as "Che," the chance to stop in an Irish pub nearby in Clare where the artist Jim Fitzpatrick was tending bar. The result was an iconic poster. Of Guevara's great-grandfather Patrick Lynch who left Clare for Argentina we know very little; of Che's solidarity with revolutionary causes, a lot.

[39] See Seán Golden, "Post Traditional English Literature: A Polemic," *The Crane Bag: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 3:2 (1979), 7-18

de Hèdé (我們的赫德) "our Hart". He was fluent in Chinese. He had a Chinese family. He learned to look at events from a Chinese point of view and published a collection of 'Essays on the Chinese Question" as a result.[40] He was on good terms with both the Chinese and the foreigners but was sometimes accused of being too fair to the Chinese side.[41] He eschewed the colonialist discourse and went some way toward constructing a new discourse on China. Hart became Pro-Chancellor of Queens University when he retired. Hart also emphasised his "Irishness" in contrast to "Englishness," although he defended the Union and the Empire as causes for the good, of the Irish on the one hand, and of the Chinese on the other, and it has been argued that it was this "Irishness" that allowed him to perceive "China" in a non-British light.[42]

The two historically most significant Irish diplomats for Chinese affairs bracket nineteenth century British colonialism in China. Macartney also administered a colonised Ireland before taking up a similar task in India and attempting to extend British sway to China. Hart played a more ambiguous role, often defending Chinese interests while administering the Chinese Customs Service for the benefit of colonial intruders. Narratives created by diplomats like Macartney and Hart helped construct a colonialist discourse that the counter-narratives of resistance created by a literary underclass of colonised writers would soon help to deconstruct. The ancient Chinese classic, the *Dàodéjīng* (道德經) by Lǎozi 老子, linked power and discourse: *yán yǒu zōng, shì yǒu jūn* (言有宗,事有君) - words have an ancestor; affairs have a sovereign. This affirmation could be seen as prefiguring Michel Foucault's much later analysis of the discourse of power through research into the archaeology and genealogy of the key words and metaphors of the discourses that consolidate the construction of social, economic and political realities and interpellate the members of any given society.

"My British to my backbone tongue"

Herbert Allen Giles (1845-1935) was recruited to be an Interpreter in China and became a colonialist administrator there from 1867–1892. He was British Vice Consul at Pagoda Island (1880–83) and Shanghai (1883–85), and Consul at Tamsui (1885–91) and Ningpo (1891–93). He then became professor of Chinese at Cambridge. Giles composed a textbook to teach the classical Chinese language, based on the transcription, translation and detailed explanation of the *Sānzìjīng* (三字經) the "three character classic" (composed of rhyming verses of three characters each), a traditional compendium of official Neo-Confucian thought. He glossed each word carefully. When he came to the word for "family" he betrayed a double colonialist contempt:

> Chia [家 *jiā*] is composed of 宀 [*mián*] shelter as radical, and 豭 [*jiā*] a boar, abbreviated, as phonetic. It is the equivalent of our word home, a pig under a

[40] Robert Hart, *These from the Land of Sinim. Essays on the Chinese Question* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1901).
[41] See Jonathan Spence, *To Change China. Western Advisers in China* (New York: Penguin, 1980).
[42] See Spence, *To Change China* and Richard O'Leary, "An Irish Mandarin: Sir Robert Hart in China 1854-1908," in *China and the Irish*, edited by Jerusha McCormack, 26-39 (Dublin: New Island, 2009).

> roof forming *an ideogram that should be especially suggestive to our neighbours in the sister isle*.[43]

His discourse in this case makes it clear that his intended readers were British and that he takes it for granted that they would share his condescension toward –if not outright contempt of-- both the Chinese and the Irish. It also creates a hierarchy with the British on top and Ireland and China sharing the same subordinated level beneath. Not content to insult both peoples in one book, he repeated the comparison in *The Civilization of China*, a standard textbook that constructed "China" for English readers:

> Considering how squalid many Chinese homes are, it is all the more astonishing to find such deep attachment to them. There exists in the language a definite word for *home*, in its fullest English sense. As a written character, it is supposed to picture the idea of a family, the component parts being a "roof" with "three persons" underneath. There is, indeed, another and more fanciful explanation of this character, namely, that it is composed of a "roof" with a "pig" underneath, the forms for "three men" and "pig" being sufficiently alike at any rate to justify the suggestion. *This analysis would not be altogether out of place in China any more than in Ireland*.[44]

Giles' construction of a colonialist discourse took an even more literal turn when he composed *Chinese without a Teacher*, a phrasebook dedicated "to the ladies and members of the mercantile, sea-faring and sporting communities of China, many of whom I have heard expressing regret at not knowing a few words of Chinese".[45] The book offers "useful" phrases in English, with the equivalent in Chinese characters and a phonetic transcription. Here are some examples of the phrases Giles assumed would be useful to the ladies and members of the mercantile, sea-faring and sporting communities of China: "Light the lamp," "Call the cook," I'll pay you tomorrow," "The coolie is also very lazy," "Do you know this man?" "He's a southerner," "I don't like him," "He can't be depended upon," "You mind your own business," "Where's my ring?" "It can't be lost." It would be difficult to find a more explicit example of the construction of a British colonialist discourse.[46]

In the case of Giles the colonialist discourse he helped to construct took aim against the Irish as well as the Chinese. As Declan Kiberd and P.J. Matthews point out with regard

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[43] Herbert A. Giles. *San Tzu Ching* (三字經). *Elementary Chinese*. *Translated and Annotated by Herbert A. Giles* ([Taipei:] Confucius Publishing Company, [1910]), 88; emphasis added.

[44] Herbert A. Giles, *The Civilization of China* (New York: Henry Holt and Company; London: Williams and Norgate, 1911), 190; emphasis added.

[45] Herbert A. Giles, *Chinese without a Teacher* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, Limited, [First Edition 1872] Ninth Edition 1931).

[46] A later but similar kind of colonialist vision of the life of "the mercantile, sea-faring and sporting communities of China" –both semantic and semiotic-- can be found in Patricia Allan's *Shanghai Picture-Verse. A Book of Sketches in Rhyme for the Shanghai Child of Yesterday and Today* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh Limited, 1940). An historical overview of the contemporaneous semantic and semiotic discourse of British contempt for the Irish can be found in Liz Curtis' *Nothing but the Same Old Story. The Roots of Anti-Irish Racism* (London: Information on Ireland, 1984).

to the gradual conversion of the English language in Ireland to Irish nationalist purposes in the mid-nineteenth century, "Previously, most sentences uttered in English would have been an order, a condescension or an insult".[47] As professor of Chinese at Cambridge, Giles became a famous Sinologist and published many translations of classical texts. He does not seem to have commented on the discrepancy between his admiration for the Chinese classics and his contempt for the people.

The discourse of power contaminates and conditions the worldview of the people who are subjected to it, both the privileged classes who benefit from it and the underclasses who do not. Ronan Sheehan gives a good example of this in his study of the Irish sculptor John Henry Foley (1818-1874) in *Foley's Asia*.[48] A passage in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* offers an example of what Louis Althusser termed *interpellation*, the obligation a subject feels to reply to an inquiry in the terms the dominant discourse of power expects to hear.

> I am woo-woo willing to take my stand, sir, upon the monument, that sign of our ruru redemption, any hygienic day to this hour and to make my hoath to my sinnfinners, even if I get life for it, upon the Open Bible and before the Great Taskmaster's (I lift my hat!) and in the presence of the Deity Itself andwell of Bishop and Mrs Michan of High Church of England as of all such of said my immediate withdwellers and of every living sohole in every corner wheresoever of this globe in general which useth of *my British to my backbone tongue* and commutative justice that there is not one tittle of truth, allow me to tell you, in that purest of fibfib fabrications.[49]

Ironically, some of the contempt for the Chinese transmitted by Gilesian colonialist discourse seeped into the popular Irish *imaginaire*. The song "Johnny Doyle" ("The Forgetful Sailor"), in itself a portrait of the underclass in colonised Ireland, reflects a stereotypical image of Chinese "barbarity": "They sailed across the harbour bar / And headed east for foreign waters / To China where they think they're wise / And drown at birth their surplus daughters".

In 1890, Oscar Wilde reviewed Herbert A. Giles' translation of the Daoist classic *Zhuāngzi* (莊子), whose very bibliographical details stressed the complicity between colonial administration and academic endeavour: *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer*, Translated from the Chinese by Herbert A. Giles, H.B.M.'s Consul at Tamsui. Wilde used Daoist ideas from this translation in the Preface he wrote to defend *The Portrait of Dorian Grey*, and in his own ideas on art and nature (not to mention *The Soul of Man under Socialism*). Later, the British establishment used Wilde's homosexuality (an underclass in itself) to destroy him. In the middle of his discussion of Zhuangzi's ideas, Wilde's Irish nationalism erupts.

[47] Declan Kiberd and Matthews, P.J. (eds.), *Handbook of the Irish Revival. An Anthology of Irish Cultural and Political Writings 1891-1922* (Dublin: Abbey Theatre Press, 2015), 132.
[48] Ronan Sheehan, *Foley's Asia: A Sketchbook* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press Ltd., 1999).
[49] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939), 36; emphasis added. See also Seán Golden, "Parsing Rhetorics: The Cad as Prolegomena to the Readings of *Finnegans Wake*," in *The Seventh of Joyce*, edited by Bernard Benstock, 173-177 (Bloomington, IN, USA: Indiana University Press; Sussex (UK): Harvester Press, 1982).

> All this is of course excessively dangerous, but we must remember that Chuang Tzu lived more than two thousand years ago, and never had the opportunity of seeing our unrivalled civilisation. […] And yet it is possible that, were he to come back to earth and visit us, *he might have something to say to Mr. Balfour about his coercion and active misgovernment in Ireland* […] Perhaps it is well that Chuang Tzu cannot return.[50]

Wilde continually and subversively satirised the "unrivalled civilisation" that Macartney had defended so spiritedly a century earlier. Wilde singled out Balfour for further barbed attacks in a review of the poems that Wilfred Blunt wrote while imprisoned in Galway Gaol for his collaboration in the Land War (W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound would famously organise a homage in Blunt's honour in 1914).[51] This is the same Balfour who built the foundations for today's chaos in the Middle East.

Wilde certainly saw a relationship between discourse, power and politics, but it is James Joyce who most explicitly related them.

> --The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words HOME, CHRIST, ALE, MASTER, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.[52]

Samuel Beckett also explicitly linked discourse and exploitation in *Endgame* when Hamm the landlord repeats the dialogue with which he humiliated a tenant and concludes, "There's English for you".[53]

The Irish Literary Revival that deconstructed the metropolitan British colonialist discourse from the colonised periphery was part of the process that created a nationalist identity strong enough to fight for liberation from British imperialism. It also contributed to the cultural innovation that inspired the Chinese struggle for liberation. Classical Chinese or *wényán* (文言) was a difficult literary dialect that dominated elite Chinese literature right into the twentieth century. Its genres were saturated with and promulgated the feudalism that modernisers wanted to eradicate. A movement began early in the 20th

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[50] Oscar Wilde, "A Chinese Sage," *A Critic in Pall Mall. Being Extracts from Reviews and Miscellanies* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1919), 184; originally published in *The Speaker*, 1:6 (1890), emphasis added. See also Isobel Murray, "Oscar Wilde's Absorption of 'Influences': The case history of Chuang Tzu," *The Durham University Journal*, 64:1 (1971), 1-13; Jerusha McCormack, "From Chinese Wisdom to Irish Wit: Zhuangzi and Oscar Wilde," *Irish University Review*, 37:2 (2007), 302-321; Jerusha McCormack, "Oscar Wilde's Chinese Sage," in *China and the Irish*, edited by Jerusha McCormack, 51-61 (Dublin: New Island, 2009).

[51] Oscar Wilde, *A Critic in Pall Mall. Being Extracts from Reviews and Miscellanies* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1919), 144, 146.

[52] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man: Text, Criticism, and Notes* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 189. See also Seán Golden, "Post Traditional English Literature."

[53] Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 51. See also Seán Golden, "Familiars in a Ruinstrewn Land: *Endgame* as a Political Allegory," *Contemporary Literature*, XXII:4 (1981), 425-455.

century to write realistically in *báihuà* (白話), the vernacular language, about relevant contemporary themes, to make literature more accessible to the people. *Báihuà* was quickly subsumed into the more widespread social revolution known as the May Fourth Movement. This Chinese literary reappraisal also included questions of form and genre. Free verse, written in the vernacular, replaced classical poetry (whose advocacy was identified as being reactionary). More significantly, Chinese writers adopted the short story and the novel as the forms most appropriate for creating a new modern popular literature in China. Translations of modern Western writers played an equally important role, and Irish writers were very prominent. Oscar Wilde was one of the first Western writers to be singled out as an exemplar. George Bernard Shaw was highly revered as a socialist thinker and visited China. Lady Gregory's *Rising of the Moon* was adapted into Chinese as a revolutionary drama. J.M. Synge's *Riders to the Sea* was endorsed as peasant drama. Sean O'Casey was admired for his communism. Sinn Fein literature was translated and promulgated by the Chinese nationalists, and George Russell's agricultural cooperatives provided a model for the communists' agrarian reforms. Mao Zedong praised Michael Collins' tactics and appreciated the role art had played in mobilising the Irish people prior to the Easter Rising.[54]

A theoretical model of the inverse fortunes of Empire

China was not entirely a colony of the British Empire, but suffered from British imperialism all the same. Ireland was entirely a colony of the British Empire, and suffered from it, but was "united" to the Metropolis (1801-1921). Some of the colonised and subaltern Irish who belonged to the underclasses in the domestic sphere became instruments or agents of British imperialism in the foreign sphere --soldiers, policemen, administrators (Figure 1).

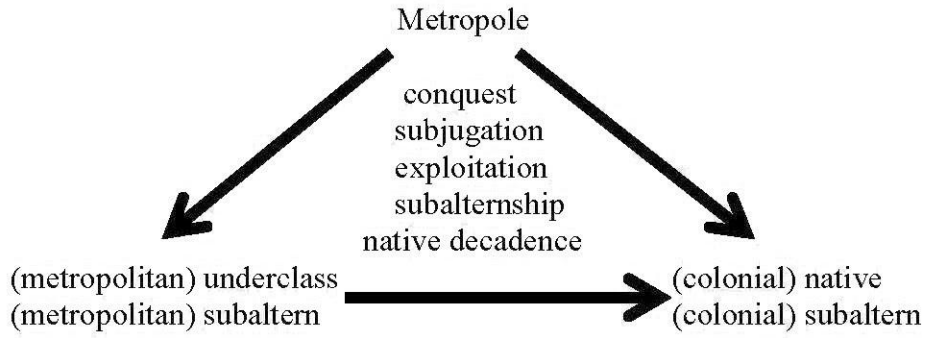

Figure 1. Domestic underclass/subalterns as instruments of subjugation

[54] See also Seán Golden, "Popular Literature in the People's Republic," *The Crane Bag: A Journal of Irish Studies*, 8:2 (1984), 169-174; Jerusha McCormack, "Ireland through a Chinese Mirror," in *China and the Irish*, edited by Jerusha McCormack, 1-13 (Dublin: New Island, 2009).

Sometimes, as a result of their involvement with the colonised people they had been sent to oppress, the subalterns joined the resistance like the *San Patricios* or the anonymous witness to the Taiping (Figure 2).[55]

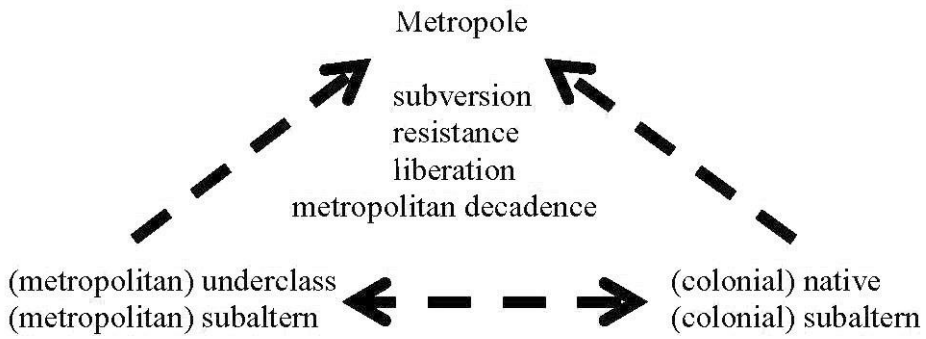

Figure 2. Domestic/native underclass/subalterns as instruments of liberation

Over time, the construction of a colonialist discourse in parallel with colonial conquest and administration yields to an upsurge in resistance that eventually constructs a counter-discourse, leading to the liberation of the former colonies and a concomitant decadence of the former metropole (Figure 3).

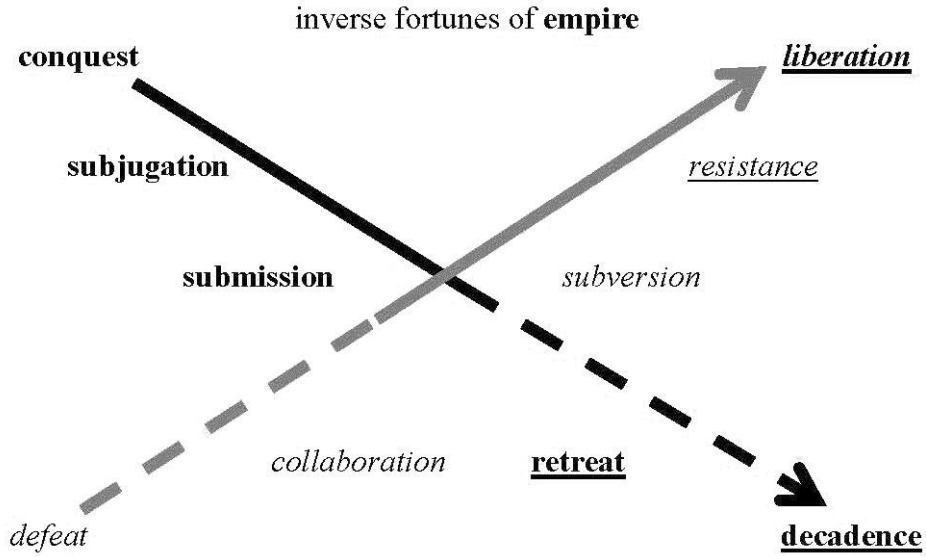

Figure 3. The inverse fortunes of empire -- from subaltern to liberator

An example of this process is provided by the memoirs of Brian Power, who was born and raised in the Chinese city of Tianjin.[56] His father from Connemara had been

[55] Or Patrick Lynch's great-grandson, Che Guevara.

recruited by Robert Hart to be a policeman in the Chinese Customs Service. "A native of Belfast, he preferred to recruit Irishmen".[57] Power also recalls conflicting opinions among the Irish expatriates in Tianjin with regard to the Chinese.

> "In my opinion," said the Captain, glancing round at everyone in the room to make sure they were listening, *"no one can see into the heart or mind of a Chinaman. He is inscrutable. Absolutely inscrutable."* He repeated the word with relish. […] "I'm bound to agree with you," said Brother Faust […] *"But what about the Irish? It's hard to read some of our minds too, is it not? Come to think of it, they've a lot in common, the Irish and Chinese. They both have long memories for a start."* […] Mad Mac […] said, *"The Irish and the Chinese may have things in common, but do any of you know about the time the Irish persecuted the Chinese in California?"* Everyone turned to look at him. "Persecution?" said the Captain. "That's a strong word, sir." […] "Aye, persecution," said Mad Mac. "It was when the Chinese coolies were building the Central Pacific railway line. Gangs of Irishmen set their fierce dogs on them and robbed and beat them in order to scare them away. In San Francisco, too, the Irish stoned poor Chinese laundry workers. All because the Chinese worked hard for very little money".[58]

Power's brother Desmond has questioned many of the details in Brian's version of his parents' lives in China,[59] but the discrepancies do not alter the implications of the conflict described here --the antagonistic relations between the Irish underclass and the Chinese underclass, both of whom tend to be anonymous in the grand narratives of the British Empire (the use of the generic term "British" in official imperial documents and statistics under the Union often cloaks the identity of the "Irish").

In his biography of an English policeman in Shanghai in the 1920's and 1930's, the historian Robert Bickers warmly describes his own family connections with empire, "I too am a creature of the empire world." He offers a detailed genealogy of forefathers who were involved in colonial service and then adds as a general aside, "And on my mother's side are the immigrant Irish, another long tale of British colonialism".[60] There are plenty of details about the ancestors involved in colonial administration but no details about the anonymous Irish emigrant experience of Empire. Another contemporary apologist for the British Empire, historian Niall Ferguson, also stresses his own family's imperialist links, while letting slip a detail that illustrates some of the consequences for the underclasses at home:

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[56] I have a special interest in Tianjin. I lived and worked there for some time in the early 1980's and a son of mine was born there, the first entry in the births registry of the Irish Embassy in Beijing.
[57] Brian Power, *The Ford of Heaven* (London: Corgi Books, 1984), 54.
[58] Brian Power, *Ford of Heaven*, 58-59; emphasis added.
[59] Desmond Power, *Brian Power's real upbringing in the ancient Ming city of* 天津 [Tiānjīn]. Available at: http://www.scribd.com/doc/16825771/Brian-s-Real-Upbringing-in-the-Ford-of-Heaven, 2009 [accessed on 15.11.2016].
[60] Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me. An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 328; emphasis added.

> Indeed, the legacy of the Empire was so ubiquitous and omnipresent that we regarded it as part of the normal human condition. Holidays in Canada did nothing to alter this impression. […] *Nor did that systematic defamation of Catholic Ireland which in those days was such an integral part of life on the south side of the Clyde*.[61]

Roger Casement (1857-1924), born near Dublin and raised and schooled in Ballymena, is a good example of the process described by the theoretical model of the inverse fortunes of empire. He began as a colonialist collaborator but his first-hand experience of colonialist reality led him to criticise it so severely –to desert it-- that his world famous reports on the Congo and Putumayo contributed to the subversion of colonialism. He came to believe that only an armed struggle would inspire the resistance that could lead to national liberation. He was hung for treason for his participation in the Easter Rising and homosexuality was used at his trial in order to destroy him (as had happened to Wilde as well, and at the hands of the same Irish defender of the Union and the Empire, Edward Carson).

Inspired by Casement's denunciation of colonial practices in the Congo and the Amazon, as well as his own first-hand experience, Joseph Conrad (1864-1916) wrote *Heart of Darkness*, a critical analysis of colonialism in Africa, and *Nostromo*, a critical analysis of colonialism in South America, and envisaged the advent of terrorist tactics of resistance in *The Secret Agent*. More recently W.G. Sebald (1944-2001) analysed the relationship between Casement's and Conrad's activities in *The Rings of Saturn* and described the present physical decadence of formerly opulent palaces in Britain that had been built on the foundation of a colonial wealth that did not survive the demise of Empire. As Adrian McKinty put it in his Sean Duffy novels that are set in the more recent "Troubles" and steeped in the *ennui* of the moribund phase of the British Empire, "whenever someone says don't ask how their antecedents made their money in the colonies it's always either opium or slaves".[62] Robert Bickers also summarised this aftermath of Empire in the metropole.

> But empire hasn't gone. Its detritus litters once colonized cities and cantonments […] And empire also lurks in the streets, parks and squares of the imperial cities of the United Kingdom […] if you stand still in the heart of the metropolis and think and look, you find yourself surrounded by the imperial past. […] [Empire] shaped and distorted twentieth-century British lives, […] Britons living and working in a world of empire and then living in a post-imperial world.[63]

Robert Hart's papers relating to his sojourn in China were bequeathed to Queens University Belfast. Harvard University edited and published his journals and correspondence on the basis of these papers. Some of them were transcribed during the "Troubles" in the North of Ireland.

[61] Niall Ferguson, *Empire. The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (London: Penguin, 2002), xvi; emphasis added.
[62] Adrian McKinty, *Gun Street Girl* (London: Profile Books, 2015), 135.
[63] Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me*, 2-3.

> Hart's great-grandson, the last Sir Robert, had died in 1970 without heirs and had left various of Hart's papers, including the seventy-seven volumes of his journals, to the Queen's University at Belfast, his alma mater. […] In the 1970s, the political situation in Belfast itself was worsening also; from the top floor of the Queen's University Library, where the journals were locked in the treasure room, one could already see occasional puffs of smoke and hear explosions. […] Dr. Bunker […] determined to use what time he could spare from medical studies to read the journals onto tapes. This he did against certain odds. […] Occasionally he was interrupted by an explosion audible on the tape, and would comment (in parentheses), "I think that was near City Hall".[64]

The intersection of the Chinese colonial experience and the Irish colonial experience continued past the end of the twentieth century. A new generation of Irish writers that grew up during the Troubles has also contributed to the deconstruction of British colonialist discourse. Eoin McNamee wrote:

> The city itself has withdrawn into its placenames. *Palestine Street. Balaklava Street. The names of captured ports, foreign outposts held against inner darkness. There is a sense of collapsed trade and accumulate decline.* In its names alone the city holds commerce with itself, a furtive levying of tariffs in the shadow.[65]

McKinty describes Belfast as, "A city in decline since the outlawing of the slave trade and the embarrassed, hasty retreat from Empire",[66] and "out here, on the edge of the dying British Empire, farce is the only mode of narrative that makes any sense at all".[67] Ciaran Carson drew upon William Howard Russell's frontline dispatches about the Crimean War in "The War Correspondent" in his book of poems *Breaking News*.[68] In other poems he also deconstructs the debris left behind by empire. In "Belfast Confetti" the post-imperial landscape underlies the violence of urban guerrilla warfare:

> I know this labyrinth so well -- *Balaklava, Raglan, Inkerman,*
> *Odessa* Street --
> Why can't I escape? Every move is punctuated. *Crimea* Street.

[64] Katherine Bruner et al., *Entering China's Service. Robert Hart's Journals, 1854-1863*, edited by Katherine F. Bruner, John K. Fairbank, Richard J. Smith (Cambridge MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1986), xii-xiii.
[65] Eoin McNamee, *Resurrection Man* (London: Picador, 1994), 3-4; emphasis added.
[66] Adrian McKinty, *Rain Dogs* (London: Profile Books, 2015), 333.
[67] Adrian McKinty, *Gun Street Girl*, 14.
[68] Ciaran Carson, *Breaking News* (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 2003).

Dead end again.[69]

Carson's deconstruction of the British colonialist discourse in Belfast even links up with the deconstruction of colonialist discourse in China in "The Poppy Battle."

Red crepe fake felt paper poppy petals with their dot
Of laudanum in everybody's buttonhole
Exuded empty perfumes of Forget-me-not.
[…]
Poppy the emblem of Peace and the Opium Wars.[70]

Carson's historical memory –and anti-colonialist solidarity with the Chinese-- goes further back than David Cameron's, who infamously placed the outcome of a State visit to China in danger in 2010 when he and his delegation flagrantly wore poppies in their lapels on Remembrance Day, oblivious to if not ignorant of the connotations for their Chinese hosts (he repeated the gesture in 2015 during a State visit to the UK by Chinese President Xi Jinping).

Conclusion

Postcolonial studies tend to concentrate on the experience of the colonised before, during and after the processes of colonisation, but not on the impact of imperialism on the colonisers themselves, or on the underclasses created in the metropole by that same colonial process. They also tend to concentrate on identifiable agents. The role of the anonymous underclasses, "at home" in the metropole or living by their wits "abroad" in the colonies (when they survived, in either case), is a more difficult study, precisely because of their anonymity. The anonymous underclasses are like black holes, themselves invisible but exercising a measurable influence on the visible bodies nearby. For all the wealth that empire generated for the elite of the metropole at the cost of native underclasses in the colonies, it also generated domestic underclasses in the metropole. All was not peaches and cream on the home front, even in the heyday of empire. The anatomy of the Irish underclasses is particularly complex, both victims and agents of colonialism. This complexity sometimes serves to justify attempts to identify Ireland (and the Irish experience) with the "centre" of imperialism, from the point of view of the peripheral "Third World," and to deny the validity of postcolonial approaches to the Irish experience. Commemoration of the anonymous agents and victims of British imperialism in Asia and its backlash among the Irish is a challenge for both Asian and postcolonial studies in Ireland.

[69] Ciaran Carson, "Belfast Confetti," *The Irish for No* (Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 1987), 31; emphasis added.
[70] Ciaran Carson, "The Poppy Battle," *The Twelfth of Never* (Loughcrew: The Gallery Press, 1998), 14.

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