

Foreword

“Asia, Your Asia”: Reflections on Orwell and Asia

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In February 1941 in the midst of the German blitz on Britain, George Orwell published his political pamphlet *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, a slim volume of about 120 pages which begins with a reflection on patriotism in the modern world entitled “England Your England.” The latter phrase indicates a characteristic Orwellian combative turn; referring to William Ernest Henley’s “England, My England,” a popular and oft anthologized Victorian hymn to England, he replaces emotional warmth with critical distance and proposes a second person rather than first person stance.¹ Patriotic sentiments were prevalent of course in England in 1941 and Henley’s verse returned in its original meaning that year in composer Ralph Vaughan Williams’s “England My England: a choral song for baritone soloist, double chorus, unison chorus, and orchestra.” Orwell, however, while applauding his countrymen’s ability to rally around the flag in times of crisis, was no mere chorus singer and denounces the conservatism, excessive respect for class differences, and hypocritical attachment to Empire which he believed riddled mainstream English patriotism. Patriotism was fine and necessary under the circumstances, he told his readers, but without socialist reforms this England was not quite yet his ideal England.²

My title “Asia, Your Asia” renders homage to Orwell’s “England Your England” and encapsulates my belief that if complex nuances surround the “English Orwell,” i.e., the Orwell who was a spokesperson for England and Englishness, similar ambiguities are attached to the “Asian Orwell,” which this special issue of

¹ Orwell may have been inspired by D. H. Lawrence’s use of Henley’s poem in his short story “England, My England” (1922) about WWI; he included it in a list of his favorite stories in a book review published on 25 Jan. 1941 shortly before *The Lion and the Unicorn* (*CW* 12: 372).

² For more analysis of Orwell’s England, see Jonathan Rose, “England His Englands” in John Rodden, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell* 28-42.

Concentric is devoted to. Orwell often behaved as an early prototype of what the Western media today call an “Asia watcher,” i.e., someone who is well informed about Asian societies and cultures and speaks authoritatively about them, and texts such as “A Hanging” (1931), “Shooting an Elephant” (1936), and his first novel *Burmese Days* (1934), which are specifically set in the East, can be readily quoted in this context. The Asian theme, however, is much more persistent in his work than is sometimes understood and surfaces in many other core Orwell texts, often unexpectedly. My/your knowledge dyads appealed to Orwell’s polemical mind and, among the oppositional structures which interested him (capitalists/working men, human beings/animals, Stalinists/democratic socialists, Ingsoc party members/proles, Tolstoy vs. Shakespeare, Raffles and Miss Blandish, i.e., genteel English crime fiction and hardboiled American crime fiction, etc.), the England/Asia pair was particularly significant. As special issue contributor Douglas Kerr stated in a previous study of Orwell, Asia gave Orwell a “cluster of ideas” about “empire, authority, and justice” which would remain his “capital subject” (2).

Asia, indeed, is deeply embedded in Orwell’s literary program and could be used flexibly to represent his evolving vision of race, empire, and the capitalist world order. He did not always do so in a manner which responded to the aspirations of the imperial subjects, and was affected at different times by his own limitations as a writer (in *Burmese Days*) or the mass media genres within which he had to work (in his BBC radio broadcasts and other commercial work). Though progressive and open-minded, he was also a man of his time and his choice of words when discussing women, Jews, Africans, and Asians sometimes reflected that. What is fascinating about his work, however, is that he advanced the debate on many of the issues that mattered (totalitarianism, imperialism, racism, capital punishment, surveillance technologies, etc.) and did so in a transnational context.³ He also went about this endeavor in a manner that rendered visible his thought process and revealed not only his successes and triumphs, but also his insecurities, shifting positions, missed opportunities, and failures.

Readers who wish to trace the trajectory of Orwell’s Eastern progress can consult “Orwell Goes East” by Orwell editor Peter Davison. It is the most detailed summation to date of the “matière d’Orient” in Orwell—to borrow a phrase from the study of medieval literature—and was written in response to an early draft of

³ My phrase “issues that mattered” echoes the title of the American edition of Christopher Hitchens’ book on Orwell, *Why Orwell Matters* (2003), which appeared in the UK under the title *Orwell’s Victory*, and was followed by Hitchens’s essay “Why Orwell Still Matters” in John Rodden’s *The Cambridge Companion to George Orwell* (2007).

the “Orienting Orwell: Asian and Global Perspectives on Orwell” CFP, but regrettably could not be included in the current special issue. Davison systematically surveys Orwell’s writings large and small about Asia from his juvenilia to the draft of a story which was left unfinished at his death in Jan. 1950 and concludes, “The East resonated in Orwell’s life long after he had left Burma” (Davison, “Orwell Goes East” [n. p.]).

Many examples of this resonant Asia could be quoted, but I concentrate on one instance, viz. Orwell’s first book *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), which includes the second major epiphany of the “Asian Orwell” following the better known “A Hanging” of 1931. At first look, this text bears no connection to the East as it is set entirely in Paris and London, but about half way Orwell digresses briefly and comments on the lives of Indian rickshaw pullers and gharry ponies when describing his experiences as a dishwasher in a hotel in Paris. Though only one page long, the digression is vintage Orwell with vivid descriptive details and introduces one of his cherished subjects as he explores the suffering of people alongside that of animals. It also offers a lucid example of Orwell’s method of proceeding empirically from concrete data to larger patterns of signification which transcend borders.

Orwell begins his reflection by asserting intellectual honesty; the examples he is about to quote, he warns, are “an extreme case, such as one hardly sees in Europe” (*CW* 1: 118). Then follows a concise journalistic description of the fate of beasts and men in India: “In any Far Eastern town there are rickshaw pullers by the hundred, black wretches weighing eight stone, clad in loincloths. Some of them are diseased; some of them are fifty years old. For miles on end they trot in the rain or sun, head down dragging at the shafts, with the sweat dripping from their grey moustaches” (*CW* 1: 118). It is a secular *Ecce homo* vignette of the kind that will be repeated in his work: the puny Indian man who is about to be executed in “A Hanging”; the sweating, half-naked coalminers in *The Road to Wigan Pier*; the broken Winston Smith in the Ministry of Love in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, etc. He next quotes a Hindi swearword to indicate what the customers call the rickshaw pullers when they are not satisfied and, while he does not translate or explain the swearword, probably because it is rather gross, it helps to establish his credibility as an Asia hand.⁴ As for the gharry ponies, their fate is no different from the one

⁴ The swearword is *bahinchut* and is used again in Ch. XXXII. Orwell did not explain the word in the English edition, but provided a footnote for the French translation of 1935 in which he clarifies the sexual nature of the insult as “*bahin* means ‘sister’ and *chut* ‘the sexual organ.’” To call someone a *bahinchut*, then, is “to remind him gratuitously that you are on the most intimate terms with his sister” (*CW* 1: 179).

suffered by their noble brother Boxer in *Animal Farm*; after years of backbreaking labor, the slaughterhouse awaits them. He concludes that rickshaws and gharries are “as anyone who has ridden in them knows, poor luxuries”—note the renewed appeal to the shared understanding of those who have been in the East—and offer but “a small amount of convenience” (*CW* 1: 119). The narrative at last returns to Europe and ends with the observation that the sweating Parisian *plongeurs* in the filthy basement of the hotel, and he was one of them, though far better off than Indian rickshaw pullers or gharri ponies, are “analogous” and are also caught in a useless and demeaning routine to manufacture “poor luxuries” (*CW* 1: 119). The latter figure of speech presses home Orwell’s point; the real purpose of the sorry spectacles in Paris and India, he claims, is to create symbolic properties, viz. class distinctions and power hierarchies, rather than real conveniences. His implication, therefore, is that the working poor in both the East and the West, though separated by geographical distance and cultural prejudices, are fellow inhabitants of a vast socio-economic underworld.

Today, our mass media, popular culture, literature, and textbooks have habituated us to Orwellian concepts and modes of thought (Big Brother Is Watching You, Newspeak, doublethink, etc.) and such literary defamiliarizations as are used in the above passage may no longer strike us with the impact that they may have had in his time. We have agreed that our world is very much his world, an Orwellian world, and paradoxically that sometimes makes it difficult to see his life and times the way he did and understand the specific thought processes and intellectual effort that went into the creation of his vision. Contemporary readers in the thirties, though, may have found the unexpected detour from Paris to India more striking and puzzling than we do as they did not share many of his assumptions and only very gradually came around to the vision of an Orwellian world.

The first essay in this special issue, “‘A Hanging’: George Orwell’s Unheralded Literary Breakthrough,” by co-editor John Rodden sheds further light on this question of the genesis of Orwell’s unique literary-political agenda and examines another early text and Orwell’s first successful publication, viz. “A Hanging” of Aug. 1931. This early work, says Rodden, is a “brilliant, 2,000-word burst of arresting insight and poignant feeling” and represents “a sudden leap of achievement” as up till then the former policeman, who was still publishing under his real name Eric Arthur Blair, had only produced unremarkable book reviews, newspaper articles, and one essay on tramping, “The Spike.” Rodden also comments that Orwell would not achieve such brilliance again in his creative nonfiction till he once again turned to the subject of Burma and wrote “Shooting an

Elephant” in 1936. Burma, in other words, brought out the best in Orwell and allowed him to develop the style and “signature issues” for which he would become famous: “the nightmare of authoritarian power and totalitarian dictatorship, the brutal tyranny of the collectivist state, the hypocrisy and cruelty of respectable ‘authority,’ the ruthless exploitation of the powerless, and on and on.” The special issue also includes an interview with John Rodden in which he further explores these “signature issues” and analyzes how they impacted Orwell’s literary afterlife. Having devoted three decades to studying Orwell and with some ten books about Orwell and his literary legacy to his credit, he is well placed to comment on a wide range of questions explored in this special issue: Orwell’s literary reputation and place in contemporary culture, the emergence of “Orwell” (i.e., the mythical Orwell of modern culture as opposed to the historical Orwell), the Asian cultural contexts of his work, novel approaches to his work and legacy, and ongoing controversies about his life and politics.

One of the questions asked, though, in this special issue is: what Asia was Orwell talking about and whose Asia? Not being Asian himself, he could not really call it his and yet that is what he frequently did; “my Asia” then meaning the exploited Asia he had inhabited and spoke for in his fiction, essays, book reviews, and columns. There was also a “your Asia” or perhaps several “your Asias” in Orwell; viz. the guilty colonial Asia which the English had created and were still occupying in their outposts of empire as described in “A Hanging,” “Shooting an Elephant,” and *Burmese Days*; and the Asia of the Indian listeners of the BBC broadcasts he produced during his years at the BBC. As has been documented by his major biographers (Bernard Crick, Michael Shelden, Jeffrey Meyers, D. J. Taylor, and Gordon Bowker), his preoccupation with Asia was grounded in two aspects of his personal biography, both of which Orwell himself considered significant and meaningful in shaping his worldview and mental landscape.⁵ The first was the fact that he was born in Motihari in India in a family, the Blair family, with a long history of service in Asia and throughout the Empire, and the second his five-year appointment from 1922 to 1927 in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma—an experience which, as he would repeat time and again, turned him into a committed anti-imperialist.

Yet, for all that, it could be argued that the time that Eric Arthur Blair, a.k.a.

⁵ See Bernard Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (NY: Little Brown, 1980); Michael Shelden, *Orwell: The Authorized Biography* (NY: HarperCollins, 1991); Jeffrey Meyers, *Orwell: Wintry Conscience of a Generation* (NY: Norton, 2000); D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* (NY: Vintage, 2004); and Gordon Bowker, *Inside George Orwell: A Biography* (NY: Little Brown, 2003).

George Orwell, spent in Asia was limited and that he really only knew one small corner of this vast continent with its many regions and cultures. Some controversy, e.g., exists about how long Orwell resided in India as an infant. Many Orwell scholars accept the view of Orwell's first biographer Bernard Crick that his mother brought him to England "some time in 1904," i.e., anywhere from nine months to a year following his birth (7).⁶ His most recent biographer Gordon Bowker, however, suggests that Orwell may have been brought to England by his family within four or five months of his birth on June 25, 1903.⁷ The difference between a time of as little as four months in Bowker's version and nine to twelve months in Crick's may seem insignificant to most observers, but the notion that Orwell may have ventured such a sustained intellectual attachment to India and generally Asia on such a brief moment of personal contact says much about the kinds of mental displacements and projections which he was engaging in.

As for his time in Burma, though he indeed spent five years there, he arrived in Burma and took up his appointment in the Indian Imperial Police at the very young age of nineteen and at no point did he seek to visit India, the land of his birth, or explore further and set foot in China, which in fact lay right across the Burmese border and could also be reached by sea on board the many ships going to Hong Kong, Shanghai or other harbors along the China coast. His stay in Burma seems to have been a particularly claustrophobic one and many years later the Burmese academic and nationalist Maung Htin Aung would observe that Orwell "was too young when he lived in Burma" and did not have the political know how and personal maturity to turn his first novel *Burmese Days* into an effective vehicle for Burmese aspirations (30). Aung's testimony indicates that, while Orwell's interventions on behalf of Asia may have impressed readers in the West, they did not always appeal to the Asians he was trying to stand up for. This state of affairs resembles the fate which the novelist and former Nigerian Colonial Service officer Joyce Cary suffered at the hands of Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. The latter included Cary's "much praised" *Mister Johnson* (1939) among the "appalling

⁶ Scholars who follow Crick's lead and identify the year of return as 1904 include Peter Davison in his *George Orwell: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1996); Douglas Kerr in his *George Orwell*, and most recently John Rodden in his *Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell*.

⁷ While not offering an exact date for the departure from India, Bowker argues that Orwell was taken to England by his parents "shortly after his birth" in 1903 as there was an outbreak of the plague in their district and comments that the photographs of the infant Eric in India in the arms of his mother and native ayah "were most likely taken at the time of his baptism on Oct. 30, just before their departure" (10). He also finds support in the fact that Richard Blair is temporarily absent from the India List of 1903, which would indicate that he took leave that year and accompanied his family on the long voyage home.

novels about Africa” written by Europeans and commented that it was these kinds of writings which led him to decide that “the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intentioned” (193).

Orwell was familiar with Cary’s work and contributed a Foreword to his *The Case for African Freedom*, which was published in July 1941 in the same Searchlight Books series as *The Lion and the Unicorn*. Students of Orwell’s work will find this Foreword disappointing. He praises Cary’s “long experience as an administrator among primitive African peoples” and hails him as someone who is “especially fitted to plead for African freedom,” but at a mere three paragraphs and lacking the wit and stylistic polish which Orwell was capable of bringing to book reviews and other occasional writings, it is a poor effort and reads rather like a polite but routine reference letter for a job applicant (*CW* 12: 521). This blandness may have been due to the fact that, having no personal experience of West Africa, he could not offer any of the anecdotes and culture observations which pepper his writing whenever the topic of Asia is broached. Orwell, though possessed of a fertile imagination, generally wrote with the greatest conviction and expressive power about people and places he knew from his personal experience: his Edwardian childhood, dreary boarding schools, tramping and hop picking, literary bohemia in Paris and London, the English countryside, and of course India, Burma and the East. These were the materials that fascinated him and inspired his best work.

The East, therefore, was vital to his emergence as a public intellectual and literary artist and—as Douglas Kerr comments in his essay “Orwell and Kipling: Global Visions”—helped him produce a global vision which was unparalleled in the England of his time. Orwell, says Kerr, as Kipling before him, escaped from “the provinciality that often marks English literature” and had “a global perspective,” i.e., he “thought globally” about the network of continents, countries, societies, cultures and peoples created by the British and other European empires. Unlike his literary model Kipling, however, he felt his own humanity degraded by contact with the brutality and oppression of life on the colonial frontier and rejected the imperial legacy of despotism, racism, economic inequality, and hatred. The writings of Kipling and Orwell, Kerr concludes, are “profoundly important texts in which we can read a *dramatization* of the imperial vision, the implications of seeing the globe as an arena of imperial struggle, and the cost of that vision in terms of the humanity of people of other races, and of the man who observes them.”

Kerr’s insightful reading suggests that Orwell’s conclusions regarding race, class and empire were useful and applicable in a global context and constitute a rare

instance of thinking on a macro level. This global vision, I would claim, was most consistently mapped out or demonstrated in a systematic manner in the major regions which he had lived in and felt personally committed to, viz. England/Britain, the Mediterranean Basin, and Asia. It is this vast area stretching south and east from the British isles to France, Spain and the Mediterranean and on to India and Southeast Asia that constituted “Orwell’s Globe”; a much larger stage than Shakespeare’s “wooden O” to be sure, but still not a fully realized global construct. Nothing very concrete or intellectually charged can be gleaned from his work about other geographies such as Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific, much of Africa and the Americas, all of which are underrepresented in his writings. I argued above that the Foreword to Cary’s *The Case for African Freedom* disappoints. Christopher Hitchens offers a similar judgment regarding Orwell’s vision of America in his *Orwell’s Victory*: “the American subject was in every sense Orwell’s missed opportunity” (102).

Special issue contributor and historian Gita Pai sheds further light on the location of Orwell in contemporary political debates in her essay “Orwell’s Reflections on Saint Gandhi.” She examines Orwell’s posthumous portrait of the Indian independence leader “Reflections on Gandhi” (1949) in light of his earlier writings on Gandhi and argues that “Orwell valorized Gandhi’s commitment to non-violence and passive resistance in the late 1940s, but he refused to see Gandhi in a simplistic way.” She also calls attention to the “vertiginous irony” implicit in a recent confrontation in Orwell’s place of birth Motihari between nationalist Indian politicians and local village residents who oppose their leaders’ plans to erase the last traces of Orwell in India and build a Gandhi Memorial Park on the very grounds of Orwell’s natal home. This, then, is a case of Orwell being revalidated in a specific postcolonial context and finding himself included in the Motihari villagers’ definition of “my Asia.”

Literature scholar Angelia Poon similarly revives the debate regarding Orwell’s politics of representation in *Burmese Days* in her “Against the ‘Uprush of Modern Progress’: Exploring the Dilemma and Dynamics of Modernity in George Orwell’s *Burmese Days*,” and claims that, while the novel is not modernist or avant-garde in its style, it offers an interesting perspective on discussions regarding modernity and the political agendas which are staked on Eurocentric conceptions of modernity. Orwell, she notes, attempted to “present an alternative modernity not premised on the Other but succeeds only in presenting one of despair and irony.” This Orwellian failure is of critical importance and reveals “the contested nature of European modernity.”

Before proceeding to a final Orwellian Asia not discussed so far, viz. China/East Asia, I explain my inclusion of the Mediterranean Basin in what I have called Orwell's Globe. Orwell did not spend a lot of time there—altogether about one year at different stages of his life—but the region appears frequently in his work as both a ground zero of the fight against imperialist and totalitarian agendas and the place where the Orient and otherness begin. He first traversed the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean as an infant when his family brought him to England and some eighteen years later he crossed the Mediterranean again when he set out for the East and then returned to England in 1927. It is during the 1927 return journey, at a time when his vision had been sensitized by his five years in Burma, that the significance of this region as an ideological battle ground became clear to him. When passing through Marseilles on his way back to England, he witnessed a general strike by the workers in Marseilles in support of the Italian anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti, who had been condemned to death in the US, and in May 1932 he included a vivid report of the strike in his review of E. R. Curtius' *The Civilization of France* (CW 10: 244-45). He returned to the region a decade later and this time he was more than just a sympathetic eyewitness of worker dissent as he spent half a year in Barcelona and other parts of Catalonia fighting against Franco with the anarchist POUM militia. Many readers rank his celebrated *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) among his very best writings and it has been called his "greatest piece of documentary prose" (Rodden, *Cambridge Introduction* 57). Spain was clearly very dear to him and he would return to the events in Catalonia in the essay "Spilling the Spanish Beans" and various reviews of books on the Spanish Civil War. From Sept. 12, 1938 to March 26, 1939, moreover, he resided in French Morocco, an experience which inspired the important essay "Marrakech" (1939), discussed by Douglas Kerr in "Orwell and Kipling: Global Visions." In his last major work *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, finally, he completed one more imaginative return to the Mediterranean as Tangier and North Africa are the Western edge of the "rough quadrilateral with its corners at Tangier, Brazzaville, Darwin and Hong Kong" (CW 9: 195) over which the three superpowers Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia are continually warring. It is this proliferation of images of the Mediterranean in both major and minor writings which warrants its inclusion in Orwell's global vision of class and race conflicts.

One other aspect of Orwell's Globe which may be of particular interest to the readers of *Concentric* and East Asian discourse communities in general is Orwell's reading of the history, politics, and culture of China over the course of his literary career spanning two decades. Earlier I queried why Orwell did not take advantage

of his five years in Burma to visit the nearby India or China and suggested that inexperience, claustrophobia, and his developing sense of the aimlessness of life in the colony may have hindered him. Perhaps another, less complicated factor may have been involved as well in that Burma, though poor, was a fairly representative microcosm of the larger Asia and offered as much cultural variety and exposure as one could desire. In recent years, the Malaysian Tourist Board has generated a lot of attention with an advertising campaign which plays up Malaysia's multi-racial society and declares "Malaysia, Truly Asia." A similar statement could be made about Orwell's Burma and its panoply of races, religions, and regions. In addition to the Buddhist Burmese and Christian and animist tribal minorities, there were many Indians in British Burma, both Hindus and Muslims, and Orwell himself worked with Indians and became fairly fluent in both Hindi and Urdu. This is reflected fully in his writing as he mentions Indians in "A Hanging" (the man who is hanged, as well as the prison wardens, are Indians) and *Burmese Days* (e.g. Dr. Veraswami).

The Chinese were present as well in the racial mix of Burma, albeit to a lesser extent, and certainly played an important role in the commercial networks which linked Burma with China and overseas Chinese communities throughout Southeast Asia. The latter network of the Chinese diaspora, i.e., of the many Little Chinas in Burma and elsewhere, was also present in the work of Orwell's favorite writers Joseph Conrad, W. Somerset Maugham, and Jack London. In sum, though Orwell never went to China, it seems to have been the outer edge of his *terra firma*, an important place which was just beyond the horizon and yet also tantalizingly close.

Burmese Days spells out this role of China in Orwell's map of Asia as he mentions the existence of a small Chinese community in the provincial town Kyauktada in Upper Burma at the beginning of the novel, and later on refers to the presence of Chinese bazaar merchants and street vendors in the Burmese social landscape. The most important passage involving Chinese in *Burmese Days*, however, occurs when the protagonist John Flory takes an English newcomer by the name of Elizabeth Lackersteen to the shop of Li Yeik, a Chinese grocer, in the bazaar. Flory, though English, enjoys contact with a wide range of inhabitants of Burma, including the Indian Dr. Veraswami, Burmese villagers, and Chinese shopkeepers such as Li Yeik. As Elizabeth strikes him as seemingly more modern and cosmopolitan than the other colonials, he imagines that she will appreciate an opportunity to explore Burmese society and gradually become more knowledgeable and acculturated. Yet, his attempt to make Elizabeth "go native" miscarries due to her cultural phobias and her excursion beyond the safe limits of the foreign enclave turns into a type of fearful descent into darkness. When entering the store, Flory

introduces Li Yeik as the representative of an ancient civilization and the Chinese merchant warmly welcomes his European guests. Elizabeth, though, who was already uncomfortable and disoriented during a Burmese dance performance and her walk through the bazaar, is ill at ease from the start. She is repelled by a naked child “crawling slowly about the floor like a large yellow frog”; objects to the fact that the tea she is served is green (it is of course Chinese green tea rather than English black tea); and is unwilling to entertain any questions from Li Yeik’s wives whether she wears stays, i.e., a corset, which Burmese women did not wear and considered a bizarre and exotic aspect of European women’s dress (*CW* 2: 129). The latter questions produce an unpleasant climax as, refusing to have the Other’s equalizing gaze turned against her European identity, she gets up and storms out of the store, followed by the embarrassed Flory.

Orwell’s inclusion of the Chinese in his vision of Burma would have interesting consequences and shed light on his evolving understanding of racial others. In his Dec. 10, 1943 “As I Please” column in *Tribune*, he comments on a recently published supplement to the American *New Republic* magazine entitled “The Negro: His Future in America” and towards the end of his column urges his readers “to avoid using insulting nicknames” (*CW* 16: 24). He further notes: “One’s information about these matters needs to be kept up to date. I have just been carefully going through the proofs of a reprinted book of mine, cutting out the word ‘Chinaman’ wherever it occurred and substituting ‘Chinese.’ The book was written less than a dozen years ago, but in the intervening time the word ‘Chinaman’ has become a deadly insult” (*CW* 16: 24). Though he does not identify the book in question, it was of course *Burmese Days*. Yet, he then complicates this seemingly straightforward reflection on his accountability as an author with a more slippery final observation: “Even ‘Mahomedan’ is now beginning to be resented: one should say ‘Moslem.’ These things are childish, but then nationalism is childish. And after all we ourselves do not actually like being called ‘Limeys’ or ‘Britishers’” (*CW* 16: 24). Orwell’s comments in this passage anticipate his powerful indictment of nationalism in “Notes on Nationalism” of Oct. 1945, but his focus on nationalism in the context of a campaign against racially charged nicknames and his use of the adjective “childish” weaken his attempt to unite with cultural others and promote tact and sensitivity.

Burmese Days and its afterlife indicate that Burma represented a moment of real—albeit temporary—contact between Orwell and Chinese culture. Another such moment occurred fifteen years later in London when he joined the Eastern Service of the BBC in Aug. 1941 and worked with the Chinese journalist and writer Hsiao

Chien (蕭乾), whom Orwell first contacted in a letter of Jan. 14, 1942 regarding a script for a radio program about Japanese atrocities in China. He also worked with Chinese Talks Producer William Empson, the author of *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), who had taught English literature in Japan from 1931-34 and in China from 1937-39. More could be said about his collaboration with Hsiao Chien and Empson, but I move on to an event which took place following his resignation from the BBC in Nov. 1943 when he occasionally still accepted radio work on a freelance basis. On 8 Oct. 1945, the BBC broadcast a radio program entitled “Jack London” in the Light Programme of the Forces (i.e., British Army) Educational Broadcast for which Orwell wrote the script and acted as narrator, two assignments for which he was remunerated. The program reviews the career of London, always a favorite of Orwell’s and a clear influence on a number of his works, including *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and also features a reading of extracts from two short stories, viz. “The Apostate” and “The Chinago.” In his “As I Please” column, Orwell had spoken about the need to keep one’s information about racial epithets up to date and, while it is pointed out in the program that the word “Chinago” is a “nickname used on some of the Pacific islands for a Chinese,” no warning is offered this time regarding the insulting nature of the nickname (*CW* 17: 303). Then follows a scripted reading of the story, with interleaved commentary by the Narrator (Orwell) summarizing events.

The story revolves around a case of mistaken identities on a French island in the Pacific as, due to a blunder by a drunken official, a Chinese prisoner named “Ah Cho” is wrongfully executed in place of a murderer named “Ah Chow.” The policeman and the executioner, while expressing doubt as to whether they have the right man, ultimately decide not to waste any more time and guillotine the prisoner. It is a disturbing tale and, while Orwell spoke earlier in the program about London’s socialism and concern for the plight of the oppressed, the story and the radio program end rather abruptly without any commentary. One may surmise that Orwell, who stated his opposition to capital punishment in “A Hanging” (as discussed in Rodden’s essay), meant for this story to exemplify the injustice of the death penalty and the slight regard of European colonizers for the lives of subject peoples. However, the narrative presentation in his script does not foreground any such agenda and leaves room for listeners to receive the piece as they pleased, perhaps as a bit of black humor, which the French were famous for. As the title of vol. 15 of the Davison *Complete Works, Two Wasted Years*, indicates, Orwell was never at ease working within the bureaucratic structure of the BBC and considered it a largely unproductive time. The “Jack London” broadcast may be viewed as one

example of the sort of unhappy compromises that he made in order to create entertainment for a mass media audience.

During and after the war Orwell also wrote reviews of books about China or works translated from Chinese, including some by Hsiao Chien, and keenly followed events in China and throughout Asia in his personal diaries and newspaper columns. On Feb. 1945, he reviewed *Shanghai Harvest* by the Australian journalist Rhodes Farmer about his experiences as a war correspondent in China. This book includes information on a number of topics that interested Orwell, such as a report on the Nanjing massacre, reflections on the Burma Road, the author's impression of "China's invincibility" and discussions about post-war arrangements then being discussed by Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin (*CW* 17: 36). This image of an invincible China in the Western press towards the end of the war and the developments in China following the war may have influenced him and we see him adjust his world view in his dystopian masterpiece *Nineteen Eighty-Four* when he predicts the rise of a new superpower named Eastasia. Consisting of China, Mongolia, Tibet, parts of Central Asia, Korea, and Japan and devoted to an ideology with "a Chinese name usually translated as Death-Worship, but perhaps better rendered as Obliteration of the Self," this Eastasia ceaselessly struggles for control over a vast South Asian and Pacific intermediate zone with the other superpowers (*CW* 9: 205). The action of the novel takes place in "Airstrip One," i.e., the England of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and at no point does the protagonist visit Eastasia or any other part of the world. Instead, Winston Smith reads about Eastasia and the other rival power Eurasia in a clandestine publication, *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism* by Emmanuel Goldstein, the number one state enemy in Oceania, and elsewhere in the novel captured enemy soldiers with Asiatic faces are paraded through the streets and jeered by citizens.

Orwell's final novel, thus, marks an interesting adjustment in his thought as China now overshadows India/South Asia in his global geopolitical landscape, even though the latter had always served as the main battle ground of his anti-imperialist critique and in fact achieved independence from Britain at the time when he was composing *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. China, meanwhile, was still in the final stages of the Civil War—although the Communists were clearly beginning to have the upper hand. Nevertheless, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in June 1949, whereas Mao Zedong did not proclaim the establishment of the People's Republic till Oct. 1, 1949. Orwell, therefore, was prescient about the totalitarian nature of the regime which was about to be established in China. What is most striking about Eastasia in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, however, is that, except for the Asiatic physiognomies of its

citizens and use of Chinese as the national language, it is a carbon copy of the other two superpowers. All three powers have the same geopolitical objectives and are ruled by very similar totalitarian ideologies, viz. Ingsoc (short for English Socialism) in Oceania, Neo-Bolshevism in Eurasia, and Death-Worship (or Obliteration of the Self) in Eastasia. All three, moreover, frequently go from being at war with one rival power and allied to the other to declaring war on their former ally and establishing an alliance with their erstwhile enemy.

More references to China in Orwell's diaries, radio broadcasts, letters, book reviews, essays, etc. can be examined, but the tentative conclusion is that China, in view of its distant location, size, antiquity, continuity as a major non-Western civilization, and "invincibility" (as stated by Rhodes Farmer), could be used flexibly by Orwell to suit various literary purposes. India/South Asia was always the loadstone of his Asia-centric vision of race, empire and the capitalist world order, but China seems to have played an interesting supplementary role. In *Burmese Days*, he represented the Chinese accurately as he had seen them during his time in Burma, i.e., as merchants, shopkeepers, street vendors, and coolies in the Chinese diaspora in British-ruled Southeast Asia. Later, he took interest in China through his extensive readings and his collaboration with Chinese intellectuals and English writers who had traveled in the East. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, finally, he constructed a new image of China in response to the defeat of the Axis powers in WWII and the beginning of the Cold War and, in doing so, anticipated the emergence of the fierce, inward looking China of Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution.

It is fitting, then, that this special issue concludes with an essay on "Orwell's Afterlife in Taiwan" by Shan Te-hsing of the Academia Sinica. Using Walter Benjamin's metaphor of translation as afterlife, he notes that in Taiwan, official name the Republic of China, Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have enjoyed a remarkable afterlife. Taiwan, says Shan, was "a self-proclaimed bastion of anti-communism during the Cold War—a term coined by none other than Orwell himself in 1945—and a unique country in the Sinophone world." This, then, virtually guaranteed an exceptionally warm reception of Orwell in Taiwan and he has remained one of the most popular and respected foreign writers in Taiwan over the past six decades. Translations and their paratexts played a very important role at the beginning of this process and critical essays and academic studies reinvigorated the discussion from time to time. More recent translations of other Orwell writings, including *Down and Out in Paris and London* and major essays such as "Why I Write," "Bookshop Memories," "Politics and the English Language", "Reflections

on Gandhi,” and “The Lion and the Unicorn,” have contributed fresh impulses. Shan’s article confirms that in the democratic, postcolonial Taiwan, liberated from both the Japanese Empire and the KMT regime of the Martial Law Era, but still unsure of its relationship with big brother—or Big Brother?—China; Orwell’s legacy remains on the agenda.

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