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C H R I S T I N E  S U  

Volume XVIII  
Spring 2008
2008 HERODOTUS BOARD

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EDITORS’ NOTE

Now in its eighteenth volume, Herodotus is Stanford University’s student-run history journal. It highlights the scholastic achievement, intellectual passion, and broad range of academic interests represented among undergraduate students in the Department of History. While we received many outstanding submissions for this year’s edition, the following four essays stood out in their creativity, attention to detail, originality, and insightful historical analysis.

We thank Margo Richardson and Monica Wheeler, without whom this edition of Herodotus would have been impossible to produce, for their guidance and enthusiasm. We also acknowledge the Carl F. Brand Fund for its generous financial support, without which Herodotus would not exist.

As always, we encourage feedback and questions about this year’s volume and the journal in general. Please address comments to the Department of History staff.

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KNIGHTS OF THE AIR:
CHIVALRY AND COMBAT IN THE ROYAL FLYING CORPS

BEN EPPLE

Despite the mechanized nature of their weapons, British combat pilots in World War I consistently referred to themselves using the archaic language of chivalry. The endurance of the knightly metaphor was even more remarkable because their countrymen on the ground were, in the words of the war poet Siegfried Sassoon, saying “good-bye to Galahad” and witnessing the divorce of the concepts of combat and medieval romance. This essay argues that the resilience of the chivalric mode of discourse in air war was not the result of more gentlemanly combat above the trenches than in them; pilots admitted that they fought dishonorably and suffered horrendous casualties. Instead, chivalry was able to endure in the air because fighter pilots closely resembled the Arthurian ideal in other ways. They possessed many of the material trappings of knighthood, took on the role of protectors of civilians, ground troops, and unarmed planes, and were engaged in the “quest” to explore an unknown frontier: the sky.

The cultural effects of World War I were as significant as its well-known political consequences. In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, his landmark literary study of the British on the Western Front, historian and literary critic Paul Fussell writes that the War “reversed the Idea of Progress” which had “dominated the public consciousness for a century.” World War I was particularly destructive to such myths because it was begun with tremendous innocence on the part of the societies involved. The men of the British Expeditionary Forces had lived their lives until 1914 in a world without a great European conflict. The Franco-Prussian War belonged to an earlier generation, and Britain herself had not fought a major war on the Continent since a century before. As a result, “[n]o man in the prime of life knew what war was like. All imagined that it would be an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly decided.” The slow, grinding battle of mass attrition that followed was rendered all the more jarring by these shattered expectations.

One of the social myths that perished in the crucible of 1914-18 was the chivalric ideal as a way of making sense of war. As millions of troops lived and died in the filth and despair of the Western Front, “chivalry died

Carried to the front fervently, especially by members of the British upper classes, romantic ways of thinking about war withered and died in the face of mechanized slaughter and unprecedented casualties. Yet even as the romantic ideal of war was guttering out in the trenches, it flourished in the skies above them. Pilots were called, and conceived of themselves as, “knights of the old romances.” This characterization of pilots as knights did not come from their conduct in combat. As soon as their machines were advanced enough to kill one another and men on the ground, pilots ceased to exhibit any special degree of honorable conduct or mercy in battle. Instead, conceptions of chivalry were able to endure in the air because the lives of pilots strongly resembled those of the romantic heroes in other ways: in their material situation, their function as protectors of both the Army and civilians from air attack, and their exploration of the unknown.

The chivalric tradition existed most prominently in Great Britain, where members of the upper classes and many aspirants in the middle class were raised on the medieval and pseudo-medieval romances of Sir Walter Scott, Sir Thomas Malory, and William Morris. In *The Return to Camelot*, a study of chivalry in the English upper classes, Mark Girouard writes that these stories indoctrinated schoolboys with a code of behavior in which a gentleman-knight was expected to be “brave, loyal, true to his word, courteous, generous, and merciful. He defended the Church and the wrongfully oppressed but respected and honoured his enemies in war, as long as they obeyed the same code as he did.” Concurrent and linked with this instillation of chivalric morals were the concepts of fair play, sportsmanship, and the "stiff upper lip" on which all Britons prided themselves. Some even saw the public schools, incubators of the British elites, as descendents of a tradition of medieval knighthly training. Sir Henry Newbolt wrote of how the public school "derived the housemaster from the knight, to whose castle boys were sent as pages; ... prefects, from the senior squires; ...and the love of games...from tournaments and the chivalric rules of war.” Newbolt, a friend of BEF commander General Sir Douglas Haig who in 1914 signed on to coordinate war propaganda for the newly-founded Ministry of Information, thus traced the sporting attitudes which defined “Britishness” as descending from a mainspring of medieval codes of honor.

From the vantage point of infantry serving on the Western Front, these ideals seemed incongruous with reality. Mechanical developments of the past three decades, from the Maxim gun of 1884 to the dramatically increased range and size of artillery, profoundly altered the face of battle. Time and again the sporting, heroic charge failed to defeat entrenched, machine-gun-equipped defenders. There was little place for overt acts of bravery and honorable combat in a war where friend and foe alike were decimated by long-range shellfire from out of sight. Under these conditions, attempts to apply old linguistic and cultural modes of talking about warfare seemed grossly out of place. Fusill writes, “[T]he machine gun alone makes it so special and unexampled that it simply can’t be talked about as if it were one of the conventional wars.” Girouard agrees, writing that the Great War discredited “the obvious and hackneyed traditions of chivalry, the happy warriors and bands of brothers breaking lances, carrying oriflammes, throwing down gauntlets, or questing for Holy Grails.”

Although the chivalric paradigm became an increasingly untenable characterization of ground combat as the war progressed, it was able to endure in the skies. The transference of these archaic ideals developed for combat in a premodern setting to the fragile pioneers of air warfare was not difficult, for air power had not yet come into its own as a form of mechanized destruction on par with that taking place on the ground. All decision-making parties were convinced at the war's outset that the airplane’s sole function was reconnaissance. The role of aircraft as fighting machines remained anathema in all national air establishments: "Even the great German General Staff, a body less hostile to new ideas than its English and French counterparts, had reported in September of 1914 that: ‘Experience has shown that a real combat in the air such as journalists and romancers have described, should be considered a myth. The duty of the aviator is to see, not to fight.” The airplanes’ function as the eyes of the army also took the form of artillery sighting. Future fighter legend James McCudden recorded that the Royal Flying Corps began to experiment with this process in June 1913, and "the principal difficulty was then to get machines to fly for more than an hour at a stretch.”

The weapons which would make combat between the so-called “knights of the air” possible had not yet been invented, but the seeds of the romantic mentality were already liberally sown there. If there was ever a modern combat force predisposed to conceive of itself in the romantic tradition, it was the pilots of the RFC in 1914. The imagined code of chivalry preached by Scott, Morris, and Newbolt was primarily the territory of the gentlemen, the elite and upper middle classes of Britain and the Dominions. Among the

RFC fliers this mentality was concentrated, for good and ill, and it helped define the way they flew, fought, behaved, and conceived of themselves. Pilots were officers, officers were recruited from public schools, and public schools remained primarily the territory of the higher social orders. Financial barriers to entry also existed for would-be fliers. Until August 1914, aspiring RFC pilots had first to acquire a civilian pilot’s license on their own time and out of their own pocket, a policy which helped make military flying the territory of the well-to-do.\

Although aces like McCudden and Edward “Mick” Mannock did not come from the upper-class background and by the end of the war two officers could write in The Lancet that, “Flying is not now confined to the public school boy, the cavalry officer, or the athlete,” the very fact that the officers felt the need to make this fact explicit meant that at some point flying really was limited to the lucky public school few. Indeed, the upper classes were overrepresented in Britain’s air arms throughout the conflict. When squadron commander and later World War II head of Fighter Command William Sholto Douglas requested personnel to replace lost and transferred pilots in October 1916, he received none other than future Undersecretary of State for Air Harold Balfour, who “learned to fly at his own expense,” Jack Scott, a barrister and “old friend of Churchill’s,” and Tom Purdy, “a member of the world-famous family of gunsmiths.” One of RFC pilot Arthur Gould Lee’s first acquaintances on his arrival in France in May 1917 was Captain Bonar Law, “son of the politician” who would become Prime Minister in 1922. In their preponderance these upper class pilots exerted a powerful influence on the discourse surrounding the air war, and their conceptions of combat helped define it in both their own minds and the public consciousness.

The knightly code was multifaceted, but its roots were in battle. Only with the arming of airplanes did the analogy between pilots and chivalrous knights-craft really take off. In September 1914, Lt. C.E.C. Rabagliati, flying as an observer, engaged a German two-seater with small arms. “[M]y co-pilot and I came across a German aeroplane which to our intense joy didn’t remove itself as German aeroplanes always did,” he wrote. After a lengthy exchange between Rabagliati’s .303 service rifle and a German Mauser pistol, Rabagliati struck the enemy pilot and sent his plane crashing to the ground. “We were of course completely thrilled,” he wrote. “We’d had our duel and

we’d won!” This early engagement embodies the chivalric virtues of combat identified by Girouard: bravery, in the form of a readiness to engage the enemy, and honoring the foe in a fair, face-to-face fight of the sort which was already impossible on the ground. Rabagliati’s choice of the word “duel” to describe the combat is also telling, indicating at least a linguistic link between medieval principles and the air war. It did not take long for the idea that airmen possessed knightly virtues to catch on in the public consciousness. We find the irrepressible Newbolt again at the forefront of this movement:

[O]ur airmen are singularly like the knights of the old romances; they go out by day, singly or in twos and threes, to hold the field against all comers, and to do battle in defence of those who cannot defend themselves. There is something especially chivalrous about these champions of the air; even the Hans, whose military principles are against chivalry, find themselves affected by it.

Unlike the war on the ground, however, in which the gloss of government and press propaganda had little impact and “[t]he visiting of violent and if possible painful death upon the complacent, patriotic, uncomprehending, fatastous civilians at home was a favorite fantasy,” many airmen actually agreed with characterizations like Newbolt’s. In his memoir Sagittarius Rising, RFC ace Cecil Lewis wrote that air combat meant

[r]e to be alone, to have your life in your own hands, to use your own skill, single-handed, against the enemy. It was like the lists of the Middle Ages, the only sphere in modern warfare where a man saw his adversary and faced him in mortal combat, the only sphere where there was still chivalry and honour. If you won, it was your own bravery and skill; if you lost, it was because you had met a better man.

As in Newbolt’s and Rabagliati’s accounts, Lewis places an emphasis on “bravery and skill,” explicitly linking the notion of single combat in the air as a reincarnation of the “lists” of old. He also honors his enemy with the idea that the victor, of whatever nationality, was “a better man.” Again and again chivalry is explicitly mentioned by British fighter pilots. Although Lee promised that his published letters from 1917 would tell the story of his experience “in unpretentious words,” he, too, lapsed into the romantic metaphor: “This was the time when air combat could indeed be tinged with something of the knightly chivalry of old, when a pilot, perhaps still in his teens, might inwardly salute his antagonist, even wave to him as they circled

20. Froude, 87.
each other, seeking the chance to fire."

One knightly virtue, mercy, was already missing as early as August 1914, and it would remain almost completely absent from the air war. Even Lee, who extolled RFC fighter pilots as "Galahads of the air," noted that they fought "without mercy." Military historian Alan Clark acknowledges that a "convention" existed that "dead-stick" aeroplanes were left their fate, but notes, "[t]he novices, the vindictive, the cold-blooded, those eager to add cheaply to their score, could not resist the easy and defenseless target which was offered to them." The weekly communiqués of the RFC provide a vivid example of a gratuitous lack of mercy. Lt. D.H. Gray fired on a German plane on June 17, 1916, sending the plane into a dive which caused it to crash into a hedge. "At the pilot made no effort to get out, Lt. Gray turned and emptied the remainder of the drum into him at about 50 feet." The decision to fire on an already-downed and possibly injured foe at point-blank range cannot be justified by any Arthurian code.

A close examination of the air war, even if it is limited only to pilots of "scouts" designed to engage and destroy enemy planes, reveals that air combat had little in common with the chivalric ideal. Pilots were brave, and they talked of respecting their enemies, but the notion of the duel was doomed almost from the beginning. Unlike the "lists of old," where combatants faced one another before engaging, tactics in the air war emphasized stealth. The "walk" was often the decisive phase of an air fight. "For a high altitude interception the most favoured tactic was to approach the two-seaters from below and to the rear where the "blind-spot"... would effectively mask the assailant." Although engagements where both sides saw each other were common, McCudden admitted that he scored several kills where "the enemy apparently had not yet seen us" when he opened fire. Lewis went further, arguing that hunting enemies unable to return fire was the preferred method of fighting for air superiority.

[Most crack fighters did not get their Hunns in dog-fights. They preferred safer means...They would then set out on patrol, alone, spot their quarry (in such cases usually a two-seater doing reconnaissance or photography), and carefully manoeuvre for position, taking great pains to remain where they could not be seen i.e. below and behind the tail of the enemy. From here even if the Hun observer did spot them, he could not bring his gun to bear without the risk of shooting away his own tail plane or...]

Lewis's language, with its use of "quarry" as a synonym for "enemy" and the idea of gaining "position" while remaining unseen, conjures metaphors not of jousts between armored cavalymen, but of a less valorous activity of the British upper class: the hunt.

The link between air fighting and the hunt is also visible in the obsession of fighter pilots with tallies and scores, another unchivalrous aspect of air combat. Knights of the romances fought against foes of equal or greater skill; hunters killed weaker things for sport. That is not to say that all pilots were bloodthirsty and obsessed with the algebra of aerial slaughter. Indeed, Britons were quick to note that "the excessive adulation of their flying heroes that was indulged in by the Germans was something that the Royal Flying Corps was spared." Yet the enduring names of the British air war were all high-scoring fighter pilots: Albert Ball, Lanoe Hawker, William Bishop, James McCudden, "Mick" Mannock. As a young public school graduate, Ball epitomized the chivalric ideal of the upper classes. According to his biographers, Ball fought for "faith, duty, and patriotism," without hatred for his enemies, but even he wanted to exceed the score of the legendary French ace Georges Guynemer. The fact that tallies included all aircraft downed, even unarmed reconnaissance planes and balloons, made them still less compatible with the doctrine of honorable "dueling."

Engaging ground targets was another inherently unequal enterprise undertaken by pilots during the First World War. Although airplanes became increasingly specialized for different roles as the war dragged on, fighter pilots, those champions of the fair fight, joined in the enterprise of ground attack with zeal. On July 3, 1916, Lewis participated in bombing and strafing of enemy supply dumps and depots behind the line not because he was ordered to do so, but because "anything that could be done ought to be done" as the Somme attack got underway. By 1917, Lewis's initiative had been institutionalized, and fighter squadrons were regularly ordered to attack enemy infantry on the ground with machine guns and bombs. On November 21, Lee was sent on a mission to support the British attack at Cambrai, where he found himself firing on enemy columns behind the front. "I realized that this kind of low strafing well behind the Lines was easy hunting, like shooting up red-tab staff

22. Lee, xv.
23. Lee, xvi-xvi.
24. Clark, 81.
27. McCudden, 169.
29. On the importance of German power parity to a chivalrous evaluation of the war, see Girdwood, 282. "The Boer War had called for a certain amount of soul searching before honourable men could accept it...But in 1914 there was no need for this kind of hesitation; Germany was an equal opponent."
31. The contemporary view of Ball is summarized concisely in Linda R. Robertson, The Dream of Civilized Warfare (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 242-48.
32. Lewis, 105-6 and 139.
cars on our side. And it was safe, nobody had much chance to have a go at me...I switch-backed along, hosing everything."

Why were fighter pilots able to conceive of themselves as "Galahads of the air," when they engaged in behavior that was completely contrary to the knightly codes of warfare? It wasn't that these men had an improper understanding of the code of honor, which emphasized fairness as much as it did bravery and loyalty. Since entering school, they had been indoctrinated with the "endless stories of chivalry, daring, knights, gentlemen and gallantry which they had read or been told by way of history books, ballads, poems, plays, pictures and novels." Yet they were perfectly comfortable with stalking their foes, racking up tallies which included weaker reconnaissance planes and balloons, and strafing and bombing ground troops and defenseless supply trains, all the while seeing their mode of battle as "tinged with something of the knightly chivalry of old," and alluding to "the lists of the Middle Ages." What enabled the chivalric mode of discourse to endure in the air when so many behaviors exposed the lie of it?

The conventional explanation holds that the chivalric trope was a delusion which enabled pilots to keep flying and fighting in the face of tremendous dangers and casualties. In An Intimate History of Killing, a discussion of the socialization process by which soldiers become killers, Joanna Bourke writes that "chivalry was evoked to stifle fears of senseless violence," and that "by conjuring up myths of chivalry, combatants were able to evoke feelings of respect and compassion for their enemy while still remaining committed to the killing enterprise." In their analysis of the British experience during the air war, Nigel Steel and Peter Hart agree: "There was little time for the notions of nobility and romance...what faint whiff of chivalry did hang about [pilots] was usually linked to a protecitive self-delusion intended to distance them from the human pain and suffering that were the intended goals of their job."

This explanation is incomplete, however. A dismissal of chivalry as a motivational delusion must explain why it endured in the air and not on the ground, despite the best efforts of propagandists to appeal to it in both places. Airmen had as much reason to fear for their lives as ground troops. If infantry could be killed from faraway shells and machine-gun fire, airmen could fall victim to unexpected mechanical failures or a stalking, unseen enemy attacking out of the sun. Future RAF Vice-Marshals Lee reported that "the average life of a Royal Flying Corps pilot in 1916 was officially reckoned at three weeks. In the first four months of 1917 it was...two weeks." In all, half of British pilots trained during the war became casualties, and only one quarter completed a nine-month tour of duty. Pilots were not unaware of this risk. Lee wrote that "there were few fliers with any experience of air combat who were not obsessed to some degree, though usually secretly, with the thought of being shot down in flames." Combat flight was a dance with death, and morbid thoughts weighed on the minds of pilots just as heavily as they did on men in the trenches. While Bourke's, Steel's, and Hart's views are certainly one reason for the resilience of chivalric imagery among combat fliers, they do not tell the full story. To explain the continuance of romantic discourse in the air war, we must look at the other aspects of chivalry as it was understood in the nineteenth century. Honorable combat was the largest single part of the romantic code, but it was not the only one. The behaviors and trappings of medieval knighthood as understood by the British gentry were myriad, and fighter combat fulfilled many of them.

Materiually, there were many factors to equate air combat with knighthood. The most obvious similarity was the link between the horse and the airplane. British pilots were well aware of knighthood's equestrian component; horsemanship, like chivalry, enjoyed a nineteenth century revival among the upper classes. The well-to-do men of the RFC grew up in an environment where "[h]e image of a little boy on a horse had acquired a special poignancy as a symbol of chivalry in embryo." The link between aircraft and horses was quickly established. Knights, as heavily armored cavalry, could not fulfill their military roles without their faithful steeds; neither could airmen be of any use without their planes. General staffs viewed airplanes as "flying horses," writes Clark, and many believed that former cavalry officers made the best pilots. Lee exhibited a common tendency among RFC pilots to personify their airplanes when he wrote, "She's so sensitive you can't relax for a second, and you have to have the constant pressure on the joystick...But she's such a marvellous plane these handicaps are unimportant." Substitute "horse" for "plane" and "flanks" for "joystick" and the result is a perfect description of a spirited charger. Sometimes these comparisons had irrational results. British pilots were encouraged to ride as a means of improving their flying, a practice that was only discontinued in the 1930s. No such equivalent existed on the ground, where cavalrymen were deprived of their traditional roles in a war of movement and many were posted to the trenches.

33. Lee, 165.
34. Grouard, 7.
36. Steel, 240.
37. The quintessential appeal to knightly virtue among the Allies was the crusader paradigm used across all service branches. See for example Robertson, The Dream of Civilized Warfare, 156-157.
38. Lee, 7.
40. Lee, 223.
41. Grouard, 273.
42. Clark, 18, and Kennett, 116.
43. Lee, 160.
44. Kennett, 116.
Another "prop" of knighthood that existed in the air but not on the ground was insignia. Coats of arms and distinctive heraldry were one chivalric trapping that passed undiminished from the Middle Ages to modernity, although their function as an identifier in battle was largely forgotten. In the trenches, differentiation disappeared during the war as camouflage became important and officers sought to conceal themselves from snipers, discovering that their pre-war garb "made them special targets in attacks." In the air, on the other hand, distinctive markings came to be recognized as more important over the course of the war because they helped preserve the lives of friendly pilots by differentiating them from enemy aircraft. At first, such markings were small, reflecting military's trend toward drab uniformity, but this created problems. According to McCudden, on August 20, 1914, "Lieut. Joubert did a four hours' reconnaissance, and landing on a Belgian aerodrome was mistaken for a German. He had an awful time before he convinced them that he was English." Air mechanic Cecil King agreed, noting that at first the RFC "had no distinguishing marks on our machines...[s]o our infantry if there was an aircraft came too low over their trenches they'd fire at it whether it was British or German." After some experimentation, the RFC settled on large roundels painted on the underside of each plane's wing.

Beyond merely identifying what nation they fought for, markings also came to identify squadrons and individual pilots, and in this most closely paralleled the old knightly encounters. The German fighter wing commanded by the "Red Baron," Manfred von Richthofen, with its garishly painted airplanes customized to pilots' tastes, was the most famous example of this phenomenon. Clark calls the practice "the last example of the tribal application of war paint—to identify the chiefs and to strike terror in the hearts of the enemy," but the idea of using a color scheme to broadcast one's identity also reached back to the battlefields of medieval Europe. British airmen were not officially permitted to decorate their planes, but many found a way to do so. Ball painted the center of his propeller red. Lee's squadron "christened" their planes when "everyone had the label of his fancy painted along the fuselage." Five Royal Naval Air Service planes which flew against Richthofen's circus in June and July of 1917 gained fame as the "Black Flight," for painting their engine cowlings, fuselage, and wheel covers black. Material components of the knightly code, mounts and insignia, were unified with the code itself in the turn of the century British mind. This made it much easier for pilots, whose material situations resembled those of their boyhood heroes in Malory and Morris, to conceive of themselves as chivalrous.

Although combat airmen did honor the merciful aspects of the romantic codes they professed, certain elements of the pilot's experience did resemble the ideal lives of the knights as they existed in the British consciousness. Two important examples were the fighter pilot's duty to protect those defenseless against bomber attacks and flight as an exploration of the unknown. From its inception in 1915, the duty of the fighter was to protect the skies so that ground troops could do their jobs. General Sir Hugh Trenchard, commander of the RFC in France, projected this view from the highest levels of the RFC. He repeated the "dictum which in essence stated that no call from the army must ever find the RFC wanting," insisting that "the impossibility of a task was not considered sufficient grounds for not attempting it." As fighter technology advanced, they were also ordered to defend less well-equipped aircraft such as bombers, artillery spotters, and reconnaissance planes from enemy attack. In a January 1916 order, Trenchard made "a hard and fast rule that a machine proceeding on reconnaissance must be escorted by at least three other fighting machines." The role of the fighter as a defender of weaker planes persisted throughout the war; describing his fighter squadron's function in 1917, Douglas wrote that its primary task was "providing protection for all the other squadrons." The fighter's role as a protector extended to civilians, too, as the war progressed. Lee and Lewis were both withdrawn from the Western Front in mid-1917 to defend London from raids by German bombers. It was from this very real role of the fighter as an aerial guardian that Newbolt derived his claim that chivalrous fighter pilots "do battle in defence of those who cannot defend themselves."

Combat fliers were also able to conceive of themselves as knights of the old romances by virtue of their exploration of the unknown. In his survey of the British experience on the Western Front, Fussell writes that elements of romantic exploration tinged the world of the trenches, which "might have been another planet." How much more so for pilots, whose war was literally not fought on Earth! The act of flying, just eleven years after Kitty Hawk, made one a member of a tiny brotherhood of pioneers—a distinction which fliers shared with both historical and fictional knightly explorers. The lineage of the explorer-knight was long; crusades to the Holy Land reestablished large-

45. Giroud, 18.
46. Fussell, 50.
47. McCudden, 28.
48. Steel, 36.
50. Robertson, 249.
52. Clark, 131.
53. Steel, 52.
54. Steel, 75.
55. Douglas, 199.
56. Lewis, 184, and Lee, 86.
58. Fussell, 65.
scale contact between Western Europe and the Near East for the first time in centuries beginning in the eleventh century. In legend, too, the chivalrous warrior often confronted enemies and challenges beyond the pale of civilized life. Morris's most famous romance was titled *The Will at the World's End.*

Flight and air combat represented such a frontier, beyond the experiences of all but a few brave and lucky pilots. On one of his first wartime flights, Lee reflected, "And there was I, perched up aloft...and looking down on something the P.B.I. [Poor Bloody Infantry] never see." It was this sense of adventure that spurred a young Sholto Douglas to seek a transfer to the RFC from his artillery unit: "After I had first seen airplanes being tested at Farnborough...I had often thought about the adventure that was to be had in flying." Lewis, writing in 1965, expressed the lure of World War I flying best: "The land and sea are long since named and mapped and parcelled out. Only the air and all beyond, the greatest mystery of all, was still unmastered and unknown when I was young."

The resonance of the chivalric trope among British pilots can be illustrated by examining the experience of American airmen, especially those who served in the RFC and RAF. These pilots served under the same conditions as their British counterparts, with one exception: the English ideal of the chivalrous gentleman whose antecedents could be traced directly to the battlefields of the Middle Ages could not be easily linked with the egalitarian, "New World" mentality of the arriving Americans. Although knighthood imagery was eagerly taken up by propagandists like *New York Tribune* correspondent Heywood Hale Brown, who wrote of the War, "I tell you it's better than 'Ivanhoe'; it does not seem to have stuck as easily with American pilots."

Written testimony from the relatively few Americans who flew in the RAF and RFC is less readily available than British recollections, but what survives indicates that the chivalric ideal did not matter as much to them. Bogart Rogers, a Stanford man who flew with the RAF in France from April 1918 to the end of the war, did not mention chivalry or knighthood in his letters home. Rogers explicitly rejected romantic conceptions of the air war in a 1930 article in *Popular Aviation,* writing:

> Everytime I hear someone speak of the war in the air—the late war and the French air—as a gallant and romantic business, a modern counterpart of the chivalrous scite of old, I break out laughing.

> It was a cold, calculating, deadly occupation—sans chivalry, sans sportsmanship and sans any ethics except that you got the other fellow or he got you. If you could shoot him in the back

Yet the British "fellows who fought it" really did see themselves as knights, because they came from a culture where members of the upper classes cherished the knighthly, aristocratic code of behavior. They were inculcated from birth to apply the chivalric metaphor to their surroundings, while American pilots were not. The survival of chivalry among British airmen was the result of a confluence of actual conditions and a unique mode of interpreting them.

The endurance of the concept of chivalry in the discourse surrounding British fighter pilots is remarkable, especially since it was virtually wiped out among troops on the ground. The phenomenon is especially intriguing because an examination of the activities of these combat aviators reveals that their mode of fighting often directly conflicted with the chivalric code as prescribed in the literature of Malory, Morris, and Scott. Stalking tactics, merciless strafing of downed enemy planes, attacks on unarmed observers and defenseless ground troops behind the lines, and keeping score could not be justified under any kind of code of honorable warfare. Yet chivalry was no mere delusion concocted by propagandists like Newbolt and foisted on fliers seeking to mollify their guilty consciences. An examination of the lives, equipment, and military role played by RFC fighter pilots reveals that many aspects of chivalry really did exist in the air war of 1914-1918. The dominant role played by the British upper classes, those most exposed to the knighthood culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the similarity of the pilot's plane and markings to the knight's horse and heraldic symbols, the role of the combat aircraft as a protector of weaker planes, ground troops, and civilians, and the aviator's role as an explorer of the unknown all made chivalry an authentic way of talking about the air war. In stark contrast to the experience of infantry subalterns like Siegfried Sassoon, who proclaimed in 1917, "I've said good-bye to Galahad," the fighter pilots of the RFC continued to think of themselves as members of a knightly brotherhood, both during and after the war, because they lived lives that more closely resembled those of the heroes they had grown up with. On the ground and in the air, men fought in a fashion that would have shamed the knights of legend and died en masse. But pilots, unlike infantry, could still trace many connections to the vanished world of chivalry, valor, and self-sacrifice.

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59. Fussell, 135.
60. Lee, 15.
62. Lewis, preface to the second edition.
63. Robertson, 177.
64. Bogart ed. in Morrow and Rogers, eds., vii.
RISE, FALL, AND REFINEMENT:
THE WORK OF ORVILLE SCHELL AND THE INTERPRETATIVE PARADIGMS
OF LEFTIST AMERICAN CHINA SCHOLARS IN THE 1970s AND 1980s

YAN CAO

Historically, American scholarship on China has been colored by international politics that influence academic paradigms for studying China. This paper traces the rise, fall, and refinement of a progressive school of American China Scholars during the 1970s and 1980s by following the writing of Orville Schell. The progressive paradigm, which rose to challenge hawkish and Orientalist mainstream scholarship, became factually and methodologically untenable at the end of the Mao era in China. In order to restore their school of scholarship, progressive American China scholars refined the tenants of their scholarship and thus contributed to the advancement of Chinese-American understanding.

"The image of something new, unique, progressive...captured the minds of foreign observers of all stripes for four decades... We thought we knew what that image was. Now much of it seems to have been illusion."

Bruce Cumings for the Bulletin of Concerned Asia Scholars (1983)

"In the absence of concrete reality, it was all too easy to fantasize about China."

Orville Schell, Watch out for Foreign Guests (1980)

Introduction

Orville Schell’s writings about Communist China from the mid-1970s to the 1980s embody many problems that America’s critical China scholars encountered at those historical moments. Schell’s early writings portrayed a glowing image of Communist China that countered the work of Americans who were more hawkish and conservative. After Mao Zedong’s death in 1976, however, reforms swept through China, and the world discovered the gory details of China’s Communist Revolution. These events rendered Schell’s idealized image of Communist China untenable. Facts that contradicted their theories dismantled the critical model of scholarship that Schell’s progressive school had constructed. As China transformed, American China scholars struggled to recoup their losses, recover their discipline, and refine their approaches to understanding and evaluating China.

The academic trajectory of Schell and other progressive China scholars adds notable implications to the broader issue of American historiography on China. In addition to changing America’s image of China, progressive
scholarship was concerned with changing the methodological approaches that Americans used to understand China. A set of critical scholars, which self-consciously situated itself in opposition to Americans who saw China through projections of personal desire, found themselves guilty of the very crimes they had criticized. The collapse and refinement of the critical paradigm, however, complicated the dialogue surrounding American studies of China. The goal of avoiding ethnocentric, paternalistic, or universalizing paradigms became more complicated when the pitfalls at the opposite extreme were exposed. With the refinement of progressive paradigms for studying China, scholars were pushed to find a balance between two opposing methodological approaches that were both problematic. As critical China scholars sought to re-establish their academic integrity, they created a more subtle, sophisticated, and sober image of China with methodological and historiographical techniques that bore those same characteristics.

This progressive paradigm can be explored by examining the strategies its architects used to recover from the severe factual blows dealt to the viability of their theories during the transformations of the 1970s and 1980s. Analyzing the writings that Orville Schell produced during those decades illuminates the trajectory of the critical paradigm from its construction to its fall and then to its subsequent revival. Moreover, studying the transformation of the critical paradigm for China scholarship provides broader insights into the development of the theories and methods of American China scholars in the late twentieth century.

Literature and Significance: The Importance of Paradigms for China Scholarship

Despite the political significance of this realm of scholarship, American studies of China during the 1970s and 1980s have not inspired many historiographical studies. Paul Cohen's 1984 work Discovering History in China, American Historical Writings of the recent Chinese Past is one of few critical analyses of American historiography on China. Cohen notes that "the recent field of Chinese history has been relatively free of self-critical historiographical writing." 1 While he notes that the first publication of the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars in 1968 opened a critical dialogue, Cohen is guarded with his praise for the Bulletin. Ultimately he argues that "the empirical data gathered in support of their criticisms [were] inadequate, or the criticisms themselves too unqualified, simplistic or extreme." 2 In China Unbound, a 2003 reprise on the topic of the historiography of China, Cohen observes change over time in American methods for studying China.

He suggests that "culture is important [but] that the claims of Western and Chinese cultural difference, when overstated, can easily lead to cultural stereotyping and caricaturing." 3 This recent attempt to guide historians of China recognizes the need to move past paradigms that wholly reject or embrace cultural differences.

Bruce Cumings also commented on critical American historiographies on China. In his introduction to China from Mao to Deng, a treatise edited by the Bulletin of Concerned Asia Scholars and published in 1983, Cumings articulates the shell-shocked sentiments of a generation of progressive American China scholars and suggests prospects for the future. Taking on the mantle of epistemological speaking, he introduces an anthology that tries to reassess misinterpreted events. Cumings' reflections offer insights into the mood and mindset of progressive China scholars in the 1980s but differ from the more comprehensive historiographical analyses of Cohen. While these two authors take different approaches to assessing American methods for studying China, they provide a foundation for analyses of historiographical transformations in the 1970s and 1980s.

While the visions of Communist China harbored by America's leftist scholars have received relatively little critical examination, an analysis of writers such as Orville Schell could fit neatly into a growing body of literature that examines narrative frameworks through which Americans have understood the East in general and China in particular. Edward Said's Orientalism is a landmark text in the critical historiography of Western scholarship on the East. To the extent that Said articulated the first comprehensive critique of the Western project of apprehending its Oriental "other" and defining itself in opposition to it, later scholarly critiques that engage with ideas of projection are in conversation with Said. In an article entitled "American Perceptions of China," Warren Cohen applies Said's insights to China scholarship. He writes that "a people's image of another people can be affected by its perceptions of itself." 4 Progressive China scholarship developed within the context of a larger struggle to challenge traditional ways in which the East was understood by a West that was grappling with issues of self-definition.

Studying the development of scholarship on China sheds light on transformations in the organization of historical power with regards to Asia in the 1970s and 1980s. In a sweeping study of historical objectivity, Peter Novick remarks that during the Cold-war, history was second only to physics as the academic discipline which contributed the most to the association

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between scholarship and geopolitical power. 6 Asia, and China in particular, was an area of political significance from the 1960s onwards, and the development of the academic discipline which studied that region related as much to the organization of power as it did to the organization of knowledge. In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault argues that there is a “schema of power-knowledge proper to each discipline,” and that “disciplinary authority” is reproduced “in a concentrated or formalized form” by scholarship that operates within the power-knowledge paradigm of each discipline. 7 The construction of a progressive paradigm for China scholarship was an explicit protest against America’s geopolitical aggression in Asia. It can be taken more broadly to signal an effort to reorganize power and knowledge with reference to Asia. Restoring the discipline of the progressives after the collapse of their paradigm was a task of restoring the power of an academic field; this required the elimination of illusory and emotional attachments that threatened the paradigm’s authority to organize power-knowledge. Thus, the development of the paradigms with which Americans study China is not an arcane point in historiography. It is a struggle that continues to have implications on power relations between the two nations.

**A New Paradigm for Studying China**

Orville Schell and his colleagues were the purveyors of a new paradigm for studying China. According to Paul Cohen, within the field of China scholarship “during the 1950s and much of the 1960s, a broad consensus...existed with regard to basic assumptions and questions.” 8 In the 1960s, however, a critical branch of Asia scholarship emerged and positioned itself in opposition to the methodology and historiography of hawkish mainstream “China-watchers.” Members of this new group were considered progressive, or even radical, because of their political views, and because their approach to studying China jolted the community of American Asia Scholars. 8

Radical China scholars constructed their own paradigm for studying China by replacing the “basic assumptions and questions” of established scholarship with new paradigmatic foundations. Critical China scholars believed that scholarship in their field was marred by political bias, fear of China, and projections of American concepts onto Chinese phenomenon. They wanted to develop an approach that would move past these pitfalls, so they build scholarly institutions like the Committee of Concerned Asia Scholars (CCAS) to maintain the parameters of their discourse. 9 The “Statement of Purpose” established by the CCAS in 1969 proclaims that “the CCAS wishes to create alternatives to the prevailing trends in scholarship on Asia which too often spring from a parochial cultural perspective and serve selfish interests and expansionism.” 10 Orville Schell’s *Modern China: The Story of a Revolution (Modern China)*, co-written with Joseph Esherick and dedicated in part to the CCAS, and his 1976 travel log *In the People’s Republic: An American’s First-Hand View of Living and Working in China (People’s Republic)* belong to this new body of scholarship.

As radical China Scholars such as Orville Schell and the members of the CCAS developed an alternative paradigm for understanding China, they turned towards a new set of methodological and historiographical assumptions: unprecedented success, historical imperatives, and exceptional difference. With this new paradigm, progressive American scholars intended to escape ethnocentric scholarship, develop a “China-centered history of China,” and learn from the more accurate portrait of modern China that would emerge. 11

A belief in the phenomenal success of Communist China was foundational for the progressive paradigm of China scholarship and permeated Schell’s pre-1976 writings. In *Modern China*, Schell and Esherick are sweeping in their assessment of China’s achievements. They write: “literacy, public education, public health, public works projects, science and technology and even nuclear weapons have become sources of strength and pride for the Chinese people.” 12 In *People’s Republic*, Schell praises the industrial and technological advances wrought by the Chinese revolution, or “liberation.”

All the commercial trilles which so consume the attention of the transportation industry elsewhere are absent here. Yet the flights leave on time, service is good, meals...are delicious. Moreover the cost of flying is now dropping. 13

This review suggests that Chinese airlines are thriving and even, in some areas, surpassing their Western counterparts. As Schell presents the statistic that industrial growth in Shanghai has increased seventeen times, he argues that these statistics “represent...irrefutable evidence of progress.” 14 Cultural and ideological improvements also proliferate. Women are respected as equals.

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9. Bruce Cohen describes the role of the CCAS in developing a critique of the “broad consensus...that had indeed existed with regard to basic assumptions and questions.” Cohen, *Discovering History in China*, 104-106.
and do not face objectifying standards of beauty. From industry to health to cultural and social equity, Communist China is bathed in the light of success.

Skepticism or criticism of China's achievements is frowned upon. When Schell writes about prostitution in China, he quickly turns from an analysis of the problem to meta-criticism of the Westerners who indulgently or jealously report on the problem.

There have been recent reports of some amateur prostitution...[I] can not help but wonder at the cynicism of the Western reporters who file these stories (usually from Hong Kong). It is of significant interest that there are not more, I can not fully explain the relish with which Western correspondents report these facts, unless it is that China's purity seems intolerable to those of us on the outside who live in a state of perpetual compromise and ambiguity. It is almost as though we can not allow the Chinese to become intelligible unless we can see them as flawed in ways which we have long identified as mortal and human—flawed that is, by greed, lust, selfishness and self-gratification.

Even so, Schell admits that he sometimes delights to find holes in the armor of China's incredible success; he describes being "pleased to find that the Chinese have a flaw as basic and human as littering...[for] it reminds one that their revolution is far from complete and that the struggle continues against human imperfection." But even in this admission of imperfection, Schell glorifies China by suggesting that the standard by which they measure their success might be human perfection.

Outfitted with a glowing concept of China's successes, Schell and his colleagues suggest that America should learn from the Chinese model. At the conclusion of Modern China Schell writes that "China has made incredible achievements" and that "perhaps they have some answers [to shared problems] which we ourselves have yet to discover." According to an article on "The China Scholars," published in Time Magazine in August 1971, the bold assertion that China's success could teach America how to address her own problems was a central feature of the scholastic community to which Schell and Esherick belonged. Time named the progressive scholars "Teach the West" China Scholars. The article describes a group which was associated with the CCAS, included self-proclaimed Maoists, and which shared the belief that

China's social experiments can teach the West something new about achieving prison reforms, operating public health programs, and developing an industrial economy that does not have wide differences in income and does not depend heavily on a technocratic elite.

Scholars like Schell wanted Americans to drop the notion that "because the Chinese experiment is so different, it must be evil or doomed to failure," and instead begin an effort to learn from China's success. A belief in Communist China as a model of success thus became a cornerstone of the progressive paradigm.

Another foundation of Schell's scholarship is a teleological historiography which frames China's revolution as a historical imperative. As they document the rise of Communism, Schell and Esherick argue that "China had changed out of necessity, to make way for what would prove to be one of the greatest social experiments in history." The historical arguments of the book are organized to demonstrate that "to create a new China out of the ruins of the old, a total revolution of the society was necessary." The structure also sets up a Marxist-Leninist reading of the Chinese revolutions as acts against class oppression and imperialism. They introduce Chinese history with a chapter on class oppression within China, followed by a chapter on Europe's imperialist encroachment upon China. Progressive scholars used Marxist teleology to situate China within their paradigm as a nation destined to become the great Communist experiment of the twentieth century.

This teleological view of history supports another foundational concept: China as a nation that is fundamentally different from other nations in the international system. In Modern China, Schell and Esherick write that "the Chinese revolution is...without precedent in the history of the world." Schell articulates the otherness of China in a more personal style in The People's Republic:

I find myself wondering whether perhaps China is not some utterly new experience in history...one in which all the cautions against too much regulation, regimentation and organization ought not to be reconsidered. The old assumptions [about] liberal doses of freedom and self-expression end with question marks. Perhaps this is some new world unfathomably by someone with occidental experiences. Perhaps it is a world for which one must cultivate a new sense to perceive.

In later reflections, Schell elaborates on the conception of China that he held

15. Schell, People's Republic, 16.
17. Schell, People's Republic, 163.
18. Schell and Esherick, 141-143.
20. Schell and Esherick, 142.
21. Schell and Esherick, 123 (emphasis added).
22. Schell and Esherick, 127.
23. Schell and Esherick, 142.
during the 1960s and 1970s:

From a distance, China seemed to defy the forces which ruled the rest of the world. "Communist China" appeared to operate according to an entirely different set of political laws ... [China was] suspended above the imperatives that ruled other nations.25

This misguided idea of Chinese exceptionalism did not just affect Schell. Cummings establishes the broad appeal and durability of this idea with his claim that "the image of something new, unique, progressive...captured the minds of foreign observers...roughly dated perhaps from the publication of Edgar Snow's Red Star Over China."26 Progressive scholars, who were critical of scholars scared by China's difference, reveled in the uniqueness of Communist China.

Steeped in the mystique of China as a nation that defied all historical precedents and international norms, progressive scholars also saw the Chinese as a fundamentally different people. The observations recorded in People's Republic anthropologically analyze bodies and sexuality to divine the depths of the differences separating China from the US. In an essay on teeth that is suggestive of the manner in which one might write about horses, Schell suggests that revolutionary progress has modified the physiology of the Chinese. He quotes a Chinese woman as saying, "the children do not go out and eat a lot of sweet things, so their mouths are not always watering for candy and ice cream the way I think yours does."27 Sexuality and attraction are also presented as phenomena that have been modified by revolutionary vigor and that now operate differently in China than they do in the West:

The Chinese have succeeded in fundamentally alternating the notion of attractiveness by substituting some of these revolutionary attributes for the physical ones which play such an important role in western courtship.28

Writing on dreams, Schell identifies a worker whose dreams center on his work in the factory to suggest that China's Communist ethic has permeated even the subconscious.29 In their struggle to construct a China-centered study of China, scholars such as Schell took cultural differences as their starting point and often went to great extremes and present what they perceived to be fundamental, even biological, differences.

Success, historical imperative, and difference on both national and biological levels were the hallmarks of the progressive American paradigm for China scholarship. These principles challenged the assumptions and agreements of the previous era of scholarship and pushed China scholars to look for a more genuine picture of China, one that was not marred with ethnocentrism and fear. Building off these central principles, progressive China scholars formed an alternative paradigm of scholarship that criticized and served as an alternative to the mainstream scholarship that preceded them.

Paradigm Collapse and the Challenge of a Paradigmatic Revolution

The progressive model of China scholarship, with its assumptions of success, historical necessity, and national as well as personal uniqueness, became untenable as new facts were leaked after Mao's death. Scholars were dumbstruck by the failures, the violence, and ultimately the reversal of Communist China. Many of the achievements that progressive scholars had applauded proved to be overstated. Schell admits that many of the statements he embraced during the heyday of progressive scholarship were illusory when he explains that "in the absence of concrete reality, it was all too easy to fantasize about China."30 Even if China's achievements matched the claims of the Chinese government, the atrocities of the Cultural Revolution would have debunked theories applauding the "purity" of Chinese communism. As Cummings writes, "the results of this century's greatest revolution now sit tarnished."31

In the post-Mao era, political reforms necessitated a paradigmatic revolution for progressive China-scholars. In The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Thomas Kuhn argues that research normally proceeds within the structured and limited parameters of a given paradigm, but that in moments of crises facts can topple the viability of that paradigm. Then, new foundations must be constructed. The "learn from China" paradigm of scholarship championed by Schell became untenable when facts contradicting that paradigm surfaced in the aftermath of Mao Zedong's 1976 death. New theories and methods for studying China were needed.

Reflecting on the collapse of the progressive paradigm and the challenges before critical China scholars, Cummings writes that "truth emerges from facts colliding with theories, and from theories colliding with each other."32 As the foundational elements of progressive China scholarship crumbled, Schell and others faced the need to reassess the foundations of their methodology and historiography. Arguments about the inevitability of Chinese communism collapsed as China abandoned Maoism to embrace

28. Schell, People's Republic, 94.
31. Cummings, 3.
32. Cummings, 4.
the West. As China underwent reforms that made it more similar to Western nations, and as the Chinese people expressed their desire to adopt accouterments of Western culture, scholars who made difference foundational to their analyses found themselves contradicting the ideas and practices of much of China. This crisis of facts and theories created an opportunity for a scientific revolution, or a paradigm shift, within the community of progressive China Scholars.

The shock of facts colliding with theories immobilized China scholarship. Cumings wrote "that the field of contemporary China studies... has been struck dumb by events since Mao Zedong's death," and that "major figures in the field have had virtually nothing to say" about the reform era. In 1983, he offered the sobering observation that

it still is impossible to find a single book that does much more than narrate the events of the past seven years... it is much more common to hear remarks about chucking out hundreds of books, now rendered irrelevant by events. Some of the major figures in the field have had virtually nothing to say.

Scholars who believed that they had whittled illusions out of their scholarly paradigms were that much more astounded when the image they had constructed of China crumbled in the face of freshly aired facts.

Progressives struggled to address inadequacies in their theories of historiography and methodology, not just their theories on China. Cumings observes that many of China's emerging concepts and phenomena "grouped under the rubric of a 'modernization program' - that paradigm which most of us [critical China scholars] spent our graduate educations criticizing." This statement suggests the need to abandon, refine, and even reverse the basic foundations and the emotional attachments that pervaded progressive China scholarship. To the degree that progressive scholars believed that their paradigm enabled them to see China more accurately, they bore the double burden of factual and methodological failure. Progressive scholars needed to develop methods that would enable them to explain phenomena that were previously unfathomable.

Responses to the Collapse and Obstacles to Reforming the Progressive Paradigm

If China scholars in general were shocked by the new facts that leaked about China's history after Mao's death, progressive scholars faced particularly difficult obstacles to reviving their work. These scholars had lost faith in China, were betrayed by China's new reforms, and felt that their presence in China contributed to negative transformations. For scholars like Schell, their betrayed ideals, their faith in a monolithic paradigm and their disdain of the west's cultural hegemony all became liabilities to the recovery of the critical paradigm.

Many progressive scholars had become personally infatuated with the model of hope that China represented and felt betrayed when their illusions disintegrated. Cumings aptly describes Schell and other progressive China Scholars as "people who connected in some way, for good or ill, with four decades of events in China suffused with awe, mystery, fundamental change, and the deepest of human emotions." In the opening of Foreign Guests Schell confesses that "that part of me which had secretly admired Chinese resistance to the homogenizing effects of Western culture felt almost betrayed by the Chinese." Schell's sense of betrayal was not a response to the atrocities of China's revolution but rather a response to China's newfound acceptance of the West; China had unforgivably betrayed the dream Schell that had inscribed into its Revolution. Schell even writes about feeling depressed because of political transformations in China:

Whenever I encounter people advocating...the West it is indeed like a nightmare, and I can only feel profoundly shocked. But I also feel alone, for I can hardly hear the sound of Marxism.

This sense of personal betrayal combined with disappointment concerning the failure of the progressive paradigm to stultify progressive scholarship on China in the aftermath of Mao's death.

The betrayal that Schell and other scholars felt was exacerbated by a growing sense that China's policies were becoming paralyzing complex and self-contradictory. Whereas progressive scholars had previously made sense of China through the monolithic prism of revolution, now their picture of China needed to incorporate multiple lines of discourse that often seemed at odds with one another. In Foreign Guests, Schell articulates a sense of bewilderment. He writes: "everywhere around me in China now I see irreconcilable forces and contradictions—East and West, Capitalism and Communism, imperialism and socialism." Rather than approaching China as a nation with necessary levels of complexity and variation, Schell feels his mind muddled by China's newfound complexity. This frustration demonstrates the difficulty of shifting from the monolithic paradigm of Marxism to paradigm collapse and a

33. Cumings, 4.
34. Cumings, 4.
35. Cumings, 6.
36. Cumings, 3.
37. Cumings, 3.
38. Schell, Foreign Guests, 4.
40. Schell, Foreign Guests, 166.
realms populated by unorganized discourses. In *Discs and Democracy*, Schell continues to denounce Post-Mao China:

> The sense of the contradictory and the absurd has... become more pronounced. So many contradictions have arisen between China's old Maoist identity and its new reformist self that the country has sometimes seemed locked into a state of self-induced cultural and political schizophrenia.⁴¹

Schell's harsh diagnosis of China also suggests a diagnosis of his own predicament. Scholars like Schell, trained to study China through a monolithic paradigm, were confounded by the multiplicitous Jabberwock of China after their paradigm collapsed.

Schell views China's historiography as yet another frustration. In various works published in the 1980s, Schell decries that nation's abandonment of its own history. In 1980 he writes that "one can only stand in awe, wondering how a people once so involved in using their history as a guide can now seem so disconnected from it."⁴² To Schell, who wrote a history of China's revolution as an illustration of the Marxist-Leninist dialectic, China's reforms could not be reconciled with its history. He charges that "in those areas through which I traveled in 1983 and 1984, the Chinese appeared to have at least temporarily lost touch with... their recent history."⁴³ Similarly, Cohen argues that efforts to overcome the historiographical challenge of American ethnocentrism were frustrated by Chinese scholars' adoption of mainstream American modes of scholarship, as it moved away from the Marxist historiography of its past. How could a group of progressive Americans argue for a "China-centered history of China" if even the Chinese scholars organized their history around American concepts? For progressive scholars, China's abandonment of Marxist historiography mounted complex historiographical challenges.

Finally, progressive scholars felt complicit in the Westernization of China, which presented an additional obstacle to their scholarship. Cummings notes that China's drive towards modernization was "a nightmare, an unbelievable and threatening window on the future" for progressive China scholars who "spent our graduate educations criticizing [modernization]."⁴⁴ How were scholars to study China if, by studying that nation, they might change it into the image of their worst nightmares? In the epilogue of *Foreign Guests*, Schell recounts his exchanges with a young Chinese man who seems to epitomize the spirit of Chinese youth. As they "talked in Peking, it became obvious that the West was for her an ineluctable frontier drawing her

outward."⁴⁵ For Schell, the only thing more troubling than the girl's fascination with the West is his feeling of responsibility. He writes: "I have also felt a little uneasy, as if I were becoming some small part of the process of draining China westward."⁴⁶ After walking around reform-era Beijing, Schell notes that "every youth was looking at my European friend and me with great intensity, as if they expected us to momentarily unlock the riddle of the universe." As he allows Chinese actresses to experience the luxuries of his Western lifestyle and demonstrates Western dancing in China's new discos, Schell continues to feel conflicted about the ways in which his research may contribute to the dreaded process of Westernization.

There were many obstacles to the emergence of a new constructive paradigm, and progressive American China scholars faced particular frustrations. Writers like Schell were left feeling betrayed by the image of China in which they had placed so much faith, conflicted about the contradictory messages they received from Beijing, and implicated in the unsavory new direction of China's reforms. When the radical paradigm for China scholarship buckled, these frustrations exacerbated the mounting methodological and historiographical challenges they faced.

### A Refined Paradigm: New Strategies for Progressive Scholarship

Through the 1970s and 1980s, progressive scholars refined their approach towards studying China. Schell and others faced two major sets of problems in post-Mao scholarship. On the one hand, the foundations that grounded their earlier work were misguided and needed revision. On the other hand, obstacles such as betrayal, political contradictions, historiographical revisions, and fears of complicity frustrated new scholarship. As progressive China scholarship reformed, new approaches that incorporated reflexivity, similarity, and complexity emerged to revive the progressive scholastic community.

One new strategy involved reflecting on the exuberant mood and subsequent sense of betrayal that characterized the stages of critical China scholarship. Armed with the twenty-twenty vision of hindsight, Schell reflects upon the mistakes of his youth. He describes the appeal of imagining an idealized China in *Foreign Guests*:

> For although the tenacious grip with which Chinese officials used to hold to their old vision of a classless society may have been unrealistic, it also filled our time with a frightening but exhilarating sense of possibility."⁴⁶

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44. Cummings, 4.
Further, he admits that his writing on China was colored by fantasies unchecked by fact because access to facts was so restricted.49 In *Rich is Glorious*, Schell reflects on the fantastical quality of the travels that produced *In the People's Republic* and admits that "traveling in China at that time, he felt like Alice in Wonderland.50 As he notes the failures of his past, he uses temporal phrases such as "for a young college student" and "at that time" to distance his reformed self from prior mistakes and to suggest that he has matured as a scholar. Reflecting on past failures was a useful strategy that enabled Schell and his contemporaries to historicize their mistakes and move beyond them.

Progressive scholars addressed a glaring failure of their past paradigm by abandoning their assumptions about Chinese exceptionalism and identifying the growing similarities between China and the West. Schell's transition included the recognition that the Chinese did not aspire to a life of unprecedented revolution, but rather to a life like his own. In one striking example, Schell is bemused to encounter a young man who proclaims that "we Chinese like to go to Hong Kong because life is good there...better than here. Everyone likes to have fun" That the notion of gratuitous fun is something new to Schell's image of China. He, like many others, had understood Hong Kong as the lonely island that was left out of China's revolutionary progress because of its sad imperialist history. Contrary to that notion, Schell observes almost pityingly that "the next generation of Chinese... had gone from the dazzling supermarket of fast cars, television, Freud, capitalism..." were more interested in modernization than they were in revolution.51 Although modernization, according to Cumings, was a paradigm that progressive China scholars loathed to apply, the Chinese were adopting it and reifying it.52 Accepting that the mindset of many Chinese people mirrored the cosmology of mainstream America helped to refine the progressive model of scholarship.

In addition to acknowledging similarities between the Chinese population and the West, Schell's new scholarship recognized that many Chinese wanted to systematically model their state after the West. Whereas Schell had previously believed that Communist China would have many things to teach the West, he ends *Foreign Guests* with the opposite conclusion. A Chinese official intones: "I hope I shall have the chance to come to your country someday to study. There are many things which China can learn from a developed country such as yours."53 Schell notes that "while Canton [was] exploding with capitalist energy and Western influences...Peking...seemed little concerned" by these new developments.54 The unsettling sense of being complicit in the Westernization of China was addressed and mitigated by the recognition that China had chosen a path towards modernization for itself. By positioning China back into the global system of modernization from which earlier progressive scholarship had isolated it, Schell and his colleagues corrected their mistake, thus ameliorating feelings of complicity in China's modernization.

Ambivalence towards the politics and historiography of post-Mao China was also addressed head-on by taking a critical approach towards Chinese scholarship. Where once they claimed to partake in a "Chinese scholarship on China," progressive scholars soon realized that Chinese scholarship on China is riddled with its own problems. Schell notes that the malleable specter of Mao's legacy shapes Chinese scholarship much as the specter of a Chinese menace shapes American China scholarship.55 As he attempts to contextualize and historicize the new approach that China's leaders have adopted towards evaluating their own history, he asks Chinese officials questions like, "how do you resolve the obvious contradiction between Mao's policy of self-reliance on the one hand and China's new willingness to rely on both foreign technology and capital on the other?"56 Addressing his sense of China's historiographical inconsistency, Schell writes that the history of China's Communist hardliners has become "inchoate."57 By contextualizing and critiquing Chinese scholarship, Schell freed himself from striving after a false model for objectivity.

Schell and his colleagues also traded their teleological paradigm for a less deterministic approach. Cumings reflects on the newfound restraint of scholarship:

So, we live in a quieter time, but also a sadder time because the results of this century's greatest revolution now sit tarnished... Sober reflections and quiet moods carry over into scholarship as well, of course.58

This statement suggests that China scholars should not be disheartened by the smallness of their claims, for this sober approach is appropriate for their times. Abandoning totalizing teleologies and transforming the necessary sobriety of post-Mao scholarship from a liability to a mark of wisdom pushed progressive scholarship forward.

In addition to discouraging totalizing claims, the new approach embraced more textured portrayals of the complexities and contradictions.

52. Cumings, 6.
58. Cumings, 4.
that characterized reform-era China. Schell's new understanding is made more complex by his assertion that events in China do not easily fit into a monolithic historical framework, but instead they play out as contests of meaning. In *Divide and Democracy*, Schell paints a complex picture of overlapping meanings. "Old things take on new meanings," he writes, suggesting that the entire lexicon of revolutionary language is now contested.59 Schell presents communists who support their party but also support Westernization, and youth who would sacrifice everything to go to America while disapproving of the wholesale cannibalization of their culture. If Schell saw contradictions everywhere in China, as he claims in *Foreign Guests*, then his strategy for incorporating these contradictions into his scholarship was simply to present both sides of the story. This technique of embracing contradictions and preserving complexity was a nod to the failures of the teleological paradigm. It offered progressive scholars a more flexible approach for understanding reform-era China.

Progressive scholars refined their paradigm during the 1980s by developing new strategies that allowed them to address the failures of the past and the frustrations of the reform era. Schell begins writing about the limitations of his own objectivity. Concepts of Chinese exceptionalism were reined in, as China was reincorporated into the folds of the international system and its narratives of liberal progress and modernization. With this removal of the rose-colored glasses, a new sobriety characterized American China scholarship and its faith in the validity of home-grown Chinese scholarship. The scope of the questions and claims shrank, but the complexity of the arguments that were formed multiplied.

**Conclusion**

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the field of American China scholarship saw the emergence, collapse, and refinement of a progressive paradigm of scholarship. Beginning in the 1960s, progressive scholars who were unsatisfied with America's politics in Asia constructed an alternative paradigm for producing scholarship about that region. This paradigm was built on assumptions of China's successful revolutionary achievements, the teleology of its Marxist-Leninist and Maoist history, and the radical exceptionalism of the nation and its people. It was built with the explicit aim of producing information on China that was free from the ethnocentric sentiments that distorted other analyses. With Mao's death, however, every principle of the progressive paradigm became untenable, and China scholarship came to a standstill. In Kahnian language, a paradigm shift was necessary. For Schell and his colleagues, the challenge of developing a new paradigm was exacerbated by obstacles that were especially frustrating to progressive scholars. American radicals felt betrayed by the new China, were stultified by China's political contradictions and historiographical revisions, and worried about their complicity in China's transformations.

Eventually, a new paradigm did emerge, which addressed the failure of the previous paradigm and the frustrations of reform-era China. Objectivity was traded for self-reflexivity, exceptionalism was replaced with similarity, and ontology was imbued with complexity. Where once progressives drew authority from identifying with the Chinese against mainstream American academics, they now began to question their own paradigms as well as those that were newly en vogue in China. Critical China scholars regained an authoritative stance within their academic disciplines by developing a more measured and self-critical approach, while continuing to raise critiques of ethnocentric scholarship and its corollary, Western-focused Chinese scholarship.

With the rise, fall, and refinement of the progressive paradigm, methodological and historiographical issues in the field of China scholarship grew more sophisticated. The emergence of the paradigm was itself a strong critique of the scholarly consensus that predated it. When the paradigm's collapse revealed that it was as ideologically opaque as any other, the simple ethnocentric or China-centric dichotomy of bad and good scholarship gave way to a more subtle, complicated set of methodological concerns. Suddenly, there was a threat of over-identifying with China in addition to the threat of antagonizing China; just like ethnocentrism or Orientalism, identification could produce inflated notions of difference. After their initial failure, these pitfalls of China scholarship were built into the strategies of the new model. Self-critical reflexivity was coupled with a cautious reconfiguration of the types of questions that China scholarship could address and the types of answers that it could support. The historical arc of the progressive paradigm ends with a field that operates with a more subtle, sober, and sophisticated approach, and that is cautious of many more errors than the mainstream scholarship that predated it.

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**Selected Bibliography**


1984.


**Gender and Morality in Colonial Kenya:**

Women’s Participation in the Loyalist Movement during the Mau Mau Rebellion of 1952–1960

Sarah Bellows-Blakely

The Mau Mau uprising that challenged British authority in colonial Kenya from 1952–1960 has been the source of considerable academic thought for over fifty years. Although many historians have analyzed the importance of gender when discussing the war’s causes and social implications, most scholars have relatively little to say about the allegiances of women during the conflict. This narrative will attempt to address the lack of attention given to women in the historical narratives of Mau Mau. Through a discussion of relevant literature on the topic and a chronological historiography of women’s allegiances in the war, the essay will assess which side of the war, if any, women chose to support, and what material and moral considerations factored into their decision making processes. Ultimately, it will place their alliances within the broader context of the war in order to demonstrate the importance of considering women’s loyalties, in addition to those of men, when looking to the conflict’s social meanings.

The Mau Mau uprising that swept across colonial Kenya in the 1950s has been the source of considerable academic thought for over fifty years. The rebellion, which was inspired by a complicated interaction between economic, political, and social grievances held by the Kikuyu, Embu, and Meru communities in the British colony, is often recognized as a violent anti-colonial insurgency that provoked an even more brutal government response. During the State of Emergency declared between 1952 and 1960, British authorities forced thousands of people into over 800 controlled villages that were known for their overcrowding and abysmal conditions. Village inhabitants, primarily women and children, were forced to perform communal labor, could not permanently leave the camps without special passes, faced widespread famine and unsanitary living conditions, and were sometimes subjected to atrocities.


like rape and beatings. Meanwhile, the government detained over 80,000 suspected Mau Mau "terrorists," most of whom were male, in detention camps across the colony. Disagreements within Mau Mau and the government's reliance on loyal colonial inhabitants to help quell the uprising quickly turned the conflict into a civil war that pitted siblings, neighbors, and friends against one another. By the conflict's end, between 30,000 and 60,000 Kenyans would lose their lives.

Despite the vast body of literature that details Mau Mau's aims and the British government's policies to counteract the rebellion, relatively little is known about the identities and loyalties of the colonial inhabitants who were not active Mau Mau fighters. Even less is known about the allegiances of women during this period. This essay addresses the lack of attention given to women in the historical narratives of Mau Mau. Through a discussion of relevant literature on the topic and a chronological historiography of women's roles in the conflict, the following analysis assesses which side of the war, if any, women chose to support, and what material and moral considerations factored into their decision making processes. Ultimately, it places their alliances within the broader context of the war in order to demonstrate the importance of considering women's loyalties, in addition to those of men, when looking to the uprising's ramifications on colonial society. Because most women were not "active" Mau Mau fighters, this essay specifically focuses on the allegiances of women "loyalists" who either opposed or did not directly support the rebels. It is important to note that "loyalists" were not necessarily loyal to the colonial government. Instead, this paper utilizes Daniel Branch's definition of "loyalism" as "opposition to Mau Mau in its many forms."

I. Previous Literature

Past historical investigations of the Mau Mau conflict usually have little to say about the loyalties of women. David Anderson's *HISTORIES OF THE HANGED*, while an insightful and historically rich description of the uprising, offers little discussion of women's alliances and actions during the civil war. Caroline Elkins' *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* gives substantial attention to the brutal methods the British Government used to quell the insurgency, but it provides little agency for the thousands of women living in governmentally imposed Emergency villages. Although Elkins identifies that women were the victims of widespread atrocities, her portrayal of the conflict ignores the nuances in women's experiences and actions. In the wider context of her historiography, she, like Anderson, dedicates relatively little attention to women or the myriad ways in which individuals acted, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to alter their futures.

Other historical works suggest that considerable nuance existed in the experiences of both men and women during the uprising. In her findings, which are based on some of the only fieldwork conducted in Kenya during the 1952-1960 State of Emergency, Kershaw suggests that the actual struggle was far less unified than many would later imply:

The majority of Kikuyu were neither loyalists nor terrorists but sat on the fence. The local Kikuyu language of 1956 that I learned did not categorize people into groups; good or bad. Mau Mau was not necessarily bad, Home Guard was not necessarily good. Whatever a man or woman had become seemed logical, given the situation... Situations constantly changed: the Mau Mau member became a Home Guard, the Home Guard took an oath. Both belonged to the same kin-group and there was little to differentiate them.

Recent historical research supports this argument. Instead of a war fought solely between Mau Mau and the colonial government, Branch portrays a civil war in which inhabitants widely varied in their support and alliances. Many factions existed, and despite pervasive violence and poverty, men and women alike employed various degrees of agency. Although Branch focuses most of his attention on male loyalists, his work suggests that women's experiences, like those of men, were more heterogeneous than either Anderson or Elkins would suggest: "At one time or another during the Emergency, most were both Mau Mau and loyalist, sometimes even simultaneously in response to the changing balance of power in localities." This description of loyalties during the war, which depicts the ambiguities and fluidities that existed in peoples' sentiments, provides the context in which this essay will examine women's loyalism.

Past historical works have also highlighted the importance of gender when assessing the uprising's causes and social meanings. In order to fully understand this connection, one must first look to the social and

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3. Anderson, S.
economic significance of Mau Mau's demands for *ihbaka na wiathi*. While a direct translation of the Kikuyu saying means "land and freedom," John Lonsdale argues that *ihbaka na wiathi* is better interpreted as "self-mastery through land." His argument states that while deep-seated economic grievances played a large factor in motivating the insurgents' calls for land, or *ihbaka*, individuals' desires for freedom, or *wiathi*, can only be understood by discussing the links between gender, self-mastery, land, and freedom in Kikuyu society at the time of the rebellion.

According to Lonsdale, Kikuyu males gained *wiathi* by owning land, by exerting control over their households, and by proving themselves capable of managing their personal lives and those of their "dependents." In doing so, they demonstrated their abilities to be responsible husbands and fathers, since the attainment of full Kikuyu manhood relied strongly on a man's ability to judiciously manage his land and household. Through the exercise of this domestic authority, men earned *wiathi* and a moral authority that gave them the credibility to extend their influence to the public sphere, where they often became leaders in their communities. This relationship between manhood, land, control of one's household, and the use of moral authority in the public sphere suggests that supporters of Mau Mau not only aspired to improve their lives economically. By protesting widespread land shortages and other financial problems that existed in colonial Kenya, they struggled to regain self-mastery, the basis for *wiathi*, and validate themselves as men. In recent research, Branch built upon this theory by arguing that while Mau Mau's promises for *ihbaka na wiathi* likely attracted many to support its cause early in the war, after 1954, more people began to oppose the rebellion and become loyalists because doing so offered a surer path to *wiathi*. According to Branch, loyalty provided economic incentives and better security. It also allowed people to regain both control of their households and the moral authority that Mau Mau promised but could not deliver.

This theory offers a compelling explanation as to how the desire for *wiathi* and its centrality to the attainment of manhood in Kikuyu society motivated men to become Mau Mau, loyalists, and anything in between. However, it provides an incomplete picture of what motivated women to participate in the struggle, since *wiathi* is a gendered term that historians usually apply only to men. The fact that these historians have emphasized the centrality of gender to the rebellion suggests that the actions of women, in addition to those of men, must be understood in order to have a complete understanding of the uprising's cultural and moral implications. For this reason, the following analysis will investigate what determined women's support during the war and, more importantly, how knowledge of this support may or may not add to current understandings of the conflict's social meanings.

II. Women in the Rebellion before 1954

At the beginning of the Mau Mau war, the Home Guard—a police-like colonial force used to guarantee security in the British colony—was largely disorganized and could not effectively protect local populations from Mau Mau attacks. Extensive documentation exists of the coercive tactics Mau Mau used to get members of both sexes to swear oaths of loyalty to the movement. Although colonial officials believed that 90 percent of the population took oaths of loyalty to Mau Mau, many likely did so out of fear. This is not to say that Mau Mau grew to popularity through force only. Indeed, discontent over colonial land acquisitions, the exploitation of labor, abysmal conditions in the Central Reserves, and seemingly unfair colonial practices meant that numerous men and women likely sympathized with the movement's call for *ihbaka na wiathi*. However, their sympathy for Mau Mau's aims did not mean that the majority of people supported the organization's violence. Kershaw estimated that only 5 to 8 percent of the local population she studied took more "serious" oaths that committed them to active service, violent or nonviolent, within the militant Mau Mau factions, and many disassociated from the violent aspects of Mau Mau while still supporting the uprising's goals. At the beginning of the war, the conflict in ideology within Mau Mau, varying degrees of support for the insurgency within the general public, and uncertainty over what exactly "Mau Mau" was, made it difficult for government officials to distinguish the rebels from the non-rebels. Nevertheless, sympathy with the movement's aims, "the use of violence and Mau Mau's initial relative strength allowed it to gain the begrudging endorsement of wavering when they were forced to choose" between supporting Mau Mau and opposing it.

Despite the passive support the rebellion seemed to elicit at the beginning of the war, some did resist the uprising early on. Christians, in particular, were one of the first groups to defy Mau Mau by refusing to take the oath on religious grounds, and women were often at the forefront of this opposition. Two weeks before Governor Evelyn Baring declared the State of Emergency in October of 1952, Christian widow Matari Muthamia refused

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20. Kershaw, 284, and Branch, "Loyaltyism During the Mau Mau Rebellion," 51.
to be oathed for religious reasons and was subsequently killed by her sister and brother-in-law, who had organized the oathing ceremony. Another widow was forcibly circumcised and murdered after refusing to take an oath, reflecting the tension within the uprising over the issue of female circumcision and the existence of violent suppression of members of both genders who refused to comply with the movement. Other Christians resisted Mau Mau with less pernicious outcomes. Numerous members of the East African Revival, many of whom had been excommunicated by elders within the Presbyterian Church of Scotland for challenging cultural traditions regarding gender, age, and morality, "fought the war by refusing to hear arms for either loyalists or Mau Mau..." Both loyalist church elders and Mau Mau rebels thought them delinquents. Although males and females alike participated in the revolt movement of the 1940s and early 1950s, evidence suggests that it held particular appeal to women: "Conversion was a way for the Kibirigwi women to criticize the failings of a church bureaucracy dominated by men, a way also to claim moral authority for themselves." Since more women participated in the East African Revival than men, females may have had more of an opportunity to oppose Mau Mau on religious grounds and lay claim to this morality. While their ability to oppose Mau Mau should not be overstated, and while Mau Mau also attracted numerous Christians, including those who identified with the East African Revival movement, it is likely that certain women opposed Mau Mau in both thought and action through religious ideology at the beginning of the war. In doing so, they gained their own kind of moral authority and found answers to "the pressing problem of Gender chaos" that was at the heart of Mau Mau's struggle for *utibhi*.

Religion did not provide the only grounds for women's resistance to Mau Mau. Although the colonial government recruited loyalists through chiefs and headmen, most of whom were men, and through the Home Guard, which was also predominately male, some women did become loyalists through the latter organization. Anderson's *Histories of the Hanged* provides a picture of a woman holding a *panga*, a machete-like knife, in her hand as she prepared to assist the Home Guard in a forest sweep for rebels in 1952. In her autobiography, Charity Waciima also describes an encounter she had with women Home Guards who fetched water for and allegedly provided sexual services to the male guards. Waciima's clear decision for the Home Guards may call into question her description of the female guards as little more than the men's sexual servants. However, it is likely that just as Mau Mau employed women both as domestic labor and as fighters, so too did the Home Guard utilize women. Although further research is necessary to fully explore the ways in which women initially aided these anti-Mau Mau organizations, Anderson's and Waciima's accounts, combined with documentation of women's participation in the organization later in the war, suggest that women, whether willingly or unwillingly, did aid the loyalist Home Guard early on in various capacities.

Despite men's and women's participation in the Home Guard, during these early years of the conflict, "The population, trapped between the two warring factions, avoided irreversible public declarations of allegiance that often proved fatal if misjudged." While this was likely just as true for women as it was for men, certain females may have lost the power to avoid taking sides by virtue of being identified as the dependents their male family members. Indeed, both Mau Mau and the colonial government frequently determined females' loyalties by the "irreversible public declarations of allegiance" made by their male kin. In some instances, this association yielded violent outcomes for the women. In the brutal and widely publicized Lari Massacre of 26 March 1953, two thirds of the 84 people Mau Mau killed were women. As Anderson notes, "All of these victims were the families of local chiefs, ex-chiefs, headmen, councillors and prominent Home Guards. The male heads of these households were the leading members of Lari's loyalist community, and all were known as outspoken opponents of Mau Mau." Although less well publicized, similar instances of violence occurred against known female members of Mau Mau. The Home Guard and other colonial authorities often brutalized women whose husbands had joined the fight in the forests, and this process intensified as the war went on. The number of supposedly loyalist women targeted by the insurgents should not be overstated, since only 98 of the documented 1,024 Kikuyu deaths caused by Mau Mau were women. However, it is still important to note that a family structure determining that
men were the "heads of...households" changed the ways in which women were able to avoid being aligned with either side in the early years of the war. Whether the women Mau Mau targeted were, in fact, loyalists is unclear. Evidence suggests that at least one wife of a prominent loyalist figure actively supported Mau Mau, and it has been argued that many other wives and relatives of loyalists both passively and actively aided the insurgency. However, others likely did sympathize with their family members' support for loyalism, especially if they were related to the documented 926 male loyalists who became victims of Mau Mau. One example of this occurred with headman Charles Wanjiro's wife and daughter, Mathae and Lois Wanjiro, who survived the Lari attacks. While the sympathies of these women before the assault is undocumented, both served as key witnesses in the four separate trials that were held to convict the Lari suspects in September and October of 1953. After the massacre, the women lived in a loyalist camp at the Uplands police post, and they were so eager to cooperate with the colonial government that they worked with officials to fabricate testimony in order to help conviction of 54 suspected Mau Mau. While Mathae and Lois Wanjiro provide extreme examples, women's family ties likely did help shape their opposition to Mau Mau. This factor, as well as others, like personal experiences, location, and friendships, meant that the contexts in which women determined their loyalties varied from individual to individual. For many females, deciding whom to support was a personal matter.

Directly preceding and at the beginning of the Emergency, the uprising could be characterized as a conflict "between neighbors and siblings." The lines between Mau Mau and loyalist were often blurred during this stage of the fighting, as considerations of survival, personal convictions, and family all determined where people stood. While many things went into women's decision-making processes over whom to support, few females openly opposed Mau Mau during the years leading up to 1954. For women, as for men during this time, "Identities were temporary and fluid, fluctuating with the course of events."

III. The Uprising after 1954

1954 marked a change in the war against Mau Mau as the colonial government began to gain a clear tactical advantage over the rebels. On April 24, 1954, the government commenced Operation Anvil, and during the course of the next month, over 50,000 residents of Nairobi, predominantly Kikuyu, were screened in order to determine their level of support for Mau Mau. 10,000 men were detained for further questioning in prison camps, and over 3,000 women and 6,000 children—most of them family members of the male detainees—were repatriated to the reserves, willingly in some instances, but forcibly in most. Anvil not only "broke the back of Mau Mau's organization in Nairobi," it also "marked the turning point in the British campaign against the rebels." Preceding and during this time period, the government aimed to ensure against Mau Mau attacks in the rural villages by expanding and reorganizing the Home Guard. A week after the Lari Massacre, the British officials decided to arm the units and bring the loyalist organization under the wing of the Provincial Administration. The force, which operated in the predominately Kikuyu districts of Kiambu, Fort Hall, Nyeri, and in the Embu and Meru districts, had approximately 25,600 members in March of 1954 and played a crucial role in the war against the insurgents. In the Rift Valley, the Farm Guard, which was similar to the Home Guard, also expanded by 50 percent to respond to the threat posed by Mau Mau fighters who had moved out of Nairobi after Operation Anvil.

This relative rise in strength of the Home Guard was accompanied by another factor in the government's initiative to defeat Mau Mau: villagization, or "the centralization of the previously dispersed population into newly constructed villages." The process was completed in Kiambu, Fort Hall, Nyeri, and Embu by the end of August 1954, and the government intended for it to both punish Mau Mau's supposedly wide base of support and reward the Home Guard loyalists and their "dependents." Located next to Home Guard bases and designed to hold only 500 people, many of the approximately 800 villages were known for their overcrowding, lack of hygiene, hunger, and the Home Guard's perpetration of violent crimes such as beatings and rape. The clear militaristic advantage the government gained over Mau Mau in 1954, coupled with the brutal and often violent villagization process that began in the same year, meant that the majority of the population likely found it advantageous to stop supporting Mau Mau, whether actively or passively. From this time on, "many people now saw loyalism as a better

51. Anderson, 201, 205.
52. Anderson, 204-205.
54. Branch, "Loyalty During the Mau Mau Rebellion," 92-111.
60. Elkins, 248-258.
way of achieving the objects of Mau Mau," and for numerous individuals, becoming loyalists, or at least allying with the cause, appeared to be the wiser option.62

While men continued to comprise the majority of the Home Guard in the second phase of the war,63 the expansion of the organization after 1953 meant that women now had more opportunities to become active loyalists. In 1954, a Kitui Women’s Home Guard Unit was constructed in Fort Hall so that female loyalists could be used to interrogate women Mau Mau suspects. In August of 1955, a newspaper article titled, “Women rise up against terrorists: 8,000 act as ‘Beaters’ in South Nyieri operations,” was released in the East African Standard.64 Both men and women patrolled for Mau Mau at night in certain areas,65 and although many were coerced into participating in these anti-Mau Mau actions, women increasingly complied with or joined the ranks of the Home Guard as the war went on.66

Loyalism also became more popular as the colonial government rewarded members of the Home Guard and other “collaborators.”67 While British authorities made many of these benefits, including land redistribution through the Swynnerton Plan, most readily available to male elders, “landless loyalists” of both sexes still saw monetary benefits to their service.68 Labor shortages caused by Operation Anvil and the repatriation of squatters in the highlands provided opportunities for loyalists to find employment when much of the population was either detained or restricted to Emergency villages.69 The government actively recruited known male and female loyalists to fill these vacated positions during and after 1954, and one newspaper report released only two months after Anvil started detailed an increase in the number of loyalist women working in Nairobi.70 In the Central Province, loyalists could more easily obtain documents freeing them from restrictions on movement placed on suspected Mau Mau sympathizers, and in Nyeri, most loyalists who were not landowners or administrative employees left the district by 1959 to take vacant jobs elsewhere.71

If women were not loyalists themselves, they often accrued the material benefits of loyalism through family ties. In Nakuru, Grace Ibrahim was appointed as a midwife in June of 1955 because her brother-in-law and father were members of the Home Guard. 72 550 loyalist families were allowed to resettle in the Rift Valley to meet labor shortages in 1955 and 1956, and at least another 120 families from Fort Hall resettled in South Kinongop in December of 1956.73 Many of the Home Guard who remained in the reserves were rewarded with payment, exemption from taxes, help with school fees for their children, food, clothing, and trading permits.74 The wives of male Home Guards were frequently excused from forced communal labor in the Emergency villages,75 and the government provided funds for widows of Home Guards whom Mau Mau killed.76 Whereas women during the first part of the war were sometimes targeted for their family members’ loyalism, they now stood to gain numerous economic benefits through their husbands’ and fathers’ “collaboration.”

Women also opposed Mau Mau through ideology, and “as the security of loyalists and potential benefits of collaboration improved, condemnations of Mau Mau became more commonplace.”77 In a letter to the newspaper in November of 1954, Muthoni Karanga, an Embu school girl who lived at a Home Guard post, wrote, “Why are you giving help to Mau Mau terrorists in the bush as if they are growing food for you in the bush? Why are you foolish to go naked and hungry and still give Mau Mau your money and food, what good will they do your?” In that same month, Nancy Njuri also wrote a letter to the newspaper urging other Kikuyu women to publicly oppose Mau Mau: “To save your life and save your children’s lives you should try in whichever way possible to see that the few remaining gangsters have surrendered.” She expressed her opposition to the violent uprising not only in terms of safety, but in terms of “progress,” which was a concern commonly voiced in the numerous letters written to newspapers during the Emergency.78 Although such letters mostly reflect the views of a narrow body of literate “elites,”79 they reveal both the motivations for peoples’ growing opposition to Mau Mau and the ways in which this opposition allowed women to participate in public denunciations of the rebellion. By giving some women the ability to oppose Mau Mau on the grounds of family and “progress,” these letters allowed women to claim moral authority and influence both inside and outside of the household at time when Mau Mau’s demands for land often limited the attainment of *uwadi* to male heads of households.

Perhaps the most important way in which women acted as loyalists, however, was through the *Maendelelo ya Wannawake*, or Women’s Progress,

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64. Branch, “The Enemy Within,” 306.
67. Ells, 72, 241.
74. Ells, 72.
75. Ells, 241.
organization. Founded by a group of female British settlers in the early 1950s, 
*Maendele ya Wanawake* was a voluntary club designed to "promote the advancement of African Women" and to raise African living standards. It was under the jurisdiction of the colonial Department of Community Development and Rehabilitation, and the government began to actively encourage the group's growth during the Emergency as a way to "rehabilitate" the female population and "counteract Mau Mau." Women were required to renounce Mau Mau before joining, and despite concerns that have been raised over how much the clubs actually helped women, the sheer number of individuals who joined suggests that females saw loyaltyism through the society as a way to deal with the hardships of daily life during the Emergency. In 1954, over 300 local *Maendele* clubs recorded more than 37,000 members, and in 1955, the number of clubs grew to 602 and official membership increased to 40,690. These figures can be compared with the number of women who are recorded to have entered detention camps in Kenya in 1954 and 1955, which were 9,609 and 13,265 during 1954 and 1955, respectively. Although leaders of *Maendele ya Wanawake* may have been motivated to inflate their membership numbers and the colonial government may have underreported the number of women it detained, the difference between these sets of figures suggests that many females found opposition to Mau Mau through *Maendele* to be comparatively advantageous to actively supporting Mau Mau. While the comparison of these figures is hard to make, it is an approximate measurement that provides meaningful perspective to the relative popularity of *Maendele* during a time when support of Mau Mau was declining.

The conditions of the Emergency villages provide some insight as to why *Maendele ya Wanawake* held such appeal for women. During 1956, Kabare, a predominantly loyalist Embu village, had a total population of around 1,360, with a vast majority of 1,184 females. One reverend estimated that the ratio of women to men in some Nyeri villages in 1955 was seven to one. Whether or not these statistics are exact, women and children vastly outnumbered men in most villages during the Emergency. In addition to enduring the widespread atrocities like rape and beatings carried out by the Home Guard, the inhabitants of many villages faced poverty, famine, uncertain living conditions, and forced labor. Even regions comprised predominately of loyalists faced unsanitary living conditions, lack of access to health care, and near-ubiquitous financial hardship.

Given these difficulties, *Maendele ya Wanawake* may have offered women a unique way to improve their living conditions. Many of the clubs distributed food in the villages, and during the famine that struck the Kiambu District in 1955 and 1956, 107 *Maendele* groups in the area "operated soup kitchens and increased their milk allotments." The association also ran childcare facilities, helped provide for the numerous children who had been orphaned by the war or whose parents could not provide for them, and taught women about hygiene as a way to combat high levels of disease in the villages. In some Kikuyu districts, the organization successfully lobbied the government to restrict forced labor for its members to two days per week or less, so that the women would have more time to attend the *Maendele* home skill classes, provide for their children and older family members, and avoid the physical ailments caused by the often back-breaking labor. A grant from the colonial government for $33,600 in 1955 helped sustain the association, and one of the club's primary goals was to offer humanitarian relief for the women and children of the villages. While *Maendele ya Wanawake* did not wholly alleviate women's suffering during the Emergency, "Membership in the organization expanded tremendously during the Emergency years since it could be the crucial difference between survival and starvation under the villagization program."  

Females who joined *Maendele ya Wanawake* were not only motivated to do so in order to improve their living conditions. The group's weekly classes often taught health and childcare, farming practices, sewing, cooking, and current events. The club also organized public gatherings and recreational activities for its members, and it taught literacy in additional courses. While it may seem counterintuitive that thousands of women would have dedicated their time to these activities as they endured the abysmal conditions in the villages, Branch explains that many of them were motivated by the promise of a better future: "Juliana Muthoni joined her branch of the group in 1953 because I missed any chance to get education when I was a girl." She compared

84. Elkins, 260.
85. Wipper, 102.
87. Branch, "Loyalty During the Mau Mau Rebellion," 159.
89. Elkins, 219, and Branch, "The Enemy Within," 300.
92. Branch, "Loyalty During the Mau Mau Rebellion," 159.
99. Wipper, 100.
her membership of the Maendele ya Wanawake, where 'I have benefited much,' with Mau Mau, 'which will bring you no good rather than to destroy anything which could help your children in the future.' Muthoni was not alone in her assessment of the organization, as many women understood their involvement with the club as a way to improve their opportunities and those of their children. Whereas supporting Mau Mau offered little benefit for these women, participation in Maendele ya Wanawake gave them a way to gain influence in a public sphere that had largely been dominated by men in the past:

This enthusiastic response from rural women may have been fostered by conditions that permitted unceasing access to institutions and processes of change on the part of men and women. Women had seen men from political associations, mutual aid societies and countless religious sects. They had watched them acquire western education, travel overseas, and carve out a niche for themselves in the new society that was coming into being. They were chafing for an opportunity to become involved in development. In Maendele, women found that they could come together, exchange experiences, acquire new information and skills, and co-operate to promote their common interests.

This explanation becomes even more evident when viewed in the context of the wider, gendered struggle for wiathithi that was manifested in the Mau Mau uprising. By denouncing Mau Mau and joining the government-run movement, women had the means to regain a degree of control over their lives, their households, and their futures, which were all critical components of the social struggle within Mau Mau. Their acquisition of the tools necessary to make a stable home under the tenants of Victorian domesticity gave them power in their households, and by extension, in the public sphere, since attaining wiathithi relied on gaining moral authority through mastery of one's home. While this control did not alleviate them from the realities of life during and immediately after the Emergency, it did provide them with a degree of agency that supporters of Mau Mau likely lacked. Somewhat ironically, loyalty now provided the very aims that Mau Mau unsuccessfully strove to achieve. The perseverance of Maendele ya Wanawake after Kenya gained independence in 1963 gives credence to this point. Although the Kenyan

women who had emerged as the leaders of the organization represented the 'literate elite' of local society, through their opposition to Mau Mau and their participation in an organization run by the colonial government, prominent loyalist women, like loyalist men, gained lasting influence over the newly independent government. Through the 1960s and 1970s, and into the 1980s, Maendele was the largest women's organization in the country, and its Kituyi leaders forged enduring bonds with the post-colonial Community Development Department, which later became the Women's Bureau.

Maendele ya Wanawake was not the only way that women regained moral authority by rejecting Mau Mau. To find answers to the social upheaval resulting from "significant gender imbalances and breakdowns in family discipline" that were commonplace in the Emergency, many people also turned to Christianity. As Branch articulated, "In common with similar episodes everywhere, others sought religious direction to find a path through the newly complicated moral maze constructed in the aftermath of the war." Church attendance increased by numbers in the thousands, more people became baptized, and as before, women dominated the populations of many congregations. As Mau Mau failed to provide women with moral authority, females increasingly turned to religion to provide answers to the social questions that had been at the heart of the uprising.

The benefits of loyaltyism should not be overstated, especially for women. Many loyalist families faced poverty throughout the Emergency, and nearly all were forced to deal with the daily hardships of life in a war-torn country. However, when contrasted with the status of women whom the government deemed to be Mau Mau sympathizers, loyalists appear to have gained distinct advantages, both materially and ideologically. The Home Guard and British officials, especially in the Central Province, often singled out and brutalized women with husbands or relatives who were detained for supposedly supporting Mau Mau. After shifts in the war in 1954, especially, these "women were embittered by their isolation and exposure to the harsh realities of life without fathers, brothers and husbands," Whether females became Home Guards themselves, had male family members who were Home Guards, or turned away from Mau Mau through Maendele or Christianity, for most, it became clear that supporting Mau Mau no longer offered women tangible or moral benefits. While the government's detention, rehabilitation, and villagization programs limited agency for many individuals during

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103. Wipper, 102.
105. Branch, "Loyalism During the Mau Mau Rebellion," 190.
107. White, 24-25.
108. Wipper, 103.
111. White, 24-25.
112. Branch, "Loyalism During the Mau Mau Rebellion," 159-160.
115. Ekiru, 258.
the Emergency, as the war progressed, some females found ways to regain a measure of control over their lives. For women, then, as for men, “loyalism had...emerged as a viable vehicle for the attainment of *wiyathi*.”

IV. Conclusions

Ultimately, this discussion reveals critical information about women's actions during the Mau Mau rebellion and the wider centrality of gender to the war's social meanings. It suggests that, throughout the uprising, identities for both sexes changed as balances of power fluctuated, and people constantly searched for ways to improve their futures in the midst of a brutal uprising and an even more brutal governmental response. Decisions over whom to support were not easy, and no matter what choices individuals made, most peoples' lives were likely profoundly impacted by the violence and poverty. In light of these hardships, women's alliances during the war, like those of men, were determined by rational considerations of how to preserve their own economic and moral interests and those of their families.

It is also important to remember that, despite these similarities, the choices women could make during the war were often distinctly different from those of men. Whether due to a colonial government whose loyalist Home Guard was run by and comprised primarily of men; a family structure that deemed many women to be the dependents of their husbands, fathers, or other male kin; or the overwhelming prominence of women in the Emergency villages; females' experiences and decisions concerning survival were often unique. While these differences frequently meant that women could more easily avoid choosing to publicly and "actively" support either side, it also meant that, as villagization altered the daily lives of thousands of women, females' abilities to become active loyalists through direct participation with the Home Guard were limited. These limitations did not mean that women had no power to alter their outcomes and could not still improve their living situations through loyalism. Instead, the benefits women stood to accrue from male family members' service in the Home Guard, and perhaps more importantly, the moral authority women accessed by opposing Mau Mau through *Maendelev*, religion, or public denunciations in the name of "progress," mean that females were able to create their own paths to *wiyathi* that neither involvement in Mau Mau nor "active" loyalism could guarantee.

That many women did find these unique paths to *wiyathi*, despite—and in many instances, because of—the existing gender roles in Kikuyu society means that an analysis of the ways in which gender shaped, and was shaped by, the war must include women. While past examinations of *wiyathi* and its influence over men's loyalties at any given time provide important insight into the war's social meanings, historians cannot fully understand the conflict

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Selected Bibliography


A War in Defense of Drugs: Attitudes and Justifications of Parliament, Merchants, and the London Times on the Opium Trade

Christine Su

In the events leading up to the Opium War, bilateral sovereignty and diplomacy were flouted in favor of British economic imperialism. Using sources from the British Parliament, London Times, and Canton opium traders to explain arguments from both the justifiers and the opposition to the smuggling trade in the years leading up to 1840, I examine the relevance of imperial prestige and ethnocentricity in political debates over British foreign policy in the mid-nineteenth century. For British merchants, the opium trade was justified by first using the laws of the free market to evade moral responsibility for the effects of opium, then regarding Parliament’s long-standing disregard for smuggling as an implicit sanction of their “right” to possess and sell opium as legitimate property. For Parliament and the British public, military enforcement of the opium trade was justified in the interest of maintaining the Empire’s reputation and prestige abroad.

Unlawful smuggling of opium had been taking place in Chinese ports for over a century when Commissioner Lin Zexu was appointed by the Qing government in 1839 to eradicate the opium trade in Canton. Following several unsuccessful edicts to ban the imports 1839, Lin blockaded the Canton port, keeping foreign merchants under house arrest until they surrendered their chests of opium for destruction. This demonstration of a serious intent to stop the opium trade escalated tensions between the Qing government and British officials. After some debate in the British Parliament, Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston responded by sending a military expedition to Canton demanding reparations for the insult to British honor and the £2 million loss of property in opium chests. These events set off the first Opium War in 1840.

What were the justifications used by British officials and merchants for the opium trade in China, and how did they grapple with the moral implications of declaring war to defend illicit sales of an addictive drug? In defiance of the Qing’s efforts to stop it, members of the British Parliament, the East India Company, and British merchants who traded opium in Chinese ports were all complicit in the sale of an addictive substance. How did these groups justify their roles in the opium trade, and what did these reasons show about imperialist tendencies towards China in the nineteenth century?
In attempting to answer this question, I first outline a short history of the events leading up to the 1840 military expedition. I rely on primary sources from top officials and merchants involved in the dispute. I then examine the arguments in support of the expedition, given by British traders in Canton and the Indian opium merchants who supplied their cargo. Next, I analyze the coverage of these issues in the London Times throughout this period. The Times was by far the most widely read newspaper in the 1840s, with a circulation of 38,100 (its five main rivals only reached a combined total of 18,000). Finally, I summarize Parliament’s debates on the war with China, which took place in April of 1840. This exploration of the trade incentives, public news coverage, and government justifications of the opium trade will provide several insights on the British empire’s attitudes and approaches to economic imperialism in overseas trade.

To summarize briefly, the justifications for military action in response to Lin’s destruction of opium chests fall under several broad categories:

1. **Laws of the Free Market**: The Chinese wanted to buy the opium regardless, so the British could not be held morally accountable for responding to consumer demand. Even if they sanctioned themselves, the Chinese would not stop purchasing opium, and other foreign merchants would take their profits.

2. **Government-Sanctioned Property Rights**: Opium merchants had operated under the unofficial approval of the British government for decades without sanction, and could not be reasonably expected to assume anything other than full protection of their cargo as property. They demanded payment for their lost cargo, either from the Treasury or by force from the Qing government.

3. **Threat of Economic Upheaval**: Opium was one of the most lucrative exports in the British trading empire, and India depended on supplying opium to Canton merchants to sustain its economy. A ban on opium would cripple Indian trade and dry up a crucial source of colonial revenue, imposing a heavy Treasury or taxpayer burden on Britain to support India’s economic stability.

4. **British Honor and Prestige**: The ignominy of British citizens having to suffer deprivation of their liberties under Lin’s house arrest incensed many Englishmen. Restoring the prestige of the Crown in Canton, as well as redressing the insults suffered by British traders, were the primary reasons Palmerston used to justify the expedition.

5. **Arrogance of the Chinese**: Numerous British accounts of Lin and the Qing government expressed dissatisfaction at the conceited and overbearing rhetoric in Lin’s edicts and letters, which treated Britain as an inferior power and did not pay full tribute to the British Crown’s supremacy in the global order. Many merchants called on Britain to demonstrate its naval power in full force, teaching the ‘barbarians’ a lesson and dispelling Chinese notions of racial superiority.

For British merchants, the opium trade was justified by first using the laws of the free market to evade moral responsibility for the effects of opium, then by interpreting Parliament’s long-standing disregard for smuggling as an implicit sanction of their “right” to possess and sell opium as legitimate property. For Parliament and the British public, military enforcement of the opium trade was justified in the interest of maintaining the Empire’s reputation and prestige abroad. Subsequent sections will highlight these elements while studying the various source sets of merchant correspondence, public news, and Parliamentary debate.

**History and Pre-1840 Imperialist Attitudes**

In the decade before the war, the British sent high-ranking diplomats such as Lord Napier as envoys to negotiate around the unfavorable Canton Trade laws and “open up” Chinese ports to British trade. From 1834 onwards, the Qing government itself debated the legalization of opium, but ultimately decided against it and appointed Commissioner Lin Zexu to eliminate the trade in China completely. Lin’s diplomatic counterpart was Charles Elliot, British Chief Superintendent of Trade in China, who became involved in disputes over British territorial jurisdiction and ultimately banned all trade with Guangzhou in 1839 — the final escalation before the war.

In 1837, the Qing Emperor issued several commands to Superintendent Elliot to stop the opium traffic and remove ships with contraband cargo. Elliot claimed that he had neither the authority to stop opium traffic from non-British ships, nor the means to regulate smugglers in addition to his oversight of regular trade. Commissionner Lin Zexu was appointed in 1839 — a vigorous administrator with a strict reputation against corruption. He was determined from the beginning to stamp out opium

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2. Gerber, 90.


5. Gerber, 60.
trade, and saw Canton as a “complete cesspool of corruption.” Lin acted decisively — within three days of giving notice by official edict, he shut down trade in Canton, closed the customs office and walled the foreign traders in the port’s factories until they surrendered all their opium cargo. Under pressure from the surrounding military forces, Elliot capitulated and coordinated these efforts, thus convincing Lin that his previous protests about a lack of authority over the merchants were nonsense. Thousands of chests of opium were handed over by the merchants for Lin and destroyed.

In April 1839, the blockade was lifted and Lin commanded that, on pain of execution if found with the contraband, bonds be signed by all merchants that they would no longer smuggle opium. Lin’s command called into question the issue of jurisdiction, as the British citizens refused to be subject to what they regarded as barbaric Chinese law. It further drew in the broader question of whether the British regarded Chinese law as legitimate constraints on imperial trade interests at all, since the entire opium trade itself had flouted Chinese laws for decades.

After meeting with William Jardine, the top opium trader in Canton, Palmerston immediately wrote to the Prime Minister, William Melbourne, to discuss a military expedition. One historian, Brian Inglis, observed:

The way the questions were put shows that Palmerston had already prejudged the issue. The confiscated opium was not contraband, it was ‘property.’ The merchants from whom it was taken were not smugglers, they were ‘suffering parties.’

The ethical disparities over opium smuggling presented themselves most clearly in the form of failed appeals for cooperation from the Chinese side. In 1840, Lin wrote a letter to Queen Victoria, signed by the Emperor, which was entrusted to Captain Warner of the Thomas Coutts:

Where is your conscience? I have heard that the smoking of opium is very strictly forbidden by your country...since it is not permitted to do harm to your own country, then even less should you let it be passed on to the harm of other countries — how much less to China.

Lin accused the British who condoned the opium trade as...careful of [their] own lives, but careless of the lives of other

8. Inglis, 125.

Lin had attempted to send a previous letter in 1839, which was rejected by Elliot on the grounds of addressing the Queen on equal diplomatic terms. His second letter reached England, but was rejected by Palmerston in the Foreign Office, because Captain Warner had signed Lin’s bond. The letter never reached the Queen or anyone in the British government.

It was evident from these events that to some extent, Palmerston already regarded Chinese laws and diplomats as subordinate to the Crown, and did not regard China as an equal diplomatic counterpart with full legal rights within its territories. The issue, then, was which British interests (trade revenues, legal jurisdiction, imperial prestige) would supersede its regard for Chinese laws enough to warrant force to ensure compliance. Historian Harry G. Gelber enumerated the objectives of controlling China’s coastal ports and borders and managing the arrangement of China’s future trade with other countries as key factors that Palmerston took into consideration in going to war. These factors demonstrated that the war was not intended to create an imperial relationship with China, but to validate by force what was already implicitly assumed in practice.

Opium Traders and the Imperial Distance

The merchants of Canton made it an open secret that they had been carrying cargoes of opium for decades, but staunchly avoided responsibility for opium’s effects in China. They evaded ethical complications by depicting themselves as agents of government-sanctioned free trade, distancing themselves economically, culturally, and politically from the moral implications of the trade itself. William Jardine and his partner James Matheson owned the company (Matheson Jardine) that was the largest importer of opium into China. Jardine once wrote to a missionary boarding his ship:

We have no hesitation in stating to you openly that our principal reliance is on opium...[which] by many is considered an immoral traffic, yet such traffic is so absolutely necessary to give any vessel a reasonable chance of defraying her expenses, that we trust you will have no objection...

A pamphlet signed by ‘A British Merchant’ (most likely either Jardine or Matheson) argued that the sale of opium was not immoral because ‘the people of China were only too willing to receive it. Surely, therefore, ‘no

10. Qtd. in Inglis, 118.
11. Gelber, 86.
12. William Jardine, Letter to Dr Charles Gutzlaff, 1830. Qtd. in Inglis, 81.
morale will be urged against it.” Chinese people were culturally different and therefore somehow culpable for their addiction, or simply less immoral to exploit through abusive transactions.

The so-called “merchants of death” also placed a political distance between themselves and their victims, offloading culpability to the British government and the Indian economy. The Committee of the London East India and China Association submitted a memorandum to Palmerston in 1839, pointing out that Parliamentary committees had enquired minimally into the trade, with a full knowledge of the destination and content of cargo as well as the amount of revenue it generated. They had observed that it seemed “most unjust to throw any blame or odium attaching to the opium trade upon the merchants, who engaged in a business thus directly and indirectly sanctioned by the highest authorities.” British merchants in Calcutta wrote to the Privy Council, arguing that the opium trade was both “eagerly sought after by the Chinese people” and “fostered into its recent magnitude by every means that ingenuity could devise on the part of the British Government of India.” They pointed out that the government “consulted on every occasion the wants and needs of Chinese consumers,” and provided charts showing that roughly 85% of the opium shipped out from Calcutta was dispatched directly in to China. The contraband sale of opium, in the eyes of the traders, had always “flourished through the connivance of Government officers,” and any blame on the merchants would be shared by government agents as well.

One famous pamphlet circulated in 1840 was The Opium Question by literary talent Samuel Warren, to whom Matheson was a patron. In it, he argued that merchants could not be held accountable for the moral rights and wrongs of dealing the drug when the British government explicitly condoned the Company’s activities. Warren compared opium to smuggled French brandy or lace.

Has any British merchant engaged in the opium trade ever fancied, or had reason to fancy, — although carrying it on every moment under the eye, and paying tribute for it into the pocket of Government, that it was during these forty-three years illegal, except in mere name? Do we venture to call them smugglers? Are they not some of our most eminent British merchants — men whose names would command respect and confidence in


Great Britain and in India — in short, in every quarter of the world where commercial enterprise, honour, and good faith are known.”

Other merchants sent reports detailing the revenue that the opium trade brought annually to India, and forecasts of silver that would be lost to the crown if it were halted. If the opium trade dried up, “such was the dependence of the Indian economy on their efforts that commerce in general would come tumbling down in ruins...[having] a catastrophic effect on firms in Britain which had trading interests in the east.” The silver bullion leaking out of Chinese coffers also purchased cargo to fuel Britain’s own national addiction to tea. This elevation of the worth of profit margin to lives, where the quality of life to a British subject was more than the actual life of a Chinese addict, was only possible in an imperialist mindset buffered by a physical and cultural distance.

Richard Cobden, a critic of British imperial expansion, tried to acknowledge positive outcomes to the opium business: “In a modern world of investment and trade, China and Japan could not possibly be allowed to remain isolated; and in any case, free trade was the blood-brother of international peace, welfare and virtue, even of Christian advancement.” Yet the Opium War expedition suggested that the mantra of economic imperialism was primarily to maintain favorable trade relations for the empire, whether it was with a free country or one under British control.

The Public and British Honor in the Times

The British public had little or no awareness of the events in Canton until London newspapers began reporting events several months after they took place. Palmerston did not receive news of the March 1839 blockade until August, and the London Times began reporting on the events then. British opinion appeared to be split on the ethical issues, and the opium trade was not generally a topic of great national concern. The most salient matter seemed to be that the Chinese insulted British dignity and pride by mistreating the expatriate families during the blockade. In the debate over whether to go to war, both sides of the public debate tried to claim the high ground of regaining British honor and national prestige.

In August of 1839, the Times focused on publicizing the factual development of events in Canton, reprinting primary documents forwarded from the Chinese Repository, a merchant-funded expatriate periodical from Canton. Presumably in an effort to show both sides of the controversy, on August 7th the Times reprinted a merchant petition to the Queen requesting

compensation for their lost property on the same page as an edict from Commissioner Lin. The merchants pointed out the capital benefits derived from the opium trade to the government, and appealed for a speedy redress of their violated property rights. Lin, comparing the great benefits of the tea trade to British citizens to the great harm of opium imports to Chinese consumers, argued that British conduct would "rouse indignation in every human heart, and was utterly inexcusable in the eyes of celestial reason." This emotional appeal was then followed by several haughty threats about how the great might of the Celestial empire, which stretched for thousands of miles, would put an end to British livelihoods.

Yet as the Times continued to report while events unfolded, a pattern emerged of public attention on British honor and prestige. The Times did print features by one or two prominent critics of opium, including an excerpt by Reverend Thelwall’s book Inquiries of the Opium Trade With China. Nevertheless, it seemed that the British public was most aroused not by the moralistic accounts of opium’s destructive effects in China, but by the sensational indignities suffered by their countrymen at the hands of the brutal and vulgar Chinese barbarians. Contrary to Lin’s mistaken belief, opium was not illegal in Britain and was commonly prescribed as a prescription drug, laudanum. Charming old ladies would take it nightly before bed— it was seen as no worse than gin or tobacco. Lin, on the other hand, had committed an "unequivocal atrocity" by blockading and then expelling British countrymen by force, gravely insulting their honor and causing subjects of the Queen to lose face abroad.

Less than a week after the first reports from Canton, the Times published another detailed, more sensational account of the blockade and events on the ground. The Chinese forces were reportedly using "intimidation" tactics, "threatening the lives of the Hong merchants," and "depriving the foreigners resident there of their liberty." The story included excerpts written by Elliot to the Canton Press from March about the "dangerous, unprecedented, and unexplained circumstance... imminent hazard of life and property, and total disregard of honor and dignity" suffered by merchant families. Readers pieced together details from the scene, recalling from the last story "the threatening language of the High Commissioner... of the most general application, and dark and violent character."

The subsequent forced expulsion of British families from Macao did even more to stir public anger at the insult to British dignity. Readers were offended to find out about English women and children being "exposed to dark and nameless insults and dangers at the hands of dirty Chinese ruffians." Threats to Britain’s pristine Victorian women particularly galvanized Englishmen to call for action. Many might have echoed Samuel Warren’s sentiments in The Opium Question:

> In the name of the dear glory and honour of old England, where are the councils which will hesitate for a moment in cleansing them, even if it be in blood, from the stains which barbarian insolence has so deeply tarnished them? Why are they not seen and heard there, by those incredulous and vaunting barbarians, the glance and thunder of our artillery?" This rhetorical slant on the ethical grounds for war was noted and adopted by the opposition. On April 25, 1840, the Times reported on a Freemasons’ meeting condemning the war. The speakers attempted to shame the government for pursuing a war that bungled "a question involving the honour of the British nation and our Christian character." Antiwar groups opposed conflict using the same language of maintaining British prestige by not fighting, as well as the religious and moral high ground of converting more Chinese through goodwill instead of violence. Such sentiments were imperialist in themselves in their prioritization of the reputation of British honor abroad. The moral question of selling dangerous and addictive drugs to Chinese addicts against jurisdictional law had been tabled and forgotten.

Skirting the Ethics: The Parliamentary Debates

After the Government sent an expedition to "obtain reparations for the Insults and Injuries offered to Her Majesty’s Superintendent and Her Majesty’s subjects," unconfirmed news reports of military operations began trickling back into London in early 1840. By March, Palmerston had admitted to the expedition under repeated queries from the Opposition. Arguments over the war took place during three debates—all unsuccessful motions to exorcise the government’s reasons and methods for going to war. On April 7, Sir Robert Peel moved to censure the Majority’s expedition. This set off a three-day debate in the House of Commons, which Palmerston won 271 to 261. Sir James Graham then brought a motion to ban the trade, which was again lost in the Commons. In the House of Lords, Lord Stanhope echoed the minority’s condemnation, but the ensuing debate split the opposition so that he was forced to withdraw his motion without calling for a
The topic of opium was exceedingly awkward in the Parliamentary debates as both sides tried to circumvent thorny ethical issues, such as protecting opium production in India, or maintaining British profits made from that revenue source. Though not opposed to fighting the war itself, the Opposition focused its attacks on the British Government bungling of Chinese relations. Even William Gladstone, who eloquently denounced the moral vicissitudes of the opium trade, stopped short of demanding that the military operations in India come to a halt. These omissions unquestionably focused the debate on the British countrymen's honor. Moreover, the lack of minority resistance to the war itself undercut the opposition's claims to the moral high ground and revealed the underlying imperial motive behind both sides. Why would the opposition allow a war if they truly believed that the Chinese had the moral and legal right to try to stop the immoral opium trade? Would they have focused on regaining British honor if they believed that the British Government should have cooperated more fully with Chinese officials?

In the House of Commons, speakers in the minority tried to occupy the moral high ground, but fell short of attempting to stall the expedition even as they called it an unjust war. Sidney Herbert said that Britain was "contending with an enemy whose cause of quarrel is better than [its] own, and that it was "a war without just cause" to "maintain a trade resting on unsound principles, and to justify proceedings which [were] a disgrace to the British flag." William Gladstone further accused the entire British community of being involved in the traffic, and even pointed out how merchants and officials alike had been deceptive in saying they could do nothing about it:

Does the Minister not know that the opium smuggled into China comes exclusively from British ports, that it is from Bengal and through Bombay? We require no preventive service to put down this illegal traffic. We have only to stop the sailings of the smuggling vessels..."

In a career-making speech, he claimed that "a war more unjust in its origins, a war more calculated in its progress to cover this country with permanent disgrace, I do not know and I have not read of." Gladstone also appealed to the British sense of honor by rhetorically shaming the crown, calling the British flag a "pirate flag, to protect infamous traffic." The fundamental hole in his reasoning was his omission of judgment on the treatment and jurisdiction of the British merchants in Canton. If his reasoning held true that opium trading was illegal piracy and that the Chinese had the jurisdictional right to enforce laws on their own coasts, there would be no reason to not allow them to expel criminals from their territories. By refusing to pass judgment on the value of "national honor," he left the debate open to the majority to emphasize the inherently greater value of British subjects' offended dignity, which outweighed considerations of Chinese lives or legal authority.

Along the majority bench, familiar themes of free trade incentives, unalterable addiction, and national prestige emerged in the speeches. In a three-hour opening speech, Sir James Graham reasoned that it would be unfair to bar British traders alone from participating in the lucrative business of selling opium, while other opium importers such as the Americans reaped the benefits. He described how they would win Britain's market share in the opium business, and increase their profits by millions that would otherwise go to the crown. Melbourne agreed that "opium was probably less harmful than gin and anyway it was the Chinese who insisted on smoking it...unless one reduced demand, there was no point in trying to strangle only one of several sources of supply." Palmerston distanced the British culturally from the sins of addiction, blaming the Chinese for opium demand. Why was it on the shoulders of the British to consider "preserving the morals of the Chinese people, who were disposed to buy what other people were disposed to sell them?"

In these debates, the mantra of British imperial prestige clearly emerged. Sir G. Thomas Staunton cautioned the floor: "Parliament should remember that the entire British Empire was founded on prestige. If they submitted to insults from China, British political ascendency would collapse." Thomas Macaulay, the Secretary of State for War, argued that the Chinese government had the right to restrict opium but not to seize "our innocent countrymen, and [insult] the Sovereign in the person of her representative." Britain was going to war so that its subjects could look with confidence on the victorious flag which was hoisted over them, which reminded them that they belonged to a country accustomed to defeat, to submission or to shame... surrounded as they were by enemies, and separated by great oceans and continents from all help, not a hair of their heads would be harmed by impunity..."

The war in Canton was essentially a signaling ground for British supremacy.

32. Hansard Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 7-9 April 1840, Vol. 43. See also W. Travis Hanes III and Frank Sanello, Opium Wars: The Addiction of One Empire and the Corruption of Another (Naperville, Ill.: Sourcebooks, Inc., 2002), 78-83.
33. Gelber, 96.
34. Hansard, col. 673-948. See also Hanes and Sanello, 78-83.
35. Hansard, col. 673-948.
36. Hansard, col. 673-948.
37. Hansard, col. 673-948. See also Hanes and Sanello, 80.
38. Hansard, col. 673-948.
40. Hansard, col. 742. See also Gelber, 95.
41. Hansard, col. 719.
to formally assert royal control over the resources of an region informally controlled by economic imperialism, and to demonstrate the empire's treatment of subordinate races who imagined themselves equal to the Crown.

Palmerston attempted to place the expedition in a less exploitative international context. In his closing speech, he argued that Lin "put down the opium trade by acts of arbitrary authority against British merchants—a course totally at variance with British law, totally at variance with international law..." 42 The British were setting things right. Palmerston's appeal to international law, British jurisdiction, and sovereignty was ironic because the whole incident arose precisely out of negligence of these considerations for the Chinese. His final proposal further eroded the ground for international sovereignty: "The actions of the Chinese Commissioner had been 'unjust and no better than robbery.' A joint British, American, and French naval force should be stationed on the Chinese coast to look after Western interests." 43 However thinly masked the imperial motives, they were shared by a majority of the British Parliament. The Opium War forced Chinese ports to open and crippled the legitimacy of the Qing government. It allowed the British to demand concession of China's coastal territories and economic resources to the imperial economy for the next century.

**Conclusion**

The relationship between British officials and the Qing government was notable in that the British were dealing with a fully-formed government of a foreign state rather than a colony of a protectorate which they already controlled. However, I have sought to argue that the British government did not view China as a real government and diplomatic equal, but rather as an informal colony whose laws were not to be taken seriously and whose demands were an affront to the Crown. For opium merchants in Canton, the laws were made to be flouted. British economic interests warranted a willful disregard to the human suffering inflicted by the opium trade. This was made easier by the cultural distancing tactic of devaluing the lives of Chinese addicts, as well as the abdication of culpability to instead blame British government agents, who had condoned the trade for decades. For the British public and Parliamentary officials, the justification for war was to redeem the British reputation and prestige abroad, which had been sullied by Commissioner Lin's audacious treatment of English subjects as criminals. The opposition's supposed neutrality on China's anti-opium policies and the ethics of the opium trade met with an inherent contradiction when they allowed a war that defended the opium merchants as victims instead of criminals. Ultimately, both the justifiers and the opposition to the Opium War opted for an ethnocentric presumption in the interests of their countrymen and the British reputation abroad. Their arguments reveal the centrality of economic imperialism in the nineteenth-century British consciousness.

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