

<b>Institution: University of Westminster</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 29: English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study: British and Chinese Cultural Relations</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Over the last five years Dr Anne Witchard's research on the representations of China and the Chinese in Britain has generated considerable social, cultural and political impact on an international stage. The research has contributed significantly to international cultural relations between Britain and China, in particular through enhancing understanding of the social and historical ties between these nations. The research has also improved Britain's knowledge of its own multicultural history and altered public understanding of ethnic groups in contemporary urban Britain. Finally, the research has directly influenced the creative industries in their efforts to represent British-Chinese relations today.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The research which underpins this case study was undertaken by Dr Anne Witchard. Dr Witchard joined the Department in January 2006 as a fixed-term Lecturer and as a full-time Lecturer in English Literature in January 2009. Her research investigates representations of China and the Chinese in Britain, especially in London. This work formed the foundation of Dr Witchard's PhD research (completed in 2003) and has been the central focus of her academic research in the decade since. This case study cites as examples of that research work published in academic journals, edited collections and in monographs from 2007-2012. The impact emerging from this research was generated from 2009-2013.</p> <p>Dr Witchard's research has traced the historical formulations and effects of Orientalist stereotypes on cultural understandings of China and the Chinese in Britain. Her interdisciplinary work has successfully displaced the boundaries between Chinese studies, literary studies and postcolonial/diasporic research. In an early journal article and, primarily, in her first book <i>Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie</i> (Items 3&amp; 4 below) Witchard analyses the cult of Chinatown in turn-of-the-century London. Witchard places Chinatown's Sinophobic reputation and representations within the context of both a racial demonology and the social concerns surrounding the notion of imperial degeneration in fin-de-siècle Britain. In more recent work, Witchard has begun to assess the impact of Chinatown and its mythologies on global modernism and in transnational cultures, dispelling, as Shiao-Ling Yu puts it in her review of <i>Lao She in London</i> in <i>Modernism/Modernity</i> (April 2013), the "misconception that modernism was entirely of western making". A key element of that work has been to situate the writer Lao She as a central figure of trans-cultural modernity and as a profoundly modernist thinker influenced by the collision of Chinese and British traditions (Items 1 &amp; 2 below).</p> <p>Dr Witchard's area of research is unique: she has, in effect, delineated a new field of study that has, in the past few years, been taken up by other scholars in the field of transnational cultural studies and modernism. Her research has captured a previously under-researched and relatively unknown part of Britain's multicultural heritage and traditions. In this way, as Eugenia Jenkins notes in a review of <i>Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie</i>, Witchard's work "offers a new model of single-author scholarship, treating its object ... as a crux of cultural activity [and] makes a compelling case for the importance of Chinoiserie [as] an essential vein of modern British culture and identity." (<i>The Space Between</i> (2010))</p> <p>Dr Witchard's decade-long study of China and Britain fed into the award of a highly competitive AHRC grant to fund the research project, "China in Britain: Myths and Realities", for which she is the Principal Investigator (see Item 5 below). The project, funded under the AHRC Translating Cultures scheme, began in 2012 and will conclude early in 2014. The project combines literary, theatrical, filmic and popular cultural studies of the representation of China in British society from the nineteenth century to the present. It has been selected by the AHRC to showcase the</p>

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Translating Cultures scheme and was described by the research council as a crucial project in “beginning to help us understand some of the key challenges facing the UK in its ever-changing interactions with other countries and cultures.”

### 3. References to the research

- 1) Anne Witchard, *Lao She in London* (Hong Kong University Press, 2012)
- 2) Anne Witchard, “Curious Kisses: The Chinatown Fantasies of Thomas Burke” in Ruth Mayer and Vanessa Kunnemann (eds), *Chinatowns in a Transnational World: Myth and Realities of an Urban Phenomenon* (Routledge, 2011)
- 3) Anne Witchard, *Thomas Burke’s Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown* (Ashgate, 2009)
- 4) Anne Witchard, “A Threepenny Omnibus Ticket to Limey-housey-Causey-way: A Fictional Sojourn in Chinatown”, *Comparative Critical Studies* 4.2 (2007): 225-40
- 5) Grant Award: Anne Witchard (PI), “China in Britain: Myths and Realities.” AHRC Translating Cultures Research Development Network Grant, 2012-14, £32,918

The quality indicators for this underpinning research are extensive:

Item 1) peer-reviewed university press publication; positively reviewed in *Modernism/Modernity* 20.2 (2013)

Item 2) peer-reviewed leading academic press publication; research central to successful AHRC Grant, “China in Britain: Myths and Realities”

Item 3) peer-reviewed leading academic press publication; positively reviewed in *English Literature in Transition* 54.3 (2011)

Item 4) peer reviewed academic journal publication; entered as research output in RAE2008

Item 5) AHRC Research Grant, extensively peer-reviewed and assessed by an expert panel, awarded a 6 on the AHRC’s bespoke research quality grading system.

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Impact on the Creative Industries:

The publication of *Thomas Burke’s Dark Chinoiserie* (2009) led directly to an invitation to discuss the history of the Chinese community in Limehouse at the Museum of London Docklands (July 2009). The success of this public lecture led to further engagements (such as contributions to ‘Making History’ [BBC Radio 4] and dialogues with the Literary London Reading Group), which in turn generated additional involvement with the creative industries. Dr Witchard collaborated with theatre writer and producer James Yeatman on the play *Limehouse Nights* (staged May-June 2010, Kandinsky Company, Limehouse, London) sourcing historical documents and ensuring the historical accuracy of the play’s representation of the Limehouse Chinese. The play was extensively and positively reviewed (e.g. in the *Guardian* and *Time Out*). Yeatman later commented that the “lecture given by Anne Witchard [along with her] fascinating book about Thomas Burke ... gave me a huge amount of information on representations of the Chinese in theatrical productions at the time. [For example,] it’s thanks to her that we’ve found the songs that you see at the beginning and end of the show” (interview, *DimSum*). The *Lao She* book and China in Britain events also had a direct impact upon the writing of a further play, *The Fu Manchu Complex*, by the British-Singaporean actor Daniel York, staged at the Ovalhouse Theatre, London in October 2013. As the author confirms (email correspondence), “Anne’s book ... was an

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immensely helpful research tool as its detail about the period was on aspects not covered ... in other publications ... providing essential insights into the period. ... The curious duology of prejudice/patronisation coupled with enormous Orientalism on both sides [recounted in Witchard's book] synthesized my approach to my material to a huge extent and is the basis of several other ideas I'm working on at present".

Witchard also contributed to the extra materials on the DVD release of a series of the British television drama *Dr Who (Dr Who Revisitations 1*, BBC 2010; in Amazon's top 100 film and TV sales). In her filmed discussion of the episode "The Talons of Weng-Chiang", included in two DVD special mini-features entitled "Victoriana and Chinoiserie" and "Limehouse", Witchard contextualised the show's depiction of Victorian Chinese communities in London in the light of the Yellow Peril iconography of the late nineteenth century.

The publication of *Lao She in London* (2012) led to Witchard being invited to discuss Lao She's significance as a modernist writer in China at various literary locations and festivals (in Shanghai, 2012; Hong Kong, 2013; Beijing, 2013). In turn, the exposure of Witchard's work in China led to an international collaboration on a stage adaptation of Lao She's short story, 'Ding', which was performed at the Beijing Bookworm Festival (2013, venue sold out for the first time in the Festival's history). As a result of bringing Lao She to international attention through her research, Witchard inspired the publisher Penguin to reprint Lao She's Limehouse novel, *Mr Ma and Son* (published 2013). Each of these contributions to theatre, television and publishing changed the performance and practice of these industries. An unknown text has been brought to light and published by a major international publisher (Penguin) and new representations and interpretations of British-Chinese culture have advanced knowledge and understanding for wide public audiences (BBC and theatre companies).

**Impact on Multicultural Society:**

The publication of both *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie* and *Lao She In London*, as well as the AHRC Network Grant and its related activities, provided Witchard with opportunities to affect the awareness of diverse audiences, communities, and organisations with regard to the representations of China and the Chinese in Western culture. As a direct result of this academic research and its subsequent AHRC-supported engagement events, which brought together filmmakers, actors, designers and creative writers along with academics, Witchard advanced British and Chinese cultural understanding in the context of multicultural Britain in the UK, Europe and Asia. This has been extended further through podcasting of talks and conversations with the likes of novelist Xiaolu Guo and actor David Yip on the open access website for the AHRC project (<http://translatingchina.info/>).

Through a series of public lectures and discussions at the Brick Lane Bookshop (2012), the Literary London Reading Group (2012) and the Sohemian Society (2013), as well as print and radio interviews (e.g. for ChinaFile and Resonance FM), Witchard further offered London's communities new understandings of the history of Chinese communities in London and so directly increased awareness of the representations of Asia and its people in Britain both historically and in the contemporary world. In a broader European context, Witchard spoke with a public audience at the Brussels Museum (Musées d'Extrême-Orient, Pavillion Chinois, October 2010) to reveal further the attitudes of Imperialist European powers towards the East during the late nineteenth century, making a significant contribution to this constituency's awareness of the global reach of Sino-phobic discourse. In China itself, in interviews with the *Beijinger Magazine* (Beijing, 2013) and *Shanghai Time Out* (Shanghai, 2013), as well as Radio Television Hong Kong, Witchard presented, to transnational audiences, Western representations of Chinese people and cultures, expanding the sensibilities of this new constituency for her work (as the many blog posts and email responses to her interviews signify).

**Impact on British-Chinese Political Relations:**

All of Witchard's publications from 2007, but especially those published in 2007 and 2011, which dealt with representational paradigms and transnational modernism, contributed to the successful AHRC Network Grant application in 2011. As one of the participants from the British East Asian Artists Group confirmed (email correspondence), the engagement events subsequently organised

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by Witchard gave “leading East Asian actors and directors opportunities to speak and listen to each other and gain an idea of where we were as an under-represented ethnic group and what needed to be done to raise our profile. ... [S]everal collaborations have been borne from these discussions that are ongoing as we speak”. The AHRC Network and its events, led by Witchard, constructed, on this basis, a number of pathways to impact which, in turn, developed into a series of advisory roles and civic contributions for Witchard herself that engaged with political interest groups and organisations with a remit for British-Asian cultural exchange. For example, Witchard’s research was employed by the British East Asian Artists Group and Equity’s Minority Ethnic Members Committee (via a Network event in 2012) to articulate the need for diversity action in the employment and representation of Asian peoples in theatre and on screen.

Witchard’s contribution to engagement in the political relations between Asia and Britain also extended to China through her engagement with the British Council (in Beijing in 2012-13), the Royal Asiatic Society (in Suzhou and Shanghai, 2012-13) and the Meridian Society (in London, April 2013), each of whom have a remit to promote ‘soft power’ relationships between China and the UK. In this way, Witchard’s presentations to these organisations aided them in better understanding changing cultural relations and so to develop actively their own strategies for political engagement with Chinese partners.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- 1) Details of the events and activities of Dr Witchard’s AHRC Network Grant can be found at <http://translatingchina.info/>
- 2) Interview with Associate Director, Kandinsky Company, detailing Witchard’s contributions to the play, *Limehouse Nights*, can be found at <http://www.dimsum.co.uk/culture/rediscovering-limehouse-chinatown.html>
- 3) Correspondence with writer of the play *Fu Manchu Complex*, detailing impact of Witchard’s Lao She research and the AHRC China in Britain events, available on request
- 4) Correspondence with BBC Producer of *Dr Who Revisitations* detailing Witchard’s contribution available on request
- 5) Information on the staging of Lao She’s ‘Ding’ at the Beijing Bookworm International Literary Festival can be found at: <http://www.chinarhyming.com/2013/03/18/the-premier-of-ding-by-lao-she-beijing-international-literary-festival-2013/>
- 6) Witchard’s presentation at the Musées d’Extrême-Orient, Brussels, can be found at: <http://www.euchan.eu/fr/actualités> and further details of Witchard’s contribution via correspondence with the director of the Belgian Film Archive available on request
- 7) Witchard’s interviews with the *Beijinger Magazine* and Radio Television Hong Kong can be found at:  
<http://www.thebeijinger.com/category/blog-tags/anne-witchard>  
[http://podcast.rthk.hk/podcast/item\\_epi.php?pid=164&lang=zh-CN&id=28918](http://podcast.rthk.hk/podcast/item_epi.php?pid=164&lang=zh-CN&id=28918)
- 8) Correspondence detailing Witchard’s advisory role to the British East Asian Artists Group and the Equity Ethnic Minority Committee available on request
- 9) Correspondence detailing contribution to the Royal Asiatic Society available on request
- 10) Details of Witchard’s presentation to the Meridian Society can be found at <http://www.themeridiansociety.org.uk/mweb/pages/events.html>