

**Dickens, China and Tea: Commodity Conversations and the
Re-conception of National Identity between 1848 - 1870**

Submitted by Hannah Ruth Kathleen Lewis - Bill, to the University of Exeter as
a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, January 2015

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Abstract

Between 1848 – 1870 Dickens's novels became increasingly outward looking towards transnational spaces. Dickens's growing interest in China and Chinese commodities such as tea can be seen in his novels where contemporary anxieties about a close association with China and the Chinese is identified. The fraught trading and political relationships between Britain and China both during and after the Opium Wars and the opening of five new ports identifies this nation as one which Dickens perceived to pose a threat to British national identity. Looking at this relationship in terms of commodities, Chinese tea can therefore be a marker not only for a fetishised commodity but also as a representation of a nation.

This thesis argues that Dickens's representation of China through commodities such as tea presents a new way for British national identity to be conceptualised. Dickens's inclusion of Chinese commodities intersects with other foreign countries that, unlike China, formed part of the British Empire. China's independence facilitated a commercial freedom that was not available to nations that formed part of the Empire and, as a consequence, increased its commercial power. This thesis underscores some of the significant moments in Dickens's novels from 1848 -1870 to reveal a commodity dialogue between China and Britain which moves beyond the page and reflects an increasingly interconnected world which was both assimilated and ostracised. This provides a new understanding of Britain that, far from establishing its commercial autonomy, shows how it became increasingly reliant on China and the conversations that these commodities contribute to an understanding of Dickens's world. The thesis considers the productive readings of China in Dickens's fiction and the importance of geopolitical commodities in forming an understanding of nation and nationality, identity and culture, and Britain and Britishness through trade.

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Acknowledgments

This thesis could not have been completed without the assistance of many wonderful people and institutions, and it is here that I am delighted to extend my thanks to them.

I would like to thank the University of Exeter and the Centre for Victorian Studies which has been a place of great energy and discourse. I hope that, during my time at the university, I have contributed to this and the student community in some way.

The Chris Brooks Collection and the special collections have also been excellent and valuable resources. I would like to thank the librarians at the British Library. I would also like to thank the organisers of Dickens Journals Online, a Leverhulme-funded project, which has facilitated such ready access to the journals I have used.

I am grateful for the opportunities afforded by many of the conferences I have attended and the thought-provoking dialogues that these engendered. The conference held at the University of Buckingham led to the publication of an article forming an adapted part of Chapter 3. Another, held at King's College, London, forms an adapted part of Chapter 1. Conferences are such an excellent opportunity to meet with fellow Victorianists and I would like to thank those who I have spoken with whilst there.

I would like to thank my mentors and friends who, without their support, would have made this process a less engaging one. I wish to firstly thank Regenia Gagnier for her supportive, constructive and careful supervision from which I have benefited from enormously. I would also like to thank John Plunkett, Tricia Zakreski, Kate Hext, Ruth Livesey, Robert Patten, Murray Baumgarten, Holly Furneaux, Ana Parejo Vadillo, John Drew, Iain Crawford, and Jude Piesse. My friends outside academia have also been enormously supportive and I would like to particularly thank, Marilyn Thompson, Amelia Scott and Kate Wakely-Mulroney for their moments of wisdom, fun and thoughtfulness.

Last, but by no means least, I have been incredibly lucky to have two wonderful parents and their love, friendship and support has been vital over the past years. My mother has been an avid reader of this thesis throughout and I have so appreciated her time, thoughts and cups of tea! Sadly, my father passed away a short time ago and his presence during the final stages of this thesis has been missed greatly. He did not have the opportunities I have been afforded but ensured they were there for me. It is to him that this thesis is dedicated.

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Introduction



Confronted by an ever-growing and cosmopolitan London, Dickens's novels and journalism address the world beyond Britain and the foreign commodities fetishised by the British consumer. Outside the Twinnings shop, which conceivably Dickens walked past every day on the way to his office on Wellington Street, is this grouping of figures. Here in London, China is present in commodity form and, indeed, the statues commodify the physical body of China over the doorway. Looking at the image above, two Chinese merchants in traditional Chinese attire are stationed on either side of a golden lion. The Chinese merchants stand as representatives of what China brought to London, whilst the lion in the centre pays homage to Britain's insignia. Together this forms a representation of the trade that was being undertaken between Britain and China. The premises where the shop stood had originally been called 'Tom's Coffee House' and it came to meet 'the border between Westminster

and the City of London, an area that was newly populated with the aristocracy displaced by the Great Fire of London.’¹ Tom’s Coffee House later became known as Twinings Tea Shop and, in Twinings’ hands, supplied tea - as opposed to coffee which was an increasingly popular Chinese commodity. The shop provides evidence of China’s commodity presence in a British space, for over 300 years, and a reference to our continued reliance on this beverage. Henry Sirr notes in 1849 that:

It is stated that tea was originally introduced into Europe by the Dutch, in 1602, but the first official report we have of tea being used in England will be found in 12 Car. II. C. 23, as an act of parliament was passed in 1660 by which a tax was levied at eightpence per gallon on all tea made or sold in coffee-houses or taverns. We read in Pepys’s Diary September 25, 1661, - “I sent for a cup of tea, a Chinese drink, of which I had never drank before”.²

Whilst tea had been present as a popular beverage since the seventeenth century, the rise in the fetishisation of this Chinese product can be noted far more explicitly in the mid-nineteenth century and it is at this juncture that I would like to situate my use of the words fetishisation and fetishism. There are two main theorists who introduce the idea of fetishisation and fetishism, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud and I would like to firstly outline their understanding of the terms and then distinguish their understanding from my own. In *Das Capital*³, Marx suggests that

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labour is presented to them

¹ This quotation is taken from the Twinings Tea Shop website which outlines the history of the company: <http://www.twinings.co.uk/about-twinings/history-of-twinings> The tea shop is still present in the same location of the Strand and now houses a museum as well as a tea shop.

² Henry Charles Sirr, M.A., *China and the Chinese: Their Religion, Character, Customs, Manufactures: The Evils Arising from the Opium Trade With a Glance At Our Religious, Moral, Political and Commercial Intercourse with the Country*, (London: Wm. S. Orr & Co. Amen Corner, and 147, Strand, 1849) pp. 364-365.

³ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, ed. by McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 41.

as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labour.⁴

The quality of this relationship alongside its mysterious production finds its basis, as suggested by Marx here, by the way in which the labour that was utilised to construct the product becomes inseparable from the person who produced it. Marx continues to state that ‘Every owner of a commodity wishes to part with it in exchange for those commodities whose use-value satisfies some want of his.’⁵ In terms of Marx’s understanding of use-value and economy therefore, fetishisation and fetishism takes on a form that is directly related to what other products can be obtained by purchasing it and the ways in which such purchasing satisfies a desire for another commodity. This is in contrast to my use of the word fetishisation. Freud’s use of fetishisation is the appropriation of a different object’s function in providing satisfaction to the user. This fetishisation can be attached to any object but it has to be recognised that as that object is being used, its fetishised state produces some sort of arousal. Neither Marx’s or Freud’s use of the word fetishisation concurs with my own usage or understanding of the process, which I will outline briefly here in order to provide an understanding of one of the over arching principles in this thesis. My understanding of fetishisation relates quite directly to the ways in which an object, which for the purpose of this thesis is tea, can be seen to be increasingly desirable because of what it represents. Therefore rather than the object providing any physical gratification or social function – although arguably it forms a part of a social function in terms of the way in which it is drunk socially - the fetishisation or fetishism is placed solely in the very foreign-ness of the object and its place as being very ‘other’. As such it is the way in which its value, in terms of its acquisition from a foreign land, and the special regard with which it is held, that marks out this process and this thesis’s use of fetishisation and fetishism. In light of this interpretation, I also suggest that it is part of a process which underscores Dickens’s own anxieties about the strength certain commodities hold in reconceptualising a nation, and underscoring its potential power. As Edward Said has noted,

⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

The Orient is an integral part of European *material* civilisation and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.⁶

The focus upon 'material civilisation' engages with the ideas present in this thesis and the balancing of the West against the East in terms of cultural identity. It marks what this thesis suggests is a mid-nineteenth century development with regard to tea and China, and a reconception of national identity which is a process with which Dickens's novels can be seen to engage.

Dickens studies is a rich and diverse field and one with which I am pleased to be in dialogue. Whilst much excellent work has been undertaken on Dickens and India, Dickens and Europe, and Dickens and Emigration, thus far little work has been undertaken on Dickens and China. Klaudia Lee's forthcoming study looks at Chinese translations of Dickens's work and the ways in which Chinese translators worked to reconstitute these literary spaces to reflect Chinese ideals.⁷ Kay Li's work engages with the ways Chinese translations of Dickens's work reflect upon cultural mores but examines this in terms of framing Chinese social expectations.⁸ My research differs from existing scholarship in that it explores the geographical commodity interplay between Dickens and China in terms of trade and social politics and examines the ways in which this relationship poses a threat to British identity. By focussing on geopolitical commodities, such as tea, silk and opium, I reveal the ways in which trade, and the fetishisation of Chinese commodities, creates a complex social dialectic between Dickens and China.

The thesis will look chronologically at six of Dickens's novels: *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit*, *Our Mutual Friend* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* to construct a nuanced reading of the interplay between trade, commodities and politics. The reason for entering into this

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 2.

⁷ Klaudia Lee, *Cross Cultural Encounters: The Early Reception of Dickens in China, 1895-1915*, (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 2013).

⁸ Kay Li, 'Dickens and China: Contextual Interchanges in Cultural Globalization' in *Dickens Studies Annual* (37) ed. by Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, Anne Humphreys, and Michael Timko, (AMS Press, Inc., 2006).

dialogue at 1848 is that this is the first instance where the representation of China in Dickens's novels begins to peak. *Dombey and Son* is published a short time after the first Opium War (1839-1842) and before the second Opium War. As a result the thesis engages with the political, social and historical ramifications of Britain and China's relationship and the ways in which the complexities of these interactions in political, social and trading terms can be evidenced in the novels. Such periodisation also facilitates an engagement with key treaties such as the Treaty of Nanking (1842), the Second Opium War (1856-60) and the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). These moments in Sino-British relations in terms of treaty and war history can therefore be reflected upon alongside Dickens's publications between 1848-1870. By reflecting on these socio-political events Dickens's engagement with this locale and the presence of China in either geographical or commodity terms in the novel can be analysed to construct a nuanced reading of the novel in light of current affairs and ideas about nationhood. An entry into this dialogue through the Dickensian works I have selected will be referred to in constructing an argument about the increasing commercial strength of China, despite over-taxation, and the ways in which a key commodity, tea, engendered anxieties about British national identity and increasing interactions with abroad. As a result Chinese commodities such as tea, silk and opium form a central focus in this thesis. Dickens's inclusion of Chinese commodities reveals the presence and importance of such objects both within his work and in the world outside the novel.

This thesis considers the ways in which Chinese commodities appearing in Dickens's novels modify ideas of British identity and Britishness to form a more cosmopolitan view of Dickens and both his and his readership's engagement with the world. The thesis examines the representation of China through commodities such as tea, silk and opium, and reflects on what questions this raises about 'buying into' other cultures. This gives rise to further questions about the stability of British identity and the threat that China posed to the nation's sense of self. Whilst other nations Britain interacted with were either treated as Western equals or were part of the Empire, China holds a unique position in its unwillingness to bend to Western rule and in maintaining its

autonomy. Whilst the trading restrictions were increasingly restrictive for the Chinese, such policies ultimately reveal the ways in which the British bought into another culture, became increasingly reliant upon the 'Other' and conceptualised a foreign space. This reappraisal of Chinese cultural representation in Dickens's novels alongside Britishness and a British consumer culture offers an original reflection on the ways in which China can be seen to navigate British bureaucracy and how the novels manage the differing modes of reconceptualisation.

Whilst this thesis does refer briefly to Dickens's journalism, there is a concentrated consideration of the novels in which Chinese commodities appear. The journal articles referred to in this work are therefore used as a mode of framing the discourses that were occurring in Dickens's work, both inside the novel and outside it. There is quite clearly a reflection in Dickens's novels on the ways in which China is engaged with and the deleterious way in which British agency is being reframed and Dickens's journals serve, in this thesis, to underscore such dialogues.

Lastly, Dickens's understanding of the world beyond Britain has its foundation in a general distrust of the role that other nations might play in Britain's future. Whilst China – and indeed India and Africa too – is treated with scepticism and anxiety, such anxieties are not present in Dickens's treatment of all foreign locales; Continental Europe, for example, is viewed more positively and, whilst not always treated sympathetically as a locale, its people, I would argue, are treated in a far more positive way. Characters such as Cavalletto are treated with a great deal of sympathy and good humour, and even Rigaud, who is presented as the French villain of the piece, is identified with as a person. Even the way in which Cavalletto's language is described and the way he is spoken to by Mrs Plornish who speaks to him in what she perceives to be Italianised English with expressions such as 'E ope you no fright'⁹ and 'Ow you know im bad?'¹⁰, betray both a humour and amiability. In contrast descriptions of Chinese characters are far more broadly and critically constructed. Thinking, for example, of the opening scene of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, where the Chinese men and the Lascars are stretched out in a variety of poses, they are

⁹ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 604

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 604.

identified, not by name but by their place of origin. In contrast the place of origin is not the focal point when Dickens creates European Characters. This pattern of negatively depicting Chinese characters can be traced throughout the novels that this thesis examines and helps to construct a sense of the anxieties that Dickens's novels evince about such spaces and the commodities they produce.

The more balanced reflection of Dickens's representation of Europe can perhaps be traced to his European and Western travels. Works such as *Pictures from Italy*¹¹ and *American Notes*¹², which I recognise is not a European location but is still a western culture, and his trips to France and the Alps allow Dickens to deal with countries and cultures that are not so very different to his own and are, by proxy, acceptable. The Great Exhibition of 1851 also serves to bring together many nations, but some of those nations – namely China - were not responsible for representing their own identities, and so they create an almost false picture of the world which Dickens's novels and journalism corroborate.

As a result, Dickens's own travels play a part in the negative construction of non-European lands and this negativity and anxiety, is recognised and explored by this thesis.

In order to situate this thesis, the introduction will be divided into three parts, the first of which will consider the history of Britain's relationship with China. The second section will engage with a literature review of works that have informed this thesis and with which this thesis is in dialogue. The final section will form a methodological reflection on the ideologies that inform my thinking about Dickens and China.

Historicising and contextualising the relationship between Britain and China in Dickens's works.

Britain's relationship with China in the nineteenth century was both complex and fraught. The British desire to open up more modern ports and

¹¹ Charles Dickens, *Pictures From Italy*, ed. Kate Flint (London: Penguin, 1998)

¹² Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, ed. Patricia Ingham (London: Penguin, 2000)

allow for free trade between the newer ports of Amoy, Foo-Chow, Nanking, Shanghai and Ning-po¹³ led to a forced opening up of trading opportunities. Prior to the first Opium War of 1839 – 1842 a dispute occurred between Britain and China regarding trade and, in addition, the rights of the East India Company were revoked in 1834. Whilst British consumers were interested in Chinese goods such as tea and silk, the market for British goods in China was virtually non-existent, due to the fact that China was self-sufficient and trading restrictions meant that Britain was only able to pay with silver or gold. Trading in this way led to a deficit in silver and gold and meant that trade had the potential to be affected. The British, recognising an opportunity to provide opium, a commodity very much desired by the Chinese, began to trade in this drug with the merchants. In this way Britain became China's biggest and most powerful drug dealer. After Britain succeeded in the first Opium War, trade opportunities for Britain flourished with the provision of cottons and wools. As Cassel has noted:

The Qing Empire concluded its first two treaties with the British Empire in 1842-1843, followed by the United States and France the next year. In the following two decades, the Qing Empire would conclude a slew of treaties with other nations and colonial empires, eager to avail themselves of the same privileges as the Great Powers.¹⁴

The Treaty of Nanking (1842) which the above quotation makes indirect reference to ensured that whilst Britain had increased power and trade rights, the Chinese did not benefit. So as the Chinese nation expanded their wealth decreased. As Cassel again states:

The commercial treaties opened a series of coastal ports for trade with Western merchants and laid down regulations for the conduct of trade. allowed Western consular agents to reside in the new ports, where they could communicate directly with local authorities, and established fixed

¹³ These spellings of place names have been selected as they were in usage at the time of Dickens and as such differ from contemporary spellings of these locations.

¹⁴ Pär Kristoffer Cassel, *Grounds of Judgment: Extraterritoriality and Imperial Power in Nineteenth-Century China and Japan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 4.

rates for the tariffs that local authorities could levy on merchandise traded with the ports.¹⁵

Such unequal trading relationships served to give the British an advantage and also served to paint China negatively in the media. It is significant to note that: 'Prior to the Opium War, the Qing Empire granted foreigners far more legal autonomy than the contemporary Ottoman Empire did under the "capitulations".'¹⁶ That Britain determinedly pushed against these increased rights and continued to request greater trading flexibility marks a British desire for increased political and trading leverage in an area of the world where the commodities that were produced were increasingly popular. That China was able to maintain – to a large extent – its autonomy is particularly remarkable when one reflects on the ways in which British rule had authority over other parts of the globe, such as India and Africa. By evading attachment to the Empire, China enabled a focussed and clear trading drive that, whilst not procuring vast sums of money, left the British nation as dependent on its products as the Chinese had been on the opium brought over from the Empire. As has been observed by Yen p'ing Hao: 'The growth of the trade was fast, rising from 16,500 chests in 1847 to 37,000 chests in 1858.'¹⁷ This moment in Chinese trading success is why this thesis begins with Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, a point in Dickens's oeuvre that marks an increase of Chinese tea appearing on British shores and a rise in Chinese trading autonomy which, despite excessive taxation, maintained a thriving trade in the commodities it produced. Henry Sirr comments in 1849 that: 'The increasing importation into, and consumption of tea in England, render everything connected with its history, cultivation, and preparation for the market, matters of exceeding interest, not only to the merchant and scientific man, but to the British nation at large.'¹⁸

After the Second Opium War of 1856 – 1860, which began because of a British desire for increased trade opportunities and no tax on imported goods,

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 4.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

¹⁷ Yen-p'ing Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth – Century China: The Rise of Sino-Western Mercantile Capitalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) p. 130.

¹⁸ Henry Charles Sirr, M.A., *China and the Chinese: Their Religion, Character, Customs, Manufactures: The Evils Arising from the Opium Trade With a Glance At Our Religious, Moral, Political and Commercial Intercourse with the Country*, p. 345.

China was opened further. Hao observes that: 'After the Convention of Peking in 1860, the Western powers adopted a 'cooperative' foreign policy toward China, which resulted in the decades of stable Sino-Western relations.'¹⁹ The stability towards the later part of the century enables a consideration of the ways in which Dickens's fiction reflected an increasing anxiety about the dependence Britain had on the 'Other'.

Origins

Over the course of this thesis, I have frequently been asked why I have focussed on Chinese tea and questioned as to what it is that makes it clear that it is Chinese tea, and not Indian tea, that Dickens is engaging with. I intend to justify here why I have focussed my research in this direction and what has caused me to identify Chinese tea as opposed to Indian tea in Dickens's novels. This will also underpin the methodology involved in establishing this distinction.

Firstly and most importantly, in a thesis about Dickens and Chinese commodities this assertion can be made by reflecting, as will be shown throughout this thesis, on the pairing of Chinese allusions alongside references to tea. Additionally, specific tea blends such as Lapsang Souchong and green teas are referenced in Dickens's novels, as opposed to Indian blends, and this underscores a Dickensian focus on Chinese tea as opposed to Indian tea. There is also a historicist approach to this reading which is situated in the study of Robert Fortune's 1852 text, which I will also engage with. It was an inconvenient reality in the nineteenth century that Chinese tea was particularly popular and fetishised by the consumer and despite, as I will discuss, tea plantations being established in India, tea from this place of origin was not fetishised in the same way that Chinese tea was. I would suggest that the decreased fetishisation was due to India's place in the Empire and therefore not being 'Othered' sufficiently. That China was not part of the Empire creates a

¹⁹ Yen-p'ing Hao, *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth – Century China: The Rise of Sino-Western Mercantile Capitalism*, p.138.

problematic relationship with the commodity both societally and in Dickens's novels. China's sense of autonomy, despite trading impediments and high taxation, means that the dialogue Dickens creates is often formed from a highly historical perspective. Both of these reflections recognise the necessity of such trading relationships but equally the dangers.

Hao has stated that: 'One important reason for the commercialisation of agricultural products was that Chinese tea was ever-increasing in demand on the European and American markets during the late Ch'ing period.'²⁰ The ever-increasing desire for Chinese tea was not just a British phenomenon, although in terms of Dickens and Chinese commodities this is the focus that this thesis takes. America was also concerned about the commodity and the people which led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Whilst the trade in tea involved a wide variety of trading houses, Hao notes that:

Large mercantile houses such as Jardine, Matheson & Co, and Dent & Co., had their own ships which regularly carried tea from Foochow to European, especially British, ports during the fifties and sixties.²¹

This reflects an increasing commodity requirement elicited by the British consumer during the period of Dickens's writing that I am reflecting on and engages with a trade that can be recognised in these novels. As such the:

...flourishing business in upcountry tea purchases in Fukien in 1855 was evident in two ways. First, in addition to Foochow, other tea purchasing ports emerged along the Fukien coast such as Amoy.... Second, the demand for tea was so heavy that not only superior and common tea was sold out, but also some "rubbish" tea was shipped from Amoy to Hong Kong.²²

²⁰ Ibid., p.139.

²¹ Ibid., p.140.

²² Ibid., p.141.

The mass commercialisation of the Chinese tea trade was a direct result of increasing British, and more broadly European, requirements. In many ways this problematises the reading of tea as a luxury commodity, as posited by Julie E. Fromer in her work, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England* and instead situates it as a wider part of common British life. The fetishisation of Chinese tea, which is evinced both societally and in Dickens's novels, is therefore participating in broader socio-historical conversations relating to ideas about trade, geography and history. This proposition can be underscored by the increasing importation of Chinese tea and:

The net result of these activities was a rapid increase in the export of tea from China. It rose from an annual volume of 20,000,000 pounds at the beginning of the century to a peak of 250,000,000 pounds in the 1880s, when tea represented three-fifths of China's exports and 88% of the world's exported tea.²³

The statistical evidence therefore corroborates this reading of commodities in Dickens's novels and validates the argument that this thesis makes about the increasing commodity inter-dependence that can be witnessed increasing throughout Dickens's oeuvre. As such Ross Forman notes:

The great expansion of empire and the acceleration of global trade mean that during the Victorian period, foodstuffs (and consequently, consumption patterns) were circulating to, from, and between the colonies and the extra-colonial world in ways they never had before. Tea became one of the world's most heavily traded commodities, with far-reaching social and political consequences. The expansion of commodity culture – showcased by the Great Exhibition of 1851...led to fundamental changes in the ways that those inside Britain saw their relationship to the world at large, not to mention the ways that those outside of Albion structured, or were forced to structure, their everyday lives.²⁴

²³ Ibid., p.162.

²⁴ Ross Forman, 'Introduction: Cooking Culture: Situating Food and Drink in the Nineteenth Century', in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 36, no 2 (2008) accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40347194> accessed on 9th February 2013, p. 364.

Whilst the Great Exhibition of 1851 certainly forms a pivotal aspect of the fascination with global commodification, it is worth reflecting that a rise in commodity culture can be witnessed in the years prior to the Exhibition as the interconnected and focussed trading relationships that had been established prior to this date facilitated and mediated these commodity dialogues. The conversations that these commodities elicited therefore, as Forman recognises, reveal the ways in which Britain's identity becomes moulded, in part, by the world beyond 'Albion'. Additionally, Paul Young notes that 'the Great Exhibition was understood to expose to view a barbaric world of Oriental extremes, thus revealing the spectacular nature of the temporal distance that separated the East from the West.'²⁵ Thus, whilst the East was thrown into light and 'exposed', at the same time, Chinese commodities became increasingly desirable and purchased for their exotic potential which was, I suggest, culturally subversive.

The trade in Chinese tea was not necessarily based on authentic traditional, Chinese modes of production. The tea the British drank was prepared differently and was adulterated in two ways: firstly by the introduction of dyes in China and then by the British with the inclusion of milk. Thus the fetishised object imbued with Chinese cultural authenticity was remodelled twice in its production. Such inauthenticity is problematic as it detracts from what the British consumer was buying into. Additionally, as Robert Fortune reported from his tea sourcing mission, tea that the Chinese merchant procured for the British consumer underwent certain modifications to satisfy their aesthetic desires:

Having procured a portion of Russian Blue, he threw it into a bowl, much like a chemist's mortar, and crushed it into a very fine powder. At the same time a quantity of gypsum was produced and burned in the charcoal fires which were then roasting the teas.... It seems perfectly ridiculous that a civilised people should prefer these dyed teas to those of a natural blue. No wonder the Chinese consider the natives of the west to be a race of 'barbarians'.²⁶

²⁵ Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order*, ed. By Joseph Bristow (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 120.

²⁶ J.A.G Roberts, *China Through Western Eyes: The Nineteenth Century* (Gloucestershire: Alan Stroud Publishing Limited, 1991) p. 90.

The idea that the Chinese, quite conversely to British popular opinion, consider the West to be a nation of 'barbarians' repositions the conception of British culture in Chinese culture. This is an anxiety that can be recognised in the inclusion of tea in Dickens's work alongside a sense that, whilst ideas about the nation and nationhood are stable when in the home country and defined by those boundaries, once the commodity has moved past the boundaries of the home nation then identity can be modified by cultural perceptions in the new home state. As such British national identity was vulnerable in as many ways as Chinese culture, perhaps more so, due to the influx of foreign commodities on British shores. The British are therefore buying into a false reality of Chinese identity and this, as Fortune moves on to reflect, is done purposefully

One day an English gentleman in Shanghae, being in conversation with some Chinese from the green-tea country, asked them what reasons they had for dyeing the tea... They acknowledged that the tea tasted much better when prepared without having any such ingredients added, and that they never drank dyed teas themselves, but justly remarked that, as foreigners seemed to prefer having a mixture of Russian Blue and gypsum with their tea, to make it uniform and pretty, and as these ingredients were cheap enough, the Chinese had no objection to supply them, especially as such teas always reached a higher price! ²⁷

In as much as the British were implementing unfair and unreasonably high taxes on the Chinese, this was being moderated by the Chinese who were undermining the authenticity of the product for a British consumer despite recognising that the tea 'tasted much better' without the addition of colourants. The British predilection for dyed teas questions notion of authenticity and the moulding of Chinese commodities to the British eye. There is an inter-textuality therefore in the dialogues this raises about the ways in which the British bought in to a false reality of a global commodity. In many ways this increases Chinese autonomy, as the nation is able to sell a fetishised global product whilst maintaining the authenticity in the homeland. This is a level of commodity

²⁷ Robert Fortune, *A Journey to the Tea Countries of China Including Sung-lo and the Bohea Hills; with a Short Notice of the East India Company's Tea Plantations in the Himalaya Mountains*, (London: John Murray, 1852) p. 92-94.

agency that Britain did not have and marks out Dickensian anxieties about an occluded sense of Britishness.

The man responsible for attempting to move tea plants from China to India and, therefore, into the Empire was Robert Fortune. As J.A.G Roberts has noted:

Robert Fortune was sent to China by the court of directors of the East India Company to obtain varieties of the tea plant and native manufactures... His comments indicate that tea production in China had been adapted to suit the European market, albeit at the cost of dangerous adulteration.²⁸

His journey was documented in his work *A Journey to the Tea Countries of China; including Sung-lo and the Bohea Hills; with a short Notice of the East India Company's Tea Plantations in the Himalaya Mountains*, in which he documents the aims of his trip, how he dressed as a Chinese national, and how he stole tea plants to take to India. Fortune relates how his:

...object of coming thus far north was to obtain seeds and plants of the tea shrub for the Hon. East India Company's plantations in the north-west provinces of India. It was a matter of great importance to procure them from those districts in China where the best teas were produced, and I now set about accomplishing this object.²⁹

It is quite apparent that such a strategy was employed in an attempt to deny the Chinese a lucrative trade in the tea that was its main export commodity. There is recognition in his text of where the 'best teas' were produced and an endeavour to traverse vast spaces to procure them. Fortune then moves on to express how he went about tricking the Chinese into believing he was Chinese and how the Chinese men who accompanied him only stated that he 'should discard my English costume and adopt the dress of the country. I knew that this

²⁸ Roberts, *China Through Western Eyes: The Nineteenth Century*, p. 84.

²⁹ Fortune, *A Journey to the Tea Countries of China Including Sung-lo and the Bohea Hills; with a Short Notice of the East India Company's Tea Plantations in the Himalaya Mountains*, p. 20.

was indispensable if I wished to accomplish the object in view, and readily acceded to the terms'.³⁰ The process of falsely posing as a Chinese man raises interesting questions about cultural and physical differences between nationalities which in turn feeds into Dickensian anxieties about identity. Fortune is proud that he fools Chinese merchants by shaving his hair and adopting national dress. If modifying one's appearance in such minor ways allows for a temporary flux in cultural identity, then identity more broadly is a lot less flexible than is necessarily comfortable. It also problematises Dickens's determined marking out of the cultural and physical differences that allow one to know that the Chinese are 'Other'. Dickens's works play into many of these nineteenth century stereotypes associated with Chinese people; however, if one can hide one's identity abroad, what is to say that the Chinese cannot modify their appearance at home in Britain? Identity is set up in terms of opposites much less than similarities and when similarities are found then there is a problematic identity flux which renders the Chinese 'Other' an invisible threat at home. Thus the Chinese commodities featured within the novel are far more problematic because they can be modified to 'fit' in the British home. If such invisible transformations can occur, with Chinese products able to morph into a state that Britain was prepared to receive them, and then be integrated, British identity can be seen to be under threat in a new way. This threat to British national integrity is a central dimension of this thesis in terms of Dickens and China. Whilst tea was grown in India and Fortune transported more than 20,000 plants, he states that:

The important objects of my mission have been brought to successful termination. Upwards of twenty-thousand tea plants, eight first-rate manufacturers, and a large supply of implements were procured from the finest tea-districts of China and conveyed in safety to the Himalayas.³¹

Chinese tea was still desired more and prized more highly than Indian tea, due to the societal privileging of its authenticity and origin. This underscores the threat that China posed in trading terms and that the assumed projective relationship is in reality reflexive, with both parties becoming reliant on the other

³⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

³¹ Ibid., p.vi.

for the commodities that were generated both physically and in the space of Dickens's novels.

Methodologies and scholarship

In a work of this scope it is necessary to limit certain other frames of reference, not because they are not fruitful but in order to maintain both the manageability of the project and to maintain focus. Whilst Dickens's fiction reflects on a range of transnational spaces, all of which have commodities that are referenced, this thesis focusses solely on Chinese commodities and China, and at times contrasts this representation with members of Britain's Empire. The thesis is divided into six chapters, each of which develop the notion of an increasing recognition in Dickens's novels of British commodity fetishisation of Chinese products and the ways in which such relationships problematise conceptions of identity. In Chapter 1 I establish a Dickensian representation of trade with China and the ways in which such trade can be seen as emblematic of the increasing interactions with China, as well as the movement of character to this locale. Constructing this argument I reflect on the ways in which Dickens's novel conceptualises trade and travel in China for the reader to develop a framework of controlling the nation and its production in the novel's space. In Chapter 2 I reflect on the ways in which the movement of characters progressed, alongside the key Chinese commodity marker of tea, in addition to the ways in which other transnational spaces were made to be more hospitable and fruitful for British characters or spaces that can be viewed as places of redemption. I also reflect on the rising consumption of tea and the subsequent decline in consumption of coffee to question the ways in which Britain was becoming increasingly dependent on Chinese culture. The issue of British identity, nation and nationhood began to be explored further and in Chapter 3 I reflect on the ways in which geographical spaces were mapped out in the home as a way of mapping the world beyond Britain for the readership. In Chapter 4, the thesis considers the trade in opium and recently resettled Britons from China alongside the ways in which language and a curiosity about Chinese culture was conceptualised by Dickens for the readership. Chapter 5 considers the

commodification of Chinese products under the watchful gaze of Wegg and Venus and their plentiful cups of tea. This considers the ways in which tea could be seen as physically affecting to the British body – both physically and politically – and presents a Dickensian representation of the negative influence of China on Britain via this commodity. My final chapter develops a reading of positive and negative Chinese commodities and looks to situate Dickens's increasing inclusion of them as an expression of an anxiety about Britain's reliance on the 'Other'. These chapters form to present a cohesive argument about the conceptualisation of China and tea, and to satisfy questions that might arise about the stability of British identity in light of an increasing reliance on China. Moreover, they present a new and original framework exploring the presence of China in Dickens's novels and the ways in which cultural flexibility and flux can be read. Dickens's representation of China in his novels and the other contemporary examples cited suggests that China was evading progress and lacking development, which is disingenuous. This thesis explores the inclusion of tea, an essentially Chinese commodity appropriated as a British commodity, and argues that it speaks more centrally to an anxiety about the erosion of British autonomy and identity. That British trade with China was being conducted under such unequal terms has been acknowledged but, simultaneously, China's unwillingness to bend to British will marks the start of the rise of this global superpower. Dickens's inclusion of China then becomes increasingly significant in the discourse surrounding a re-situated British identity that was vulnerable to commodity pressure and an increasing desire to reach out to fetishised objects.

Over the past few years various studies have interested themselves in either thing theory or commodity culture and valuable works by Catherine Waters, Elaine Freedgood, John Plotz and Bill Brown all feature in this thesis at various junctures. The arguments posited by these academics form part of a broader dialectic which this thesis has benefited from and which I engage with. I want to situate firstly these critical contributions in terms of their specialisms and their difference to my own work in an endeavour to frame the debates and current discourses surrounding this critical reading. Finally I will reflect on possibly the most central contribution in terms of this thesis, the work of Julie E. Fromer in her work *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*.

Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things: Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, establishes a framework for considering the ways in which 'things' have been overlooked and the ways in which 'the mid-Victorian novel is a particularly rich site for tracing the fugitive meanings of apparently non-symbolic objects.'³² The pursuance of non-symbolic objects was a particularly fruitful notion in terms of this research and its participation in dialogues about objects in the novels. That ultimately these commodities are loaded with symbolism and intent is something that Freedgood explores and my work also engages with. Whilst the discussion revolves around the materiality of the 'thing', which honours Bill Brown's work *Thing Theory*³³, the readings of such objects lead to a reading of the missed messages within the novels presented by the objects, and this is a trajectory this thesis also considers. The limitations, however, of this reading, and what I believe this thesis contributes to furthering this discourse, is that Freedgood's focus is on 'things' from within the Empire. Whilst this serves to open up dialogues surrounding Empire studies and dialogues surrounding the oppressive nature of the Empire, it neglects those nations with which the readership engaged and which were depended upon. Chinese commodities, for example, enter into a discourse with commodities from the Empire but they are framed differently. Chinese commodities have autonomy that moves beyond the British realms and whilst excessive taxation stifled progress it did not prevent it.

Grace Moore's work *Dickens and Empire* produces a valuable way of framing Dickens's racist materials which, whilst it does not deny their presence, seeks to situate them in a broader social context. The ability to recognise the historical rationale behind such Dickensian works has been valuable to my research and to navigating the often fraught relationship between Dickens's racist journalism and his commodity references within the novels with reference to China.

Catherine Waters's work, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words*, makes a valuable contribution to this discourse and reflects in a series of thought-provoking ways about what such commodities say about their

³² Elaine Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things Fugitive Meaning in the Victorian Novel*, (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2006) p. 4.

³³ Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: Object Matter in American Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003)

inclusion in different aspects of nineteenth-century life. In particular, her chapter on 'Worldly Goods' brings to the fore the ways that:

As foreign goods are shown to get together in *Household Words*, they display a vibrant transnational dynamic that raises questions about the effects of imperialism, and about the relationship between people and things in the formation of national and cosmopolitan identities.³⁴

This provides a productive means of conceptualising these commodity transactions and the ways in which, in *Household Words*: 'descriptions of global trade, commodities mediate between nations: substituting for those who produce and consume them, they effect an international sociability.'³⁵ The commodity conversations that Waters notes in *Household Words* move, I argue, beyond the journal, which is her focus, and into the novels' spaces. Such Chinese commodities are transmitted beyond an international sociability and into a historical, political and societal discourse that surrounds not only anxieties about Britain and Britishness but additionally the inclusion of Chinese cultural markers in the dialectic. Sabine Clemm's work also contributes to discourse about nation and nationhood in *Household Words*, but considers this more specifically in relation to key historical moments. The connections that can be forged between such historical moments is, in this thesis, used to establish a way of thinking about Dickens's cultural understanding of the world beyond Britain and the ways in which, during the period of 1848 – 1870, such historical moments are managed in his works, and how they affect trade and trading relationships.

Julie E. Fromer's work, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*, quite naturally intersects with my own research whilst working towards a different objective. In her work Fromer reflects on the British tea table and the

³⁴ Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods*, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008) p. 103.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

ways that tea mutates from 'a foreign commodity into a product of the British Empire.'³⁶ Beyond this she also reflects that:

While Victorian tea histories exhibit confidence in the ability of tea to unify and fortify the British people, they remain anxious about the foreign source of tea. Dependence on a "national beverage" produced outside the bounds of empire raised anxieties about ingestion and fears of permeable cultural, political and physical boundaries.³⁷

Her understanding of tea and of relationships with tea looks specifically at the materiality and processes of consuming tea, enabling her to build up a dialogue about the process of taking tea in relation to the Empire. The permeability of 'cultural, political and physical boundaries' is a concept that this thesis will engage with in relation to China. Fromer recognises the various roles that tea plays in understandings of Britishness and foreignness, which are productive and which this thesis mirrors. Whilst it traverses this relationship in terms of tea and its position in British society, the study has a clear absence in relating the important historical, trading and geographical considerations. This is something this thesis addresses with regard to Chinese tea and its position in Dickens's novel.

It is my endeavour within this thesis to reflect on the ways in which Dickens's inclusion of Chinese transnational commodities intersect with other foreign countries which, unlike China, formed part of the British Empire. This study underscores some of the significant moments in Dickens's novels from 1848 -1870 to reveal a commodity dialogue between China and Britain which moves beyond the page and reflects an increasingly interconnected world, which had at once been assimilated and ostracised. The contribution this thesis provides is to a new understanding of Britain that, far from establishing its commercial autonomy, became increasingly reliant on China, and the conversations that these commodities contribute to an understanding of

³⁶ Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture* p. 115 includes Julie E Fromer 'A Typically English Brew': Tea Drinking, Tourism and Imperialism in Victorian Literature' in *Nineteenth Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space from the Victorian Age to the American Century*, ed. Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003) p.99.

³⁷ Julie E. Fromer, 'Deeply Indebted to the Tea – Plant: Representations of English National Identity in Victorian Histories of Tea' in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 36, No 2 (2008) p. 534 accessed on 17. 08. 2014 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40347203>

Dickens's world. Ultimately it considers the productive readings of China in Dickens's fiction and the importance of geopolitical commodities in forming an understanding of nation and nationality, identity and culture, and Britain and Britishness through trade.

Chapter 1

'The world was very busy now, in sooth, and had a lot to say.'³⁸ The growth of commodity culture in *Dombey and Son*

Dickens's conclusion of *Dombey and Son* in 1848 signified not only the end of the novel but also a period of British cultural flux. The novel appeared at a time when British identity at home and abroad was a central concern, alongside the notion of an increasingly interconnected world. Published in 19 serialised parts between 1st October 1846 and 1st April 1848, the novel was received positively by the readership. Globalisation was afoot and the world for the British was becoming larger. This was also true for Dickens as members of his family travelled across the globe. Dickens sent his sons abroad and away from the homeland: Charlie to China, Walter to India and Alfred to Australia. Dickens's son Walter, like his grandfather John, struggled with debt and Dickens sent him to India to try and improve his prospects; unfortunately this was not the success he had hoped and he died there. Dickens did not view the world beyond Britain as being without possibilities and this is particularly true with regard to emigration. That Dickens saw emigration as a potentially transformative process is evidenced also through his charitable work with Angela Burdett-Coutts, who sent fallen women to Australia and Canada. This will be considered further in Chapter 2, with reference to *David Copperfield*.

Whilst *Dombey and Son* identifies key Chinese commodities and their infinite interest to the nineteenth-century consumer, they are used as cultural markers and, as such they become representative – be this accurate or inaccurate – of the locale. Jeff Nunokawa considers this in terms of advertisement and suggests that:

[i]n a book like *Dombey and Son*, the commodity form doesn't need the agency of advertising to make itself known; its native talents are their own publicity. According to the view of the Dickens novel, the commodity is not merely advertised or exhibited; it is itself already advertisement and exhibition.³⁹

³⁸ Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed by Andrew Sanders (London: Penguin, 2002) p. 877.

³⁹ Jeff Nunokawa, *The Afterlife of Property, Domestic Security and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) p. 47.

This is a highly productive way of considering the commodities produced by China in *Dombey and Son*. Whilst Nunokawa's reading of commodities in *Dombey and Son* considers these in domestic terms and in relation to personal property, my reading of the novel considers the commodities in trading terms and foregrounds the effect they have on British identity. Nunokawa's discussion of commodities in terms of 'advertisement' and 'exhibition' is fruitful for my own approach to the novel. If the commodities are able to facilitate an advertisement of the locale independently then their inclusion in the novel becomes even more highly charged. The placement of tea in the narrative can, therefore, be read as a way of shaping cultural awareness and emphasising the power and influence of foreign locales, such as China, on Britain and Britishness. This also engenders questions about the stability of British identity and the influence of other cultures that have the potential to modify traditional cultural and social mores. This highlights the potential threat that can be read into the representation of China in the novel.

As the World Trade Organisation has posited:

One valuable lesson from history is that globalisation has not been a smooth process. It has often been marked by periods of accelerated integration (as observed in the 19th century and in the second half of the 20th century) and by periods of dramatic reversals... sometimes with costly consequences.⁴⁰

Whilst Britain's control of the East India Company and the attached empires was strong, certain parts of the globe resisted British control in an endeavour to enact some sense of agency. The 'marked period of accelerated integration' recognised by the World Trade Organisation during this period was in terms of trade and the ways in which the interconnected nature of the globe could be fashioned. The globalisation 'problem' was that through these interconnected nations and the relationships they undeniably generated the home population, both in a literal sense of Britain and in the broader sense of Europe, became a

⁴⁰ http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/wtr08-2b_e.pdf p. 1.

closer problem that co-existed during the rise of the increasingly globalised world.

Whilst both the press and Dickens recognised problems abroad, troubles at home were also apparent. The Irish Potato Famine, which had begun in advance of the novel's publication in 1845, was still on-going. In addition the French revolution of 1848 occurred post-publication and was accompanied by a series of revolutions across Europe. Revolutions occurring so close to British shores were a concern and posed a threat to British stability. Dickens remarked in a letter to Emile De La Rue that 'I have never known anything at all like the sensation that is made here by the French Revolution.'⁴¹ Whilst instability in the New World had come to be expected, instability in the Old World was even more worrying. The European revolutions identified issues surrounding nation and nationhood, identity and independence, and this was something that Dickens's work responded to. Dickens's work additionally identifies a time when trade and the economy were becoming increasingly unpredictable, as evinced by Sol's dying trade in *Dombey and Son*. Global commodities were becoming increasingly popular and China was becoming an ever-growing provider to Britain of key commodities such as tea, silk and chinaware.

Elaine Freedgood, in her compelling work *The Ideas in Things*, moves the reader to consider objects contained within the Victorian novel and asserts that:

The Victorian novel describes, catalogues, quantifies, and in general showers us with things: post chaises, handkerchiefs, moonstones, wills, riding crops, ships' instruments of all kinds, dresses of muslin, merino and silk, coffee, claret, cutlets – cavalcades of objects threaten to crowd the narrative right off the page.⁴²

This sets out very neatly the ways in which different commodities featured in the novel's space and are cultural markers. However, I dispute her notion of 'crowding' in terms of the narrative space. Instead I recognise a crowding of an ever-competitive marketplace that was receiving products from both the Empire

⁴¹ To Emile De La Rue, 29 February 1848, *Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. V, ed. by Graham Storey and K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) p. 254.

⁴² Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things*, p.1.

and beyond. The Opium War of 1839-1842, the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 and the opening of the five ports of Canton, Amoy, Fuchow, Ningpo and Shanghai enabled increasing British interaction in trading terms, though at what cost to British independence or Chinese financial security. In many ways there is a dialogue occurring beyond the pages of the novel. In Dickens's work this is informed by journalism: both his own and that of others. Grace Moore's work similarly and interestingly considers the ways in which Dickens was engaging in a critique of colonial spaces but does not take into consideration China and Dickens, which is where this work differs. Without the work of Elaine Freedgood, Catherine Waters, Grace Moore, Bill Brown, Priti Joshi and Sabine Clemm, this exciting field would not have been opened up in the ways that it has, and offered me various potential ways in which to read and reconsider this hitherto unexplored dimension of the Dickens novels with a particular focus on China. Through a series of close readings I am able to construct an argument about the ways in which trade, statistics and commodities alter the ways in which such spaces can be engaged with in Dickens's novels. This enables me to explore the ways in which this layering of commodity markers facilitates a reflection on the increasing importance of geopolitical commodities and the representation of transnational communities in the novel. This chapter, and this work as a whole, identify a series of connected references to commodities within the novel which can then be used to create a cohesive transnational discourse. I will also consider the intentionality of the inclusion of these objects on the part of Dickens and, whilst this may be a contentious issue, I will argue that the placement of these objects necessitates and, most importantly, validates this reading.

Dickens's childhood reading matter can be seen to have influenced his conception of faraway lands and, in later life, informed notions about travel. In his youth his reading tended towards texts considering faraway lands and as Claire Tomalin in her most recent biography states:

They were hefty eighteenth century travel books and novels; Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Smollett's *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle* and *Humphrey Clinker*; also Mrs Inchbald's collection of farces, some volumes of *Tatler* and *The Spectator*, and fairy stories, the *Arabian Nights* and *The Tales of the Genii*. Catching the light of the long summer evenings as he sat

alone at the top of the house, he travelled, suffered and triumphed with the heroes of the small print, his imagination free of constraint.⁴³

This lack of 'constraint' refers, I would suggest, not only to the powers of imagination but also the ways in which geographical boundaries are constructed. The mapping of lands from the eighteenth century novels and the conception of cultures modifies his opinion of those same locales in a nineteenth century reading. Dickens refers frequently to *The Arabian Nights*⁴⁴, both in his letters and within his novels, and the characters in *Dombey and Son* also use well-known novels and texts as frames of reference to construct a Dickensian map of the world.

This chapter will firstly consider the ways that ships, commodities and travel are presented within the novel's narrative. By referring closely to statistics I will build up a profile of a world which seemingly contracted through improvements in travel and was then affected by the increasing reliance on foreign commodities. This will then move further into a consideration of India and the East India Company as the antithesis of China and the ways in which distances are conceived through an abstract mapping of textual spaces. Finally, but I believe most significantly, I will use Dickens's references to China to build up an exciting and new reading of a layering of commodities that pre-introduces the country through subtle commodity references and a series of inverted sentences which situate China firmly in Dickens's novels, and is an area of Dickens studies which has until now been overlooked. It will be this focus on China that will be especially developed throughout each chapter to show an increasing interest in this locale and its potential for eroding British national identity.

Ships, Commodities and Travel

Ships and the passage of vessels bound for abroad, or ships returning with precious cargo, provide a focal point for *Dombey and Son*, and it is this pattern

⁴³ Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens A Life*, (London: Penguin, 2011) p. 11.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, *The Arabian Nights, 1001 Nights*, ed by Robert Mack (London: Penguin, 2010)

of trade, change and exchange that is of particular interest. The port of London saw 150,000 ships arriving into the docks in 1845 and sent out as many again, either to export objects from Britain or to collect items to return to eager British consumers at home. This is not to neglect the port at Liverpool, a place where ships sailed out to America and Canada and therefore a space that became important in terms of the emigration narrative. Time and the necessity for increasingly rapid trade are fundamental in recognising the complexity of relationships abroad. *Dombey and Son* is at the beginning of this Dickensian journey and the ways in which such geopolitical commodity reliance is shown is developed throughout Dickens's oeuvre. Dickens does not construct a harmonious picture of the world beyond Britain but during the course of his oeuvre, as will be explored in this work as a whole, seeks to demonstrate the ways in which an increasingly negative picture, which becomes more and more intensely focussed on China, is developed. Dickens begins to acknowledge nineteenth century British life as being part of a global framework that was reliant on outside commodity assistance and the ways in which this threatens British commodity independence. The World Trade Organisation recognises that the 'two most recent episodes of globalisation were characterised by increased integration in trade, capital flows and movement of labour.'⁴⁵ This increased integration, particularly with regard to the arrival of foreign commodities arriving on the British docks, and the trade that facilitated this, highlights the anxieties present in Dickens's works about British cultural sustainability.

Dickens also recognises the potential for such relationships to jeopardise British independence as certain commodities were increasingly fetishised. As Robert Douglas Fairhurst has stated:

With so many possible futures opening up the public mood was far more ambivalent excited and wary, optimistic and sceptical – and Dickens, for all his commitment to progress, was quick to recognise how dangerous it would be to put the driving forces of science and technology in the wrong hands.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/anrep_e/wtr08-2b_e.pdf p. 1

⁴⁶ Robert Douglas Fairhurst, *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2011) p. 320.

Fairhurst focusses here on the dangers of science and technology, which of course trade connects with, and it is interesting to reflect on the ways in which commodities feed into such relationships. Whilst technology brought advances in terms of transport, machinery and production, it also brought with it progress in terms of the spaces that were brought ever nearer.

The occurrence of the First Opium War of 1839 - 1842 intensified the distrust between Britain and China. Britain was keen to force open the ports which would ease their passage under their own terms. As Nick Knight asserts: 'After 1840, Western colonial powers compelled China into ever-widening networks of interaction, communication and exchange with the industrializing and capitalist west.'⁴⁷ These networks served to force conversations between China and Britain regardless of the cost to Chinese, and perhaps significantly to this project, British identity. Ultimately the Chinese faced defeat in keeping their ports closed due to trading restrictions. The Chinese were forced to trade in far from advantageous conditions, both in terms of taxation and trade rights in order to ensure Britain was appeased. That Dickens focussed in *Dombey and Son* so intently on the commodities China produced and the routes the ships took should come as less of a surprise as new routes were now open to the British, and this could be seen as a Dickensian pride in Britain's global fortitude. The trade in opium as opposed to silver was hugely advantageous to the British, but resulted in financial loss for the Chinese. The trade in tea was perhaps preferable for the Chinese traders; however, the high rate of taxation at 180 per cent meant that again the Chinese were losing out financially. This can be identified even more clearly when one considers that Britain was only subject to a 6 per cent tax on imported articles to China.

That Britain refigured and conceptualised China in this way shows a determination to ensure it maintained its own supremacy at any cost. The

⁴⁷ Nick Knight, *Imagining Globalisation in China*, (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2008)

desirability of tea meant that ships' journeys were subject to intense pressure and by 1800:

...the average East Indiaman could carry 1,200 tons of cargo. The trading pattern for China tea usually meant the East Indiamen set sail from Britain in January, sailed round the Cape of Good Hope at the southern-most tip of Africa and arrived in China in September. They would load up that year's tea harvest and set off again.⁴⁸

The journey that is described here to procure tea for the British consumer marks out not only the route, but also the determination to fulfil the desires of the British consumer. Walter's journey and meeting with the Chinese ship is also highly poignant serving as it does, to map out the world of the seas in conceptual terms for the readership. Walter's continued journeying to China both after the shipwreck and again towards the end of the novel marks out the trading relationship with China that Britain was increasingly reliant upon. Not only does this fictional character travel the readership travels with him through the pages of the novel encouraging questions about the global marketplace.

In addition to this Alistair Pennycook has proposed that:

Issues of modernity are also relevant to this discussion primarily in terms of Worldliness questioning the assumptions of modernity, the so called Enlightenment, the hegemony of Western thought in the world and the tools and concepts that have been used to understand the world.⁴⁹

This recognises the ways in which 'Worldliness' was conceived and equally how such a re-conception could potentially alter the comprehension of the world beyond the West for a Western thinker. The use of the words 'tools' and 'concepts' addresses not only the theoretical tools but also cultural tools, such as the commodities that were becoming increasingly necessary to the British lifestyle. Such consideration of commodities such as tea is as much a comment

⁴⁸ <http://www.tea.co.uk/page.php?id=97>

⁴⁹ Alastair Pennycook, 'Rethinking Origins and Localizations in Global Englishes' in *Contending with Globalization in World Englishes* ed. Mukul Saxena and Tope Omoniyi, (Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2009) p. 200.

on lifestyle requirements as it is about the lands themselves. Additionally, the ways in which these structures manifest themselves as providing advances in relations between locales engenders questions about British agency at a time when commodities from foreign locales were becoming increasingly fetishised, whilst traditional British commodities were being discarded.

Uncle Sol, an aged gentleman and the Uncle of Walter, reflects that:

not being like the savages who came on Robinson Crusoe's Island, we can't live on a man who asks for change for a sovereign....As I said just now, the world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I no longer understand it. Tradesmen are not the same, business is not the same, business commodities are not the same....I have fallen behind the time and I am too old to catch it again.⁵⁰

The passage of time and the movement of commodities, both in terms of the changes that were going on and also the relationship with the novel *Robinson Crusoe*, are interesting. Sol's pecuniary needs are at odds with the seeming simplicity of life in this fictitious space. Sol shapes a less than progressive sense of the 'Other' in terms of naming these people as 'savages'. It is questionable that he is not simply referring to savages in a colonial sense but also with regard to his absent consumers. That the 'world has gone past' him is also highly charged and points towards notions of progress and improvement that reject the past and which are no longer dependent on home products but instead on foreign commodities. This dependence on products which do not originate from Britain proclaims an anxiety that can be read in *Dombey and Son* and elsewhere in Dickens's work, which points towards a world which is privileging foreign products. This is alluded to by his comment about 'business commodities' not being the same. The alienation from the contemporary ways of trading capitalises on anxieties about Britain and Britishness and what such connections might mean. What is particularly striking here is that the British consumer is increasingly less interested in consumables produced in Britain and is becoming more interested in those that originate from foreign locales. Major Bagstock is representative of another older character in the novel who insults the 'Other' for being 'Other' and having:

⁵⁰ Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 53.

...disposed of all the missiles that were convenient to his hand, and having called the Native so many new names as must have given him great occasion to marvel at the resources of the English language, submitted to have his cravat put on; and being dressed and finding himself in a brisk flow of spirits after this exercise, went down stairs to enliven 'Dombey' and his right-hand man.⁵¹

The Major is proud of what the English language has enabled him to do in terms of ordering and speaking profanities, but that verbal acuteness still leaves him reliant upon another to dress him. In many ways it can be suggested that he is in as submissive a position as the 'Native', because he is reliant upon him. This focus on other ways, I would argue, suggests that Dickens sees Britons as being 'submissive' through a dependence on foreign commodities, in both object and human form. The use of 'submitted' is also an interesting choice as it places Bagstock in a somewhat servile position; he does not have agency other than with his language as his body submits. Although the Native is silent, his physical presence and the roles he is asked to complete are very personal. There is a sense here that the role of the 'Other' is to physically provide assistance, but the Native also represents a permanent verbal marker for the reader of a transnational presence in character form within the novel that is reflective of societal changes and immigration. Dickens does not directly critique the treatment of 'The Native' but he does use the presence of the Native to provide an overarching focus between a space that is *for* the 'Other' and a space *apart* from the 'Other' within British culture. Priti Joshi argues that:

The nativist argument is unsubtly and clumsily made. Coupled with Major Bagstock's servant, 'the Native' identified solely by his otherness and utterly silent (*Dombey and Son*), we are left with the impression not merely of disregard but active disdain on Dickens's part for the 'dark races'.⁵²

I dispute this reading and feel that it misses the central point that I have previously expressed about Dickens's attitudes to the 'Other' in the novel's

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 410.

⁵² Priti Joshi, 'Race' in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.206.

space. Major Bagstock is an ill-liked character and as such his actions cannot be viewed in the same terms of a negative presentation as one might read them if a character such as Florence had spoken them. The Major *is* racist, the silencing of the Native *is* unpleasant and foully racist, but I do not feel that it is a Dickensian acceptance of the behaviour of Major Bagstock. I believe it is more a reflection and an awareness of the presence of racism in society, a recognition of Britain's increasing dependence on the 'Other' and what this potentially means to British identity. Major Bagstock's naming of Edith's mother as Cleopatra is also culturally suggestive. Here is a British woman who is being described as having oriental features. The naming connects her with both the original vision of Cleopatra, a powerful Egyptian queen, and elucidates connections between the East and the novel which are detrimental to notions of Britishness. As Dickens often does within his journalism and novels, he includes a Shakespearean connection in terms of *Anthony and Cleopatra*, further heightening the connections between history, literature and foreign locales. The Major states that: 'it was hard in Cleopatra to require the world to be all heart, and yet to appropriate to herself the hearts of all the world.'⁵³ This, if inverted as an image, can be seen as an example of Britain desiring to be respected by all but not reflecting the same respect back to the world. The challenges that are implicit in such reflections relate not only to British self-conception but also the ways in which the outside world conceives of the homeland. The movement then to an attack on Islam is pinpointed within the novel and connects with the principle faith in many Eastern countries: 'Like those wicked Turks, there is no What's-his-name-but-thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it-is-his-prophet!' Edith deigned no revision of this extraordinary quotation from the Koran, but Mr Dombey felt it necessary to offer a few polite remarks.⁵⁴ This is lack of specificity in terms of name and the most important prophet in Islam is disturbing and yet underscores the ambivalence that other cultural mores and faiths are met with. It is ironic when one considers the increasing reliance Britain had on these nations.

Dickens asserts: 'Ah it's a strange world, it is indeed.'⁵⁵ He spends time within *Dombey and Son* recognising that, in technological and trading terms, the

⁵³ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 325.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 542.

world was making rapid progress but in societal or cultural terms this change was happening less fluidly. Cultures and societies were not unifying and this is the cause of the conflict in representations between Britain and abroad. That the East India Company, one of the strongest in terms of trade that Britain held, (although recognising it had receded some of its powers) is reliant upon transactions with abroad shows how Britain, by the same token, is as reliant on the 'Other' as the 'Other' was on Britain. That a company features so centrally within this novel points clearly to the East as an 'othered' space but also shows the West's control – and new found dependence on these lands.

Tope Omoniyi makes a distinction between colonisation and globalisation suggesting that: 'Whereas colonisation invokes a binary relationship between the colonisers and the colonised, globalization operates within a wider, more complex network of relationships of power and capital distribution; including linguistic and language power and capital.'⁵⁶ This distinction between the term coloniser and the more expansive term globalisation acknowledges the importance of the 'network of relationships'.⁵⁷ There is also a sense of a linguistic network based on ideas of shared language or areas of discourse that undeniably could not occur between Britain and China in equal terms. Linguistically, in India, Britain brought a common language in which to converse - English. In China however, the differences between the language and a Chinese desire (as much as a British one in terms of the English language) to maintain independence renders language a far more divisive issue. Dickens's inclusion of commodities contributes to this, as a network of commodities is identified. Such commodities do not form the basis of global balance or equality but they do support the idea of a method of engaging with spaces in terms of their trading output rather than solely as a nation. China, India and Africa are all part of this commodities network in Dickens's novels. India and Africa take on a more subservient role due to their being a part of the Empire, whilst China maintains some degree of independence and agency. Although this space is not found for the nation itself, the dependence that is revealed in commodity terms on these spaces on the part of Britain is important in reading the transnational relationships that are present.

⁵⁶ Tope Omoniyi and Mukuk Saxena, *Contending with Globalization in World Englishes* ed Mukul Saxena and Tope Omoniyi, (Buffali: Multilingual Matters, 2009) p. 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.3.

This notion can be reinforced when Dickens describes the scenes by the London Docks, where:

Just around the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious snuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets with their slippers very much turned up at the toes. Anywhere in the immediate vicinity there might be seen pictures of ships speeding away to all parts of the world; outfitting warehouses ready to pack off anybody anywhere, fully equipped in half an hour; and little timber midshipmen in obsolete naval uniforms, eternally employed outside the shop doors of nautical instrument makers in taking observations of the hackney coaches.⁵⁸

This cornucopia of objects is striking; there is a clear sense of where the objects come from - the East - but in Orientalist terms, as established by Edward Said, it is the people's and objects' 'otherness' that is being held in tension. Yet, by reading more closely, a niche reading can be gained. Certainly there is a wide range of exotic objects and, in many senses, this cataloguing of a country's produce fits well with the soon to be organised Great Exhibition of 1851, a mere three years after the novel's publication. There is both a sense of stasis and movement achieved here. The objects have travelled vast distances and yet, on arrival, they are static. The East India House is described as being 'rich' and certainly in terms of the amounts of money circulating within its walls this is accurate. Yet any of the expensive commodities such as 'precious stones and snuffs' are on the side of the dock, curiously denigrating their worth. Whilst Britain is broadly pushing forward with progress, these foreign commodities are left with an inability to develop away from the shop or their place of origin. The orientalisation of the scene, filled with preconceived ideas of the 'Other', is hard to avoid with 'gorgeous princes of a brown complexion' and the fairytale-esque carpets and 'slippers turned up at the toes'. Interestingly, however, the British dockside workers are also static, with 'little timber midshipmen'. The obsolescence of their uniforms and, equally, the nautical instruments makers' profession is suggestive of a change in the ways in which ports and docks are managed in Britain. This is a world, as well as a Britain, that is on the move. The un-comfortableness of this transnational commodity movement seems to be brought to the fore. The items that are catalogued here have come over from

⁵⁸ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 46.

abroad but they are conceived as being 'unnatural' and yet, within the space of the novel they are naturalised when found inside the houses of the British public, whose eagerness to possess them facilitates a cultural adoption. At the dockside the objects can remain less culturally dangerous; however, due to the ways in which such commodities are fetishised by the British consumer, they increasingly become more dangerous upon their arrival in the British home. That they are accommodated more naturally within the British home is perhaps more startling, for it raises questions about the ways in which foreign objects maintain their exoticism, even in the British home. Part of the 'Other' is at home in Britain. This leads into an idea posited by Juliet John that: 'a new structure of literary communication...a far more powerful structure of communication than any political movement could contemplate'⁵⁹ was being developed. Perhaps, and it is a possibility that I wish to pursue, literature enabled exotic locations to be conceived, conceptualised and made part of the national psyche and, with it, came an interdependence on foreign commodities which had all the potential to become dependable facets of a new world view of Britain.

'Of love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of the world, or by the end of time, but ranging still beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away!'⁶⁰ India, space, place and distance.

India is one of the first transnational locations mentioned in relation to a British character in *Dombey and Son* and this is in reference to Master Blitherstone, who has family in India. It is firstly, however, important that a firm historical and contextual basis for the consideration of the role India plays in *Dombey and Son* is constructed and for the differences between the relationships Britain had with India and China to be contrasted. The uprising of Indian workers shocked the British, who anticipated the Empire to be a controlled locale due to British rule. The overarching understanding in Britain was that the East India Company went to India to civilise and, hubristically, improve a civilisation and seek to achieve the same 'progress' there as had

⁵⁹ Juliet John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 33.

⁶⁰ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 876.

been reached in Britain. As a consequence: 'Britain's involvement in India had not been straightforward: the centuries of the company's rule were peppered with revolts, including uprisings in 1757, 1764, 1782, and 1843.'⁶¹ The uprising in 1843 is particularly significant in terms of *Dombey and Son* as publication came after the latest uprising – although the word uprising itself has a master/servant dialectic and implies blame where, on the part of the Indians, it was more a question of establishing some level of independence in response to Britain's determination to uphold power. This notion is affirmed by Grace Moore, who states that: 'Britain's involvement in India was not a consequence of a sustained imperial policy, but rather a gradual acquisition of land by a private trading concern.'⁶² The private trading that Grace Moore is referring to is that of the East India Company, a trading body that Mr Dombey is directly associated with and which helps him become so fiscally successful. This success, one suspects, cannot be claimed in monetary terms either by those he employs at home or indeed those he employs abroad.

The ways in which Britain systematised and categorised other nations is emblematic of the ways in which order and structure were imposed. Alex Bremner has noted:

From the ashes of Company rule emerged a tighter and more centralised form of administration, reaffirming London as the pivot of responsibility for Britain's empire in Asia. British involvement in India had always been a metropolitan concern and was intimately woven into the commercial and administrative fabric of the city.⁶³

The metropolitan nature of this process privileges the city with its centralised offices and administration. It pinpoints an area of British life within the novel where the books that catalogue the comings and goings at the docks and the money coming in and out from trade are to be found. It additionally recognises an ebb and flow that acts as a mirror for the river and network of seas that reflect Britain's shipping businesses and the ways in which the nation was able to be so powerful. What I intend to do here is to situate India as an unknown

⁶¹ Grace Moore, 'Empires and Colonies' in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 288.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁶³ G. Alex Bremner, 'Nation and Empire in the Government Architecture of the Mid-Nineteenth Century London: The Foreign and India Office Reconsidered' in *The Historical Journal* Vol 48, No, 3 (Sept., 2005) pp. 703- 742. Article Accessed at: <http://o-www.jstor.org.lib.exeter.ac.uk/stable/4091720>

entity in geographical terms for the readership and to suggest ways in which in *Dombey and Son* Dickens attempts – somewhat unsatisfactorily – to order the locale in a geographical sense in the mind of the readership. Before I continue with this, however, I intend to reflect briefly on an idea developed by Josephine McDonagh that: ‘Nineteenth-century literary representations intensify contrasts between country and city. They associate rural locations with a traditional world of wholesome, face-to-face social relations, and urban places with states of corruption and alienation associated with capitalism, technological innovation and industrial development.’⁶⁴ The distinction being made between such locales can be applied, I would argue, to representations of China and Britain in Dickens’s work.

The geographical imprecision with regard to India - and indeed China - is highlighted in the discourse between Florence and Master Blitherstone, who, we discover has all of his relatives in India

and who was required to sit, between the services, in an erect position with his head against the parlour wall neither moving hand nor foot, suffered so acutely in his young spirits that he once asked Florence, on a Sunday night, if she could give him any idea of the way back to Bengal.⁶⁵

Blitherstone’s sense of the inconceivable direction of India, and its place in the world, enables it to be seen as a space that is not part of British geography and as such is problematic to the understanding of Britain’s interactions with it. As such, the nineteenth century reader is left to wonder where exactly it is and what is done there, with a lack of specific details provided by Dickens. It has been argued that this lack of specificity is a sign of the reader’s disconnection, as it is too far away to be meaningful to the British public. I think this interpretation is too limited, as it does not do justice to Dickens’s burgeoning consciousness of the world beyond Britain and the dangers of being a point of such global interconnectedness. Additionally, it is important to recognise the ways in which Dickens’s authorial power over the readership influences the potential readings of the plot. The willingness of the reader to subscribe to ideas about the globe due to their belief in the author cannot be underestimated.

⁶⁴ Jo McDonagh, ‘Urban migration and mobility’ in *Charles Dickens in Context* ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p. 268.

⁶⁵ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 121.

The spaces traversed through trade are contracted in the novel's narrative and this highlights what Arjun Appadurai has proposed, that: 'Consumption creates time, but modern consumption seeks to replace the aesthetics of duration with the aesthetics of ephemerality.'⁶⁶ It is this sense of time and ephemerality that I will now consider in more detail - that it is through the process of consumption that an ephemeral time is conceived of. This is achieved by the creation of a new consumerist culture that is – even now – preoccupied with passing trends rather than traditions. This consumer culture is applicable to a nineteenth century audience eager to buy from abroad to make their homes appear more cosmopolitan and to buy into a transnational object craze. The ephemerality of this purchasing process connects with a fluctuating intrigue in items from abroad and also highlights a sense of the passage of time which makes one item desirable for a period, for it then to be swiftly replaced by another. This can also be seen in terms of coffee from Africa – as is revealed in *David Copperfield* and as I will show in Chapter 2 - which was hugely popular in the early nineteenth century and progressed to a fetishisation of tea from China. Paul Dombey, Mr Dombey's son, discusses with Florence the time it takes to travel to India and in this discussion the reader gets a very clear sense of the immeasurability of this structured notion of time; in this sense time is only made meaningful when it is relative:

“Floy,” he said one day, “where’s India, where the boy’s friends live?”
“Oh it is a long, long distance off,” said Florence, raising her eyes from her work.
“Weeks off?” asked Paul.
“Yes, dear. Many weeks journey, night and day.”⁶⁷

Time itself is only ever truly meaningful if it is tangible or relative and for Paul it is not. That he asks where India is makes one almost map out the geographical spaces; the miles, the spaces and the time are only really brought to mean something once he has the response from Florence – whose European city namesake adds a sense of proximal space - and her reply that it is many weeks away, alters the perception of space through a timeframe of travel. The notion of geography, the geography of the world and clarifying spaces which seem

⁶⁶ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p. 85.

⁶⁷ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 128.

intangible can be seen in the way that games facilitated a notion of the passage around the globe.⁶⁸ The difference with these, as with Dickens's novels, is that they facilitate a surreal notion of travel that allowed for global interaction without actually having to leave the home environment.

Indeed, even young Master Blitherstone seemingly has no notion of exactly where he is going if he goes to India. It is stated that:

He began that very night to make arrangements for an overland return to India, by secreting from his supper a quarter of round bread and a fragment of Dutch cheese, as the beginning of a stock of provision to support him on his voyage.⁶⁹

The use of the word 'stock' echoes back to trading or mercantile terminology and the inclusion of a Dutch cheese reveals the European commodities that are also on the dining table - there seems to not be even one British commodity directly identified. That Master Blitherstone plans to make the whole journey by land also reveals his lack of geographical knowledge and the impractical nature of making his journey to this foreign clime. India's daily interactions with Britain through trade, the East India Company and emigration brought Britain and India together on the same shores and, by the same merit, ever closer - if not geographically then materially - through Britain's control of India as part of the Empire in a way that China rejected.

Not for all the tea in China.

The British were keen to develop trade links with China on terms that were advantageous to the British, rather than on an equal basis, and as Perera asserts:

⁶⁸ Games such as 'The Crystal Palace Game', an example of which can be found at the British Library, served to map a world that had previously been immeasurable. That it was a 'game', however, is questionable.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

English foreign policy worked to ensure that more and more trade passages were "open to the English." The First Opium War of 1840, when Chinese ports were besieged to force the free passage of English narcotics, was the logical conclusion of an aggressive free trade policy.⁷⁰

Dickens's intrigue, fascination and, I would argue, excitement about the products available to the nineteenth century consumer can be seen within his own private letters. The richest example of this would be on the occasion of his attending a dinner party at Emile Girardin's mansion, where he found:

On the table are ground glass jugs of peculiar construction, laden with the finest growth of Champagne and the coolest ice. With the third course is issued Port Wine (previously unheard of in a good state on this continent), which would fetch two guineas a bottle at any sale. The dinner done, Oriental flowers in vases of golden cobweb are placed upon the board. With the ice is issued brandy; buried for 100 years. To that succeeds coffee, brought by the brother of one of the convives from the remotest East, in exchange for an equal quantity of Californian gold dust. The company being returned to the drawing-room – tables roll in by unseen agency, laden with cigarettes from the Harem of the Sultan, and with cool drinks in which the flavour of the lemon arrived yesterday from Algeria, struggles voluptuously with the delicate Orange arrived this morning from Lisbon. That period past, and the guests reposing in divans worked with many coloured blossoms, big tables roll in, heavy with massive furniture of silver, and breathing incense in the form of a little present of Tea direct from China – table and all, I believe; but cannot swear to it.⁷¹

The variety of produce from across the globe situated in this one room, at this one dinner, seems to have fascinated Dickens and engaged his commodity consciousness. The finely detailed description of the Oriental flowers in 'vases of golden cobwebs' with all the fragility this implies and the tea which is 'direct from China' show that Dickens is very familiar with - and yet still in awe - the ability to essentially construct a commodity picture of the world in one sitting. The inclusion of China in the text reflects the ways in which this locale was so central in British life. His description of the ice, the champagne and the port are telling of an occasion that was both sumptuous and globally commodified. The

⁷⁰ Suvendrini Perera, 'Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation: Empire and the Family Business in "Dombey and Son"' in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), pp 603-620. P. 608. Accessed at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3827793>

⁷¹ To John Forster, 20 January 1856, in *The Pilgrim Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol VIII, ed. Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p. 33-34.

absence in general of people from the countries where these commodities originate shows that Dickens can appreciate the produce but is reluctant, at present, to appreciate the people themselves. As is to be shown later in this work, post publication of *Dombey and Son* there was an increased engagement with other global locations in his work. The inclusion of these commodities marks a very special time in British culture and in literature which is essential to this reading.

The above letter, with all its focus on the opulent transnational commodities, is different to the way in which Dickens writes in *Dombey and Son*, when it is the foreign nationals who are described in great detail. Mr Dombey finds himself 'requesting the honour of a great many incongruous people to dinner on the same day.'⁷² The 'incongruous' nature of his party reveals that they are 'Other', yet they seemingly belong in the setting of Mr Dombey's house due to his trading relationships. The guest list, once compiled, also raises questions about the guests and separates East and West:

Accordingly Mr Dombey produced a list of sundry eastern magnates who were to be bidden to this feast, on his behalf; to which Mrs Skewton, acting for her dearest child, who was haughtily careless on the subject, subjoined a western list.⁷³

Mr Dombey's list of Eastern magnates brings the East firmly into the British, and Western, imagination. He is outward looking to transnational spaces, not necessarily because he wants to be, but rather because of his business he has to be. In contrast Miss Skewton, who has not travelled, selects a guest list of people who are from the West. There is a fracture between the realities of an increasingly globalised world and a British population who are not outward looking. The two locales are separated by many miles and are here separated by a semi-colon, which acts as a literal separation as well as a psychological one. Whilst they are geographically distant they co-exist and are close to each other within the novel's space.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 554.

⁷³ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 554.

After the discussion of the Eastern and Western guest list, Mr Dombey then re-enters the narrative and in so doing brings with him a transnational commodity:

The proceedings commenced by Mr Dombey, in a cravat of extraordinary height and stiffness, walking restlessly about the drawing room until the hour appointed for dinner; punctual to which an East India Director, of immense wealth, in a waistcoat apparently constructed in serviceable deal by some plain carpenter, but really engendered in the tailor's art, and composed of the material nankeen.... Now the spacious dining-room, with the company seated round the glittering table, busy with glittering spoons, and knives and forks, and plates, might have been taken for a grown up exposition of Tom Tiddler's ground.⁷⁴

This is not only a description of the scene but also of Mr Dombey's business attire. Both Dombey's business standing and his attire are of fundamental importance. There is a clear emphasis placed on Mr Dombey's stiffness and this rigidity seems to be attributed to his Britishness. There is an unwavering inflexibility that is at odds with his forced interactions with the world beyond Britain. What is most exciting from a commodity perspective is the description of the waistcoat. Initially it is described as appearing like 'plain deal' and something that has been made by a plain carpenter. However, instead of being made from 'deal' it is made from a foreign commodity from China: nankeen. The fabric nankeen originates from the Jiangsu province of China and as such is a loaded commodity to be included. The fact that the commodity enters with no restriction into this British home, or this British business, underscores the challenging nature of retaining British authenticity in a global marketplace. The Jiangsu province is also a trading hub in China and again, Britain's trading relations with China are being presented for the reader. That the fabric is mentioned so seemingly nonchalantly, and yet acts as a marker of a country which is central in trading terms and in relation to the East India Company, is of importance. The reader may well choose to read over this but, through careful exegesis, an internal trading and commodity profile can be constructed which expands the meaning of the novel and the novel's broader societal purpose. The fabric appears within the novel and is readily connected with an increase in British trade with China and the need to fulfil public demand for objects from this

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 554-556.

locale. Again Dickens shows his reader the world through the commodities it is reliant upon. The description of the table, with its 'glittering' cutlery, bears a striking similarity to the description Dickens constructs in his letter to Forster. That it sparkles, glitters and is new shows how commodity experiences are presented within the novel's space - their newness marking the items out as being from the 'New World' - and Dickens is introducing other cultures into his prose and making them part of the British commodity narrative.

The increase in the consumption of tea is also central to this discussion, as is the fact that prior to the publication of the novel, in '1846 tea was imported at 46,740,000 lbs and by 1850 this had increased to 51,178,000 lbs.⁷⁵ Whilst, clearly, the novel did not have any role in influencing an increase in trade or imported products, it does show a Dickensian engagement with Chinese trade and its increasing presence in the British home. This adoption of a foreign commodity is important, not only in terms of what it says about British commodity relations, but also in terms of how the nation sees itself. The importance of tea in British culture is acknowledged within the novel and begins, even in this early novel, to shape a growing notion of Britain's dependence on China for this commodity. As the World Trade Organisation states:

Until the rise of Thomas Lipton and other British companies, which promoted the consumption of teas from colonies of the United Kingdom, teatime was synonymous with the consumption of China teas, regardless of whether it took place in London, Melbourne, St. Petersburg, or Boston. They were manufactured - in the original sense of the word, "made by hand" - in one or another skilful permutation of the stages depicted here.⁷⁶

The synonymous nature of the act of taking tea with a firm connection with China lasted until, as has been mentioned in the introduction, Robert Fortune took tea plants to India. Even then, the finest tea was still originating from China and it was this process that enabled a commodity reliance on China.

Whilst any mention of tea in the novel *Dombey and Son* can safely be connected with China, as I have already explained in relation to Robert

⁷⁵ Customs Duty Bill, House of Commons debate, 26th April 1850, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1850/apr/26/customs-duties-bill#S3V0137P0_18550426_HOC_38

⁷⁶ <http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/2868.html>

Fortune's travels, other acts in Dickens's own writing enabled a commodity layer that focusses the reader on the geopolitical object and encourages broader societal reflection. A commodity pattern emerges and one that is particularly exciting to uncover. This layering and textual patterning is significant in that it shows how a country's commodities enter into the novel's narrative before even the mention of the country itself arises. By increasing the number of references to tea and tea drinking paraphernalia Dickens is able to secure the place of China as a nation in his readers' minds and then develop a reading of that space. Dickens and contemporary culture recognise China to be a locale that is culturally dangerous, due to a Chinese unwillingness to bend to British rule. I will examine this literary layering here and show how this functions in situating the commodity tea and the location of China in *Dombey and Son*. This introduction can be firstly noticed with the appearance of tea paraphernalia: 'With that Miss Nipper untied her bonnet strings, and after looking vacantly for some moments into a little black tea-pot that was set forth with the usual homely service, on the table, shook her head and a tin canister and began unasked to make the tea.'⁷⁷ The act of taking tea is mentioned, situating it as a respectable British occupation. That the service is homely, makes it seem as though it originates from Britain and naturalises the object from China, as I have suggested earlier in this chapter, and begins to encourage a reflection on the origins of tea. That her head shakes almost serves as a sense of disbelief that a foreign commodity is at home in this British space.

A little later in the novel Mrs Perch 'is in the kitchen taking tea; and has made a tour of the establishment, and priced the silks and damasks by the yard, and exhausted every interjection in the dictionary and out of it expressive of admiration and wonder.'⁷⁸ Again, here is a character in a familiar domestic setting 'taking tea'; the relaxed manner in which she samples this foreign beverage continues with allusions to Chinese products such as 'silks and damasks'. The origin of these items is not explicitly mentioned rather, they appear as floating visual markers for a land beyond Britain, which can be identified as China.

⁷⁷ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 291.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 541.

These references are not merely made by insignificant characters. Mr Dombey is made aware as:

He glanced around the room: saw how the splendid means of personal adornment, and the luxuries of dress, were scattered here and there, and disregarded.... of flowers, plumes of feathers, jewels, laces, silks and satins; look where he would, he saw riches, despised, poured out, and made of no account.⁷⁹

The 'glance' does a lot more than this. The word itself implies a brief look but here he takes a careful and focussed gaze, taking in again the silks and other adornments. They are, as decorative pieces, mentioned and their 'otherness' identified to concentrate the reader's focus. That the items are made of 'no account' recognises the casual engagement with these commodities, but also the 'account' by the dock which would have catalogued and handled these foreign wares. One cannot help but consider whether Dickens, through this process, encourages his readers to reflect on these transnational commodity relations - both in a positive and negative light.

This layering of allusions to China's commodities does not end here; it continues, building up these connections. Dickens next moves his readers to consider Captain Cuttle, who:

...fairly dropping anchor, at last, by the side of Florence, began to talk at all connectedly. But when the light of the fire was shining on the walls and ceiling of the little room, and on the tea-board and the cups and saucers that were ranged upon the table...the Captain broke a long silence.⁸⁰

The twilight that begins to cause Captain Cuttle to reflect on what he is about to tell Florence, and the use of shipping terminology of 'fairly dropping anchor' by her side, leave the reader feeling as though he is being anchored to a new moment in the text that is fixed and being drawn to the attention of the reader.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 611.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.745.

The closely following mention of the 'tea-board and the cups and saucers' again ensures that the commodity paraphernalia is introduced. The objects are referenced in this way to create a type of cultural order.

What happens next is an interesting inversion of words: Dickens states firstly that: 'The captain hastily produced the big watch, the tea-spoons, the sugar-tongs, and the canister, and laying them on the table, swept them with his great hand into Walter's hat.'⁸¹ Here we have images of the tea - being brought in by the spoons - from China, sugar from Demerara and the 'laying them on the table' creates a linear ordering which ultimately leads to a sweep of the items into Walter's hat. This sweep acts as a metaphorical movement of the 'Other' into an area that can be neatly encapsulated under the heading of Walter's travels. Each place he visits has its commodity signifier. Yet a few sentences later Dickens does something which I am convinced is intentional in his writing practice: he re-introduces the objects and that it is again the Captain who does this recognises his role in marking out commodity. Dickens is taking control and ordering the geographical commodity references: 'The Captain could be induced by no persuasion of Walter's to wind up the big watch, or to take back the canister, or to touch the sugar-tongs or tea-spoons'.⁸² It is upon closer reflection that a reorganising of the order in which Walter travelled can be recognised. The motif of time which acts as an overarching theme with progress and trade, which I introduced at the start of this chapter, is brought to the fore with the big watch and then again the canister, which is left to 'contain' these influences, is introduced. The sugar tongs and the teaspoons, all ephemeral pieces of equipment for this ceremony, are used and made to have meaning and yet Captain Cuttle does not want to touch them. I would suggest that this is perhaps a realisation or an acknowledgment that these commodities from transnational locations have found their way into the British space and, in the final moments, the meaning of their inclusion and the implications of this British reliance on transnational commodities is posited.

Focussing again on China and Walter's journey, once this commodity impasse has occurred, the story of Walter's original journey and then the journey within that journey is discussed:

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 750.

⁸² Ibid., p. 754.

“Aye!” nodded Captain Cuttle. “The ship as took him up, when he was wrecked in the hurricane that had drove her clean out of her course, was a China trader, and Wal’r made the woyage, and got into favour, aboard and ashore – being as smart and good a lad as ever stepped – and so, the supercargo dying Canton, he got made (having acted as clear afore), and now he’s supercargo aboard another ship, same owners. And so, you see, repeated the Captain thoughtfully, the pretty creature goes away upon the roaring main with Wal’r, on a woyage to China.”⁸³

Dickens draws attention to the specific details of how and where Walter ended up in Canton in China. Canton was the site of much trade in the nineteenth century and was a major port. This was originally the only port that Britain was allowed to trade from, until the opening of the other five ports after the Treaty of Nanking (1842). That Dickens refers back to this port in a novel written six years after the opening of the five other ports is intriguing, as it is suggestive of a certain retrospection. Dickens is bringing the world beyond Britain into the reader’s armchair, into their house and into their consciousness, making this a very active reading process. Dickens is encouraging his readers to think further about the origins of the products in their houses, but this is not now achieved solely through focussing on the objects. Dickens moves beyond this and into the world of trade, commodities and British power abroad. As Suvendrini Perera has stated:

Walter and Florence embark on a trading voyage to a China forcibly opened to England's opium trade; Dombey sends Walter aboard the prophetically named "Son and Heir" to act as a junior clerk in his factory in Barbados and Uncle Sol uses his scientific skills to work his way as a seaman from Demerara to China in search of his missing nephew.⁸⁴

This focus on the ways in which the journey is laid out is important; however, what Perera does not recognise is that this sending off of the different characters to various points around the globe does mean that the nineteenth century readership is forced to reflect on the ways in which Britain’s presence is

⁸³ Ibid., p. 847.

⁸⁴ Suvendrini Perera, ‘Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation: Empire and the Family Business in “Dombey and Son” in *Victorian Studies*, p. 608.

a global phenomenon. I am not suggesting that Dickens presents an enlightened world view and I would not want to denigrate the significance of Britain's offensive trade drive abroad, but Dickens does open up many questions about such global spaces and the ramifications of their interaction with Britain. These interactions are unfettered in a commodity sense as, once they have arrived in the home space, they become absorbed into British culture. It is the insidious nature of such commodity adoption that is problematic in terms of maintaining British autonomy or a sense of a 'pure' Britain which causes a Dickensian – and countrywide – anxiety. In revealing a British dependence on commodities from China, Dickens highlights a cultural dialogue with China that has its foundation in trade. In many respects trade is one of the most pervasive features of life, as once the commodities are unleashed they take on their own cultural agency.

This layering of commodities within the text continues to the end of the novel, where Captain Cuttle wants to contribute to their leaving retinue with items such as: 'pink parasols, tinted silk stockings, blue shoes, and other articles no less necessary on shipboard.'⁸⁵ The silk stockings again develop a connection between China and Britain and a desirable transnational commodity. That there is a 'chaotic combination of furniture' grasps the reader's attention with: 'Matrasses and bedding appearing in the dining-room; the glass and china gets into the conservatory'⁸⁶ identifies the temporary migration on board the ship to China that Walter and Florence make, and the chaos in the house they leave behind creates a sense of the unknown quantity of a land so distant to Britain.

Whilst this chapter recognises a Dickensian sense of the world beyond Britain that is informed by acts of trade and foreign commodity purchases in British retail, I acknowledge that Dickens does not possess an enlightened world view. The importance of recognising Dickens's awareness of such locales is that he forms, through a historical and political framework which is borne out by the current patterns of trade with China - and indeed other transnational locales - a basis for re-orientating notions, not only of the Chinese but also of British nationhood and nationality. That commodities such as tea and silk were

⁸⁵ Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, p. 851.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 897.

present in both the marketplace and the novel's space ensures that the world beyond Britain becomes an increasingly powerful place. Albeit that such locales were taxed heavily and traded on an unequal basis, the commodities they produced became so relied upon that without them British necessities could not be manufactured. In this sense we have in the novel a notion of Dickens, 'Mr Dombey and the World'.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 772.

Chapter 2

Beyond the Empire in *David Copperfield*

‘Global mass culture is dominated by a modern means of cultural production, dominated by the image which crosses and re-crosses linguistic frontiers much more rapidly and more easily, and which speaks across languages in a much more immediate way.’⁸⁸

David Copperfield, serialised in 20 monthly parts between May 1849 and November 1850 by Bradbury and Evans, charts the journey of David and the characters who shape his life. Dickens declared in a letter to W.W.F. de Cerjat that ‘You will be glad to hear, I know, that *Copperfield* is a great success. I think it is better liked than any of my other books’.⁸⁹ Yet, not only does it tell this tale, it also charts British progress and the nation’s endeavours to control its Empire and beyond that, trade with China. Dickens’s global consciousness is in evidence in much of his fiction, where a relationship between Britain and cultural ‘others’ is examined. This extends to an exploration of the relationship between home and abroad, and often sharply delineates between the home nation and the foreign. In *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens sets out a globalised notion of life beyond Britain and the ways in which the ‘New World’ is necessary for the ‘Old World’ to progress and, simultaneously, the risk involved in an increasing dependence on foreign commodities and lands. Whilst this work is not putting at its centre Dickens’s journalism, it is significant to note that articles such as ‘The Schoolmaster at Home and Abroad’⁹⁰, ‘An Emigrant Afloat’⁹¹, ‘A Bundle of Emigrants’ Letters’⁹², ‘Pictures of Life in Australia’⁹³,

⁸⁸ Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity,” in *Culture, Globalization, and the World System*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) in *Globalization* ed. Arjun Appadurai, p. 304.

⁸⁹ To W.W.F. De Cerjat, 29 December 1849, in *The Pilgrim Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. V, ed. Graham Storey and K.J. Fielding, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981) p. 682-683.

⁹⁰ [William Henry Wills], ‘The Schoolmaster at Home and Abroad’, *Household Words*, Vol. I, No. 4, (20 April 1850), 82- 84 (p. 82).

⁹¹ [Alexander Makay], ‘An Emigrant Afloat’, *Household Words*, Vol. I, No. 23, (31 August 1850) 534-539, (p. 534)

⁹² [Caroline Chisholm and Charles Dickens], ‘A Bundle of Emigrants’ Letters’ *Household Words*, Vol. I, No. 1, (20 March 1850), p. 19-24.

⁹³ Caroline Chisholm and Richard H. Horne, ‘Pictures of Life in Australia’ *Household Words*, Vol. 1. No. 13, (22 June 1850), p. 307-310.

'Two Letters from Australia'⁹⁴ and 'Illustration of Cheapness: Tea'⁹⁵ were all published in 1850 during the novel's serialised publication. The novel's publication in its entirety, marks out clear connections between the journalism printed in *Household Words* and the ways in which this feeds into the novel's broader narrative. I would suggest that this evidences a working through for the reader of contemporary cultural concerns in an increasingly globalised world.

Objects from the New World appear frequently in *David Copperfield* and result in the world of the 'Other' gaining meaning and cultural resonance with the home readership. Rather than a notion of bridging differences between the locales, such inclusion in Dickens's fiction serves to underscore the differences. Whilst the countries themselves are frequently presented as 'Other', the commodities present in the British home become naturalised by the user and, within the home space, any foreignness is lessened and the differences between the cultures become less defined. It is this, I believe, that Dickens recognises as an inherent danger and raises questions about Britain's trading independence.

Whilst *David Copperfield* was published in advance of the Great Exhibition, preparations for it were under way and I suggest that the idea of entering into an exhibition that would, in essence, encourage a sharing of ideas, locales and objects is very much present in a reading of this novel. The objects included, such as tea, Hindoo baskets, and chinaware, broaden the British notion of the world outside Britain and begin to address the ways in which the Great Exhibition, and the arrival of new and exotic items, establishes a curiosity between the world at home and the world abroad. Additionally, such a cataloguing and representation of commodities and creations underscores the risks involved in not being solely reliant upon home products. As Paul Young has proposed: 'All the world reveals itself, by consent, to all the world.'⁹⁶ Such a revelation encourages a notion of a world where community rather than conflict is at the centre. An aspiration of this kind in terms of the Great Exhibition's remit is perhaps ironic in light of the on going wars and global

⁹⁴ Francis Gwynne and W. H. Willis 'Two Letters from Australia' *Household Words*, Vol. 1, No. 20, (10 August, 1850) p. 475- 480.

⁹⁵ Charles Knight, 'Illustrations of Cheapness: Tea' *Household Words*, Vol. 1. No. 11, (8 June 1850), p. 253-256.

⁹⁶ Paul Young, *Globalisation and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 87 from Excelsior, *The Dial of the World*, (London: Ward, 1851) p. 8.

disputes but reveals a certain hopefulness on the part of its nineteenth century organisers. It is highly suggestive of a globalised world which, rather than viewing the world beyond each other's borders as a threat, instead positions it as a community, whether this be accurate or false. Young also recognises that the Exhibition was in contrast to Dickens's romantic ideals and that he 'regretted the Great Exhibition as an example of what he similarly saw as a cold hearted if pragmatic Victorian tendency to ignore humanity's romantic inclinations'.⁹⁷ One might reflect that this cataloguing of all that is great in the world commodifies and privileges the world's creations, rather than encouraging an investigation of the nation's lands. *David Copperfield* and the inclusion of objects from global locales creates a sense of a Great Exhibition within the novel where a love of the 'fancy' of items usurps the more 'factual' ordering of the exhibition and connects cultures in a more idealistic than systematic manner, whilst exposing an increasing interconnectedness. David's journeys through foreign spaces, either by himself or through the voyages of other characters, allows the readership to enjoy 'the novelties of foreign towns, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pictures, castles, tombs, fantastic streets – the old abiding places of History and Fancy'⁹⁸ in a way that Dickens predicts will not be possible within the very 'ordered' Great Exhibition. This relates to the reading that Grace Moore presents of the exhibition as:

...a type of false promise. The display had seemed to him to offer everything, but instead offered a proliferation of largely static, taxonomised exhibits, which did not appeal to him in the slightest. Indeed, a glance at the catalogue reveals a number of 'things', and what, for someone as easily bored as Dickens would have been, the repetitious nature of some of the exhibits.⁹⁹

That Dickens saw the taxonomisation of the Exhibition rather than the broad range of objects themselves suggests that a more random occurrence of foreign objects might have been more satisfying. Dickens is keen to disrupt - and resents - the ordering of foreign articles and appreciated the world in a unified, rather than separate fashion. That *David Copperfield* uses this system

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁹⁸ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, ed. by Jeremy Tambling (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 820.

⁹⁹ Grace Moore, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) p. 22.

of concurrent representation of foreign and British objects seems to affirm this, and is something that this chapter will address.

The important reading of 'things' is valuable and much has been written on this topic, namely by scholars such as Bill Brown, Catherine Waters and Elaine Freedgood. Freedgood's book *The Ideas in Things*¹⁰⁰ develops a multi-layered meaning of objects within the novel and examines their inclusion. However, this thesis will develop Freedgood's reading further suggesting that, rather than the objects themselves having a secret or hidden meaning, the objects instead have a declarative meaning, thus enabling a cultural and literary dialogue. This in turn requires us, as readers, to ask important questions about the nations from which such 'things' originate. Whilst Dickens's intentionality can be questioned and his influence reflected on, Freedgood states that: 'In this highly flexible trope, we see the beginnings of a global movement of commodities and racial symbols from the New World to the Old World.'¹⁰¹ This global movement is something that this thesis concurs with and, as has been suggested in the preceding chapter, the connections made between cultures through the repetition of global locales and the objects attributed to these places, enables a form of literary colonisation, which is reflexive in nature. This insertion of foreign objects into a British text, alongside those global locales the characters visit, ensures that Dickens develops a perspective of the New World that seems far less foreign. The commodities originating in the New World undergo a process of naturalisation through the fiction in an objectival rather than an immigration sense. This interlocution of objects serves to make a meaning for the reader of worlds which may never be visited but are frequently depended upon. How these objects are interpreted within the text itself, and the potential meanings made by the readership, also provide a fruitful reading.

The novel opens with anxiety surrounding those objects which originate from other cultures. David moves away from them and attempts to escape their effects:

A dark store-room opens out of it, and that is a place to be run past at night; for I don't know what may be among the tubs and jars and old tea-

¹⁰⁰ Freedgood, *The Ideas in Things*, p. 82.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

chests, when there is nobody in there with a dimly-burning light, letting a mouldy air come out at the door, in which there is a smell of pickles, pepper, candles and coffee all at one whiff.¹⁰²

The darkness of the room is the first thing that is acknowledged. This, it is argued, is a connection with the perceived darkness of the other cultures; a suggestion that they are unknown, and less enlightened than Britain. That David has to 'run past' the space at night is suggestive of a disinclination to connect with other cultures. There is something about the darkness and the potential for danger that makes such a global community challenging. It also functions as a means of ignoring the world beyond Britain which, as the novel as a whole shows, is impossible due to Britain's dependence on other cultures. Other nation's spaces are made to become frightening as they are reflected upon as something that Britain needs to rely upon for trade; Britain's moments of independence, at least in a trading sense, are threatened. That David does not 'know what may be among' the items in the store cupboard highlights again the sense of the unknown world of the New World and a cultural scepticism, an awareness of the inherent dangers involved with trade and travel. That the objects contained within the room possess such a power over David is remarkable and yet they only do this in his youth, as when he is an adult he is accepting of objects from global locales. The smell marks out the 'otherness' and a lack of perceived development that shrouds the space in a 'mouldy air'. These objects represent, in the novel's terms, cultures that have shown a lack of progress and yet here are their commodities in a British storeroom being depended upon by the British consumer. There also seems to be a Marxian¹⁰³ use value at work in this extract, where the products are shown to have a 'use value' in British culture. However, whilst the commodity has been allowed in the British space, its presence in a human, physical sense through immigration is not desired. The objects become almost fetishised commodities, marking out the culture from which they originate and holding in that sense a desirability, yet the people themselves do not. The combination of items which are coming out of the cupboard also marks the global nature of this store cupboard. It reveals so much about Britain's relationship and dependence on the 'Other'.

¹⁰² Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 25.

¹⁰³ Marx, *Capital Volume 1*, (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2003)

This reading can be pursued further when David embarks on the ship to say farewell to the emigrants. This continual listing, categorising and systematising functions as a means of 'reorienting the world'¹⁰⁴ and indexing material possessions and spaces:

Among the great beams, bulks, and ringbolts of the ship, and the emigrant berths, and chests, and bundles, and barrels, and heaps of miscellaneous baggage – lighted up here and there, by dangling lanterns; and elsewhere by the crowded groups of people, making new friendships, taking leave of one another, talking, laughing, crying, eating, and drinking; some, already settled down into possession of their few feet of space, with their little households arranged, and tiny children established on stools, or in dwarf elbow-chairs; others, despairing of a resting space, and wandering disconsolately. From babies who had but a week or two of life behind them; and from ploughmen bodily carrying out soil of England on their boots, to smiths taking away samples of soot and smoke upon their skins; every age and occupation appeared to be crammed into the narrow compass of the 'tween decks.¹⁰⁵

The concentration here on the paraphernalia that accompanies the emigrants gives a very clear sense of them travelling with their own world into the New World. Again, this is a very sensory interpretation of the journey before the journey really begins. The arrangement of little households and an extension of spaces on board the ship mirrors that very same expansionist initiative that they are embarking on in their new homeland. Britons abroad seem to connote a move from the household of Britain to Britain's global household of colonial spaces. The movement of aspects of Britain abroad, in the very basest sense of soot, smoke and earth, suggests that the migratory process always comes with a connection with the homeland. The home 'product' might leave but it carries with it to the new climes the mark of origination.

The inclusion of other worlds within Britain is continually situated in the novel and the reader's sense of a more geographically broad British identity is encouraged. Mapping though a cultural memory as well as in a real sense is important: 'It was a large long room with some large maps in it. I doubt if I could have felt much stranger if the maps had been real foreign countries and I cast away in the middle of them.'¹⁰⁶ The lack of reality with which David views these

¹⁰⁴ Paul Young, *Globalisation and the Great Exhibition*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 817.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

maps suggests a seeming disconnection between the space that is represented pictorially and that which is geographically, physically present. By holding the maps as representing 'unreal' lands', spaces beyond Britain are rendered almost imaginary, lacking in reality because many would never travel to them. This problematising of the world beyond Britain continues with Betsey Trotwood's poor global investments where she:

"took her pigs," said my aunt "to a foreign market and a very bad market it turned out to be. First she lost in the mining way, and then she lost in the diving way – fishing up treasure or some such Tom Tiddler's nonsense" explained my aunt, rubbing her nose; "and then she left in the mining way again, and, last of all, to set things entirely to rights, she lost in the banking way...the bank was at the other end of the world, and tumbled into space."¹⁰⁷

The use of the word 'space' is significant in as much as it is limitless, unordered and unchartered. The bank at the 'other end of the world' does not possess the fixity that is required and raises anxieties about the potential losses beyond Britain's shores. Whilst generally the move to colonial spaces is viewed to be a move toward prosperity, Dickens reminds his readership that the risk abroad can be as financially great as the risk at home, and 'a prosperous journey out'¹⁰⁸ might not lead to a prosperous journey home. The pushing forward of progress is not always represented positively within the novel.

The race for Britain to show her supremacy over all other cultures initiates a desire to see the ways in which other countries can be controlled and continues with the notion that doing anything else is a sense of weakness:

If we failed to hold our own, because that equal foot at all men's doors was heard knocking somewhere, every object in this world would slip from us. No! Ride on! Rough shod if need be, smooth shod if that will do, but ride on! Ride over all obstacles, and win the race!¹⁰⁹

The aggressive mission for Britain's progress and desire for success cannot be ignored. Britain's relationship with abroad being one of domination and control is highlighted here. The rather Roman conquering spirit is used to underscore the strength of the British Empire. Essentially, Dickens recommends that regardless of the obstacles - in this case represented as the nationals of the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 518.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 434.

countries they wish to 'civilise' – progress is, above all, of importance. David's notion that 'we might even improve the world a little, if we got up early in the morning, and took off our coats to the work,'¹¹⁰ is representative of the colonising drive of Britain. Such narrative is at odds with Dickens's later fiction which, rather than focussing on the gains of land that can be made, instead resituates the focus on the commodities that have arrived, the necessary trading relationships that these create and ultimately the ways in which such relationships have the potential to fracture Britain's independence through commodity reliance by the British people.

David Copperfield, I argue, presents a cultural consciousness of the world beyond Britain and it is significant at this juncture to briefly consider one of the titles considered by Dickens for this work: 'The Copperfield Survey of the World as it Rolled'.¹¹¹ The title acknowledges Dickens's own awareness of the global interests present in the novel. Indeed it recognises not only the chief protagonist but a way of looking at the world and Britain's relationship with her global family. In this chapter there will be an examination of the ways in which India, China and Africa are shown to assist the native Briton abroad, whilst simultaneously eroding a sense of independence and cultural superiority. Dickens inserts other countries within the text to create a sustained presence within his fiction, and to underscore the potential challenges faced by an ever increasingly globalised world. One is encouraged to think not only of the advantages of obtaining transnational commodities but also to question what this consumer culture does to Britain's identity. This, it will be shown, is achieved through the insertion of objects and locales from outside Britain and characters from the homeland going out into the colonial world. Published in advance of the Great Exhibition, *David Copperfield* engages with many anxieties concerning the influx of objects and people from afar. The impact of these physical products in objectival form arriving on British soil is considered in both positive and negative terms, and the objects situate themselves not only as objects but also as manifestations of the people from these other countries and what such relationships do to British national identity. As Paul Young has proposed, the Great Exhibition was a place for Britons to see the world and to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 485.

¹¹¹ Please see Dickens's letter to John Forster, dated 26th February 1849, in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Jenny Hartley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 196.

conceptualise it in new ways. In 1851 this would be in contrast to the reality of global spaces, a place 'where the world went past them in the streets of London, fragmented by fleeting and commodified aesthetic, at the palace it would be pinned down, systematised and rendered whole again.'¹¹² This 'systematised' world is evident within the structure of *David Copperfield*, where each nation is 'pinned down' by its product and the way that this has the potential to erode a 'pure' British nation. The commodities that were being purchased represent not only desirable items for the British home but also are suggestive of the foreign entering the home and being assimilated. In this sense 'abroad' is necessary for the conceptualisation of 'home' and the relationship can be considered as being mutually dependent. *David Copperfield* is not an anti-global novel; rather it shows the threat posed by outside forces. This chapter will examine the ways in which colonial spaces are presented and the way in which Britain is shown to be reliant upon cultures which are reliant on Britain. The presence of a 'fleeting and commodified aesthetic' is in evidence within the text and is used, I argue, to place Britain in a global community much in the sense that Benedict Anderson¹¹³ has proposed to place global locales in a community, as opposed to viewing them in isolation.

This chapter will consider *David Copperfield* and the global journey, addressing the nature of Britain's relationship with abroad and establishing a way of considering how Dickens's representations of different cultures, and British characters within them, are managed. This chapter will centre on the quotation: 'A Prosperous journey out, a thriving career abroad, and a happy return home'¹¹⁴, which will be used to create a global framework for a home audience bound, through reading, to venture abroad. The ways in which the characters within the novel traverse geographical boundaries will be examined, revealing the ways in which Britons abroad were shown to manage their futures with agency as opposed to those abroad who are controlled through intense taxation and trade – as well as the East India Company – by Britain. As Grace Moore notes, Asa Briggs states: 'by the late 1840s and early 50s more than a quarter of a million emigrants were leaving in a single year.'¹¹⁵ Emigration was therefore a popular topic for consideration, and Dickens in *David Copperfield*

¹¹² Paul Young, *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order*, p. 3.

¹¹³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1991)

¹¹⁴ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 253.

¹¹⁵ Grace Moore, *Dickens and Empire*, p. 17.

makes it a central theme.¹¹⁶ India, China, Australia and Europe feature within this novel; however the focus on the emigrant relationships that are constructed within the novel will be on India and Australia and the differences between British settlers in these colonies.

Elaine Freedgood's work will be used to reflect on the hidden meanings in objects but I will take her reading further, analysing the ways in which these objects play a performative role in conceptualising outside influence on Britain. Rather than the object placed within the text having a hidden meaning, this thesis will propose that the objects are placed within the text to enable Dickens to highlight the significance of the world beyond Britain and to insert these cultures into the British zeitgeist, and reflect on the dangers posed by the process of 'Othering'.

"Oceans of room, Copperfield! I assure you, Oceans!"¹¹⁷

The number of British citizens emigrating in the nineteenth century increased exponentially and *David Copperfield* reflects the popularity of emigration, both for its redemptive possibilities and increased fortunes. *David Copperfield* considers two cases of emigration to Australia, a British run colony: the Micawbers and Peggottys. Emigrant literature and the potential for emigration to be a transformative process can be seen with both Australia and India. Significantly, Britons were not recommended to emigrate to China. However, in Dickens's oeuvre, China is a place used frequently for trade and is commercialised and commodified in a way that India and Australia are not. Both the Peggotty and Micawber families emigrate to restore their fortunes - financial and physical - and to develop a prosperous career abroad. What is particularly significant about this process is that their prosperity is situated in a land filled with British settlers (and ex-convicts), but this is viewed positively and in contrast to settling in a colony of 'natives'. It is valuable to consider whether this facilitates a positive representation of the journey abroad and whether that

¹¹⁶ For further work on emigration and settler narratives please see Judith Piesse's PhD thesis entitled, *British Settler Emigration in Print: Mainstream Models and Counter-Currents, 1832-1877*, (Exeter: University of Exeter, 2012)

¹¹⁷ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 648

means that the abroad of Australia is less foreign, and therefore less controversial, to the readership at home.

Mr Micawber is a character with whom the reader has a combination of both sympathy and exasperation; as he is living beyond his means his family careers from one financial crisis to another. The famous lines: 'Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen pounds nineteen six, result, happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery'¹¹⁸, whilst spoken by him are never followed, and the family moves around Britain from city to city, either escaping debtors or attempting to 'find' money. It is only when they emigrate that they become solvent and the prosperous journey out becomes a reality. As such the family are acting as an emblem of those for whom the Empire and colonial spaces give opportunities. Whilst on British soil prosperity evades them; however, on foreign soil it arrives in abundance and is 'found'. The question seeming to be of such importance here is: why is this? What is it about Britain, with all its industrial and social power, that means men such as Mr Micawber are disenfranchised and left where want exceeds means?

In Australia want and desire are shown to co-exist and result in prosperity. The idea that Micawber is able to leave England and experience a metamorphosis in Australia to become a magistrate suggests that the challenges faced by British citizens at home are not experienced by British citizens abroad; there they have the thriving career that eluded them. To this end Grace Moore critiques Dickens's device, arguing that: 'The ending, however, becomes increasingly implausible as something 'turns up' for the Micawber family who have risen to a prominence in direct contrast to their financially embarrassed circumstances at home.'¹¹⁹ The perceived 'implausible' rise of the Micawbers, whilst factually implausible, is not implausible in a literary sense given Dickens's determined representation both in his novels and journalism of the ways in which a new life abroad can be achieved through emigration. The colonial space allows 'another chance'. Dickens uses the Micawbers to affirm many of the hopeful stories he published in *Household Words* of prosperity due to emigration in Australia. It encourages his readership

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 186.

¹¹⁹ Moore, *Dickens and Empire*, p. 20.

to believe that the world outside Britain is rich with opportunities for those who have 'fallen', either sexually or financially. It also reinforces his motivations at Urania Cottage with Angela Burdett-Coutts where the fallen young women emigrated to either Australia or Canada, which will be considered shortly. Dickens suggests that the infrastructure at home is sufficiently well developed that men, women and families, such as the Micawbers, do benefit from almost going back in time, in a new country.

It is significant that, even in Australia, Micawber's epistolary addiction continues. Geographical spaces are contracted and the departure from home to abroad is eased through continued communication:

My aunt and I when we were left alone, talked far into the night. How the emigrants never wrote home, otherwise than cheerfully and hopefully; how Mr Micawber had actually remitted divers small sums of money, on account of those 'pecuniary liabilities.'¹²⁰

Letters sent around the globe allow emigration from the fireside and a relationship beyond Britain; that David and his aunt discuss them 'far into the night' reflects the interest with which these narratives were received at home. The letters in this sense are emblematic of the movement of ideas and objects, which this thesis argues is at the heart of what Dickens's fiction was addressing. The contrast between the speedy communication between Britain and Australia, an English speaking nation, with the tardy receipt of communications from India is also discussed later in this chapter. This is evinced by the items which arrive within the novel's space from global locales and will be discussed both later in this chapter and in the thesis as a whole. Mrs Micawber is reassured that it cannot be the case that she can 'be so weak as to imagine that Mr Micawber, wielding the rod of talent and of power in Australia, will be nothing in England?'¹²¹ The movement from Britain to Australia heralds a success, not only in the New World but also in the old world of Britain. If the homeland does not suit the son, the colonial land with less competition and a British identity will - and a thriving career abroad can be established. It is worth questioning whether this rise is translatable to British shores and the answer is indeed questionable.

¹²⁰ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 841.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 815.

The relationship that the Micawbers have with the homeland is gendered. Mrs Micawber is keen to assert that any benefit to them must be returned to the homeland: “I cannot forget the parent-tree; and when our race attains to eminence and fortune, I own I should wish that fortune to flow into the coffers of Britannia.”¹²² Although she is happy to benefit from the New World financially, she is maintaining her perspective of the land being ‘othered’. As a consequence she looks back rather than forward and maintains her Britishness. In contrast, as this conversation reveals, Mr Micawber feels quite the contrary:

“My dear,” said Mr Micawber, “Britannia must take her chance. I am bound she has never done much for me, and that I have no particular wish upon the subject.” “Micawber,” returned Mrs Micawber, “there you are wrong. You are going out, Micawber, to this distant clime, to strengthen, not weaken, the connexion between yourself and Albion.”¹²³

Mr Micawber’s insistence on Britannia taking ‘her chance’ reveals a sense of Britain as being little deserving of any real kind of loyalty. Micawber states that ‘she has never done much for me’. Mrs Micawber, however, is interested in the return of wealth to ‘Albion’ from its diverse global sources. Without the vast geographical spaces which are readily traversed through continual policies abroad and the development of new transport methods, geographical spaces which were once too far away to maintain a sense of reality find that the distance has been contracted through trade, social and technological developments. The potential to reinvent oneself abroad seems to me at least to be only available to the native Briton and the foreign traveller remains in a tenuous position where his presence in the ‘homeland’ of Britain is not yet welcome.

Grace Moore presents a striking argument that suggests: ‘Dickens’s fiction does not reject the emigration solution in such an adamant manner, but rather undermines it through a comedic usage that would have been inconceivable to more serious contemporaries’.¹²⁴ Dickens uses emigration as a device to uncover a space where the emigrant British population can be positively represented in lands where they are bound to succeed through opportunities, either created by the government at home or opportunities which

¹²² Ibid., p. 813.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 813.

¹²⁴ Grace Moore, *Dickens and Empire*, p. 22.

are yet to be explored by the 'Other' themselves. It is important here to reflect upon Australia being referred to as 'Other', which feels disingenuous. From a linguistic perspective it could be argued that the country, from a nineteenth century perspective, can be perceived as an expansion of Britain and that a shared dialectic makes the 'foreign' space naturalised. The 'Tower of Babel'¹²⁵ and the fear of a linguistic alienation abroad, which is investigated within the novel, fails to manifest itself in Australia. Yet it is precisely the reason that Dickens does not consider China in this light as the language means that the concept of Global Britain is not possible here, as will be shown later in this chapter.

Betsy Trotwood's proposal about emigration reveals that this is not an exclusively male option: "Mr Micawber, I wonder you have never turned your thoughts to emigration....Why, what a thing it would be for yourselves and your family, Mr and Mrs Micawber, if you were to emigrate now."¹²⁶ The word 'wonder' holds so much more than merely a curiosity; it represents hope and, I argue, the world of the 'New World' which seemed in miles so far away as to be almost unreal. The bi-gender benefit of emigration for both Mr and Mrs Micawber confirms that this is not a male-only mission, but one which allows the problems that follow them as a couple to be left behind as they are transported to another country filled with possibilities. The 'now' that concludes this quotation is also indicative of the immediacy of this plan and emigration, far from being presented as a mere possibility, is a happy conclusion. The message within the novel is that if the homeland does not suit the son the colonial land, with less competition and a British identity, will.

Micawber's preparations for the voyage to Australia are fairly extensive. Australia is feared to be a primitive destination where precautions for the British traveller have to be made. Consequently Mr Micawber purchases a 'complete suit of oil-skin, and a straw hat with a very low crown, pitched or caulked on the outside. In this rough clothing, with a common mariner's telescope under his arm'¹²⁷, Micawber's ignorance of the country to which he is going is farcical. Micawber journeys to Australia as an explorer and Dickens uncovers the

¹²⁵ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 852.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 768.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 808.

tingoistic nature of the British traveller abroad, whose primary endeavour is to civilise.

The Peggottys' move from Yarmouth to Australia is poignant and acts as a mirror to the work of Urania Cottage, a place which was co-founded by Angela Burdett-Coutts and Charles Dickens. The house worked to improve the lives of fallen women - a nineteenth century euphemism - and a supported emigration programme was established. Emily, as a fallen woman, needs the 'journey out' to regain autonomy and her uncle is keen to reinstate, in the space abroad, a new unblemished reputation for her. As Grace Moore has argued:

It is obvious that he [Dickens] regards emigration as a vital component in the redemptive process, and it is important to ask why this should be the case. It would appear that in Dickens's mind these women could only be completely rehabilitated if they were removed from the 'corrupting' elements present in industrial Britain, and the stigma that would be attached to them as 'fallen' women.¹²⁸

By carrying the prestige of a British identity and yet losing the stain of Emily's personal identity, emigration in *David Copperfield* erases the past and allows a future.

Steerforth, even before he meets the Peggottys, is intrigued by this family, which to him seems so primitive and yet are inhabitants and products of the same land as himself. Steerforth creates a 'British zoo' in much the same way as the empire created a 'zoo' of the native inhabitants. He wants to indulge his voyeuristic tendencies and believes it will be: "no fun....unless we take them by surprise. Let us see the natives in their aboriginal condition."¹²⁹ Steerforth's characterisation of the Peggottys as savages questions the representation of certain classes in the novel. In addition it is an early indication of the role Australia plays in the narrative, and reveals that the Peggottys are as alien to Steerforth as people from other countries are to the majority of the British people. It additionally sets China and Australia apart as lands of possible emigration. Steerforth wants to watch them in their natural environment; however, he doesn't just observe, he ruins too. Steerforth's desire to see the 'natives' in their 'aboriginal condition' does not last long; rather he wishes to expose and corrupt them, much as it can be suggested Britain did in the Empire

¹²⁸ Moore, *Dickens and Empire*, p. 18.

¹²⁹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 310.

and colonial spaces. It is evident that Steerforth and Emily are infatuated with each other as he takes her away on a seeming grand tour of Europe. The letter Emily writes to her family to explain her departure again underscores the interconnectedness of Britain with the world. Steerforth tires of Emily, much as he tires of life, and decides to use Emily as a trading device by offering her to Littimer, his butler. In this way Steerforth prostitutes Emily in much the same way as colonisers frequently did with women in the Empire. This trading of lives mirrors the trade that continued abroad in the colonies with people and objects. The fact that it is conducted with Emily, a product from the homeland of Britain, makes this 'trade' even more loaded, presenting a sense that things that originate from the homeland can be traded just as they are abroad.

When Emily does return to Britain before she and Mr Peggotty emigrate, Rosa Dartle is swift to pass judgment. The scene between Emily and Rosa is keenly felt by the readership as Miss Dartle, who is wounded in a physical sense by Steerforth, is placed as a counterpoint to Emily's social ruin by the same man. She is referred to as a 'purchased slave'¹³⁰ and this presents a notion of the British coloniser functioning in different areas societally. This is in direct contrast with David's conversation with Littimer: "Thank you sir. But you'll excuse me if I say, sir, that there are neither slaves nor slave drivers in this country, and that people are not allowed to take the law into their own hands....I am not afraid of going wherever I may wish, sir."¹³¹ Littimer's absence of fear when speaking of David's threat, and his outspokenness as a servant, marks a difference between the male and female means of dealing with misdemeanours and the freedom that British 'slave-drivers' have at home as opposed to abroad. Whilst Littimer is prepared to take 'bodily donations' in the form of Emily from his master Steerforth, he does so as a freeman; slavery and slave driving, despite his position in servitude, do not relate to him. However with regard to Emily quite the opposite is the case. The difference in Littimer's and Emily's treatment is underscored when Rosa Dartle states that Emily was 'part of the trade of your home, and [you] were bought and sold like any other vendible thing your people dealt in.'¹³² Rosa's characterisation of Emily as a 'vendible thing' who has been essentially enslaved by an 'internal coloniser', Steerforth, is

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 724.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 678.

¹³² Ibid., p. 725.

persuasive as a counter-example of slavery within the classes in Britain. Emily, like the commercial items Britain trades in, has her price and that price is her fall.

Steerforth has a prosperous journey out to Europe with Emily, through both his financial strength and his physical appearance as a dapper young gentleman with an attractive female companion. However, his happy return home is prevented by his poignant death at sea; the very place upon which Mr Peggotty places his faith. The fact that Steerforth is so near the shore and his homeland when he dies seems to be a pleasurable irony within Dickens's scheme – the man who assumes in his arrogance he can master the sea and the world is denied by Dickens the 'happy return home' to British soil. The passage over water that ultimately provides salvation for Emily proves to be deadly for Steerforth; Steerforth is happy to leave Emily to her own fate abroad and explicitly denies her protection, yet determinedly seeks home when his own need takes him. That Steerforth dies on the very seas responsible for so much transnational trade resonates significantly with these discourses.

Mr Peggotty's brief return to Britain after migrating to Australia confirms the theme of the 'happy return home'. Indeed, Mr Peggotty is the only character to wholly represent all three facets of the paradigm 'a prosperous journey out, a thriving career abroad and a happy return home.' The distance, which to the readership may well have seemed almost impassable, is rendered merely: "a mort of water" said Mr Peggotty, 'fur to come across, and only stay a matter of fower weeks. But water ('specially when 'tis salt) come nat'ral to me; and friends is dear, and I am here.'" ¹³³ The continuation of friendships both near and far is the focal point; the idea that one might go abroad and never return is presented as an imploded myth. Whether the communication be in a physical or epistolary sense, boundaries between lands are traversed and the old world of Britain goes out to the New World of Australia and returns again. There is a circularity to the relationship.

Even Martha, who is represented as more of a creature than a woman early in the novel, emigrates and moves from suicidal moments by the Thames to joy and matrimony over the ocean:

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 872.

“Martha,” he replied, “go married, Mas’r Davy, in the second year. A young man, farm labourer, as come by us on his way to market with his mas’r’s drays – a journey of over five hundred mile, theer and back – made offers fur to take her fur his wife (wives is very scarce theer), and then to set up fur their two selves in the Bush.... they live fower hundred mile away from any voices but their own and singing birds.”¹³⁴

The distance of four hundred miles from the nearest neighbour, almost unthinkable to an inhabitant of Britain, doesn’t seem fearful; rather, it is cast as a blissful return to nature and simplicity – almost a new Eden. The message again is that where there is space, so too is there mobility and this is what the ‘New World’ can provide.

‘A most misrepresented country’¹³⁵

Trading between Britain and India was well established at the time of publication and the continued, and increasing, influence of the East India Company meant that India was considered rich in opportunities from an objectival as well as commercial sense. The company had great power over India, and indeed China, as will be discussed later in this chapter. The purpose of this analysis is to differentiate between the power held by Britain over India as part of the Empire, versus the difficulties of managing a nation that was not part of the Empire, such as China. *David Copperfield* engages with the opportunities presented abroad and also reflects on the ways in which India has the potential to be a place where characters – and by proxy the readership – can go and improve their financial prospects. This emphasises Dickens’s conception that the movement of people from Britain rather than the entry of people into Britain has a redemptive as well as financial potential. This situates *David Copperfield* as an emigrant rather than immigrant focussed narrative. The issue of a cultural ‘Other’ entering Britain is still met with apprehension and yet, as early as this point, there was a significant Chinese immigrant population in London’s Limehouse area. The financial benefits are not, however, reciprocal; Britain sought a preferential trading relationship to benefit its own economy over

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 874.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 252.

that of the other. The trade routes, and trade more generally, are not addressed explicitly; instead, the objects which that trade brought into the British consciousness are. In this way Dickens's novel allows for undertones of discourse about the impact of trade without directly addressing the potential ramifications of embarking on such global relationships. Dickens's representation of India is, in this novel, not outwardly or aggressively hostile; instead, the narrative reinforces several cultural and geographical stereotypes which are generally addressed in commodity terms. This is in contrast to the representation of China and tea, where it is the commodity that takes the focal point and is analysed.

The movement of people to India from Britain saw an increase in popularity, and the rich land of which the British had control had an allure as a country that offered the potential for enacting perceived progress over the colonial space. However, it also functioned as a repository for those members of British society for whom there was no place, or who were no longer wanted. Dickens, in *David Copperfield*, uses this device and places several of the characters who are socially disadvantageous to other characters in India. Betsey Trotwood's complex relationship with men is swiftly explained early in the novel, where we are told her husband:

...went to India with his capital, and there, according to a wild legend in our family, he was once seen riding an elephant, in company with a baboon; but I think it must have been a baboo – or a begum. Anyhow, from India, tidings of his death reached home, within ten years. How they affected my aunt, nobody knew; for immediately upon the separation she took her maiden name again, bought a cottage in a hamlet in the sea-coast a long way off, established herself there as a single woman with one servant, and was understood to live secluded ever afterwards, in an inflexible retirement.¹³⁶

These descriptions would have fulfilled the readership's expectations and helped to support the conception of the very 'otherness' of the climate, wildlife and the culture. It is in sharp contrast with the prosperity that can be sought in places such as Australia, which will be discussed later in this chapter and, whilst not discussed in this thesis, can also be witnessed in Dickens's later novel,

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 15

*Great Expectations*¹³⁷, where Magwitch makes his fortune as a sheep farmer. In Australia the land is rich and the opportunities are plentiful; in India, capital is easily lost and not so easily regained. That India, as part of the British Empire, is a place of British loss seems to jar with a sense of the never-ending gains of the Briton abroad which can be witnessed in reports about the British in India. Yet, in terms of the East India Company's trading opportunities, commodities from abroad are financially advantageous. The life of a British man on an elephant has all the qualities of a fairy tale and romanticises the 'Other'; indeed it seems to borrow representations of the 'Other' from Dickens's own childhood reading with *Arabian Nights*.¹³⁸ The depiction of India as being wild and 'Other', a place where money can be lost, is clear. The fact that Betsey Trotwood moves, reclaims her maiden name and removes herself to seclusion suggests that, far from not being affected by the change, she re-establishes and claims her connection to 'safe' British shores. The news of Betsey Trotwood's husband's death, which takes '10 years' to arrive, explores the concept of communication. The suggestion is that India is a place with limited capacity and tardy progress which is at odds with British efficiency and modernisation. Indeed, it is also in contrast to depictions of China that will be explored in Chapter 4. This epistolary route of communication is key to this novel, where correspondence occurs both in a physical and non-physical manner. This is contrasted later in the novel where, in a comparatively short space of time, a letter arrives from Jack Maldon. This highlights, I believe, the advances that have occurred from many years past to the present day in terms of communication: 'There is a post come from India, I observe.'¹³⁹ The sense that all nations were moving toward each other in the sense of progress, communication and transport provides an opportunity to assess the impact not only that Britain would have on other cultures, but also the influence they would have on Britain. The occurrence of communication between different countries engages a sense of transnational dialogues. Those Britons who choose to leave the homeland can still be reached; this sense of communication and an extended British global community is something that *David Copperfield* capitalises on.

¹³⁷ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, (London: Penguin, 2003)

¹³⁸ Anonymous, *The Arabian Nights, 1001 Nights*, ed by Robert Mack (London: Penguin, 2010)

¹³⁹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 287.

In *David Copperfield* Dickens treats India satirically, drawing on preconceived ideas about Britain's foreign land. Dickens recognises the very 'otherness' of India, yet the presence of Britons in India to an extent naturalises the land. David's description of Jack Maldon's departure presents an example to examine, where he states that:

I recollect that it was settled by general consent that India was quite a misrepresented country, and had nothing objectionable in it, but a tiger or two, and a little heat in the warm part of the day. For my own part I looked at Mr Jack Maldon as a modern Sinbad and pictured him the bosom friend of all the rajahs in the east, sitting under canopies, smoking curly golden pipes – a mile long, if they could be straightened out.¹⁴⁰

The order and types of detail about the person and journey are significant: the name of the traveller - Maldon - is resolutely British and, in addition to this being his surname, it is also a place where fine British salt comes from; thus a connection is developed between a trusted commodity and a less trusted character. The notion of the voyage out, a general exploration of foreign climes and the people he might encounter progresses to the plans and prospects he might anticipate. The India Dickens shows us here is a country where those less desirable British products, such as Jack Maldon, can be exported to become a colonial, rather than a 'home' problem. India is described as a being a 'misrepresented country' which, when taken as a reflection on David's naivety, is less reassuring. Yet, there is an attempt to assuage the anxieties about this foreign land. Introspection as well as retrospection with different cultures is developed.

David's fairy-tale conception of India and Jack Maldon's role there is also symptomatic of making meaning and sense out of the foreign commodities, creatures and the unknown. David imagines the 'curly golden pipes' and appears to enjoy a moment of fancy. This is then collapsed by the suggestion that they would be 'a mile long, if they could be straightened out'. This straightening out and ordering of other cultures is part of what I would argue is Dickens's perception of British influence abroad, and the lack of progress occurring without assistance. Dickens uses fancy and fact to communicate to his readership the progress made at home and abroad.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 252.

Jack Maldon's outward journey isn't without the hope of a 'happy return home'; the return home is central. Travel and exploration might well be good for the economy, but a strong connection with the homeland is a focal feature of the voyage to India. The return, in this sense, is as important as the journey itself, allowing the outside world to be explored with the security of a return home to rely on:

Mr Jack Maldon, you have a long voyage, and a strange country, before you; but many men have had both, and many men will have both, to the end of time. The winds you are going to tempt, have wafted thousands and thousands to fortune, and brought thousands upon thousands happily back.¹⁴¹

Jack Maldon is sent to India to find a career, to ensure Britain's prosperity and to make his fortune - the gain is monetary and for the homeland. However, the intended positive improvements for abroad are important too. Jack is forced to return to Britain, allegedly because of his health: "Poor dear Jack!" said Mrs Markleham, shaking her head. "That trying climate! - like living, they tell me, on a sand-heap, underneath a burning-glass! He looked strong, but he wasn't."¹⁴² The piling on of sand, which is a central component in the making of glass along with the 'burning glass' creates a representation of India as a microcosm or a vacuum, which is looked into but not lived in comfortably by the Briton abroad. Jack Maldon fails to have a prosperous journey out or a thriving career abroad; however he does return home, though his hold over Annie is lost and his happiness is tempered. The failure, however, is not on the part of 'abroad' but on the part of the home product, Jack. The question is, how many contemporary readers would recognise this?

The text, as I have already suggested, is rich in objectival meanings, yet particularly intriguing is the placement of these objects within the text. Dickens holds India and Britain in tension on the page where firstly India is referred to and then Britain. This is something I will explore throughout this thesis, where foreign commodities are presented alongside British commodities as a way of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 287.

recognising Britain's commercial prosperity, but also its reliance on foreign products. I would suggest that this is conceived to highlight a sense of the way that lands and cultures are developing a network of interdependence. This can be seen firstly when Mrs Markleham enters, where:

There was a superstition that this cap had come from France, and could only originate in the workmanship of that ingenious nation but all I certainly know about it, is, that it always made its appearance of an evening, wheresoever Mrs Markleham made *her* appearance; that it was carried about to friendly meetings in a Hindoo basket.¹⁴³

Dickens's inclusion of France forges a historical connection for the reader, recognising the loss the French had in the seven year war of India and thus making a particularly pointed political remark. The 'Hindoo basket' is also included, inserting India into the consciousness of the reader. The Hindoo basket takes on not only the country, but also the nation's primary faith. It can be suggested that there is a conflation of the faith and the cultural differences. The basket contains the French hat that is carried in a ceremonial fashion into the room and then is used to make a European object transfer into British possession. Through the 'ownership' of India as a British colony, the object is in a sense naturalised and consumed in a cultural sense. The party held in Jack's honour provides another example of Britain and other cultures being presented together and developing relationships. India is mentioned and the fact that a party 'was given on the occasion of Mr Jack Maldon's departure from India, whither he was going as a cadet, or for something of that kind'¹⁴⁴ is introduced. Jack, the British traveller, develops a place within the global framework. However, this is tempered by a reference, through the blush of Annie's cheeks: 'The clear red and white of her complexion was not so blooming and flower-like as usual.'¹⁴⁵ This red and white whilst clearly showing her vitality also mirrors, I would suggest, the English flag with its red and white. Thus a colonial space is presented alongside a British space concurrently. Yet this red and white complexion is described as being 'less blooming'. I would suggest that this is a

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 248.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 249.

reflection of the 'sharing' of space at home and abroad, and the realisation that the Britain is now reliant upon India and the 'Other'. Britain's colonial strength is acknowledged and yet its dependence on resources – and bodies – abroad is recognised.

Mr Mill's departure to India - and with him, Miss Mill - is felt by David as an annoyance; it not only disrupts his plans with Dora but the lack of any real 'connection' with the locale on the part of Mr Mill is commented upon. What is not addressed here is that every Briton is inextricably linked with Britain through its reliance on the prosperity of its colonial spaces. This movement in terms of the novel is a further example of the way that geographical spaces are traversed and boundaries are blurred, through situating characters and Britishness in the world of the 'Other':

It was a great augmentation of my uneasiness to be bereaved, at this eventful crisis, of the inestimable services of Miss Mills. But Mr Mills, who was always doing something or other to annoy me - or I felt as if he were, which was the same thing - had brought his conduct to climax by taking it into his head that he would go to India. Why should he go to India, except to harass me? To be sure he had nothing to do with any other part of the world, and had a good deal to do with that part; being entirely in the India trade, whatever that was (I had floating dreams myself concerning golden shawls and elephant's teeth); having been at Calcutta in his youth; and designing now to go out there again, in the capacity of resident partner.¹⁴⁶

David's declaration that he 'had nothing to do with any other part of the world' is rather curious when one reflects on the inter-relatedness of the colonial spaces. Perhaps one might reflect on this as Dickens reminding his readership that Britain is connected to every part of the world, most notably, the colonies, and that without them the Empire would not exist. This global spider-web of trade, commerce and characters is what makes the transnational spaces, alongside geopolitical commodities, so powerful. David includes the romanticised notion of India with the 'golden shawls' and the 'elephant's teeth' which are suggestive of items that might be anticipated to arrive in the collection of the Great Exhibition, with global tourism and fetishised global commodities. Mr Mill's travels to Calcutta develops a connection with China and the trade that was illegally

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 596.

completed there. Opium was illegal in China and the British used Calcutta as a means of facilitating and transporting opium into the country. The way in which Dickens interweaves relationships between transnational groups, products and spaces shows the interconnectedness of Britain with the world. Equally, the ways that objects create meanings to both Britain and the 'Other', both at home and abroad, develops a shared cultural dialectic. China is no longer on the periphery for Britain; it is another valuable country which supplies tea through trade. This is a prime example of the reflexive nature of these relationships and the increasingly globalised world of Dickens's time.

'Then we had more tasks until tea' ¹⁴⁷

China features within *David Copperfield* as a prime example of a locale upon which Britain was dependent in commodity terms. Britain's love of tea from China was something that continued to grow in popularity throughout Dickens's writing and showed an increasing commodity dependence. In an article entitled 'English Annals of Tea' published in *Household Words*, Dickens discusses the love of this commodity and Britain's increasing fetishisation of Chinese products. In the article, published at the same time as publication of *David Copperfield* was ongoing, Charles Knight writes, initially sympathetically about the Chinese, that 'Like many other foreigners, they received a full share of abuse and persecution from the people and the state.'¹⁴⁸ This is an unusually compassionate moment for Dickens in his treatment of the Chinese, and other examples throughout this thesis will reveal a less enlightened view. Dickens then proceeds to state a disparity between the cost of tea and volume imported between 1833 and 1850: 'With the amount of duty on tea twice as high in 1850 as in 1833, how is it that tea may be universally bought at one half of the price of 1833? How is it that an article which yields five millions of revenue has become so cheap that it is scarcely a luxury?'¹⁴⁹ Dickens's curiosity about the pricing of tea is questionable here. The questions appear to be almost rhetorical, for surely a man who was so well informed politically could not fail to see why the trading rules in terms of taxation were so heavily weighted in

¹⁴⁷ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 91.

¹⁴⁸ [Charles Knight], 'Illustrations of Cheapness: Tea', *Household Words*, Vol. 1. No. 11, (8 June 1850), pp. 253-256.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

Britain's favour. The First Opium War of 1839-1842 and the subsequent treaties and opening of ports ensure that cost was decreasing for the British consumer, whilst the quality of life in taxation terms for the Chinese was decreasing. The notion of the lost luxuriousness of tea marks a significant point where Dickens acknowledges the fetishisation of the product, not just for the wealthy but also the poor. Very few commodities traversed the social strata and that tea - and by proxy China - was able to do this marks not only the commodity's appeal but also its provenance. The article continues by stating that 'Tea is the barometer of the poor man's command of something more than bread' and lastly that 'Tea is more and more becoming a necessary of life to all classes.'¹⁵⁰ That a foreign commodity was able to make such an impact on British life marks a dangerous progression from a nation with little power over Britain to one which was a commercially savvy nation and one which Britain, in commodity terms, was reliant upon.

In a more obvious way than other 'New World' locations, China encourages the British reader to concentrate on the produce and visual culture, rather than the specifics of location and geography. China is not presented as a land in which to live, but instead one to trade with. This is a device employed to underscore the fact that few Britons settled in China in comparison to other locations and the language barriers meant that in a linguistic sense they were free from the cultural constraints of other colonial spaces.

The connection between trade, China and Britain begins fairly instantaneously in the novel. The caul which David was born with around his neck is sold for protection and serves its buyer well, albeit under the conscious irony that the lady in question avoids the sea:

I have understood that it was, to the last, her proudest boast, that she never had been on the water in her life, except upon a bridge; and that was over to her tea (to which she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation at the impiety of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go 'meandering' around the world. It was in vain to

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 256.

represent to her that some conveniences, tea perhaps included, resulted from this objectionable practice.¹⁵¹

Dickens uses this woman as a device to reveal general anxieties about seafaring. The caul around David's neck represents a sense of the weight around the neck of Britain, which has become as dependent on the 'Other' as the 'Other' is to Britain. It is interesting that the old lady is reliant upon tea from China and yet, at the same time, is seemingly oblivious to the means by which her tea is procured. The ability for minds in the novel, and indeed perhaps outside the novel, to separate the commodity from the practice is significant. The criticism of going out upon the sea, which was so required for defence, emigration, acquisition and maintenance of colonial spaces as well as for trade is significant and contrasts with all that Britain was striving for. The notion of 'meandering' around the world is in contrast with the real speed of movement across the globe that ensured Britain's progress and acquisition of commodities - and land - which are central concerns of the novel. The idea that trade in tea resulted from this 'objectionable practice' connects with the both the objectionable need for Britain to depend on the 'Other' but also on the object itself: the tea.

The way in which the tea and representations of Chinese culture are portrayed develops a British conception of China that is, in many ways, as stereotyped as the preconceived representation of India. The difference, of course, between the two spaces is that Britain had absolute control over India and did not have the same level of control over China, despite the desirability of such a geographical acquisition. For now, the commodity had to suffice. Dickens's description of the space and the organisation of the objects placed in the room shows the very cosmopolitan state of the nineteenth century home:

There was a table, and a Dutch clock, and a chest of drawers, and on the chest of drawers there was a tea-tray with a painting on it of a lady with a parasol, taking a walk with a military looking child who was trundling a hoop. The tray was kept from falling down, by a bible; and the tray, if it

¹⁵¹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p. 14.

had tumbled down, would have smashed a quantity of cups and saucers and a teapot that were grouped around the book.¹⁵²

The presentation of different cultures, all in a small space in a British home, highlights the notion of the world on one table. The Dutch clock introduces the presence of Europe and a sense of the passage of time. The tea-tray itself allows the reader to make connections between the drinking of the tea and the ways in which it is carried into Britain, whilst the lady with a parasol and the military looking child are suggestive of both past and present joining together to bring the old and established world of Britain into the New World of China. The comment about the militaristic child underscores this reading and forges a sense of transnational progress. The Bible which props up the tray seems to be almost bestowed with a protective power and the ancient traditions which present themselves in a literary and spiritual sense encourage a sense of reflection and pause at a time when society was pushing forward. That the Bible also prevents a crashing down of tea cups is suggestive of endeavours to keep the cultural ebb and flow stable and to create a sense of Christian stability at home and in Britain's global home abroad.

Tea, and by proxy China, features within *David Copperfield* and connects both cultures with a shared past-time. David sits with Mr Mell and drinks tea and it is here that a relationship between China and England can be seen to be further developed in an objectival sense. David recalls that: 'Then, we had more tasks until tea, which Mr Mell drank out of a blue tea cup, and I out of a tin pot.'¹⁵³ The very 'foreign' tea is drunk by Mr Mell, from a blue tea cup, echoing colours commonly associated with China, whilst David drinks his tea from a tin pot - a quintessentially British metal. By joining the two cultures in this way, Britain and China are presented concurrently and the cultures, at least in this small domestic space, are brought together. As has been shown earlier, this is a further indication of Dickens presenting cultures from the New World alongside Britain. The ceremony of taking tea is represented as a shared cultural custom between China and Britain and is anglicised by the characters within the novel. From the first incident with Mr Mell to David's visit with the

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 91.

Doctor for tea: 'We were to drink tea at the Doctor's....The Doctor, who made as much of my going away as if I were going to China.'¹⁵⁴ The movement between drinking tea and its place of origination further develops connections between the commodity reference and the nation.

David's conflation of the tea drinking with very English subjects and then journeying beyond the tea table and into China is suggestive of a new-found comfort in 'otherness'. It is this familiarity that Dickens, I would suggest, finds concerning. Britain's own cultural agency is being jeopardised by a foreign clime. That in *David Copperfield* tea it is always situated alongside a British image or product suggests that China has a place, as long as it is alongside Britain: "Exactly so," replied Traddles, "all to be earned. Of course we have something in the shape of teaspoons, because we stir our tea, but they're Britannia metal."¹⁵⁵ This distinction between China and Britain and the pairing of the images together is something that Dickens moves away from in his later novels and shows, I argue, the insidious nature, and danger, of China which provides a commodity that is desired and leaves Britain culturally dependent. Dickens anticipates his readers' ability to move beyond the simple ceremony and into a whole other culture which is co-mingled with one so different from their own. I would argue that such an expectation was quite radical, as it suggests a very real awareness of a world beyond Britain that in a literary and lingual sense was really very distant from their own.

This lexical unfamiliarity is again unified with the very British concept of Parliament. British governmental proceedings are presented as 'foreign' to David, much as the Chinese language and alphabet are to the home readership. Although the policies are written in English and are naturalised, David states that: 'I might as well have copied the Chinese inscriptions on an immense collection of tea-chests, or the golden characters on all the great red and green bottles in the chemists' shops.'¹⁵⁶ Dickens balances the idea of copying 'Chinese inscriptions' from a tea chest, underscoring again the trading relationship between home and abroad of Britain and China and the well-known commodity that Britons were purchasing by the ton. The fear, therefore, is a

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 286.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 831.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 553.

double one: Britain desires the control of the 'Other' whilst the 'Other' is depended upon and becomes increasingly elevated.

The furniture that is sought out for David and Dora's first home takes them on a comprehensive journey of the city: 'Miss Clarissa and my aunt roam all over London, to find out articles of furniture for Dora and me to look at...Dora sees a Chinese house for Jip, with little bells on top, and prefers that. And it takes a long time to accustom Jip to his new residence, after we have bought it; whenever he goes in or out, he makes all the bells ring, and is horribly frightened.'¹⁵⁷ The idea of women roaming across the city and encountering a range of objects connects with a global conception of Britain and Britons roaming the globe for new spaces to 'buy'. The way that Dora's eye is immediately drawn to a 'Chinese house' for her dog, which has bells on the top, reveals how even Dora with her limited awareness is trying to seek out something new and exotic; she desires the Chinese fetishised objects. Susan Shoenbauer Thurin has noted more broadly that at the Great Exhibition in 1851 - an event that Dickens himself described in a letter to Forster as 'not that there is nothing in it, there is too much'¹⁵⁸ - notes that the exhibition had 'a Two storey pagoda constructed especially for the purpose which housed 'Ten Thousand Chinese Things', which displayed the 'Genius, Government, History, Literature, Agriculture, Arts, Traditions, Manners, Customs and Social Life of the Celestial People.'¹⁵⁹ This clearly identifies that there was a national interest in the commodities that were being produced by China, such as chinaware, silks and tea, and the Great Exhibition was keen to represent this. The fact that the dog is 'horribly frightened' is suggestive not only of the dog's anxiety about the introduction or entry into a foreign product and marketplace, but Dickens suggests an anxiety about what such an item does to British identity. The difference between the way that India is presented in the novel as a settlement of 'natives' to the way that China is represented as a land which is in possession of prized goods (which the British consumer is eager to possess), shows the ways in which desirable commodities can be seen to modify national identity. In a Dickensian literary sense, this process can be seen as the rising

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 633.

¹⁵⁸ To John Forster, *Pilgrim Edition Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 7 ed. Catherine Tillotson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

¹⁵⁹ Susan Shoenbauer Thurin, *Victorian Travellers and the Opening of China, 1842-1907* (Ohio: Ohio State Press, 1999) p. 27.

significance of geopolitical commodities and an increasing dependence on Chinese goods. What this does to ideas about British identity and independence is at the crux of this discourse.

Chapter 3

From Britain to beyond: *Bleak House* and objects of social desire

Even if our own approach to things is conditioned necessarily by the view that the things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions and motivations endow them with, the anthropological problem is that this formal truth does not illuminate the concrete, historical circulation of things. For that we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories that we can interpret the human transaction and calculations that enliven things.¹⁶⁰

Bleak House was written in 1852, a year after the world and all her commodities came to Britain for the Great Exhibition. Although the first serialised part was not issued until March 1852, the final instalment published in September 1853 produced a total of 20 monthly parts. The title itself is highly suggestive of the ills present in the British house with the ever increasing presence of foreign commodities and a clear critique of the British judiciary system. The novel captured a very precise moment of social change in Britain and anticipated the ways in which transnational spaces were moving ever nearer through the movement of commodities and increasing trade. Michael Slater's biography *Charles Dickens* quotes a nineteenth century American journalist who congratulated Dickens on *Bleak House*, stating that it was a 'wonderful instance of mental transmigration.'¹⁶¹ This 'mental transmigration' will provide a useful concept for consideration for, it will be argued, the reader is taken across vast geographical spaces through the act of reading and is encouraged to draw out connections made between the commodities Britain had become dependent upon, such as tea in the case of China, and the locales from which they originated.

During the publication of *Bleak House* Dickens published a range of articles in *Household Words* that look at the nations represented in the story. Articles such as 'The Buried City of Ceylon'¹⁶², 'A Chinaman's Ball'¹⁶³, 'Chips:

¹⁶⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens*, (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) p. 347.

¹⁶² [William Knight and Henry Morley], 'The Buried City of Ceylon', *Household Words*, Vol. V, No. 105, (27 March 1852), p. 25-27.

Chinese Players’¹⁶⁴, ‘India Pale Ale’¹⁶⁵, ‘The Great Indian Bean-Stalk’¹⁶⁶, ‘African Zephyrs’¹⁶⁷ all focus on areas that formed part of Britain’s Empire or trading partners and reveal the way in which Dickens’s journal’s world view complements the content of Dickens’s novel.

Bleak House cannot be read, I believe, without reflection on Dickens’s ‘The Noble Savage’¹⁶⁸, one of the most vitriolically aggressive articles published by Dickens in his working life. As Michael Slater notes: ‘Lord Denman publicly criticised the Borrioboola-Gha satire, linking it with what he saw as pro-slavery bias in *Household Words*.’¹⁶⁹ In this article, *Household Words*, presents a vision of the world beyond Britain that is inferior and less developed. Dickens’s own personal references to people from Africa are also unenlightened, with him stating to John Leech that ‘I shall dine at the Household Words offices on Thursday at ½ p 5 [sic], and afterwards go to see the Savages at Hyde Park’.¹⁷⁰ By writing in this way, I would argue that Dickens’s work reveals not only racist attitudes but also a complex anxiety about the increasing inter-connectedness of the world.

Whilst *Bleak House* has often been read in the context of commodification and the Great Exhibition, what has yet to be recognised is the novel’s fuller dialogue with trade and its specific interest in exotic, Eastern objects. Within this chapter transnational objects do not relate solely to the material commodities themselves, but also to the global object of the country itself, by which I mean the conception of the country and the citizens. This is an argument I will explore throughout this work. This chapter will firstly concentrate in detail on two articles featured in *Household Words* during the publication of this novel and reflect on the representation of China. By reading the novel and

¹⁶³ [James Augustus St John], ‘A Chinaman’s Ball’, in *Household Words*, Vol. 5, No.117, (19 June 1852). p. 331-332.

¹⁶⁴[Edward Henry Michelsen], ‘Chips: Chinese Players’, in *Household Words*, Vol. 8, No. 191 (19 November, 1853) p. 281-283.

¹⁶⁵ [George Augustus Sala], ‘India Pale Ale’ in *Household Words*, Vol VII, no. 174. (23 July, 1853) p. 488 – 492.

¹⁶⁶ [John Capper], ‘The Great Indian Bean-Stalk’, in *Household Words*, Vol. VIII, No. 182, (17 September, 1853) p. 60-64.

¹⁶⁷ [Edmund Saul Dixon], ‘African Zephyrs’, in *Household Words*, Vol. VIII, No. 186 (15 October, 1853) p. 145-150.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Dickens, ‘The Noble Savage’ in *Household Words* Vol. 7 (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853).

¹⁶⁹ Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens*, p. 348.

¹⁷⁰ To John Leech, 23 May 1853, *Pilgrim Edition Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol 7 ed. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) p. 91.

the two selected articles, 'The Great Exhibition to the Little One'¹⁷¹ and 'China with a Flaw in It'¹⁷², I will explore the ways in which global relationships and an increasing dependence on Chinese commodities in Britain effect perceptions of identity and the nation. The second section will consider the ways in which India and China are introduced as additional transnational spaces to create a clear sense of a community between Britain and abroad. This 'sense of community' will be held in tension with India's presence in the Empire versus China's autonomy. Furniture from India, such as a Hindoo-chair that metamorphoses and the tea produced in China suggest that Britain's trading power is being referenced whilst simultaneously displaying a commodity (and country) dependence on transnational spaces. Acknowledging this trading power will allow me to reflect upon the quantity of tea being imported to Britain from China and the money that was obtained through taxation to further Britain's prosperity. The appearance of opium will also be underpinned, with a reflection on the First Opium War of 1839-1842 and the ways in which opium from the Empire served to increase British strength in China. I will argue that one of the primary objectives of *Bleak House* was for Dickens to engage his readers in a political sense with the lands they were, in many ways, as dependent upon as they were on Britain, their homeland. By presenting a detailed examination of the text itself alongside a consideration of the trading, historical and political effect of the presence of these objects a nuanced reading of Britain's relationship with China can be gleaned. Lastly I will situate the role Africa plays in the novel and the role of the female philanthropist. This section will seek to explore the relationship between Britain and Africa and to address the ways in which Africa, through the repetition of Mrs Jellyby's cause and the coffee that is sourced there, is included in the commodity dialogue. This will also elicit an engagement with a gendered reading of this space. The appearance of coffee will be connected with trading statistics to show that, at this time, the popularity of coffee was diminishing in Britain as opposed to the rise in tea sales from China.

Dickens's novel reveals a cultural consciousness of the world beyond Britain which is achieved by maintaining cultural distinctions. In many ways such distinctions are fundamentally important in revealing the fetishisation of

¹⁷¹ [Charles Dickens and Richard H. Horne], 'The Great Exhibition to the Little One', *Household Words*, Vol. III, No. 67 (5 July 1851), pp. 356-360.

¹⁷² [Henry Morley], 'China with a Flaw in It', *Household Words*, Vol. V, No. 119 (3 July 1852) p. 368-374.

foreign commodities and, as Nicholas Thomas has suggested: 'The fact of difference is thus different to any contingent similarities between ourselves and other peoples, as it is to our mutual entanglement.'¹⁷³ Rather than attempting to create clear similarities between other nations, Dickens defines such differences in terms of language, geography and arguably political power. As a result, Dickens's representation of foreign commodities becomes increasingly fraught. The commodities, which hold onto these cultural differences, are eagerly purchased in Britain and the question of whether this then erodes British identity and cultural 'purity' then becomes a central concern. Britain's increasing commodity dependence, even at this juncture, threatens to jeopardise British trading independence.

The fact that commodities from abroad required transit across such vast geographical spaces further underscores the desirability of the objects; it is their 'un-Britishness' that is being fetishised. It is Britain's national prosperity that facilitates this trading power and the network of commodity interchange. Significantly, the ability to import commodities from transnational locales at a rate that is disadvantageous to the transnational trader contributes to this interaction. As Arjun Appadurai has suggested: 'The long-distance movement of precious commodities entailed costs that made the acquisition of them *in itself* a marker of exclusivity and an instrument of sumptuary distinction.'¹⁷⁴ That these items are viewed as markers of 'distinction' is significant, and suggestive of both the social status of the consumer as well as a connection with the transnational space whilst never having to moving overseas or personally engage with the 'Other'. It can be argued that by importing these goods Britain was able to obtain those elements of the 'Other' that were coveted and was a way of gaining the appearance of being globally conversant through commodities. These objects were imported for the delectation of the British consumer with little regard for those who produced them. It is Appadurai's notion of exclusivity that is key and is a notion that this chapter will consider, alongside the implications of such commodity transactions. That the working classes often sought out counterfeit versions of chinaware and teas is also significant.

¹⁷³ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991) p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, p. 6.

By introducing objects that are reliant upon their very foreign-ness to be desirable in the British community, the object itself is given a life beyond what it is and is imbued with qualities that mark its difference as a central feature: 'the commodity situation in the life of any 'thing' can be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present and future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature.'¹⁷⁵ The foreign-ness of these objects is therefore legitimised and they become absorbed as part of British culture. This is a potentially dangerous state as the boundaries between home and foreign products becomes muddled. It is this notion that Dickens so clearly engages with in his writing and which provides a means of revealing how objects enable dialogues, of a potential culturally erosive nature, between other cultures and Britain. Dickens's fiction encourages a very distinct notion of national identity by using national markers, but also encourages the reader to reflect on the ways in which cultures cross and absorb elements of the 'Other'. *Bleak House* moves the readers through different geographical spaces, concurrently reminding them that the commodities they have become reliant upon are not national but transnational.

From 'The Great Exhibition to the Little One' to 'China with a Flaw in It': China, Commodities and Conflict in *Household Words*.

Charles Dickens's *Household Words*, published between 1850 and 1859, richly handle transnational locales and the objects they produced. These two articles appeared during the serial publication of *Bleak House* and fed into the notions of a country, culture and commodity that the novel itself was concerned with. Within the journal Dickens creates an important textual layering of product and locale to establish a sense of space and place. A significant difference can be noted between Dickens's novels and his journalism in the order that the objects are considered; the novels focus on the objects initially, which leads to an investigation of trade and location, whereas the journalism is primarily focussed on the location, which then leads to the object. Whilst the end result is seemingly similar, the process by which these results are achieved is nuanced

¹⁷⁵ Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, p. 13.

and leads to an intriguing new level of textual richness. Both the novels and journalism encourage the reader to reflect on the provenance of objects such as tea, china and fabrics whereby a culturally meaningful, textual, geographical network is built.

Understanding that this network of commodities is at the heart of this discourse this first section of the chapter seeks to address the ways in which, through this complex textual layering, Dickens inserts China into the British psyche through these highly focussed – and highly critical – articles in *Household Words*. This section addresses the role *Household Words* plays in making ‘familiar in their mouths’¹⁷⁶ the relationship between Dickens, China and Britain, focussing on the close reading of two articles from this seminal journal: ‘The Great Exhibition and the Little One’, published on 5th July 1851 by Charles Dickens and Richard Horne, and ‘China with a Flaw in It’ by Henry Morley, published on 3rd July 1852. Whilst I recognise that neither of these articles is solely authored by Dickens, all articles within the journal hold Dickens as their ‘conductor’ and, as such can be read as the voice of Dickens through his editorial controls. I will hold the articles in tension through their two differing methods of evaluating China and will provide a means of examining how negative cultural and social representations of China are legitimised. Whilst Dickens and Horne are keen to show the failings in trade, production and development - playing on the term ‘little’ throughout - ultimately, I will argue, the article serves to contextualise, within the British psyche, where and how these objects and this locale fit in Britain and open up an exciting discourse between Dickens, China and Britain. This discourse will be held in tension with the second article, ‘China with a Flaw in It’, written by Henry Morley for *Household Words* on 3rd July 1852 which, using a seemingly statistical or governmental cataloguing framework and through a combination of opinion and quantitative analysis, seeks to undermine China. The pun of a flaw in the ‘china’ is used as a marker of a crucial flaw in the country’s outlook - and by extension its trade - yet it also highlights a commodity which was so very valuable to the Chinese in trading terms with Britain and was, equally, desirable to the British consumer. It is this critique, cataloguing and statistical privileging these articles address and I will argue that the articles seek to undermine China’s potential trading strength

¹⁷⁶ This forms part of the full title of *Household Words* and is taken from William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, Act IV, Scene III, line 52.

in order to minimise the very real commodity challenge China presented to Britain.

Both articles are published post the Opium War of 1839-1842 and use this as an important frame of reference. Horne and Dickens begin the 'The Great Exhibition and the Little One' by outlining the values of the Great Exhibition: the ideas of progress, population and commerce. This swiftly moves into an article of two parts, being a constant contrast between Britain's superiority and China's insignificance. The article opens without initially or explicitly naming China by stating that:

There may be an odd, barbarous, or eccentric nation, here and there, upon the face of the globe, who may see fit to exercise its free will, in the negative form of will-not, and who may seclude itself from the rest of the world, resolved not to move on with it.¹⁷⁷

The circular image of the globe is one that I will return to, for there seems to be a very real interest in a notion of circularity and certainly in the context of the Great Exhibition this is particularly fertile. The absence of a direct name for the country serves to underscore the perceived insignificance of China yet, ironically, Britain's increasing dependence on that nation makes it anything but. The article then moves on to state that:

As it is impossible in any allowable space to "go through" the whole Exhibition or touch upon a tithe of its catalogue, let us suggest as curious subjects of comparison, these two countries which display (on the whole) the greatest degree of progress and the least – say England and China - England, maintaining commercial intercourse with the whole world; China shutting itself up, as far as possible, within itself.¹⁷⁸

This notion of shutting itself up and sequestering itself deliberately from the rest of the globe reveals a key British concern. The necessity that certain ports be opened to benefit trade routes is a real anxiety. When this is considered alongside the start of the quotation with 'go through', clear associations with progress and empire building are brought out. The sense is of a British

¹⁷⁷ [Dickens and Horne], 'The Great Exhibition and the Little One', p. 357.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

frustration that this process has yet to be satisfactorily achieved. That Britain will 'go through' regardless of any impediment is clear and leads the reader to the foundation of the article's discomfort with China: the fear that this perceived isolation brings with it a lack of information and knowledge by Britain. In many ways it is this sense of cultural alienation which is so very foreign to the British reader. Sabine Clemm recognises that in the Great Exhibition: 'the Chinese collection at the Crystal Palace had not in fact been assembled by the Chinese but by the East India Company and thus represented a British construction of China.'¹⁷⁹ That the Chinese were not left to develop their own identity is suggestive of the British manufacture of Chinese identity and culture. Therefore, if little development is shown it is a British choice to limit the nation's identity. Clemm provides a compelling argument about the original construction of the display and suggests that 'The Great Exhibition and the Little One' functions as a way of showing Chinese progress as being reliant upon Western influence. This current of fear is detectable in the argument the article sets out as well as the means employed to do so; the use of statistics, wordplay and imagery revealing the need to culturally control the perception of China is a key element in ensuring British supremacy in the trade battles.

That the world can also be compartmentalised is significant in terms of British progress as, by compartmentalising the globe in this way, Dickens and Horne are able to regress other transnational spaces whilst simultaneously elevating Britain and its sense of progress. By ordering locales in this way Dickens and Horne move to organise the world's spaces in terms of Empire and the ways in which Britain is:

...moving in a right direction towards some superior condition of society – politically it appears that England doubles its population in fifty-two years; France in one hundred and twenty-five years; Russia, in forty-two years; the United States of America in twenty-two and a half years; Sweden doubles its population in one hundred years; and all Europe in fifty-seven years. What are we to say of China? We believe the figures are not known; and, even if they were, the practice of infanticide would in a great measure perplex, if not defeat, our judgments and deductions.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Sabine Clemm, *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood Mapping the World in Household Words*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2010) p.25. From Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) p. 176.

¹⁸⁰ Dickens and Horne, 'The Great Exhibition and the Little One', p. 357.

Both Dickens and Horne are at pains to appear to be precise throughout with statistical privileging; the cataloguing of population growth is evidently significant in expounding the value of progress and it is evident that this precision is biased. Britain, Russia and the United States of America are, through this method, clearly situated as three hubs of world power. The strength of the spaces is demarcated by their growth and the layered details are privileged. However if we look at the figures with reference to China, this is not the case. Words such as 'believe' and 'even if they were' are used. This focussed absence of facts is important as it seeks to falsify China's true worth and identity. China in 1851 had a population of 450 million, dwarfing the 'little' population of England with the 'great' population of China. That Dickens and Horne neglect to provide any precise details about the population shows a reluctance on the part of Horne and Dickens to manipulate the facts rather than their real absence, as well as a disingenuously swift dismissal of a continent. That, at this juncture, only a few Chinese ports were open to trade is also highlighted in here but will be referred to in greater detail with regards to 'China with a Flaw in It'.

There is also, excitingly, an interest within this article in commodities and materiality. Dickens and Horne set about cataloguing British raw materials placing them as of obvious superiority. However, what is interesting in the prose here is something that I have identified as a textual layering process and something present throughout Dickens's oeuvre and is a literary tool I address in great detail elsewhere in this work. However, for the purpose of identifying this process in Dickens's journalism, I will discuss its operation in this article to demonstrate that it is a technique Dickens uses to underscore the points he makes about global locations. By a method of word organisation Dickens is able to do something fundamentally important, taking us through three changes which I will identify. Firstly he begins with: 'Consider our English raw material' then he moves to ask the reader to: 'Consider the materials employed at the great Teacup Works of Kiang-tiht-Chin (or Tight Chin).' ¹⁸¹ Finally the article asks the reader to consider in tandem: 'the greatness of the English results and

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 358.

the extraordinary littleness of the Chinese.’¹⁸² By placing the information and managing it firstly in isolation and then in unison a productive picture can be built up. This textual layering provides a subliminal, yet repetitious, message for the reader and encourages a reflection on the ways in which China and Britain interact. This is also achieved when the teapots are introduced later in the article. It begins with the: ‘cabinets and richly painted lanterns, and teapots, and tea cups’¹⁸³, followed by ‘we have more teapots and a revolving lantern’¹⁸⁴ and then concludes with and ‘more teapots’¹⁸⁵. This repositioning of the language, the slight modification and alterations of word order underscore the ways in which certain key themes are inserted within the narrative to construct a transnational commodity dialogue. This can, importantly, be seen even more so in Dickens’s novels and is, I would argue, an intentional literary process. The cataloguing of these commodities works almost as a global shopping list which is provided to reveal Britain’s increasing reliance on foreign produce: ‘medicine roots, hemp-seed, vegetable paints, varnishes, dyes, raw silk, oils, white and yellow arsenic, saffron, camphor, green tea dyes &c.’¹⁸⁶ That these commodities have infiltrated British shops, and consequently British homes, reveals the ways in which the movement of commodities became an unavoidable part of a transnationally influenced nation. The circular motif resurfaces at this juncture, connecting with notions of the globe and circularity and China’s lack of progress. The circular motif also forges further connections between silk and the popular ivory balls that British consumers desired:

Go from the silk-weaving and cotton-spinning of us outer barbarians, to the laboriously-carved ivory balls of the flowery Empire, ball within ball and circle within circle, which have made no advance and been of no earthly use for thousands of years.’¹⁸⁷

Yet these are commodities the British purchased which, for all the ridiculing, became, along with tea and tea-making paraphernalia, fetishised objects in the British home. It should also be noted that the silk arriving on British shores was

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 358.

different to that which the Chinese bought at home. As J. R. Scarth, a nineteenth century business traveller, notes:

In the temple attached to the pagoda at Ning-po, and also in several other large temples at Foo-chow and elsewhere, silk throwing is carried on. The process would astonish a Macclesfield throwster. The silk is hung in long lines from one end of the temple to the other, the end of the threads hanging towards the floor from a wooden framework....It spins round for a long time, and twists the silk attached to it; but it does it too tightly for the European nations, and the thrown silk brings a better price when the twist is less close.¹⁸⁸

There is a level of deceit here that reveals the British consumers desired authentic foreign commodities and yet they were prepared, or those who were purchasing the silk were prepared, to modify the Chinese preferences for the British consumer. The notion of the authentic Chinese product is therefore violated as the British consumer requires an inauthentic method.

Dickens and Horne then continue to reflect on the 'Chinese Junk' and this familiar sight is introduced to the reader as another example of Chinese inefficiency:

Compare these with the models of junks and boats in the Chinese Exhibition. Compare these with the Junk itself, lying in the Thames by the Temple-Stairs. As a bamboo palanquin is beside a Railway–train so is an English or American ship, besides this ridiculous abortion.¹⁸⁹

This reference bears a little more attention and requires the reader to reflect on a popular site in Temple where a boat came from China with a mixed crew of Chinese and British sailors and was moored at the docks. Indeed Dickens wrote an article about this, 'The Chinese Junk'¹⁹⁰ where, once again, the title possessed a strong double sense of meaning. The article was written and published in *The Examiner* on 24th June 1848 with Dickens making two visits to the boat. He was at once both dismissive and intrigued and, whilst the

¹⁸⁸ J.R. Scarth, *Twelve Years in China: The People, the Rebels, and the Mandarins*, Edinburgh 1860, p. 12 in J.A.G. Roberts, *China Through Western Eyes: The Nineteenth Century* (Gloucestershire: Alan Stroud Publishing Limited, 1991) p. 91.

¹⁸⁹ Dickens and Horne, 'The Great Exhibition to the Little One', p. 358.

¹⁹⁰ Charles Dickens, 'The Chinese Junk', in *The Examiner*, 24th June, 1848, p. 403.

overwhelming sense of derision is unavoidable, it is important, I argue, to reflect on exactly why, if the site was so dismal, he felt it worthy of a second visit. I would, at this juncture also point out that Dickens dismissed 'The Great Exhibition' and yet feels compelled to revisit it. Something about the foreign intrigues or concerns him, and that is identified by the repeated visits. Dickens's description of the Chinese Junk as a 'ridiculous abortion'¹⁹¹ and also as 'more like a china pen tray' and a 'floating toyshop' draws on notions of China and objects and further cements that union in the British psyche. As John Drew argues, Dickens here is: 'building on the exaggerated contrast between East and West accentuated by this trope, and reproducing both factual details and stereotyped attitudes towards Chinese culture.'¹⁹² This occurs similarly in these two articles and reveals, I would argue, the threat that China posed to Britain due to its unwillingness to move away from its own culture. The determined adherence of China to its own cultural mores posed a far greater threat to Britain as it demonstrated an unwillingness to yield. It is also of note that there was a small Chinese settlement located in Limehouse, East London, and it is intriguing to reflect on how - in this sense - on British soil the two cultures interacted. As Catherine Waters suggests: 'By the middle of the nineteenth century ordinary men and women were experiencing the pleasures and pains of consumer choice on a scale hitherto unknown.'¹⁹³ The consumer pain that Waters identifies here is, I would argue, closely tied up with an awareness that with this choice came a greater transnational interconnectedness and, with that, a potential cultural uncertainty. Clearly China was making up part of this consumer choice; the influence of chinoiserie and products from China such as silk, rice, tea and chinaware meant that whilst British produce lacked that exoticism, Chinese products had it in abundance. In competition with the practical products of the West, it is noted that the Little Exhibition presented 'a very curious porcelain box in the form of a crab, with moveable eyes and feet.'¹⁹⁴ If one questions whether the item is useful then clearly the answer is no; however, with a burgeoning middle class which was increasingly interested in foreign commodities, the use value was perhaps of little significance. Yet this casual adoption of global commodities marks a dangerous shift and the

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p.403.

¹⁹² John M. Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p. 98.

¹⁹³ Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods*, (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008) p. 3.

¹⁹⁴ [Dickens and Horne], 'The Great Exhibition and the Little One', p. 359.

recognition by Dickens of a growing reliance on transnational locales. The article states that: 'One of the indications of the progress of a nation is interchange, including internal communication and trade, and external communication and commerce, currency and wages.'¹⁹⁵ That Britain actively stifled this due to excessive taxation is something 'China with a Flaw in It' reveals yet does not criticise.

'China with a Flaw in It' does something very different to 'The Great Exhibition and the Little One'. Morley sets out the historical framework for the readership, often mocking China's lack of progress, but what is important about this is the 'why'. If a country is of so little import, *why* would one bother to criticise it or to reference in such a meticulous fashion the points of change brought about by the Opium Wars. I would argue that the real reason for this is that China is perceived as a threat and the article's primary function is to raise awareness of this threat under the guise of dismissal. Morley recognises China's thriving manufacturing industry and its ability to add value by transforming its natural materials into commodities that Britain as a consuming nation was buying into. Equally Morley engages with the 'internal distractions of the Chinese Empire'¹⁹⁶ which, he suggests, may benefit Britain in terms of trade and progress. Clearly, however, the article's focus remains on securing access to the ports which they determinedly went about gaining in earlier years through the introduction of opium, which the Chinese rulers had explicitly banned. The ports, which were subsequently opened to British trade after these wars, meant that Britain had access to goods that it wanted. Yet, despite the partial military control that was brought about by the war, Britain still had something to fear: China was attached to its own culture and resisted British influence. Indeed, Morley states that:

Taking the matter, however, on its own ground, we are disposed to doubt whether the evil of the Chinese war will lead to so much good as our conceit in the character of Europeans caused us to imagine. No wonders have happened in the way of commerce with the external world, and the internal state of China, since the war.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 360.

¹⁹⁶ [Morley], 'China with a Flaw in It', p. 369.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 369.

That the war achieved 'no wonders' suggests a feeling of futility on the part of the British as, despite Empire building successes elsewhere, the Chinese resolve to maintain agency is still a powerful force. Morley also notes that:

If it should hereafter appear, as possibly it may, that the chief result of the Opium War is the overthrow of the Tartar influence, and the restoration of the dynasty of Ming, or any other set of Chinese emperors, then it will be pretty certain that the prospects of a friendly commerce with China have not been cleared, but rather clouded, by our thunder.¹⁹⁸

It is interesting to note that Morley recognises the fragile moment of power the British are enjoying and the danger any alteration to rule may bring. The notion that 'friendly commerce' is achievable shows a surprising level of optimism, which fails to recognise the effects excessive taxation has brought upon the Chinese. Morley then moves on to considering the ways in which the Chinese failed to have a thorough knowledge of European ways, stating that:

Before the war with England the Chinese were very ignorant of European ways, and knew little or nothing of European geography. They had no clearer idea of the distance between Manchester and Liverpool, than many of us have of the distance between Ladak and Penjinsk.¹⁹⁹

The concluding sentence bears further attention; there seems to be a recognition that what the Chinese did not know about our geographical distances is mirrored by a British ignorance of transnational distances abroad. It is interesting that Morley uses Ladak, a place already colonised by the British as part of the Empire, to represent another foreign geographical space 'controlled' by the British.

The clear construction of the challenges presented by the war are also stated though, significantly, the financial implications are refocussed on China, with Morley stating that:

The cost of the defence against the English taxed to the utmost the imperial resources; and when they were still further taxed during the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 370.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 369.

peace to pay for the expense of the tax by which they had been subdued, the emperor was fairly smothered by pecuniary difficulties, and forced into shifts and schemes of the most perilous description.²⁰⁰

Whilst the war was essentially initiated by the British, of fundamental importance is the fact that China ultimately is made to pay; thus their pecuniary difficulties are caused by Western intrusion rather than Eastern financial difficulties. Regenia Gagnier states that:

China did not enter modernity as the helpless “lands of famine” enshrined in Western imagination. They were made so by British policy on trade deficits and export drives, over taxation and merchant capital, foreign control of key revenues and developmental resources, imperial and civil warfare, and a gold standard favouring Britain.²⁰¹

Thus the seeming lack of progress is not due to a lack of Chinese ingenuity but instead to a determined effort to challenge the smooth trading passage of China by taxation. Morley then states that:

Our trade with China, since the war, has not increased with any great rapidity. The Chinese authorities do what they can to force the teas down to the port of Canton, where the people are riotous, the geographical situation is inconvenient and the harbour is bad; ships cannot approach the town itself; Whampoa, eight or nine miles lower down. Canton being, moreover, the old trading port to which the old-fashioned traders, whose ideas run in a groove, have always been accustomed, ships are still sent out to Canton, that might be dispatched much more wisely to Shanghae.²⁰²

Morley situates the older ports as places of stasis, not convenient to British trade, and the Shanghai ports as ones that are infinitely preferable and profitable. Morley’s agenda is therefore clear: he needs his readers to recognise the significance of past Chinese trade restrictions on Britain, the importance of the reduction of Chinese strength and the ways in which Britain can exert continued control over this space. Morley then states in a series of tightly made points the trading rules brought about by the new treaty. For the purpose of this

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 372.

²⁰¹ Regenia Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalisation: on the relationship of part to whole 1859-1920*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 22.

²⁰² [Morley], ‘China with a Flaw in It’, p. 372.

paper I will focus on two of these. Morley firstly states the initial British trading disadvantage as: '1. The confinement of trade to the single port of Canton, at the southern extremity of China far from the tea districts'²⁰³ which is then solved by the provision in the treaty that: 'four ports should be open to our trade in addition to Canton: Amoy and Foo-Chow Foo in Fokien Province, Ning-po in Che-Cheang and Shanghae in Keang-nan.'²⁰⁴ This opening up of the borders meant a very definite ability on the part of the British to make progress in trade and open up an area to which it was previously denied admission. Point number three in the article highlights the difficulties faced when trade occurs between Britain and China and the Treaty of Nanking is introduced

It was provided by the treaty that there should be a fair and permanent tariff on export and import duties. On this head it ought to be noted, that no article at present entering China is taxed by the Chinese at more than five per cent of its value, while we repress with a duty of two hundred per cent, the admission of tea into England.²⁰⁵

This excessive taxation outlined above and corroborated by Regenia Gagnier's observation is further evinced by a document published by Hansard as part of a House of Commons debate on 26th April 1855, stating that:

Whilst we taxed the commodities imported from them at the rate of 180 per cent, we insisted on their taking ours at a Customs duty of only 6 per cent. It was feared that the increase of the duty on tea would materially check our trade with China.²⁰⁶

Whilst seemingly the trade was not 'checked', it raises very serious issues with trading legislation and indeed the prudence of such fiscal policy. The fact that China was able to maintain its trade through the interest of the British in its commodities therefore reveals a commercial resilience that goes against

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 371.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 371.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 371.

²⁰⁶ Hansard, 'The Customs Duties Bill House of Commons', 26th April 1852 vol. 137 cc791-805 accessed on 3rd June 2011 at 14:55pm

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1855/apr/26/customs-duties-bill#S3V0137P0_18550426_HOC_38

expectations and bestows, as Morley states: 'new lights on China'²⁰⁷. China, in this sense represents a growing super power.

The articles I have considered shaped a growing interest in China in a social, political and geographical sense. What I have shown is that despite Dickens's, Horne's and Morley's protestations about the lack of progress in China and the inward-looking nature of this locale, something - and I have cited this in spatial and material terms with ports, tea and chinaware - could be both desirable and threatening. The reason behind the sustained criticism of this locale, far from revealing a disinterest, reveals instead an interest heightened by the threat China posed, albeit from afar, to Britain through a lack of conformity to British will. It is this critiquing, cataloguing and statistical privileging these articles address, and it is through this process that China's strong cultural identity is challenged in order to minimise the very real threat that China and her diverse imported objects presented to Britain.

Hindoo Chairs, Opium and Tea

Continuing with the theme of geopolitical commodities in Dickens's fiction, China and India are two transnational locales Dickens engages with in *Bleak House* and he presents them to the reader through the objects they produce, rather than their geographical locations. Arjun Appadurai has suggested that this reveals: 'The Western taste for the past and of the other.'²⁰⁸ By reflecting on these locations in this way the novel provides a space in which the reader can look back at the histories of these locations and the associated 'Otherness' whilst also encouraging these spaces to be seen in terms of their production. Dickens, when using objects to define India, focusses on 'Hindoo' commodities such as baskets, bottles and chairs. The use of the word 'Hindoo' as opposed to 'Indian' marks out the location via its faith as opposed to its state. The non-Christian identity is drawn up to isolate the nation from Britain, albeit that it was a part of the Empire. Their inclusion in the novel's space places objects from this transnational location as being desirable and their presence in a British setting also evidences their presence in the home environment. This section of

²⁰⁷ [Morley], 'China with a Flaw in It', p. 373.

²⁰⁸ Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, p. 27.

the chapter will consider these objects and draw out the purpose of their inclusion within *Bleak House*.

The exterior of the house that Esther, Ada and Richard arrive in after their stay with Mrs Jellyby is quintessentially British and is described as such. However, the interior seems to reflect a world beyond Britain, with Dickens placing an object from a transnational locale within the setting to reveal the way in which an object from abroad can be used at home in Britain. The fact that its origin is made explicit ensures that it retains its 'Otherness':

But if, instead of going out at Ada's door you came into my room, and went out of the door by which you had entered it, and turned up a few crooked stairs, you lost yourself in passages, with mangles in them, and three cornered tables, and a Native-Hindoo chair, which was also a sofa, a box, a bedstead, and looked in every form, something between a bamboo skeleton and a great birdcage, and had been bought from India nobody knew by whom or when.²⁰⁹

Whilst the main body of the house is British, the description of the area they inhabit is, I believe, representative of a view of India as a colony. The crooked steps which connect the rooms represents a culture which is not fully understood by the nineteenth century readership, a domain that twists and turns and is at present less than familiar. The house which Ada and Esther inhabit has its own complex history, as does India, and thus, through the house and allusions to it, India is brought, through objects, alive. The passages in which Esther is able to lose herself represent, I would argue, the geographical spaces that are mapped but not yet ordered in the British psyche. Here Esther can encounter foreign objects in the safety of a British location in much the same way that Dickens's readership could, by their engagement with different climes through objects and Dickens's prose, suggesting that their does not have to be direct objectival contact. That the 'Native Hindoo-chair' has the ability to metamorphose into a variety of objects shows the ability of India to mould itself into whatever it is needed to be; it is flexible to the desires of the coloniser and evolving to fit the West's new model of what its culture should be. That it has a convenient ability to alter shape and function should not be lost on the reader

²⁰⁹ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. by Nicola Bradbury (London: Penguin, 2003) p 86.

and brings with it an ability to see a world beyond Britain that can adapt swiftly to the demands of the coloniser whilst providing objects that the coloniser desires. That the chair also looks like both a bamboo skeleton and a birdcage seems to connote connections between Britain and China too; the wood is flexible and at the same time possesses a fragility which, I believe, Dickens is playing with for the purpose of showing his British readership the ways in which the world beyond Britain is a place to be explored not feared. The birdcage traps its birds in much the same way as the British trapped the Indian nationals within the framework of the Empire and the East India Company. The image of a skeleton brings to mind a body of workers who are undertaking work for Britain, the workers are not seen by the British at home but their labour is before them in their homes: they are the skeleton workforce. The reader is also encouraged to reflect that these much desired transnational objects are making Britain further dependent upon a foreign workforce; they desire what the 'Other' has or can produce which makes the relationship more reflexive in nature. The image of the chair looking like a birdcage is a familiar motif within the novel and appears with regard to Miss Flite- she releases her birds in a similar way that, a few years after the publication of this novel, Britain freed its colonial 'birds'. The lack of specificity of the origin of the chair, other than that it is a 'Hindoo chair' deprives the object of a definite provenance. Instead Dickens bestows it with a countrywide one. This suggests that, for the moment, a generalised notion of abroad and the 'Other' is all that is required; it is the commodities these locations produce which are the focus.

The description that Esther provides when discussing the room continues from one that is concentratedly of an Indian perspective to a view of the decoration as being of Chinese origin. The furniture is described with reference to India and Indian culture; however, when it comes to the fine decorative details of the room this switches to Chinese allusions. Dickens, I would argue, is using these images to contrast the two locations, one as a place which is firmly part of the British Empire and the other as one which has independence, though it is dependent on Britain for trading. What is also a key feature of this dialogue is that Britain is dependent on both transnational spaces for its own success, so that inter-dependence is established. The fact that China was viewed as a location for fine porcelain is also a significant feature, as are the fine detailed engraving skills:

Our sitting room was green; and had, framed and glazed, upon the walls, numbers of surprising and surprised birds, staring out of pictures at a real trout in a case, as brown and shining as if it had been served with gravy; at the death of Captain Cook; and at the whole process of preparing tea in China, as depicted by Chinese artists. In my room there were oval engravings of the months - ladies haymaking, in short waists, and large hats ties under the chin, for June - smooth-legged noblemen, pointing, with cocked hats, to village steeples, for October. Half-length portraits, in crayons, abounded all through the house; but were so dispersed that I found the brother of a youthful officer of mine in the china-closet.²¹⁰

There seems to be an enamelled effect to this room with the glaze, which is picked out on the wall, making a definite connection with China, and the whole description connects with the idea of fine china storage units or plate displays. The green of the walls is a colour commonly associated with the Orient; jade as a much revered stone comes to the fore, furthering the allusions to China. The 'surprising and surprised birds' are likely to be cranes, birds frequently connected with China. However, an alternative reading could be that the surprising nature of these birds could mark them out as very different in appearance to birds native to Britain. That birds fly and often migrate makes, I would argue, a connection between immigration and emigration and the distance covered is made to be manageable though this description. The allusion to Captain Cook also furthers the idea of travel and movement within the prose of the novel and uses a familiar British character to forge this connection. Although the reader is in a state of physical stasis the plot itself is continually moving the reader amongst and between transnational spaces. The tea that has been such a prevalent motif relating to China is again used, becoming a central image. This creates a jarring sense of commenting upon tea originating from China and its arrival on British shores, thereby blurring geographical boundaries. The preparation of the tea and the depiction of it within the 'oval engraving' commented upon by the narrator is accompanied by a dual image, not only of the tea from China but additionally that the image is depicted by a Chinese artist. By using repetition in this way the location and moment within the text become seeming acts of 'mental transmigration'. By placing the origin and the nation together the reader is further encouraged to

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 86-87.

develop connections between spaces in order to gain a far more global conception of the changes occurring in Britain. That Esther comments on the different engravings depicting different months is also important; it is almost as if Dickens is correlating the seasonal happenings in Britain with those in China to create further mental connections for his reader. That the garments worn by the workers in the fields are described shows Dickens is keen to reveal the working practices of this country, so that the consumer of the porcelain objects at home, or the spectator of the 'oval engravings' in the novel, is forced to engage with a different culture. I would propose that both the prose and the images present within it are extremely didactic. The hats tied under the chin are also in a recognisable Chinese style – a style that the nineteenth century readership would have been familiar with from images painted on the china and porcelain objects they consumed. The 'ladies haymaking' also relates to a rather unfamiliar association between China and farming and contrasts with the image of Chinese workers picking tea leaves. The 'dispersal' of these portraits around the house mirrors the dispersal of different nations across the globe and provides another means of space, trade and travel to be managed within the space of the novel for the reader. That the steeple is reminiscent of a church and that the 'brother' is found in a different cupboard furthers the Christian notion of a family of the world, albeit of different faiths. Christian ideology in this respect further underscores Dickens's desire for transnational understanding and comradeship. That the brother is found in the china closet ends the conflation of China as a location and china as a product, and encourages the readers to look around their home for evidence of a transnational invasion of objects. The invasion of foreign objects is not limited to commodified objects; it is also related to commodified bodies. Britain's role in the Empire and its philanthropic endeavours form a commodified sense of geography and people, and are referenced in the novel.

Mrs Pardiggle is one of the philanthropic female characters within *Bleak House* who lacks any of the redeeming features that Mrs Jellyby possesses. Whilst both women are determinedly supportive of their own particular cause, Mrs Jellyby leaves her children to their own pursuits; she engages them in the African mission through letter writing, but she doesn't ask anything of them financially. It is a worry presented with *Bleak House* that the 'home' child is forgotten and is emblematic of Britain not forgetting, whilst abroad, the 'home'

needs. Mrs Pardiggle enforces her philanthropic pursuits on her family with disastrous results:

“Egbert, my eldest, (twelve), is the boy who sent out his pocket-money, to the amount of five-and-threepence, to the Tockahoopo Indians... Alfred, my youngest, (five) has voluntarily enrolled himself in the Infant Bonds of Joy, and is pledged never, through life, to use tobacco in any form.” We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazen and shrivelled – though they were certainly that too – but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent. At the mention of the Tockahoopo Indians, I could really have supposed Egbert to be one of the most baleful members of that tribe, he gave me such a savage frown.²¹¹

The giving of money to these causes creates disharmony amongst her children, who clearly feel the unfairness of the ‘charity’ which is clearly anything but. It is a deed enacted upon them. The enrolment of Alfred in the ‘Infant Bonds of Joy’ sounds anything but joyful and parodies this philanthropy. Dickens is, I would argue, reflecting on the ways that Britain’s outward-looking approach has negative repercussions at home. The objects which are utilised in this context are the tobacco and the Tockahoopo Indians. Their name, whilst fictitious, employs a real country and turns any look towards this locale negatively. That involvement in such ‘charitable’ pursuits renders the children to give a ‘savage smile’ suggests that Dickens is warning of the dangers of involvement abroad and the home repercussions. The tobacco further underscores an object that is traded and which can be seen to be part of the British haul of commodities. The children are far removed from possessing attributes commonly associated with the ideals of nineteenth century childhood; they seem to be more savage than the colonies which are typified within much nineteenth century literature.

Britain itself does not escape criticism, through some of the characters within the novel who seem to enjoy the slow, circuitous nature of British bureaucracy much as the circuitous of nature of China is held up for parody in the examples I presented. The case in Chancery is continued throughout the novel and is presented as a very British pursuit - one that Sir Leicester Dedlock endorses because: ‘It is a slow, expensive, British, constitutional kind of thing.’

²¹² The fact that it is long and tedious as well as being fairly circuitous is

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 124-125.

²¹² Ibid., p. 25.

parodied throughout the novel; the criticism of British bureaucracy is in evidence within the novel far more frequently than it is praised. Places where change is occurring, such as India, Africa and China, are presented as places that possess commodities that the British population depend upon and as such have their own value beyond merely being 'Other'.

Britain and China's relationship had for many years been tense and the Opium Wars, the first of which occurred between 1839 and 1842 and the second in 1856-60 - well after the publication of *Bleak House* - alerted Britain to the power China could potentially hold in trading terms. In a determined effort to maintain its own strength Britain went about undermining China's power in any way it could, in order to be able to continue to trade in opium rather than silver. That Britain was prepared to go to any lengths to secure opium as an object it knew would bring control is significant. By presenting China – and India – as places dependent on support from the West and by weakening their strength through control and excessive taxation, Britain achieved what it wanted to and was able to trade in a way that Britain perceived was beneficial to itself rather than to China. This is seen not only in terms of opium and silk but also with regard to tea. Tea became increasingly popular, as is shown by the following statistics given in a House of Lords debate by Lord Wharncliffe which showed: 'tea, import in 1846, 46,740,000 lbs.... import in 1850, 51,178,000 lbs.'²¹³ Clearly the popularity of this transnational commodity increased pre-publication of *Bleak House* and this is reflected in the inclusion of this object within the novel. Equally important to note is the high import tax charged to China and the inequality between the tax Britain paid and what it paid to China. These rates were reported in the House of Commons, where it was recognised that: 'whilst we taxed the commodities imported from them at the rate of 180 per cent, we insisted on their taking ours at a Customs duty of only 6 per cent. It was feared that the increase of the duty on tea would materially check our trade with China.'²¹⁴ What is significant here is the way in which British conceptions of transnational cultures are presented. By depicting both China and India as

²¹³ Hansard, 'The Adulteration of Coffee', House of Lords debate, 3rd July 1851 accessed at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1851/jul/03/adulteration-of-coffee> on 3rd June 2011 at 14:22pm.

²¹⁴ Hansard, 'The Customs Duties Bill House of Commons', 26th April 1852 vol 137 cc791-805 accessed on 3rd June 2011 at 14:55pm
http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1855/apr/26/customs-duties-bill#S3V0137P0_18550426_HOC_38

'lands of famine'²¹⁵ and endeavouring to keep them as such through high taxation, Britain was able to benefit from the objects and excellent trading possibilities whilst also seeming to characterise transnational locales as ones which 'needed' Western assistance. However, it also served to erode Britain's identity. The ethics of this endeavour are reprehensible when one reflects that in reality what was being done was removing the freedoms that the country originally possessed in order to ensure British trading success. Britain's desire to hold power over other cultures was in this respect unstoppable and the negative example of this was Britain's trade in opium.

Dickens introduces the death of a character by opium - and again uses the drug in his final novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*²¹⁶ - to reveal the dangers of trade between Britain and China and the dangers present in a global community: "He has died," says the surgeon, "of an overdose of opium, there is no doubt. The room is strongly flavoured with it. There is enough here now," taking an old teapot from Mr Krook, "to kill a dozen people."²¹⁷ The alliterative 'overdose of opium' encourages the reader to focus in on what killed Nemo but does not invite the reader at this juncture to consider anything else that might have led to the death. It places blame solely with opium and, by proxy, China and transnational trade. The room is described as being dirty and looks very much like a den, somewhere he has come to hide, and there is an animalistic quality to this space. The image of the den is common in nineteenth century literature and can be seen in the following engraving by Gustave Dore which appeared in *London a Pilgrimage*.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalisation: On the Relationship of Part to Whole 1859-1920*, p. 22.

²¹⁶ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1870)

²¹⁷ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 167.

²¹⁸ Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré, *London: a Pilgrimage* (London: Anthem Press, 2005)

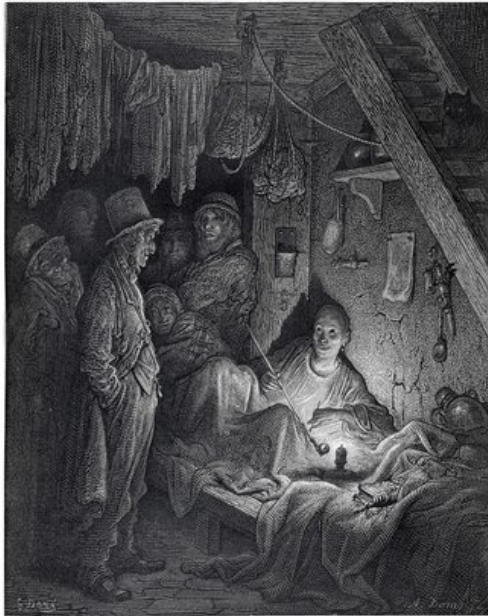


Fig. 2 Gustave Doré: 'Opium Smoking – the Lascars Room in Edwin Drood' in *London: A Pilgrimage*, (London: Grant & Co, 1872)

The above image focusses on a Chinese figure reclining on the bed with a pipe whilst a British man stands observing. That many members of the nineteenth century indulged in opium, as well as many literary figures (Dickens included), makes opium a very loaded commodity. The implications of the inclusion of opium will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 6. In *Bleak House* the amount of opium Krooks has smoked is highlighted for the reader by the doctor stating he had taken enough to kill a dozen people. The opium, an unacceptable product from China (although originating from India) - and yet abused by the British in China to gain power - is shown to be used by those less savoury members of society and is contrasted with the tea which is an object or product consumed by the majority of respectable Britons, also desired and placed within the scene. It is interesting to reflect that both commodities are stimulants and 'unnatural' to this domain. By using both positive and negative images of China and placing them together at home in Britain, transnational relations can be explored as, too, can the dependence on transnational commodities. However, the presence of the 'Other' in the home space is a notion that still elicits concern. Dickens highlights Britain's role in China and the potential advantages of being connected with this locale; however, he is also keen to establish that advances across the globe cannot be encouraged at the risk of the home population and not all objects from these transnational spaces

are desirable. Perhaps most importantly foreign commodities generally remove work from Britain and make 'Other' locales even more powerful.

China's 'otherness' is recognised within the novel by Dickens and the reader is invited to reflect on the differences both in language and culture between Britain and China. Dickens is keen for his readership to recognise that Chinese objects had an important place in British culture and the objects produced there became markers of social distinction and prestige. The trading between Britain and China, whilst tightly controlled, bought over wares for the consumption and delectation of a British consumer who was determined to own something foreign. It would appear that the fear of a different culture was removed to an extent through the desirability of certain goods. As Regenia Gagnier has stated: 'The Europeans' cargoes consisted in the main not of Western wares but of Chinese porcelain and silk.'²¹⁹ The fact that the European consumer was not as interested in possessing Western goods and that, conversely, the cargoes arriving from China were so highly prized is significant. It shows that the objects China produced were recognised as being fetishised for their 'Otherness' and the distance they travelled is a marker of distinction for the consumer. When these objects arrive on British soil their origin is a central feature; however, from the moment they enter the British home, they are adopted and become part of a British cultural dialogue.

'Telescopic Philanthropy'²²⁰

The properties of exchange relations derive from broader cultural structures and premises, from inequalities and asymmetries in rights over people, social groups and their products – and also from the histories which engender cultural and political transformations of notions and relation. Exchange thus mediates conditions and relations that are not, or not wholly, constituted within the immediate frame of exchange. If actions and events are to be understood politically, they need to be situated historically.²²¹

²¹⁹ Gagnier, *Individualism, Decadence and Globalisation: on the relationship of part to whole 1859-1920*, p. 24.

²²⁰ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 49.

²²¹ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, pp. 8-9.

Africa is first introduced in *Bleak House* through the character of Mrs Jellyby, who becomes a representation of both the country itself and the objects that are found there. Mrs Jellyby was based on a woman called Caroline Chisholm who was known to Dickens and contributed articles to *Household Words*. Dickens was not enamoured by Chisholm's philanthropic endeavours, which he felt were focussed in too many directions. This mirrors the philanthropic behavioural patterns of Mrs Jellyby, who Dickens describes as having:

...devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects, at various times, and is at present (until something else attracts her) devoted to the subject of Africa; with a general view to the coffee berry – *and* the natives – and the happy settlement on the banks of the African rivers, of our superabundant home population.²²²

The work Mrs Jellyby is involved in provides an example of work being done at home in Britain to further British opportunities abroad. This forges connections between the British perspective of Africa as a 'home' colonial space, one that people emigrated to, to seek prosperity and a location which facilitated the perceived progress at home in Britain. This connects with the concepts raised in the preceding chapter of this thesis which posits places in the Empire where prosperity for the home British population can be found in her colonies if not in Britain itself.

Africa was the home of a popular commodity too, coffee. However, coffee suffered with public detailing of the ways in which it was adulterated. Whilst tea was also adulterated for the British consumer, as discussed in the introduction of this work, this was not the feature of as much anxiety. The coffee berry also connects clearly with the notion of a product as well as an object from Africa which the British had become dependent on, thereby revealing a commodity dependence on Africa. Coffee was a popular beverage in Britain throughout the early to mid-1800s; however, by 1850 this was in decline according to government trading statistics: 'In 1846, the quantity imported was

²²² Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 49.

36,754,000 lbs.; and in 1850 it was reduced to 31,226,000 lbs.’²²³ The popularity of this beverage seems to have decreased due to an increase in taxes due to be paid upon import and again a House of Commons debate reveals that: ‘since 1847, there had been a diminution of 6,000,000 lbs., and that every year there had been a decrease in the deliveries of consumption’.²²⁴ As a consequence the coffee itself was adulterated with other products, such as almond powder, and although this was not harmful it was fraudulent and raised public concern. Dickens reveals the valuable commodities abroad that are very much part of British culture. Equally he is pinpointing an instance of Mrs Jellyby being behind the times in her coffee initiative, as this was no longer as desirable a transnational object in the way that I argue tea became.

It is important to note that Dickens thoroughly disapproved of the Niger Expedition in 1841 and wrote about it in *The Examiner*.²²⁵ There was a Victorian fear of the changes that abolishing slavery would bring and the economic difficulties this could pose for Britain. Between 1776 and 1800 Britain had taken 38,000 African people as slaves, yet the British Abolition of Slavery Act of 1833 freed those taken captive but only paid compensation to the owners and traders. Clearly Dickens shared a common fear of what might occur if the West ceased to dominate. A Hansard report from a House of Commons debate on the 16th of December 1841 shows, however, a more positive stance on slavery and one that Dickens may have found challenging. Lord Ingestre stated that:

He was ready to give the greatest credit to the motives of the promoters of it, knowing that their object was the abolition of the slave-trade in Africa, by the planting of colonies and the gradual extension of commercial, agricultural, and other peaceful and humanising pursuits throughout that great continent.²²⁶

²²³ Hansard, ‘The Adulteration of Coffee’, House of Lords debate, 3rd July 1851. Accessed at: <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1851/jul/03/adulteration-of-coffee> on 3rd June 2011 at 14:22pm.

²²⁴ Hansard, ‘Coffee and timber duties’, House of Commons debate, 14th April 1851 Vol 116 p. [179.90?] Accessed at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1851/apr/14/coffee-and-timber-duties-acts#S3V0116P0_18510414_HOC_106

²²⁵ Dickens wrote for *The Examiner* frequently between 1839 and 1842 and then submitted occasional articles until 1849.

²²⁶ Hansard, December 16th 1841, Vol. 56. p. 694.

This demonstrates a fear of what might be lost in destabilising a system that had seemed, to the Victorians, so successful and was a mark of British global power.

The ways in which Mrs Jellyby communicates with those who are making their charitable donations is important. She is an avid letter writer, much as Micawber is in *David Copperfield*, and the continual movement of her letters across the country provides a clear indication of the ease with which people could communicate rapidly and across great distances without physically travelling themselves. In 1840 the first postage stamp was issued and, whilst a postal system across Britain had been in operation in various different forms over previous centuries, the nineteenth century gave rise to deliveries across the Empire. This meant that areas which once were difficult to maintain communication with and seemed almost intangible were brought nearer by improved communication methods and the global distances were reduced. The inclusion of Mrs Jellyby's letter writing means that her correspondence can be seen as an engagement with objects and countries in a far broader sense:

“You find me, my dears, as usual, very busy; but that you will excuse. The African project at present occupies a lot of my time. It involves me in correspondence with public bodies, and with private individuals anxious for the welfare of the species all over the country. I am happy to say it is advancing. We hope by this time next year to have from a hundred and fifty to two hundred healthy families cultivating coffee and educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger.”²²⁷

The differentiation between public and private bodies marks a difference between the ways in which the two operations in Britain function.; The public ‘bodies’ represent the government and a far greater mass involvement of activities to secure progress, namely the Niger Expedition. The public bodies also refer, I argue, to the African population who are viewed as public property versus the private property that Britain, along with the East India Company held. The use of the word species is also one I would consider to be a fairly loaded Darwinian term and positions the men and women Mrs Jellyby is keen to help in a very different position to that of the British citizens going out to secure

²²⁷ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 53.

plantations. The notion of 'advancing' has militaristic connotations in terms of the British Empire, making it seem as though forces are pushing onwards with expansion and progress.

The epistolary communication then continues when Mrs Jellyby talks more fully about her mission:

She told us a great deal that was interesting about Borriboola-Gha and the natives; and received so many letters that Richard, who sat by her, saw four envelopes in the gravy at once. Some of the letters were proceedings of the ladies committees, or resolutions of ladies meetings, which she read to us; others were applications from people excited in various ways about the cultivation of coffee, and natives; others required answers, and these she sent her eldest daughter from the table three or four times to write. She was full of business, and undoubtedly was, as she had told us, devoted to the cause.²²⁸

The white envelopes, I would suggest, are representative of the British seeming to set sail through the gravy on what I read as being a journey into a yet not fully known transnational space. By using familiar household objects and foods the geographical space from Africa is contracted. That this 'journey', as it were, occurs within the home is also significant as it encourages the reader to look at the ways in which progress is necessary both for Britain itself and the world beyond. The genteel meetings being held by ladies contrast with the description of the African people as merely 'natives'. By using this pejorative term Dickens maintains for his readership a sense of superiority. It can also be read problematically, as the British readers are dependent on a 'native' product which raises questions about identity. The notion of commodity value is addressed further in light of the letters, coffee and, peculiarly, piano-forte legs:

This young man, besides having a great deal to say for himself about Africa, and a project of his for teaching coffee colonists to teach natives to turn piano-forte legs and establish an export trade, delighted in drawing Mrs Jellyby into conversation. You have received as many as from one hundred and fifty to two hundred letters respecting Africa in a single day, have you not?' or 'if my memory does not deceive me, Mrs Jellyby, you once mentioned that you had sent off? five hundred circulars

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

from one post-office at a time?’ always repeating Mrs Jellyby’s answer to us like an interpreter.²²⁹

The process of teaching the ‘coffee colonists to teach the natives to turn piano-forte legs’ is curious. The production of piano legs for Britain underscores the continual outsourcing of trades to the Empire. It indicates an erosion of British trade at home and an increasingly dependent relationship. Both the coffee and the piano-forte leg will be consumed by the British at home with little benefit to the worker abroad, seems to be the implication. However, surely, in terms of trade and agency the real loser here is Britain which sacrifices its independence – seemingly unwittingly – whilst acting in what is presented as mock charity by the British. The entwined connections allow an assumed British benevolence when in reality it is an erosion of British trade Dickens seems keen to recognise throughout his oeuvre. The young man who remains nameless seems to find this categorising and filtering of information advantageous to the process. This parallels the learning and distribution of information both within transnational spaces and beyond, towards the home location of Britain. It is through this slow filtering of a shared relationship between Africa and Britain that Dickens builds up a picture where communication of ideas permeates Britain and this is achieved through the inclusion of objects. The receipt of ‘one hundred and fifty to two hundred letters’ per day initially seems sizable, however when this is considered alongside the sum of five hundred letters distributed by Mrs Jellyby herself, clearly the output is far greater than the return.

Whilst Mrs Jellyby is focussed on her Borrioboolan mission and the coffee beans are a repeated motif, at one point her beverage alters from coffee to tea. This subtle switch could easily go unnoticed but, as I have already suggested, tea appears to have become naturalised as a British beverage by the reader and has been adopted as a home product so loses, over time, its foreign status:

On our arrival in London, we had called with Mr Jarndyce at Mrs Jellyby’s but had not been so fortunate as to find her at home. It had appeared that she had gone somewhere, to a tea-drinking, and had taken Miss Jellyby with her. Besides the tea-drinking, there was to be some

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

considerable speech-making and letter writing on the general merits of the cultivation of coffee, conjointly with natives, at the Settlement of Borrioboola-Gha. All this involved, no doubt, sufficient active exercise of pen and ink.²³⁰

The absence of Mrs Jellyby from her home for a tea drinking ceremony further focusses the reader on products produced in China. That tea and coffee are available reveals both British trade links and the dependence Britain has upon objects from foreign locales. This encourages the reader to think about items they deem to be essentially British and to recognise their true provenance. The fact that the tea-drinking is repeated twice marks out the difference between her continual drinking of coffee in the home with the outside world of tea drinking, which had by this date overtaken the popularity of coffee. China as opposed to Africa is privileged and the rise of China can be witnessed at this juncture. Trade, travel and commodities are shown to have travelled from afar and yet become a staple of British culture. Although Dickens's readership might not be physically covering miles each day their beverages and their letters traverse miles, whilst their reading matter enables them to make 'mental transmigrations' and contracts the spaces between different cultures and transnational locales. It also raised questions about the increasing lack of trading agency that Britain had as it became increasingly dependent on fetishised foreign commodities.

²³⁰ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 216.

Chapter 4

Little Dorrit and the Chinese commodity matrix

Little Dorrit was first published in monthly, serialised parts from December 1855 to June 1857 and then in a single volume in 1857 and was hugely popular with the readership. However, the novel's critical reception was mixed, with John Forster declaring it to be a 'droop in invention'²³¹ and G.K. Chesterton calling it 'Dickens's one collapse'²³² whilst George Bernard Shaw viewed it positively, suggesting instead that it was 'the most complete picture of English society in the XIX century in existence', adding that it was 'a more seditious book than *Das Kapital*.'²³³ The novel situates itself in an antagonistic political context critiquing both the world of banking and politics, which are accused of possessing a circumlocutory bent. Alongside the publication of this novel there appeared in *Household Words* articles about China, such as 'Francis Moore in China'²³⁴, 'The Chinese Adam'²³⁵, 'The Chinese Postman'²³⁶, 'Canton English'²³⁷, 'Chinese Charms'²³⁸ and 'John Chinaman in Australia'²³⁹. All of these articles feed into concerns present within the novel's space and society's broader concerns about globalisation.

What is intriguing about *Little Dorrit* is its sense of movement between geographical spaces and the subsequent engagement with geopolitical commodities. The novel has at its heart a protagonist who has spent twenty years in China, though the ambiguity surrounding his employment there is never resolved. The reader infers that he is involved through his business with the East India Company trade in China and that, as a result, he has had some

²³¹ Paul Schlike, *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 341.

²³² Paul Schlike, *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 341.

²³³ Paul Schlike, *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 341.

²³⁴ [William Charles Milne], 'Francis Moore in China', *Household Words*, Vol. 10, No. 238, (14 October, 1854) pp. 203-204.

²³⁵ [William Charles Milne], 'The Chinese Adam', *Household Words*, Vol. XI, No. 256, (17 February, 1855) pp. 67-68.

²³⁶ [William Charles Milne], 'The Chinese Postman' *Household Words*, Vol. XI, No. 264, (14 April 1855) pp. 259- 261.

²³⁷ [William Charles Milne], 'Canton-English', *Household Words*, Vol. XV, No. 372, (9 May, 1857) pp. 450-452.

²³⁸ [William Charles Milne], 'Chinese Charms' *Household Words*, Vol XVII, No. 419, (3 April, 1858) pp. 370-372.

²³⁹ [Henry Morley and Frank Vincent], 'John Chinaman in Australia', *Household Words*, Vol. XVII No. 421, (17 April 1858) pp. 416-420.

dealings with opium. However, this suspicion is never resolved and Arthur Clennam's feelings of guilt throughout the course of the novel are only heightened. The fact that the novel is set 'thirty years ago'²⁴⁰ means that the reader holds China both in tension with the past and in the present, a device that is employed systematically throughout the novel. As Ayse Çelikkol notes:

Little Dorrit evokes the opium trade subtly as it offers nothing but hints about the background of its protagonist, Arthur Clennam, who returns to London in 1827 after conducting business in China for two decades. The time frame of the Clennams' involvement in commerce in China provocatively intimates that the father and son may be involved in the infamous opium trade. We infer that the Clennams were trading in China during the golden age of the opium trade, at a time when British merchants were smuggling literally tons of opium into China, whose ports were not open to that commodity. *Little Dorrit's* contemporary audience would have been familiar with the history of the opium trade, because the second opium war was taking place as Dickens was composing *Little Dorrit* in 1857.²⁴¹

As a consequence, the reader engages with a past political world, in the novel's space, meaning that the Opium Wars have no bearing on the happenings within the novel, yet for someone reading in the 1850s such cultural and political motifs would resonate and clear connections and inferences could be drawn to contemporary history. By experiencing such mental slippage, in the novel's space, the reader is able to consider China and the other nations engaged with in the novel and assess both the past and present situation.

This chapter will be divided into three sections taking as its focus China and *Little Dorrit*. The chapter will firstly consider the ways in which Britain is seen to shape ideas of 'Otherness' and examine the ways in which the novel portrays spaces that are not indigenous to the readership. The second section examines the role of Chinese commodities and the ways in which they build up a consciousness and world view that are legitimised for the reader by placing familiar British objects or locales alongside foreign ones. By placing items that originate in a foreign locale next to those from Britain their perceived foreign

²⁴⁰ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. By Helen Small (London: Penguin, 2002) p. 15.

²⁴¹ Ayse Çelikkol, *Romances of Free Trade: British Literature, Laissez-Faire, and the Global Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) .p 126

danger, it is argued, is explored. As a result foreign commodities are given space within the novel and within the British home, becoming absorbed rather than separated from British society which, as this thesis has explored, problematises the relationship. By viewing the commodities in this way a material cultural analysis can contribute to a reading of Dickens's work that views text, locale and object together and develops a new way of organising them in the novel's space. The final section of this chapter will focus on the inclusion of tea and examine the ways in which this product has become anglicised in the home space and also culturally dangerous. The textual layering that has been recognised in previous chapters will be drawn on again; however, in this chapter it will be supported not only by the novel but also by an analysis of the way in which the trade in tea was being executed in Britain. Ultimately this chapter will question the ways in which the three sections interact with each other and construct a world view that recognises Britain's increasing dependence on China and the potential dangers of such a relationship.

Space, place and nation: The development of national identity

Little Dorrit opens on the shores of Marseilles and, unlike all of Dickens's other novels, this foreign opening sets forth a notion of what is to come in terms of an increasing transnational focus. It privileges ideas about the foreign over the British by shaping a consciousness of the world beyond Britain. More broadly it can also be seen as a reflection on the ways in which Britain, post 1851 and the Great Exhibition, was looking towards what the rest of the world was producing in terms of trade and commodities. In shaping a sense of the difference between other cultures and Britain, Dickens moves towards a world of paradigms: we have both positive and negative 'Others' and in constructing such tensions the novel moves beyond the plot and into the political infrastructure of nineteenth century life. The novel offers a critique of a system that makes use of resources and people from China whilst not recognising the threat that these relationships might pose. Annette Cozzi has argued that: 'Otherness is not merely figured as radical or oppositional difference; it is also figured as a superfluity, a monstrous excess that threatens to topple the

balance of power.’²⁴² This sense of the threat to power is precisely what Dickens’s novel engages with. *Little Dorrit*, as in Dickens’s other novels, works at developing a view of the ‘Other’ that does justice to their potential power rather than highlighting their insignificance. Whilst Britain’s trading can unquestionably be seen as in a position of superiority in terms of power and fiscal stability, it also reveals a weakness. The weakness that is identified is, in fact, one of dependence on transnational locales and on the commodities produced by other nations such as India, China and Africa. Dickens’s novel identifies that, whilst Britain is moving ever faster toward progress and improvement, it is concurrently increasingly reliant upon other nations to achieve this. Whilst steel and manufacturing industries were flourishing in Britain, many of the raw materials were coming from abroad. As a result Britain could only questionably be considered in these terms as independent.

Whilst products from abroad were fetishised and fostered a commercial desirability they also presented problems in terms of power. As Peter Jackson has suggested:

Such accounts of global inter-connection emphasise the multi-centred origins of modernity and demonstrate that European power, though increasingly dominant, was fiercely contested. From such a perspective, references to ‘globalization’ in the present era can be understood as a rhetorical device, deployed in support of a specific (neo-liberal) political agenda.²⁴³

By fostering ideas of inter-connectedness, the ways in which the world in the nineteenth century was seemingly contracting can be realised more acutely. Jackson’s observation is also highly suggestive of the ways in which transnational spaces, both in terms of their representation socially and in the media as well as in Dickens’s own work, can be viewed as problematic. Transnational spaces can subsequently be refigured on a global map through

²⁴² Annette Cozzi, *The Discourse of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 17.

²⁴³ Peter Jackson, ‘Making a Difference in a Globalizing World’ in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, (June 2004) p. 166.

the commodities that are present both in the real world and in the world of the novel. It is in this way that Dickens's fiction can be seen to hold such a central role in the refiguring of the value of material culture analysis in nineteenth century. Viewing Dickens's work in this way allows for my work to build upon the significant contributions that have been made by academics such as Catherine Waters, Elaine Freedgood, Isobel Armstrong and Bill Brown, and begin to develop a new way of syncretising the ways in which Dickens's inclusion of transnational commodities and, for the purpose of this chapter those from China, construct a nuanced world view. Jackson suggests that 'Globalization does not so much mark the erasure of a place but in a curious way contributes to its revitalization.'²⁴⁴ It is this process of transnational revitalisation that Dickens's work speaks to, arguably, in dangerous ways. As a consequence *Little Dorrit* can be seen as a response to the threat that countries such as China posed through their supply of popularised commodities and a British desire to possess them.

Dickens develops connections with these foreign locales from the start of the novel. The seas, so central to trade, are the focal point and the selected mode of transportation. The port of Marseilles is described in detail, and as having boats that,

were too hot to touch; ships blistered at their moorings; the stones of the quays had not cooled, night or day, for months. Hindoos, Russians, Chinese, Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Genoese, Neapolitans, Venetians, Greeks, Turks, descendants from all the builders of Babel, come to trade at Marseilles, sought the shade alike – taking refuge in any hiding-place from a sea too intensely blue to be looked at, and a sky of purple, set with one great flaming jewel of fire.²⁴⁵

The boats provide the initial focus with the awnings that are 'too hot to touch' being described as such not only because of the climate on that day but also due to their place of origin. It is interesting to note that despite their cultural differences all the nations behave the same and seek out the shade. Dickens focusses on the similarities of all the nations here as opposed to the

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 166.

²⁴⁵ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, (London: Penguin, 2002) p. 15.

differences, albeit that they hale from geographically different locales. The listing of the countries in this way, almost cataloguing them in much the same way as one would in a museum, focusses the reader on the locale as opposed to the person. The Biblical connection with the Tower of Babel and the different languages serves to distinguish both the origins of the people and the apparent babble of discourse that to the uninitiated ear was meaningless. The image of 'The Tower of Babel' is a familiar one in Dickens and, as has been discussed in Chapter 2, presents a multi-linguistic as well as multicultural world view. The difference this time is that now all the languages find themselves present on European shores as opposed to being separated. This is a successful device in terms of the role language plays in the making of cultures and the increasingly globalised world that is presented within Dickens's narrative. As Ulrike Hillemann has suggested, with reference to China, 'linguistically, its complete 'otherness' was the most important feature'.²⁴⁶ Therefore, by situating language as a marker of 'Otherness', Dickens, by placing the activity at the start of the novel in foreign lands serves to open up the potential for a contemporary reader to question the role of the 'Other' in an increasingly globalised world. It facilitates a consideration of Britain's global place in juxtaposition to that of the 'Other'. Hillemann continues to assert that 'the contest in Europe was thus not with the Chinese authorities about identity, representation, and the power over words, but rather between the eternal rivals France and Britain on which could create knowledge about China'²⁴⁷ That *Little Dorrit* opens in Marseilles, a well-known French port, feeds into these ideas of rivalry and competitive nationhood which were very much bound up with ideas of nation and identity. The novel is focussed on the ways in which all nations are now on the world's stage and, as a result, part of the reader's consciousness. The diverse origin of the people is described as being almost painful, physically affecting as well as psychologically so, in terms of place, space and nation: 'The universal stare made the eyes ache'.²⁴⁸ The sense is that this 'universal stare' when the eyes of all travellers are upon each other at the port at Marseilles is overwhelming and shows how seemingly borderless the world has become. The universal gaze is a focal feature. It is presented as a visual assault – in contrast to the

²⁴⁶ Ulrike Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge, China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p. 171.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 171.

²⁴⁸ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 15.

earlier verbal assault. The characters are no longer considering themselves as being of one nation; instead, their ability to travel and experience new cultures marks them out as 'citizen[s] of the world.'²⁴⁹ This is not to suggest that nationality is not of importance, for undoubtedly it is; however, so too is the sense that by travelling and by experiencing new cultures the world that once seemed so foreign is, in some respects, less curious to those who have experience traversing it.

The Clennam's family business, as has already been mentioned, is never made explicit. There is a sense, however, in Arthur's mind that there is some shame associated with it and his eagerness to distance himself from it is palpable. Yet it is not China itself that is problematic or the traditions - it is his family ties at home in Britain which cause his discomfort. He identifies himself firstly as 'an Englishman, who has been more than twenty years in China'²⁵⁰, but at no point does Arthur show any attachment to the country; it is as though he is eager to separate himself from it and arguably his business undertaken there. His first conversation with his mother underscores this sense. Arthur states that he was:

Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from *me* in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.²⁵¹

This description is highly telling. Were one not to know that it is Arthur - who has only recently identified himself as an Englishman - it might be recognised as a description of a slave narrative or a subject of the Empire. Arthur describes himself as being 'broken not bent'. There is no yielding; by his treatment he is turned, by 'force' to his trade. He is ironed, which seems reminiscent of the shackles convicts were sent to Australia wearing and feels as though he has lost his free will. That upon being sent away to China Arthur has lost his 'will,

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 35.

purpose and hope' indicates that the movement of people from the homeland to abroad, far from having a transformatory effect, has had the opposite. Dickens is indicating that a more insular approach to trade and location offers greater possibilities than trade and expansion for the health of the nation. This notion is further supported by Clennam's assertion that:

Mother, our House has done less and less for some years past, and our dealings have been progressively on the decline. We have never shown much confidence, or invited much; we have attached no people to us; the track we have kept is not the track of the time; and we have been left behind.²⁵²

This sense of the business being staid intriguingly points towards those trades that are fruitful and those that are not. Whilst the novel is set some thirty years before the First Opium War the reader would have to mind the current Chinese situation and read the novel with this additional focus. The Opium War of 1839-1842 had only recently occurred and the Second Opium War 1856 - 1860 was already underway. The Treaty of Nanking, signed on the 29th August 1842, opened up many new ports which, whilst not part of the novel's discourse, would have been part of Dickens's and the readership's consciousness. The sense of being 'left behind' connects with ideas of development and progress and the idea that at all times Britain pushes forwards, yet here is an example of a business that is positively regressive.

Travel within the novel is made to feel a more viable option than in previous times. The distances that once seemed so immense are contracted. The arrival of 'A gentleman from thousands of miles away wanting to know your history!' ²⁵³ marks an important moment in the text. The distance is the first key factor and the lack of specificity surrounding the origins of the gentleman is the second. The miles, which are described in terms of 'thousands', are surmountable through improvements in transport and trade and as a result the space is much nearer. The idea of a need to know the history of another is also interesting, as it marks a fascination with the world outside Britain as well as

²⁵² Ibid., p. 60.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 117.

inside. This is further reflected by Flora's desire to know more about Arthur's time in China:

I don't know where I'm running to, oh do tell me something about the Chinese ladies whether their eyes are really so long and narrow always putting me in mind of mother-of-pearl fish at cards do they really wear tails down their back and plaited too or is it only the men, and when they pull their hair so very tight off their foreheads don't they hurt themselves and why do they stick little bells all over their bridges and temples and hats and things or don't they really do it! ²⁵⁴

Flora has seemingly collected her ephemeral knowledge from the commodities she has seen, from the chinaware she has purchased to the chinoiserie furniture she has in her possession and the decorative arts that have been brought over from abroad to represent this nation. Her entire knowledge about China is based not on what she has read but rather on what products she has been able to purchase. The bridges with the bells decorating them are reminiscent of the description of the doghouse that Dora chose for her puppy in *David Copperfield*, which was discussed in Chapter 2, and there is a sense that Dickens is drawing on familiar personal images of his own to construct this world view of China.

The China that is represented in *Little Dorrit* is socially constructed rather than representative. As Ulrike Hillemann has noted:

Particularly in the 16th and 17th Century, when the Chinese were still thought to be culturally equal, they were described as 'white' most of the time. As the opinion of the Chinese became more negative, they were increasingly seen as 'yellow; or coloured in some way, normally 'black' or 'brown'. Yellow probably became the colour that was attributed to the Chinese, because one saw them as not as civilized as the Western Europeans, but also not as primitive as the Africans and therefore looked for an intermediate colour that suited this position. Furthermore, Demel points out, according to the psychology of colour, 'yellow' corresponded

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

particularly with ambivalence and lack of transparency which was often seen as a dominant characteristic of the Chinese.²⁵⁵

That on some level China was still regarded as a nation not wholly devoid of developmental potential was significant. For the many years preceding the nineteenth century China had been held up as a well-developed and diverse nation. It was not a place that was regressive and yet, at the turning point of the Opium Wars, its negative representation in the media began to be privileged. Yet Dickens is not suggesting, I would argue, that the commodification of China is entirely without risk; rather he is identifying the ways in which by allowing these foreign objects into the house they become naturalised. Whilst the figures may maintain their 'Otherness', ultimately their inclusion within conversation and the narrative serves to naturalise them. As a result, the boundaries placed around such trading relationships are not necessarily safe ones for they adopt a familiarity with the 'Other' that is highly unusual.

The relationship Arthur Clennam had with Flora is held up by her against a new imaginary relationship:

'Indeed I have little doubt,' said Flora, running on with astonishing speed, and pointing her conversation with nothing but commas, and very few of them, 'that you are married to some Chinese lady, being in China so long and being in business and naturally desirous to settle and extend your connection nothing was more likely than that you should propose to a Chinese lady and nothing was more natural I am sure than that the Chinese lady should accept you and think herself very well off too, I only hope she's not a Pagodian dissenter.'²⁵⁶

That such potential relationships are discussed within the narrative underscores a cultural anxiety about inter-racial relationships and the alteration to what it might mean to be British. Dickens recognises that by experiencing new cultures and people that a familiarity may well bring with it a weakening of British

²⁵⁵ Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge, China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion*, p. 163.

²⁵⁶ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 166.

strength. Alongside a weakened sense of nationhood the novel opens up dialogues with what such global relationships may entail. Flora, albeit accepting that she is a figure of mockery and, as such, a character potentially to be dismissed does make some incisive comments. She recognises that the time away from Britain brings with it a change in Arthur's demeanour and an analysis of British customs on his part. The fear therefore with globalisation is that Clennam is more aware of the changes rather than less so:

'Dear dear,' said Flora, 'only to think of the changes at home Arthur – cannot overcome it, seems so natural, Mr Clennam far more proper – since you became familiar with Chinese customs and language which I presume you speak like a native if not better for you were always so quick and clever though immensely difficult no doubt, I am sure the tea chests alone would kill me if I tried, such changes Arthur – I am doing it again, seems so natural, most improper.'²⁵⁷

That Flora recognises he has become aware of Chinese customs and language includes the culture within the novel's space and whilst it does not serve to demystify it, it does effectively mean that a cultural consciousness of the world outside Britain is being constructed for the readership. The changes that Clennam's departure has brought about are suggestive not only of social but cultural modifications. That Flora uses the tea chest as a marker of this difference ties in with a central commodity that this chapter, and work as a whole, has recognised. Therefore both the locale and the commodity become intrinsically linked and create meaning for the readership about a culture that bears little resemblance to their own.

A final example of this balancing of cultures as a means of representing nation and nationhood is Clennam's meal with Pancks. It is described as:

A dinner of soup and a pigeon-pie, served on a little round table before the fire, and flavoured with a bottle of good wine, oiled Mr Pancks's works in a highly effective manner. So that when Clennam produced his

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 167

Eastern pipe, and handed Mr Pancks another Eastern pipe, the latter gentleman was perfectly comfortable.²⁵⁸

The primary foodstuff is British, a pigeon pie; familiar to the reader, it opens the description of the meal and its origin is made clear. Dickens anglicises the food narrative, ensuring that any notions of the 'Other' are removed initially from the consciousness. The quotation interestingly concludes, however, with a consideration of the East. Clennam draws out his pipe and begins to smoke from it. It is significant that Dickens mentions that 'the latter gentleman was perfectly comfortable'. Clearly, by presenting a foreign commodity alongside a British commodity the foreign commodity feels less alien and as a result a commodity impasse occurs. The foreign commodity is legitimised by the presence of a British one and, as a result, the process of globalisation becomes less threatening. However, this device raises questions about the role that foreign objects take in the British world and whether, by acknowledging them positively when in the company of foreign commodities, their threat is diminished. By doing this one might then question whether this then minimises the perceived threat as opposed to highlighting something which has the potential to be threatening to Britain in trading terms as well as socially and economically.

Commodities and the response to transnational trade

The significance of the role commodities play in *Little Dorrit* should not be underestimated. Their appearance and presence within the novel's space provides a place for China to reside whilst not always being explicitly referenced. Certain commodities feature within all of Dickens's novels as this work has recognised, such as tea, chinaware and silk. The final section of this chapter will, in light of the important work completed by Julie E Fromer, consider tea in greater detail. However, at this juncture I intend to consider the role that commodities play more broadly. Frank Dikötter has made an important contribution to this discourse and his work, *Things Modern: Material Culture and*

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 608.

Everyday Life in China, looks at the development of China and the presence of such objects. He references Liang Zhangju, who states that 'People frequently change their minds as soon as they see a new object. If one person admires something, soon everyone else will try to take to it.'²⁵⁹ The importance of consumer pressure on the desire to possess foreign commodities offers the possibility of seeing the ways in which other cultures mediate each other's produce. By fetishising certain objects and increasing their desirability, the objects' social worth increases. Without this societal function and commodification the object's life does not exist beyond the shop it is sold in. It is when a commodity enters the home and the social consciousness that its meaning is multiplied. The significance of the inclusion of such commodities in Dickens's novels, and for the purpose of this chapter in *Little Dorrit*, is great and marks an awareness of the influence of other cultures on Britain. Dikötter continues by asserting that:

Emulation is a popular notion because it furnishes an integrative framework of analysis. Like all totalizing explanations, it reduces human and historical complexity to a single variable: it gives a clear motive for the reasons why goods multiplied and spread down the social ladder and across the entire globe.²⁶⁰

The value that Dikötter places on emulation is interesting as it is indicative of cultures employing mimicry, as described by Homi Bhabha²⁶¹, to mirror other nations. Therefore, as much as nations such as India, Africa and China may well have been considered as ones that wished to emulate British traditions and developments, Britain too participates in this process. Through the fetishisation of foreign commodities that initially were only available to the upper echelons of society to their inclusion in aspirational households, foreign commodities spread globally, and their global worth should not be underestimated.

Dickens reflects this desire to emulate other nation's styles when he describes the interior of Pet's house:

²⁵⁹ Frank Dikötter, *Things Modern: Material Culture and Everyday Life in China*, (London: Hurst & Company, 2007) p. 9.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁶¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, (London: Routledge, 1990)

There were antiquities from Central Italy, made by the best modern houses in that department of industry; bits of mummy from Egypt (and perhaps Birmingham); model gondolas from Venice; model villages from Switzerland; morsels of tessellated pavement from Herculaneum and Pompeii, like petrified minced veal; ashes out of tombs, and lava out of Vesuvius; Spanish fans, Spezzian straw hats, Moorish slippers, Tuscan hair-pins, Carrara sculpture, Trastaverini scarves, Genoese velvets and filigree, Neapolitan coral, Roman cameos, Geneva jewellery, Arab lanterns, rosaries blest all the way around by the Pope himself, and an infinite amount of lumber.²⁶²

There desire to acquire, collect and catalogue commodities from their travels can be noted in this passage. This process of collecting foreign goods can be seen as a marker of Pet's presence in countries other than her own. The details in this extract are borrowed from Dickens's *Pictures from Italy* (1846) and a sense of the consumable quality of memories and nationhood can be constructed. The reference to the 'bits of mummy from Egypt (and perhaps Birmingham)' synthesises with Dikötter's notion of emulation. Whilst authenticity plays a significant role so too does fabrication. The frequency of this fabrication of authenticity is evinced further by the notion of the 'department of industry' and by placing something so ephemeral in such a tightly worked business framework the boundaries between accurate portrayal and false representation are brought into sharper contrast. The question here is whether this false representation is something intentional or a Dickensian remodelling of the world's produce. What such false items do achieve is a way of suggesting that the reality of other cultures can be easily modified textually, and by proxy, socially. Juliet John suggests that: 'The reality is, however, that in an industrial, capitalist society, things become commodities or 'social things' only by a process of mystification which represses the value of labour and the human social relations underpinning it.'²⁶³ This process of mystification is central to representations of Chinese commodities and, with little contemporary knowledge of the region, Dickens attempts to build a picture of the nation through these objects rather than through the people who inhabit the locale.

²⁶² Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 210.

²⁶³ Juliet John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 21.

By presenting commodities as 'social things' and imbuing them with meaning outside their use-value, Dickens achieves something quite unique; he creates a world which is dependent upon objects rather than 'Others' to reveal a British dependence on a nation that, as part of the British psyche, was frequently being represented as dependent on Britain. Ulrike Hillemann states that:

China had long occupied European imagination as a faraway, mysterious country.... A similar process took place with regard to the consumer products which the increasing trade with China brought to European shores, and which gave rise to the European fashion for Chinoiserie.... This shaped the image of China in Britain significantly, however, this process mainly took place within a European network and created an idea of China as a far away, mystical country rather than a real political entity.²⁶⁴

By constructing a mystical representation of a real locale, some of the threatening features of the nation are minimised. Dickens, however, is keen to include such commodities within the novel to reveal an increased trading relationship between Britain and China. By negating the political elements of the nation Hillemann suggests that China is made to seem fictitious; I would suggest that Dickens, whilst clearly not engaging fully with the nation, uses the commodities to reveal the ways in which China has entered Britain and become a social threat due to an increasing dependence. This process can be made even more complex when, as Hillemann suggests, 'Objects can move from commoditisation to singularisation, all the more in complex situations where individuals or groups devise innumerable schemes of valuation that conflict with more widely recognized commoditisations.'²⁶⁵ What Hillemann is suggesting here is a way of looking at the ways in which commoditisation functions. She suggests that this is made more difficult to engage with if groups create meanings for an object and this is an idea I would like to pursue. This seems to be an area that Dickens's work speaks to; there is something about the ways in which a group identifies with a text that makes the text itself more powerful.

²⁶⁴ Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge, China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion*, p. 16.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Dickens's notoriety was the chief factor in the resulting stellar sales and what has recently been termed the 'Cult of Dickens'²⁶⁶. As a result, over time, the text ceased, arguably, to be as central as the figure who created it. This can be seen to be replicated with regard to commodities. An object comes over from China and is hugely popular, is then accepted as something which is seen to be representative of the whole group or, arguably, the nation. Therefore the commodity no longer needs to be of as high a quality or value because the society adopting it has elevated its value. Its value is itself. In this sense that is what is occurring with the inclusion of references to China in the novel; the novel recognises that China is becoming increasingly powerful – yet uses a retrospective in order to navigate any awkwardness this might cause politically and socially – and situates it in such a way as to create a sense that the commodities are quite separate from the nation.

Britain's interest in Chinese commodities was not new; however, the ways in which these commodities appear in Dickens's novel is distinct. Hillemann again notes that:

In the 17th and 18th Century, this trade was to a large extent an import trade, supplying Europe with consumer goods such as porcelain, silk, lacquers, and of course tea. These imports inspired the fashion of 'Chinoiserie' during the baroque and rococo periods, the manufacture of Chinese-style pagodas, garden seats and bridges.²⁶⁷

The popularity of these imports reveals a longer term trading threat to Britain than might previously have been considered. Whilst China was taxed heavily on all the goods they exported, the commodities continued to arrive on British shores and were eagerly purchased by consumers. The commodities are given a sense of agency in as much as they are bestowed with a value that is both at once connected to and separate from their cultural heritage. Hillemann asserts that:

²⁶⁶ Juliet John uses this term in her work, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The trade with China had introduced the foreign into the houses of Britain, and a meaning of China was created in this sphere of consumer goods, adaptation, imitation and rococo rebellion against baroque and classicism. Even though this was not a direct encounter between Britons and Chinese, the imported goods nevertheless established a 'contact zone' where this supposedly Chinese style could also threaten British taste and identity.²⁶⁸

This threat to British identity is something that this work has already recognised and it is this, I would argue, that encourages Dickens to present such commodities in the home space as a warning to the readership of the increasing dependence that was building. This 'contact zone' is interesting as the commodities were produced by Chinese hands, travelled thousands of miles over the seas and then ended their journey in the hands of British consumers. There is a very tangible, physical element to this relationship. Whilst there is no real 'physical contact' between people, the commodities facilitate contact in a new way. British style is neglected in preference of a style and nation that was being politically vilified. There is something questionable about the British consumers' desire to participate in this commodity drive with a nation it did not respect. However, as I have previously suggested, I believe this obstacle was traversed by the fact that in the shop the commodities maintained their exoticism and as a result their desirability. However, once they entered the home, they became naturalised in the home space and ceased, in the eyes of the consumers, to possess that intriguing quality they had originally been prized for. Dickens's treatment of such commodities certainly leans toward this reading and indeed his willingness to show this in *Little Dorrit* through the included commodities certainly suggests this.

Dickens's concern about such trading relations is verbalised early in the novel when it is said that he 'Has misgivings that the goods of this world, which we have painfully got together early and late, with wear and tear and toil and self-denial, are so much plunder; and asks to whom they shall be given up, as reparation and restitution!'²⁶⁹ The lexical choices made by Dickens here are significant. There is a sense that there are 'misgivings' and an unease has

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁶⁹ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 64.

developed about the trade which is occurring which is intrinsically linked with a dependence of British consumers on such objects. The sense that these have been accumulated 'painfully' is also interesting and whilst I am not suggesting that Dickens felt any particular discomfort about the treatment of the Chinese during the Opium Wars, there is clearly something about the disparity between their treatment and that of other nations that troubles him. Undoubtedly Dickens views Britain as having supremacy, but perhaps he also sees there is something else that is difficult about a relationship of such inequality which may perhaps lead to trouble at a later point. The word 'plunder' is again very evocative and is tied up with ideas about Empire and empire building. There is a worry voiced by the novel's characters that what is occurring now in terms of trade and commodities cannot be undone. There is a duality to these relations which is also recognised by Juliet John who suggests: 'The fact is that in Dickens's worlds, objects often function as both material things and as commodities, partaking of a characteristic doubling whereby reality is commercial and uncommercial simultaneously.'²⁷⁰ Dickens's *Little Dorrit* recognises, as do his other novels, the inherent danger of such commodity dependence and the fact that on a daily basis more commodities were landing on British soil and being anglicised. If such anglicisation of foreign commodities occurs, what then happens to British identity when it is so increasingly bound up with the 'Other'? Why is it that the 'Other' and commodities that are not British appeal to such a great extent in the fashionable homes of nineteenth century Britons and lead to a dependence on cultures that threaten British identity on the tea table?

Not for all the tea in China: Dickens and the inclusion of a very un-British beverage

The trade in Chinese tea expanded in the nineteenth century and its popularity is reflected in Dickens's work as more ports opened and the trade in this commodity became increasingly brisk. Tea appears at key moments in the text and acts as a marker of a discourse between the characters as well as serving

²⁷⁰ John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, p. 22.

as a means of shaping ideas about nations and nationhood. Beyond this, however, tea represents a commodity which forms a consistent part of the British home and, as Julie E Fromer has noted, 'Tea is represented as dependable, a frequent part of everyday life that forms a comfortable, secure basis for the rest of life's responses, decisions and actions.'²⁷¹ Whilst the tea is undoubtedly a 'dependable' commodity, I would question to what extent it performs a secure basis for the rest of life's responses, decisions and actions.' This seems to me to be giving the commodity a far more innocuous agency that in reality it possesses, especially when considering how much is tied up in the object. China and Britain's shared history instantaneously make this a problematic reading, I would argue, and it also fails to recognise the important work that such commodities perform in Dickens's literature. The process of the inclusion of tea is essential as it facilitates a cross-cultural dialogue which, regardless of whether it is intentional, provides a grounding for the reader on certain aspects of the product and the processes enacted to achieve its arrival on British shores. Fromer continues her argument, suggesting that:

The repetition of a specific consumption pattern gives it meaning, providing shape and order to the days of one's life and one's place within the family, the community, the nation, the empire and the world. Repeated daily activities thus contribute to constructions of identity from within, but these are based on social norms and ideals and occur within social spheres.²⁷²

The idea of 'the repetition of a specific consumption pattern' is significant and allows for a reading of commodities that charts the movement of the commodity alongside the presence of it on British shores. The ordering of a commodity, in terms of its inclusion as part of a British routine, also serves to encourage an analysis of the ways in which certain fetishised objects enter the novel to mirror the consumption pattern being enacted at home. Equally, by separating the commodity from the locale the item is more readily naturalised; a notion that my work has engaged with and which *Little Dorrit* underscores.

²⁷¹ Julie E. Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*, (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008) p. 1.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Whilst this work is keen to maintain the distinctions between English and British and focusses on Britain as a counterpoint, Fromer continues her analysis of tea by distinguishing between the two, suggesting that: 'The slippage between "English" and "British" highlights the tension between the simultaneous inclusive/exclusive function of tea drinking in nineteenth-century literature'.²⁷³ Fromer's further distinction between these two parts of Western identity throw into contrast the conflict that is present within the novel. The inclusive/exclusive relationship has a great deal to bear on the class relations and the ways in which tea was accessed by the masses. Initially, as a commodity only the wealthy could afford, the increase on tea duty in 1850 in China to 180 percent and the decreasing of it on British shores to 6 percent, alongside increasing concerns about the adulteration of coffee that had been present in the 1840s and 1850s, helped to ensure that tea became a less exclusive commodity. As a member of the Liverpool East India and China Association stated in a letter to Sir Robert Peel in 1845:

Tea, in this country, is an article of almost universal use; with a large portion of us it has become a necessary of life. It is never absent from the breakfast table of the rich, or of the middle classes. It forms, also, a chief part, and, in many instances, the only part, of the beverage of the after-dinner meal. Thus it enters largely into the expenditure of every family, comprising, probably, one-third or one-half of the cost of two meals of the day, and that amongst the better portion of the community. But it is also very generally used amongst the labouring classes.²⁷⁴

There is something far more socially dangerous about a foreign commodity which reaches out to all the population as opposed to solely the upper classes, for it is highly suggestive of a wider influence than a commodity that appeals only to the minority. As the author continues to assert, 'No foreign article of consumption, sugar, perhaps, excepted, is of such general use.'²⁷⁵ Yet, due to the varying quality of tea available to purchase, the different classes had access to different varieties which thereby enabled a maintaining of its desirability that

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁷⁴ By A Member of the Liverpool East India and China Association, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir Robert Peel, Bart, First Lord of Her Majesty's Treasury, ETC.* (London: Simkin, Marshall, & Co. 1845) p. 4.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

would have been otherwise lost. It is the widespread appeal of tea Dickens recognises and one which perhaps in certain respects parallels the popularity of his own writings. The author of the letter to John Peel in 1845 continues his dialogue by recognising that:

Tea is the principal medium of exchange in the commerce between this country and China; and to tax it unnecessarily, is very like what a tax upon the circulating medium of this country would be. Our trade with China, since its complete opening, is on a totally different footing from what it was under the East India Company. Then we were nothing more, in our mercantile relations with that country, than importers of tea, and appeared in that market in the character of buyers only, paying for it in Company's bills on their Treasury in India, and by such means furnishing the East India Company with a mode of remittance home of their yearly revenues. Now, we are essentially exporters to China of our manufacturers, for which we have already found extensive markets.... We have become sellers of our goods to them, by which a large amount of our employment has been opened up to our manufacturing population.

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The potential for Britain to trade with China reveals an awareness by Britain of the transnational opportunities available and China's strength rather than its weakness. Dickens clearly recognises in *Little Dorrit* that such trade holds its own dangers for Britain where an increasing dependence on the 'Other' brings with it less agency for Britain. Affrey's observation of Flintwich also shows this fear at work:

Moreover, he went about to other counting-houses, and to wharves, and docks, and to the Custom House, and to Garraway's Coffee-House, and the Jerusalem Coffee-House, and on 'Change; so that he was much in and out. He began, too, sometime of an evening, when Mrs Clennam expressed no particular wish for his society, to resort to a tavern in the neighbourhood to look at the shipping news and closing process in the evening paper, and even to exchange small socialities with mercantile Sea Captains, who frequented their establishment. At some period of every day he and Mrs Clennam held a council on matters of business;

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

and it appeared to Affery, who was always groping about listening and watching, that the two clever ones were making money.²⁷⁷

Flintwich's journeying around the docks further underscores the trade being conducted by Mrs Clennam at home and abroad. That the trade she participates in is never mentioned leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions about the business in China. Flintwich's interest in the docks and the comings and goings highlights the international feel of the novel and encourages a sense of the interconnectedness of the globe in commodity terms.

The fear surrounding the adulteration of commodities is identified by Dickens in *Little Dorrit* when it is described how a saleswoman:

...also stumbled, with a large balance of success against her failures, through various philanthropic recommendations to Try our Mixture, Try our Family Black, Try our Orange-flavoured Pekoe, challenging competition at the head of Flowery Teas; and various cautions to the public against spurious establishments and adulterated articles.²⁷⁸

Dickens does something interesting here with the language; firstly he repeatedly uses the word 'our', insinuating that the produce is British and, secondly, a possessive quality to the description is developed. This builds on ideas of national identity that seem to become blurred by this foreign commodity and its presence in the novel raises questions about transnational relationships. The description of the situation as presenting 'challenging competition' is also highly suggestive of competition in business terms both at home and abroad. This is then finalised with the warning about 'adulterated articles' which thus far tea was not associated with. The sense of contamination and false representation is central to this description and is used to build ideas around increasing trade between Britain and China and the unknown quantity of it.

²⁷⁷ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 361.

²⁷⁸ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 118.

As a result of fear surrounding adulteration, tea entered the British home in greater quantities than it had previously and thereby became a British national commodity rather than a foreign one. This conflation of a foreign commodity with British identity was, however, not without its own dangers and as Fromer asserts, 'perceiving China as the "other" and depending on Asian tea to produce a sense of English national identity threatened to collapse the distinctions upon which that national identity was formulated.'²⁷⁹ This identification of the ways in which a Chinese foreign commodity essentially made meaning of British identity is significant as it recognises the ways in which such commodities held power. *Little Dorrit* engages with this sense of the anglicisation of this foreign commodity and the position it holds in the British home. As Annette Cozzi asserts, 'Similarly, food provides a literal and metaphorical example of Britain's dominance, the result, to some extent, of Britain's ability to absorb other cultures and their resources, ultimately recreating and re-evaluating them as something uniquely British'.²⁸⁰ This process of re-evaluation and the ultimate recreation of an identity holds value in terms of tea and of other Chinese commodities. It is, as I have argued, through this process of anglicisation that these foreign commodities can be so seamlessly integrated into the novel's space and into British culture. However, this also reveals a dangerous dimension of the integration of Chinese commodities that had the ability to syncretise on the British table. These commodities enter the space of the novel and foster dangerous conversations about identity and Dickens seems aware of the risks such dependence presents to the audience. Britain's ability to modify foreign commodities shows a way of making use of objects which were not native and corrupting or altering their use. This process is not, however, one-sided. Tea was initially intended to be drunk without milk, according to Chinese custom. However, the British added milk and as a result modified a foreign commodity, rendering the contents inside the cup alien to the producer. This alteration can, however, be seen in terms of the products that the Chinese sent over to Britain and that the British purchased. As Fromer states:

²⁷⁹ Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*, p. 27.

²⁸⁰ Cozzi, *The Discourse of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, pp. 17-18.

Chinese porcelain teacups in the nineteenth century – and today – have a much simpler shape and design: like the teacups found in Chinese restaurants, they are usually small, simple, convex cups with no handle and no saucer. The teacup handle and saucer were added purely for European export, marking the power of English tastes to exert changes on global commodities.²⁸¹

Whilst Britons were keen to buy into Chinese culture they were doing so on their own terms. They were altering Chinese culture and working to recreate a cultural memory of a culture that was not their own. This manipulation, whilst highly effective, brings about questions of authenticity and identity and the instability of it. If Chinese identity could be so readily modified on British shores, what was to suggest the same was not occurring in China? I would argue that in fact Chinese national identity was far more fixed; whilst China was prepared to modify its commodities for British consumers it was not modifying its cultural practices. In contrast, Britain was in the process of adopting new cultural mores, as Dickens reveals in his novel, and was increasingly flexible in its welcoming of new cultures when presented as consumable commodities.

In part such cultural modification is representative of the danger inherent in the form of a culture dependent upon commodification and also in the form of the novel. As Cozzi suggests:

Nationalism requires internalisation to ideology, and both food and literature are portable, exportable repositories of nationalist beliefs and sentiments, repositories that provide modes – even blueprints and recipes – for the reproduction and consumption of nationalist ideology.²⁸²

The notion that food and the novel's portability are what serve to further nationalism is highly persuasive and, using this reading, commodities such as tea from China act as nationalist objects in the novel's space. In turn they serve to present a continual reminder of Britain's increasing dependence on foreign

²⁸¹ Fromer, *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*, p. 48.

²⁸² Cozzi, *The Discourse of Food in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, p. 17.

commodities and a cross-cultural flux. By reflecting on the portability of the novel's form, something I have done already in this thesis with reference to John Plotz's work²⁸³, ideas about space, place and location can be engaged with further and questions about the process of national integration of foreign commodities within Dickens's novel can be addressed. Ulrike Hillemann argues, however, that:

At the same time, British identity was defined in contrast to the Chinese. While the Chinese were seen to be as crafty and industrious as any good Briton, they were considered to lack the moral aptitude which would have made Chinese rule positive for the people of Southeast Asia. Here, a Briton, who through superior knowledge and his high moral standard improved the lot of the native population, was clearly contrasted with the Chinese, who had almost equal opportunities but only worked for self-gain.²⁸⁴

The suggestion that Britain's success was based on moral altruism is highly problematic and leads to a difficult reading of cultural identity. The sense that, in contrast to Britain's Chinese counterparts, they were able to concern themselves with the progression of the nation was difficult. The suggestion was that this resulted in swifter progress. If this was indeed the case then China's rapid commercial growth, so frequently undermined in Dickens's journalism, becomes problematised. However, due to Britain's increasing dependence on China for commercial prosperity, the denigration of this nation only really serves to highlight what Dickens saw as a potential power which needed to be reined in.

Britain's dependence on tea and its inclusion in *Little Dorrit* is demonstrated throughout the novel with frequent allusions to the commodity. The way in which Dickens inserts the act of taking tea is part of the strategy of including China and revealing an awareness of a cultural consciousness of the world beyond Britain. By systematically layering these allusions the commodity features in such a way as to seamlessly integrate and form part of British

²⁸³ John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009)

²⁸⁴ Hillemann, *Asian Empire and British Knowledge, China and the Networks of British Imperial Expansion*, p. 192.

tradition. The references to tea are balanced with common homely reference points and they follow each other in swift succession. Observations such as 'She thought she was in the kitchen getting the kettle ready for tea'²⁸⁵ followed by 'It is nearly time for tea'²⁸⁶ moves on to 'To come to tea here forever?'²⁸⁷, 'Don't you know it's her tea-time?'²⁸⁸ These simple phrases all appear to be perfectly innocuous and of course can be read as such; however, I would argue that Dickens includes them here in such swift succession and with reference to the Clennams quite purposefully. A mere nine pages after the first reference to tea the final tea reference in this selection is made with 'Mrs Clennam's tea....After tea.'²⁸⁹ What is particularly interesting about these tea references is that they are only made with reference to the Clennams. No other character has so many specific references to this commodity and this is highly suggestive of Dickens drawing the Chinese commodity to the attention of the reader and using it as a further marker of the Clennams' close association with China. This process is repeated again later in the novel when Rigaud comes to visit. Initially the conversation begins by analysing Mrs Clennam's business and by her blaming her sex for an inability to undertake commercial transactions. Mrs Clennam asserts that:

'My sex disqualifies me,' she proceeded with merely a slight turn of her eye in Jeremiah's direction, 'from taking a responsible part in the business, even if I had the ability; and therefore Mr Flintwich combines my interests with his own, and conducts it.'²⁹⁰

Mrs Clennam's perception of herself as unable to take a 'responsible' part in the business is curious and misleading, especially when one considers her role in the business when her husband was alive. It suggests that she is using a device to conceal her strength in front of this new character. The combination of 'interests' again is lacking in specificity and provides no indication of the trade they are participating in. Flintwich's next question to Mr Blandois/Rigaud is odd

²⁸⁵ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, p. 196.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

considering his surname: 'You are English, sir?' ²⁹¹ This seems to suggest that identity and origin are being blurred at the tea table at the Clennam's house due to the global trade that is being enacted there. Flintwich's question as to whether he has 'been much about the world?' ²⁹² This speaks to the notion of the Clennam's business being globally focussed and the interconnected nature of such trade.

The second incidence of the layering of allusions to tea in the Clennam's house occurs in the presence of Blandois. It begins with 'Mistress Affery, who stood at the table near him, pouring out the tea' ²⁹³ and continues with her recognising the danger of the situation in 'which her identity stood' and she 'relinquished the teapot as her husband seized it, put her apron over her head, and in a twinkling vanished.' ²⁹⁴ The ceremony of tea taking is presided over by Affery, who has been tormented by Flintwich throughout the novel. The placement of the apron over her head seems suggestive of a desire to escape the situation and bear no part in it. It is fruitful to question whether this extends to a consideration of the participation of Britons in trade with China. The ceremony then continues with Flintwich, Clennam and Blandois and is completed with a repetition of small actions associated with tea drinking. Flintwich firstly asks for Affery to be pardoned and then pours 'out the tea himself.' ²⁹⁵ Blandois, in contrast to Mrs Clennam and Flintwich who both drink the tea, refuses his, stating: 'Thank you; no tea for me.' ²⁹⁶ It is significant, I feel, that a Frenchman is unwilling to imbibe a foreign beverage, but the two British characters whose country is so frequently in conflict with the China so readily accept it as part of their tea-time ritual. It marks an instance of tea becoming naturalised in the home space and also as a clear indication of the forging of connections between the beverage and the Clennams' unspecified trading in China. The tea table is then described as being 'drawn up to the sofa, with a small interval between it and Mrs Clennam's own particular table.' ²⁹⁷ The two lines drawn up in the space between them summon images of geographical boundaries and the connection between transnational land and geopolitical

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 376.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 376.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 376.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 377.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 377.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 377.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 377.

commodities. The pattern of the drinking is also chronicled by Dickens, who described Flintwich 'who had been observantly pausing all this time with a cup of tea in his hand, and his mouth open ready to swallow the contents, began to do so, always entirely filling his mouth before he emptied it at a gulp, and always deliberating again before he filled it.'²⁹⁸ The intimately described process of his drinking is significant in as much as it seems to be suggestive of him gulping, or consuming rapidly. This connects with notions of trade and an increase in the dependence on Chinese commodities that are being swallowed up by eager consumers. The meeting concludes with Flintwich pouring 'himself out another cup of tea, which he was swallowing in gulps as before, with his eyes directed to the invalid.'²⁹⁹ The inclusion of tea in the narrative in this way is, as I have already argued, suggestive of a Dickensian awareness of increasing trade with China and anxieties about its effect on British identity. The fact that the consumption of tea only occurs when in the presence of Mrs Clennam is indicative of a connection between trade and consumption and broader questions about identity.

Little Dorrit is a complex novel with regard to its dealings with China. There is no sense that China is accepted or forms a valued part of British society; however, what it does is participate in a commodity dialogue with eager consumers who were keen to purchase items from abroad and a Dickensian anxiety about the increasing reliance on commodities from afar. The relationship between Britain and China, whilst frequently fraught, was also increasingly reflexive and *Little Dorrit* both acknowledges this and challenges it, asking the readership to question what such relations might mean to British trading stability, identity and nationhood.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 378.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 378.

Chapter 5
Our Mutual Friend and the China Question

Dickens's penultimate novel was as eagerly anticipated as those that had come before it. Serialised between May 1864 and November 1865, the novel focussed the reader on the challenges present in both social and economic terms in Britain. The novel revealed not only an awareness of the dangers of The Thames and confused identity but also engaged with the world beyond Britain, most notably China. A keen sense of a global presence within the novel's space and the recognition of what globalisation might mean to British identity is ever present and connected within the textual framework of the ideas presented.

The novel exhausted Dickens, who wrote to John Forster that 'work and worry, without exercise, would soon make an end of me. If I were not going away now, I should break down. No one knows as I know to-day how near to it I have been.'³⁰⁰ This physical breakdown, whilst anticipatory of the stroke that would befall Dickens a short while later, reveals not only the effort taken to produce a literary work with such rapidity but also the ways in which engaging with such discourses on the parts of the characters could be so physically fatiguing. This was the novel that journeyed. The manuscript for *Our Mutual Friend* was left (and then collected) by Dickens from the Staplehurst train disaster on 9th June 1865. Whilst rail incidents occurred frequently, and often with far greater magnitude, this incident captured the media's interest due to Dickens's presence. The rise of Dickens's celebrity functioned as a means of fully exploring the story and Dickens's perceived heroism.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Jenny Hartley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 390

³⁰¹ Equally of note here is the presence of Ellen Ternan and her mother which raised questions about their relationship. For further scholarship on this please see Michael Slater, *The Great Dickens Scandal*,



Fig. 3 'Charles Dickens helps the suffering at the fatal Accident' in *The Penny Illustrated Paper*, London June 24 1865 Vol. IX No. 1145.

The image of Dickens caring for a young woman, positioned in the foreground with the wreckage behind, provides a clear Dickensian focus. The rise of the railways, and the frequency of their use to travel across Britain, mirrors the railway works Britain carried out in India. Rapid transit and rapid progress remain a central British fixation. The novel's presence on board this train contributes to this message where the world outside Britain was, as Britain was, on the move.

This chapter will be divided into two sections, the first examining the ways in which contemporary journalism and discourse shaped an understanding of trade, statistics and commerce. The focus here will be on Britain's reaction to China and the importance of Chinese commodities in framing this relationship. By exploring these notions through contemporary journalism a commodity picture can be constructed that will, in turn, do justice to the complexity of Dickens's own world view. The second section will focus on *Our Mutual Friend* and, in particular, the conversations between Silas Wegg and Mr Venus. In these communications Dickens's focus upon the commodity, tea, and the country, China, is vivid and can be brought to the fore. As has been shown in preceding chapters, Dickens's focus on transnational spaces becomes heightened throughout his oeuvre and reveals an increasing British anxiety about the worldly nature of Britain. Such perceptions of these relationships can be witnessed through the commodity's frequent appearance in

the novel's space and also in the broader sense of Dickens's increasingly cosmopolitan outlook.

Critical and journalistic reflections on tea and China

Dickens's journal, *All the Year Round*, took over the mantle of global reporting from his previous publication, *Household Words*. *All the Year Round* published a multitude of articles about China, revealing an interest particularly in Chinese popular culture and the nation itself. In *A Brief History of Tea* by an anonymous author it is noted that: 'Mr Dickens in his *All the Year Round* justly remarks that tea is more and more becoming a necessary of life to all our classes'.³⁰² The recognition of another reader, interested in tea and being particularly aware of Dickens's inclusion of this commodity, gives credence to my view that this commodity was becoming increasingly relied upon by Britain and, in addition, that a burgeoning understanding of Britain's relationship in trading terms, was being developed. The fact that this foreign commodity was becoming vital to British consumers is of note as, whilst the commodity was not a native British commodity, it was seen to be affecting the wellbeing of all classes. The ability of tea to be so affecting to all social groups marks a central moment in the commodity's history and indeed establishes its presence in the British home as a necessary part of British culture. No other foreign commodity can be considered, at this time, to be as fundamentally important as tea. This is mirrored in the other articles Dickens published in *All the Year Round*, with titles such as 'Voyage in a Gun Boat to China'³⁰³, 'Chinese Amusements'³⁰⁴, 'The Chinese Philosopher'³⁰⁵, 'The "Flowery" Drama'³⁰⁶, 'Chinese Thoughts'³⁰⁷, 'Up

³⁰² Anonymous, *A Brief History of Tea With A Glance At The Flowery Land*, (George Street: Richmond: John Woods, 1853) p. 7.

³⁰³ [John Bowring], 'To China in a Gunboat', *All the Year Round*, Vol. 13, No. 310, (1 April, 1865), pp. 222-225.

³⁰⁴ [John Bowring], 'Chinese Amusements', *All The Year Round*, Vol. 13, No. 301, (28 January, 1865), pp. 12-16

³⁰⁵ [John Bowring], 'The Great Chinese Philosopher', *All the Year Round*, Vol. 13, No.315, (6 May, 1865) pp. 352-357.

³⁰⁶ [John Bowring], 'The "Flowery" Drama', *All the Year Round*, Vol. XIII No. 302, (4 February, 1865), pp. 29-33.

³⁰⁷ [N/A], 'Chinese Thoughts', *All the Year Round*, Vol. XIV, No 333, (9 September, 1865) pp. 159-163.

and Down Canton’³⁰⁸, ‘New China’³⁰⁹ and ‘Chinese Thoughts’³¹⁰, which all appeared during the publication of *Our Mutual Friend*. These articles document not only hard ‘facts’ about China’s lack of progress, they also feature the everyday lives of Chinese traders and the culture that was participated in. These articles would have resonated with the British reader who was keen to establish a sense of a land and culture so removed from their own. That the commodity they were buying into most prolifically was tea - a foreign commodity - fetishised the object but anglicised it in the British home. It is important to reflect that prior to the nineteenth century China was viewed as a highly developed locale and one upon which Britain looked admiringly. This cultural shift arguably occurs within Britain’s and China’s increased – and frequently fraught – interactions after the creation of new treaties and the Opium Wars. Ross Forman has suggested that ‘China and its people were, commentators insisted (on a rhetoric that would not seem out of place today), an untapped and potentially vast market for the exchange of goods, ideas, religion and labour’.³¹¹ This presents an important perspective where the British recognised the value of such a fruitful ‘exchange’ market. Whilst I fully concur with the notion that there was a vast market for the exchange of goods and ideas, I question whether it was untapped, bearing in mind the trading relationships already being developed. That they were tapped into is undeniable but, equally, they were inhibited (not unreasonably) by the unwillingness of China to subjugate itself to an alleged British superiority. This seems to me to be a more fruitful reading of this burgeoning relationship and one which takes into account the ever increasing relationships between China and Britain in commodity terms and the commodities representation in the literary marketplace of Dickens’s novels. Forman continues to suggest that ‘China was figured as a site of almost infinite possibilities; her much vaunted air of isolationism, elevated to a Victorian commonplace, simply fuelled speculation about what lay behind the bamboo curtain.’³¹² The speculation that is alluded to here with reference to this ‘isolationism’ is thought-provoking. Certainly by disguising certain cultural

³⁰⁸ [N/A], ‘Up and Down Canton’, *All the Year Round*, Vol. XIV, No. 327, (29 July, 1865), pp. 15-19.

³⁰⁹ [NA], ‘New China’, *All the Year Round*, Vol. XIV, No. 346, (9 December, 1865), pp. 471-474.

³¹⁰ [N/A] ‘Chinese Thoughts’, *All the Year Round*, Vol. XIV, No. 333, (9 September, 1865), p. 159.

³¹¹ Ross Forman, *China and the Victorian Imagination: Empires Entwined*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) p. 8.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

elements the curiosity concerning what China actually is becomes heightened. By doing this the proposed 'isolationism' is eroded by an increasing engagement with Chinese culture which can be seen on a weekly basis in the journal and on a monthly basis – in commodity terms – with the novel, *Our Mutual Friend*.

As Shoenbauer Thurin asserts: 'A dominant view of China during the second half of the nineteenth century was of a decaying culture deserving to be reconstructed with Western values.'³¹³ By 'reconstructing' China Britain was able to compartmentalise the nation and ensure it fulfilled the functions and expectations enacted by British desires, whilst journalistic engagement served to underpin some of these prejudices. It is significant that this 'decaying culture' is emblematised by an increasing presence of a negative Chinese commodity in the later novels, as will be discussed in the final chapter of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. The need for China to appear to fulfil a very clear set of social and cultural roles ensured the creation of a nation that was what Britain projected as opposed to, necessarily, what it was. This was done in order to serve a social function that positioned China in direct opposition and contrast to Britain. Arguably, this opposition serves a limited purpose due to the increasing trading relationships that Britain found itself to be in with China. This relationship meant that Chinese production and British reliance on such productions becomes fraught, due to commodity dependence that eroded British independence.

Dickens's representation of China in his journalism might not present an enlightened view of the nation but in its consideration of the locale it serves to privilege its importance. China appears in the journalism and establishes a clear sense of this land. Similarly, *Our Mutual Friend* includes a commodity central to this relationship and the conception of this land in trading terms. The ways in which such definitions serve to reveal British anxieties, either realised or subconscious, ensure that a certain media and novelistic representation is created. Looking briefly at Dickens's article entitled 'Up and Down Canton', such cultural constraints can be witnessed. In the article Dickens describes the shop owners as 'fat, comfortable fellows, with pleasant, good-humoured faces. They

³¹³Susan Shoenbauer Thurin, *Victorian Travellers and the Opening of China, 1842-1907* (Ohio: Ohio State Press, 1999) p. 51.

showed me their curiosities very willingly and none the less courteously exchanged a smiling chin-chin with me, if I left the shop without purchasing anything.’³¹⁴ This appraisal of Chinese manners and faces deals with a bodily physicality of Chinese people yet keeps them as a distant human counterpart due to their presence in China. This appraisal of manners then progresses to an exploration of different teas and tea practices. The article raises important questions about the increasing dependence of Britain on China commercially and what this means to British identity are highlighted:

Tea-shops are numberless. They are piled up with chests such as we see in England, and with open baskets of coarse and inferior tea for the poor. The cheapest kind is made in thin round cakes or large wafers, strung upon slips of bamboo. It partially dissolves in hot water, and is flavoured with salt by those who drink it. Of this form of brick tea I have never seen any mention in the books published by travellers.³¹⁵

Whilst the description endeavours to maintain a level of cultural authenticity and permanence in the location, the description does refer back to British shores where the tea chests in China are described as being the same as the ones seen on English shores. This device is included to create both an air of familiarity and authenticity. There is something reassuring about the fact that Chinese products on British shores ‘appear’ the same as those in China. The stasis that is frequently noted in the nineteenth century about China is ironic, as China is in fact evolving rapidly in order to master the trade relationship with Britain. This article thereby enables the readership to firstly perceive the similarities as opposed to differences and to then move on to identify nuances in the production. The differentiation between the cheapest kind of tea - which is made in a ‘thin round cake’ and is noted to have never had ‘any mention in the books of travellers’ - suggests that there are certain products only available on Chinese shores to Chinese consumers. This in turn raises questions that have been present throughout this thesis about the authenticity of the product

³¹⁴ [N/A], ‘Up and Down Canton’, *All the Year Round*, Vol. XIV, No. 327, (29 July, 1865), pp. 15-19. (17)

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

consumed by Britain abroad and the tea that is consumed in China by the Chinese. Additionally, questions about the way in which the product is received in terms of the packaging of such commodities are very different to that of the British merchandising. Britain, it would seem, is receiving a refined version of the product. Such variations bring about questions regarding the authenticity of such products on the British shore versus the perceived authenticity the consumer is buying into. That Dickens was writing about this commodity reveals a key interest in the locale and commodity that is similarly reflected in *Our Mutual Friend*. The readership is encouraged to focus on the narrative but, by including references to the commodity into the novel's space, a complex global picture can be gained.

There is something fascinating about an object such as tea that is featured so predominantly in a culture and yet is a non-native product. Perhaps no other culture has so willingly taken on so many other commodities that are not from its own shores as Britain has. Such British commodity intrigue can be seen throughout the ages and reveals an interest in the world as a grocer. Whilst Britain forced other cultures to take on its mores and commodities, Britain quite willingly sacrificed part of its cultural identity through commodities which were not native to its shores. It is this cross-cultural intrigue that Dickens recognises in 'Chinese Competitive Examinations', where it is stated that:

There are magazines of native and foreign manufactures, porcelain and curiosity shops, ironmongery of all imaginary sorts, tea of fifty varieties, seal cutters, antique and modern; boot and shoe makers, of silk for the quality, cotton for the vulgar and beautiful embroidery for the Lin-lien (golden lilies).³¹⁶

This walk around the docks and the assessment of the commodities available for procurement is telling. The sense of the vast quantity and types of tea (numbered at 50) calculated and catalogued is significant as it distinguishes a sense of the singular object of tea into a variety of blends of tea that were

³¹⁶ [John Bowring], 'Chinese Competitive Examinations', *All the Year Round*, Vol. XII, No. 295, (17 December, 1864), pp. 445-453 (p. 445).

readily available. Equally, the silk and the detailed embroidery are points of focus, both of which provide markers for China in trade and commodity terms. Dickens's inclusion of these commodities recognises their major importance in nineteenth century commercial culture and is highly suggestive of a method of presenting these commodities as part of the cultural dialogue; internationalisation, in commodity terms, is occurring on Britain's shores. All of these publications engage not only with the location but also with the commodity output. In critical terms, it is the geopolitical commodities that resonate with Dickens and form a complex commodity dialectic.

Shanyn Fiske acknowledges that 'China could neither be homogeneously absorbed into nor excluded from England's imperial identity.'³¹⁷ This inability to be either absorbed or excluded is central to a Dickensian sense of the world beyond Britain. It is a means of establishing a way of accepting certain aspects of Chinese culture convenient to an imperial identity whilst denying a means of fully integrating. Whilst it is the country that is being referred to here, as part of my process to view this in commodity terms, it can be established as a determination to retain British authenticity that can be seen to be eroded through the purchase of transnational commodities. Britain needed China to maintain its exoticism in order for its produce to be fetishised. Journalism, whilst describing China, offers a biased interpretation as opposed to, necessarily, a complete view of the land due to British, nineteenth century prejudices. By ensuring China was defined by a set of commodities, its broader societal importance could be restricted. This can be identified when one looks at the ways in which tea is used in Dickens's fiction. Tea is used as a marker for China and by isolating this commodity a clear connection between the product and the locale can be gathered. This leads to a cultural consciousness of the world beyond Britain that builds upon current understanding of the locale which is built upon commodities. As Fiske continues to assert:

The study of Sino-British relations in 19th-century England provides a vital component in the understanding and reinvention of this relationship

³¹⁷ Shanyn Fiske, 'Orientalism Reconsidered: China and the Chinese in Nineteenth Century Literature and Victorian Studies', in *Literature Compass* (2011) p. 218
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00788.x/full>

not only because it forces us to confront the sources of stereotypes and ineffectual categories that persist in limiting current relations but because it offers the possibility of rediscovering productive models of ideological exchange and cross-cultural dialog.³¹⁸

Fiske's notions of productive models help to form a cultural dialectic, acknowledging the importance of the inclusion of commodities from transnational locales and beginning to shape a critical practice. For the purpose of this work Dickens is the primary focus and, whilst Fiske is speaking more broadly about nineteenth century concepts, this framework is a valuable one. Fiske recognises that, through the process of reinvention, one is forced to confront stereotyped cultural images. This cross-cultural dialogue provides a compelling means of engaging with the transnational locale via the commodities that are included.

References to the trading opportunities present need also to be noted when considering China and Britain's relationship with tea. Such noting of trading statistics can be seen in newspapers of the time, with it being stated in the *Freeman's Journal and Commercial Advertiser* that coming from 'Canton, Dec, 15 – Tea unchanged. Total export to date, 92,250,000 lbs. Exchange on London 4s 8½. Shanghai, Dec. 9 – Tea and silk unchanged. Export of silk to date, 7,8275 bales. Exchange on London 6s 7d.³¹⁹ Such exchange and import figures begin to shape a key sense of the trading pattern and the consumption of a geopolitical commodity which was increasingly forming a central part of British culture and was published at the same time as *Our Mutual Friend*. Whilst the price of tea remains unchanged, the price can be seen to fluctuate when this figure is contrasted with the earlier statistics which show 'Imports of Tea: 1835, 36,574,004 lbs, 1836, 49,142,236lbs, 1869, 145,000,000.³²⁰ It is clear that over a thirty six year period there has been a vast increase in the consumption of this commodity and, naturally, a decrease in other commodities such as coffee. This is important in relation to this work as it reveals the ways in which Britain moved from one foreign commodity, coffee, which was

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 223.

³¹⁹ N.A, 'Stock and Share Market' in *Freeman's Journal and Commercial Advertiser*, (Dublin, Ireland, Tuesday 24th January, 1865) n.p.

³²⁰ Anonymous, *A History of The Sale And Use of Tea in England*, (London: Licensed Victuallers' Tea Association, 1869/1870?) p. 17 (back cover)

manageable in terms of the Empire to tea which, due to China's refusal to submit to British rule, was not. This statistic does not stand alone and is reflected again in newspapers across the country. This reveals clearly, I would argue, increasing trade opportunities but also a British desire to obtain a commodity which essentially moves from being a foreign commodity into one posing an increasing threat to British independence when naturalised in the home space. Such a process of naturalisation and integration in commodity terms is quite unique and the vigour with which the retailing of this product was met with is testimony to the interest in the increasing dependence that existed between Britain and China, albeit on unequal trading terms.

However, not everyone was comfortable with the inequality of this trading relationship and The Right Hon. F. Peel at Bury, after a conversation in the House of Commons, is reported as saying in the *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, on January 26th 1865 that:

The consumer of tea and sugar had also experienced considerable relief. Since 1860 there had been a total of taxes remitted of 10,000,000[!?] and the surprising thing was, that the general income was no less now than it was before the reduction commenced. Pruning reductions in this prudent manner was like thinning a plantation – the more that was cut away within bounds of prudence the more vigorous was the growth of what was left behind. We appeared to be about to lose the long pre-eminence we had maintained in the matter of a national debt. We were threatened with a rival, the rapidity of whose debts, although they were much junior to our own, fairly our experience. Our debt had been the accumulation of a war expenditure, spread over several years.³²¹

This recognition of the salve of tax relief to the British people unquestionably heightened the desirability of this product. The remission, on such a grand scale, of taxes served to ease the commercial burden on Britain, though that fails to demonstrate what such a trade drive served to do to China, which was pushed to breaking point through over-taxation. Mr Milner Gibson in a further parliamentary debate was reported as throwing:

³²¹ The Right Hon. F. Peel at Bury in *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, (Dublin, Ireland, January 26th 1865) n.p.

...himself, however, upon the common and futile cry for a complete remission of the tea, coffee and sugar duties. May we enquire whether a partial relief of the interest or a total succumbing to the China interest would best conduce to the welfare of a considerable class in England. It was natural, and, we may add, necessary, on Mr Milner Gibson's part, to escape from this question, which makes him slightly responsible to another about which he may converse at large, in official mediation fancy free – the problem of English foreign policy.³²²

The problematic relationship between Britain and China documented here highlights the disputes present due to the desire to continue trade, but also in the recognition of the complexities over taxation procedures. It is of note, however, that the concern on Mr Milner's part about taxation lay in the repercussions such actions might have in trading terms to the access to this commodity for the working classes; it was not the indigenous Chinese population which was preying on his mind. Dr Watts takes a more humanitarian perspective at a reform meeting where he notes that:

We seemed to beckon all nations to send us their productions for our own use, and the moment their vessels came into our harbours we fined them for bringing the very articles we needed. (Applause) To levy duties on the tea, coffee, and corn we really required from other countries seems a monstrous mode of taxation.³²³

This is possibly the most beneficent reaction to the trading relationship and recognises the disparity between the desire for the commodity and the living conditions of the people who provide it. Dickens does not spend much time considering these conditions, however. Worryingly, Dickens asserts in relation to taxation in a letter to George Fordham on the 8th December 1855, in light of his comments about money and trade, that:

³²² *The Standard*, (London England), Thursday 26th January 1865 p. 4.

³²³ Dr Watts, 'Reform Meeting in the Free-Trade Hall' in the *Manchester Times*, Saturday February 4th 1865 p. 1.

In one or two points I differ from your view of facts, and think it scarcely fair. It is by no means clear to me that England is peculiarly “A 1” in the thirst for gold and the pursuit of trade.³²⁴

That Dickens is seemingly unable - or unwilling - to see Britain’s actions abroad as being primarily enacted for trade and financial gain is highly problematic. It shows a British bias that serves to protect the home nation whilst ignoring the nation’s mission. Britain’s offensive trade drive was what enabled it to build its Empire and was the basis for trade and any dismissal of this shows a concerning inability to critique or rationalise society. As I intend to show in the next section, Dickens, for the first time in his novels, begins to draw on commercial and societal concerns alongside these commodity dependence anxieties and, in so doing, shapes a sense of the world beyond Britain. By recognising the increasing relationship between Britain and China through this commodity, the dialectics of commodity relations can be witnessed and the inclusion of tea in Dickens’s novel becomes even more meaningful in terms of Dickens’s own cosmopolitanism and Britain and China’s commercial relations.

‘A cup of tea, partner’: The Unheard Tea Conversations in *Our Mutual Friend*

Dickens’s inclusion of tea and references to China come early in the novel’s space. Lizzie Hexam, when consoling her father, is described as sitting by him and:

In spite of her unchanged manner of speaking, and her unchanged appearance of composure, she scarcely trusted herself to look at him,

³²⁴ Letter to George Fordham, 8th December 1855 in *Pilgrim Edition Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol 7 ed. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) p. 760.

but kept her eyes employed on the cutting and buttering of his bread, and on the mixing of his tea, and other such little preparations.’³²⁵

Dickens’s attention to Lizzie’s movements sets the scene and domesticates it, perhaps showing the importance placed on the female sex on the restorative nature of this beverage offering a gendered reading. There is a repeated sense of her position with the focus being placed on her ‘unchanged manner’, both with regard to her composure and speech. The image presents a British commodity in the form of bread with the mixing of the tea which is exoticised and clearly Chinese. That the tea is mixed references the ways in which Britain received tea and she creates a ceremony in its provision for her brother. The tea is then adulterated - in a different way to that of the Chinese with their added colourants - when Lizzie states that: ‘There’s a drop of brandy for your tea, father, if you’ll put it in while I turn this bit of meat.’³²⁶ It is interesting that the tea, whilst being presented as a positive foreign commodity, is a stimulant. Its stimulant effect is then quelled by the addition of the relaxant, brandy. The European commodity suppresses the effects of the Chinese commodity. That in this passage Dickens presents two foreign commodities, one from a European nation and the other from an Eastern nation, reveals a way in which, even in the most resolutely English homes, commodities from foreign locales have become integrated into the home space and have become adopted as everyday objects. This also gives credence to the reportage of the poor being as needy of this beverage as the upper classes. It is the immediacy of this integration into the British home that heightens the intensity of the threat that other cultures pose to Britishness. The domestic scene moves from Lizzie and her brother Charley to one between Lizzie and Gaffer Hexam. There are continued references to tea as Lizzie engages with her father over the tea table and the tea becomes the means by which they partake of intimate conversations: “Father, if you’ll begin your breakfast, I’ll sit by and tell you.” He looked at her, stirred his tea and took two or three gulps, then cut at his piece of steak with his case knife.’³²⁷ The process of consuming the tea is the focal point of this passage and will continue to be a focus in the following section with the conversations between Silas

³²⁵ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. by Adrian Poole (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 78.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Wegg and Mr Venus. There is a very sensory passage with the visual connection maintained between Lizzie and her father and this progresses to an oral experience as he gulps the tea. The motion is not delicate; these are not sips. There is an almost greedy acquisition of the commodity that, in terms of the taxation faced by the Chinese for this product, is interesting. Clearly highlighting this issue is not Dickens's intention; however, looking at the effect such legislations had on the Chinese offers a productive reading of trade, taxation and consumption. In many ways this discomfort can be seen to surround not only the act of taking tea but also the actual possession of the foreign commodity.

The relationship between Silas Wegg and Mr Venus is particularly interesting in terms of both of their oddities; the man who sells a wide range of ephemera, from all over the globe, is focussed, throughout these intimate moments, on references to China and this 'Other' global product. Few of Mr Venus's day-to-day interactions are focussed on British commodities; instead he trades in the world outside Britain. The question this automatically raises is: what exactly is it about the China question, explored through this geopolitical commodity, that is so central to their discourse and to the continued focus on China in Dickens's novels? Regenia Gagnier has developed a model for assessing both the novel and Dickens's writing, stating that she historicises 'both Dickens and the genre of the novel, showing that diverse societies caught between traditional cultures and the forces of modernisation, as Dickens's society was, give rise to formal similarities in their literatures.'³²⁸ This is extremely helpful in that it recognises the complex conflict faced by Dickens in representing - and being part of - a traditional society which simultaneously was in the process of modernisation. Whilst this quotation speaks quite directly to issues of translation and cultural translation it also connects with the ways in which Dickens's work is concerned with the challenges inherent in such relations: the inclusion and integration of new cultures and the seemingly ready acceptance of foreign commodities as potential British markers. In using commodities in this way and in using, for the purpose of this work, China and tea, one can recognise the way in which Dickens's novel begins to address the ways an increasingly globalised world presents new challenges to both the

³²⁸ Regenia Gagnier, 'The Global Circulation of Charles Dickens's Novels' in *Literature Compass* 10/1 (2013) p. 83.

readership and, indeed, society more broadly. Laura Peters has noted that: 'The 1860s also saw a moment of crisis in Dickens's celebration of the continual source of inspiration to be found in the unchanging nature of fancy.'³²⁹ I find this reading questionable inasmuch as it is suggestive of a reading of Dickens that detracts from the ways in which so much of Dickens's work rests on notions of fancy. The sense of it being an unchanging nature is also problematic. However, to de-problematise this one might view China as a fanciful illusion as Dickens never visited China and, for this reason, his perceptions and depictions of this locale are achieved via secondhand narratives, commodities and his imagination. Therefore the depiction, whilst not unchanging, relies upon fancy in order to capture the readership's imagination and thereby represent the geographical space in a meaningful way.

The sense of stasis that is created, resonates with the following quotation that makes reference to China with: 'The world that appeared so flowery has ceased to blow!'³³⁰ China was often referred to as the 'flowery nation' and Dickens's use of the word 'flowery' here can be seen to reference that re-naming of China. When one considers the term in relation to the subsequent conversations held between Wegg and Venus who, despite their very English location, keep referring back to China through the commodity marker of tea, connections between locale euphemisms and the authentic name come into action. As Sambudha Sen has proposed, 'In *Our Mutual Friend* the list of things that can be uprooted and made mobile and exchangeable includes not only shares, commodities, information, but also dead bodies, body parts and simulated fragments of inner life.'³³¹ The sense of the uprootedness of the commodities that feature in the reading of the novel are reflected in terms of the commodities. Many of the commodities are uprooted in *Our Mutual Friend*, from the Hindoo baby in the bottle to Wegg's wooden leg and then the tea. Each of these object has origins or roots, yet they have been uprooted and placed within a British setting. In order for the reader to make meaning of such commodity positioning, such references to foreign climes are cited and, in turn, a subtle commodity picture of the world is developed. In doing this as a reader one is able to create new extra textual meanings, by which I mean the text

³²⁹ Laura Peters, *Dickens and Race*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013) p. 123.

³³⁰ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 79.

³³¹ Sambudha Sen, *Radical Culture and the Making of the Dickensian Aesthetic*, (Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2012) p. 141.

situates the plot and plot progress but the visual markers enable a commodity subtext to be created.

The objects within the room are also central to the exploration of the foreign commodities, as can be seen when:

Having so held and waved the candle as that all these heterogeneous objects seemed to come forward obediently when they were named, and then retire again, Mr Venus despondently repeats 'oh dear me, dear me!' resumes his seat, and with drooping despondency upon him, falls to pouring himself out more tea.³³²

The heterogeneity of these items is significant as it is highly suggestive of a lack of place or geographical placement. The act of naming them feeds into the sense of the importance of naming and what it means to identify certain objects. In naming what he calls forward, Mr Venus not only serves as an identifier but also works towards making meaning of these miscellaneous objects: specifically tea. Mr Venus positively drowns himself in tea and takes to this stimulant at weakened moments. It is at this juncture that, far from the tea being simply a marker for China and Britain's relationship with the locale, it progresses to a dangerous influence. This continues when the two men begin to drink their tea:

'Well,' replies Venus, blowing his tea; his head and face peering out of the darkness, over the smoke of it, as if he were modernising the old original rise in his family: 'you were one of a various lot, and I don't know.'³³³

The tea is a unifying feature of this image; he blows on the tea to cool it and yet his head appears out of the darkness. The darkness can be read as representing China as a locale, one both unfamiliar and potentially dangerous. The way in which the tea acts almost as a medium for their

³³² Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 88.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

conversation continues: 'Well,' replies Venus, still blowing his tea, I'm not prepared at a moment's notice, to tell you, Mr Wegg.'³³⁴ It is the act of taking tea in this British location, but surrounded by these worldly possessions, that begins to construct a commodity picture of the world. Whilst the origin of the tea is not mentioned, the fact that the commodity frequently reappears begins to forge important links between the commodity and its Chinese homeland. The tea is not solely represented as a comfortable commodity, as the following conversation between Wegg and Venus shows. Drinking tea has a physical effect on Venus's body, as is shown when, 'Mr. Venus takes a gulp of tea, so hot that it actually makes him choke, and sets his weak eyes watering - 'as a Monstrosity, if you'll excuse me.'³³⁵ Whilst Mr Venus is an English gentleman, his interactions with this Chinese commodity upon which he has become dependent are frequently uncomfortable and almost painful. It is as though the commodity itself reacts negatively to foreign handling and his British body cannot bear its influence. It is perhaps interesting to reflect at this juncture that whilst tea is frequently considered a peculiarly British beverage in reality it is not, yet over time it has become increasingly adopted as such. Similarly, whilst tea is often considered to be an innocuous substance, as has been mentioned previously in this work, it is, at the same time, a stimulant, and as such can be read negatively in much the same way as one might read coffee or indeed opium. In contrast to what I will term in my next chapter 'negative commodities', tea is presented as a 'positive commodity', albeit that it is simply a legitimised stimulant. The fact that Venus continually returns for more reveals a dependence and an addiction that mirrors the continued re-administration of that other Chinese addiction or addictive substance, opium. Certainly, whilst Mr Venus continues to ingest the liquid it does not appear to be a positive experience, for 'Mr Venus takes gulps of hot tea, shutting his eyes at every gulp, and opening them again in a spasmodic manner; but does not commit himself to assent.'³³⁶ There is something very uncomfortable about the engagement with this commodity and yet it is engaged with in a compulsive manner. His refusal to 'commit himself to assent' suggests that his addiction to the commodity is caused by the realisation of the role an increase in transnational trade plays and he is compelled to drink the beverage. The

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 88.

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

repetition that can be seen in other Dickens works and the textual layering I have identified is present here, where the narrator first asserts that, 'Fain to accept his promise, and wishing to propitiate him, Mr Wegg looks on as he sighs and pours himself out more tea, and then says, trying to get a sympathetic tone in his voice..' ³³⁷ This moves on to 'Mr Venus pours himself more tea, with a look and in an attitude of deepest desolation' ³³⁸ and then again to 'Mr Venus drinks more tea by gulps, and offers an explanation of his doing so.' ³³⁹ The repetition of the 'more tea' heightens the obsessive consumption of this commodity on Mr Venus's part and ensures the commodity maintains its presence in the reader's mind. He drinks the tea not because he wants to but because it is creating some sort of relief. Venus is seemingly compelled to ingest the tea and this is suggestive of some inherent danger in relations with China.

When Venus discusses the effects of the commodity on himself with Wegg one can note that they are not wholly positive. He states that 'It lowers me. When I'm equally lowered all over, lethargy sets in. By sticking to it till one or two in the morning, I get oblivion.' ³⁴⁰ The fact that the imbibing of tea results in him achieving oblivion is central to the analysis of this commodity. The use of the word oblivion gives the tea more traction as a far more powerful and indeed potentially dangerous commodity. One would usually consider tea to be a fairly innocuous substance; however, in the large volume consumed by Venus, it becomes far more potent. To read into this consumption pattern and to draw further connections between China and tea one might argue that the tea acts as a marker for the effects of China on Britain in trading terms. Gradually, the rise in trade erodes aspects of Britishness. The commodity has been allowed into the British home and has been naturalised in that environment, yet there are connections being forged between this as a positive commodity and the clearest of negative Chinese commodities, opium. Dickens seems to be, at this point in the novel and with these characters, suggesting that, far from its appearance as an innocuous substance, its effects in terms of trade, statistics and broader influences upon British culture are anything but. The physical demeanour of Venus gives further strength to this opium/tea

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 89.

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

reading and the negative qualities imbibing this product bring. This continues with 'the unfortunate Mr Venus gives him a shake of the hand with a shake of his own head, and drooping down in his chair, proceeds to pour himself out more tea.'³⁴¹ Venus seems to become almost inebriated, yet there is no alcohol added to the mix that we are told of and, owing to Dickens's particularities with regards to details, this is a detail one would assume would have been included, yet it is not. What is it then that makes the tea so potent? I would argue that tea is being established as a marker for China in the novel by Dickens and, as such, he positions it in commodity terms as something the British constitution is not fully prepared for in any volume. The presence of tea throughout Dickens's oeuvre is always more casually included and yet here its dangerous effects on Venus's corpus are emphasised. The dialogue surrounding China, both in terms of the country and the physical product of china, then continues:

'Are you a judge of china?' Mr Venus again shook his head.' 'Because if he had ever showed you a teapot, I should be glad to know of it,' said Mr Boffin. And then, with his right hand at his lips, repeated thoughtfully, 'a Teapot, a Teapot,' and glanced over the books on the floor, as if he knew there was something interesting connected with a teapot somewhere among them.³⁴²

This conversation marks an interesting shift in the dialogue. Whilst it is clear that Boffin is asking whether Venus knows about the commodity, china, there is a sense of a double entendre as both the tea, the teapot and the country of origin are appearing in this passage either directly or indirectly. The reference to the books suggests a connection in literary and geographical terms to the commodities. The repetition of the phrase, 'a teapot, a teapot', continues to resonate with Mr Boffin's reiteration of: 'A Teapot,' repeated Mr Boffin, continuing to muse and survey the books; 'a Teapot, a Teapot.'³⁴³ This is a further indication of the commodity preceding the locale and places it as a central feature in the novel that serves to raise questions about globalisation and British agency.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁴² Ibid., p. 474.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 474.

The act of taking tea and further references to China are, I would argue, central to Dickens's increasing awareness of an increasingly globalised world. By selecting China as a place that had been forcibly opened up to trade, the novel gives rise not only to the potential for increasing interactions with the foreign land, but also indicates a clear anxiety about this growing, necessary, relationship. Whilst I am not arguing that Dickens's process feeds into anxieties about the potential risks such relationships pose in a nineteenth century British context, the fetishisation of other nations is of central importance. Therefore, in challenging not only what other cultures' beliefs are but how they reflect a British sense of what Britishness means, Britain defines itself in part by its Empire; and China's absence from this Empire gives rise to important questions about British identity and interactions with China on this basis. By defining Britishness against the process of 'Othering', Dickens throws these challenges into sharper contrast.

The process of preparing the tea is continued with these characters when Silas visits Venus again and the first instance of their meeting is described thus:

Silas took his seat in silence on the wooden box before the fire and Venus, dropping into his low chair, produced from among his skeleton hands, his tea-tray and teacups, and put the kettle on. Silas inwardly approved of these preparations, trusting they might end in Mr Venus's diluting his intellect.³⁴⁴

The ephemera are again made to be the primary focus. The tea-tray and the tea cups are part of this commodity process and connect with the beverage about to be imbibed. That his hands are described as 'skeleton hands' adds to the surreality of the meeting and the potential dangers of the commodity. There is something deathly and creeping about this commodity interaction occurring as it does over a seemingly friendly cup of tea in this equally rather unfriendly seeming room. The lines:

³⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 488.

‘A cup of tea, partner?’ To which Mr Wegg returned ‘Thank’ee, partner,’ and the tea was made and poured out. ‘Next,’ said Venus, blowing his tea in his saucer, and looking over it at his confidential friend, ‘comes the question, What’s the course to be pursued?’³⁴⁵

This shows the intimacy that tea brings and again focusses on the business dealings of these two men. As opposed to looking at the tea merely as a commodity marker, the broader business implications as identified earlier in terms of trade and statistics are focussed upon. It is as much China’s adaptability that is problematised as the commodity itself that proves to be problematic.

Continuing with this notion of textual layering, a process I have identified as Dickens purposefully using a set phrase of expression repeatedly or the reorganisation of word order, Venus and Wagg’s conversation from earlier in the novel closely mirrors that of one that occurs later. This begins with:

‘I have an opinion of you, sir, to which it is not easy to give mouth. Since I called upon you that evening when you were, as I may say, floating your powerful mind in tea, I have felt that you required to be roused with an object. In this friendly move, sir, you will have a glorious object to rouse you.’³⁴⁶

The phrasing here is really rather interesting. Firstly the notion of floating his powerful mind in tea is one that, as I will show, is repeated some two hundred pages later but, equally of importance, are the allusions to the ‘object’. Certainly the object of finding the fortune is the most obvious reading of this; however, it is interesting to reflect on this ‘object’ being a societal object in terms of one that sees an increasing interaction with foreign lands. That his mind though is ‘floating in tea’ leads on to the following passage, where the phrase is repeated:

³⁴⁵ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 490.

³⁴⁶ Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 300.

‘Brother,’ said Wegg, when this happy understanding was established ‘I should like to ask you something. You remember the night when I first looked in here, and found you floating your powerful mind in tea?’ Still swilling tea, Mr Venus nodded assent. ‘And there you sit, sir,’ pursued Wegg with an air of thoughtful admiration, ‘as if you had never left off! There you sit sir, as if you had an unlimited capacity of assimilating the fragrant article! There you sit, sir, in the midst of your works, looking as if you had been called upon Home, Sweet Home, and was obleeing [sic] the company!’³⁴⁷

This is perhaps even more intriguing from a Chinese commodity perspective. As I have already identified, Dickens repeats the phrase; however, there is then a use of the notion of the ‘fragrant article’ - a common allusion to tea. That the phrase ‘Home, Sweet Home’ is then employed brings about further disturbing questions about exactly which ‘home, sweet home’ is being referred to: is it the homeland Britain or, perhaps, the home of China and the Chinese commodity?

Exactly why Wegg and Venus are so connected with Chinese allusions seems due, primarily, to Venus’s and Wegg’s interaction with ephemeral global commodities and that they are dealers in parts. The two men use their own stories alongside cups of tea to flesh out a world that was increasingly facing a threat from outside. Far from China being a passive nation which, due to its defeat in the Opium Wars, could be managed, China, through its reflexivity and ability to produce commodities adapted to their British consumers meant that they were a far more productive threat to Britishness than Britain had faced before. They were also unbounded by the East India Company and legislation attached to the Empire, and therefore had an unusual independence. Dickens’s novel alludes to this through these commodity inclusions. The trade and trading relationships are where, I would argue, in Dickens’s mind the dangers lay.

Such dangers in trade can be recognised when, on walking through the streets, it is noted that:

So with the lighted shops, and speculations whether their masters and mistresses taking tea in a perspective of back parlour – not so far within but that the flavour of tea and toast came out, mingled with the glow of

³⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 491.

light, into the street – ate or drank or wore what they sold, with the greater relish because they dealt in it.’³⁴⁸

The tea is again highlighted as a commodity that is central to the discourse. What gives them ‘greater relish’, however, is that ‘they dealt in it’. Here is perhaps the clearest indication that trade is of central importance to this dialogue. They thrive on the trade that is occurring because of the money such transactions bring in – not forgetting that such transactions incurred a 180 per cent taxation on Chinese importers versus the 6 per cent faced by British traders. Such trading inequalities do serve to identify the ways in which trade benefitted Britain and stifled other lands. However, due to China’s intense adaptability, such losses still meant that Britain was able to effect a cultural change and a movement from the popularisation of drinking coffee from Africa to drinking tea from China - albeit it that it lost, to an extent, its authenticity. As Sambudha Sen has argued:

On the one hand, *Our Mutual Friend* deploys the processes of finance capitalism to intensify the experience of dispersal that has been, all along, an important feature in Dickens’s representation of urban existence. That is, the novel registers the many ways in which the operations of an economy based on shares and promissory notes – on values completely detached from any material moorings – disperse individual identities as well.... On the other hand, the novel’s many business activities also promote a second and contradictory trajectory associated with the urban aesthetic; they facilitate unexpected encounters between dispersed Londoners and, in this way, a form of urban sociability very different from the “organic” ties around the domestic-realistic novel are built.³⁴⁹

Whilst, as Sen observes, there are many indicators of operations of economy, he neglects the significant role that material culture plays. This seems curious in light of the dense layering of commodities throughout the novel. The ways in which this reading facilitates a reading of unexpected encounters is, however,

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 497.

³⁴⁹ Sen, *Radical Culture and the Making of the Dickensian Aesthetic*, p. 143.

productive. Dickens, in *Our Mutual Friend*, provides numerous opportunities for such encounters, though, I argue, he does this through the material culture he includes. By including within the narrative these references to China, Dickens constructs a clear sense of a growing commercial power and interaction.

Such tea drinking is also included with reference to Twemlow, Fledgby and Wrayburn. These resolutely English figures reference this very un-English commodity both with reference to their own personal interactions and with regard to their interactions with others. The superfluous imbibing of tea is continued here too, with Mrs Milvey remarking that 'I *hope* it's not uncharitable to remember that last Christmas Eve she drank eleven cups of tea and grumbled all the time.'³⁵⁰ There seems to be something within this novel's space that encourages an over eager consumption of tea. Eleven cups are referenced, as opposed to the more normal one or two. The fact that Mrs Milvey grumbled about Mrs Goody's tea consumption is suggestive of the tea not agreeing with her constitutionally. There is something about Chinese tea which encourages a lack of restraint, which is suggestive of the dangers of such commodities. There is a clear desire to connect tea with over indulgence and this again connects with notions of tea as a stimulant and the potential for it to be as dangerous – commercially – as opium.

However, the referencing of Chinese commodities alongside those of Britain serves to render those commodities as potentially less dangerous. By balancing them in this way it can be seen that the complex commodity relationship is shared between Britain and abroad in this way for the readership. The inclusion of tea is continued with: 'two or three weeks ago, Twemlow, sitting over his newspaper, and over his dry toast and weak tea.'³⁵¹ That his tea is weak is suggestive of a higher quality variety of tea than Venus has been imbibing and differentiates between the commodities available. This occurs again with Lammle and Fledgby, when:

Mr. Alfred Lammle came round to the Albany to breakfast with Fledgby. Present on the table, one scanty pot of tea, one scanty loaf, two scanty

³⁵⁰ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, p. 109.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

pats of butter, two scanty rashers of bacon, two pitiful eggs, and an abundance of handsome china bought as a second hand bargain.³⁵²

Again there is a pairing of British native commodities in the loaf, butter and bacon along with the Chinese commodities in the form of the pot of tea and the china. By including commodities in this way Dickens creates a text that balances British produce with foreign produce, whilst challenging and acknowledging the increasing interdependence between nations.

Bella Wilfer is the final character to engage with China and again this is done in trading terms. Whilst her husband's precise employment is not specified, she recognises where he works and feels no need to research further what it is that he does:

Her married life glided happily on. She was all alone all day, for after an early breakfast her husband repaired every morning to the City, and did not return until their late dinner hour. He was 'in a China house' he explained to Bella, which she found quite satisfactory, without pursuing the China house into minute details than a whole sale vision of tea, rice, odd smelling silks, carved boxes, tight-eyed people in more than double-soled shoes, with their pigtailed pulling their heads off, painted on the transparent porcelain.³⁵³

The fact that he is in 'the China house' very neatly delineates a space in which China can be conceptualised on the British shore. The potential fragility of this 'China house' is also played on with the sense of the 'china' for which the nation was acclaimed. Bella's views of China corroborate my reading of commodities in Dickens's novels. The products originating from that locale are privileged first and then, secondly, the people. It is what one can buy, and trade, such as tea, rice, and silk that is the focal point, over the location of China itself. Dickens then continues by reflecting in an intensely racist and stereotypic manner on the physical appearance of the Chinese men. That the Chinese are transported to

³⁵² Ibid., p. 267.

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 665.

London in this manner within the novel historicises their appearance and pays no heed to social integration of other nationalities. It also serves to reveal that Dickens is more comfortable with the commodities than with the Chinese, and he creates a historically static representation of them which fails to do justice to their trading flexibility.

Bella studies to gain a clear sense of the locale by picking up a book to educate herself and ensure she has as complete a picture of the Chinese as she can:

For Mrs J.R., who had never been wont to do too much at home as Miss B.W. was under a constant necessity of referring to for advice and support to the sage volume entitled the Complete British Family Housewife, which she would sit consulting, with her elbows on the table and her temples on her hands, like some perplexed enchantress poring over the Black Art.³⁵⁴

That Bella as a British housewife identifies a need to familiarise herself with the Chinese population highlights the necessity for Dickens's readership to increasingly familiarise itself with trading relationships and immigrant Chinese populations. That Bella is perplexed and pours over the book like 'Black Art' suggests that there is a mystical element to the Chinese and hence the British interaction with them.

By crossing these cultural boundaries and using them as a means of distinguishing cultural identities, *Our Mutual Friend* grapples with perhaps the most difficult of observations and invites the reader to question how the increasingly reflexive relationship between Britain and abroad can be managed. It gives rise to questions about the danger in maintaining trading relations with China and yet recognises that China has already arrived, through those commodities that have arrived in the British home. The inclusion of tea reveals a nation dependent on foreign commodities. Dickens's novel shows the insidious manner in which commodity culture affects a sense of Britishness and

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 666.

destabilises a notional sense of independence. Wegg and Venus's engagement with tea over conversation situates the commodity firmly in the British home. Yet, additionally, it frames tea as a product that jars with the British constitution not only personally with Venus's but, in trading terms, with Britannia as a whole. What Dickens's final completed novel serves to do is to offer up to his readership a cosmopolitan Britain that is vulnerable to outside influences. What Britain represents without its commercial agency is questionable and volatile. Chinese commodities render a trading relationship that is reflexive in nature and increasingly dependent on outside support.

Chapter 6

Dickens's vision of the old and new world in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

The Mystery of Edwin Drood was published in serialised form every month from April 1870 to September 1870 and then as an incomplete novel in 1870 by Chapman and Hall. This was Dickens's final and incomplete novel, with only the first six parts completed before his death. The novel provides a final example of Dickens's work engaging with China and global spaces. As with Dickens's

earlier works, his current journal *All the Year Round* reflected on China in commodity terms with articles such as: 'With Opium for Hong Kong'³⁵⁵, 'Lazarus, Lotus-Eating'³⁵⁶, 'Told by a Skipper'³⁵⁷, 'Leaves from the Mahogany Tree'³⁵⁸, 'Leaves from the Mahogany Tree: A Cup of Tea'³⁵⁹ and 'Chinese from Home'³⁶⁰ mirroring an interest in China, both within the novel and outside it in the journal. The appearance of China, conceptualised in commodity form through opium and tea, forms a focal point, whilst Egypt and India play a role in situating their own identities against China.

Building on the arguments developed in the preceding chapters, two new perspectives on the representation of China in Dickens's work will be posited to reveal the progression of Dickens's own thinking throughout his oeuvre. This chapter will firstly develop a notion of positive and negative commodities as a means of reflecting on a Dickensian representation of China whilst engaging with John Plotz's notion of 'portable property'. This will be followed by a way of reflecting on the geography of China and the geography of Chinese people in the novel which are placed alongside Britain and, with the assistance of the 'china shepherdess', I intend to consider the role of the Naiping Rebellion and the Limehouse settlement in London as important markers of a cross cultural flux that was landing on British soil and one which encouraged Dickens to reflect on the role of China in Britain.

'Ah, poor me, the business is slack, is slack'³⁶¹ From the salubrious trade in tea to the insalubrious trade in opium: Dickens, China and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

³⁵⁵ [N/A], 'With Opium to Hong-Kong', *All the Year Round*, Vol. 15, No. 373, (16 June, 1866) pp. 537-540.

³⁵⁶ [Joseph Charles Parkinson], 'Lazarus, Lotus-Eating', *All the Year Round*, Vol. 15, No. 368 (15 May, 1866) pp. 421-425.

³⁵⁷ [N/A], 'Told by a Skipper', *All the Year Round*, Vol.19, No. 465, (21 March, 1868) pp. 354-360.

³⁵⁸ [Charles Mackay], 'Leaves from the Mahogany Tree[. Furniture (china, glass & etc)]', *All the year Round*, Vol. 20 No. 495, (17 October, 1868) pp. 440-443.

³⁵⁹ [N.A.], 'Leaves from the Mahogany Tree: A cup of tea', *All the Year Round*, Vol. 20, No. 483 (25 July, 1868), pp. 153-156.

³⁶⁰ [N.A.], 'The Chinese from Home', *New Series, All the Year Round*, Vol. 1, No. 16 (20 March, 1869) pp. 367-372.

³⁶¹ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, ed. by David Paroissien (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 8.

The Second Opium War of 1856-1860 and frequent trading disputes between Britain and China provided opportunities for trade policies that saw the oppression of this nation and policies that succeeded in stifling China's fiscal strength for many years. Posited in the press as a nation that was opposing progress is at odds with what Sabine Clemm has noted, as one 'which European travellers only two centuries previously had admired as far advanced and more civilised than any state Europe had to offer.'³⁶² The disparity between a British perception of China and the reality of its trading potential is problematic. Dickens's novel seems to point to an awareness of the trading strength China had, despite the excessive taxation. This strength was due to the production of Chinese commodities for the eager British consumer.

Whilst other nations - and most Britons - recognised the locale from which tea originated, the Licensed Victuallers' Tea Association notes that: 'Of the origin of tea it is difficult to speak with any certainty. It has undoubtedly been in use in China from very remote periods.'³⁶³ The notion of any uncertainty about the origin of this commodity seems disingenuous and stems from anxieties surrounding reliance upon a foreign commodity whose nation was part of great turmoil. The Tea Association attempts to problematise British understandings of the origin of this commodity whilst blurring connections with China. The opportunity for China to capitalise on the popularity of this raw material is at odds with a British desire to retain its autonomy. Thus, Dickens's inclusion of the commodity's origins as resolutely Chinese acknowledges the difficulty of such dependence.

China's ability to use its raw materials to produce commodities desirable in Britain was one of its greatest strengths and one that made it eminently flexible. China did not just produce commodities traditionally; it was prepared to modify its production methods to produce commodities that appealed to the British palate. As this report from the British Medical Journal states:

The Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed to inquire into the working of the Adulteration of Food Act, 1872, held its first sitting on Wednesday, for the purpose of taking evidence; Mr. C. S. Read,

³⁶² Sabine Clemm, *Dickens, Journalism, and Nationhood Mapping the World in Household Words*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2010) p. 25.

³⁶³ [N/A] *A History of The Sale And Use of Tea in England*, (London: Licensed Victuallers' Tea Association, 1869/1870?) p. 3.

Secretary of the Local Government Board, presiding. Mr. Owen, of the Local Government Board, having given a history of the Adulteration Act, Mr. Reeves, who has been connected with the tea trade for nearly half a century, said that gypsum and Prussian blue were used for the purpose of colouring green tea, but he had never heard of any injury resulting from the colouring matter used. It was necessary to mix tea to make it palatable, but there was no natural green tea. He did not believe there was much adulteration of tea going on, because the article would not stand for it. He did not think that iron filings were extensively used, but iron and sand were in some case mixed with tea. Mr. Thorne, a Mark Lane tea-merchant, said that tea was not sent to England as it was grown in China. Black tea was partly fermented before it was roasted.³⁶⁴

By colouring teas, as was discussed in the introduction of this thesis, British consumers bought into a foreign commodity that held the manifestation of authenticity, yet was modified for them as consumers. Britain, in that sense, had unwitting agency over its foreign products whilst also losing such agency through their compulsion to purchase fetishised foreign goods. That China, despite excessive taxation, was still able to maintain agency in ways that India and Africa as part of the Empire had not, shows not only independence and autonomy but also a great threat to British rule.

The favoured commodity coming out of the Chinese ports, and the one I am constructing as a positive commodity in this chapter, is tea. In a pamphlet from 1853 published by Mary S. Rickerby, a Chinese author is quoted stating that:

Cultivate it, and the benefit will be widely spread: drink it, and the animal spirits will be lively and clear. The chief rulers, the dukes and nobility, esteem it; the poor and beggarly, will not be destitute of it; all use it daily and like it' – Tung Po, a Chinese Author, upon Tea³⁶⁵

It is interesting that the notion of 'benefit' is cited in this quotation and equally that later in the same article it is noted by J. Ingram Travers that: 'Tea is the favourite drink of the people - all desire to have it strong and good, and none who can afford it are without it.'³⁶⁶ The need for Britons to have access to this

³⁶⁴ No Author, 'The Adulteration of Tea' in *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 1. No. 697 (May 9, 1874) p. 620 accessed on 17 08. 2014 at 1625, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25238585>

³⁶⁵ J. Ingram Travers, *A few words on the Tea Duties* (London: Mary S. Rickerby, Printer, 1853) p. 14.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 14.

foreign commodity for reasons of health and vitality seems to be implicit. The effects of the ruinously high taxation of the Chinese people is commented on by Travers, who continues to state that: 'A reduction of tea duty would be eminently popular. A question popular too, not only with the tea-drinkers, but with all who value an extended market for British manufactures amongst the vast population of China.'³⁶⁷ It is significant that the importance of establishing an 'extended market' for the British is behind this desire to decrease taxation. That the reduced tea duty would be popular is also predictably a concern in terms of maintaining the British advantage of access to the product, as opposed to Chinese benefit and improved trading opportunities. That the desire to cheaply manufacture British produce in China is a nineteenth century preoccupation is telling and a significant twenty first century commercial reality, yet the need for British cottons and wools was markedly less than the British desire for tea, silk and chinaware.

Yet Dickens in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* continues to blend images, as shown in other of Dickens's works in this thesis, by presenting the foreign alongside the resolutely British: 'Hah! Said Septimus. And finished his breakfast as if the flavour of the Superior Family Souchong, and also the ham and toast and eggs, were a little on the wane.'³⁶⁸ That at the same time as eating traditional British fare the 'Family Souchong' is introduced is culturally significant. Sirr notes in 1849 that: 'The Ming-yen and finest Souchong are produced here, which are unknown in England, and may never have found their way here except in the shape of cushions, or presents.'³⁶⁹ This marks an increasing interaction with a wider variety of tea varieties in the 23 years since the publication of *Dombey and Son*, since in 1849 it was unknown and yet in 1870 it is part of the British beverage experience.

The importance of recognising the provenance of the foreign commodities remains a significant consideration in the novel. Whilst their difference is a focal concern, so too is the ease with which they can be

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁶⁸ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, p. 55.

³⁶⁹ Henry Charles Sirr, M.A., *China and the Chinese: Their Religion, Character, Customs, Manufactures: The Evils Arising from the Opium Trade With a Glance At Our Religious, Moral, Political and Commercial Intercourse with the Country*, (London: Wm. S. Orr & Co. Amen Corner, and 147, Strand, 1849) p. 349

assimilated. This can be exemplified by the following, where Mr Sapsea states his ability to determine the provenance of foreign commodities:

I see a French clock. I never saw him before, in my life, but I instantly lay my finger on him and say 'Paris!' I see some cups and saucers of Chinese make, equally strangers to me personally: I put my finger on them, then and there, and I say 'Pekin, Nankin and Canton'. It is the same with Japan, with Egypt and with bamboo and sandal-wood from the East Indies; I put my finger on them all. ³⁷⁰

The process Sapsea goes through is symptomatic of making meaning of the commodity world. There is something about the fact that authentication can be undertaken merely by touch which underscores the increasing appearance of foreign commodities on British shores. There appears to be something innate in their manufacture that marks them out as being from a particular locale. It also suggests that, despite their arrival in Britain and subsequently in British homes, there is something overtly 'Other' about their construction. Dickens has Sapsea identify three ports opened as part of the Opium Wars and, in effect, locates trade, history and geography firmly within the novel's space.

An increasing willingness to allow the interaction of certain commodities in British homes and to facilitate their absorption can be seen in Dickens's novels, which also anticipates the dangers of such alliances in terms of British commodity autonomy. As Plotz suggests, this is an example of the ways in which 'The more global such trade becomes, the more need to develop auratic – or even somatic – forms of storing personal or familial memories'. ³⁷¹ Therefore it can be suggested that Dickens builds up these layered cultural references, combining the British and the Chinese, and encourages his readership to recognise the ways in which trade and relations with China have created a Britain that, in terms of British identity, is not quite as distinct as it once was. Plotz also notes that this develops:

...a notional portability that protects Englishness but forecloses on other national transmission mechanisms, then is implicitly, and at times even

³⁷⁰ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, p. 38

³⁷¹ John Plotz, *Portable Property*, p. 17.

explicitly, committed to pure asymmetry. If in the best of times portability is the mechanism ensuring that British culture survives unaltered overseas, at the worst of times the process can also go in reverse, sending from the edges of empire to its core artefacts still freighted with foreign meaning.³⁷²

This touches on a Dickensian anxiety that can be evidenced by the inclusion of Chinese commodities in the novel; the concern that, whilst Britain maintains a strong sense of cultural identity, when that identity leaves British soil it is as vulnerable to interpretation and alteration as any other culture. That Britain is not immune to this cultural interchange is something that *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* engages with; it is considered in the framework of the cathedral town and held up against the broader frame of reference of Britain and China.

Opium appears at the beginning of the novel with references to the negative commodity that was both being supplied to China and then migrating to Britain. The provenance of the opium is problematic in forming a picture of the negative commodity provided to China by the British versus the positive commodity that comes out of China and is consumed by the British. The woman who owns the den behaves curiously, often repetitiously and again the textual layering that has already been acknowledged in earlier chapters, and also above with regards to the articles discussed earlier, occurs. The three characters are described as being: 'also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a chinaman, a lascar, and a haggard woman'.³⁷³ The detailing of their positioning on the bed is significant and not only does their appearance set them apart, their behaviour does too. They do not conform to the social norm and lay across rather than longwise. The mention of this irregularity is a clear example of Dickens setting them apart for the readership and from accepted behavioural norms and they are subject to the process of 'Othering'. That Dickens also identifies the characters as being an English woman, a Chinese man and a Lascar is important. The reader is encouraged, I would argue, to consider where the opium originates from and perhaps reflect further on the reason for the presence of people from transnational locales in Britain. As R. K. Newman observes:

³⁷² John Plotz, *Portable Property*, p. 21.

³⁷³ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, (London: Penguin, 2002) p. 7

Much of the foreign opium in China was Indian in origin. Part of it was grown under official licence on the Ganges plain, processed and packed at government factories in Ghazipur and Patna and then auctioned to dealers in Calcutta for shipment to China.³⁷⁴

The inclusion of opium presents an opportunity for Dickens to engage with his reading public on a politically pertinent topic. Clearly in the nineteenth century opium was commonly used for medicinal purposes; however, the working classes especially had become increasingly dependent and their decreased productivity became a concern.

The Chinese government, in an 1870 pamphlet, stated that: 'the Celestial Government has issued another edict prohibiting the domestic cultivation of the drug, but so long as the foreign trade continues it is impossible that the edict can be anything more than a *brutum fulmen*.'³⁷⁵ That China, despite its best efforts in destroying the drug, was unable to stop it crossing its borders is a sign that not only had China lost control of its ports due to the Opium Wars and subsequent treaties, but also that Britain was purposefully subverting their endeavours to halt its entry. Members of the Anglo-Oriental Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade endeavoured to halt the trade and yet, due to the ways in which the Empire operated the commodity network which facilitated its movement, it flourished. Dickens, however, passes no direct comment on this subject, suggesting that he is at present observing rather than wholly critiquing British action abroad. I think, however, that this is quite a limiting reading of the appearance of opium in Dickens's novels. A more productive way of extrapolating meaning from the text and broader cultural considerations is to argue that Dickens's inclusion of opium represented a societal reality in the trade in opium, but also the dangers of commodity transit around the globe. By creating this literary collision of locales, Dickens encourages his readers to be active in their political thoughts; he places the objects and, this time, the people directly connected with the trade: the Chinese, the Lascars and, importantly, the British.

³⁷⁴ R.K. Newman, 'Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 4 (Oct., 1995) p. 770 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312804> accessed at 2:43pm on 31st March 2012.

³⁷⁵ The opium trade between India and China and some of its present aspects, (N.A.) 1870 accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60247064> p.6

Although opium was a product originating in a foreign land that was part of the British Empire, the origin of opium has the potential to problematise the conception of British identity, as opposed to the British pushing forward with progress in a positive light. Here the British were trading a commodity having negative, and addictive, connotations. Whilst providing opium illegally to the Chinese was of primary interest to the British, opium was increasingly popular in Britain, where it was often chewed or smoked medicinally or, less salubriously, in dens. Indeed, the ways in which the opium can be taken are evinced in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, when the woman who runs the opium den refers to her business and the mode that she consumes it: “I’ll get back to London then, and trouble no one. I’m in a business. – Ah, me! It’s slack, it’s slack, and times is very bad!” “Do you eat opium?” “Smokes it,” she replies with difficulty, still racked by her cough.”³⁷⁶ That she perceives her trade to have decreased, despite major importation from China and a total output of ‘241,440 lbs’³⁷⁷, is interesting. As Newman notes: ‘The export trade in opium from India to China expanded rapidly immediately before and after the Opium War of 1839-1842 and again in the 1870s, reaching its zenith in 1879-1880 when 94,835 chests were sent.’³⁷⁸ The rise both before and after the First Opium War and then again nine years after the completion of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* raises questions not only about the way in which the commodity was being imported and traded but also about its distribution. Whilst tea is fetishised and naturalised in Britain, opium maintains its foreignness very distinctly and in a way that other foreign commodities do not. Opium is, in this respect, an outsider when compared to tea, which was a cultural insider. There seems to be discomfort between this transnational commodity and its anglicisation within the novel’s space.

The sale of opium is at no point in the novel sanitised; the imagery is dark, dank and dreary, and mirrors the destructive qualities of the drug. The same pamphlet speaks of three particular advocates for the cessation of trade and suggests that:

³⁷⁶ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, p. 161.

³⁷⁷ R.K. Newman, ‘Opium Smoking in Late Imperial China: A Reconsideration’ in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 4 (Oct., 1995) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/312804> accessed at 2:43pm on 31st March 2012. p. 770.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, . p. 773.

The Country owes a debt of gratitude to Sir Wilfrid Lawson, Mr R. N. Fowler and Mr Arthur Kinnaird for their earnest protests against the forced cultivation of a drug which is notoriously the means every year of poisoning many thousands of the people of China, and producing physical and moral evils of the most appalling character.³⁷⁹

Whilst the pamphlet is not in itself revolutionary, with regard to the ideas it presents there is a clear indication that the topic forms a part of contemporary discourse. There is a stereotypical representation of the Chinese; however, it also places blame on Britain:

There is no doubt that the Mandarins are a corrupt class, “only too accessible to bribes”, but it is manifest that the gigantic opium trade, which was legalised by the treaty of Tientsin, and which is supported by the whole authority of Great Britain, equally tends to render the Imperial edict inoperative. England ought surely to blush at the fruits of her own policy, as seen in the lamentably disorganized condition of China.³⁸⁰

This notion of a ‘disorganised condition’ reflects not only on China but also on Britain’s role in the opium trade. That the authors then move to suggest that: ‘In the light of morality we share their guilt, if indeed we are not the authors of it’³⁸¹ is indicative of a realisation of the dangers present in the traversal of global spaces and an increasingly interconnected world where a shared rather than isolated responsibility is formulated. Additionally, Dong Wang has stated:

The major concession offered by the Treaty of Nanjing was the opening of five ports – Guangzhou (Canton), Xiamen (Amoy), Fuzhou (Foochow), Ningbo (Ningpo), and Shanghai – to British citizens for residence and trade without restraint of any kind...ARTICLES 4, 5, 6 and 7 stipulated that the Emperor of China agreed to pay twenty-one million dollars for indemnity, including six million dollars in compensation for the dissolved opium and for the loss of British lives, and three million dollars to cover debts owing to British merchants by Chinese merchants.³⁸²

³⁷⁹ The opium trade between India and China and some of its present aspects, (N.A.) 1870 accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60247064> p. 5..

³⁸⁰ The opium trade between India and China and some of its present aspects, (N.A.) 1870 accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60247064> p. 6

³⁸¹ The opium trade between India and China and some of its present aspects, (N.A.) 1870 accessed at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60247064> p. 6

³⁸² Dong Wang, *China’s Unequal Treaties: Narrating National History*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2005) p. 12.

That the British were so well protected from the collapse of the opium trade and given financial remuneration is appalling. It is yet another example of the ways in which Britain managed to extricate itself from an illegal trade in a banned substance and still receive recourse. The debts that were repaid and the value placed on British lives are in direct contrast to the absence of financial value placed on Chinese lives by the British.

Opium's insidious presence in the lives of the poor is also a point of reflection. Whilst as has already been stated opium was prescribed medicinally, the recipients of this commodity spanned broad social strata. Henry Charles Sirr states that: 'To furnish poison to the multitude, be the gain what it may, is a crime against humanity, which cries aloud to those in power to prohibit, and arrest the destroyer: and woe be to the mighty, if they put forth their strength to stay the human sacrifice.'³⁸³ Dickens's novel seems not to be passing judgment on the morality of the commodity, and, indeed Dickens seems quite unperturbed by this aspect; however, what the novel does engage with is an anxiety about the clouding of British products and the taint that the 'Other' bears on British identity. That it was the British Empire which was responsible for this trade does not become a focal point for Dickens; rather it is the presence of a commodity that is an unnatural part of British culture that is the focal point of these descriptions.

By sending out or transmitting commodities and receiving the same onto British shores, the culturally imbued objects are as likely to traverse social and cultural boundaries whether they are British or transnational. The question that this then raises is how one maintains control over cultural identity across global spaces. The sense is that a: 'cultural portability generates definitions of "neighbourhood" that have become detached from geography, so that "local space" can itself become a portable notion.'³⁸⁴ That the portable notion of 'local space' might be advanced to consider global space is productive, and I will now move to examine the ways this can be considered in terms of geography marked out by commodities. By reflecting on the ways in which space and place are defined, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* reflects on both a commodity that is

³⁸³ Henry Charles Sirr, M.A., *China and the Chinese: Their Religion, Character, Customs, Manufactures: The Evils Arising from the Opium Trade With a Glance At Our Religious, Moral, Political and Commercial Intercourse with the Country*, (London: Wm. S. Orr & Co. Amen Corner, and 147, Strand, 1849) p. 251

³⁸⁴ Plotz, *Portable Property Victorian Culture on the Move*, p. 174.

distinctly negative and separate from British culture, though politically intrinsically linked to another commodity, tea, which is absorbed into the British culture and anglicised.

Location, place and space: The geography of ideas

Whilst the presence of Chinese characters has been absent in the preceding novels, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* focusses upon the rise not only in Chinese commodities but also in geographical flux and immigration. As opposed to fear elicited by suggestions of Chinese immigration, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, immigrants are already present. The novel itself represents a prime example of an object that represents mobility and social change. Not only does the novel engage with contemporary ideas about identity, trade and commodities, it also introduces the locale - marking a departure from Dickens's past reticence to locate people. As John Plotz has argued: 'The more successful a text is at rendering a place palatable, the more it delocalises the locale on which the representation is founded.'³⁸⁵ With regard to the representation in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* of China and the Chinese, rather than making the land palatable it makes it comprehensible, as it is based alongside the fetishised commodity, tea. The land also holds tension however, as I have already stated, with the inclusion of opium which was at the heart of the two earlier wars. What Plotz also suggests is that, by making a locale acceptable to the readership, the actual location is no longer clarified. This blurring is especially important with regards to the representation of China and Chinese commodities. Plotz then continues to assert that:

The developing logic of portability in the Victorian cultural realm, though, suggests that so long as the aesthetic objects through which identity was constituted and solidified could both represent and engender a sense of seamless identity on the move, the "absence of mind" that allowed a culture to finesse or ignore its immersion into global circulation could continue.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁵ John Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) p. 5.

³⁸⁶ Plotz, *Portable Property: Victorian Culture on the Move*, p. 21.

This ability to create an 'absence of mind' is a powerful notion. This engendering of identity which, with regards to tea and silk, is achieved so seamlessly, is part of a method of developing a global circulation that is mutually beneficial. Dickens's readership is able to consume a commodity imbued with foreignness and exoticism and yet, simultaneously, allow for it to pass into the home. It is this fusion and traversal of identities that, I argue, is a concern within Dickens's work. Culture and origin become part of a global conversation that facilitates absorption of other cultural products. Thus, when Mr Sapsea states that: 'If I have not gone to foreign countries, young man, foreign countries have come to me'³⁸⁷, he states something that is meaningful in terms of this cultural interchange. Mr Sapsea's assurance that he will engage with foreign spaces, regardless of his or their movement, makes a comment not only about the interconnected nature of the world but also cultural invasion. It leaves room for a less fixed and stable identity that is constantly engaging through trade and, indeed, immigration with the world outside.

The woman from the opium den - who remains nameless throughout the novel and whose anonymity heightens the notion that this could be any woman, anywhere - seems to have a very distinct measure of her clientele:

Well, there's land customers, and there's water customers. I'm a mother to both. Different from Jack Chinaman t'other side the court. He ain't a father to neither. It ain't in him. And he ain't got the true secret of mixing, though he charges as much as me that has, and more if he can get it. Here's a match, now where's the candle? If my cough takes me, I shall cough out twenty matches before I get a light.³⁸⁸

It is interesting that she divides them into two categories: land and water. This suggests that she is serving both the home population as well as those coming from abroad. She defines herself in opposition to 'Jack Chinaman' who is 'father to neither' and as such presents a view of herself as an English woman who interacts with all clientele whereas Jack Chinaman is isolated. This seems to

³⁸⁷ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, p. 37.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

me to be making a point about Chinese insularity and the difficulties this poses in trading terms.

One might also consider the ways in which similarities might be drawn between the representation of the British poor, in this instance, and that of the transnational immigrant. As Wai-Ki Luk has noted:

Since the late 19th century, the enclave Chinese settlement at London's Limehouse Causeway, and subsequently Gerrard Street, has been an important site through which immigrants floundered and prospered, and through which white society's concepts about the Chinese are constituted and reproduced.³⁸⁹

The den portrayed in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is filled with those from the Empire - India and Britain - as well as those outside it - China. The London docks and Limehouse meant that, quite naturally, all types of nationalities are represented on the shore, from the Chinese to the British. The female opium dealer recognises the significant role the docks play in bringing in both foreign commodities and foreign people, stating that:

Ah, poor me, the business is slack, is slack! Few Chinamen about the Docks, and fewer Lascars, and no ships coming in these days! Here's another ready for ye, deary. Ye'll remember like a good soul, won't ye, that the market price is dreffle high right now? More nor three shillings and sixpence for a thimbleful! And ye'll remember that nobody but me (and Jack China-man t'other side the court; but he can't do it as well as me) has the true secret mixing it?'³⁹⁰

She again places the sale of opium in relation to the Lascars, from where the opium originated, and the Chinese which was where the opium was originally sent out to by the British. The woman mentions the market price of the opium and provides figures, thereby underscoring my argument about the important role trade and taxation played in British commerce. The notion of trade being 'slack' engages with the notion of this becoming an increasingly negative

³⁸⁹ Wai-Ki Luk, *Chinatown in Britain: Diffusions and Concentrations of the British New Wave Chinese Immigration*, (Cambria Press, 2012) p. 2.

³⁹⁰ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, p. 8.

commodity. The secret mixing technique shrouds the product in mystique in a disturbing way.

The movement of Jasper, the only English man situated in the novel's narrative as partaking in this drug, is described in detail for the reader:

He rises unsteadily from the bed, lays the pipe upon the hearthstone, draws back the ragged curtain, and looks with repugnance at his three companions. He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her. Said Chinaman convulsively wrestles with one of his many Gods or Devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still.³⁹¹

That the woman is described as having smoked herself into a likeness of the Chinese man is telling; not only is she partaking in the drug but it causes her to metamorphose and adopt other cultural physicalities. The Chinese man who is writhing and struggling references, perhaps, a struggle under British rule or indeed with himself in this new nation. The dribbling Lascar is equally unsettling and the scene is described in sufficiently horrific terms as to be unnerving and affecting. Yet the woman is still. That it is a British woman who is still almost mirrors the stasis that has been stated to occur in foreign climes such as China. Therefore the opium does not merely represent the drug, it also mirrors the ways in which other cultures can cause stasis in Britain due to foreign influence.

By crossing these cultural boundaries and using them as a means of distinguishing distinct cultural identities, Dickens's final novel grasps with perhaps the most difficult of observations and invites the reader to question how the increasingly reflexive relationship between Britain and abroad can be managed. If Dickens's ideal is to create a Britain wholly independent from outside influences, then the presence and his determined inclusion through textual layering of these commodities become increasingly fraught. It is less surprising, therefore, that what Dickens achieves here is a balance with a desirable commodity: tea against an undesirable social ill - opium. What Dickens asks his readers to do is to draw on their own reading of the relationship with transnational spaces which, over the past fifty years of his

³⁹¹ Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, p. 8.

writing career, had become ever more dependent on the influences of the 'Other'.

Conclusion

My study of Dickens and China necessarily concludes with *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* due to Dickens's death on 9th June 1870. The following leading article from *The Times* stated that:

Charles Dickens is no more. The loss of such a man is an event which makes ordinary expressions of regret seem cold and conventional. It will be felt by millions as nothing less than a personal bereavement. Statesmen, men of science, philanthropists, the acknowledged benefactors of their race might pass away and yet not have the void which will be caused by the death of Dickens.³⁹²

Such reflections on Dickens's life continued across the press with exclamations about his generosity and flexibility of mind. Familiar Dickensian phrases appear alongside seeming critiques:

Wherever the English tongue is spoken the name of Charles Dickens is a household word, and throughout the world it is accepted as that of a writer whose works most thoroughly and completely represent English fiction. It was indeed his greatest strength, as it was his weakness, that he was thoroughly English.³⁹³

More recently in 2012 Dickens's bi-centenary was celebrated. Again this offered an opportunity to commemorate his life and achievements but, additionally, the chance to explore the ever changing landscape of Dickens studies. The bicentenary was marked in a range of ways with the issue of Charles Dickens stamps, a commemorative two pound coin, a range of public talks by eminent Dickensians as well as the re-opening of the Dickens House Museum in Doughty Street. Museums such as the National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Museum of London all held events and the University of Exeter, the University of Kent, and the University of Leicester to name a few

³⁹² 'The Death of Charles Dickens, in *The Times*, 10th June 1870, p. 1.

³⁹³ No Title, *The Morning Post*, (London: England) Friday, June 10th 1870, issue 30111, p. 4

were also involved. Additionally, The British Council, the Mayor of London, the Dickens Fellowship and the Dickens Project also worked on raising the profile of the event and organising a wide range of activities. Most significant to my critical thinking was the 24 hour global readathon which occurred on the 7th February 2012 organised by the British Council.³⁹⁴ For me, along with the numerous conferences available and the rising focus on Global Dickens, the readathon cemented the notion of the global appeal of his works. Not only were the novels being read aloud they were resonating with those who read them. Dickens's novels, whilst resolutely British, are more than that. In many ways, to frame him in this way is to do Dickens a disservice as his work, whilst often highly critical of the world beyond Britain, considers the implications of global interactions - an issue that in the twenty-first century we are still grappling with.

Dickens's novels can be seen to have anticipated the changes in the world and society, as an acknowledgment of ever changing world and of the irrevocable interconnectedness of global spaces. Dickens's fiction engaged with contemporary debates, and encouraged his readers to reflect not only on the story itself but the politics of life in Britain. Whilst it can never be conclusively argued, it is feasible to anticipate that Dickens's work would have continued to engage with transnational spaces such as China, and that a commodity presence within the novel could be anticipated. In many ways Dickens's novels' landscapes can be seen to mirror the British home. Certainly anxieties about China's role on the global stage were present immediately after Dickens's death and in the years following.

As Ayse Çelikkol suggests, 'Dickens's strikingly original formulations of space bear on free trade debates of his time and Marx's theories on the annihilation of distance, as well as recent theorizations of the global in Victorian studies.'³⁹⁵ Such debates have been examined throughout this thesis in terms of the Chinese commodities analysed. This thesis has engaged with this conception of the 'recent theorizations of the global in Victorian studies' and has shown the ways that such global relationships bring to bear great consternation

³⁹⁴ For further details relating to the Dickens Bi-Centenary please visit the following link:
<http://www.dickens2012.org/about-dickens-2012>

³⁹⁵ Ayse Çelikkol, *Romances of Free Trade: British Literature, Laissez-Faire, and the Global Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) pp. 124-125

in Dickens's novels about the increasing reliance of Chinese products and the threat to British identity.

As I have already argued, and the thesis that underpins the whole of this research proposes, it is the ways in which Chinese commodities such as tea enable a reconceptualisation of Britain and Britishness that are of importance in referencing their inclusion in Dickens's novels. By conceiving of a framework of positive and negative commodities, one directly originating from China and the other supplied to the Chinese for negative gains, this thesis has been able to reflect on the ways in which China and other transnational locales present a means of identifying a more globally cosmopolitan Dickens. As Kay Li suggests:

China with its imperial rule and great distance from England fits into the exotic fairytales Dickens created in his novels. At other times, China is regarded more realistically within the limited economic globalization the world had developed. The country is part of nineteenth-century mercantile trade and there are "China traders," captains and merchants bringing back silk, tea, and china.³⁹⁶

This dual representation of China is fruitful in that it facilitates a multi-layered perspective on representations of China in Dickens's novels. Whilst Li suggests that there is a 'limited economic globalisation' developed, I have shown that issues of trade and statistics alongside Chinese commodities leave a valuable space to reconceptualise the nation alongside a subverted and problematized notion of Britishness.

I have taken a chronological route through this study focussing on Dickens's novels with reference to his journalism and have, of necessity, omitted the smaller novels printed during the period, such as *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*. This is not due to an absence or paucity of examples, but rather due to the restrictions placed on me in terms of space. By focussing on an individual novel in each of the chapters I have created a sense of a

³⁹⁶ Kay Li, Dickens and China: Contextual Interchanges in Cultural Globalization, in *Dickens Studies Annual* (37) ed. by Stanley Friedman, Edward Guiliano, Anne Humpherys, and Michael Timko, (AMS Press, Inc., 2006) p. 118.

progressive engagement with China in Dickens's work and used, on occasion, other transnational spaces, such as India, Africa and Australia. Where other nations have been included this has been to offer a counter balance to show the ways in which these other nations were used in Dickens's literature in contrast to China. I have also used articles from Dickens's journals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, to provide a clear sense of Dickens's engagement with China in all his writing. Recognising China's ability to retain imperial agency without the restrictions placed on it by the British Empire reveals a nation that was able to retain some autonomy despite excessive taxation and frequent critique. This is in direct contrast to India and Africa, which were constrained by their attachment to the Empire, and Australia as part of the Commonwealth. By establishing these distinctions within the novels I have sought to reveal the advantages offered to China with its own controls, despite being under treaty rulings. In Chapter 1 I began by establishing a Dickensian representation of trade with China and the ways in which such trade can be seen as emblematic of the increasing interactions with China, as well as the movement of characters to this locale. In Chapter 2 I reflected on the ways in which the movement of characters advanced conceptualisations of China alongside the key Chinese commodity marker of tea. In addition I reflected upon the ways in which other transnational spaces were made to be more hospitable and fruitful for British characters and how such spaces can be viewed as places of redemption. I also reflected on the rising consumption of tea and the subsequent decline in consumption of coffee, to question the ways in which Britain was becoming increasingly dependent on Chinese cultural commodities. The issue of British identity, nation and nationhood began to be explored further and in Chapter 3 I reflected on the ways in which geographical spaces were mapped out in the home as a way of organising and systematising the world beyond Britain for the readership. In Chapter 4, the thesis considered the trade in opium and recently resettled Britons from China, alongside the ways in which language was explored. This gave rise to questions about linguistic differences and categorisations alongside the process of 'Othering'. Chapter 5 considered the commodification of Chinese products under the watchful gaze of Wegg and Venus and their plentiful cups of tea. Whilst the act of taking tea is seemingly innocuous I proposed an alternative reading of this beverage which was connected with ideas of imbibing another culture. The physically affecting and

excessive consumption of tea were shown to be affecting to the nature of the British body – both physically and politically – and the Dickensian representation of the negative influence of China on Britain was examined. My final chapter featured positive and negative Chinese commodities, tea and opium, and looked to situate Dickens’s increasing inclusion of them as an expression of an anxiety about Britain’s reliance on the ‘Other’. By reflecting on the transformative process of the inclusion of tea on the novel and conceptions of identity this thesis developed a new way of reading the locale. All of these chapters have formed to present a cohesive argument about the conceptualisation of the erosion of British identity in Dickens’s novels and the role China and tea play in this relationship. I have sought to satisfy questions that might arise about the stability of British identity in light of an increasing reliance on China. Dickens’s presentation of China in his literature, and the other contemporary examples cited, provide evidence that China was perceived to be evading progress and lacking development. This thesis has shown that the inclusion of tea, an essentially Chinese commodity appropriated and adopted as a British commodity, speaks more centrally to a real anxiety about the erosion of British autonomy and identity. That British trade with China was being conducted under unequal terms has been acknowledged but, simultaneously, China’s unwillingness to bend to British will marks the start of the rise of this global superpower. Dickens’s inclusion of China and Chinese commodities therefore becomes increasingly significant in the discourse surrounding a re-situated British identity that was vulnerable to commodity pressure and an increasing desire to reach out to fetishised objects.

Questions relating to the responsibility of British politicians and traders have also been considered. Dickens’s own reflection was that: ‘It is by no means clear to me that England is peculiarly “A 1” in the thirst for gold and the pursuit of trade.’³⁹⁷ Dickens’s sense that England is no more mercenary than other nations fails to acknowledge the effects over-taxation highlights and an anxiety about what such taxation meant for those involved. It also neglects anxieties that such cultural interactions may have on notions of identity. This thesis has considered the ways in which taxation posed limits on Chinese growth whilst also engaging with nineteenth century speeches and political

³⁹⁷ Letter from Dickens, *Pilgrim Edition Letters of Charles Dickens*, Vol. 7 ed. Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) p. 760.

discourses about the trade in Chinese tea. The thesis has also engaged with the work of Regenia Gagnier, which specifically comments on the burden taxation posed to both India and China. Whilst undoubtedly such burdens existed, this work also sees the potential for such trading relationships to be reflexive. As suggested by William Henry Sykes: 'Whether our past policy towards China is justifiable or not, the extension of our commercial relations with the Chinese is sufficiently remarkable.'³⁹⁸ He then continues to reflect that: 'Our trade with the Chinese resolves itself almost exclusively into our taking from them teas, and raw silks, and their taking from us cottons, cotton yarn and woollens.'³⁹⁹ This thesis has striven to recognise that, whilst China was responsible for providing a range of exported materials, they were also in receipt of many British imported materials. Such a trading dialectic and the reflexivity of such relationships have been examined to suggest a world which, through its interconnectedness, was increasingly becoming interdependent.

I have shown, furthermore, that throughout Dickens's oeuvre reactions to China and the commodities acquired there are continually shifting. By recognising the impact historical moments have on contemporary discourse, the changing face of China in the eyes of Britain has been assessed in relation to Dickens's novel and a new framework for considering this relationship has been developed. The great significance of both the Opium Wars on Britain's interactions with China has led to a movement from a Dickensian focus on locale and product to a broader anxiety about the physical and mind-altering effects of such products on the British population and the nationwide repercussions. This shift is important and that it can be recognised in Dickens's oeuvre is something that, until now, has been understudied. Whilst much work has been undertaken on the ways in which Dickens engaged politically with Europe, and also considered India and Africa, the absence of scholarly discourse surrounding China in Dickens studies has been significant. Where discourse has occurred with regard to Dickens and China it has been in the field of translation studies⁴⁰⁰. It has, in the case of Li's work, been proposed that no

³⁹⁸ Colonel William Henry Sykes M.P. F.R.S, *Notes on the Progress of the Trade of England with China since 1833, and on its Present Condition and Prospects in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection* (1861) Contributed by the University of Manchester, The John Rylands Library, p. 1 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60234126>

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁴⁰⁰ For research considering Chinese translations of Dickens the work of Kay Li, *Dickens and China: Contextual Interchanges in Cultural Globalisation* may be considered. Interestingly, Li

connection with China can be seen to have occurred in Dickens's writing. This thesis has effectively revealed that this is not the case, and presented a new way of reading Dickens and China in commodity terms.

This thesis began the journey between Dickens and China from *Dombey and Son*. This moment in Dickens's oeuvre was chosen quite determinedly as it is the novel dealing most comprehensively with trade and a character leaving Britain for China. Thus, published four years after the First Opium War, it offered a very precise moment in Dickens's writing that reflected on the influence and effects of such global relationships and what such relationships meant to Britain and ideas of Britishness. As Çelikkol has noted:

Even before the opium trade, Sino-British commerce raised many questions about the state's role in trade relations. In the 1830s, liberals such as J. R. McCulloch had criticized colonial policies that prevented all British merchants except those affiliated with the East India Company from buying Chinese goods. The monopoly of the East India Company in Sino-British commerce was abolished in 1833, so McCulloch's treatment of them was no longer relevant by mid-century. In the aftermath of the Opium Wars and the Treaty of Nanjing, through which England colonized Hong Kong, Britons discussed whether and to what degree the Chinese government would open up other Chinese ports to British merchants.⁴⁰¹

The debates surrounding the opening of the ports to British trade and merchants forms a central part of this thesis. The apparent frustration felt by Britain about the restrictions posed upon its movements is telling. Whilst impediments on other nations are passed over this is not the case with Britain. Whilst the East India Company's monopoly was abolished in 1833 the repercussions of this behemoth was an increasing interaction with the world outside Britain. As a result Dickens's inclusion of China underscores the complex relationship between the two nations but also an awareness of the essential nature of its participation in world, and trading, affairs. Çelikkol continues to assert that:

argues that 'Dickens did not write with China nor Chinese in mind', which this thesis has definitively contradicted.

⁴⁰¹ Ayse Çelikkol, *Romances of Free Trade*, p. 127.

Like the importation of grain, the exportation of British goods to China became a topic that invited larger discussions about the benefits of free trade. The laissez-faire stance was perhaps easier to maintain in the case of British goods flowing into foreign countries, because Britons did not have to worry about the hypothetical invasion of the homeland by foreign merchants and their commodities.⁴⁰²

This is a problematic reading in relation to my own thesis. Whilst I concur that Britons did not object to the export of their own commodities it is irrefutable that Chinese merchants did land on British shores accompanied by their commodities. As I showed at the banks of the Thames in *Dombey and Son* there was a cornucopia of products from across the globe. Whilst an idealised conception of such trade would extricate the Chinese merchant this is factually problematic in historical terms and inaccurate in relation to Dickens's works. The reading I have presented instead reveals the commodities arriving on British shores imbued with their Chinese heritage. This was bought into by the British consumer and is then problematised in Dickens's work where it is evident that such items erode British national identity in addition to modifying the products original form. It is part of what Li terms a 'Global multidirectional cultural passage'⁴⁰³ and is a notion that this thesis acknowledges.

The work that this thesis represents has the potential to be considered in relation to other nineteenth century authors. Whilst what I have recognised in Dickens's work is unique, there is real scope for work such as this to be explored via different authors and, for a nuanced perspective of China's interaction with Britain to be mapped out further. Whilst this current project in relation to Dickens and China has concluded, this aspect of my research my next project will seek to examine the role of the Chinese community in Britain. I intend to examine the role of the immigrant population in the rental environment and use both nineteenth century literature and journalism to reflect on the ever-changing cultural dynamic of Britain. By reflecting upon the reception of this new and diverse community I hope to build upon this scholarship to explore the role of the Chinese in shaping British identity.

⁴⁰² Ayse Çelikkol, *Romances of Free Trade*, p. 127.

⁴⁰³ Kay Li, *Dickens and China: Contextual interchanges in Cultural Globalization*, p. 118.

The progression of Dickens's oeuvre from 1848 to the culmination of his writing career in 1870 has enabled me to refer to the progression of British cultural connections with Chinese commodities and the effect that such reliance might have on ideas about nation and nationhood couched in a reflection on trade and inter-dependence. By exploring this precise moment in Dickens's oeuvre, this thesis has been able to acknowledge a portion of history retold in this cultural framework, using Dickens's fiction that resituates China in the nineteenth century imagination. The inclusion of tea from China especially speaks directly to the ways in which trade facilitates dialogues about this process of 'Othering'. By reflecting on this process, a new way of considering geographical boundaries between nations and cultural identity has been considered and the dangers that Chinese commodities pose alongside their fetishised nature have been reflected upon. The transnational relationships which are established between China, Britain and tea alter not only the way in which the locale is recognised but also the ways in which this marks out both the altered state of trading relationships and Dickens's novelistic landscape. The framework of Dickens's work ensures that both the locale and the commodity communicates what it is to traverse the boundaries of the local and the global, and to engage with a Dickensian sense of the world beyond Britain.

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