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"The Foreigner in Far Cathay": Exploring the Foreign Community in China's Treaty Ports in W. Somerset Maugham's On a Chinese Screen

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Abstract

With the onset of China's imperialist era, a number of treaty ports were opened to foreign commerce and residence. Soon enough, these ports became the centers of imperialist policies, with the development of a community that prioritized its own privileges and status quo over the smooth functioning of Sino-foreign relations despite China's semi-colonial status of China vis a vis the imperialist powers. During his travels in 1919-20, W Somerset Maugham witnessed this community firsthand, an experience that has been chronicled in a series of vignettes in On A Chinese Screen (1922). The current paper aims to put forth a discourse that transcends the bounds of merely analyzing a travel narrative, which Maugham's work undoubtedly is, with a view to locating the narrative within the broader socio-political and economic context of the changing conditions of 20th century China, specifically with respect to the imperialist incursions by the Western powers. By doing this, this paper aims to further an interdisciplinary approach that exceeds not just the scope of the author's own visions and experiences but also the prerequisites of the genre so as to forward an approach that provides the readers with a sense of the community as recorded in Maugham's work.

Keywords: China, Treaty Ports, Foreign Community, Colonialism, Imperialism

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Introduction:

Published in 1922 and set against the backdrop of the hardened treaty port world, W. Somerset Maugham's *On a Chinese Screen*, based on his trip along the Yangzi in 1919-1920, lampoons the foreign community through a series of skilfully crafted vignettes that delineate a world whichin spite of its apparent proximity to the heartland of the Chinese empire, remained largely disconnected from it. The treaty ports opened as a result of China's first military encounters with the West in the form of the First and Second Opium Wars (1839-1842 and 1856-1860), functioned not just as strongholds of Western imperialism but also as areas where foreigners andnatives co-existed side by side. Differing vastly in terms of nature, development, population, trade, and living conditions, the treaty ports consisted of a very heterogeneous populace stemming from various strata and professions in society, where residents generally maintained a Western style of living completed with various exotic elements (Wood, 2020, p. 3). Commenting on the general disconnectedness of the populace, Francis Wood (2000) quotes a certain Americanjournalist, Harry Frank, who states that the archetypal Shanghai resident:

> Makes it almost a point of honor to come into the least possible contact with the Chinese…I have met adult children…who were born and have spent most of their lives inShanghai yet have never been in China…they have never set foot in the Chinese city, justacross the street from the foreign settlement… (p. 4).

Thus, amidst scattered incidents of anti-foreignism, rebellions, and interrupted businesses, the treaty ports grew, and trade flourished. While living conditions were not always ideal, these centers of foreign incursions continued to exist well into the 20th century. They were abolished only during the Second World War when growing expenses and the changing socio-political scenario of China made it impossible to carry on the unequal treaty system of the past century. The aim of this study is to emphasize not just the nature of this community by employing an interdisciplinary approach vis a vis Maugham's narrative but also to transcend the specifications and prerequisites of the genre of travel writings by examining the text from a socio-cultural and political standpoint with respect to changing conditions of China in the post-1911 revolution era.

Locating The Community: The Foreign Presence In The Treaty Ports:

Interestingly, the presence of the treaty ports, together with its rapid urbanization drives, gave rise to two China: the China of the ports, where both the ruling Manchu government and the foreign powers made efforts to modernize the state, and the China of the interior, which barely saw any effects of such reforms, but carried with it the ever-increasing possibility of mass rebellions (Cheaneaux, 1976, p. 240). Despite the general unawareness of the conditions in the treaty ports or the large-scale westernization drives of the capital, the peasant masses in the interior of China were troubled by missionary activities and the impact that industrialization had on their daily livelihood. The large-scale inflation in the value of products, the decrease in value of copper coins, the heavy taxations to support the massive indemnities due to the repeated military losses, the destruction of handicraft industries, together with rampant corruption and various agricultural and natural disasters engendered anti-imperialist and anti-Manchu sentiments among them. The presence of Western powers not only hindered the maturing for China's national industries, but the establishment of foreign banks and their repeated loans to the Manchu government to pay the indemnities created a situation in which the West exercised a certain control over China's finances, setting up railways and mines, exploiting her resources and exercising complete monopoly over all imports and exports (Tan, 1986, p. 271-273).

At this point, each power exerted complete control over their "spheres of influence" (a term popularized following the Sino-French and Sino-Japanese wars of the 1890s and the rapid rise in concessions, areas that enjoyed all extraterritorial rights and remained outside Chinese jurisdiction), pushing China almost towards the brink of partition. It was under such conditions that the Boxer Rebellion, a popular peasant uprising that attacked all signs of foreignism, spread.

The Boxer War, ironically enough, owing to its large-scale propaganda in the West together with the signing of the Boxer Protocol of 1901, not only integrated the foreign community of the port world into the overarching colonial discourse, serving as rites of passage to being recognized as members of the Empire but also made China safer than ever for its foreign residents (Bickers, 1999, p. 34). The Protocol, thus signed, therefore transformed China into a haven for foreign settlers who exercised a sort of hegemonic rule over its holdings, privileges, and status quo in China, a hegemony that was only challenged with the rise of the Nationalist movement and the ushering of the Warlord era.

The leaders of this foreign world, especially those in the big ports like Shanghai, Tianjin or Hankou, not only cut themselves off entirely from the Chinese world around them but also upheld an exceedingly aggressive regional mentality that made this group consisting of businessmen, missionaries, officials and diplomats, a threat to the very nature of Sino- British/foreign relations. It is therefore, not surprising that when faced with active nationalism and anti-foreignism in the decades following the Boxers (May Fourth Movement 1919, May Thirtieth incident 1925, Warlord wars, Guomintang Northern Campaign, Wanxian incident 1926, etc), the local settler community became hell-bent on resisting Chinese demands for the end of its imperialist privileges, fighting against both the Chinese government as well as their own states back home. Being a semi-colony and functioning outside of a formal colonial government, China's foreign community was thus not just susceptible to harboring both a national and local identity due to their settler status, but the desire to continue their well-established status quo also made their policies and actions that often depended on the dispatch of troops and gunboats, an easy target of Kuomintang's anti-imperialist struggle, while at the same time their aloofness and ignorance of China's socio-political situation and its emerging nationalism led to a complacence, disregard and misunderstanding that ultimately led to recurrent and large-scale strikes and boycotts that threatened their own existence and forced them towards reform (Bickers, 1992, p.10-13).

Thus, this class-conscious and rigid community, which divided not only itself along class lines with lifestyles, entertainment, salaries, and memberships in different clubs and other social institutions being hierarchized according to the status and profession of each individual but also extended it towards the Chinese who were looked upon and regarded in terms contrary to their own exaggerated "English"/ white supremacist identity, an identity that was thoroughly imprinted in their consciousness (Bickers, 1992, p. 23-35). Such was the extent of this distinction that visitors like Arthur Ransome invented the term "the Shanghai Mind" to describe the local anti-Chinese attitude among the populace in the largest China treaty port which, through establishments like the British dominated International Settlements, the French Concessions and institutions such as the Municipal Council, the Mixed Courts, the Shanghai Volunteer Corps (SVC), the Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) exercised an almost tyrannical control over the massive Chinese populace living within these settlements. It is this world, complete with all its bizarreness and idiosyncrasies, that becomes the subject of Maugham's On a Chinese Screen, a text which, through a series of 58 vignettes, satirizes the treaty port world as he saw it at the height of China's Warlord era (1916-1928).

Examining The Discourse: A Survey of Maugham's Narrative

Thus, amidst all their hardened policy-making and fortifications of identities as members of a "superior" race, the curtains of Maugham's first tale, which already reinstates the liminal role of this foreign community within the Chinese empire with its passing mention of "rude boys" who "cry out at foreigners in a shrill and scornful voice" (Maugham, 1922, p.12). This motif is taken a step further in the second narrative, which delineates the attempts made by a British lady to redecorate an old temple built for "a very holy monk by his admirers" some 300 years ago. The temple, acting possibly as a symbolic rendition of old China that has fallen into decay, becomes an object of interest to this lady, who tries to convert it into a suitable dwelling by taking great pains to ensure that "it did not look Chinese at all" (Maugham, 1922, p.15). Having successfully recreated a simulation of her home life, not unlike the treaty port itself, she admires her work, which "might quite well be a room in some nice place in England…" (Maugham, 1922, p. 16).

A Bastion of Strength: Businesses, Diplomats and Consuls

The power within the treaty port world rested in the hands of a select few. The big businesses like Jardine, Matheson & Co., Swires, Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, B.A.T, etc. exercised massive influence and held immense wealth, with clubs and other such institutions run by a coterie of these individuals who also exerted their authority over committees like the Shanghai Municipal Council, China Association, British Chamber of Commerce, China Committee and later the British Resident's Association (Bickers, 1992, p. 94-95). Closely related were the diplomats and officials, especially those in Peking, who, whilst having a different set of interests, held attitudes quite similar to the other groups. The Legation Quarters of Peking, complete with all its historic significance in the form of the 55 days siege of the Legations during the Boxer Uprising of 1900, effectively transformed it into a haven for foreigners, foreign officials, missionaries, and globetrotters despite its not being an open treaty port, thus became a source of prestige and pride, which they attempted to retain even during the tumultuous period of conflict between the Warlords in the north and the Nanjing government in the south when Beijing's name was changed to Beiping to remove any association with the warlords and their overt dependence on foreign economic aid (Bickers, 1999, p. 118). Maugham's (1922) sixth tale efficaciously delineates the rich, gay, and indifferent world of the diplomatic coterie whose lavish and gaudy dinner parties skillfully capture this sense of a world enshrouded in wealth and privileges---

> On the whole, it made little difference to them in what capital they found themselves, for they did precisely the same things in Constantinople, Berne, Stockholm, and Peking. Entrenched by their diplomatic privileges and supported by a lively sense of their social consequence, they dwelt in a world in which Copernicus had never existed, for to them, sun and stars circled obsequiously around this earth of ours, and they were its center. (p. 29).

Commenting on the pseudo-knowledge of these individuals, Maugham (1922) further adds…she was an authority on the country. She told you that the Chinese had such perfect manners, and you really should have known the Empress Dowager; she was a perfect darling…Homeless, she was at home wherever her country had a diplomatic representative. (p. 30)

In a similar vein, the world of the big businesses, the greatest upholders of the treaty port status quo, led a life in which China appeared merely as a locale from which to extract resources and money. In this closed-off universe of luxury and wealth, there appeared no need for China to intrude for:

> China bored them all; they did not want to speak of that; they only knew just so much about it as was necessary to their business, and they looked with distrust upon any man who studied the Chinese language…You could hire an interpreter for twenty-five dollars a month, and it was well known that all those fellows who went in for Chinese grew queer in the head. (Maugham, 1922, p. 31-32).

Interference in Chinese law and jurisdiction by foreign consuls and officials often became the order of the day. Whilst extraterritoriality granted them the right to be judged and governed under their own country's legal system, a system that undoubtedly compromised China's sovereignty, it did not stop them from actively encroaching upon the nation's own judicial system. In "Her Britannic Majesty's Representative," a British consul, whilst going to negotiate the safety of his people during the Revolution, interferes and stops the killing of three prisoners of war after his pride has been offended by the Chinese official in charge. In a similar vein, "The Vice-Consul" records the story of a vice-consul who, as the narrative suggests, becomes instrumental in the killing of a supposedly innocent Chinese man for reasons that are not made clear. Although his conscience is momentarily piqued, it is his self-satisfied indifference towards the oppressed that wins the day.

Imperialist privileges, thus, allowed even the most ordinary of its residents the right to exploit those privileges. For instance, in "Sullivan," the eponymous Irish sailor of the title travels across

China, avoiding British consuls and extorting money and other benefits from various Chinese Magistrates by lying about being robbed. His ruse continues for several years before it is stopped by a certain Magistrate who has him beaten up, an incident which ultimately makes him "give up his vagrant life" (Maugham, 1922, p. 108).

A Discourse of Power: A Divide Engendered by Words

Any entry into the port world was carefully conditioned by a series of published works, both fiction as well as non-fiction, by missionaries, academics, sinologists, and other writers who carefully controlled the discourse designed to uphold their own community and protect their own holdings (Bickers, 1992, p. 29-30). These treaty port propagandists, or "Old China Hands," as they have been called, engendered a narrative that not only reinforced their self-ascribed expertise on all things Chinese but also ensured that any new addition to their community would already be equipped with the foreknowledge of how to "behave" or "act" in China (Bickers, 1992, p. 31-32). Vindicating its own usefulness and relevance vis a vis their functions within China, the foreign residents constructed their own chronicles and histories, endorsing repeatedly an innate pride in their settler's identity expressed in their celebrations of events like Empire Day or the King's birthday, something which evidently buttressed their identity as imperialists (Bickers, 1992, p. 107-108).

Thus, it doesn't take long for the socialist Henderson to set aside his moral qualms regarding riding a jinrickshaw or his willingness to regard the man "between the shafts as a man and a brother" and integrate himself entirely into the status quo and behavior patterns of port life. Quite contentedly, he remarks to the narrator while kicking the rickshaw driver—"You mustn't ever pay attention to the Chinese. You see, we're only here because they fear us. We're the ruling race" (Maugham, 1922 p. 68). Likewise, both the subjects of "Mirage" and "One of the Best" live out years of their life in an alien land which remains alien in the true sense of the word since never do they experience any desire or need to step out of the familiar simulation of treaty port life. Living life, as though by proxy, navigating an essentially unfamiliar world by employing certain representatives—comprador, servants, clerks and coolies, the subjects of Maugham's stories express a fervid hatred towards all things Chinese—"I hate the country, I hate the people. As soon as I've saved enough money I mean to clear out…I never want to see anything Chinese as long as I live" (Maugham, 1922, p. 212). Perhaps the most effective delineation of the treaty port mentality is expressed in "The Taipan", the "no. 1" man in the port, whose smugness and complacency at his own achievements extends even towards the dead whom he regards as having "scored…off." In one of his self-satisfied strolls around the graves of those whom he had surpassed, he comes across two coolies digging a grave, and as if by a stroke of some hallucinatory prophecy, fear seizes the heart of the Taipan which climaxes in his urgent need to return to the safety of his homeland, but not before he succumbs to the jaws of death and his only fear of being "buried among all these yellow men with their slanting eyes and their grinning faces" becomes a reality (Maugham, 1922, p. 203).

God's Own World: Missions, Missionaries and Evangelisms

Any discussion on the imperialist era in China remains incomplete without a mention of Christianity, the foreign religion that left almost little to no mark on the Chinese civilization, despite the success of other aspects of Western imperialism. Confucianism, a philosophic and religious belief system, remained indifferent to it, while Buddhists sought nirvana and Taoists immortality. Even then, Christianity would possibly have fared better had it given up its "monopolist" stance and integrated itself, like Buddhism, into the Chinese social milieu (Purcell, 1963, p. 126-127). In addition, the prevalence of heterodox sects and the ever-present possibility of rebellions due to large-scale sectarian activities by the secret societies entailed that China's rulers be on guard against all subversive activities, something which proved detrimental to Christianity due to missionary aggressions and interference in aspects of Chinese legal and judicial systems. Indeed, the missionaries, often regarded as the "scapegoats of imperialism," were the object of much contempt on the part of the natives due to their fierce lawsuits, forceful usurpation of property, aggressive challenges to the local authorities, and disregard for Chinese customs together with the ever-

increasing number of bandits within the ranks of the converts who sought sanctuary within church walls. It is, therefore, not surprising that the first victims of Boxer violence were the missionaries working in isolated groups in the interior of the country in close proximity with hostile natives and government officials, who often looked upon the practices of the church (such as baptism, medical work, etc.) with suspicion.

The missionaries, thus, constitute a unit unto itself which, in spite of its homogenous nature, remained vastly divided among themselves, and much like the rest, their position too was fortified in the post-Boxer era. Cynicism, doubt, distrust, and skepticism, therefore, animate Maugham's missionaries, a group that often raises questions regarding the efficacy and sanctity of mission work. In "Fear", the model missionary, Mr. Wingrove, who initially comes across as being a perfect rendition of everything a missionary must be, hides a dark secret. Behind his apparent love for the Chinese is a "hatred beside which his wife's distaste was insignificant…his missionary life revolted him…He martyred his tortured soul with a passionate exasperation" because his life in England had been too joyous and "so well satisfied" that he "began to think it sinful" (Maugham, 1922, p. 53-54). Thus, Mr. Wingrove lives a life of lies from which he is unable to escape, and despite his pretenses, he ultimately becomes a representative of failed mission work. The ex-missionary Dr. Macalister, who had come to China 30 years ago expecting hardships and a life of sacrifices, had been surprised when he instead encountered one of luxury and riches, and although it had adversely affected his young, inexperienced mind, he had been swiftly integrated into the port mentality, and although no longer a missionary, he now lived a life of wealth and comfort by successfully running multiple business ventures for the foreign residents of his community.

Likewise, "The Fannings," "The Stranger," and "The Seventh Day Adventist" all touch upon the similar motif of failed mission work as being merely an extension of a business venture or an entry into a life of luxury that may not have been accessible in their own homelands. The mysterious and shunned Dr. Saunders in "The Stanger" becomes a mouthpiece of this very fact when, after accosting a missionary, he cleverly entraps him with a conversation regarding a stranger who had been asking him about the missionaries who go on vacation during the months from May till September leaving behind their mission work which apparently seems like a part-time endeavor. The "stranger", as the doctor reveals later, was Christ himself, who had come to see something of the mission before leaving. In a similar vein, "The Seventh Day Adventist" records a missionary to whom mission work is merely "a business proposition…He seemed to be under the impression that the Chinese were very simple people, and because they did not know the same things that he did he thought them ignorant" (Maugham, 1922, p. 145). Nevertheless, a much more positive account of mission life is painted in "The Nun" and "The Sights of the Town," both of which depict a hospital/orphanage run by nuns who are involved in actual social work and work towards the betterment of Chinese life.

Marginalization and Ambivalence: The Position of Women in the Treaty Port World

The isolation and ennui of port life were perhaps the most palpable for its woman residents. In the male-dominated expatriate world of the treaty ports, not only were women hard to find in the initial years, but most women who actually came were married to missionaries. Taking on a Chinese mistress was, therefore, a common occurrence, although most men never married them (Wood, 2000, p. 55). "The arrival of a white woman," as Wood (2000) says, was thus "an occasion to celebrate" (Wood, 2000, p. 128). Oliver Ready, the commissioner of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, had written:

> …a small port where, for a long time, there had only been one lady, who was naturally regarded as the belle of the place. Presently, a rival appeared, and with her two pretty, unmarried sisters, whereon my messmates and I forthwith gave an impromptu dance (Ready as qtd in Wood, 2000, p. 128).

Beneath the lighthearted musings of Ready was, however, the very palpable dangers of isolation and rootlessness that undoubtedly affected its female residents. The British writer and campaigner, Mrs. Alicia Little, spoke extensively about the indolent and often dreary nature of lives that the non-missionary wives of foreign residents had to face---"…they were doubly hindered. They were not allowed to join their husbands' clubs or in these early days, take part in any of the health-giving sports that the men practiced" (Wood, 2000, p. 134). Limited job opportunities, together with the social expectations they were presumed to fulfill vis a vis their household and family, restricted both their possibilities and independence (Bickers, 1999, p. 88- 89). Closely connected was the perpetual fear of the Chinese male's sexual desire for the white woman, which gave rise to a number of treaty port taboos, foremost among which was the anxiety surrounding the marriage of a white woman to a Chinese man, something which automatically removed her from the protection of British/foreign law (Bickers, 1999, p. 101). In Maugham's "The Last Chance" and "The Consul", however, it is the callousness and apathetic nature of the port world that comes to the fore. To the subject of "The Last Chance," China is merely a marriage market from which she desires to fish out a suitable husband, while Mrs.

> Yu/Miss Lambert of "The Consul" though stuck in a horrible and abusive marriage to a Chinaman who had lied about his own means, remains surprisingly obstinate about ending her marriage. The Consul, Mr. Pete, who is unable to help her, is both shocked and revolted by the idea of a British woman's marriage to a Chinese. However, all of the Consul's cautions and advice falls on deaf ears when, even after attempts at poisoning her, Mrs. Yu refuses to leave her husband's home because—"There's something in the way his hair grows on his forehead that I can't help liking" (Maugham, 1922, p. 121).

Disenchantment and Ennui: The Hazards of Out-port Life

With the exception of the larger ports like Shanghai, Tianjin, or Hankow, most other ports in the interior or along the Yangzi remained almost entirely disconnected from the heart of China's white settler population. Needless to say, life in the outports was never easy. Barring the isolation, and rootlessness, the ever-present threat of anti-foreign attacks was the ubiquitous shadow of death that constantly haunted its residents. Nonetheless, the outport life served as a sort of "rites of passage" for its employees who, during their initial years, learned the nuances of their trade and gained the ability to negotiate the treaty port world of China (Bickers, 1999, p. 90-91). In contrast to the general tenor of the majority of Maugham's tales in On A Chinese Screen is the few that delve into the intense, often poignant pathos of the life of the expatriate in his attempts at coping with life in an essentially alien land. So the B.A.T agent Birch in "God's Truth", whose very life in the heartland of China seems "bounded by wild, barren mountains" that appeared to "shut him in," is overjoyed to encounter a missionary in the interior in hopes that he would be able to speak to a white man after three long months. Contrary to his expectations, however, the missionary, for unspecified reasons, remains reluctant to associate himself with "a man who trades in tobacco" (Maugham, 1922, p. 91-92).

The missionary's indignant discourtesy causes Birch to lash out at him, only to be overcome by a deep sense of desolation after the man leaves. In a similar vein, Robert Webb, a consul in one of the smaller ports in "The Normal Man," lives out a life separated from his family. Webb, who had successfully saved both the foreign and Chinese population within his area during the Revolution, is unable to return home on leave due to the disturbances engendered by the conflict. In a conversation with the narrator about his family, specifically his daughter, who is about to get married, the readers get a glimpse into the acute sense of loneliness that haunts his life in the outport. Likewise, the aged sailor in "The Old Timer", who has lived out a full career in China, having participated in both the Ever Victorious Army during the Taiping Rebellion as well as the Boxer loot, is now at the fag end of his life when his only companion is his equally aged "boy" (Chinese servant), and having lost his fortune, now must return to a life of a sailor.

Needless to say, despite all its imperialist incursions, China continues to remain an essentially alien land, an inscrutable and enigmatic space that continues to baffle the outsider. Thus, the traveler in "The Rolling Stone," despite all the experience and knowledge he has gathered, can never shake off his outsider persona, and although he talked extensively about his journeys, none of it had ever "intimately touched him…his experiences were merely of the body and had never translated into experiences of the soul" (Maugham, 1922, p. 22). The futility of the imperialist endeavor is symbolized further in "The Altar of Heaven," a place of solemn significance in the history of China where an American, Willard B. Untermeyer, writes his own name and place of origin, perhaps to immortalize his visit. His efforts, however, are in vain since soon after, a Chinese caretaker steps in a wipes the name off with spittle. For all their efforts to force open the Chinese Empire, trade was not always prosperous. The "merchant prince" community, as they have been called, remained on multiple occasions, unable to maintain their once thriving venture. The first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), together with the replacement in popularity of Chinese tea for Ceylon tea, thus forms the subject matter of Maugham's "The Dining Room" and "Failure," both of which evoke an image of a once glorious past that now lies in shambles.

"On a Chinese Screen": Native Voices and the Future of China

In the midst of all the radical modernization drives and reforms initiated by the Chinese intellectuals and public through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, there was a strong undertone of anti-foreign and anti-imperialist sentiments that persisted throughout the treaty port era and gained momentum in the post-Revolution years when the Guomindang attempted to phase out and eventually terminate all imperialist privileges. The displeasure and general contempt towards the "foreign devils," though not apparent in On a Chinese Screen, is referenced in his two short tales "The Cabinet Minister" and "The Philosopher" both of which, however, underscore the reluctance among a section of the Confucian scholar/gentry class to let go of the traditional regime. In "The Cabinet Minister", the narrator meets an unnamed Chinese official who nostalgically muses upon the once glorious past of the Chinese empire that has now ceased to be. In the midst of all his regret about the ineffectiveness of West-trained Chinese students' inability to recapture the grandeur of China's tradition is the narrator's covert comments on the official's corruption and unscrupulous deeds that have undoubtedly contributed to the present plight of the nation. A much more extensive encounter with a Chinese philosopher as Chunmei Du (2014) has points out, was the Confucian philosopher Gu Hongming in her essay "Travel Along the Mobius Strip: Somerset Maugham and Gu Hongming East of Suez," raises an interesting notion about East-West interactions by calling it "a psychological battle" between intellectual "elites" as they try to come to terms with contradictions and uncertainties within the British Empire and its identity (in case of Maugham) and the conflict of interests between a modernizing and Westernizing China and a desire to retain any semblance of its authentic past self (in case of Gu):

> On the one hand, the English writer's initial interest in an authentic Chinese philosopher was, in fact, caused by his great concerns about the British Empire and identity. Projecting the yellow peril onto the Chinese philosopher, Maugham turned Gu Hongming…into Fu Manchu and, in so doing, maintained an illusion of white supremacy. On the other hand, Gu projected onto his imagined homeland the antithesis of Western civilization, flawed and now on the edge of bankruptcy, in order to forge an ideal and authentic self. As a way to resist Western power and colonial ideologies, Gut turned himself into a Confucian philosopher and Fu Manchu and invited the coercive gaze. He forced Maugham to conform to the terms he set up for their dialogue, reversing the colonial hierarch in regulating East-West relations. (p. 14)

Despite the fact that Gu's persistent loyalty to the defunct monarchy was looked upon with criticism by the proponents of a modernized and Westernized China and earned him the nickname of "crazy Gu" (Du, 2014, p. 3), his comments as "the last representative of the old China" appears to hint at "the fundamental problem of the civilizing-mission ideologies and the ultimate danger of Oriental mimicry" (Du, 2014, p. 7) when he comments: And what will become of your superiority

when the yellow man can make as good guns as the white and fire them as straight? You have appealed to the machine gun, and by the machine gun, you shall be judged. (Maugham, 1922, p. 153-154).

Conclusion:

Thus, touching upon important motifs that undoubtedly shaped East-West relations in the post-World War I era, Maugham's account appears to foreshadow the events of the century that witnessed the victory of the Nationalists, the imperialist incursions of Japan, the coming of the Chinese Communist Party, all of which ultimately forced the foreign diplomats to take decisive actions towards the reform and Sinification of consular jurisdiction, business and missionary bodies and control over the primary revenue raising organs of the Chinese Empire. The dismantling of the "informal empire" and the ushering in of the regime of the CCP, thus, in a way, wiped out the vestiges of the Western world, which had never really penetrated the vast interiors of China as delineated in Maugham's final vignette with its portrayal of the enduring spiritual The life of ancient China is portrayed in the image of an old woman as she carries out a solemn ceremony of offering "A Libation to the Gods." Thus, Maugham's on A Chinese Screen becomes a testimony to the peculiar nature of the community that developed and proliferated on China's coast, a community whose ambivalent and equivocal nature not only challenged the very nature of imperialist incursions but also raised questions about power, discourse, identity as well as its formation. The purpose of this paper has been to further a discourse that goes beyond the confines of merely scrutinizing a travel narrative, which Maugham's on A Chinese Screen undoubtedly represents, in order to place the work within a wider socio-economic and political framework of the changing conditions of 20th century China, something which becomes a fundamental necessity in any discussion on the country. In so doing, this paper has attempted to advance a more interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond the immediate scope of not just the author's experiences and perspectives but also the preconditions of the genre of the chosen work, with the intention to facilitate an approach that gives the reader a thorough sense of the world that forms the subject of Maugham's narrative.

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