Western Debates About Chinese Entrepreneurship in the Treaty Port Period, 1842-1911

# Introduction

After the close of the First Opium War in 1842, Westerners gained the right to reside and do business in a progressively larger number of Chinese treaty ports.[[1]](#endnote-1) This paper covers the period from that date up to 1911, when the Qing dynasty was overthrown in a revolution supported by much of the emergent Chinese bourgeoisie.[[2]](#endnote-2) The so-called treaty-port system contributed to the rapid growth in Sino-Western commerce, which increased more than seven fold from 1864 to 1911.[[3]](#endnote-3) The growth of Sino-Western trade meant that Westerners had both more opportunities to observe Chinese entrepreneurs and a stronger incentive to think about Chinese entrepreneurship. Westerners during our period frequently debated the nature of Chinese entrepreneurship in books, articles, pamphlets, and other interventions in the public sphere. Those of these publications that have survived were the basis of the research presented in this paper.

The History of Capitalism movement in the United States has developed our understanding of how the ideologies of race, “civilization,” and class have intersected in the United States and other countries around the North Atlantic.[[4]](#endnote-4) Scholars who work on the business histories of colonial Africa and of twentieth-century India have published similar research.[[5]](#endnote-5) Similar research themes as they relate to Japan have also been investigated. For instance, Susie Pak has examined how ideas about racial and ethnic difference influenced how New York bankers in the early twentieth-century viewed Japan, a country that borrowed on Western capital markets.[[6]](#endnote-6) More recently, Janet Hunter has used contemporary books and pamphlets to examine how imagined hierarchies of nations and races influenced how nineteenth-century Westerners perceived merchants from Japan, a nation then seen as being at an intermediate level of civilization.[[7]](#endnote-7)

On a theoretical level, much of this business-historical research draws on the work of postcolonial researchers who have studied the mental systems that imperialist cultures in the West created to justify their political, military, and economic interventions in countries in the non-Western world. [[8]](#endnote-8) A common theme in colonialist discourses about non-Westerners was a tendency to “Other” people in the so-called Orient, an imagined region that extended from Morocco to Japan.[[9]](#endnote-9) Historians of capitalism have, hitherto, said not applied this theory to the study of Western business in China in the same period. Our paper seeks to integrate the history of Sino-Western trade into our general understanding of the history of capitalism while also providing a nuanced interpretation of the roles of colonialism and Orientalism in this process.

The paper shows tremendous variation in how contemporary Westerners thought about Chinese entrepreneurs: some of their assessments of Chinese entrepreneurship were clearly informed by the colonialist and racialist ideologies, but other Westerners discussed Chinese entrepreneurs in a fashion that was distinctly non-colonialist and non-Orientalist. We find that while some contemporary authors, particularly English-speaking missionaries and government officials, employed the standard Orientalist tropes of passivity and economic stagnation in the course of discussing Chinese entrepreneurship, other Western writers, including those from mercantile backgrounds, directly challenged such colonialist ideas and stressed that Chinese people, or at least some sub-sets of the Han Chinese populations, were actually extremely entrepreneurial. Such depictions of Chinese entrepreneurs undermined the Orientalist and racialist stereotype of the Chinese as essentially passive, tradition-bound, and backward. This paper modifies our understanding of how colonialism shaped Western perceptions of China by showing the some Western writers rejected Orientalist ideas in the course of their discussions of Chinese entrepreneurship. The paper is thus a contribution towards a fuller and richer understanding of the cultural history of Sino-Western business.

Let us define our key terms. Following Schumpeter, we define “entrepreneurship” as the capacity and intention to plan and manage innovative profit-oriented business ventures,[[10]](#endnote-10) and as crucial agent that drives economic changes within business history.[[11]](#endnote-11) An “Orientalist” discourse emphasizes the sheer difference between the so-called “West,” which was conceptualized as rational, progressive, and humane, and the so-called Orient, which was barbaric, irrational, stagnant, and ruled by cruel tyrants. Orientalist modes of thought were distinct from but frequently overlapped with ideas such as scientific racism that Westerners used to bolster the idea that they were superior to all non-white, non-Christian, and non-Western peoples.[[12]](#endnote-12) Orientalism exaggerates differences between macro-geographical regions such “the East” and “the West” while minimizing individual and micro-geographical differences within such regions. Orientalism thus “essentializes” the differences between East and West. As used in post-colonial scholarship, the term colonialism has a broader definition than Orientalism, as it includes discourses that denigrated any non-Western cultures that were located outside of the spatial imaginary of “the East.”[[13]](#endnote-13)

There can be no doubt that intense anti-Chinese prejudice was present in the Western expatriate communities in China throughout the seven decades covered by our paper. The extent of anti-Chinese prejudice in contemporaneous Western cultures has been well documented by Robert Bickers’s studies of Western mercantile community in China,[[14]](#endnote-14) by intellectual and cultural historians,[[15]](#endnote-15) and by the many historians who have studied the experience of Chinese immigrant communities. [[16]](#endnote-16) As James Hevia, David Scott, and others have shown, contempt for the Chinese also informed Western diplomatic, naval, and military action in China during and after the Opium Wars.[[17]](#endnote-17) Postcolonial scholarship has demonstrated that period covered by our paper also saw a reduction in the status of the Chinese in the global hierarchy of races that was part of the contemporary Western spatial imagination: the Chinese were re-classified as definitely non-white.[[18]](#endnote-18) Simply put, many Westerners in this era harboured extremely racist attitudes towards the Chinese. The Chinese Communist Party’s ongoing “patriotic education” program, which emphasizes the sheer extent to which Westerners mistreated China during the so-called “century of humiliation”, is based on legitimate grievances about real historical events.[[19]](#endnote-19)

However, we hold that it would be a gross error to over-generalize by arguing that anti-Chinese prejudice was universal amongst the Westerners resident in China. The Western businessmen who lived in the Treaty Ports between 1842 and 1911 were not uniformly chauvinistic and parochial. This paper’s examination of what Westerners said in public about Chinese entrepreneurs will, in our view, help us to arrive at a nuanced understanding of how Western people in the Treaty Port period viewed Chinese business people. Our position is that there needs to be balance in our depiction of how colonialist ideas influenced Western thinking about Chinese business people. It is, therefore, helpful to draw on the recent cultural-historical research that is informed by the nuanced version of postcolonial theory that takes into account the diversity of Western attitudes during the era of colonialism. Our approach is, therefore, similar to an influential 2002 book by the historian Sir David Cannadine that showed that Victorian British people sometimes behaved in strikingly non-racist and non-discriminatory ways when interacting with Asians and Africans, particularly those from princely or mercantile backgrounds.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Moreover, our argument is also congruent with that of Jürgen Osterhammel, who has recently demonstrated that Enlightenment depictions of Asians were far more diverse and characterised by less Orientalist stereotyping of Asians than many post-colonialist scholars have allowed. Among postcolonialist historians and other scholars, it has long been common to assert that the Enlightenment changed how Westerners viewed Asians by promoting the view that Asians were backward, irrational, and bound by tradition. As Osterhammel notes, postcolonial scholars associate this “epistemological disaster” with white supremacy and Western chauvinism. Our research on Western depictions of Chinese entrepreneurship corroborates Osterhammel’s claim that the prevailing view is overly simplistic and ignores diversity.[[21]](#endnote-21)

Historians have found considerable diversity in how Westerners in the heyday of imperialism viewed non-Western peoples. Recent comparative colonial research suggests that the ideology of white superiority was much stronger in some of the colonial nations than others: racial barriers in the French and, *a fortiori*, the Portuguese colonial empires were less rigid than in the British Empire, let alone the United States.[[22]](#endnote-22) Just as attitudes towards the Chinese varied from one Western culture to the next, there was tremendous individual variation within national populations. For instance, some of the Western business people who lived in China displayed open-minded and respectful attitudes that contrast markedly with those of individuals who came from very similar national, occupational, and family backgrounds. Consider Samuel Greg Rathbone (1823- 1903), who was dispatched by his family in 1843 to establish branches of their trading firm in Shanghai and Canton. These branches sold British goods to Chinese wholesales and bought silk and tea for export to the West. Samuel Greg, who appears to have been a particularly earnest young Quaker, sent lengthy and thoughtful letters back to Liverpool that contained extensive evaluations of the morality other Western merchants in China, as well as condemnations of their contemptuous attitudes to and actual mistreatment of Chinese merchants. For instance, he deplored how many of his fellow Westerners would dishonour financial commitments to Chinese business partners.[[23]](#endnote-23)

 Further evidence of the diversity of Western attitudes towards the Chinese is seen in examining the statements made by and about Charles Addis, the Scottish banker who would later lead the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, was unusually tolerant for a man of his generation and background, at least judging from the comments about the Chinese he made in during his youth. As a young man, he took lessons in Chinese language and culture from a Confucian sage, which caused other Western expatriate businessmen to regard him as eccentric.[[24]](#endnote-24) The cases of these two individuals show that it is difficult to generalize about how Western expatriates in China viewed their Chinese business partners. Addis himself noted that there were considerable tensions within the British expatriate population in China, with the missionaries being “generally disliked and shunned by European merchants and diplomatic personnel.”[[25]](#endnote-25)

The fact that the merchants and the missionaries saw the world differently is not entirely surprising, given that they had travelled to China for very different reasons (i.e., to make money rather than to impose Western religious ideas). As we shall see below, the diversity in Western attitudes towards the Chinese was reflected in the texts about Chinese entrepreneurship they published. We would hasten to add that some missionaries who wrote about Chinese entrepreneurship were critical of Orientalist perspectives and some writers with business backgrounds used Orientalist ideas for understanding Chinese entrepreneurship (see Table 1).

# The Rise of Sino-Western Commerce

Our paper focuses on the ideas that Western authors used to make sense the reality of Chinese entrepreneurial behaviour rather than the actual behaviour of contemporaneous Chinese entrepreneurs or the behaviour of the Western business people who interacted with their Chinese counterparts. It nevertheless builds on research about how Chinese business was transformed in this period. This research has demonstrated that the strategies and structures used by Chinese businessmen evolved rapidly in the treaty-port period.[[26]](#endnote-26) Chinese merchants enjoyed “a real rise in social status” that was due, in part, to the influence of Western ideas that legitimated capitalism and, in part, to an influx of men from official and gentry backgrounds into the merchant class.[[27]](#endnote-27) At the same time, the Chinese state embarked on a program of “self-strengthening” that involved state-subsidies for the adoption of Western technologies.[[28]](#endnote-28) This modernization program involved a mixture of assistance to private entrepreneurs and the establishment of arsenals and other industrial enterprises directly managed by the state.[[29]](#endnote-29) The result of all of these changes was what some historians have called a Chinese “commercial revolution.”[[30]](#endnote-30)

 Chinese business and economic history is a rapidly growing field that covers many historical topics and research methods.[[31]](#endnote-31) The recent research on Chinese business history has deepened our understanding of the aforementioned commercial revolution by showing how late Qing entrepreneurs selectively borrowed Western business practices. Elizabeth Koll, for instance, has shown how the conglomerate founded by Zhang Jian in 1895 adopted some Western businesses practices while retaining many Chinese characteristics.[[32]](#endnote-32) Andrew Godley and Haiming Hang have examined how Chinese merchants learned how to finance Western-style department stores.[[33]](#endnote-33) Other scholars have shown that the business enterprises founded by Liu Hongsheng[[34]](#endnote-34) blended Western and traditional Chinese business practices to form a similarly hybridized organization.[[35]](#endnote-35) Chinese accountancy was similarly hybridized.[[36]](#endnote-36) The recent research on Chinese business history has also shown that relationships between Chinese and Western businesses, which were sometimes conflictual, sometimes cooperative. Eichi Motono discovered that while relations between Chinese and British merchants in Shanghai were occasionally marked by ethnic rivalry and a “lack of mutual trust,” British and Chinese business people also cooperated, as when Chinese merchants invested in British-incorporated companies within the international settlement in Shanghai.[[37]](#endnote-37) Sherman Cochran also found that relations between Chinese and foreign firms sometimes involved extensive cooperation across ethnic lines. [[38]](#endnote-38) In other cases, such as in the cigarette industry, rivalry between firms acquired an ethnic and nationalist significance: the intense competition between British-American Tobacco Company (BAT) and Chinese Nanyang Brothers Tobacco Company was interpreted by some contemporaries as a struggle between Chinese and Western capitalism.[[39]](#endnote-39)

# The Lenses Westerners Viewed to Understand Entrepreneurship

Westerners who travelled to late Qing China brought a variety of lenses for thinking about entrepreneurship. Ideas about the Chinese that had emerged from the Enlightenment appear to have influenced how many observers thought about Chinese entrepreneurship. In the early Enlightenment period (1650-1770), Leibniz and Voltaire had praised China as a nation of rational government and commercial sophistication.[[40]](#endnote-40) Late Enlightenment writers such as Montesquieu and Adam Smith then challenged the view that China was more advanced than Europe, which contributed to a growing profound belief among Westerners of their own superiority to the Chinese.[[41]](#endnote-41) Smith, who wrote about China in the 1770s, supported Montesquieu’s view that China was an oriental despotism much like Turkey and Russia, the “eastern” regimes most familiar to Europeans.[[42]](#endnote-42) Since Smith was widely read in the nineteenth century, such ideas about China became part of the intellectual toolkit of Western writers in the treaty port period.

The post-Smith classical political economists, who also were read widely in our period, contributed to the stock of ideas that Western observers applied in understanding Chinese entrepreneurs. They did so by helping to perpetuate the already established concept of the “Oriental despotism,” the notion that governments in the vaguely defined “East” were arbitrary, predatory, and obstacles to commercial development.[[43]](#endnote-43) For instance, John Stuart Mill’s 1848 *Principles of Political Economy*, which went through many British, French, and US editions after 1848, shaped how Westerners thought about the environment for entrepreneurs in China was part of the knowledge base of most educated Westerners. Mill taught that in “the extensive monarchies which from a time beyond historical record have occupied the plains of Asia,” the rulers “seldom leaves much to the cultivators beyond mere necessaries, and often strips them so bare even of these...” The result was that while “the bulk of the population are ill provided for” the royal court is able to make the elaborate displays of riches that had tricked the first European explorers into regarding these societies as wealthy. In such societies, a few sycophantic merchants would amass great wealth due to favors bestowed by rulers. Mill taught that the rich merchants in Asia were, therefore, fundamentally different from the rich merchants in the West who had made their fortunes through their unaided efforts in the free market.[[44]](#endnote-44)

The concept of “Oriental Despotism” disseminated by Smith, Mill and other political economists would go on to inform Western views of the conditions faced by Chinese entrepreneurs. In a 1854 discussion of commercial morality in China, Father Évariste-Régis Huc, a French missionary, noted that in Europe it was common to regard China as the “*pays du despotisme et de la tyrannie*” and “*l’Asie comme la terre classique de l’arbitraire et de la servitude.*” Huc also observed that most Europeans perceived this land of despotism of a backward nation in which commerce was underdeveloped relative to the vast population.[[45]](#endnote-45)

Ideas about race were also present in widely-read texts about entrepreneurship. The Scottish writer Samuel Smiles also shaped how many contemporaries viewed entrepreneurship via his works on entrepreneurial heroes, which were published after the spectacular success of his 1859 best-seller *Self-Help*.[[46]](#endnote-46) Smiles devoted little attention to entrepreneurs who were active in fields such as finance, advertising, or retail, and instead focused on the heavy industries that were on the cutting edge of technological development. In effect, he presented the practical engineer as the highest form of entrepreneur. For the purposes of this paper, Smiles’s distinction between higher and lower entrepreneurship is relevant to understanding how Westerners thought out entrepreneurship in late Qing China, since Western authors who published in this period disagreed about the capacity of Chinese individuals to engage in various types of entrepreneurship ranging from the routine to the simply innovative. As we shall see below, some authors suggested that while Chinese merchants were capable of old-fashioned entrepreneurship through arbitrage, only Westerners were capable of the higher entrepreneurial functions, which involved the introduction of new technologies.

For Smiles, the presence of the entrepreneurial spirit in a population was, in part, a function of the existence of a government that confined itself to the protection of “life, liberty, property and the fruits of accumulated industry.”[[47]](#endnote-47) He also suggested that degree of Nordic blood in a nation’s population helped to determine who entrepreneurial it was. Smiles declared that Britain’s rapid material progress was due to the unaided efforts of the individual “spirit of self-help, as exhibited in the energetic action of individuals, has in all times been a marked feature in the English character.”[[48]](#endnote-48) Smiles conceded that the spirit of self-improvement was not confined to Englishmen or Britons and could indeed be found in other Teutonic races. Smiles suggested that the economic individualism and entrepreneurial boldness demonstrated by members of these ‘Teuton’ races might be traced back to their Norse ancestry.[[49]](#endnote-49) Smiles was here insinuating that Viking ancestry may have made northern Europeans natural entrepreneurs. Smiles’s comment, which was admittedly made in passing, associated self-reliance, risk-taking, and entrepreneurship with northern European ancestry and related physical traits. Given that entrepreneurship had taken on racialist associations in the works of such an influential author, it is not surprising, therefore, that ideas about race influenced how many contemporary Westerners viewed entrepreneurship in China and, indeed, many other non-Western societies. However, as we show below, some Western observers stated that the Chinese could be just as entrepreneurial as any white European, which demonstrates that ideas of biological racial superiority were far from universal in China in this period.

We should also note that Western ideas about entrepreneurship did not remain constant over the period covered by this paper (1842 to 1911). Samuel Smiles’s book reflected the mid-Victorian British faith in the benefits of *laissez-faire* and free enterprise. Britain’s support in free enterprise weakened in the late nineteenth century and the growing demands for the regulation of business seen in Britain had strong parallels in France, the United States, and other Western countries, even if few people in these nations came to favour outright socialism.[[50]](#endnote-50) In our view, changing attitudes toward entrepreneurship in the West began to influence Western perceptions of Chinese entrepreneurship towards the end of our period. In this context, Smilesian hero worship of businessmen became less fashionable. The growing scepticism about the profit motive and entrepreneurship colored Western discussions of Chinese commerce by encouraging Western expatriates to focus on the issue of whether cartels and other mercantile agreements in restraint of trade were the main choke on China’s commercial development. As we show below, observers from the English-speaking countries began around 1890 to apply a sort of anti-trust lens in thinking about entrepreneurship in China.

# Western Debates About Chinese Entrepreneurship

In this section of the paper, we analyze the texts in which contemporary Westerners debated Chinese entrepreneurship. We show that while some authors adopted a strongly Orientalist pose that denied that the Chinese could ever be entrepreneurial, others argued that the Chinese were, in fact, an extremely entrepreneurial population. We also identify a third perspective, which held that some groups within the Chinese population, such as people from a particular locality or speakers of a certain dialect, were more entrepreneurial than other Han Chinese groups. In our view, this third perspective also challenged the Orientalist idea that the Chinese were a monolithically non-entrepreneurial group of individuals.

 Westerners published about Chinese entrepreneurship in a variety of different venues. For instance, retired merchants wrote memoirs about their careers in China and diplomats filed reports on commercial conditions that were published by their home governments, some of which were then published. In preparing this paper, we identified a range of sources published between 1842 and 1911 in which Westerners discussed Chinese entrepreneurship. We searched for texts in English, French, and Portuguese, the languages of the researchers. Texts in these languages were particularly important for our study because the British, American, French, and Portuguese entrepreneurs played a very important role in mediating trade between China and the West in this period, although at least a few merchants of every European nationality could be found living in China’s treaty ports in this era. British and American merchants were found throughout China in this period, with particularly large concentrations in Hong Kong and the International Settlement in Shanghai.[[51]](#endnote-51) Shanghai has a separate French “concession” or sector: French commercial activity in the country was primarily in Shanghai and the southern regions immediately adjacent to Indo-China.[[52]](#endnote-52) The Portuguese, who had had a colony in Macau since 1557, were particularly important in Guangdong and in Hong Kong.[[53]](#endnote-53) German firms were also numerous and were found throughout China, not just in the German concessions.[[54]](#endnote-54) A more detailed analysis would require interdisciplinary approach and we acknowledge from the outset the limited expertise we bring to this essay by focusing only on English, French and Portuguese languages.

 We began our research process by searching the catalog of the British Library, a library of legal deposit, for contemporary British and US texts dealing with Chinese entrepreneurship. A parallel search for French-language sources was conducted at the Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand. We searched for Portuguese language texts at research library in Macau and Hong Kong, a former Portuguese and British colony respectively. We were aware that Westerners may have discussed Chinese entrepreneurship in texts from this period that have either failed to survive or which did not appear when we searched through databases and catalogs using such terms as “Chinese merchant” and “Chin\* commerce\*.” Our initial keyword searches produced a long list of texts on commercial conditions in China, only some of which discussed Chinese entrepreneurs and other businesspeople. We discarded any sources, such as detailed reports of commodity prices, that did not seem relevant to the socio-cultural themes that were at the core of our research question. At the end of this selection process, we found thirty-seven relevant books, pamphlets, and government reports, many of which are cited and quoted in this paper and all of which are listed in Table 1.

The authors evaluated each text to see whether its evaluation of Chinese entrepreneurs was informed by Orientalist and colonialist stereotypes such as passivity, irrational commitment to tradition, and lack of entrepreneurial drive (see final column in Table 1). We found that twenty-six of these texts represented Chinese entrepreneurs in a largely or exclusively non-Orientalist/non-colonialist fashion while eleven depicted Chinese entrepreneurs in terms that were largely or entirely consistent with Orientalist stereotypes. We determined that all of these authors were male; despite our best efforts, we were unable to find any relevant female-authored texts in this period. We also identified the nationality and occupation of the writers to determine whether there was an obvious relationship between these author characteristics. We found that neither of the French and none of the five Portuguese language texts used a colonialist-Orientalist lens to understand Chinese entrepreneurship, a pattern that is consistent with the aforementioned historiography that argues that racial barriers were less pronounced in Portuguese culture than they were in cultures of the English-speaking countries in this era. In examining the English-language texts, we found that colonialist-Orientalist ideas were used by authors from a wide range of occupational backgrounds that we place into three categories: missionary, governmental, and private-sector. We are thus unable to associate strongly Orientalist ideas with any of these three occupational categories.[[55]](#endnote-55)

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Our reading of these primary sources suggests that there was a consensus among Western observers of Chinese business that the Chinese national character included traits such as frugality and an ability to work hard. These traits were widely regarded as a necessary, but not sufficient, foundation for entrepreneurial success. In 1855, Évariste Régis Huc informed readers of *Harper’s Magazine* in the United States that “if the Chinese have any object in life, it is trade and money. They are born speculators. As soon as a boy can walk, he begins to traffic with his companions.” The Chinese, the article elaborated, were passionate about commerce and it did not matter to them whether his business dealings were “legal or illegal, honest or dishonest.” Although not at all flattering to the Chinese, this description in an influential magazine reinforced the idea that were entrepreneurial and constantly alert to possibilities for profit.[[56]](#endnote-57) Similar statements about the eagerness of the Chinese to make money appeared in primary sources published throughout the period covered by this paper. However, the contemporary Western observers disagreed about the capacity of Chinese businessmen to engage in various types of entrepreneurship. Some of the texts we analysed drew on Orientalist ideas and depicted the Chinese as utterly passive and conservative and implied that any economic change or entrepreneurial dynamism currently visible in China was solely the result of the presence of Westerners, who were uniquely capable of the higher entrepreneurial functions.

Some Western observers of China doubted the capacity of the Chinese to engage in any entrepreneurial activity beyond simple arbitrage and routine commercial transactions. This idea was presented in 1870 in a memorandum by the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce, which represented the interests of Western merchants in that city. While this memorandum conceded that Chinese political institutions were partially responsible for the commercial underdevelopment of the country, it cautioned against putting too much of the blame on China’s political system, noting that oppressive government was “only one obstacle” to the circulation of goods. “Much stress has justly been laid” on the role of the “exaction of the mandarins” in obstructing trade, it declared in a report on trading conditions in the Yangtze valley. The “greater” obstacle, it said, was “the passive and unconscious resistance of a people of stagnant ideas” and “of very limited enterprise.” The report noted that Chinese merchants were willing to adopt new technologies, such as steamers, but only if Westerners took the lead in introducing them: “in China, it is only the foreigner who is capable of pushing” commercial progress. They concluded the Chinese merchants, while industrious and alert to the potential for profit, were “incapable of originating” novel ways of doing thing, “the spirit of enterprise is all on the side of the foreigners and the onus of every forward movement in commerce must necessarily rest on them.” [[57]](#endnote-58)

The Orientalist idea of Chinese commercial passivity was perpetuated in an 1895 history of Hong Kong by Ernest John Eitel. Eitel, who had originally come from Germany as a Protestant missionary, was the colony’s Inspector of Schools when he wrote the book. He depicted the Chinese as essentially passive players in Hong Kong’s economic history. Eitel was, of course, aware that China had had commerce and a merchant class for generations, but he represented Chinese business people as uncreative souls who worked in the same well-worn grooves as their distant ancestors had formed. He remarked that from the days of the East India Company to the present, “it seems indisputable that… European merchants have ever been the leaders” and the “Chinese merchants the indispensable hangers-on.” The white man, not the yellow man, was the carrier of the mighty “spirit of free trade.”[[58]](#endnote-59) He also remarked that the “destiny of the one race is to rule and the fate of the other is to be ruled,” the success of Hong Kong illustrating not the vigour of indigenous merchant class but rather what “Chinese labour and industry” could achieve under the direction of the British.[[59]](#endnote-60)

In keeping with his missionary background, Eitel advanced a religious rather than a biological explanation for why the Chinese entrepreneurs were passive and non-innovative. In his history of Hong Kong, he depicted the “Chinese merchants” as superstitious and primitive, a theme he elaborated upon in his books on *feng-shui*.[[60]](#endnote-61) He conceded that the Chinese merchants had attempted to imitate steamship companies and other businesses based on the advanced technology of the West, but that these schemes had failed miserably, despite being “well supplied with funds” and “strongly supported by Chinese officials.”[[61]](#endnote-62) Eitel also reported that in 1881, some Chinese merchants had attempted to establish a trading house in London so as to deal directly with European firms, but this “attempt proved a conspicuous failure,” even though it had been graciously supported by Sir John Pope Hennessy, the governor. Eitel disparagingly described an “even more short-lived was another project, which Sir John did his utmost to encourage,” namely a Chinese-run dock company.[[62]](#endnote-63) Eitel depicted that Chinese as essentially incompetent at business, especially its higher branches, even when living in the favourable legal and political environment of Hong Kong. Eitel’s view of Chinese businessman was echoed in 1907, when Arthur John Sargent, one of the founders of business education at the London School of Economics, attributed the economic backwardness of China to the “intense conservatism of the Chinese people” and their aversion to new products, technologies, and business practices.[[63]](#endnote-64) He wrote that “the Chinese are nothing if not conservative in the matter of foreign innovations.”[[64]](#endnote-65) He also wrote that “the Chinese are suspicious of change, particularly when it is not due to a genuine native development.”[[65]](#endnote-66)

The negative depiction of Chinese entrepreneurship by authors such as Eitel and Sargent did not go uncontested. Writing in 1867, Manuel de Castro Sampaio, a Portuguese army officer in Macau, praised the Chinese merchants for their hard work, intelligence, and dynamism.[[66]](#endnote-67) He also challenged the trope of Oriental duplicity, noting that “Chinese, with regard to trade, are conducted in general with honour and probity, because, knowing the great scope of these qualities when it comes to such rich source, are admirably circumspect in all your accounts.”[[67]](#endnote-68) Other Portuguese authors based in Macau noted that the British had a tendency to make the Chinese appear as bad as possible: another government official in Asia (Portuguese India and Macau), José Inácio de Andrade, wrote in 1843 that “the character of British is so averse regarding the Chinese that since Lord Anson to Lord Amherst, that is from 1741, a time when Anson entered the Tigris river until 1816, when Amherst arrived in Beijing, the Bretons [sic] have always been repelled: so as to take vengeance, they depict China in the darkest colours.”[[68]](#endnote-69) It is likely that these Portuguese authors harboured attitudes to the Chinese that we today regard as prejudiced. However, their comments suggest that they perceived the British as excessively prejudiced against the Chinese.

Patrick Lafcadio Hearn challenged the stereotype of Chinese business conservativism in an article published in 1896 in which he distinguished the conservativism of the Chinese in politics and matters of dress from actual business activities. Hearn, a journalist of mixed Irish and Greek ancestry who had lived in France and the United States before his arrival into Asia, had a decidedly cosmopolitan outlook that challenged the prevailing colonialist and Orientalist views. Hearn said that “men who know China also know that Chinese conservatism does not extend to those activities which belong to trade, to industry, to commerce or speculation.” Even the Chinese who had ventured above, he conceded, had retained their traditional dress, ethical system, and religion: “Whether in Japan or in India, Canada or Australia, Cuba or Chili, Siberia or Burmah, the Chinaman remains a Chinaman.” Nevertheless, Chinese businessmen freely utilized “the modern inventions of industry, the modern facilities of communication, the new resources of commerce.” The Chinese merchant, he explained, sends coded telegrams, charters steamers, operates modern factories and banks, launches joint-stock companies, and “hires steam or electricity to aid him in his manufacturing or speculating.”[[69]](#endnote-70)

Other Western observers joined with these authors in disputing the Orientalist view that the Chinese were non-entrepreneurial and argued that the Chinese were natural entrepreneurs and that they were quick to take advantage of new technologies. Writing in 1875, just two years after Eitel had published a book arguing that the unwillingness of the Chinese to adopt modern technology was a function of their mindless faith in *feng-shui*, Charles Alabaster dismissed the idea that religious beliefs were inhibiting Chinese entrepreneurship. He noted that the Chinese of Hankow (Hankou) were “already beginning to look on foreign appliances as sources of greater wealth” and that “*feng shui* as an excuse is scarcely heard” among the enterprising merchants of the city who were enthusiastically investing in “steamer companies, banking companies, insurance companies, and, last but not least in this province, mining companies.”[[70]](#endnote-71)

Other developments in Chinese commerce in the 1860s and 1870s likely reinforced the sense that the Chinese were actually quite entrepreneurial and dynamic, despite the claims of Eitel. For instance, increased competition from native merchants caused the failure of a number of British and American firms that began with a wave of bankruptcies in 1867, when Dent and Company, and old and established British house, failed due to Chinese competition. The 1875 bankruptcy of Augustine Heard and Company prompted *Shen Pao*, China’s first vernacular newspaper, to declare triumphantly that the foreign mercantile community as a whole was in trouble.[[71]](#endnote-72) A major trend in this period was the Chinese merchants were bypassing the Western middlemen who had previously mediated trade between China and Western countries. John Thomson observed in 1873 that the commerce was passing from Western hands to the Chinese merchants, “who have readily adopted the use of telegraphs and steamers in carrying on their business operations.”[[72]](#endnote-73) At an 1877 meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute in London, Paul F. Tidman said that he had seen Chinese as colonists in Borneo, the Strait Settlements, and the Dutch East Indies in his capacity as a “magistrate, merchant, manufacturer, planter, and miner”. Drawing on his experiences in business, he concluded that they were “pre-eminent among Asiatics for frugality, enterprise, and indomitable energy.” Tidman made these remarks in accounting for why Chinese migrants had come to dominate many sectors of the economies of South-East Asia, a region in which the indigenous Malay population was underrepresented in business.[[73]](#endnote-74)

Writing in 1878, the American diplomat Thomas Knox declared that the Chinese were superb entrepreneurs. Knox noted that the trade of Hong Kong and the treaty ports, which had initially been in the hands of European firms, had been taken over by the enterprising Chinese. The process had begun, he said, when the Western firms had hired native merchants, or compradors, to handle dealings with the local population. The typical comprador was “earnest, active, and frugal, and by strict attention to business and rigid economy he could save five or ten thousand dollars a year out of an income of one thousand.”[[74]](#endnote-75) The compradors used the capital they had amassed to go into business themselves and had now largely displaced their Western competitors, achieving a sort of revenge for the national humiliation of the Opium Wars. He reported that “the sugar trade of Amoy [Xiamen, Fujian] and Formosa [Taiwan] has gone into Chinese hands entirely” that flour exports from “San Francisco to China” were now handled by combinations of Chinese merchants.”[[75]](#endnote-76) Moreover, enterprising Chinese merchants were spreading throughout South East Asia and were in the process of taking over the trade of Singapore, Siam, and the Dutch East Indies, where they were “as keenly alive to industry and profit as anywhere else.”[[76]](#endnote-77) Similarly, Bento de França, who was an official of Portuguese government, attested in 1897 that “Chinese, in general, lead business with honour and integrity, being very circumspect in all their duties. The cooperative nature highly prevails between them: they don’t try business, except in rare occasions, through partnership” and concludes saying that they are “hard-worker, proactive, and skilful for business.”[[77]](#endnote-78) In his memoirs of his career in China, which had involved complicated dealings with business partners of many nationalities, Boston’s Forbes declared that “I cannot recall any acts of dishonesty on the part of the leading Chinese merchants, and I might cite several of great liberality.”[[78]](#endnote-79)

In 1899, Émile Bard, a businessman who had previously served as president of the municipal council in Shanghai’s French Concession, spoke of the “grandes aptitudes commerciales” of the Chinese population.[[79]](#endnote-80) Bard, who described his book as the first French-language study of China by a businessmen presented the Chinese merchants in a more positive light.[[80]](#endnote-81) Bard’s work would have left the attentive reader with no doubt that the “espirit commercial” was alive and well in China. Indeed, Bard attacked those Western authors who denigrated the Chinese simply because their cultures were somewhat different from those of Europe. It was true, he wrote, that the Chinese write vertically while European write from left to right, but these superficial differences did not make the Chinese inferior. Bard mocked the ethnocentrism displayed by many Westerners in China by referring to a comedy in which a Frenchman travels to England and is morally outraged to find that the English word for “bread” is different from that in French.[[81]](#endnote-82)

In 1908, Hosea Ballou Morse, a Canadian-born officer of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, praised the “business capacity and foresight of the Chinese merchant” and used the ancient silk road route between Asia and Europe as proof of their dynamism. Alluding the historic Silk Road route that had once been the major thoroughfare between Asia and Europe, he remarked “the same enterprise that built up the foreign trade by land” was also applied to the “development of internal trade between provinces the size of kingdoms.”[[82]](#endnote-83) Morse stressed that Chinese entrepreneurs were quick to adopt new technologies the moment their rulers authorized them.[[83]](#endnote-84) He commended the dynamism of the “enterprising merchants, foreign and native alike, of Tientsin” who had overcome a poor natural harbour to build up a thriving commerce.[[84]](#endnote-85) Similarly, Thomas R. Jernigan of Standard Oil described the Chinese as “merchants by nature” in his book on business methods in China.[[85]](#endnote-86) He also reminded his readers that there was “authentic evidence that the Chinese understood and practiced as system of banking long before the inhabitants of Western nations.”[[86]](#endnote-87)

As was noted above, the prevalence of pseudo-scientific racism in this period clearly affected how some Western policymakers and academics thought about the Chinese. However, there is little evidence that many Western business people resident in China actually used these theories to understand Chinese entrepreneurship. Indeed, to the extent to which Social Darwinist ideas influenced how Westerners living in the region thought about Chinese business people, it was to underscore the economic superiority of the Chinese over other Asian groups. Such ideas were especially common in Malaya, which had seen an influx of Chinese settlers. In 1893, William Hood Treacher, the British Resident in Selangor, a nominally independent Malay sultanate, declared that the indigenous “Malays are unenterprising” and that they faced “the danger of their being pushed altogether aside in the struggle for existence by more enterprising and energetic peoples,” such as the Chinese who had already taken control of the local mining industry.[[87]](#endnote-88)

 Another important way in which contemporary Western writers challenged Orientalism was to point to differences in the level of entrepreneurship within the Chinese population. Establishing that some Chinese regions or dialect groups were more entrepreneurial than others undermined the Orientalist view that the Chinese were a monolithic and non-entrepreneurial group. Throughout the period under consideration, Western observers singled out the Cantonese as a particularly enterprising subset of the Chinese population. In 1849, Henry Charles Sirr, an Irish-born diplomat, singled out Xiamen as a place that had produced a disproportionate number of China’s most “enterprising and wealthy merchants.” Men hailing from this region had spread themselves “all along the coast of China” and had established “commercial houses in many parts of the eastern archipelago.”[[88]](#endnote-89) A few years later, the British trade superintendent in China also described the people of Xiamen as an “enterprising race” in which the typical “ordinary labourer” was “ambitious of elevating himself in the social scale.” He also remarked that the “transformation from the labourer to the artizan class take place with more rapidity” in this country than in any other in the world.”[[89]](#endnote-90) In 1864, the diplomat James Mackay reported to Robert Hart that much of the trade of the Yangtze region had fallen into the hands of merchants from southern China, “where enterprise and capital seem to be combined in a manner unknown in the North.”[[90]](#endnote-91) Another British diplomat reported that “the English merchants established in the northern ports” had suffered due to the “competition of the Cantonese and other southern merchants who have sprung into existence under the recent system.”[[91]](#endnote-92)

In 1877, the British diplomat Alexander S. Harvey said that while “the people in the neighbourhood of Kiungchow [Qiongzhou, Hainan] are well disposed and friendly,” they were “inferior in physique and enterprise” to the Cantonese, who had “supplied the principal merchants and best energy” in Hainan’s largest city. [[92]](#endnote-93) Writing in 1904, Thomas Jernigan, who had recently retired from Standard Oil’s China operations, drew a sharp distinction between the northern and southern Chinese in his book on Chinese business. In his view, the southern Chinese were more enterprising than the northerners. Jernigan criticized other Western authors for having depicted the Chinese as homogenous.[[93]](#endnote-94) Jernigan’s comment thus served to undercut the Orientalist stereotype that all Chinese people were passive and non-entrepreneurial simply by virtue of being Asians. Although his distinction between northern and southern Chinese risked creating its own set of stereotypes that obscured variation between individual merchants, it did have the effect of undermining the Orientalist perspective evident in other contemporary Western accounts of Chinese entrepreneurship.

 Towards the end of the period covered by this paper, a new element entered into Western depictions of Chinese entrepreneurship, namely, a growing concern about agreements designed to limit competition between Chinese business people. We suspect that the growing tendency of Western observers of Chinese entrepreneurship to focus on anti-competitive practices was driven by events in their home societies rather than developments on the ground in China. Following the passage of the celebrated Sherman Anti-Trust Act by the US Congress in 1890, Anglophone observers began to identify the prevalence of price-fixing arrangements and other agreements in restraint of trade as the major barrier to China’s commercial development. As historians such as Richard von Glahn and William T. Rowe have observed, the institutions Westerners labelled “guilds” (*gongsuo* or “public halls” in Chinese) had long regulated trade in many Chinese localities.[[94]](#endnote-95) Guilds were thus nothing new in 1890. However, Western accounts of Chinese entrepreneurship did not begin to focus to the guilds’ efforts to limit competition until so-called agreements in restraints of trade had become a major political issue in the United States. These extended comparisons between US trusts and Chinese guilds underscored the fundamental similarity between Chinese and Western business people and thus challenged the Orientalist depiction of China as exotic. The anti-competitive practices explanation for the retardation of Chinese entrepreneurship undercut the aforementioned theories that the root causes of China’s economic problems were the nation’s failure to adopt Christianity, some other feature of Chinese culture, or the supposed biological inferiority of Asians. The anti-competitive practice paradigm suggested that what China really needed was a good strong dose of anti-trust legislation.

 The first application in print of the anti-competitive practices paradigm to understanding Chinese business was by Harold Edward Gorst, a British writer whose 1899 book explicitly compared the anti-competitive practices of the guilds of China with the oligopolistic trusts that had recently emerged in the United States, Britain, and other Western countries. Like the American trusts, China’s guilds crushed their competition without the benefit of statutory monopolies or other assistance from the State, using techniques such as boycotts of renegade members. Gorst wrote that it was common “nowadays for large companies” in the West “to systematically crush the smaller fry” in the same industry so as to gain control “of the market by the ruin of less powerful and wealthy competitors… But the Chinese guilds can strike swifter and more crushing blows than any of the millionaire syndicates floated here.”[[95]](#endnote-96) Gorst complained that China’s excessively powerful merchants were generally “unhindered by the central government” and had captured local officials.[[96]](#endnote-97) His explanation suggested that the dynamic in China was similar to that of the United States, where anti-competitive trusts such as Standard Oil were alleged to have captured entire state legislatures.

Gorst’s theory was repeated by a Canadian-born author, Hosea Ballou Morse, in his 1908 book on *The Trade and Administration of China* and his 1909 work on *The Gilds of China,* both ofwhich documented the cartel-like and trust-like practices of the guilds*.*[[97]](#endnote-98)The sinister efforts of the guilds to limit competition were also discussed in *Anglo-Chinese Commerce,* a 1907 book by Arthur John Sargent, the British academic who helped to found the Bachelor of Commerce programme at the London School of Economics.[[98]](#endnote-99) The aforementioned Thomas Jernigan declared the anti-competitive practices enforced by guilds were impoverishing China as a whole. In his account, any Chinese merchant who displeased the guild by competing too vigorously risked painful social exclusion.[[99]](#endnote-100) In a book published in London in 1904, Jernigan called on the Chinese government to “have the courage to remove” these obstructions to free competition, although he predicted that Chinese officials were unlikely to take action, since too many of them were on “friendly terms” with the guilds.[[100]](#endnote-101)

Jernigan appears to have been calling for the introduction of some form of anti-trust legislation into China to break up mercantile cartels, which is somewhat ironic given that Standard Oil, his former employer, would soon be broken up by antitrust action by the US government.[[101]](#endnote-102) Jernigan’s book does not indicate what he thought about Standard Oil’s anti-competitive practices in the United States. What it does suggest is that Jernigan was among the Westerners who quickly applied new theories used for understanding business in their own societies to the analysis of Chinese entrepreneurship. In applying the anti-competitive practices paradigm in this way, Jernigan and other underscored the similarity between Chinese and Western business people, thereby challenging the Orientalist tendency to exaggerate the differences between East and West.

# Conclusion

This paper has argued that while some contemporary Western authors certainly described Chinese entrepreneurship in terms that were entirely consistent with Orientalist ideas about Chinese stagnation and passivity, other observers of Chinese business challenged Orientalism by stressing that Chinese people, or at least some dialect groups in China, were actually extremely entrepreneurial. Our research, therefore, challenges the view that the hegemony of Orientalist ideas in contemporary discourses about Chinese entrepreneurship was uncontested. Simply put, not all Westerners who wrote about entrepreneurship in late Qing China looked at Chinese business people through an Orientalist lens. Cannadine showed that there was tremendous heterogeneity in how Victorian and Edwardian Britons viewed individuals from the subject races of their colonial Empire. We have shown that Westerners who discussed Chinese entrepreneurship in this period had similarly diverse attitudes.

This paper suggests directions for further historical research projects, both qualitative and quantitative. The first possible project would involve using Historical Big Data research methods, such as text-mining large number of digitized primary sources, to determine the extent to which the competing discourses identified above were widespread in Western cultures in this period. The research methods associated with Historical Big Data are now providing fresh insights into older questions and it is possible that they could be usefully applied here.[[102]](#endnote-103) As we noted in the introduction, the thesis of this paper is that it would be wrong to think that all Western depictions of Chinese entrepreneurs from this period were informed by Orientalist, racist, and otherwise discriminatory ideas. Many of the texts discussed above actually challenged these discriminatory ideas. A critic of our paper might respond to our claim by saying that while we have demonstrated that some Western writers in this period viewed Chinese business people in a non-racist and non-colonialist fashion, these individuals were statistically unrepresentative of either the societies from which they came or of the Western expatriate population in China. Such a critic might point out that many of the relevant writings from this period have not survived due to war and other hazards and that the texts we examined in research libraries thus represented only a small cross-section of the texts from the treaty-port era in which Westerners discussed Chinese entrepreneurs.

We will concede that it is possible that the non-Orientalist writers we have found were statistical outliers, but we suspect that liberal, non-Orientalist views were fairly common among Western business people in late Qing China and that the texts we have found were tolerably representative. Our search in research libraries for primary sources in which Chinese entrepreneurs were discussed was reasonably comprehensive and turned up a significant number of non-Orientalist texts, as Table 1 indicates. There is no evidence of systemic bias in the survival of relevant texts has been discovered that would lead one to think that non-Orientalist texts would today be over-represented in the holdings of the British Library, the Bibliothèque François-Mitterrand, and the other libraries we used. However, only Historical Big Data research methods would allow to us to reach hard conclusion about the relative popularity of Orientalist and non-Orientalist viewpoints in this historical period. Such research could also allow us to test the hypothesis that English-speakers in Treaty-Port China were more likely to subscribe to Orientalist or racialist ideas than Portuguese or French speakers in the same period.

Our paper points to another avenue for future research. Now that we have a better understanding of the heterogeneity of ideas about Chinese entrepreneurship that were articulated by Western expatriates in this era, we are in a position to investigate how this heterogeneity influenced the actual business strategies of various Western firms in China and the subsequent performance of such firms. The performance of Western firms in treaty-port China was highly heterogeneous. Some went bankrupt, while others became highly profitable MNCs that still survive. Some economists have theorized that market forces tend to penalize firms whose managers indulge in a taste for discrimination or who allow discriminatory attitudes to distort business judgment.[[103]](#endnote-104) Psychologists who study business-decision making use the concept of the “stereotype tax”, which is a penalty that individuals pay whenever they harbor prejudicial attitudes towards members of otherized groups. This stereotype tax is distinct from the costs that stereotyping imposes on the members of the otherized group.[[104]](#endnote-105) We can apply the concept of the stereotype tax to thinking about the factors that influenced why some Western firms in late Qing China were more successful than others. If we were to accept that accepting racist or Orientalist ideas would increase one’s liability to pay the stereotype tax, one could hypothesize that those Western businessmen in late Qing China whose thinking was influenced by Orientalism and racialism were less successful than those of rival Western businessmen who did not to use these ideologies to understand the Chinese.

In other words, we would predict that Western businessmen whose views of the Chinese were characterized by the absence of colonialist and/or racist ideas outperformed those Western businessmen whose thinking was clouded by these ideologies. There may be sufficient surviving data either to test this hypothesis in a rigorous quantitative fashion or to investigate it using qualitative case studies. A quantitative test of this hypothesis might involve finding data about as set of Western businessmen resident in Chinese treaty ports, determining each individual’s attitudes to the Chinese via signatures to anti-Chinese petitions, and then seeing if there is a correlation between expressed anti-Chinese attitudes and firm survival and/or firm performance. The qualitative investigation of whether and how Orientalist ideas affected Western business practices in late Qing China might involve either the study of the structuring of contracts with Chinese business partners or the development of these firms’ marketing strategies. Such research would likely involve the archives of the Western firms that were active in China in this period, such as Jardine Matheson, Standard Oil, and HSBC. Although extensive work using these corporate archives has certainly been undertaken by historians using other theoretical frames,[[105]](#endnote-106) nobody has approached this set of archival records seeking to answer the specific research question raised in the previous paragraph.

One the basis of our finding that the attitudes towards the Chinese of nineteenth-century Westerners were heterogeneous rather than monolithically Orientalist, we are inclined to venture a speculative explanation that links attitude diversity to firm performance and survival. Many of today’s multinational firms originated in the heyday of imperialism, but only some of the great multinationals of the pre-1914 have survived to the present. Among historians of international business, there is considerable interest in trying to explain why some historic multinationals survived and others did not. As Robert Fitzgerald’s magisterial work of synthesis *The Rise of the Global Company* has made clear, a range of factors must be considered in accounting for why a given historic multinational firm made it to the present while a similarly situated competitor did not. Although Fitzgerald occasionally refers to racial ideologies, differences between firms in the degree to which their managers subscribed to ethnic stereotypes, and thus forced their shareholders to pay the “stereotype tax,” are not part of Fitzgerald’s interpretative framework.[[106]](#endnote-107) If subsequent historical research finds that Western businessmen whose thinking was strongly influenced by ethnic stereotypes were outperformed by those Western businessmen whose attitudes were more liberal, Fitzgerald’s explanatory framework will have to be expanded to include work on the history of racial discrimination and the stereotype tax.

 Another possible research agenda suggested by this paper would be the examination of how colonialist ideologies influenced Western depictions of entrepreneurship in other colonized societies in Asia and in Africa. For instance, we have shown that Westerners considered merchants from some regions of China to be more entrepreneurial and dynamic than those from other regions. Did Westerners draw similar distinction between the business behaviour of different African tribes or of Indian castes? If so, how did Western business people apply such distinctions in commercial decision making? We need research that can answer these two questions. We would then be able to see how such depictions influenced the strategies of Western firms and entrepreneurs in an era when the costs of moving goods, people, and ideas were falling dramatically.[[107]](#endnote-108)

 Gender analysis may allow scholars to build on this paper, for as postcolonial scholars have observed, colonialist ideologies frequently “gendered” non-Western populations by associating them with stereotypically female traits.[[108]](#endnote-109) While the traits that some Westerners associated with Chinese entrepreneurs, such as passivity and a lack of commercial drive and ambition, would certainly seem to correspond to stereotypical femininity, none of the primary sources we looked at directly addressed gender roles. Sadly, none of the texts listed in Table 1 discussed the role of female Chinese entrepreneurs.[[109]](#endnote-110) We believe that there may be room for additional research that examines how gender and colonialism intersected in Western representations of female entrepreneurs from China and other non-Western cultures.

We close the paper by touching on the issue of social memory (i.e., how non-academics in China today remember this period). After 1989, the Chinese government launched its Patriotic Education campaign. This well-funded operation teaches Chinese people that their country was subjected to extreme oppression by essentially demonic Western business and military interests during the nineteenth century. The campaign serves to keep alive memories of the Opium War and the subsequent century of humiliation.[[110]](#endnote-111) Ashas noted, the Manichean view of history embodied in the patriotic education narrative ignores evidence that some Western and Chinese individuals had cooperative and mutually respectful relations during the era of the Opium WarsThe more nuanced view of Western attitudes towards the Chinese presented in our paper has implications for how non-academics ought to view of the Sino-Western commercial relationship in this period. Our research findings, which show that Westerners in China were not monolithically Orientalist and racist, contribute to the development of a more balanced view of this important period in the history of capitalism.

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1. Feuerwerker, “The foreign presence in China”; Nield, *China’s Foreign Places*; Bickers and Jackson, *Treaty Ports in Modern China*. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Bergère, “The Chinese bourgeoisie, 1911–37,” 729. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Hsiao, *China's Foreign*. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. These works include Walker, *The history of black business in America*; Rosenthal, ‘‘From Memory to Mastery”; Beckert, *Empire of cotton*. The movement is surveyed in Rockman, “What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?”; Sven Beckert et al., “Interchange”; Lipartito, ‘‘Connecting the Cultural and the Material in Business History.’’ [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Decker, “The silence of the archives”; Lubinski, “Liability of Foreignness.”  [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Pak, *Gentlemen Bankers*, 165-168 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Hunter, *Deficient in Commercial Morality?*. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. For a gateway into the literature on postcolonial theory, see Childs and Williams, *An* *Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Lewis and Wigen, *The Myth of Continents,* 47-69, 82. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Schumpeter defined entrepreneurs as “individuals who exploit market opportunity through technical and/or organizational innovation,” in *The Theory of Economic Development,* 99-102. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. For further explanation on the term “entrepreneurship”, see: Jones and Wadhwani, “Entrepreneurship;” Wadhwani and Lubinski, “Reiventing Entrepreneurial History.” [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Hobson, *The Eurocentric*. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Lewis and Wigen, *The myth of continents*, 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Bickers, “Shanghailanders.” [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*; Bickers, *Britain in China*; Scott, *China and the international system,* 60; Mawdsley, “Fu Manchu versus Dr Livingstone”; Blue, “Gobineau on China.” [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 38-9, 320; Gyory, *Closing the Gate*; Auerbach, “Margaret Tart.” [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Hevia, *English lessons*; Scott, *China and the International System,* 181. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Keevak, *Becoming Yellow;* Orser, *The Lives of Chang and Eng*. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Wang, “The Legacy of Historical Memory.” [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East,* 15. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Matos, *The Colours of the Empire*; Lesser, “Neither Slave nor Free”; Priest, “Imperial Exchange”; Michel, “Colonisation et défense nationale”; Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, 28-30. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. S.G. Rathbone in Shanghai to W. Rathbone Junior in Liverpool, 13 May 1850 in University of Liverpool Library Special Collections, Rathbone Papers. RP XXIV.3.5. See also T. Moncrief to J. Worthington, 27 November 1849 in RP XXIV.3.4. For the history of the Rathbone family, see Marriner, *Rathbones of Liverpool*. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Dayer, *Finance and Empire*, 21-22, 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid.,21. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Hao, *Comprador in Nineteenth Century China,* 10-12; Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Networks*, 13-15 ; Cox, “The Changing Nature of Sino-Foreign Business Relationships, 1842-1941”; Cox et al., “Compradors, Firm Architecture and the 'Reinvention' of British Trading Companies”; McWatters et al., “Family business.” [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Chan, *Merchants, Mandarins, and Modern Enterprise*, 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, 123; Trescott and Xu, *The history of the introduction*. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Liu, “Revisiting Hanyeping Company.” [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Hao, *The Commercial Revolution*. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. See surveys of the literature in Von Glahn, *An Economic History of China*; Zan and Deng, “Micro foundations in the Great Divergence.” [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Koll’s work includes: *From Cotton Mill to Business Empire*. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Godley and Hang, “Collective financing among Chinese.” [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Chan, *Business expansion*. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. See for instance: Cheng, *Banking in Modern China*; Cochran and Hsieh, *The Lius of Shanghai*. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Yuan et al “The development of Chinese accounting.” [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Motono, *Conflict and cooperation*. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Network*. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Cochran, *Big Business in China*. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Clarke, *Oriental enlightenment*. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Mungello, *The Great Encounter*, 122; Millar, “Revisiting the Sinophilia/Sinophobia Dichotomy.” [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Smith, *An Inquiry*, 126. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Venturi, “Oriental Despotism”; Rubiés, “Oriental Despotism and European Orientalism.” [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 31-33. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Huc, *L'empire chinois,* 102. [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Smiles, *Self-Help*. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Smiles, *Men of Innovation and Industry*. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. Smiles, *Self-Help*, 22, 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., 253, 294-5. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Searle, *Morality*; McCraw, *Prophets of Regulation*; Rodgers, *Atlantic crossing*. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. Nield, *China’s Foreign Places*. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Bergère, *Histoire de Shanghai*. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Wong, “Interport printing enterprise.” [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Hou, *Foreign Investment*, 84; Kirby, Germany and Republican China, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Western discussions of Chinese entrepreneurship that appeared in unpublished texts (e.g., private correspondence) were outside the scope of our research project since our focus was on debates that took place in the Habermasian public sphere. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Huc, “*Journey Through China*,” 81-86, 86. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
57. “Report of the delegates of the Shanghae General Chamber of Commerce,” 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
58. Eitel, *Europe in China*, 569. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
59. Ibid., ii, v. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
60. Ibid., 167. See also Eitel, *Feng-Shui.* [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
61. Eitel, *Europe in China,* 505, 558. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
62. Ibid., 558. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
63. Sargent, *Anglo-Chinese,* 133. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
64. Ibid., 269. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
65. Ibid., 189. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
66. Sampaio, “A chave do commercio de Macau está, por assim dizer, nas mãos dos chins. Activos e intelligentes, hão sabido conservar a posse desta fonte de riqueza.” “The key to Macau commerce is, so to say, in the hands of the Chinese. Active and intelligent, know how to retain possession of this source of wealth.” Translated by authors. Sampaio, *Os chins de Macau*, 114. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
67. Sampaio “*Os chins, no que toca ao commercio, conduzem-se em geral com honra e probidade, porque, conhecendo o grande alcance destas qualidades quando se trata de tão rico manancial, são admiravelmente circumspectos em todas as suas contas,*” Ibid., 115. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
68. Andrade, *Cartas*, 142. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
69. Hearn, “China and the Western World,” 461. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
70. Alabaster, “Report of the Trade of the Port of Hankow,” 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
71. Hao, *The Commercial Revolution*, 318-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
72. Thomson, *Illustrations of China*, 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
73. Tidman, discussing a paper on “Queensland and Chinese Immigration.” [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
74. Knox, “John Comprador,” 427-34, 429. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
75. Ibid., 431. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
76. Ibid., 433. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)
77. França, *Macau e seus habitantes*, 172. [↑](#endnote-ref-78)
78. Forbes, *Personal Reminiscences*, 368. [↑](#endnote-ref-79)
79. Bard, *Les Chinois*, 226. [↑](#endnote-ref-80)
80. Ibid., 21-23, 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-81)
81. Ibid., 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-82)
82. Morse, *The Trade*, 18, 311. [↑](#endnote-ref-83)
83. Ibid., 18, 329. [↑](#endnote-ref-84)
84. Ibid., 18, 215. [↑](#endnote-ref-85)
85. Jernigan, *China’s Business*, 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-86)
86. Ibid., 44. [↑](#endnote-ref-87)
87. Treacher, *Straits Settlements*, 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-88)
88. Sirr, *China and the Chinese*, 138. [↑](#endnote-ref-89)
89. Winchester, “British Consulate, Amoy,” 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-90)
90. James Mackay to Robert Hart, 28 November 1864, *Commercial reports*, 127. [↑](#endnote-ref-91)
91. Lay, “General Observations” 22 February 1866, 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-92)
92. Harvey, “Report on Trade,”51. [↑](#endnote-ref-93)
93. Jernigan, *China’s Business*, 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-94)
94. Rowe, *Hankow*, 264-282; Von Glahn, *The Economic History of China*, 395. [↑](#endnote-ref-95)
95. Gorst, *China*, 188. [↑](#endnote-ref-96)
96. Ibid., 113, 116-119. [↑](#endnote-ref-97)
97. Morse, *The Trade*, 74, 170, 252; Morse, *The Gilds of China*. [↑](#endnote-ref-98)
98. Sargent, *Anglo-Chinese*, 202, 204, 287. [↑](#endnote-ref-99)
99. Jernigan, *China’s Business,* 104. [↑](#endnote-ref-100)
100. Ibid., 112, 54. [↑](#endnote-ref-101)
101. Chandler, *Scale and Scope*, 97. [↑](#endnote-ref-102)
102. Winters, “Tackling complexity”; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, François-Mitterrand, Panel on “La longue durée en débat,” 2 October 2015; Edelstein, “Intellectual history.” [↑](#endnote-ref-103)
103. Becker, *The Economics of Discrimination*; Lang and Lehmann, “Racial Discrimination.” [↑](#endnote-ref-104)
104. Chugh, "Societal and managerial implications of implicit social cognition". [↑](#endnote-ref-105)
105. E.g., Cochran, *Encountering Chinese Networks*; Horesh, *Shanghai's bund and beyond*. [↑](#endnote-ref-106)
106. Fitzgerald, *The rise of the global company,* p. 24, 242. [↑](#endnote-ref-107)
107. Topik and Wells, *Global Markets Transformed*. [↑](#endnote-ref-108)
108. Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity*. [↑](#endnote-ref-109)
109. About the role of Chinese women during the late imperial period, see: Choi, Chi-cheung, “Stepping out?” [↑](#endnote-ref-110)
110. Wang, *Never forget national humiliation*. [↑](#endnote-ref-111)