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Travel Along the Mobius Strip: Somerset Maugham and Gu Hongming East of Suez

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During his 1919–20 trip to China, English writer Somerset Maugham paid a special visit to Gu Hongming, an Edinburgh-educated Chinese philosopher and so-called 'Confucian Sage'. By exploring the enigmatic interactions between Maugham and Gu in the context of colonial travel, this article illustrates the important role of psychological projection in the exchanges among elite travellers during an age of empire. Beyond a simple Orientalist or Occidentalist approach, the author proposes a new framework modelled on the geometric puzzle of the 'Mobius strip', a twisted and closed one-sided surface, to highlight the intersubjective nature of the East–West continuum. At first glance, East and West, as in the writings of Maugham and Gu, are on opposite sides of the strip, appearing static and well defined to each other at any given moment. However, the paradox of a Mobius strip lies in its twirling and continuous motion: East and West are constantly interacting, defining one another through contacts like Gu's and Maugham's, and actually merge as one object. As the transcultural processes of colonial travel created contacts between elites, their intersubjective encounters melded East and West in the co-construction of the binary. As such, East and West are always paradoxically defined together.

Keywords: Somerset Maugham; Gu Hongming; Mobius strip; colonial travel; psychological projection

Between 1919 and 1920, Somerset Maugham, a veteran traveller and one of the most popular English writers of the time, took a four-month trip to China.[1] During the trip, he paid a special visit to Gu Hongming (Ku Hung-ming) (辜鴻銘1857–1928), an Edinburgh-educated Chinese philosopher living in Beijing.[2] The meeting left such a deep impression on Maugham that he devoted a twelve-page polished account on the philosopher in his 1922 travel book *On a Chinese Screen*. The book consists of fifty-eight short, supposedly unedited sketches of figures he encountered in China, most of whom were European expatriates. The piece on Gu Hongming stands out for its length and the more studied nature of the account.[3] Despite the initial strong interest,

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Maugham was greatly disappointed towards the end, calling the philosopher a 'pathetic figure'.[4] According to the English writer, the Chinese philosopher insisted on giving him a calligraphy poem in Chinese, which turned out to be an erotic love poem.

Why did Maugham insist on visiting Gu Hongming in particular, an eccentric conservative who supported monarchy and Confucianism in Republican China? And why was Gu so determined in presenting Maugham, a renowned English writer and visitor, with an erotic poem as a gift? What does this particular historical and textual encounter tell us about the actual and symbolic exchanges between British and Chinese elites and their impacts on each other in the early twentieth century? This article explores the enigmatic interactions between Maugham and Gu in the context of colonial travel.[5] Part I, 'On a Chinese Screen', examines Maugham's narrative on the philosopher and China, and discusses its complex relationships with the political ideologies, social changes, and popular culture of the British Empire. Part II, 'The Enigmatic Poem', decodes Gu's gift to Maugham, the mysterious poem, by exploring the psychological impacts of colonialism on Gu, a former colonial elite and likely a Eurasian by origin who in his late twenties claimed a conversion to 'a Chinaman' again.[6] Altogether, the article illustrates the important role of psychological projection in the exchanges among elite travellers during an age of empire. While Western travellers like Maugham projected their own denied and undesired characteristics onto the East, colonial elites like Gu projected onto their imagined homelands the antithesis of what they saw as flawed Western civilisation. Beyond a simple Orientalist or Occidentalist approach, I propose a new framework modelled on the geometric puzzle of the 'Mobius strip', a twisted and closed one-sided surface, to highlight the intersubjective nature of the East–West continuum. At first glance, East and West, as in the writings of Maugham and Gu, are on opposite sides of the strip, appearing static and well defined to each other at any given moment. However, the paradox of a Mobius strip lies in its twirling and continuous motion: East and West are constantly interacting, defining one another through contacts like Gu's and Maugham's, and actually merge as one object. As the transcultural processes of colonial travel created contacts between elites, their intersubjective encounters melded East and West in the co-construction of the binary. As such, East and West are always paradoxically defined together.

I. On a Chinese screen

The Chinese philosopher in *On a Chinese Screen* 'was said to speak English and German with facility', and 'had been for many years secretary to one of the Empress Dowager's greatest viceroys'.[7] Despite the increasing number of Chinese going abroad to study since the second half of the nineteenth century, there were still only limited numbers of Confucian scholars who were Western-educated and world-renowned by 1920, and who so feverously criticised modern Western civilisation. Even fewer would fit Maugham's account of him as a stubborn throwback who still wore a *queue* and declared himself 'the last representative of the old China'.[8] Although no explicit name of the philosopher was mentioned by Maugham, his profile matches Gu Hongming, a graduate of Edinburgh University who boasted mastery of half a dozen classical and modern European languages, and who had worked for about twenty years as a private secretary for the powerful late Qing Viceroy Zhang Zhidong.

Gu Hongming was born on 19 June 1857 into a wealthy Chinese immigrant family in the British colony of Penang, Malaya. As a colonial subject from an elite

family, he received two years of formal English education in the Penang Free School, the oldest English school in the Straits Settlements. Gu then went to Scotland, studying at a local academy for approximately two years before receiving a degree of Master of Arts[9] in English literature at the University of Edinburgh in 1877. After nearly a decade studying and travelling in Europe, Gu Hongming returned to Penang around 1879. He then served in various positions in the colonial systems and foreign service in Hong Kong, Singapore, and China. In his late twenties Gu experienced a self-proclaimed conversion from 'an imitation Western man' to 'again a Chinaman'.[10] He regrew his *queue*, replaced Western suits with Chinese gowns, and started learning classical Chinese and Confucian Classics. From 1885 to 1909, Gu worked as private secretary to Zhang Zhidong. In the early twentieth century, Gu continued to endorse the Qing monarchical system even after the 1911 revolution successfully turned the country into a republic. Toward the end of his life he taught at the Department of English Literature at Peking University, the centre of the radical New Culture Movement, followed by his last four years of teaching, travelling, and lecturing in Japan and its colonies in Korea and Taiwan.[11]

The writings by Gu Hongming, a noted Confucian scholar in the Western world, had become popular in European metropolitan cities. By the 1920s his English works such as *The Spirit of the Chinese People* were translated into half a dozen languages and published by major presses in Shanghai, Tokyo, London, Paris, and New York.[12] His translations of the Confucian canon, such as *The Universal Order*,[13] were published in several editions by leading British and US publishers. Following the First World War, his earlier writings on the depravity of modern Western civilisation were seen as insightful and prophetic. His name often appeared together with Rabindranath Tagore and Leo Tolstoy in Western journals of the time as a principal spokesman of Chinese culture.[14]

It is possible that Maugham had read or heard about Gu before his trip to China, since he stated that 'here lived a philosopher of repute the desire to see whom [Gu] had been to me one of the incentives of a somewhat arduous journey.'[15] Despite his international fame, however, Gu was largely disliked and ignored by the new generation of Chinese intellectuals in the New Culture Movement, who were occupied by China's modernisation and Westernisation. In the radical environment of the early twentieth century, Gu's continuous loyalty to the bygone Qing monarchy and staunch support of Confucianism as the basis of the Chinese socio-political system easily won him the popular nickname of 'crazy Gu' (辜瘋子*Gu fengzi*).[16]

It is critical to examine why Maugham, a popular writer of the twentieth-century English world, was particularly drawn to Gu.[17] Maugham made his trip almost a decade after the overthrow of the imperial system and in the middle of what many call a period of Chinese Enlightenment that denigrated the teachings of Confucius. Other foreign celebrities, such as Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, and Hans Driesch who visited Republican China around the same time, were hosted by the new generation of leading intellectuals like Hu Shi, Xu Zhimo, and Zhang Junmai. Maugham's interest in an eccentric, 'reactionary' Oriental scholar is curious. In the writer's own words, Gu was a 'stubborn' and 'pathetic' figure who 'upheld the old China and the old school, the monarchy, and the rigid canon of Confucius'.[18] What exactly triggered his distinctive interests in Gu Hongming? How did the meeting affect Maugham?

We know that Maugham's interest in the East did not end when he left China. In September 1922, shortly after his return to England, a new play by Maugham opened at His Majesty's Theatre in London titled *East of Suez*.[19] The play transforms

Maugham's travel reflections into another idiom and in so doing transplants them into the centre of English popular literature. Although *East of Suez* has not yet received much scholarly attention, it is a compelling work that illustrates many elements of imperialist mentalities of the day. Maugham took the title of his play from Kipling's poem 'Mandalay': 'Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst, Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst.'[20] The story tells of a scandalous and tragic interracial love affair between a Eurasian woman and two Englishmen in Beijing. Daisy, the child of an expatriate British father and lower-class Chinese mother, is married to Harry, an English merchant. The other man in the love triangle is George, an Assistant Chinese Secretary of the British legation in Beijing. He is both Daisy's former lover and Harry's close friend. George, once a respected and promising colonial official, betrays his friend and becomes self-loathing. The other main male protagonist is Lee Tai Cheng,[21] a wealthy and evil Chinese merchant, who years ago bought Daisy as a concubine and who is now trying to get her back from the Englishmen by any means necessary.

In the play, Maugham draws heavily from stereotypical Chinaman images. Daisy's mother, Amah, a generic term for lower-class domestic servants in Western households in China, combines many quintessential 'Oriental characteristics'. She sells her own daughter as a concubine to Lee Tai Cheng. She steals from Westerners whenever she can, takes bribes, and assists in the plots that almost kill George. She speaks in 'broken' English and has no true religious belief, as evidenced by her multiple-time conversions to different Christian denominations. Maugham presents Daisy's mixed-race heritage - her 'half-caste' status - in a negative light and casts her as the fundamental cause of tragedies. Although Daisy is brought up as a lady with an authentic English education, dresses in Western clothes, eats Western food, and speaks English,[22] she is doomed to degrade into the 'lower yellow race'. Unable to act in a true English way, she corrupts good white men and causes their falling. The off-screen message is clear: not only do the mixed-race children inherit the worst of their parents' traits, the 'non-white race' will always be the determining factor in them.[23]

The play clearly shows Maugham's fear of miscegenation and hybridity. As with other travel writings of the time, Maugham's accounts of persons of mixed-race are informed by contemporary 'scientific' ideas about biological and cultural evolution. There was a widely shared belief in the scientific world at least until the 1930s that interbreeding between 'distant' races had disastrous procreative consequences. The 'half-caste' child was doomed to inherit the worst features of both parents.[24] The words of Major Leonard Darwin, President of the Eugenics Society and youngest son of Charles Darwin, illustrate some sentiments of the day. He warned the national leaders in 1923: 'Interbreeding between widely divergent races may result in the production of types inferior to both parent stocks.'[25] Since Maugham studied medicine and received his licence as a physician and surgeon at St Thomas's Hospital in London, he would have been exposed to those so-called scientific discussions that helped justify prejudices against mixed-race people. He also was likely influenced by the discourses on white men's contamination by the Orient, especially women. In his period of colonialism, it was commonly believed that 'native women bear contagions'; 'colonial men are susceptible to physical, mental and moral degeneration when they remain in their colonial posts too long.'[26] In such narratives, racial degeneration and miscegenation were inherently linked. It was through sexual contact with women of colour that European men '"contracted" not only disease but debased sentiments,

immoral proclivities and extreme susceptibility to decivilized states'.[27] Such common ideas may help to explain Maugham's perceptions of race and portraits of mixed-race people in *East of Suez*.

What is more interesting to me, other than the common fear of miscegenation in Maugham's portrait, is the striking similarities shared between the Chinese philosopher and the evil Chinese merchant. First, they are both extremely 'Oriental'. Gu Hongming appears dressed in a shabby Oriental gown, wearing a long *queue*, and has 'broken and discoloured' teeth. 'He was exceedingly thin, and his hands, fine and small, were withered and claw-like.' All seem to confirm the hearsay that 'he was an opium-smoker.'[28] Similarly, Lee Tai Cheng, 'dressed in a long black robe and a round black cap'[29], is an opium addict who keeps multiple concubines. Despite these essential 'Oriental traits', they both had thorough Western educations and mastered European languages. As with Gu, Lee Tai Cheng is a graduate of Edinburgh who spent eight years abroad, including visits to Oxford and Harvard, and speaks fluent English. Further, during the first and only direct encounter between Lee and George in the play, Lee bursts into a furious and lengthy attack that is taken directly from 'The Philosopher' in *On a Chinese Screen.* Lee, like Gu, remains loyal to the old China and Chinese culture and is hostile to Westerners. The images and voices of the two Chinamen, Gu, the old Confucian philosopher, and Lee, the wealthy Chinese villain, become conflated.

Is such a resemblance a result of literary borrowing and recreation, merely transforming the actual figure Gu Hongming to the literary character Lee Tai Cheng? Although Maugham did plan to use his overseas travels to collect materials, a more critical look at the narratives challenges such a simple explanation. The images of Gu Hongming and Lee Tai Cheng pose interesting structural parallels with the most famous Oriental danger of the day, Fu Manchu. Using arcane methods, the evil genius Dr Fu Manchu launches countless criminal activities in the Western world and always manages to escape. The Fu Manchu stories reached a phenomenal global success that has lasted to the present day, providing prototypes for future generations of Oriental criminals. Despite their Western educations, Fu Manchu, Gu and Lee Tai Cheng, are inscrutable to the Western mind. Fu Manchu's secret plots in underground London are beyond logical calculation and detection. The Chinese philosopher's words and behaviours also are beyond common sense. His supposedly farewell gift to the visitor turns out to be an erotic poem seemingly addressing a female prostitute. His 'dalliance in hidden places', the world of sing-song girls, made Maugham conclude that 'perhaps he sought but to elucidate the most inscrutable of human illusions.'[30] Fu Manchu's goal is to create 'a universal Yellow empire' by reversing the direction of the flow of power in the epistemological empire and ending the 'Great Game' once and for all.[31] Gu denounces Western civilisation and sees Confucianism as the universal basis of humanity. He, too, wants to 'sinicise' the world by propagating Confucian values and monarchical system in a missionary-like zeal.

It is unclear how much Maugham was directly influenced by the popular Fu Manchu genre. Nevertheless, it can be argued that there are actual and psychological links between Maugham's representations of Gu and Lee and the larger cultural context of the yellow-peril discourses and Limehouse literature. The Limehouse district in London's East End and part of the city's old Chinatown provided material for the literary world.[32] Newspaper reports, novels, and Hollywood films set in fictional Limehouse helped create and spread the yellow-peril images.[33] Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu book series[34], Thomas Burke's *Limehouse Nights*[35], and the 1919 silent film

Broken Blossoms[36] were all contemporaries of Maugham's works. While this literature popularised the Oriental criminal images, public fears were further confirmed by descriptions of trials involving Chinese criminals. For example, the case of 'Brilliant' Chang, a key figure in the dope-drama scandals of the 1920s, was widely publicised. Taken by the public to be a drug dealer, Brilliant Chang allegedly gave a young white woman the cocaine that facilitated her suicide. When further fuelled by the press, his case fed into the popular belief that Chinese men lured away English women and girls through gambling and drugs.[37] Although he was acquitted in this case, his seeming desirability by white women threatened the masculinity of their white male counterparts.[38] Still, in the public mind, yellow men and their existing or potential relationships with lower-class white women blurred social and racial boundaries, and threatened white purity and 'Englishness'. Owing to the popularity of this literature within which opium dens, gambling houses, and the white slave trade were the leitmotifs of East London's Chinatown, English readers at the end of the nineteenth century possessed a vivid mental image of evil Chinamen and their various deviant behaviours.[39]

Within the cultural context known as the yellow peril and Limehouse literature, themes of excessive sexual drive, opium addiction, exoticism, and threats to white communities were familiar Western portraits of the Orientals. Prominent writers of the day such as Charles Dickens, Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, and Rudyard Kipling all contributed to what Curtis Marez calls the opium-den literature.[40] For example, Wilde's interest in Oriental ornaments reveals their hierarchical relationship with the autonomous European fine arts, while homosexual panic and fear of Chinese retribution are explicit in Kipling's opium writings.[41] Like Wilde and Kipling, the Chinese presence in England also shaped Maugham's works. In 'The Opium Den' from *On a Chinese Screen*, Maugham describes 'a cheerful spot, comfortable, home-like and cosy', reminding him of 'the little intimate beerhouses of Berlin'. This is in contrast to the descriptions he has read in some novels that 'made his blood run cold'.[42] The lure and fear described here towards the opium den shows Maugham's familiarity with the opium-den narratives, as well as an inherent ambivalence towards the East. Even without a stated direct influence, his novels, plays, and books were actively functioning in a similar space as the concept of yellow peril within London's popular culture. *On a Chinese Screen* and *East of Suez* reached out to the same groups of middle-class audience, as part of the emergent British mass culture. Gu, Lee, and the yellow peril are therefore inherently linked in the minds of English readers of the time by the dangers each posed and fears they caused.

The essence of the yellow peril is closely connected to white men's damaged masculinity and the overall fear of miscegenation. Such rising sentiments should be understood within the socio-economic contexts of Britain in the post-First World War era, as a reaction to the increasing Chinese immigrants and intensified social and racial tensions in England and in the colonies.[43] Meanwhile, popular opium-den literature also reveals the simultaneous recognition of the reality of British conquest in Asia, the Opium Wars, and denial of such conquest and British responsibility for the opium trade. Such literature almost never mentions the Opium Wars. Nevertheless, it regularly includes Chinese characters who promote the pleasure of opium, therefore making the Chinese assume responsibility for the drug's consumption themselves.[44] The positions of England and China in this literature are reversed. By the late nineteenth century, the Chinese, who were victims of the forced opium trade, became perceived by the British as foreign devils that corrupted good English men

and women with drugs. Such ideological distortions were achieved through a type of psychological projection: that is, to project one's own undesired characters unto others. It was well known even at the time that members of the 'white race', which was supposed to be superior and civilised, acted unjustly and immorally in the East, a fact that was largely ignored or denied in the Western world. Ironically, Westerners often attributed these same qualities to the Easterners, now labelled as 'Oriental characteristics', and denounced them as the uncivilised Other.[45] In other words, they created an East as the opposite of their ideal self-image, who they hoped to be, rather than who they actually were. Despite its apparent success, such projection remains inherently problematic: what Western imperialists claim as Oriental characteristics are in fact their own. Therefore, the moment they create the evil and deviant Chinamen, they simultaneously denounce themselves.

Locating Maugham's travel writing within the realm of popular yellow-peril narratives provides a new way to answer the initial question: why did he choose to seek Gu out in the first place? In *On a Chinese Screen*, Maugham is primarily interested in the British in China rather than the Chinese. The book is filled with caricatures of Western expatriates in China, who live a luxurious and wasted life there, and remain ignorant and disinterested in knowing the real Chinese, fearing racial pollution through direct contact. For example, in one story, a socialist was a great fan of Bertrand Russell's 'Road to Freedom' and refused to use the rickshaw when he first came to China. However, he now has no problem kicking a rickshaw boy when the latter misses a turn.[46] In another story, an expatriate merchant spends many years in exile with little desire to return to Europe to see his family, although he deeply despises the Chinese.[47] Maugham's darkest satires are undoubtedly reserved for missionaries, who appear hypocritical, pathetic, and corrupted. A devoted missionary is unable to conquer his innate hatred for the Chinese, whom he is at the same time striving to convert.[48] A former medical missionary now amasses a fortune in China by overcharging the missions for land.[49] Such caricatures show Maugham's clear anxieties and concerns over the legitimacy and stability of the British Empire.

Maugham's travel book and play take place in the essentially old China, manifested in its narrow streets, rickshaw men, opium dens, and gambling houses, and resembles the familiar scenes of London's Chinatown in popular imagination. Like Fu Manchu, Gu is an anachronism who lives in the imperial past and who opposes the reform and revolutionary movements in the new China. To me, Maugham's writings reflect as much about his preoccupation with post-war England and the British Empire as they do about his impressions of China. As Chinese coolies were forced into mass consumption of opium and participation in the global capitalist system, this old China was viewed with similar imperial eyes as the ones towards India, Malaya, and Hong Kong in the empire, regarding their relationships to Britain. Similarly, his portraits of Gu are directly related to his perceptions of London's Chinatown criminals and commonly known narratives of the yellow peril. In other words, Maugham found in Republican Beijing a bygone old China, embodied by Gu Hong-ming, the China of coolies who consume opium and cohabit in London's East End. The nature of Maugham's projection, creating images of Chinamen including Gu and Lee as dangerous, immoral, and deviant, in fact results from Westerners' unacknowledged anxieties over their own amoral behaviours in China. Witnessing the internal social problems in England and fearing retribution by the Orientals, the meeting with the Chinese philosopher brought out much of a white man's deep anxieties over the empire, later projected onto the Chinese screen.

Maugham writes in his other well-known travel book *The Gentleman in the Parlour: A Record of a Journey from Rangoon to Haiphong*: 'I travel because I like to move from place to place, I enjoy the sense of freedom it gives me, it pleases me to be rid of ties, responsibilities, duties, I like the unknown ... I am often tired of myself and I have a notion that by travel I can add to my personality and so change myself a little. I do not bring back from a journey quite the same self that I took.'[50] The travels and writings did provide an escape from Maugham's then troubled relationship with his wife and family life, as well as ways to speak the unspeakable about his personal struggles and deep frustrations because of his homosexuality.[51] Totally absent from his account, Maugham was accompanied by Frederick Gerald Haxton, his long-term US lover throughout the China trip. In a way, journey to the East provided an outlet for Maugham's non-conformity and resistance to certain powerful ideologies of the day, whether those of sexuality and gender roles, or of political domination and military expansion.

Maugham's statement that 'I do not bring back from a journey a different self' seems to indicate his role as an innocent observer transformed via journey to the East. What he does not admit or realise is that his portraits of the East also come from the very centre of the metropole: he created the travel book through a complex web of projection. In other words, Maugham's intellectual and mental journey was not simply from Gu Hongming to Lee Tai Cheng, but rather from the Limehouse of London to China, then back to the metropole, from Fu Manchu to Gu Hongming and to Lee Tai Cheng, with each pair in constant dialogue with each other. As such, East and West become inherently interdependent and truly intertwined in their very existence and creation. In this way, it does not surprise us that on return, the British traveller's luggage was filled with treasures from the old China: 'porcelain, Ming figures, Chinese silks', 'a gold and jade necklace and a heap of chinchilla to make a cloak; a white squirrel fur coat and little blue coolie suit for five-year-old Liza'.[52]

II. The enigmatic poem

At the end of the meeting between Gu Hongming and Maugham described in *On a Chinese Screen*, the philosopher sent Maugham away with a calligraphy poem in Chinese. Replying to Maugham's initial refusal of a gift, Gu insisted: 'Men have short memories in these degenerate days. I should give you something more substantial.'[53] After finishing the calligraphy, Gu declined to translate it for his guest, replying that '*Tradutore - traditore*': 'You cannot expect me to betray myself.'[54] Some time after the visit, Maugham had a sinologist translate the calligraphy. It turned out to be an erotic love poem, normally addressing courtesans in Chinese literary genre. The poem has not received much attention among scholars, perhaps because of its apparent inscrutability as a farewell gift. Although some have studied Gu's meeting with Maugham,[55] none have decoded Gu's gift or fully explored the complexities of such interactions from both sides. I see the whole meeting as a staged performance by Gu Hongming and the poem as a key to understand his mentality.

The interaction begins with some episodes of 'misunderstanding' even before the actual meeting takes place. Gu refuses to come to see Maugham after his host sends a summons on behalf of Maugham for a meeting. After not hearing from the philosopher for some time, Maugham sends a personal message to Gu asking forgiveness for the original letter and requests permission to visit Gu at his home instead. Gu responds within hours in agreement. After an 'interminable' journey on a sedan chair

through the 'crowded' and 'deserted' streets, Maugham finally arrives at the destination.[56] Leaving Maugham to wait for some time alone in a cold living room, the philosopher finally enters, waving him to a chair and pouring out the tea. '"I am flattered that you wished to see me," he returned. "Your countrymen deal only with coolies and with compradores; they think every Chinese must be one or the other." I ventured into protest. But I had not caught his point. He leaned back in his chair and looked at me with an expression of mockery.'[57] In Maugham's account, the awkward and hostile atmosphere of their initial encounter continues through much of the visit. Finally, the long meeting, which is dominated by Gu's attack on Western civilisation, ends with the mysterious poem.

To explain the odd gift and decode the encounter, it is necessary to introduce the Chinese philosopher in more detail. Little is known about Gu's immediate family except that his father Gu Ziyun (Koh Chee Hoon) worked for a plantation owned by a Scottish entrepreneur named Forbes Scott Brown.[58] Gu's elder brother, Gu Hongde (Kaw Hong Take), set up a company in the new treaty port of Fuzhou, China. Gu's mother, presumably the primary child caretaker and crucial figure in Chinese family structure, remained curiously absent in Gu's writings. She is probably a Nyonya, Malay-Chinese creole from Southeast Asia.[59] Despite his 'Chinese' family background, Gu's education was thoroughly English. He attended the Penang Free School established by Colonial Chaplain R. S. Hutchins in 1816. As the school's aim was to train intermediaries for colonial rule, pupils primarily consisted of children of European settlers, colonial officials, and local elites. At about the age of thirteen Gu was taken to Scotland by his guardian, Forbes Scott Brown, to experience life in a foreign environment. Gu's family resided in Brown's mansion in Penang and kept a close relationship with the European employer. Forbes Brown was a son of David Brown from Scotland, a colonial pioneer in Penang, and a local woman, either Malay, Chinese, or a mixture of the two. There have been speculations about Brown's possible biological relationship with Gu.[60] The question, however, has never been thoroughly explored because of a lack of primary sources and the ambiguities of racial identities in the colonial age. The close relationships between Brown and Gu seem beyond a simple patronage, as Gu himself suggested. For example, in the Leith Academy where Gu attended before university, he lived in the Gardners' household, where the wife was a daughter of Forbes Scott, and where Brown's two sons had also been staying.[61] Furthermore, new archival records show that Brown financed Gu's stay in Europe and included Gu in his will together with his various racially mixed children.[62] Although difficult to prove, Gu is very likely Brown's bastard son and, consequently, a 'half-caste'.

In 1881 Gu is said to have experienced a 'conversion' in which he 'became again a Chinaman', when he met the Qing diplomat Ma Jianzhong in Singapore:

> My meeting with Ma Chien-chung at Singapore ... was a great event in my life. For it was he, - this Ma Chien-chung, who converted and made me become again a Chinaman. Although I had come back from Europe for more than three years, I had not yet entered and did not know the world of Chinese thought and ideas ... choosing to remain an *imitation* Western man ...
>
> Three days after my meeting with Ma Chien-chung, I sent in my resignation to the Colonial Secretary's Office, and, without waiting for an answer, I took the first steamer to my old home in Penang. There I told my cousin, the head and senior member of our family that I was willing to let my queue grow and wear Chinese clothes.[63]

This widely accepted narrative opens many possibilities for interpretations of Gu's radical identity transformation. Conventional scholarship often attributes the so-called return of the overseas Chinese to the homeland, such as Gu's proclaimed conversion, to a pre-existing patriotism and quintessential Chineseness. Such an image was strongly influenced by Sun Yat-sen, a diasporic Chinese himself, who is said to have famously hailed the overseas Chinese as 'the mothers of the [Chinese] Revolution'. In reality, however, diasporic figures' decision to 'return' to China was often more practical than ideological, especially for colonial elites, such as Gu, who had ample resources, strong ambitions, and multiple alternatives. These educated professionals were pragmatic and consciously utilised their plural identities and multiple nationalities as a means to generate opportunities for themselves. A strong desire for personal achievement was crucial in affecting their choices during a time when China offered chances to fulfil some of their ambitions that were otherwise difficult to achieve in the colonial system. While pragmatism played an important role in Gu's choice of 'returning', this article focuses on the more personal and psychological aspect of his so-called conversion.

In 1927, the year before his death, Gu explained his conversion to a *New York Times* reporter. The article quotes Gu as saying: 'I had a hard time becoming a Chinese ... for I could not become accustomed to the dirt and general disregard of physical comfort.' Gu went on to say:

> My first shock came when I was aboard the steamer returning from Penang. I had spent much time during the voyage expounding the beauty of Chinese poetry to several charming French women, and telling them of the marvels of China's culture. When we anchored at Penang a barge loaded with naked, sweating coolies approached our steamer, and when these French women asked me if those men were not Malays I had not the heart to admit that they were my own countrymen.

He then continued:

> I was similarly blind [as were many returning Chinese] when I first returned from my long years abroad ... At first I was ashamed to admit I was Chinese; now I am so proud of my heritage that I am conceited enough to think the rest of you are all barbarians.[64]

If we divert ourselves temporarily from the surface narrative of Gu's radical changes, what stands out in Gu's account of return is the picture of a young colonial elite flirting with 'several charming French women'. Gu was trying to impress the female passengers on board, by talking about 'the marvels of China's culture' and 'expounding the beauty of Chinese poetry', most likely in French.[65] The recounting of this episode could simply be Gu's fantasy. His description resembles Romantic travel literature where men defied the modern world with aristocratic disdain, seeking sexual escapades and heroism. A portrait of Lord Byron dressed proudly in Albanian clothes illustrates the early nineteenth-century point of view. Although Romanticism lost its earlier prominence in the Victorian era, Gu's intellectual writings show clear influence by thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Therefore, such a cultural borrowing and emulation would not be a surprise.

Despite the seeming resemblance, there is a fundamental difference between Gu and his Romantic heroes. For them, it was a duty to defend or serve the British Empire on behalf of its interests, and their explorations fulfilled both personal and national

missions.[66] What is problematic in Gu's case is that China was a recent victim of Western imperialist expansions, while Malaya had been subject to British control for over a century. Therefore, Gu's actual or imagined heroic conquest of white women and foreign lands reversed the hegemonic colonial order and was doomed to fail.

Fantasising as a Romantic hero on the ship, Gu asserted his cultural pedigree and elite social class to his lady friends by reciting Chinese poems and speaking in French, English, or other European languages. When confronted by the question regarding the Chinese coolies, 'Are they Malays,' however, Gu's fantasy collapsed and permanently failed. The contrasts between the great Chinese poetry and the dirty coolies are not purely aesthetic, but also ideological. Overall, Chinese coolies were at the bottom of the colonial system and global labour chain. Gu might have seen his own position and fate through the images of Malays in the eyes of those French women. They saw the 'naked, sweating' bodies of the coolies who were objectified into an exotic, erotic, and inferior existence. In the hierarchical colonial system, the exclusive concept of race became so powerful that it made Gu's masculinity and class immediately and permanently impotent. An Edinburgh education and the mastery of European classics were valuable, yet insufficient. As a quintessentially elitist, such a realisation of his kinship with Chinese coolies could be devastating.[67] Gu was forced to embrace his Chineseness violently and shamefully as a racial concept and undeniable reality. The despair of loss of masculinity turned into resentment, expressed in a provocation via a *New York Times* reporter: 'I now think of all of you as barbarians.'[68]

The Gu before transformation fits the category of 'an imitation Western man'. He cut off his *queue* and adopted Western clothes and hairstyle. He took English literature as his major, acquiring a classical education and perfect English. He fantasised about white women. After the conversion, Gu became an anachronism. He regrew his *queue*, put on antiquated Qing costumes, and practised his daily rituals of riding a rickshaw in such clothes for a city patrol. The charming French women, who used to symbolise the high culture of Europe, representing idealistic women and civilisation, were now degraded into the category of 'barbarians'. The desired yet dominating white women were in parallel structure with the very Western society that Gu tried to enter. By replacing his admiration for white women with his obsession with bound-feet Chinese women, Gu displaced his desire to be a Western man by creating and possessing authentic Chineseness. The conversion, Gu's national awakening and identity transformation, can therefore be seen as partly caused by his tainted masculinity.[69] The transformation is a type of psychological-turned-political resistance against colonial ideologies that had not only made him an inferior Chinaman but that also had deprived him of his masculinity. By recovering the highly symbolic *queue*, Gu achieved personal as well as national redemption.[70]

When one takes into account Gu's life experience and resistance to colonialism, the two poems the philosopher gave as a parting gift to Maugham in 1919 take on an underlying meaning.

> You loved me not: your voice was sweet;
> Your eyes were full of laughter; your hands were tender.
> And then you loved me: your voice was bitter;
> Your eyes were full of tears; your hands were cruel.
> Sad, sad that love should make you
> Unlovable.

I craved the years would quickly pass
That you might lose
The brightness of your eyes, the peach-bloom of your skin,
And all the cruel splendour of your youth.
Then I alone would love you
And you at last would care.
The envious years have passed full soon
And you have lost
The brightness of your eyes, the peach-bloom of your skin,
And all the charming splendour of your youth.
Alas, I do not love you
And I care not if you care[71]

The poems appear to be one's farewell to a former lover, her physical charm and romantic love. But it can also be read as Gu's statement on his complete rejection of the West, embodied in the fictional female lover.[72] Gu had to announce in public his renunciation of his fantasies of white lovers, his memories of the past, and any identifications with the West. Maugham therefore became a venue through which Gu expressed his repressed and displaced attachment to the West, his simultaneous love and hatred, the essential colonial ambivalence. Like his translations of Confucian classics and interpretations of 'real' Chinese culture, Gu's gift to Maugham, although not explicit, is yet another expression of his self-appointed role as a Confucian missionary to the Western world.

III. Chinese theme park

It is interesting to note that despite the initial strong interest, Maugham was greatly annoyed by Gu's behaviours in the meeting, calling the philosopher a 'pathetic figure'. The English writer then explained: '[H]e felt in himself the capacity to administer the state, but there was no king to entrust him with office; he had vast stores of learning which he was eager to impart to the great band of students that his soul hankered after, and there came to listen but a few, wretched, half-starved, and obtuse provincials.'[73] Despite the largely negative comment, Maugham includes Gu's lengthy lecture verbatim in Scene VI of *East of Suez* and repeats the angry provocation several times. How can we make sense of such a replica, something almost like a compulsive repetition?

> Have you excelled us in arts or letters? Have our thinkers been less profound than yours? Has our civilisation been less elaborate, less complicated, less refined than yours? Why, when you lived in caves and clothed yourselves with skins we were a cultured people.[74] Do you know that we tried an experiment which is unique in the history of the world?
>
> We sought to rule this great country not by force, but by wisdom. And for centuries we succeeded. Then why does the white man despise the yellow? Shall I tell you?
>
> Because he has invented the machine gun. That is your superiority. We are a defenceless horde and you can blow us into eternity. You have shattered the dream of our philosophers that the world could be governed by the power of law and order. And now you are teaching our young men your secret. You have thrust your hideous inventions upon us. Do you not know that we have a genius for mechanics? Do you not know that there are in this country four hundred millions of the most practical and industrious people in

> the world? Do you think it will take us long to learn? 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 shall you be judged.[75]

In this long monologue, Gu seems to illustrate the fundamental Oriental danger: its mimicry and retribution. Gu's attack on Western violence against Eastern civilisations - the machine gun as white superiority - explicitly exposes the violent nature of Western domination. Gu's warning that '[y]ou have appealed to the machine gun and by the machine shall you be judged' points directly to the fundamental problem of the civilising-mission ideologies and the ultimate danger of Oriental mimicry. If the Chinamen mastered Western science and technology, just as the *East of Suez* protagonist Lee Tai Cheng did, they would defeat the white men adopting Western ways. They would use violence against the violence that was forced upon them. It reveals the fundamental contradictions of the colonial pedagogy: teaching the natives to act like civilised Westerners essentially depends on the uncivilised way of violence. Gu's personal example is also compelling in the eyes of foreign observers. Despite his thorough classical Western education, the Chinese philosopher became a staunch Confucian missionary.[76] As a Western product, a 'civilised' non-Westerner, he turned into an anti-Western Chinaman. The message Gu sent out is that Western 'pedagogy' and Oriental mimicry only lead to hatred and retribution, thus turning a Chinaman into Fu Manchu.

Compared to Fu Manchu, Gu's threats to Western civilisation are more ideological and his power is more psychological. While Western governments largely denied or justified the Opium Wars, repression of the Boxers, and the following frequent lootings, it is impossible to completely ignore such a history because of their ongoing dependence on the East for profits and legitimacy. The Chinese presence therefore continued to cause anxieties among the Western psyche. Gu's warning of Chinese revenge may have touched upon what James Hevia describes as 'widely diffused anxieties over the possibility that the Chinese would exact revenge for the opium trade and Western aggression in China'.[77] Just as Lee's warning to Daisy that '[y]ou will come back to China as a tired child comes back to his mother' came true, to Maugham and many English readers, Gu's warning on the disastrous consequence of Easterners' mimicry of Western material progress and violence was prophetic. If understood from this perspective, there was rational and moral power behind Gu/Lee's aforementioned speech.

Gu Hongming's entire meeting with Maugham can be seen as a performance, a conscious role-playing that invites gazes and has effects on his spectators. His obsession to possess and display Chineseness in public was therapeutic. In the words of Lydia Liu, Gu in his meeting with Maugham 'could have been speaking to the ghosts of his own memory or the ghost of a former self that had lingered behind in Penang, Singapore, Berlin, Edinburgh, or a host of other places where he had lived and studied'.[78] Chineseness provided a salvation, not only as a political entity, but also as a structure that Gu could use to save himself from all the ambiguities within his hybrid identities. The Chinese gown, *queue*, and Confucian classics now became a form of empowerment via possession and embodiment. Through an antithetical formation, Gu forged a coherent identity as a Chinese. He projected onto 'China' the antithesis of what he deeply desired yet had been denied. He constructed a new Self in the adopted homeland, China, based on a total renunciation of his own past and

perceived ideological Other, the West. Such reconstructions remain problematic: as its antidote, China becomes essentially dependent on the West, therefore turning into the West.

Gu Hongming, a Confucian philosopher, a 'bastard' son, and former colonial subject, travelled in the same colonial system and ideological world as Maugham. His ambivalent relationship with the West was caused by rejection, repression, and desire. His rejection by the colonial system and the repressed desire to be a Western man became transformed into a radical longing for alternatives. Consequently, he forged a coherent identity as a Chinese, and projected onto his adopted homeland, China, the antithesis of modern Western civilisation. Such emotional and ideological ambivalence was never resolved. The blocked desire continued to return and haunt Gu throughout the rest of his life.

In addition, Gu's symbolic performance can be seen as a pedagogical session. In a way, he created a theme park that provided Maugham and other foreign visitors an authentic and haptic experience of China. He appeared as an 'authentic' Chinese philosopher, who lived in the middle of an ancient district, dressed in a shabby old-style gown, wearing a long *queue*, opposing the revolution and Western learning, and propagating Confucian values. All of this matched Western fantasies of the old China, and helped to popularise Gu's image as a Confucian sage and Chinese Tagore in early twentieth-century Western culture.[79] However, any initial feeling of control and pleasure from voyeurism is soon to be undone by Gu's words and actions. During the meeting, Gu trapped Maugham in an uncomfortable position, an arena of pedagogy and punishment. On the one hand, he educated Maugham on the civilised nature of the Chinese and the barbarism of Westerners and their failures; on the other hand, he punished Maugham by attacking, ignoring, and humiliating him. Gu set up the rules of Chinese etiquette from the very beginning, and forced the English guest to act on the Chinese terms.

The encounter had a visceral impact on Maugham. While the gift and whole experience appeared inscrutable, Maugham went away loaded with images and ideas that would continue to haunt him. He could not help but reproduce the meeting in his other works: he made Lee Tai Cheng in *East of Suez* repeat Gu's words, and had Daisy put on a Manchu dress and die from swallowing opium. The performance debunked white men's fantasies about the East and undercut their projections.

To conclude, the interactions of Somerset Maugham and Gu Hongming epitomise the psychological battles between Western and Chinese elites within their conscious and unconscious spheres during an age of empire. 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 and then Lee Tai Cheng into Fu Manchu, and in so doing maintained an illusion about white supremacy. On the other hand, Gu projected onto his imagined homeland the antithesis of a Western civilisation, 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, Gu 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 hierarchy in regulating East–West relations. Both Maugham and Gu used projection to construct new identities in the paradoxical route of colonial travel. Just as it is impossible to reach the other side on a Mobius strip, it is a futile exercise to

define the East as the opposite of the West, or vice versa. Under scrutiny the two exist on the same twisting side.

Notes

1. The trip provided material for Maugham's three works: *On a Chinese Screen* (New York, 1922), *East of Suez: A Play in Seven Scenes* (New York, 1922), and *The Painted Veil* (London, 1925).
2. Some scholars have identified the Chinese philosopher as Gu Hongming, but without stating how they arrived at this conclusion. For example, L. Liu, 'The Desire for the Sovereign and the Logic of Reciprocity in the Family of Nations', *Diacritics,* xxix, no. 4 (1999), 161, and P. Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation: W. Somerset Maugham's Exotic Fiction* (Westport, CT, 1996), 68. Holden quotes S. C. Soong, 'My Father and Maugham', trans Diana Yu, *Renditions*, iii (1974), 81–90. I therefore offer a brief explanation in the subsequent section.
3. Maugham, 'The Philosopher' in *On a Chinese Screen*, 147–58.
4. Maugham, 'The Philosopher', 147.
5. Although China was not colonised by any single European power, it was shaped by similar Western military, economic, and ideological forces as other colonies in Asia and the world during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I recognise the distinctiveness of China's position compared to other colonies, but here use 'colonial travel' to emphasise the similar 'imperial eyes' through which Westerners viewed China. For more discussion on China's position in colonial studies, see J. L. Hevia. *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC, 2003), 1–27.
6. Wen Yuanning, 'Ku Hung-Ming', *T'ien Hsia Monthly,* iv, no. 4 (1937), 386–92.
7. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 147–8.
8. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 154.
9. Equivalent to a BA degree today.
10. Wen, 'Ku Hung-Ming'.
11. Pan-Eastern Cultural Association (Daitō Bunka Kyōkai) was a government-founded association that sought to promulgate Confucian morality in Japan. It is the predecessor of today's Daitō Bunka University.
12. Ku Hung-ming, *The Spirit of the Chinese People: With an Essay on 'The War and the Way Out'* (Taipei, 1956). 1st edition in 1915 by the *Peking Daily News*.
13. See Ku Hung-ming (trans), *The Universal Order; or, Conduct of Life, a Confucian Catechism, Being a Translation of One of the Four Confucian Books, Hitherto Known as the Doctrine of the Mean* (Shanghai, 1906).
14. See C. Du, 'Gu Hongming as a Cultural Amphibian: A Confucian Universalist Critique of Modern Western Civilization', *Journal of World History,* xxii, no. 4 (2011), 715–46.
15. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 147.
16. For example, see Chen Duxiu, 'Jiyi Gu Hongming sanze' [Three Satires of Gu Hongming] in Huang Xingtao (ed), *Kuangshi guaijie: mingren bixiade Gu Hongming, Gu Hongming bixiade mingren* [Eccentric Cultural Hero: Gu Hongming as Written by the Famous; Famous People as Written by Gu Hongming] (Shanghai, 1998), 16–18; and Hu Shi, 'Ji Gu Hong-ming' [On Gu Hongming] in Huang (ed), *Kuangshi guaijie*, 19–24.
17. Study of Somerset Maugham's travel writings on China remains relatively underdeveloped. For a review of scholarship on Maugham, see Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, 1–26. Holden considers *On a Chinese Screen* as 'tourist memorabilia' and links it to *flâneur*, nineteenth-century urban perambulation. He interprets Maugham's narrator's valorisation of China's pre-modern aspects as a way to establish the boundary of modernity. See Holden, *Orienting Masculinity, Orienting Nation*, 63–77. This article goes beyond literary studies and looks at the complex impacts of colonialism on Maugham.
18. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 147.
19. See A. Curtis, *Somerset Maugham* (New York, 1977), 127. It is interesting, yet not surprising, that the music of the play was specially composed by Eugene Goossens who toured London's Limehouse for inspirations.

20. R. Kipling, 'Mandalay', *Collected Verse of Rudyard Kipling* (Garden City, NY, 1918), 287.
21. In the play, Maugham uses Lee Tai as his name, while Daisy sometimes addresses him as Lee. I use Lee as his last name because family names usually appear first by Chinese custom.
22. Maugham, *East of Suez,* 30.
23. It is interesting to note that in *Pygmalion: A Romance in Five Acts* (1912), later adapted as *My Fair Lady*, the audiences discover that it is indeed possible to take the tramp out of a lady. The secret is probably that the female protagonist is 'white'. I thank Ian Chong for pointing this out.
24. L. Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour: Miscegenation Fears in Britain after the Great War', *Gender & History,* xvii, no. 1 (2005), 48.
25. Quoted from L. Bland, 'British Eugenics and "Race Crossing": a Study of an Interwar Investigation', *New Formations*, lx (2007), 67.
26. A. L. Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th-Century Colonial Cultures', *American Ethnologist,* xvi, no. 4 (1989), 636.
27. Stoler, 'Making Empire Respectable', 647. Also see R. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Rac*e (London, 1995) for comprehensive discussions on hybridity and colonialism.
28. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 150.
29. Maugham, *East of Suez*, 44.
30. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 156.
31. U. Seshagiri, 'Modernity's (Yellow) Perils Dr. Fu-Manchu and English Race Paranoia', *Cultural Critique,* lxii (2006), 162–94.
32. See A. V. Witchard, *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown* (Farnham, 2009).
33. J. Burrows, '"A Vague Chinese Quarter Elsewhere": Limehouse in the Cinema 1914–36', *Journal of British Cinema and Television,* vi, no. 2 (2009), 282–301.
34. Published earlier as magazine serials, the first Fu Manchu novel appeared in 1913 as *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (London, 1913), in the United States as *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu* (New York, 1913).
35. T. Burke, *Limehouse Nights* (New York, 1917).
36. *Broken Blossoms* was based on a story from *Limehouse Nights* and directed by D. W. Griffith as one of his lesser-known films.
37. Burrows, '"Vague Chinese Quarter Elsewhere"', 286.
38. Two years later Chang was in court again, this time sentenced for possession of cocaine and followed by deportation.
39. C. Marez, *Drug Wars: The Political Economy of Narcotics* (Minneapolis, 2004), 41.
40. Marez, *Drug Wars*, 39–45.
41. Marez, *Drug Wars*, 70–101.
42. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 60–1.
43. In 1919, for example, a series of race riots occurred in nine of Britain's main ports, where running battles were fought between blacks and whites. See Bland, 'White Women and Men of Colour', 34–9.
44. Marez, *Drug Wars*, 65–9.
45. This article does not assess the complex theories of Self/Other. For some debates on the question of Self/Other and discussions on identification, see H. K. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse', *Screen,* xxiv, no. 6 (1983), 18–36, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', *October,* xxviii (1984), 125–33, 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry,* xii, no. 1 (1985), 144–65. A. R. JanMohamed, 'The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature', *Critical Inquiry,* xii, no. 1 (1985), 59–87. Diana Fuss, 'Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification', *Diacritics,* xxiv, no. 2/3 (1994), 19–42.
46. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 66–9.
47. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 109–112.
48. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 47–54.
49. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 80–4.

50. Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour: A Record of a Journey from Rangoon to Haiphong* (Garden City, NY, 1930), 13.
51. For studies on the connections between travel and sex especially in the colonial era, see R. Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester, 1990); I. Littlewood, *Sultry Climates: Travel and Sex since the Grand Tour* (London, 2001), and Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London, 2003).
52. S. Hastings, *The Secret Lives of Somerset Maugham: A Biography* (New York, 2010), 248.
53. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 155.
54. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 157.
55. For example, see L. Liu, 'The Desire for the Sovereign and the Logic of Reciprocity in the Family of Nations' and *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2004).
56. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 148–9.
57. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 150.
58. See the obituaries, 'Death of Mr. Ku Hung ming', *The Straits Echo* (4 May 1928), and 'Ku Hung Ming, Eminent Philosopher, Poet and Linguist', *Sunday Gazette* (4 Oct. 1936).
59. Baba and Nyonya are the terms used for male and female Peranakans respectively. They often speak Baba Malay, a Creole language that blends Malay with Hokkien syntax and vocabulary, and adopt many of the aspects of Malay lifestyle while maintaining certain Chinese socio-religious practices such as ancestor worship. See G. W. Skinner, 'Creolized Chinese society in Southeast Asia' in A. Reid (ed), *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen & Unwin, 1996), 51–93.
60. Some have hinted that Scott Brown, Gu's adoptive father, was actually his biological father. See Lo Hui-min, 'Ku Hung Ming: Schooling', *Papers on Far Eastern History*, xxxviii (1988), 45–64.
61. Lo, 'Ku Hung-ming: Schooling', 52.
62. See Edinburgh Sheriff Court Wills, '1875 Brown, Forbes Scott', Reference SC70/4/155, National Archives of Britain. It was common for early wealthy European settlers to send their children back to Europe for secondary and higher education, including the ones they had with local women. Forbes Brown's father, an early settler of Penang, came from Scotland and sent his sons including Forbes Brown to Scottish schools when they were young. Forbes Brown followed the same practice with his own sons. For a study of the experience of British families who resided in late-imperial India, including their children's education, see E. Buettner, *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (Oxford, 2004).
63. Quoted from Wen, 'Ku Hung-Ming', 387. Wen Yuanming recounted in an English article Gu's earlier conversations with him in 1937. Wen was a Cambridge-educated younger colleague of Gu at Peking University and editor-in-chief of *Ti'en Hsia Monthly*, a highly rated English literary magazine.
64. See H. Abend, 'Discord with China Laid to Our "Pests"', *New York Times* (27 Nov. 1927).
65. As a polyglot, Gu Hongming likes to talk to different foreigners in their own languages.
66. For example, the works by Carlyle and Ruskin often display a strong imperialist assumption. See G. Workman, 'Thomas Carlyle and the Governor Eyre Controversy: An Account with Some New Material', *Victorian Studies,* xviii, no. 1 (1974), 77–102; and P. Brantlinger, 'A Postindustrial Prelude to Postcolonialism: John Ruskin, William Morris, and Gandhism', *Critical Inquiry,* xxii, no. 3 (1996), 466–85.
67. Gu was fundamentally an elitist. He believed in the sole leadership of elites in government and society, and supported the monarchical system and aristocratic culture. He was sympathetic to the mass, peasants, and critical of the middle-class culture of the industrial age, warning of the danger of mob rule. See Ku Hung-ming, *The Spirit of the Chinese People*, and 'Will the Chinese Become Bolshevik' in *Yazhou xueshu* zazhi [The Journal of the Asiatic Learning Society], I, no. 1 (1921). Also see Lin Yutang, 'Gu Hongming' in *Youbuwei zhai suibi* (Casual Writings from the Youbuwei House), included in Huang Xingtao ed. *Kuangshi guaijie*, 70.
68. See Abend, 'Discord with China Laid to Our "Pests"'.

69. It is common to see storylines in colonial literature where Westernised natives attempt to become 'white' by winning the love and bodies of Caucasian girls. These attempts usually involve traumatic experiences and fatal failures. A classic example is the fictional French 'Negro' Jean Veneuse discussed in *Black Skin, White Masks*. A well-known Chinese example is the young Chinese student in 'Sinking' (*Chenlun*) by early twentieth-century writer Yu Dafu. See F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York, 2008), and Yu Dafu, *Yu Dafu xiaoshuo quanji* (The Complete Works of Yu Daxu) (Changchun, 1996).
70. Gu's experience of transformations provides an interesting case that complicates the concept of mimicry. He was not simply a colonized individual emulating the White nor a Western coloniser going native. In neither environment was Gu fully accepted. Gu's imitations and identities remain inherently problematic and unstable. For systematic discussions on mimicry, see H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 2004) and D. Fuss, *Identification Papers* (New York, 1995).
71. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 157–8.
72. Maugham's book only provides the English translation and I have not seen the Chinese original. Although love verse and erotic poetry have a long tradition in classical Chinese literature, it seems to me that Gu had his Western audience in mind and the poem resembles more of a European style. For an analysis of Chinese male authors' usage of female voice as a political act, see P. Rouzer *Articulated Ladies: Gender and the Male Community in Early Chinese Texts* (Cambridge, MA, 2001).
73. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 154–5.
74. The language and narrative of the 'cavemen' is likely inspired by Lucretius. See Titus Lucretius Carus, *De Rerum Natura, with an English Translation by W. H. D. Rouse* (Cambridge, 1975), 406–9. I thank Richard Weigel for pointing this out.
75. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 153–4; *East of Suez*, 108–9.
76. Maugham, *On a Chinese Screen*, 152.
77. Hevia, *English Lessons*, 323.
78. Liu, 'The Desire for the Sovereign', 162.
79. Gu's interpretation of Chinese culture, a Confucianism-based spiritual East, became a principal image of Chinese identity in the early twentieth-century Western world. Nevertheless, the authenticity of Gu's Chineseness was never fully recognised by the mainland's 'modern' elites. Ironically, since the 1980s Gu and his ideas have been revived in China as a useful way to redefine Chinese identities at a new historical juncture. See Du, 'Gu Hongming as a Cultural Amphibian'.