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A Threepenny Omnibus Ticket to ‘Limey-housey-Causey-way’: fictional sojourns in Chinatown

But O Cook, O Thomas Cook & Son, pathfinders and trail-clearers, living signposts to all the world and bestowers of first aid to bewildered travelers – unhesitatingly and instantly, with ease and celerity, could you send me to Darkest Africa or Innermost Thibet, but to the East End of London, barely a stone's throw distant from Ludgate Circus, you know not the way! ‘You can't do it, you know,’ said the human emporium of routes and fares at Cook's Cheapside branch. ‘It is so – ahem – so unusual.’ ‘Consult the police,’ he concluded authoritatively, when I persisted. ‘We are not accustomed to taking travellers to the East End; we receive no call to take them there, and we know nothing whatsoever about the place at all’.

Jack London, *The People of The Abyss*ⁱ

The title of this essay is taken from *The Nights of London* (1926), by the travel writer and journalist H.V. Morton. In a piece about the docks entitled ‘Ships at Night’, Morton writes: ‘Threepence. I gave it to the conductor at Ludgate Circus and left the omnibus at Limehouse. If I had paid fifty pounds for my ticket I could not have travelled farther from the London that most of us know’.ⁱⁱ Despite the hyperbole of this, Morton is actually reiterating what by the mid-nineteen-twenties had become a commonplace. The melodrama of London's uncharted terrains had been familiar to readers since the 1890s, when works of social exploration such as William Booth's *Darkest England* likened London's proliferating immigrant ghettos to the outlying districts of empire; in Booth's case, the jungles of Darkest Africa.ⁱⁱⁱ The expansion of the East End's Chinese Quarter in the 1910s heightened Booth's analogy.^{iv} Here in Limehouse, as another London journalist, Thomas Burke, would put it, was ‘the Orient squatting at the portals of the West’.^v It was ripe for exploration and Burke

was to claim the territory. This essay will examine the ways in which Thomas Burke established himself as ‘the laureate of Limehouse’. In works of fiction, verse and autobiography, as well as London travel writing, Burke is the omniscient tour guide, a seasoned habitué of dark side-streets that lead ‘to far countries or to secret encampments of alien and outlaw’.^{vi} The East-End-West End division of the capital offered a microcosm of Britain’s imperial project and in the manner of sons of empire who have knocked about the world and seen a thing or two, Burke’s claim is to have ‘loafed and wandered in every part of London, slums and foreign quarters, underground, and docksides’.^{vii} Today Chinese Limehouse retains its hold on our imaginations as the shadowy London lair of Sax Rohmer’s evil genius, Dr Fu Manchu.^{viii} That Rohmer’s unequivocally racist *Fu Manchu* series is still in print owes something no doubt to the sinophobia that remains close to the surface of the Western psyche. The relative obsolescence of Thomas Burke’s Chinatown writing raises questions that point to particularities of socio-historical location. A much admired and popular author in his day, Burke’s Limehouse stories seem remarkable now for the complex and contradictory ways in which he upset social orthodoxies. Far more than Rohmer, Burke’s Chinatown writing was formative in establishing the ‘queer spell’ that the very mention of Limehouse came to exert on the public imagination during the inter-war years.

By the time H. V. Morton was writing, the cultural divide was well mapped and there was an implicit connection between perceptions of East End and West End that linked the Chinese Quarter by the docks with the recreational use of drugs amongst society revellers. Investigative journalists in the last decades of the

nineteenth century, intrigued by East London's promise of the exotic, the strange and the sordid, fascinated readers with hints of luxurious opium palaces hidden in the slums. The following newspaper description of 'a recognised establishment' hidden away in shabby Limehouse, is typical:

The soft light of shaded lamps hanging from the ceiling disclose a spacious hall. The feet sink in the rich, heavy carpet as the visitor passes on to the next floor, where there is an excellent restaurant with weird Chinese decorations and a menu that offers a variety of seductive Chinese dishes. Its patrons sometimes include Society women seeking a new sensation.^{ix}

It was the latter suggestion that would be the focus of twentieth-century attention. Everyone knew that opium dens rendered up white women for obscure Chinese desire, that they 'stretched out in mixed company and gave themselves up to a somnolent narcotic'.^x In 1916, Thomas Burke's collection of lurid Chinatown love stories, *Limehouse Nights*, brought him international attention due to 'the novel, and to most unsavoury, implication that Yellow Man cohabited with White Girl in that East End of an Empire's capital surrounding Limehouse Causeway'.^{xi} The fact of relations between Chinese men and white women was fast becoming an issue of critical concern. The form of yellow perilism that circulated in Britain during the early twentieth century was a demonology of race and vice, bound up with anxiety about degenerative metropolitan blight and imperial and racial decline. The Chinese who lived in the Limehouse docks area were the scapegoats of Edwardian social ambivalence. Because of their cultural isolation they represented the breakdown of social order, whilst as a bachelor community they posed a sexual and racial threat. In the face of war the very existence of foreign quarters 'threatened the idea of a nation 'wish[ing] to believe itself socially and ethnically homogenous'.^{xii} The fact of co-

habitation in Chinatown challenged the imperial status quo which was maintained by a hierarchical structure of race and grounded in racial purity. Rohmer reinforced the ideology of separating 'us' from 'them' with his unremittingly evil Chinamen whose interest in English women is part of their fiendish Yellow plot to destroy the West. Thomas Burke on the other hand caused outrage by his misappropriation of the underworld of establishment concern. In *Limehouse Nights*, the most English of institutions are undermined. Young Cockney girls eat Chow Mein with chopsticks in the local caffs, blithely gamble their house-keeping money at Fan Tan and Puck-a-Pu, burn joss sticks in their bedrooms and painstakingly prepare opium pipes in the corner pub. The book's blend of shocking realism with lyrical romance flew in the face of consensual thought and social taboo and it played a significant part in the national hysteria which peaked in the late 1920s with press appeals to the Home Office to 'do something' about 'unhappy white girls fascinated by the yellow man'.

xiii

In 1916, the *Evening News* reported on 'the growing craze for opium smoking' as well as 'the use of that exciting drug cocaine' amongst the girls of 'West End Bohemia', adding cryptically 'no one seems to know why the girls ... find the drug so easy to obtain'.^{xiv} The spotlight was already on Limehouse where the 'problem' of interracial alliances was accounted for, not by the almost total dearth of Chinese women, but by the giddy susceptibility of a certain 'type' of white woman to 'Oriental' vices, namely gambling and dope. In Rohmer's books, degenerate daughters of the upper-class become dangerously intimate with foreigners. Flappers

were the agents of Britain's doom, incapable of resisting the manipulations of Chinamen intent on their moral downfall. In *Dope: A Tale of Chinatown*, the wholesome Dr Margaret Halley despairs:

‘I know no fewer than thirty unfortunate women in the West End of London alone who are simply helpless slaves to various drugs.’...
 ‘Cocaine was her drug?’
 ‘One of them. She had tried them all, poor silly girl.’^{xv}

It was the startling lack of moral censure regarding doping and worse, miscegenation in *Limehouse Nights*, that caused outrage. The book was banned by the circulating libraries, which contributed towards its notoriety both in Britain and in the United States. Here, ‘you were utterly behind the times if you were not intimately acquainted with Burke’s stories of Limehouse’.^{xvi} By 1926, three of them had been adapted for Hollywood films and ‘the whole English-reading world knew every dark and dangerous alley of Limehouse as well as they knew the way to the corner grocery’.

^{xvii} After *Limehouse Nights*, an omnibus ticket from Ludgate Circus to ‘Limey-housey Causey-way’ was symbolic to the suggestible of all manner of disreputable pleasures.

Today, London’s Chinatown clusters around Gerrard Street in Soho, where it evolved in the 1950s to service the West End theatre trade with late-night restaurants. Barely a trace remains of the old Limehouse Chinatown which occupied shops and houses mainly in the riverside streets of Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway, although the names of the adjacent streets are a reminder – Mandarin, Ming, Oriental, Nanking, Peking and Canton Streets, and Amoy Place.^{xviii} Trade between England and the Far East began operating from London’s docks in the 1860s. Asian seamen were

signed on by merchant steamship companies in China's treaty ports because they could be paid less than half the wage of the British sailor.^{xix} Some of them prolonged their London sojourn, settling in the streets adjoining the West India Dock where there gradually developed a small Chinatown – laundries, grocery stores, boarding houses, gaming parlours, restaurants and opium rooms. In Pennyfields there was a Christian Mission for Chinese and a Confucian temple. The men were more or less isolated by cultural difference, by language, and by the transience of their stay.

Chinese Limehouse had several times been portrayed in works of fiction, 'from "Edwin Drood" to "Sherlock Holmes"', as the ghost-story writer and sinophile James Platt observed in 1900, but:

this was always with sole reference to gentlemen going there to smoke opium and not to any other aspect of Chinese life: No novelist has divined what eccentric local colour might be brought into a story along with those quaint gaming tables, covered with Canton matting, and always surrounded by a polyglot crowd, which are as characteristic of the opium dens as the pipe itself.^{xx}

It was thanks to events in China that the 'eccentric local colour' provided by the Chinese in Limehouse would shortly be exploited to the very utmost. Platt's article for the July 1900 edition of *Notes and Queries* had already gone to press when news broke through Reuters claiming the slaughter of all the white men, women and children besieged by the so-called Boxer rebels in the British embassy at Peking.^{xxi} During the weeks that followed, *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* printed what would prove to be entirely fictitious accounts of a 'Pekin Massacre'.^{xxii} Throughout that summer of 1900, newspaper readers were transfixed by details that gained in horror as stories of dismemberments, mutilations, poisonings and forced suicides were

repeated around the globe. The reputation of the Boxer Rebels was to leave a lasting impression on the Western psyche: 'In film, fiction and folklore, they functioned over the years as a vivid symbol of everything most detested and feared about China ... its fiendish cruelty, its xenophobia, its superstition'.^{xxiii} A fear and loathing of the Chinese was informed by 'atrocities' in the outposts of empire and by the notion of a Yellow Peril at its heart. Limehouse was the natural headquarters for Rohmer's arch villain, Dr Fu Manchu was an unambiguous embodiment of the sinophobia that flourished in the wake of the Boxer uprising.^{xxiv}

Because the popular idea of London's Chinese Quarter was inextricably linked with the opium 'den', changing attitudes towards opium and the control of drugs in general would also inform the ways in which the district was envisaged. In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Dorian pays the cab driver with a sovereign and the promise of another to take him all the way in the dead of night from Bond Street to the river because: 'There were opium dens, where one could buy oblivion'.^{xxv} Directly following the publication of Wilde's novel, the Surgeon-Major, addressing the annual meeting of the British Medical Association, proclaimed that the importance of getting rid of the 'opium smoking saloons' in East London 'could not be overestimated'.^{xxvi} As drug use became increasingly criminalised, Chinese Limehouse became synonymous with crime. The new century saw escalating legal controls culminate in the wartime criminalisation of narcotic use.^{xxvii} Victorian narratives of excess, the untellable horrors of the slum, the gothic romance of opium and the erotic mysteries of the Orient, now converged in a fascination with London's Chinatown.

Whilst Rohmer's writing is a straightforward exploitation of contemporary anxieties, Burke wrote tales of love between yellow men and white girls.^{xxviii} One of *Limehouse Nights*' most direct challenges to convention is the happy outcome of a mixed race love affair which according to the moral code of the time, and as its narrator acknowledges, 'ought to have ended in disaster for both of them'.^{xxix} Indeed any one of four neighbourhood men, three Chinese and one white, might be the father of young Marigold's prospective baby. 'The Father of Yoto' opens like this: 'a tale of carnival, moon-haunted nights ... a gossamer thing of dreamy-lanterned streets, told by my friend, Tai Ling, of West India Dock Road. Its scene is not the Hoang Ho or the sun-loved islands of the East, but Limehouse'.^{xxx} Sordid stories of darkest Limehouse couched in the flowery language of *chinoiserie*, confounded readers; these were not acceptable notions of London's Yellow Peril. The novelist Edwin Pugh was delightfully confused, writing: 'Here is London indeed, masquerading as Fairyland. And yet it is no masquerade. It is the real London in all its glamorous unreality'.^{xxxi} A common conceit of fairy-tale is to tantalise the reader with the possibility of access to the fantasy zone. Accordingly the story concludes:

Tai Ling and Marigold are still in West India Dock Road, and very prosperous and happy they are, though, as I say, they have no right to be ... Visit them all one day, at the provision shop, which is the third as you pass Pennyfields; and they will tell you this story more delicately and fragrantly than I.^{xxxii}

Burke's Limehouse was both a territory of the imagination and an actual place on the map. Readers were eager to search out the originals of Tai Ling and Marigold, and to stare at those real-life 'children with sallow faces and un-English eyebrows', whose existence, remarked the rector of Limehouse in 1930, 'one would regret were it not

that they are often none the less delightful enough little creatures'.^{xxxiii} In the years since Jack London bemoaned the lack of a guide to point him in the direction of 'the abyss', Thomas Cook & Son had taken notice of this development and established an 'Evening Drive by Pullman Motor Coach to The East End of London, embracing Whitechapel ("The Ghetto"), The People's Palace, Limehouse and "China Town," Dockland, The Rotherhithe Tunnel, London Bridge and the Ancient Borough of Southwark'.^{xxxiv} The tour was advertised as 'a means of making acquaintance with an aspect of London entirely different ... peopled by those who are usually designated the working class'.^{xxxv} At a carefully stage-managed time, doors would burst open and Chinese, complete with pigtailed, would chase each other down the street wielding cleavers.^{xxxvi}

The popular press and its presentation of a 'problematic' drug subculture was a factor initiated and defined by wartime regulation. Scare stories about cocaine and opium use amongst soldiers both at the Western Front and on leave in the West End prompted the extension of the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act (DORA 40B) which gave extended powers of search to the police and establishing the principle of prohibition. In his fictionalised Limehouse, Burke draws upon Decadent or bohemian associations with drug-taking and insists upon the shady glamour of Chinatown. Later, he holds DORA responsible for emptying the word 'Chinatown' which once 'carried a perfume of delight', of any meaning at all, 'save as indicating a district of London where Chinamen live'.^{xxxvii} In *Out and About: A Notebook of London in War-Time* (1919), in the chapter 'Chinatown Revisited', Burke regrets that of everything Chinatown once possessed 'of colour and mystery and the macabre, one

must write in the past tense'. He blamed 'the Salvation Army chorus bawling a lot of stuff about glory and blood', the war and its effect of unprecedented state control over the lives of the nation: 'All the dusky delicacies were suppressed. Dora had stepped in and kyboshed the little haunts that once invited to curious amusement'.^{xxxviii} The effect on the Chinese population of the ban on opium smoking was to criminalise a large portion of it, giving the authorities 'a pretext to invade Chinese privacy, to stage exemplary deportations, and thereby to intimidate the entire community'.^{xxxix} Most significantly, as Kohn points out, by placing the pleasures of nightlife outside the law it created a drug 'scene'. With drug legislation, the possibilities of Chinatown may have been dissipated but its symbolic role was strengthened. In 1919, Burke's appealing imaginings of a blithely lawless Limehouse had poignant reverberations. Why, bemoaned *The Athenaeum's* review of *Out And About*,

do so many writers, in describing a beloved country or city adopt the elegiac tone? ... is there no place left we can read about and fly to find more marvellous than ever? It would be delightful to believe the London of five years ago, mourned for so entertainingly by Mr Thomas Burke, would return now the war is over.^{xl}

H.V. Morton's reconnoitre in 1926 is nostalgic then: 'I sniffed the air hopefully' he writes, 'for the unforgettable pungency of opium, but found only the unforgettable pungency of fish and chips'.^{xli} Distracted from his appointment with the dock police, for he has come ostensibly to write about the shipyards, he gazes at 'the frozen faces' of passing Chinamen, 'their live slit eyes, like the eyes of animals looking from a cave' and he muses upon whether 'the masks conceal drama or only mild domesticity down Limey-housey-Causey-way'.^{xlii} Here Morton is drawing on the ambiguity by which the reputation or fascination of Chinatown was sustained. It was a rhetoric that had

evolved from over a century of British cultural subjection to equal doses of virulent sinophobic propaganda on the one hand and on the other the charm or enchantment of *chinoiserie* entertainments. Burke's Chinatown is symptomatic of the same cultural concerns that produced Rohmer's demonised Chinaman, but whereas for Rohmer the alien element is accepted as undesirable and operates as a byword for all that is sinister and threatening, Burke's Limehouse is as alluring as it is forbidding: 'There was the blue moon of the Orient. There, for the bold, were the sharp knives, and there, for those who would patiently seek, was the lamp of young Aladdin'.^{xliii} This Limehouse is theatrical, evolved from the influence of orientalism on British popular culture, the dazzle and pyrotechnics of pantomime spectacular and the exotic eroticism of *The Arabian Nights*. On the stage, the sexually charged racial and cultural Otherness of the spectacular oriental influenced a craze for *chinoiserie* theatricals, amongst them were *San Toy* (1899), *A Chinese Honeymoon* (1901), *See See* (1906), *The New Aladdin* (1906) and *Chu Chin Chow* (1916). Competing Orientalist discourses intensified imaginative distinctions between East and West. The impact of *Limehouse Nights* was a cultural phenomenon that emerged in relation to the landscape of its time, an orientalist fantasy that hovered suggestively between the sinister and the innocuous, the idea that both the menace and the delights of a remote and exotic China could be discovered within the heart of London.

The journalist George Sims had been the first to refer to the district as 'Chinatown' in *The Strand* in 1905 and his account is exemplary of this simultaneous romancing and debunking. He begins: 'in Limehouse the Asiatic seafaring men is still a conspicuous

note. You will find specimens of him – Oriental, mysterious, romantic – at almost every turn'.^{xliv} Then a few paragraphs later:

There are no Oriental garments or pigtails in this or in any other part of China Town. The Chinamen who have settled here in business have mostly married English wives, and have English babies who are wheeled out in English perambulators. The Chinese lodgers in the Chinese boarding-houses round about are seafaring men, and dress in serge suits and wear cloth caps under which the pigtail, if it has not been sacrificed, is coiled up and concealed.^{xlv}

Although *Limehouse Nights* made his name, Thomas Burke's first significant publication was *Nights in Town: A London Autobiography* (1915) a book which established his reputation as a London travel writer.^{xlvi} It was written in the tradition of those travel guides for the armchair tourist specifically devoted to London's nightlife. A demand for these had begun in the late-eighteenth-century when, with the advent of street-lighting, it was possible to stay out later. As Burke explains in his *English Night-Life* (1941), there were: 'Guides to night-resorts; Exposures of night-resorts and the London sinks; Rambles round the night-resorts and so on'.^{xlvii} In merging two genres, louche travelogue and autobiography, *Nights in Town* encouraged the assumption that its author was intimately familiar with the life he chronicled and this would serve to lend authority to *Limehouse Nights*. The seminal chapter of *Nights in Town* was 'A Chinese Night: Limehouse'. Here Burke interwove orientalist fantasy with slum reportage and here one can see syncretised the material that informs *Limehouse Nights*. Burke forged a style intended to encompass both fact and fiction. In *The Wind and the Rain: A book of confessions* (1924) he fabricates a close boyhood friendship with a dockside shopkeeper, Quong Lee, weaving a fictional construction of Oriental London into his own life-story in order further to

authenticate his ‘knowledge’ of Limehouse and its immigrant and transient communities. Misinformation such as ‘years of hell’ growing up in the Hardcress Home For Orphans from whence he would absent himself to wander the slums of nearby Limehouse, were stories left uncontested by the author, cited in dictionaries of literary biography during his lifetime and repeated in his obituaries.^{xlviii} Burke’s prose shifts between poetic fancy, the ‘glamorous shame’ of Chinatown, the horror of ‘dread things’ and ‘unholy things’,^{xlix} and the kind of matter-of-fact information one might expect from a local resident:

I ... have smiled many times at the articles that appear perennially on the wickedness of the place. Its name evokes evil tradition in the public mind ... Those amazingly thrilling and amazingly ludicrous stories of East End opium-rooms are mainly, I may say, the work of journalistic specials.¹

Despite such disclaimers, he goes on to present a Chinatown absolutely conforming to the mythical Orient of Western imagination. Relying on the supposed sexual preference of the Chinaman for very young girls, Burke’s Limehouse is a twilight world of dockside opium dens and dissolute cockney waifs. The American writer Emily Hahn commented on how the Cook’s tourists who leapt ‘eagerly from their ships down on the Bund or in Yangtzepoo’ were inevitably disappointed by their first glimpse of China’s modernity, the busy tram lines, elegant hotels and department stores, yet were generally appeased by a trip to the twisted streets of Shanghai’s native quarter: ‘Thomas Burke ... would always mean more’ she comments sardonically, ‘now that one had a genuine memory of Old China - before the white man came’.^{li} This precisely illustrates the point Robert Bickers makes in *Britain In China: Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900-1949*, that popular representations

of the Chinese in Britain were formative of the perceptions and preconceptions of England's 'treaty port mind':

In thrillers, on the stage, in romances and in film, in both children's and adults' literature, China and the Chinese - and the Chinese in Britain too - were represented to such an extent that those pleading for improvements in relations between Chinese and Britons routinely joked about the fact.^{lii}

After the war, London newspapers worked overtime with excitable stories about the seduction of innocent white girls in Limehouse, their healthy glow sucked from them by dissipation and drugs. In 1922, the *Empire News* warned that 'mothers would be well advised to keep their daughters as far away as they can from Chinese laundries and other places where the yellow men congregate'.^{liii} Stories about dreadful things happening to young women, through getting involved with dancing, nightclubs and drugs, conveyed the message that women were really too delicate and vulnerable to be able to cope with their new post-war freedom, whilst their naive gullibility threatened national security. Headlines such as 'Cocaine Curse – Evil Habit Spread by Night Clubs' highlighted the role of dissipated young women as a conduit for trafficking 'foreign' drugs, paradoxically fuelling the rage for West End revellers, after a couple of champagne cocktails, to go slumming 'down Chinatown way'.^{liv} In 'Fan-tan' another piece from *The Nights of London*, Morton describes how he 'dined in a smart West End hotel, exchanged a silk hat for a cap in the cloak-room, and in half an hour was enjoying one of London's strangest contrasts – Limehouse'.^{lv} Arnold Bennett's journal for these years recounts a whirl of fashionable pursuits; first nights, dinners at the Savoy, yachting weekends, and the requisite trip to Chinatown. On Tuesday, the 28th of April, 1925, Bennett recorded: 'I went to Chinatown last

night with Beaverbrook [Lord Beaverbrook of the *Daily Express*] and Ashfield [Lord Ashfield] ... It took us exactly fifteen minutes to drive there from Ciro's [one of the most exclusive and expensive dinner and dance clubs in the West End]. Great change in a short time'.^{lvi} Bennett notes: 'There are Chinese gambling at "Fantan"' and some 'nice-looking' prostitutes, in Pennyfields, 'Jewesses mainly'. They visit

a Chinese Music Club, where four men were playing Mah Jong and one [was] strumming a sort of Chinese guitar ... a suggestion that they should sing was not well received. They were very polite but didn't want us. We were to have seen the Chinese Chapel where the religion of Confucius is practised; but it was locked up ... On the whole a rather flat night.^{lvii}

Responses to the actualities of Limehouse were often of disappointment, which is no doubt why Thomas Cook took the trouble to stage hatchet fights. J. G. Birch, the rector of Limehouse warned: 'That there is an underworld no-one would be rash enough to deny, but it is not on view for sightseers ... and those who look for the Limehouse of Mr Thomas Burke simply will not find it'.^{lviii}

Charlie Chaplin, visiting London just after the war, had the privilege of the ultimate guide, Thomas Burke himself. He described the prospect of a personal tour of Limehouse accompanied by 'its laureate', a 'man who sees London through the same glasses as myself', as 'alluring as Christmas morning to a child'.^{lix} A working-class Londoner in exile, Chaplin was perhaps the ideal tourist, nostalgic and open to the dramatic. Evidently he did not feel short-changed by the Limehouse effect, but his depiction in *My Wonderful Visit* reads as though Burke had written it:

The very shadows take on life and romance. The skulking, strutting, mincing, hurrying forms that pass us and fade out into the night are now becoming characters. The curtain has risen on *Limehouse Nights* dramatised with the original cast. There is a tang of the East in the air.^{lx}

By the late 1930s, the Limehouse Chinese had diminished in numbers. In 1913, when Burke wrote his first Limehouse story 'The Chink and the Child', Pennyfields was almost entirely inhabited by Chinese. By 1934, 'the Register of Electors shows that of twenty-seven houses listed in the street only one was inhabited by a Chinese family'.^{lxi} The combined pressures of the Alien Restriction Acts of 1914 and 1919, together with police harassment, slum clearance and the effects of the Depression and consequent slump in international trade, were responsible for the decline. Many of those dependent on shipping for employment and unable to earn a living, contrived to return home to China. Because of this, local businesses, the gaming rooms, boarding houses and restaurants, suffered. In 1934, the local council decided to clear the 'slum area' whilst, incidentally, leaving numerous worse slums standing. In the atmosphere of hysteria, few people were going to complain about the razing of Chinatown. Limehouse Causeway was widened and the shops, restaurants and clubs swept away. The myth of Chinatown declined along with the reality. Thomas Cook's suggested route for 'an East End Drive' no longer made an 'attraction' of Limehouse, instead remarking dismissively: 'Until recent years it was known as the Chinese Quarter, in an unpleasant sense: a locality of shady opium dens and resorts of rowdy inebriety'.^{lxii} Perhaps most significantly, newspaper stories about the 'dwindling population' of Chinese Limehouse sympathised only with 'the sensational writer bereft of one of his more thrilling scenarios'.^{lxiii}

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- ⁱ Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (New York: Macmillan, 1903)
- ⁱⁱ H.V. Morton, *The Nights of London* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., (1926) 1934), p. 16.
- ⁱⁱⁱ General Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (New York: Garrett Press, 1970 (1890)), pp. 11-12. General Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, referred to the East End as 'darkest England' in response to the explorer H.M. Stanley's *In Darkest Africa* (1890).
- ^{iv} 94 'China born aliens' appeared in London's Census returns for 1871; in 1921 this had increased to 711.
- ^v Thomas Burke, *Limehouse Nights* (London: Daily Express Fiction Library edition, n.d. [1916], p. 19.
- ^{vi} Thomas Burke, *The Wind and The Rain: A Book of Confessions* (London, Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1924), p. 136.
- ^{vii} *ibid.*, p. 86
- ^{viii} Sax Rohmer (pseud. Arthur Ward). The earliest Fu-Manchu stories were printed as magazine serials in 1911 and 1912, the first novel in the series was *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (London: Methuen, 1913), published in the US as *The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu* (New York: McBride, 1913).
- ^{ix} 'Opium Smoking: East End Dens', *South London Advertiser*, 28th December, obscurely dated cutting, 1910s. Chinatown File, Local History Archive, Tower Hamlets Central Library.
- ^x Barbara Hodgson, *Opium: A Portrait of the Heavenly Demon* (London, San Francisco: Souvenir Press Ltd., 1999), p. 74.
- ^{xi} *The Best Stories of Thomas Burke*, selected with a foreword by John Gawsworth, (London: Phoenix House, 1950), pp. 8-9.
- ^{xii} Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls; the birth of the British drug underground* (London: Granta, 2001(Lawrence & Wishart, 1992), p. 30.
- ^{xiii} *Evening News*, 5 October, 1920.
- ^{xiv} *Evening News*, 3rd January, 1916, p. 5. Cited in Marek Kohn, *Dope Girls: the birth of the British drug underground* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1992), pp. 30-31.
- ^{xv} Rohmer, *Dope: A Story of Chinatown and the Drug Traffic* (London: Cassell, 1919), p. 75.
- ^{xvi} Karl Brown, *Adventures With D. W. Griffith*, p. 224. Brown was cameraman on *Broken Blossoms*, D.W. Griffith's film adaptation of the *Limehouse Nights* story, 'The Chink And The Child'.
- ^{xvii} *ibid.*
- ^{xviii} A modern dragon sculpture now marks the centre of Chinese settlement in Limehouse.
- ^{xix} In 1850, the Navigation Act which stated that crews must be no less than seventy-five per cent British was repealed. This allowed shipowners to exploit cheap sources of labour. See Maria Lin Wong, *Chinese Liverpoolians* (Merseyside: Liverpool Press, 1989), p. 29.
- ^{xx} *Notes and Queries*, 21st July, 1900, p. 21.
- ^{xxi} The Boxers got their name from descriptions submitted by missionaries to the English language *North China Daily News*. Their Chinese name was The Society of the Fists of Righteous Harmony. At their rallies they demonstrated spirit trances and supernatural resistance to bullets, poison and the sword. See Ross G. Forman, 'Peking Plots: Fictionalizing the Boxer Rebellion of 1900' in *Victorian Literature and Culture* (1060-1503/99), pp. 19-48.
- ^{xxii} See Diana Preston, *Beseiged in Peking: The Story of the 1900 Boxer Rising* (London: Constable, 1999).
- ^{xxiii} Paul A. Cohen, *The Boxer Uprising: A Narrative History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 14.
- ^{xxiv} The first of the series was *The Mystery of Fu Manchu* (1913).
- ^{xxv} Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1992), p. 146.
- ^{xxvi} Virginia Berridge, *Opium And The People: Opiate Use and Drug Control Policy in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century England* (London, New York: Free Association Books, 1999), p. 198.
- ^{xxvii} In 1908, Britain passed the Poisons and Pharmacy Act. In 1909, the first International Opium Conference was held in Shanghai calling for a stricter control of opiates, a second was held in 1912, and a third in 1914 in The Hague.

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- ^{xxviii} See Urmila Sheshagiri, 'Modernity's (Yellow) Perils: Dr Fu-Manchu and English Race Paranoia', *Cultural Critique*, 62, Winter 2006 pp. 162-194.
- ^{xxix} Burke, *Limehouse Nights*, p. 45.
- ^{xxx} *ibid.*, p. 23.
- ^{xxx1} Edwin Pugh, 'Thomas Burke', *The Bookman*, July, 1917, p. 111.
- ^{xxxii} Burke, *Limehouse Nights*, p. 48.
- ^{xxxiii} J. G. Birch, *Limehouse through five centuries* (London: Sheldon Press, 1930), pp.142-6.
- ^{xxxiv} *How To See London And Places of Historical Interest*, Thomas Cook Guide, Summer Season 1928, The Thomas Cook Group Ltd., Company Archives. The earliest reference to East End tours that I have been able to find appears in a Thomas Cook London guidebook of 1913. It states: 'Also starting from some of Thos Cook & Son's offices, during the summer season there are half-day drives on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons, and evening drives on the same days in the "East End" of London.' Unfortunately, no details of the route are given. This quote does not appear in any edition of 'Cook's Handbook to London' up to and including that published in 1910 (the archive does not hold copies for 1911 or 1912), but it (or a slight variant) can be found in all issues from 1913 onwards.
- ^{xxxv} *ibid.*
- ^{xxxvi} The Godfrey Edition, Old Ordnance Survey Maps, 'Stepney and Limehouse 1914', reprint, 1999. This arose from: 'The misleading characterisation of the small and peaceable Anglo-Chinese community resident in Pennyfields and Limehouse Causeway created by writings such as Sax Rohmer's about his evil Fu Manchu.'
- ^{xxxvii} Thomas Burke, *Out And About: A Notebook of London in War-Time* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1919), p. 35.
- ^{xxxviii} *ibid.*
- ^{xxxix} Kohn, *Dope Girls*, p. 66.
- ^{xl} *The Athenaeum*, 16th May, 1919, p. 336.
- ^{xli} Morton, *The Nights of London*, p. 16.
- ^{xlii} *ibid.*
- ^{xliii} Burke, *Limehouse Nights*, p. 155.
- ^{xliv} 'In Limehouse and the Isle of Dogs', Chapter XI of 'Off the track in London' by George R. Sims, published by Jarrold & Sons, 1911. Originally published in *The Strand* magazine, July 1905.
- ^{xlvi} *ibid.*
- ^{xlvi} *The London Spy: A Book of Town Travels* (1922), *City of Encounters* (1932), *London in My Time* (1934), *Living in Bloomsbury* (1939), *The Real East End* (1936).
- ^{xlvii} Thomas Burke, *English Night-Life: From Norman Curfew to Present Black-Out* (London: B.T Batsford Ltd., 1943 (1941), p. 95.
- ^{xlviii} See my 'Thomas Burke, the "Laureate of Limehouse": A New Biographical Outline' in *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 48:2 (Jan 2005), pp. 164-187.
- ^{xlviii} Burke, *The Wind and The Rain*, p. 86.
- ^{xlix} Burke, *Limehouse Nights*, p. 91.
- ^l Burke, *Nights in Town*, p. 76.
- ^{li} Emily Hahn, *The Soong Sisters* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company Inc., 1941), pp. 16-17.
- ^{lii} Robert Bickers, *Britain In China: Community, Culture and Colonialism 1900-1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 23.
- ^{liii} *Empire News*, 1922
- ^{liv} *The Sphere*, May 8, 1926 'Down Chinatown Way: A Peep Behind the Scenes in Limehouse – The Foreign Colonies of London Series, No. III., p. 164.
- ^{lv} H.V. Morton, *The Nights of London*, p. 44.
- ^{lvi} Newman Flower, ed., *The Journals of Arnold Bennett: 1921-1928* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1933), p. 263.

^{lvii} *ibid.* Still, despite having seen ‘no vice whatsoever’, when he came to write the scenenplay for the film *Piccadilly* (1928), the legendary Limehouse gloom provides a foil for the glitter and dazzle of the West End. The nightlife setting moves between the upmarket glamour of the Piccadilly Nightclub, probably modelled on *Ciro’s*, and the lower-class squalor of Chinese Shosho’s Limehouse lodgings. Shosho, played by Anna May Wong, is a scheming Chinese scullery maid whose exotic ‘oriental’ dance routine outshines the outmoded shimmy of Mabel, the fading star of *The Piccadilly*.

^{lviii} Birch, *Limehouse through five centuries*, pp.142-6

^{lix} Charles Spencer Chaplin, *My Wonderful Visit* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1922), p. 130. The book was published in America that same year as *My Trip Abroad*. Burke describes his impressions of Charlie Chaplin and their midnight ramble in *The London Spy* (1922) and in *City of Encounters* (1932).

^{lx} *ibid.*

^{lxi} ‘Chong Ching, Chong Sam, Wong Ho, Yow Yip, Choi Sau, Ah Chong Koon, Pong Peng, Cheng Pong Lai, are a few names taken at random from a collection of application forms for ration books during the First World War’. See ‘Our Fascinating Borough’, *Tower Hamlets News*, Vol 1., No. 4., p. 3. Chinatown File, Local History Archive, Tower Hamlets Central Library.

^{lxii} *London: A Combined Guidebook & Atlas* (London: Thos. Cook & Son Ltd., 1937), p. 47.

^{lxiii} ‘Limehouse ‘Debunked’, unattributed newspaper clipping, 1934. Chinatown File, Local History Archive, Tower Hamlets Central Library.