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BOOKS OF CHANGE: A WESTERN FAMILY'S WRITINGS ON CHINA, 1855-1949

BY TIM CHAMBERLAIN[1]

In the hundred years between 1843 and 1943, using the treaty port system which was established in China after the so-called Opium Wars, the Western world actively sought to shape and change China. Although China as a whole was never formally brought under colonial rule, the loose coalition of foreign powers who had managed to impose this system of foreign concessions and extra-territoriality upon the Chinese Imperial (and later Republican) Government came to be seen as exerting a system of quasi-colonialism or "informal empire" within the country. From the Chinese perspective it was a humiliating situation which deprived their Government of direct authority over a number of foreign settlements, as well as their inhabitants, within the bounds of their own country. The treaty port system only underlined the fact that China was in a politically weakened and economically impoverished state.[2]

One of the concessions ceded by the Treaty of Tientsin in 1858 was that religious liberty should be permitted to all Christians in China. In addition to permitting foreigners to travel and trade more freely, they would henceforth also be permitted to carry out missionary activities as well. One of the most notable of these missionaries to travel widely in China at this time was the Reverend Alexander Williamson.

Williamson was born in Falkirk, Scotland on 5 December 1829, into a prominent family of cotton bleachers based in Lochwinnoch, near Glasgow.[3] He was the eldest of seven brothers, two of whom also became missionaries.[4] Ordained in April 1855 Williamson began his missionary career with the London Missionary Society, leaving for China the following month with his wife, Isabelle. They sailed on the *Hamilla Mitchell*, a 540 ton wooden vessel with three masts built in 1850. The journey from London to Shanghai, via the Cape of Good Hope took them four months. Travelling with them was a fellow LMS missionary, Griffith John and his wife, Margaret. Griffith John would also go on to have a long and distinguished career evangelising in China.[5] They set sail from Gravesend on 21 May 1855, and were seen off by Isabelle's parents and grandparents. On the voyage out the 25 year old Alexander

kept a diary for his younger brothers and his wife's younger siblings.[6] The diary shows his keen interest in science and the natural world as well as the underlying piety of his religious conviction. In much of its tone and subject matter we are given a glimpse of Williamson, still only a young man himself, striving both to edify and perhaps also to impress his junior siblings as he discourses upon Galileo and Kepler having been shown the satellites of Jupiter through "a common ship glass" loaned to him one night by one of the ship's officers.[7] But there are some moments of levity in the journal too, where he makes light of some of the inconveniences of shipboard life:

> *What would you think if your seat were to take it into its head to walk away to the other side of the room without a moment's notice while you were busily engaged at your desk? And then repenting of its evil deed to return as unceremoniously? … Or what would you say if [at dinner] while you were handing the spices to your neighbour, your plate full of soup emptied its contents or part of them on your trousers, and a leg of mutton took up its abode on your knee!*[8]

Whilst the journey may not have been an easy one there were other more hazardous inconveniences to contend with; not least when it became apparent that the ship's captain had a tendency to seek solace in the bottle, especially at moments of greatest adversity in the voyage, and as a consequence on one occasion he managed to run the *Hamilla Mitchell* aground. When they eventually reached Woosung (Wusong) the Williamsons were given the fortuitous opportunity of a convenient exit by the captain of one of the opium receiving ships stationed there.

> *[Captain Baylis] kindly invited us to breakfast with him on the Monday morning and promised to convey us to Shanghai in the forenoon. We went and enjoyed ourselves very much: the breakfast was served up in the very first style in a large room; and for the first time we were attended by Chinese servants with tails reaching nearly to the ground. It was rather novel. There are seven receiving ships of that nature lying at Woosung, and they are heavily armed and manned. The East India Company and other merchants dare not land the opium in China, and they have therefore adopted this subterfuge. Fast clipper ships from India bring the opium and it*

is put on board these vessels, and then native Chinese boats and merchant's boats come and get it from them. It is a nefarious and deadly traffic. Would that it were stopped.[9]

It is reported that Williamson threw himself into his missionary work "with far more zeal than discretion", yet in less than two years as with many Western contemporaries unused to the ills of China's climate, he succumbed to malaria, and his health broke down so severely that he had to be invalided home, almost dying in 1857.[10] Consequently he was discharged from the London Missionary Society, but he did eventually return to China in 1863, this time representing the National Bible Society of Scotland as its first agent in China. He later became one of the founders of the Society for the Diffusion of Christian and General Knowledge among the Chinese.[11] Whilst working for the National Bible Society of Scotland Williamson travelled extensively throughout North China, visiting many places which hitherto had been off-limits to Westerners. Williamson described these remarkable journeys in a two volume work, entitled *Journeys in North China, Manchuria, and Eastern Mongolia, with some account of Corea*, published in 1870. *Journeys in North China* long remained an important and authoritative account of the country. The journeys described were primarily undertaken for the purposes of missionary work, preaching and distributing Christian tracts, but as Williamson states in his Preface:

Travelling over districts near and remote from the Ports, I met with much that was interesting in the natural features of the country, in the character and aspect of the people, and not a little which was both new and important in reference to the products of the soil and the mineral resources of the different provinces. It appeared incumbent on me to make these things known, and therefore I hope this book will be looked upon, not as the offspring of any ambition for authorship, but as the result of a sense of duty.[12]

Williamson also compiled lengthy sets of "Notes" on his various journeys which were read before the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1867 (relating to North China and Shan-tung (Shandong)); and the Royal Geographical Society in 1869 (relating to Manchuria), in which it is clear he never wavered in his forthright criticism of the iniquities of the opium trade.[13] In these journeys he paid

close attention to a range of geographical topics, carefully noting details of agriculture, topography, social customs, and in particular details of the mineral wealth, as well as the more commercial kinds of flora and fauna which characterised the various regions he passed through. He also collected specimens of various ores and plants. One collection of botanical specimens which he made whilst travelling through Shantung he presented to Edinburgh Botanical Gardens; and a second, collected whilst travelling in North China and Manchuria, he presented to the Edinburgh University Herbarium.[14] Williamson was by no means unusual in pursuing this kind of parallel mission. Indeed many other Westerners residing in China at the time undertook similar activities. It has been shown that this kind of zeal for empirical fact-finding was all part and parcel of the Western project of informal empire. The quest to "open up" and "civilise" China was justified at the time using the rhetoric of assisting China; helping to educate and enlighten the Chinese so that they might ultimately help themselves, whilst simultaneously exploiting and making best use of China's natural resources in such a way that benefited the wider Western world.[15] Williamson's Preface to his *Journeys in North China* shows in no uncertain terms his views with regard to this particular point:

> *The truth is, China can never be truly or permanently opened up without inland residence among the people; and as Protestant missionaries are centres of light and truth and beneficence, better adapted for salutary pioneer work than any other class, acceptable to the natives, and never guilty of political intrigue, it is clearly the interest of all concerned that provision be made for their legal establishment and unfettered action. … On the general question I make no remark further than that the history of the Chinese demonstrates that it is not only impolitic, but dangerous, to grant them all the privileges of civilized nations, and allow them to ignore all the responsibilities recognized by other powers.*[16]

Williamson goes on at length to discuss the contemporary obstacles to progress which he sees as having arisen in China's past, and naturally many of these are rooted in the Chinese Imperial system and in Chinese culture itself. He cites the Inspector-General of the Chinese Customs Service, Robert Hart's view that of those Chinese officials who had grasped Western notions of progress "not one is prepared to enter

boldly on a career of progress, and take the consequence of even a feeble initiative".[17] In this way Williamson's epic travelogue becomes a representative, if rather forthright, polemic of the prevailing foreign opinion at the time. His survey of the country is a curious mixture of both commercial and scientific "fact finding", as well as social observation, commentary, criticism, and practical suggestion; in this sense his personal mission is very much bound up with the Western project of informal empire. He acknowledges, however, that not all foreigners in China were of the same opinion as to how these ends were to be achieved: "Much has been said against missionaries going into the interior, lest they should complicate matters between the Chinese Government and our own. But what is a missionary or other traveller in China? Is he not a living volume on ethnology adapted to the capacities of the weakest of the people?"[18]

The task which Williamson and his fellow missionaries had set themselves was challenging in the extreme and not without very real personal danger. Whilst travelling through Chih-li (Zhili) with fellow missionary Jonathan Lees (LMS), he noted that "Everywhere we were welcomed by the people, curiosity leading them to purchase our books greedily; but to-day one of us was stopped in an address, which he fondly hoped was interesting the people, by an inquiry whether he had not brought foreign matches to sell. Fancy being mistaken for an itinerant match-seller!"[19] But, in such instances of Chinese passive resistance (intentional or otherwise), where the foreign merchants' encouragements towards progress through the notion of "free-trade" might have met with more success, missionaries and merchants alike could find themselves the individual focus of much more violent forms of Chinese opposition. Indeed, only the year before the publication of Williamson's *Journeys in North China,* Alexander's brother James had been murdered near Tientsin (Tianjin) by robbers. This was one of several attacks on foreigners at this time which eventually culminated in the "Tientsin Massacre" of 1870.[20] Such tragedies however only seemed to strengthen the resolve of many missionaries and spur them on to fight for greater provisions for foreigners in their calls for modifications to the treaties already imposed. Williamson was somewhat unusual in his approach, whereby he thought the aims of the Christian mission would be better served by appealing to the educated classes of the Chinese.[21] Williamson's wife, Isabelle (sometimes also referred to as Isabella), who accompanied him on his journeys, wrote of her own particular

approach towards the evangelisation of China:

> *The object of these journeys was first to carry the Gospel truth to as many of the women of China as I could reach, and secondly to familiarise them with Western women, and so to render the visits of those who followed me more easy. … Missionaries of the widest information and greatest experience, both in China and India, concur in affirming that missionary operations have reached that point when efficient zenana work is indispensable to satisfactory progress. They find that men will never be converted in any large numbers till the women are won over to the side of Christianity. The women conserve the ancient religions and superstitions of their country; and what can a man do when the women of the household are against him? The elevation, therefore, of the nations of the East, and the advancement of Christianity among them, depend to a large extent upon the women of Christendom.*[22]

Old Highways in China (1884), Isabelle Williamson's own account of their journeys through China is an invaluable work of historical ethnography, not least for its particular focus on the lives of Chinese women. In many ways the modern reader today might well agree that Isabelle's book is perhaps more sympathetic in its descriptions of Chinese culture than her husband's better known two-volume work. Indeed, although there was much that the Williamsons saw in China which they would wish to reform, there was also much to admire too. Alexander Williamson was clearly impressed by the figure of Mencius, whose descendants cordially received him when he visited the philosopher's hometown; although he rather negatively confesses to finding Confucius more of an "enigma."[23] Each of the Williamson's works still stand on its own merits as an valuable and insightful eye-witness record to the history and the culture (both East and West) of the period in which it was written.

This project of literary observation was continued by their daughter, Margaret, who wrote variously under the names Mrs Paul King, Madge King, Veronica King, or with her husband under the pseudonym of William A. Rivers.[24] Perhaps best remembered as Veronica King, her writings differ distinctly from those of her parents. Veronica did not follow them into missionary work. In 1881 she married Paul Henry King, who served in the Chinese Maritime Customs Service; the wedding was

conducted by Bishop George Evans Moule in Shanghai's Holy Trinity Cathedral.[25] The couple were prominent members of treaty port society, each with literary aspirations. In December 1894 the *Peking and Tientsin Times* reported that:

> *Visitors to the Writers' Club or the Pioneers, says Hearth and Home, may remark a popular little lady surrounded by a crowd of friends all eager to claim her attention. To ask who she is argues oneself unknown in feminine clubland, where Mrs Paul King, authoress of "Cousin Cinderella," is a familiar figure. Mrs King has a singularly magnetic personality, and, talking well, invariably draws round her a circle of interested listeners. To a wide knowledge of life in many climes – for she has been twice round the world and once round the Cape of Good Hope, without reckoning various voyages to the Far East – Mrs King adds a very observant and sympathetic nature and a keen sense o' humour.*[26]

After becoming known for various pieces of journalism and criticism, Veronica King began to write fiction. Her first novel, *Cousin Cinderella,* was published in 1892. The book appears to have been greeted by favourable reviews in the foreign press in China, even prompting Robert Hart to remark in a letter to his colleague, James Duncan Campbell: "Have you read *Cousin Cinderella?* It's not an unwelcome addition to the host of novels – it is original, well written, and improves every page, winding up in a novel and capital ending."[27]

Veronica's husband, Paul King, had joined the Chinese Customs Service in 1874, following in the footsteps of his maternal uncle, John Alexander Man (later known as Man Stuart), who had served as private secretary first to Horatio Nelson Lay and then to Robert Hart, and later became a Customs Commissioner at Newchwang (Niuzhuang) and Takao (present day Kaohsiung in Taiwan).[28] Man was a military man at heart, having served with distinction in many parts of the globe, including China with General Gordon in 1860, and again as part of the force sent to suppress the Taiping Rebellion in 1864; he later served as Commandant of Local Forces (and possibly also for a time as Acting Governor) in Trinidad and Tobago.[29] Founded in 1854, the Chinese Maritime Customs Service was an agency of the Chinese Government, but in reality the management of this organisation was firmly held in foreign hands. Its officers, including the Inspector-

General, were mostly British, but the Service also included the nationalities of the other major foreign "powers" in China.[30] Further down the ranks there were a great number of Chinese clerks and writers. All of the foreign staff were required to pass a civil service type examination and were expected to learn and attain a basic proficiency in the Chinese language.[31] They were often moved from one treaty port to another where they were stationed for varying lengths of time, and all of them had to interact with local officials from the regional Chinese administrations as well as with the Chinese clerks and writers who worked for the Customs Service itself, which meant that they had a uniquely placed experience of Chinese officialdom, quite unlike the merchants and missionaries who made up the majority of the foreign population of the treaty ports. It should come as no surprise then that in time some of these foreigners took a different or more nuanced view of the Chinese compared to their missionary counterparts. Indeed, writing at the end of a very long career of nearly fifty years in the Chinese Customs Service, Paul King attempted to analyse the gap between East and West in his book, *Weighed in China's Balance* (1928).[32] In this work he examines at length the missionary project in China and tries to imagine, and thereby explain, the Chinese perception of Christianity. He is often at pains to stress that in so doing he is "not intending to criticize missionaries on the one hand, or the Chinese on the other."[33] Yet, as contemporary reviews attest, it was almost impossible for him to walk such a narrow line. He was accused of expressing "nothing but the well-known prejudices of the Treaty-port foreigner suffering from the usual anti-missionary complex."[34]

The first part of the book is an appreciation of the great antiquity of the Chinese system of government, Chinese culture and religion. And he attempts to give balanced observations:

> *China has for millenniums been splendidly and solidly self-supporting and self-sufficing, and she owes this admirable quality, in the main, to her system of patriarchal government. The Chinese ideal is law and order first in the home, then in the village, the city, the district, the province and finally in the central government of the Empire. It is perfectly logical, and what is more to the purpose – it works, at least it has worked up to recent years. … This form of government, of course, did not lend itself to enterprise or experiments, and as stability and maintenance were its principal*

objects, it had to be chary of encouraging original ideas in case they proved destructive.[35]

Yet it is clear to see why his views of the Western influence on China, and in particular the work of the various denominations of Christian missionaries working in China might not have sat too well with certain quarters of his Western readership. Particularly when he states that:

Europeans have indubitably forced themselves on China, knowing for certain they were not wanted. And the Voice in the Wilderness, crying before them, and announcing their approach, was to the Chinese an oracle of dubious interpretation, hinting of amazing beliefs, and also at times insinuating that the whole world would come under the domination of their Deity. After this had been promised for centuries by advanced pickets, as one may call them, at last the main body of the invasion arrived with an iron determination to "Open up China"![36]

Such opinions, even if aired impartially (as King repeats), are a far remove from those expressed by his father-in-law, the Rev. Alexander Williamson.[37] To some extent it might be argued that these two writers represent the polarisation of opinion in the foreign communities residing in China. They are the two opposite ends of a single spectrum, who were in fact essentially aiming at largely the same ends; namely the assimilation of the Chinese people into the Western spheres of both commerce and social organisation. Yet we should bear in mind the fact that Williamson and King are both writing from distinctly different standpoints at markedly different times within this period of informal empire in China's history.[38]

Indeed, the situations in which Customs officers and missionaries found themselves were broadly very similar. Customs officers, just as missionaries, were often stationed at remote and out of the way places. Some of these outposts were truly tiny and meant extended periods of isolation from the company of fellow Westerners. But the role of the Customs official was perhaps a more subtle and complex one, as it required them to negotiate a certain degree of antagonism on two fronts as they professionally tried to balance potentially conflicting loyalties. During his time as Inspector-General of the Customs Service, Horatio Nelson Lay's attitude towards his employers was clear: "My position

was that of a foreigner engaged by the Chinese government to perform certain work *for* them but not *under* them."[39] Yet the work of these foreign Customs officials was frequently resented by their merchant compatriots and Chinese traders alike.[40] As with many of the Customs Commissioners, Paul King served in both remote outposts as well as the larger treaty ports, and in the course of his career he came into contact with both prominent and lower profile personages. Most notably he was known and appears to have been well liked by the prominent Chinese statesman, Li Hung-chang (Li Hongzhang); and whilst at Hangchow (Hangzhou) he was charged with looking after the visiting Prince and Princess Heinrich of Prussia in 1898.[41] He was decorated by the Chinese Court, receiving the Imperial Order of the Double Dragon, in recognition of his "loyal" work during the Boxer Rebellion, and also later on by the Republican Government, receiving the Order of the Golden Grain.[42] The fact that a Customs official in effect had a foot in each camp, so to speak, could well have influenced their personal perspective on the Westerners' uninvited presence in China.

Paul and Veronica King's fictional works on China certainly reflect their personal perceptions of both native Chinese society and the society of foreigners residing in China. Some of their plot themes mirror actual events and issues of the time. In one particular novel, *Eurasia* (1907), they address the issue of mixed-race offspring.[43] The Westerners of the treaty port system adhered to contemporary European social hierarchies which were grounded in strict Victorian and Edwardian principles of propriety and legitimacy. Whilst they certainly interacted with the Chinese on a day-to-day basis, living side-by-side even in the foreign settlements, employing Chinese domestic servants, there were strict social barriers maintained between the two communities. Yet it was a widely known and even an openly acknowledged fact of treaty port life that Western men would sometimes "condescend" to consort with Chinese women.[44] In some cases, especially in the early days, it was not uncommon that new recruits to China found themselves quietly encouraged to find native "concubines", often euphemistically referred to as "sleeping dictionaries."[45] Social ideas bound up in notions of gender and race were inescapable parts of treaty port life. It has been argued that racist prejudices were propagated as a defence mechanism against the perceived threat inherent in the dilution of colonial settler communities if their members integrated with the native population.[46] However, not everyone in the treaty ports adhered to these unwritten

rules, and although marriage of Western men and women to Chinese partners was distinctly frowned upon there were instances of this openly occurring.[47] Indeed, Louis Magrath King, Paul and Veronica's fourth son, was just such an individual.

Louis was born in Kiukiang (Jiujiang) on the Yangtze on 16 December 1886, and attended Chefoo School (at Yantai) until the age of 10 when he and his brother Wilfrid were sent to Berkhamsted School in England. At Berkhamsted the two boys first experienced the reality of displacement which, having been born as expatriate foreigners in China would always set them apart from their English compatriots "at home". On their first day at Berkhamsted they were labelled as "Chinks" by their new schoolmates and duly endured the initial friction engendered by such an epithet.[48] Yet Louis clearly had fond memories of China which his education in England didn't wholly manage to eclipse. He later wrote of his years at Chefoo:

> *I can remember holding converse with all sorts and conditions of Chinese, men, women and children; especially the farmers and their families working in their vineyards close by the school. … And great was my joy when one summer a missionary going inland, over those very hills, took me with him, and I travelled for a week or so by hsien-tzu or mule litter, a swaying contrivance of a mat shed on a couple of stout bamboo poles carried by two mules, fore and aft. It was my first overland journey and I must have been about six years old.*[49]

After completing their schooling Louis and his brother Wilfrid both returned to make their careers in China. Wilfrid Tindal King had a long career working in various parts of China for Jardine, Matheson & Co. Louis joined the Consular Service in 1905, and initially his career progressed along the usual path – training as a student interpreter at the Legation in Peking (Beijing), then moving to Shanghai in 1910, he moved up the assistant ranks, serving at various ports, until finally being appointed Consul; his career, however, was cut short before he managed to reach the position of Consul-General.[50]

Early on he showed the literary tendencies of his forbears when he anonymously published a work titled *China As It Really Is* (1912).[51] The book, which some commentators have deemed showed more youthful self-assurance than insight, is an examination of China, its history,

politics and culture in the immediate aftermath of the revolution of 1911.[52] The revolution had brought to an end the Imperial system in China with the removal of the Manchu Qing dynasty which had reigned since 1644 and ushered in a time of massive upheaval and uncertainty for the Chinese nation. Louis was only in his mid-twenties when the book was published, yet the introduction grandly states that the author "has spent two-thirds of his life" in China, and that the book was "the outcome of personal observation."[53] In his notes towards an uncompleted autobiography written almost forty years later, Louis reflects that the book demonstrated "the Treaty Port outlook before the days of … [seeing the] moat (sic) in one's own eye," and, whilst acknowledging it was a "superficial" work, he notes that at the time it was published it did manage to impress some of his senior colleagues, such as Henry English Fulford, who was then Consul-General at Tientsin.[54]

In 1913 Louis King was chosen to establish a rather unusual Consular outpost. Following on from the Simla Conference which had failed to reach an agreement in establishing the territorial borders of British-India, China and Tibet, Louis was given instructions to travel to the remote mountainous region of the Chinese-Tibetan frontier in Szechuen (Sichuan).[55] Ostensibly he was sent as an assistant attached to the Consulate-General in Chengtu (Chengdu), to monitor the cross-border trade. His real mission, however, was to gather intelligence regarding Chinese troop movements in the area.[56]

He set up his base at Tachienlu, now better known as Kangding (Dartsendo, in Tibetan), a town set at an altitude of some 8,500 feet (2,600 metres) above sea-level in which a transient population of Chinese and Tibetan merchants came to trade with each other. The Chinese brought up on foot back-breaking loads of brick tea from the plains around Chengtu, trading it for Tibetan medicines, wool and hides, after which Tibetan caravans of yaks then carried the highly prized tea back to Lhasa and the other regions of Tibet. Louis was certainly successful in his mission. He befriended the local Magistrate, Mr Han Kuang-chun, and was on good terms with the local Chinese General, Ch'en Hsia-ling, who was by most accounts a somewhat unhinged personality whose tenacious grip on power, like most other warlords of those tumultuous times, was maintained through an unequivocal rod of iron.[57] Louis was also friends with many of the local Tibetan authority figures: the Lamas, living Buddhas, local Chieftans and regional Army Generals, and, most notably, the Kalon Lama, who was in charge of the entire Tibetan Armed

Forces in Eastern Tibet.[58] Although King's mission was to observe and gather intelligence in the region, these activities were not necessarily as covert as one might assume. Louis King, Oliver Coales, and Eric Teichman, two Consular Officers who later maintained the Tachienlu outpost when Louis was withdrawn (initially because he was suffering from malaria, but thereafter when he went on to serve with the Chinese Labour Corps in France during the last year of the Great War), each made extensive journeys in the surrounding country, drawing maps as they went.[59] This particular region of Eastern Tibet is where three major rivers originate: the Salween; the Mekong, and the Yangtze. In many of the areas they explored these were the first proper geographical surveys undertaken; and, like his grandfather before him, in some places he mapped Louis was the first Westerner to travel through those areas.[60] It was on one of these extended journeys that he met his future wife, Rinchen Lhamo.

Rinchen was related to the local Tibetan nobility. When asked about their romance Louis later joked that he'd had no choice in the matter, Tibetan women being famously independent, she had chosen him![61] When he was withdrawn from the frontier in 1922 after his second period of duty there he applied for his marriage to be solemnised when he reached Chengtu. But W. Meyrick Hewlett, the Consul-General at Chengtu whom King had been tasked to relieve, was scandalised to discover that not only was King's partner Tibetan, they were also already parents to one child and were imminently expecting a second to be born.[62] Many of his superiors had already expressed worry that Louis had been left too long in such a remote spot, and here he had clearly stepped outside of the norms of treaty port society and the Consular Service rules for marriage were subsequently fully brought to bear upon him. His refusal to abandon his family, perhaps compounded by personal political differences he had stirred between the British Consular Service in China and the British Government in India, eventually meant that he was compelled to retire from the Service.[63]

During his early career in China, King was clearly drawn to all the usual aspects of the established expatriate lifestyle which characterised the treaty ports. He was a member of the Shanghai Club, and he held a lifetime membership of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, but his real passion was riding horses in the races held at Peking, Shanghai, and other race circuits in China; he was also a member of the Shanghai Light Horse Volunteer Corps.[64] It is interesting to note, however,

that in his first years after being posted to Shanghai in 1910, he shared a house with a Consular colleague, W.J.B. Fletcher, who had married a Chinese woman, much to the disapproval of his seniors, and like Louis he too was eventually compelled to retire from the Consular Service.[65]

Louis and his family left China in 1925 and settled in England where he and his wife, as his parents and grandparents before them, each set about writing books. Rinchen Lhamo's book, *We Tibetans* (1926),[66] which Louis assisted in translating, is a unique portrait of Tibetan life and culture; it is perhaps the first authentic ethnography of Tibetan society. Louis King's book, *China in Turmoil* (1927),[67] is a set of "character studies" of prominent Chinese and Tibetan persons of influence whom he had known during his time at the frontier. Many of these "pen portraits" were first published as individual sketches in *Blackwoods Magazine*. Curiously enough the book manages to be a highly insightful work, examining the wider situation of China's warlord era through these point-focussed studies of particular persons, whilst managing to remain very reticent as to the actual identities of the majority of the persons described. There may or may not have been a deliberate reason for this. In December 1925 Louis contacted the Foreign Office, hoping to put himself forward for intelligence work in Central Asia. Yet it was to no avail, as his offer was discretely turned down. A Labour Government came to power in 1929 and so Louis tried to seek reinstatement to the China Consular Service, complaining of unfair dismissal on the grounds of racial discrimination. In his letter he cited both works, but he was once again disappointed in this effort.[68] It is interesting to note that he was aided in his first approach to the Foreign Office by John T. Pratt, a former colleague from the Consular Service in China who had been transferred to the Foreign Office. John Pratt was the elder brother of Richard Septimus Pratt, who had joined the Service as part of the same intake group as Louis in 1905. John and Richard were themselves the off-spring of a racially mixed marriage, their father was English and their mother Indian. The brothers were said to have been subjected to racial prejudice themselves owing to their dark complexions; hence it seems natural to assume that John Pratt would have been understandably sympathetic towards Louis and Rinchen's situation.[69]

Although Louis never returned to China he never lost his interest in the changes which were taking place there. He continued to write commentaries and book reviews upon the subject, speculating as to

what kind of nation China would become. Shortly before he died he published a perceptive essay in *The Contemporary Review* (1947) in which he states:

> *To follow what is happening in China it is necessary to go back to fundamentals. The basic factors here are the vigour, industry and high intelligence of this race and its abounding multitude, factors of the first promise for the future but operating at the moment to the general stress and turmoil we see to-day. The Chinese are, in fact, a very numerous and vital people, too numerous for the country as hitherto organised to support comfortably, too vital to take matters supinely. I would emphasise the nation's vitality. There would appear to be something in the air there that makes man be up and doing, the genius loci perhaps, or the economic situation pure and simple, the produce of the country relative to its population. Whatever it is, the Chinese are very much alive.*[70]

Louis King's tone here is far removed from that of his grandfather, who almost 80 years previously had declared that "China is like a man under a course of medicine, we have put him in this position, we dare not leave him alone far less trust him to his own ideas, for that would prove his ruin. We must take him in hand, point out the proper methods; and, as far as consistent, force him to follow them, until we have set him on his feet again in new health and fresh vigour, qualified to start on a new and glorious career."[71] Alexander Williamson clearly thought that China could only benefit from the colonial-style interventions of the West, consequently one wonders what he would have made of the following statement written by Paul King:

> *… the West has made the first move to meet, the onus is on us to understand and appreciate the East. We shall not meet comfortably and securely until the West has other ideas besides making money out of the East, and, what is worse, deciding off-hand that Asia knows nothing and has everything to learn from us.*[72]

If we look specifically at the writings of the Williamsons and Kings with regard to their changing attitudes towards China it is clear that there was a marked difference in their perceptions. In many ways the writings of Williamson, the grandfather, sit entirely at odds with the

writings of King, the son-in-law, and King, the grandson; but perhaps it would be more accurate to say that their writings do not reflect so much a shift in the family's perceptions of China *per se*, but rather that they reflect the extent to which China itself had changed in the time span of just three generations. Indeed, it is important when looking at their writings to place them in their proper context. One could easily argue that what began as an approach based on well-meaning condescension or the assertion of patronising racial preconceptions – the colonial rhetoric of "the civilising mission" – did in time, through increasing familiarity, eventually become an awareness of, and a respect for, Chinese civilisation as it already existed on its own terms. Yet I would argue that it is not quite so clear cut. Western perceptions as a whole had to adapt over the first half of the twentieth-century because of the broader context in which the expatriate communities of informal empire existed. In particular, the decline of British power and its diplomatic influence in Asia, along with the enormous political changes which followed the revolution of 1911, and the turmoil which accompanied the rise of Chinese nationalism in this period, and the increasing perception of the treaty system as being "unequal", eventually compelled the foreign settler communities to question, or, perhaps more accurately, strive to justify the *raison d'être* for their own continued existence. In analysing the writings of the Williamsons and the Kings one needs to avoid the temptation to generalise from such specific examples, for each member of the small, scattered foreign communities in China would have held their own personal opinions nuanced largely by their own vested interests according to the extent of their commitments to, and their personal investment in, the system of informal empire of which they were an active part. The political changes and upheavals in the power structures of Chinese Government and the different factions which were vying for control in this latter period of informal empire were rapidly reshaping the character of Chinese sovereignty. Those foreigners with enough foresight could see that in time if they did not adapt, their presence in China would become untenable; and so, in the interests of free trade – the original notion which had drawn most of them to China in the first place – they would have to seek to redefine their relationship with China accordingly.

Alexander Williamson had devoted his life entirely to China through the courage (or rather the tenacity) of his own convictions in seeking to influence China towards its improvement, but so too, his descendents

were devoted to promoting China through the more nuanced insights they had gained from interacting with China via their positions in the Customs and Consular Services.[73] Those foreigners who worked in the administrative services and had the closest contacts with the various Chinese political and judicial administrations were perhaps best placed to witness and perceive this change and the realities it would eventually bring once the revolutionary period of unrest and turmoil had finally passed. The West had forced itself upon China at a point in time when China was already ripe for dynastic change. In this regard then, these changes stemmed as much from within China itself as well as, to a certain degree, having resulted from the pressures placed upon China from without during the century in which it was prey to the external forces of informal empire.

Endnotes

1. I would like to record my thanks to my brother-in-law, Jonathan Rolfe, and his wider family for supporting my efforts in researching the lives and writings of his and their forbears. I would also like to thank Dr Jacqueline Young for a small suggestion which helped me to sharpen my focus on what was originally a very big and amorphous general idea for this paper. All opinions, as well as any errors, oversights, and/or omissions (although hopefully avoided) are, of course, my own entirely.
2. John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1943* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953); Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), Chapters 4 & 6.
3. Louis Magrath King, *The Five Coloured Clouds* (MS. unfinished autobiography, unpublished, c.1947-1949).
4. Paul King (ed.), *Voyaging to China in 1855 & 1904: A Contrast in Travel* (London: Heath Cranton, 1936), 17; James Sibree, *LMS Register of Missionaries, Deputations, etc. 1796-1923* (London: London Missionary Society, 1923), No.s 527, 601, & 604.
5. R. Wardlaw Thompson, *Griffith John: The Story of Fifty Years in China* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1907), 33-34; see also, Noel Gibbard, *Griffith John: Apostle to Central China* (Bryntirion: Bryntirion Press, 1998).
6. King, *Voyaging to China*, 20.

7. King, *Voyaging to China,* 49-50.
8. King, *Voyaging to China,* 53-54.
9. King, *Voyaging to China,* 68.
10. King, *Voyaging to China,* 22.
11. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 381-382.
12. Rev. Alexander Williamson, *Journeys in North China*, Vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1870), p. v.
13. Rev. Alexander Williamson, "Notes on the North of China, its Productions and Communications" and "Notes on the Productions, Chiefly Mineral of Shan-tung", both in *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, New Series, Vol. 4 (December 1867): 33-63 and 64-73; Williamson, "Notes on Manchuria" (Discussion), *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 13.1 (1868-1869): 26-39; "Notes on Manchuria", in *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 39 (1869):1-36.
14. Williamson, *Journeys in North China*, Vol. 2, Appendix D.
15. Fa-Ti Fan, "Victorian Naturalists in China: Science and Informal Empire," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 36.1 (March 2003): 1-26; see also, Fairbank, *Trade on the China Coast,* Chapter 1.
16. Williamson, *Journeys in North China,* Vol. 1,viii-ix.
17. Williamson, *Journeys in North China,* Vol. 1,7-8.
18. Williamson, *Journeys in North China,* Vol. 1, 28-29.
19. Williamson, *Journeys in North China,* Vol. 1, 269.
20. H. N. Lay, *Note on the Opium Question and a brief survey of our relations with China* (London: M.S. Rickerby, 1893); G. T. Candlin, *John Innocent: A Story of Mission Work in North China* (London: The United Methodist Publishing House / The Magnet Press, 1909), 169-170; see also, Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, 231-235. Williamson also appears to make an oblique reference to his brother's murder in the Preface to his *Journeys in North China,* Vol. 1, vii.
21. Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China,* 438-441.
22. Isabelle Williamson, *Old Highways in China* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1884), 6-7.
23. Williamson, *Journeys in North China*, Vol. 1, 219-220 and 231-232.
24. Her full name was Margaret Alice Houston King (*née* Williamson).
25. The *North China Herald*, 8 March 1881, p. 240; Paul King, *In the Chinese Customs Service: A Personal Record of Forty-Seven Years* (London: Heath Cranton, 1930), 56.

26. *Peking & Tientsin Times*, 29 December 1894, 172.
27. John King Fairbank, Katherine Frost Bruner & Elisabeth Macleod Matheson (eds), *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), Vol. 2, Letter 852: Hart to Campbell, August 14th 1892.
28. China Imperial Maritime Customs Service List, Second Issue, 1 August 1876 (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1877).
29. King, *The Five Coloured Clouds* (MS.); The London Gazette, Issue No. 26188, 31 July 1891, Issue No. 26864, 22 June 1897 & Issue No. 26947, 14 March 1898; Fairbank et al., *The I.G. in Peking*, Vol. 1, Letters 53 & 59; and Vol. 2, Letter 879; *Who Was Who* (Oxford: A&C Black, 2007); he resumed the ancient family name of Stuart by Royal Warrant in 1898.
30. P.D. Coates, *The China Consuls: British Consular Officers, 1843-1943* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1988),137.
31. Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949* (London: Routledge, 2006), 27-28 and 42-43.
32. Paul King, *Weighed in China's Balance: An Attempt At Explanation* (London: Heath Cranton, 1928); see also, King, *In the Chinese Customs Service.*
33. King, *Weighed in China's Balance*, 16.
34. Review in *The Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 7.3 (May 1928): 220-221; see also, Bickers, *The Scramble for China,* 240-242.
35. King, *Weighed in China's Balance*, 83-84.
36. King, *Weighed in China's Balance*, 104; see also, Bickers, *The Scramble for China,* 235.
37. See King, *Weighed in China's Balance*, 95.
38. Isabelle Williamson died in 1886, and the Rev. Alexander Williamson died in 1890; Paul King is here writing some 40 years after their deaths. See, The *North China Herald*, 4 September 1886, pp. 262-263, & 5 September 1890, pp. 288-289.
39. John King Fairbank, Martha Henderson Coolidge and Richard J. Smith, *H.B. Morse: Customs Commissioner and Historian of China* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 28.
40. Frances Wood, *No Dogs and Not Many Chinese: Treaty Port Life in*

China, 1843-1943 (London: John Murray, 1998), Chapter 10.

41. King, *In the Chinese Customs Service*, Chapters 12 & 10. Paul King was also fluent in German; see, "Obituary," *The London Scottish Regimental Gazette*, 513, Vol. XI.III, September 1938.
42. King, *In the Chinese Customs Service*, 168; *The London Gazette*, Issue No. 28223, 12 February 1909; Haileybury School website, "A Brief History of Haileybury – Medals and Awards," accessed 4 May 2012, http://www.haileybury.com/medals/china.htm.
43. William A. Rivers [Paul & Veronica King], *Anglo-Chinese Sketches* (London: S.R. Menheneott, 1903); *Eurasia: A Tale of Shanghai Life* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1907); *The Chartered Junk: A Tale of the Yangtsze* Valley (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1910); Paul & Veronica King, *The Commissioner's Dilemma: An International Tale of the China of Yesterday* (London: Heath Cranton, 1929); see also, Jacqueline Young, *Western Residents of China and their Fictional Writings, 1890-1914* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, May 2011).
44. Coates, *The China Consuls*, 10, 25, 100, and 125.
45. Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me: An Englishman Adrift in Shanghai* (London: Penguin, 2004), 81; Bickers, *The Scramble for China*, 225-227; Lise Boehm, *China Coast Tales: Of The Noble Army, No. 2* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1898),121.
46. Ann L. Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist*, 16.4 (Nov. 1989): 634-660.
47. Coates, *The China Consuls*, 99-100, 396-397 and 441-443; Robert Bickers, "Shanghailanders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai, 1843-1937," *Past & Present*, 159 (May, 1998):161-211.
48. King, *The Five Coloured Clouds* (MS).
49. King, *The Five Coloured Clouds* (MS).
50. Louis King was appointed a Consul on 1 December 1921, see *The London Gazette*, Issue No. 32668, 11 April 1922. See, The North China Herald, 4 September 1886, pp. 262-263, & 5 September 1890, pp. 288-289.
51. A Resident in Peking [Louis Magrath King], *China As It Really Is* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912).
52. Coates, *The China Consuls*, 418.
53. A Resident in Peking, *China As It Really Is*, p. v.
54. Louis Magrath King, *The Five Coloured Clouds: Framework* (note-

book associated with the unfinished MS., c.1947-1949); see also, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Special Collections, Sir A.G.N. Ogden, PPMS 47, Box 17, File 141.

55. For more details on the Simla Conference, see Carole McGranahan, *Empire and the Status of Tibet: British, Chinese, and Tibetan Negotiations, 1913-1934,* in Alex McKay (ed.), *The History of Tibet,* Vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2003).
56. National Archives (NA), FO 228/2582 Alston to King 4 September 1913.
57. NA, FO 228/2960, Tibet, Dossier 36, Vol. 5, King to Alston, 21 June 1920.
58. Louis Magrath King, *China in Turmoil: Studies in Personality* (London: Heath Cranton, 1927), Chapter 15.
59. NA, FO 228/2588, Jordan to F.O., 22 September 1915; NA, WO 374/39724, King, Capt. L.M., 1918-1921; Oliver Coales, "Eastern Tibet," *The Geographical Journal*, 53.4 (London: The Royal Geographical Society, 1919); "Economic Notes on Eastern Tibet," *The Geographical Journal*, 54.4 (1919); Eric Teichman, "Journeys through Kam (Eastern Tibet)," *The Geographical Journal* 59.1 (1922); *Travels of a Consular Officer in Eastern Tibet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).
60. King, *China in Turmoil*, 196-197; John Hanbury-Tracy, *Black River of Tibet* (London: Frederick Muller, 1938), 271 & 273. Hanbury-Tracy incorrectly gives the year of King's journey as 1925, it was actually 1922, see The British Library OIOC L/P&S/10/884, King to Alston, 12 October 1922, 'Route Report of Mr King's Journey on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier.' Louis King also collected and donated an important collection of Tibetan artefacts to the British Museum, see Tim Chamberlain, "Edge of Empires," *The British Museum Magazine*, 66 (Spring/Summer, 2010): 50-52. Similarly John Alexander Man donated a collection of artefacts which he collected in Taiwan to the British Museum in 1870.
61. "Pioneer Woman from Tibet," *Evening Standard*, 12 August 1925.
62. SOAS, Special Collections, P.D. Coates, PPMS 52, Box 5, File 29, "Notes of a Conversation with Ogden," 3 October 1973; Sir A.G.N. Ogden, PPMS 47, Box 17, Files 132 & 141; Coates, *The China Consuls,* 421-423.
63. NA, FO 228/2963, Tibet Dossier 36, Vol. 8, King to Alston, 18 June 1922; Lamb, *Tibet, China and India, 1914-1950: A History of Imperial*

Diplomacy (Hertingfordbury: Roxford Books, 1989),123-128.

64. King, *The Five Coloured Clouds* (MS), and other miscellaneous family papers; see also, C. Noel Davies, *A History of the Shanghai Paper Hunt Club, 1863-1930: With Complete Records of Hunts, Hunt Handicaps, Steeplechases and Point-to-Points* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1930).
65. King, *Five Coloured Clouds: Framework*; Coates, *The China Consuls*, 441-443. W.J.B. Fletcher also published two collections of his own translations of Classical Chinese poetry: *Gems of Chinese Poetry* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1918), and, *More Gems of Chinese Poetry* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1919).
66. Rinchen Lhamo (Mrs Louis King), *We Tibetans* (London: Seeley Service, 1926).
67. Louis Magrath King, *China in Turmoil: Studies in Personality* (London: Heath Cranton, 1927).
68. NA, FO 369/1885, 'Proposed employment of Mr L.M. King on Intelligence Work in Central Asia' (1925-1926); FO 369/2076, "Mr Louis King's Application for re-instatement in the China Consular Service" (1929); King made a final appeal to the Foreign Office in 1930 after the death of his wife in November 1929, FO 369/2129, 'Question of re-instatement of Mr Louis King in the China Consular Service' (1930).
69. Coates, *The China Consuls*, 429-430; Martyn Atkins, *Informal Empire in Crisis: British Diplomacy and the Chinese Customs Succession, 1927-1929* (New York: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1995), 15. Another of the Pratt brothers, William Henry Pratt, achieved fame as an actor in Hollywood under the stage name Boris Karloff.
70. Louis Magrath King, "Cause and Effect in China," *The Contemporary Review*, 172 (1947): 94-98.
71. Williamson, *Notes on the North of China, its Productions and Communications*, 56-57.
72. King, *Weighed in China's Balance*, 93.
73. For more on Williamson's character and his life's work, see SOAS Special Collections, Sir C.S. Addis, PPMS 14/66, Box 7, Letter book 1890-1892, Letter 29: Addis to his sister, 2 September 1890.