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ARTICLE

"Whiteness," Prejudice, and the Consolidation of an Anglo-American Elite in Nineteenth-Century Hong Kong

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Abstract

Americans living in nineteenth-century Hong Kong and China's treaty ports encountered a contradiction. The British dominated elite foreign society, their political, social, and cultural agendas often setting the pace for life within the community. But as citizens of a country that had recently wrested its independence from its one-time imperial overlord, Americans arriving in China were ostensibly averse to imperialism and the culture of empire. They maintained a belief that theirs was a benevolent republic that championed international amity and self-determination. Still, as Elisa Tamarkin notes, if Americans were wary of the British Empire, many found the spectacle of it appealing—a tendency evident in Hong Kong and the foreign enclaves along China's coast. Americans eager to enter elite foreign society proclaimed newfound sympathies for British belligerence in China, in turn developing increasingly prejudiced opinions about their Chinese neighbours and staff. Their derisive expressions of racial difference reinforced efforts to reconcile Anglo-American cultural incongruities. Such sentiments reflect the entangled processes through which extraimperial groups such as Americans fashioned themselves as members of the colonial elite. I argue that through such processes, the British and Americans subordinated national rivalry in the interest of entrenching racial divisions between white and non-white communities.

Keywords: Colonialism; Race; Identity; United States; Hong Kong

It rained on 31 March 1867 in Hong Kong. It rained so hard that the Chinese community gave up trying to remain dry and spilled into the streets to wash their clothes and bathe in it. The American John Murray Forbes described the scene in a letter to his father: "It looked very tempting and if it had been at night I should have tried the experiment myself, but during the day, I should have been thought rather idiotic by the colonials."[1] Forbes's account, mundane in its delivery, masks the range of colonial tensions that concern this article. The Chinese community appears unrestrained, unashamed to be bathing by daylight, "idiotic" in their conduct. While enticed, Forbes is by contrast too self-aware of how participating might reflect upon himself and his image. His choice of the word "colonials" is doubly charged. It both signals who set the agenda for respectability (the British) and voices contempt for the pretensions of nineteenth-century Hong Kong's

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[1] Massachusetts Historical Society (hereafter MHS), John Murray Forbes letters [copies], 1863–1869, Ms. N-156, John Murray Forbes to Father, Hong Kong, 31 March 1867.

Anglo elite. These interwoven racial, social, and cultural tensions defined the elite American experience in the colony.

Such tensions weighed on Americans with elite aspirations living in Hong Kong and throughout China's treaty ports in the late nineteenth century. The British dominated elite white society in these foreign enclaves. Their political, social, and cultural agendas set the pace of life within the colony and the foreign settlements along the China coast. Americans, as citizens of a country that had wrested its independence from its one-time British overlord, arrived in China ostensibly averse to the British imperial project and British imperial culture. Often occluding the fact that the United States was forging a continental empire westward and making forays into the Pacific, mid-nineteenth-century Americans abroad championed the narrative that their country was a benevolent republic, one that advocated international amity and the right to self-determination.[2] Yet, as Elisa Tamarkin argues, despite being vocally critical and wary of the British Empire, many Americans found the "prevailing spectacle of it" appealing.[3]

The Anglophilia Tamarkin refers to was at once a "fetish and nostalgia," and a "politics and aspiration," but in a racially fraught British colony far from Boston's Brahmin clubs and Harvard's halls it was also a projection calibrated to ease acceptance into elite society. Sometimes genuine, often selectively performative, it was almost always steered by racial ideas that drew lines between a white community of Britons, Americans, and Europeans and an ambiguously defined "Other" encompassing Chinese, Malay, Filipino, Macanese, Parsi, Jewish, and Sikh communities.[4] But whiteness was a fraught category in contact zones such as Hong Kong. Much research, including Catherine Ladds's article in this series, demonstrates how, to a British colonial elite, the presence of lower-class whites and Eurasian children or the intermingling of white and non-white communities threatened the construct's prestigious perch atop colonial racial hierarchies.[5] This research confirms what are now widely accepted seminal arguments such as Noel Ignatiev's and Theodore Allen's that whiteness was a category constructed against real or imagined threats; that the requisites for its attainment shifted according to local socio-political anxieties.[6]

The requisite traits and behaviours that comprised the contours of "whiteness" for Americans in Hong Kong were contingent upon the colony's peripheral position relative to the U.S. metropole.[7] Writing about racial encounters in the United States, Elijah Anderson's *Black in White Space* flags multiple important considerations for how race affects quotidian interactions; the most important in this context being that white spaces from which others are "typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present at

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[2] For more on early American overseas expansion see Miles M Evers and Eric Grynaviski, *The Price of Empire: American Entrepreneurs and the Origins of America's First Pacific Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024); Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

[3] Elisa Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 118.

[4] For the construction of race in relation to China, see Michael Keevak, *Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 72.

[5] Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community Culture and Colonialism, 1900–1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 72, 96; Catherine Ladds, "Managing 'White' Criminality: Disorderly Britons on the China Coast, c.1918–40," *Itinerario* (2025); H. J. Lethbridge, "Condition of the European Working Class in Nineteenth Century Hong Kong," *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15 (1975), 88–112, 106–8.

[6] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 59; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race: Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso, 1994), 19–21.

[7] See Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, "Introduction," in *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*, ed. Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2020), 1–22, 9–11.

all" enforce a "white sensibility."[8] Colonial Hong Kong amplified such white sensibility due to the overlapping circumstances of its function as a contact zone and its population's racial imbalance. By the mid- to late nineteenth century, foreign migration to Hong Kong increased steadily, but demographically the colony remained a predominately Chinese city—one in which distance from the U.S., numerical marginality, and ambivalence towards the Chinese community made the American community socially and politically reliant upon the British.[9]

Penelope Edmonds's analyses of nineteenth-century Melbourne and Victoria remind us that such "developing [urban] frontiers" were "charged and often-violent sites of racialized spatial contestations."[10] Edmonds's research maps these contestations as the mid-nineteenth-century exceptionalist belief in a "community of transcontinental Anglo-Saxonism" bound through shared racial, cultural, and English-speaking heritage evolved into an explicit colonial impulse to regulate and segregate "bodies and spaces" along "hardening racial lines."[11] Edmonds helpfully frames the often overt triumphalism of nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism as a foil to how whiteness later functions as "invisible, privileged, normative, and taken-for-granted," but her argument sidesteps how whiteness operated as a salient function of Anglo-Saxon identity. Scholars of the British Empire emphasise a historical trajectory that would see overt articulations of whiteness draw legitimacy from the "long traditions" of Anglo-Saxonism, of "English-speaking culture," and, between Americans and the British especially, within the "convergence of imperial and republican discourse."[12] This chronology suppresses, however, the ways whiteness functioned in advance of colonisers popularising "white man's country" rhetoric.

In multinational colonial spaces, one's race—more than cultural heritage or language, which may not be obvious—served as a visual shorthand for belonging. In these diverse cites, where the boundaries of whiteness were vulnerable, colonisers treated non-white individuals navigating white colonial space with "unease or curiosity," tolerating them so long as they performed expected roles. As with Anderson's "Black space," the entrenched white colonial elite construed non-white spaces as destitute, fearsome, or ghettoised.[13] As a result, colonial "contact zones" or "meeting places" such as Hong Kong paradoxically cultivated binary framings of race that pitted whiteness against all "others," the "edges of empire" throwing—as Ladds argues—"the relationship between inclusionary and exclusionary colonial impulses ... into sharper relief."[14] This "binary logic" refined in the colonial crucible was a stepping stone towards an emerging "politics

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[8] Elijah Anderson, *Black in White Space: The Enduring Impact of Color in Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 14.

[9] Jessica Hanser, "Private British Traders Between India and China," in *The Private Side of the Canton Trade, 1700–1840: Beyond the Companies*, ed. Paul A. Van Dyke and Susan E. Schopp (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2018), 7–20, 20.

[10] Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 6.

[11] Penelope Edmonds, "'I Followed England Around the World': The Rise of Trans-Imperial Anglo-Saxon Exceptionalism, and the Spatial Narratives of Nineteenth-Century British Settler Colonies of the Pacific Rim," in *Re-Orienting Whiteness*, ed. K Ellinghaus et al. (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 106, 107.

[12] Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 6, 8.

[13] Anderson, *Black in White Space*, 16–17.

[14] Catherine Ladds, "Educating the China-Born: Colonial Cosmopolitanism in Shanghai's Schools for Settler Children, 1870–1943," *Journal of Social History* 55:1 (2021), 180–206, 200. See also Paul A. Kramer, "Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910," *Journal of American History* 88:4 (2002), 1315–53, 1326.

of 'whiteness'" that Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds argue late-nineteenth-century imperialists relied upon to divide "the world into white and non-white."[15]

Recent research has taken the discussion further to explore these issues as they unfolded amongst different communities in Hong Kong, suggesting that within the colony "social and economic structuring was constant and intense," and that possibilities for cultural reconfiguration were "almost limitless."[16] As scholars have shown, the privileged position of whiteness was hardly absolute. Non-white British subjects attempted to "reform hierarchies of race and nationality under colonial order" by skirting the issue of race entirely, by shifting the arena to debates about what it meant to be British or by capitalising upon the colony's ambiguous and mutable socio-cultural, racial, and political boundaries to carve niches for themselves.[17] Such research lays the groundwork for assessing the competing forces that affected American efforts to assimilate with nineteenth-century Hong Kong's Anglo elite. If white non-British imperial subjects could use race to attenuate ethnic divisions, Americans were further advantaged through their shared claims to an Anglo-Saxon heritage that muted extant Anglo-American rivalries and provided the leverage needed to mark their belonging amongst Hong Kong's elite.[18] Whiteness and Anglophilia served as the "tools" the American community brandished to do so.[19] In using these tools—even if performatively—elite Americans learned to thrive within and inevitably appreciate British imperial and colonial systems and their attendant privileges.

This article compiles a range of contemporary American accounts to probe how racial and national differences were amplified or suppressed to define an elite identity in nineteenth-century imperial contact zones such as Hong Kong. Focusing on the U.S. mercantile community, I evaluate the extent to which Americans replaced their republican identity with that of their imperial hosts to clarify how and why communities in such spaces refashioned themselves according to an elite colonial ideal. Recent research on the informal agents driving early U.S. Pacific imperialism demonstrates that Americans were comfortable working within the imperial playbook.[20] This scholarship revises the historical timeline of the U.S. overseas empire, reinvigorating Ian Tyrrell's 1991 arguments by showcasing how thinking globally can correct exceptionalist historical narratives of U.S. ascendency.[21] The reality that Americans in Hong Kong were navigating a

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[15] Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 215.

[16] Elizabeth Sinn, "Wang Tao in Hong Kong and the Chinese 'Other,'" in *Meeting Place: Encounters across Cultures in Hong Kong, 1841–1984*, ed. Christopher Munn and Elizabeth Sinn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), 1–22, 22.

[17] Catherine Chan, "Cosmopolitan Visions and Intellectual Passions: Macanese Publics in British Hong Kong," *Modern Asian Studies* 56:1 (2022), 350–77, 353; Catherine Chan, *The Macanese Diaspora in British Hong Kong: A Century of Transimperial Drifting* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 20–23; Vivian Kong, "Whiteness, Imperial Anxiety, and the 'Global 1930s': The White British League Debate in Hong Kong," *Journal of British Studies* 59 (2020), 343–71, 368.

[18] Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

[19] See Nell Irvine Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 204–5.

[20] Emily Conroy-Krutz, *Missionary Diplomacy: Religion and Nineteenth-Century American Foreign Relations* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2024), 45–6; Chris Rasmussen, "Manifest Destiny's Fortunes in the Western Pacific: The First and Last United Sates Consul to Guam, Samuel J. Masters, 1854–1856," *Federal History* 16 (2024), 64; See also Lawrence A. Peskin, "Out of Sight and Out of Mind: The Early Consular Service and the Facilitative State, 1776–1856," *Federal History* 16 (2024), 39–60, which proves the importance of non-state agents by suggesting that the U.S. government deliberately "emaciated" the powers that Antebellum-era American consuls held to curtail the unregulated overseas expansion of American influence.

[21] Ian Tyrrell, "American Exceptionalism in an Age of International History," *American Historical Review* 96:4 (1991), 1040.

British imperial space with a majority Chinese community nuances this historical discussion further.

Lacking their own imperial infrastructure in China, Americans grafted their aspirations onto the British imperial project. Assimilation in these British spaces was—on the surface—a two-part process whereby the benefits of publicly conforming to British socio-political systems represented the pull factor, while identification of and alienation from a Chinese "Other" represented the push. While fruitful to remember that Americans abroad drew upon a wellspring of imperial experience to better assimilate, it is important to recognise that Anglo-American rivalries simultaneously encouraged them to vocalise exceptionalist rhetoric calibrated to elevate American values and institutions above what they deemed the imperial bellicosity of their British peers. As Forbes's 1867 letter implies, assimilating in Hong Kong was a tense process that pitted shared imperial priorities, a belief in Anglo-Saxon unity, and an implicit racial alliance against perceived Anglo-American incompatibilities and a performative desire to champion the values of American republicanism.

How did this impulse to adapt to British socio-cultural norms shape the American colonial lifestyle in Hong Kong? How, in turn, did American accounts of, and quotidian encounters with, the Chinese community shift as they settled into the colony? How did their reflections demonstrate or contribute to processes of "race making" and the sharpening of colonial racial hierarchies?[22] To answer these questions I first consider how early experiences of Hong Kong encouraged American traders to locate themselves as members of the colony's white elite. I then assess the inherent racial and cultural tensions Americans identified as they assimilated with British society. Finally, I outline the shape of elite Anglo-American society and how American elites performed and articulated their status. I argue that adaptation to colonial culture and the refining of prejudiced attitudes were contingent parts of a complex process whereby extraimperial groups—that is, those from polities outside the British imperial sphere, such as the Americans—fashioned themselves as members of the white colonial elite, entrenching racial divisions between white and non-white communities in the process.[23]

The Colonial Crucible

Hong Kong was, in the words of Elizabeth Sinn, a "meeting place," a space where "the flow of people, things, and ideas became more dense, more multi-directional, and more multi-scalar" as trade, migration, and imperial activities accelerated.[24] It was also a colonial space on the edges of the British and Qing Empires where an imperial logic of social and racial hierarchies ordered society from the merchant princes of Jardine Matheson & Co. and upper-tier administrators down to teamsters, sailors, and the indigent of all backgrounds. The port developed paradoxically as an intermediary node in imperial networks and an imperial periphery where most of those diverse communities that came into contact did so in a space marginal to their respective metropoles' political, social, and cultural authority. This diluting of metropolitan influence allowed new forms of belonging to

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[22] The discussion here builds upon my analysis of one high-tension flashpoint in 1857 to consider the more pervasive ways race and "othering" shaped colonial society. See Thomas M. Larkin, "'A Life of Suspicion and Distrust': Sino-American Relations, Racialized Anxieties, and Anglo Panic in Nineteenth-Century Hong Kong," *Pacific Historical Review* 92:2 (2023), 135–63.

[23] *Extraimperial* is used in this article exclusively in relation to British imperial belonging. It does not, in this sense, connote that the groups it might refer to (e.g., the Macanese or the Americans), were not subjects of other imperial authority (e.g., the Portuguese or U.S. Empires).

[24] Elizabeth Sinn, "Introduction," in *Meeting Place: Encounters Across Cultures in Hong Kong, 1841–1984,* ed. Elizabeth Sinn and Christopher Munn (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2017), ix–xx, ix.

take hold as varied communities scrambled to define their place within an emerging colonial hierarchy. The resultant society was a mutable one, where local mores conflicted and needed to be negotiated with parochial national interests.

Such framing is essential for understanding the syncretic but fraught intermixing that took place in response to political and cultural (in)compatibilities and competing national interests. Extraimperial migrants to the city negotiated these local and metropolitan influences as a matter of necessity. In the process, certain markers used to define status gradually stood out; race and its entanglement with class and culture being among the most prominent. For those such as the Bostonian trader John Murray Forbes and the nineteenth-century American elite, commercial and social success in China hinged upon the ability to reconcile Anglo-American cultural incongruities with the mores of British colonial society. Whiteness became a powerful, if passive, means of doing so that underlaid an overt prevailing belief in a shared Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The consolidation of a unifying white identity that bound the British and American communities was especially significant given the interplay between Anglo-Saxonism, overlapping systems of Anglo-American competition and collaboration, and Sino-American amity associated with the early decades of the China Trade.[25] The first Americans to arrive in China, members of an entrenched elite in the metropole, reached Canton's Thirteen Factories well equipped with the social capital and cultural fluency necessary to succeed in a British-dominated foreign enclave. Hailing predominantly from Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, these men (their wives ensconced downriver at Macau) hobnobbed with British traders, forged connections with Hong merchants, and lay the foundation for the community that would grow in Hong Kong from the mid-nineteenth century.[26]

Their elite American pedigree was central to both their success and their struggles to penetrate the British elite. Introduced to China through kinship networks formed in the U.S., partners of leading firms such as Russell & Co., Augustine Heard & Co., and Olyphant & Co. bore names associated with wealth and respectability in the metropole. The most prominent families were connected through webs of intermarriage. Perkinses, Higginsons, Cushings, Paines, Sturgises, and Forbeses formed the "Boston Concern's" core kinship group in Canton, providing the manpower behind Russell & Company. Relatives King, Talbot, and Olyphant were behind Olyphant & Co., while Russells, Wetmores, Nyes, Blights, Delanos, Heards, Morsses, and Banckers all reached China via family channels.[27] In the U.S. these were powerful families that dominated commerce and industry.

The Bostonians traced their roots to a socially and geographically circumscribed community, traditionally clustered around Beacon Hill's south slope. The Boston Brahmins, as they became known following the publication of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.'s 1861 novel *Elsie Venner*, were an "East Coast establishment that discreetly but effectively dominated academia, trade, politics, and the arts."[28] As they would in China, they represented an exclusive elite—comparable in standing to the British upper class—whose status hinged

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[25] See Heard Family Business Records, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, (hereafter HBS), GQ-2-2, Augustine Heard Jr, *Old China and New,* 1894, 42; HBS, FP-4, John Heard, *An Account of His Life and the History of Augustine Heard & Co.,* 1891, 172; William C. Hunter, *The "Fan Kwae" at Canton: Before the Treaty Days, 1825–1844* (Shanghai: Oriental Affairs, 1882); Robert Bennet Forbes, "Rambling Recollections Connected with China," in *Personal Reminiscences* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1882), 369–74.

[26] See Jacques Downs, *The Golden Ghetto: The American Commercial Community at Canton and the Shaping of American China Policy, 1784–1844* (London: Associated University Press, 1997); James Fichter, *So Great a Proffit: How the East Indies Trade Transformed Anglo-American Capitalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[27] Downs, *The Golden Ghetto,* 367–70.

[28] Andrea Greenwood and Mark W. Harris, *An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 60; See Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., *Elise Venner: A Romance of Destiny* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1861).

on more than wealth. Their reputation relied upon "an acceptable mix" of breeding, education, capital, and culture that inculcated reverence for the Anglo-Saxon pedigree that allegedly elevated these men and women. Race, too, defined the boundaries of the community, distinguishing them, for example, from members of Boston's Black community a couple streets further on Beacon Hill's north slope.[29] These white New Englanders married well, retired early, sent their children to Harvard or Yale where Holmes Sr. and James Russell Lowell educated pupils in the English tradition, and then on to China to earn their competency (a sum of money suitable to retire on).[30]

For these Brahmins, race, culture, and prestige were entangled. Indeed, a peculiar characteristic of the group—a product in part of their education—was their Anglophilic sensibility, bolstered through pride in an Anglo-Saxon heritage supposedly shared with their British kin.[31] Brahmin and Anglo-Saxon heritage functioned as pillars of the elite identity of many Americans trading in China. But if contemporary Brahmin writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson extolled the imperial achievements of the "English" race, Anglophilic sentiment failed to reconcile the divergent paths seventy-five years of American independence and British empire building had taken in the minds of Americans abroad.[32] In Hong Kong and other British imperial spaces throughout the nineteenth century, perceived (and sometimes legitimate) cultural, social, and political divergences were negotiated as increasing numbers of Americans participated in the British imperial/colonial project.[33]

Peripheral port cities like Hong Kong, where various extraimperial communities encountered colonial transmutations of "Britishness," provided arenas for such negotiations to occur. In the British metropole, "Britishness," refined and ingrained through sustained international conflicts with "dangerous and hostile Other[s]," common investment in Protestantism, and belief in the empire's "providential destiny," bound together disparate ethnicities and classes.[34] The "Britishness" that American merchants encountered in Hong Kong merged metropolitan influences with local ones, establishing a hybrid colonial "British identity" that Peter Mandler suggests was more "imperial" than "domestic" and dependent upon a "sense of racial difference."[35] Indeed, the colony reveals how the "exigencies and ambivalences of local contexts" challenged racial boundaries and an emerging sense of trans-imperial whiteness.[36] In some respects British colonial culture and

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[29] Shaun O'Connell, *Boston: Voices and Visions* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 87; Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick, *Sarah's Long Walk: The Free Blacks of Boston and How Their Struggle for Equality Changed America* (Boston: Beacon, 2004), 21–4.

[30] Tamarkin, *Anglophila,* 253–5; Edward L. Glaeser, "Reinventing Boston: 1630–2003," *Journal of Economic Geography* 5 (2005), 119–53, 126.

[31] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1856), 139–40. See also Fichter, *So Great a Proffit,* 280; Nell Irvin Painter, "Thinking about the Languages of Money and Race: A Response to Michael O'Malley, 'Specie and Species,'" *American Historical Review* 99:2 (1994), 396–404, 402; Stephen Rice, *Minding the Machine: Languages of Class in Early Industrial America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 5.

[32] Stephen Tuffnell, *Made in Britain: Nation and Emigration in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 19.

[33] Stephen Tuffnell, "Crossing the Rift: American Steel and Colonial Labor in Britain's East Africa Protectorate," in *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain,* ed. Kristin L. Hoganson, Jay Sexton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2020), 46–65, 46.

[34] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2005), 365–8.

[35] Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blaire* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 17.

[36] Jane Carey, Leigh Boucher, and Katherine Ellinghaus, "Re-Orienting Whiteness: A New Agenda for the Field," in *Re-Orienting Whiteness,* ed. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey, and K Ellinghaus (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 10.

identity were porous, permitting class and ethnic barriers to be circumvented, but in others the colonial experience cemented differences, markers including race, politics, and religion acquiring renewed significance.[37] U.S. merchants and their families found some aspects of this culture familiar; others felt stifling or alienating. But if cultural incongruities created dissonance, race and class anxieties in Hong Kong encouraged Americans to integrate with a predominantly white British foreign community while distancing themselves from the Chinese. This impulse would help entrench the racial hierarchies embedded in British colonial society.

British imperial identity was the most difficult hurdle for Hong Kong's elite American community to surmount. Britain's two Opium Wars with China had alienated the American public, who thought of the first one that "a more unjust war was never waged, even by [the British]."[38] Opposition to British imperial belligerence was refracted through a self-consciously anti-imperial political identity. Americans in China brandished the values of republicanism, self-determination, and sovereign rights woven into the fabric of their nation's founding mythology as discursive tools to elevate their conduct above Britain's. Merchants such as William Low, William Hunter, or John Heard cast Britain's war-mongering in an antagonistic light recognisable to citizens of a country that had secured its independence from the British Empire in 1776.[39] Their reservations reflected a metropolitan discourse sustained in letters to and from Canton that condemned British militancy and their hand in smuggling opium, while performatively demurring that few, if any, Americans had peddled the contraband.[40]

In the immediate context of the Opium Wars, such distinctions mattered to Canton's Americans, but as the Anglo-American community migrated to Hong Kong in the 1840s and 1850s, anti-British rhetoric would be subordinated to a racialised discourse that saw U.S. merchants redirect their prejudice towards a Chinese "Other." Such critiques, by extension, engendered white solidarity with the colony's British elite. This sense of solidarity stemmed from two interrelated processes. Americans arriving in the port conceptualised the Chinese community as at least a nuisance and at most a pressing threat to their well-being, a concern the port's demographic imbalance heightened (75,683 Chinese inhabitants dwarfed the 1,411 white inhabitants in 1857).[41] At the same time they recognised the advantages of adapting to British colonial mores to cement their status within the fledgling colony.

The first process of establishing racial distance gained traction during the Second Opium War, when the Chinese community was construed as a pressing threat to the colony.[42] There was a thin logic to the foreign community's anxieties, reified through the unsuccessful January 1857 attempt to poison the colony's white inhabitants or the murder

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[37] Sinn, "Introduction," ix–x.

[38] Heard, *An Account of His Life*, 36; Hunter, *The "Fan Kwae" at Canton*, 94.

[39] "William Low to Seth Low, Canton, 29 April 1840," in *The Canton Letters, 1839–1841 of William Henry Low*, ed. James Duncan Phillips (Salem, Mass.: Essex Institute, 1948), 41–3.

[40] Nathan Allan, *An Essay on the Opium Trade Including a Sketch of its History, Extent, Effects, Etc., as Carried on in India and China* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Co., 1850), 13, 40–2; "Robert Bennet Forbes to Rose Forbes, Canton, 11 April 1839," in *Letters from China: The Canton-Boston Correspondence of Robert Bennet Forbes, 1838–1840,* ed. by Phyllis Forbes Kerr (Mystic, Conn.: Mystic Seaport Museum Inc., 1996), 117. See also Hans Derks, *History of the Opium Problem: The Assault on the East, ca. 1600–1950* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 748; Charles C. Stelle, "American Trade in Opium to China, 1821–39," *Pacific Historical Review* 10:1 (1941), 57–74, 74.

[41] *Historical and Statistical Abstract of the Colony of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Noronha & Co., 1911), chart 2.

[42] Christopher Munn, *Anglo China: Chinese People and British Rule in Hong Kong, 1841–1880* (London: Routledge, 2001), 280. For more on portrayals of the Chinese community, see Keevak, *Becoming Yellow*, 4–7; Robert Peckham, "Critical Mass: Colonial Crowds and Contagious Panics in 1890s Hong Kong and Bombay," in *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settnes: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné (Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 375.

of eleven Europeans aboard the *Thistle* weeks prior, but rumours that Governor-General of Liangguang 兩廣總督 Ye Mingchen 葉名琛 was paying bounties, encouraging arson, and planning to invade the colony's western shore amplified fears.[43] These rumours fed an echo chamber of news travelling between Hong Kong, the U.S., and Britain, and the foreign community's attendant anxiety was enacted through racially motivated precautions undertaken in the colony.

Safety concerns during the war evolved into place-based biases that helped theoretically segregate the colony.[44] The American Heard brothers, for instance, lamented the 1859 location of their first house bordering the Chinese neighbourhood of Taipingshan, both for its proximity to anticipated Chinese assailants and for the ways it undermined their social lives, their friends expressing reluctance to venture from Victoria's well-lit and patrolled streets to this Chinese-adjacent periphery. Mid-nineteenth-century American travellers to the port would entrench the sense of separate and unequal neighbourhoods, as accounts of "elegant" terraced European façades of central Victoria rising over the harbour contrasted those of the "Chinese part[s] of the city": the "shabby" and "stinking" locales of Wan Chai and Taipingshan on either flank.[45]

This first pattern of demarcating a different and conceptually "lesser" group against which to elevate themselves fed into a second process whereby Americans consolidated their strategy for penetrating the colony's predominantly white, English-speaking British elite. The leading partners of prominent American firms reestablished themselves within the boundaries of "respectable" society so that they might better participate and be seen participating. The Forbeses of Russell & Co. situated themselves and their kin in the "Rose Hill" mansion centrally located off Caine Road, "part way up the mountain" and—in their words—"far the most attractive place except Government House and Jardine Matheson & Co's fine place at East Point."[46] Here they hosted visiting elites and social peers including the Heards, who in 1859 moved to a new capacious and conspicuous company headquarters located beside St. John's Cathedral above Victoria's Parade Grounds—the house providing visual testament to their elite aspirations.[47]

Proximity secured, their quest for status within the British colony necessitated that Americans, at least in public-facing contexts, rescind some of their Canton-days critiques of British society, culture, and empire. As members of a mercantile class at the vanguard of imperialist lobbying in the U.S., their changing rhetoric often reflected genuine shifting sentiments.[48] Bearing first-hand witness to the British imperial project's efficacy in China, Hong Kong's aspiring American elite readily turned to their British peers for support as they established themselves in this periphery far from U.S. political and commercial power.

Yet while the rest of this article considers the social and discursive forms the American strategy took, their discomfort with British imperial forms vocalised during the Canton days is important to keep in mind. American elites in Hong Kong established themselves

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[43] Kate Lowe and Eugine McLaughlin, "'Caution! The Bread Is Poisoned': The Hong Kong Mass Poisoning of January 1857," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43:2 (2015), 189–209, 192.

[44] John Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 36.

[45] Benjamin Ball, *Rambles in East Asia, Including China and Manila: During Several Years Residence* (Boston: James French & Company, 1855), 89–91; MHS, Martha Green Journal, 1852–1869, Ms. N-49-30, Martha Green, December 1863, Hong Kong. See Stacilee Ford, *Troubling American Women: Narratives of Gender and Nation in Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 53.

[46] MHS, James Murray Forbes Papers, Ms. N-49.67, J. Murray Forbes, *Recollections and Events from the Threshold of Eighty-Five* (Boston, 1930), 32; MHS, Ms. N-49, James Murray Forbes to Mother, Hong Kong, 9 April 1870.

[47] HBS, Gustavus Tuckerman Jr. Papers, Mss.766 1847–1898 T896, Gustavus Tuckerman to Whitney, Hong Kong, 17 January 1858.

[48] Evers and Grynaviski, *The Price of Empire,* 14.

in a foreign imperial space that was largely untethered from metropolitan influences. But it was never entirely so. The foremost goal driving American merchants was to secure a competency and return home. Their transience meant they actively preserved relationships with those in the metropole, the resulting correspondence preserving a strong link to the socio-cultural and political traditions they had been raised with. Theirs was a negotiated strategy, then, that required balancing ties to Hong Kong with the reminder that they were—in the words of one such sojourner—American, with "home endearments" and "love of Country."[49]

Malleable Identities

Comfortably ensconced in "respectable" white locales, Hong Kong's American elite became active participants in and commentors on colonial society. Whether at home or in public, Americans adapted their conduct to suit the British-dominated port's socio-cultural mores. Stacilee Ford's analysis of American women in Hong Kong suggests that efforts to adapt exposed the simultaneous plasticity and rigidity of the American identity. Hong Kong's social, demographic, and economic realities might "rupture" American "certainties about nation, ideology, political affiliation, and gender," but experience in the port also inspired a defensive spirit as Americans writing home extolled the virtues of their nascent benevolent republican ethos.[50] While a sense of whiteness, ideas of Anglo-Saxon solidarity, and growing appreciation for the British imperial project aligned Americans with the colonial elite, a pervading sense of cultural difference infused the process with constant if waning tension.

Various criteria ranging from class to politics, religion, education, wealth, and kinship affected Americans' success at navigating elite British spaces, but threading through most of their experiences was an omnipresent sense of race, often framed through targeted cultural critique. Americans were rarely explicit in their identification of whiteness (euphemisms such as "Anglo-Saxon" or "English-speaking" stood in), but they described difference as they encountered it, framed through an othering discourse that rehashed whichever racial and cultural stereotypes were most in vogue.[51] In public spaces outside colonial authority, Chinese people were "crowds"—the term bearing unpleasant connotations of being overwhelmed or outnumbered.[52] In the context of the 1857 panics during the Second Opium War, the Chinese community was painted "treacherous and unscrupulous," a "rabble" of fanatic barbarians.[53] Throughout the century American migrants to China learned to parrot colonial tropes for their Chinese staff (the house boy, the chair coolie, the Chinaman), and as scientific racism captured minds from the 1860s, they used the new vocabulary to locate their Chinese employees along the evolutionary ladder.[54] In each case, their comments established Chinese communities as a homogenous "Other," against which a unified white "foreign" community took shape.

[49] MHS, Diaries, 1862–1909, Ms. N-307, Lucy Lord Howes Hooper, 28 December 1866, Hong Kong.

[50] Ford, *Troubling American Women*, 179–90.

[51] See Painter, *The History of White People*, 174–5.

[52] HBS, HL-1, Albert Heard to John Heard, Canton, 5 February 1854; Ruth Bradford, "Diary, 21 June 1862," in Katherine Dunham Leith, ed., *"Maskee!" The Journal and Letters of Ruth Bradford, 1861–1872* (Hartford, Conn.: Prospect, 1938), 87.

[53] HBS, HN-1-3, Helen Smith to Albert Heard, Shanghai, 7 February 1857; "The United States and the British Dispute with China," *New York Daily Times*, 2 May 1857, 2.

[54] HBS, Case 27, Augustine Heard & Co., Inventory, "Office House," 1 November 1859; MHS, Crowell Family Papers, 1869–1976, Ms. N-49.6, Ruth Bradford, "Monkey Letters," Shanghai, 7 September 1871. For further reading, see Claire Lowrie, *Masters and Servants: Cultures of Empire in the Tropics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 71; Indira Ghosh, "The Memsahib Myth: Englishwomen in Colonial India," in *Women & Others:*

Othering and omission amplified the "us-and-them" mentality that restrained John Murray Forbes from joining the Chinese community in the rain that March night in 1867. Acutely aware of the social stakes heightened by overlapping ideas of race and propriety, constrained by the taboos around intermingling and his understanding of what it took to perform the role of a colonial elite, Forbes distilled the social anxieties of Hong Kong's American elite in the anecdote to his father. His derision for the Chinese revellers blurred with his self-conscious understanding that such behaviour would be inappropriate for a member of the colony's white community. Both sentiments became contingent parts of articulating the boundaries of eliteness, statements condemning the Chinese community working in tandem with American efforts to pantomime the role of the Anglo-Saxon colonial elite in both public and private spaces while mediating the resulting Anglo-American cultural dissonance.

Sentiments such as Forbes's unfolded seamlessly in the numerous accounts Americans penned of life in Hong Kong. American diaries, travelogues, and letters home balanced sermons on Chinese peculiarities with positive impressions of colonial society, the prescribed qualities of both emphasised through contrast. Such accounts related American attempts to locate themselves within the upper strata of Hong Kong's social hierarchy. Testament to their efforts, the lives that the Americans described acquired a more British, or at least more "colonial" or Anglo-Saxon, quality with each passing decade. If American men at Canton and American women at Macau had made a point of distinguishing themselves from their belligerent British neighbours in the 1830s and 1840s, those in Hong Kong described from the 1850s a progressively more unified social setting.

Excepting generalisations, the few Chinese and "Others" that appeared in American accounts confirmed race-based hierarchies that implicitly reinforced the white elite's elevated status. Martha Green's sparing comments on those she witnessed in 1863 while travelling to and from social engagements used racialised assessments to rank civility. The Chinese men bearing her sedan chair were notable for their simple clothing, and the bound feet of Chinese women she passed were offensive to Americans' "less barbarous notions." The Indian men she observed—performing ordained colonial roles—were "very striking with their brown limbs and white wrappings."[55] The different rhetoric here mattered. Sikh constables confirmed the desired imperial order, but the Chinese public occupied an ambiguous, and thus threatening, social position.

Benjamin Ball's 1855 East Asia travelogue contained similar subtext, expressing anxiety that the Chinese upon whom Hong Kong's foreigners were dependant must consider this white community "helpless beings." Helplessness was a recurring trope in American accounts. William Hunter recalled the chaos that ensued when Lin Zexu 林則徐 barred Chinese servants from working for Canton's foreign community in 1839.[56] Francis Blackwell Forbes likewise proclaimed how despondent he was without his Chinese staff when a similar exodus occurred from Hong Kong in 1858.[57] Anxieties around dependency heightened the impulse to establish distance between Chinese and white communities. On paper, this distance was fabricated through targeted statements that criticised the Chinese community, placing, by extension, white people and Anglo-Saxon culture on a pedestal.

Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Empire, ed. Celia R. Daileader and Rhoda E. Johnson (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 107–28, 114.

[55] MHS, Ms. N-49.30, Martha Green, December 1863, Hong Kong Journal.

[56] Hunter, *The "Fan Kwae" at Canton*, 88.

[57] MHS, MS. N-49, Francis Blackwell Forbes Papers, Francis Blackwell Forbes his sister, Hong Kong, 6 August 1858.

To those penning such statements, it was imperative that the Chinese, who Ball considered arrogant, conceited, and prepossessed of their "supposed superiority over Europeans," be debased to a lower cultural and racial position.[58] Doing so helped white commentors skirt the issue of white minority rule in imperial peripheries such as Hong Kong. Ball reconciled the white community's vulnerability through a diatribe about the colony's Chinese community that deployed dehumanising and often racialised rhetoric to mitigate the potential threat the Chinese posed.[59] "Heathen" Chinese men had "long" features: a "long head, long face ... long arms, hands and fingernails, long lank body shrouded in a long white or blue frock, long tail or queue, long neck pitching angularly forward ... long strides of [their] long, clumsy legs."[60] Their expressions were senseless, their behaviour gluttonous and deceitful. In every respect Ball's Chinese man was monstrous, alien, unnatural. The subtext was that foreigners were not like this, that white bodies and Anglo-Saxon or European culture were natural, "correct," and that Americans fitted within the scope of such whiteness. Tales of foreign mastery over Chinese servants and of pleasant interactions with the colony's foreign community bookended Ball's comments, making clear the desired social order. By articulating racial and cultural differences with the Chinese, Ball flipped the power dynamic, conflating what were disproportionally small European and American communities together atop the colony's social hierarchy.

Yet, for all that race provided a convenient visual shorthand for acceptance into/exclusion from elite society, it failed to completely suppress Anglo-American cultural tensions. Americans throughout China remained homesick for familiar culture and wary of what they considered the British pretensions. The increased presence of Americans—women no less—in Hong Kong and the treaty ports from the mid- to late nineteenth century provided the opportunity to turn inwards should interacting with the British on British terms prove too onerous. Tiring of British peers, Pennsylvanian Ruth Bradford found it refreshing to meet newly arrived Americans "just from the sod" in Shanghai.[61] The American gatherings Ball attended in Hong Kong "agreeably reminded" him of home.[62] Americans might enjoy dinners and drives about town with each other, the colonial context even supressing metropolitan rivalries as competing families such as the Forbeses and the Heards took turns hosting each other in their grand homes.[63] Growing numbers of like-minded peers provided the American community a refuge from the daily task of performing British colonial mores.

As a by-product of their growing community and social stability, American commentaries on British society and culture became more barbed. While the British might set the pace of the social circuit, "English people" ignorant of American culture and politics could be poor company to commentors such as Massachusetts-born Elizabeth Warden, née Beal.[64] References to Queen Victoria in sermons (they found British preaching, in general, tedious) bothered American church-goers; perceived anti-American slights stoked insecurities about the standing of their relatively young nation; and letters home denounced British imperial and social pretensions.[65] Class propriety, too, weighed on

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[58] Ball, *Rambles in Eastern Asia*, 206.

[59] Ibid., 204–5.

[60] Ibid., 205.

[61] MHS, Ms. N-49.6, Ruth Bradford to her father, Shanghai, 23 October 1871.

[62] Ball, *Rambles in East Asia*, 207.

[63] MHS, Ms. N-156, John Murray Forbes to his father, Hong Kong, 31 January 1868.

[64] MHS, Ms. N-49.55, Warden Family Papers, 1747–1940, Elizabeth Beal to "Julia," Shanghai, 25 March 1870.

[65] MHS, Ms. N-1818. Beale Family Papers, 1802–1931, Helen Beal to Elizabeth Beal, Shanghai, 14 May 1842; MHS, Ms. N-1818, Helen Beal to her parents, Shanghai, 21 March 1852; MHS, Ms. N-1818, Helen Beal to "Lizzie," Shanghai, 11 June 1851; MHS, Ms. N-307, Hooper, 28 December 1866, Hong Kong, Diaries.

American minds prepossessed of social and religious beliefs that valued rational thought, a "capacity for moral action," and a growing distaste for commercialism and the crass pursuit of wealth.[66] The elite American migrant celebrated, in theory, parsimony and temperance, while condemning public notoriety.[67] The successful American merchant in China should honour their upbringing, avoid vice, work hard to make a competency, and retire early to the U.S.

Part of the dissonance Americans experienced as they navigated British colonial society stemmed from insecurity about what it meant to be American. American elites' commentaries reflected their attempt to consolidate their identity in the liminal space of Hong Kong as they measured their nation's culture, institutions, and global aspirations against those of their British neighbours. The contrast between their activities and rhetoric reflected the difficulty of reconciling the society and culture of Hong Kong and the U.S. Those too long in China, or too eager to adapt to deleterious and expensive rounds of drinking, dining, and hosting, invited their kins' critiques. Elizabeth Warden's sister Helen Beal condemned young clerks who acquired "all kinds of luxuries and indulgent habits" in their efforts to conform.[68] Albert Heard's brothers similarly denounced his decadence—a point he contested by explaining that Hong Kong's social life necessitated overspending.[69] As *China Mail* contributors declared in 1862, one must return the hospitalities of fellows, or else live "like a hermit."[70] But excessive spending deviated from metropolitan values and the underlying purpose of working in China. If the American community's interests adapted to reflect the colony's socio-political and commercial context, and if, in public, they performed the mores of elite white society, they still found it necessary to defend their lifestyle against metropolitan critiques.

As the 1862 *China Mail* article suggests, the size of the foreign community generally constrained one's social opportunities, and Americans wishing to navigate elite society needed to adapt—in public at least—to colonial mores. In this matter they were often willing participants. Insecurities about their nation fuelled the Beals' or Bradford's critiques of the British and their desire to articulate their "Americanness," but such sentiments hardly restrained Americans from engaging with Anglo-Saxon society outright. Americans far from the metropole and with vested local interests in politics and commerce on the China coast found much to commend about the British imperial project and colonial society in China. In British contests with the Chinese, American commenters increasingly found themselves cheering their "Anglo-Saxon" kin. In social settings, despite latent rivalries, they made "pleasant friends among the English."[71]

Such negotiated process defined how Americans adapted their sense of national identity to suit the colonial context. When prudent they were able to perform elite colonial culture on British terms. Their efforts to racially and culturally "other" the Chinese community, and their identification of shared commercial and political aspirations for China with the British bolstered attempts to do so while encouraging Americans to think in binaries. Life in China was rarely a permanent venture, however, and the knowledge that they would shortly return to the U.S. anchored Americans to the metropole, encouraging them

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[66] Paul Goodman, "Ethics and Enterprise: The Values of a Boston Elite, 1800–1860," *American Quarterly* 18:3 (1966), 437–51, 446–52.

[67] HBS, FM-1-1, Augustine Heard Sr to John Heard, Canton, 26 January 1841; HBS, FM-1-1, Augustine Heard Sr to John Heard, Boston, 13 December 1844; HBS, HN-6-2, Augustine Heard Sr to Albert F. Heard, Boston, 10 May 1864.

[68] MHS, Ms. N-1818, Helen Beal to Elizabeth Beal, Shanghai, 25 May 1851.

[69] HBS, HL-49, Albert F. Heard to Augustine Heard Jr, Hong Kong, 25 April 1873.

[70] "There Is a Giant in Hong Kong," *China Mail*, 18 September 1862, Hong Kong, 2; "To the Editor of 'China Mail,'" *China Mail*, 24 September 1862, Hong Kong, 2.

[71] Forbes, *Recollections*, 31.

to cultivate, in private, a strong sense of national difference. Their willing participation in colonial society was thus more calibrated than its public face might suggest.

"Whiteness" and the Contours of Elite Anglo-American Society

The interlinked processes through which Americans positioned themselves as part of Hong Kong's colonial elite converge in Albert Heard's descriptions of the annual spring races in 1860. Heard's letters blended musings about race and culture into a coherent commentary on status within colonial society. Like other Americans, the Heard brothers used the races to peacock themselves, erecting a private booth on the grounds and supplying guests with champagne and the best food Lane & Crawford could supply.[72] For the Heards, this was a chance for "hobnobbing," entertaining, and displaying the success of their enterprise, Augustine Heard & Co., to the wider community. The brothers invited associates, dignitaries, and military officers to join them in dining, partying, and watching the races. For these American merchants, the event was an expensive but vital opportunity to generate social capital. By playing the host, the brothers signalled their business's success to the port's foreign community, bought their place amongst the British elite, and instilled confidence in their company's stability.

Class and race were ever-present and entangled themes in Heard's accounts of the festivities, and his letters—like those of his contemporaries—fixated on differences. He complimented the American officers at the tiffin and felt that the soldiers at the race ball cut a "gallant" bearing of "bewildering loveliness." The ladies of the room were, of course, "tastefully adorned." Heard fawned over the British, admiring the lavish suits and military regalia of the port's elites and officers, dressed in "red coats and blue coats, lace and embroidery." The colony's British pageantry stood miles above the "dull and gloomy" atmosphere of Shanghai, from which he had just come.[73]

The British pomp Heard found so appealing was offset by what he described as "squalid" crowds of "Chinese, Parsees, Jews, Malays," Sinhalese, and "Siamese" racegoers. His disgust hinged upon his understanding of an inherent set of white "virtues" which had become entrenched in mid-century ideas of race and Anglo-Saxon primacy, supplanting assimilative notions that non-whites could acquire "Victorian" values.[74] With the rise of scientific racism within British and American thought, adherents increasingly promulgated rigid ideas of racial virtues and flaws which helped shore up "white"/"Other" binaries.

As had Ball's before him, Heard's accounts implicitly located Americans alongside the white British community at the apex of emerging colonial racial hierarchies, both communities laying claim to a supposedly privileged Anglo-Saxon heritage. For Hong Kong's New Englander population, this heritage evoked nostalgia for the "tradition, ornament, and ritual" of British imperial forms, a nostalgia prevalent in Heard's descriptions of the races.[75] Such reverence helped smooth contradictions, as Nell Irvin Painter argues, helping Americans reframe freedom and liberty as central tenets of the Anglo-Saxon race while preserving the paradoxical belief that Anglo-Saxons were "natural rulers of other races."[76]

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[72] "Peep O' Day on the Hong Kong Races," *China Mail*, 27 February 1862, Hong Kong, 2; HBS, HL-33, Albert F. Heard to his parents, Hong Kong, 23 February 1860.

[73] HBS, HL-33, Albert F. Heard to his parents, Hong Kong, 23 February 1860.

[74] Douglas Lorimer, "From Victorian Values to White Virtues: Assimilation and Exclusion in British Racial Discourse, c.1870–1914," in *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 111.

[75] Tamarkin, *Anglophilia*, xxviii.

[76] Painter, *The History of White People*, 175.

Albert Heard's confidence in white "virtues" was bolstered through comparison. His racial juxtaposition, more explicit than either Ball or Green, of the resplendent British with "squalid" Chinese attendees stemmed from a latent desire to identify the Americans as part of Hong Kong's white elite. His comparisons highlighted Anglo-American similarities as much as they articulated difference, and writing about the races was the perfect medium to do so. If, as Anderson argues, such "weaponised" prejudice reminded outsiders of their status, it conversely signalled the wielder's insider status amongst the wider elite community.[77] Colonial space helped refine this strategy, transnational experiences helping to familiarise Americans abroad with the relationship between "racial diversity and social complexity."[78] American aspirants became more sensitive to how others saw them and to how they wished to be seen. Heard's letters testify to this awareness, implicitly conferring status on his family as they intermingled with British revellers in elite spaces. He documented racial difference, by extension, to equate the British and Americans as constituents of a single Anglo-Saxon colonial elite.

The festivities are a microcosm of the quotidian ways Americans performed the trappings of white colonial society. Indeed, the American social programme adapted readily to the British elite's habits. Any American chasing status made sure to join the correct clubs, committees, or associations, and to participate in ordained social patterns. Such included by necessity the Hong Kong Club, which limited membership to a strict social milieu, and perhaps the Hong Kong Yacht Club or the Victoria Cricket Club. A balloted admission policy and prohibitive fees cemented the first institution's exclusivity. By joining (or sometimes serving on the Club Committee as George Heard did) American elites announced their social standing.[79] John Murray Forbes bragged that banquets at the Masonic lodge attracted most of the colony's "prominent men" including the governor.[80] Membership alongside colonial officials and merchants from major British firms in the General Chamber of Commerce, joint company boards, or philanthropic initiatives such as the Sailors' Home likewise signalled Americans' place amongst the port's elite.[81]

American elites also made sure to be seen. On the parade ground, along Queen's Road, at The Peak and Pok Fu Lam, Americans were present in approved, respectable white locales.[82] As in other colonial spaces, Hong Kong's neighbourhoods that exposed "non-bourgeois" whiteness such as Wan Chai with its American prostitutes or the Praya with its drunken sailors and soldiers, were to be avoided.[83] Within the boundaries of respectable spaces, however, Americans participated in the gamut of colonial activities, and as James M. Forbes recalled, "Hong Kong being an English colony, things were very English." They rode their horses, mornings and evenings, around the "English"-style

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[77] Anderson, *Black in White Space*, 19.

[78] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 33.

[79] Wai-kwan Chan, *The Making of Hong Kong Society: Three Studies of Class Formation in Early Hong Kong* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 35; Vaudine England, *Kindred Spirits: A History of the Hong Kong Club* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Club, 2016), 11; *The Directory & Chronicle for China, Japan, & The Philippines* (Hong Kong: Daily Press, 1868), 133–5.

[80] MHS, Ms. N-156, John Murray Forbes to his father, Hong Kong, 31 December 1866.

[81] *The Chronicle & Directory for China, Japan, and the Philippines* (Hong Kong: Daily Press, 1874), 190; *The Chronicle & Directory for China, Japan, and the Philippines* (Hong Kong: Daily Press, 1875), 190–1.

[82] Ball, *Rambles in East Asia*, 215; William M. Wood, *Fankwei: Or, the San Jacinto in the Seas of India, China, and Japan* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1859), 267.

[83] Ford, *Troubling American Women*, 53; Robert Fortune, *Three Years' Wanderings in the Northern Provinces of China, Including a Visit to the Tea, Silk, and Cotton Countries: With an Account of the Agriculture and Horticulture of the Chinese, New Plants, etc.* (London: John Murray, 1847), 17. See also Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Race, Class, and the "Domiciled Community" in British India, 1858–1930* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Monographs, 2011), 46–8; Eileen P. Scully, "Prostitution as Privilege: The 'American Girl' of Treaty-Port Shanghai, 1860–1937," *International History Review* 20:4 (1998), 855–83, 856–7.

track at Happy Valley, or enjoyed "a cup of coffee and a biscuit" while watching the "horses in training."[84] They might join their British peers in a cricket match on the parade ground, take in a military tattoo or concert, or keep up with the carousel of attending balls, hosting balls, visiting and being visited.[85] Such activities mitigated the potential monotony of colonial life while helping to ensure "cohesion within the community."[86]

When relating quotidian activities, Americans reimagined these elite spaces—on paper, at least—as exclusively white. Accounts of dinners focused on the company of other white guests, infrequently acknowledging the Chinese labour required to stage such events.[87] Excepting the sometimes-mentioned Chinese doorman, descriptions of visiting likewise rarely referenced the ubiquity of Chinese employees throughout the ritual. A Chinese amah assisted the hostess, Chinese staff served the party, Chinese cooks prepared the tea. Chinese porters bore their employers to and from these engagements. Without these staff the social rituals necessary for Americans to participate in elite colonial society would hardly have come off. Martha Green complained when visiting Hong Kong in 1863 of being "obliged to walk" to one engagement on account of the host not sending a chair, while others criticised the conduct of their servants when hosting, cooking, or cleaning despite admitting that they would be despondent without the help.[88] Still, if dependent upon their servants, familiarity bred, as Robert Bickers notes, contempt for the Chinese community.[89]

The importance of race was ironically most explicit through the conspicuous absence of Chinese people in American accounts of colonial space. Even though white foreigners ostensibly "did not know or meet Chinese" outside work and the home, Chinese labour and collaboration underpinned the entire foreign enterprise in colonial and semi-colonial ports throughout China. Yet letters home, rich in details about the foreign community's activities and characteristics, reserved little space for the Chinese "Other." Observations such as Green's as she traversed the colony recreated an idealised segregation through omission that was impossible to achieve. In a colony where the Chinese population dwarfed the foreign, it is telling that the descriptions Americans produced of their social lives contained references to the Chinese community. Contrary to the port's demographic imbalance, the life Green and her compatriots related was predominantly white and unfolded within the boundaries of colonial propriety.

The consolidation of a nominally homogenous elite was reified in the establishment of these theoretically "white spaces," which, by virtue of skin colour, Americans enjoyed access to alongside their British and European peers. Descriptions of the races that Heard attended highlighted, for example, the distinct modes through which different communities enjoyed the affair. American betting was done at the Hong Kong Club, well in advance of the event. They then attended the festivity through one of the various foreign booths interspersed trackside fronting the grandstand. Non-white observers could, by contrast, be found picnicking on the surrounding hillside as they took in the

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[84] Forbes, *Recollections*, 32; HBS, HL-49, Albert F. Heard to Henry Livingston, Hong Kong, 15 May 1873.

[85] J. Heard, *An Account of His Life*, 118–9; MHS, Ms. N-49.55, Althea Appleby Moller to "Friend," 11 February 1873. Although describing Shanghai, the Beal sisters' accounts of balls give an impression of the forms such events took; see MHS, Ms. 49.55, Elizabeth Beal to "Julia," Shanghai, 25 March 1870; MHS, Ms. 49.55, Elizabeth Beal to "Julia," Shanghai, 23 January 1871; MHS, Ms. 49.55, Elizabeth Beal to "Julia," Shanghai, 20 February 1871.

[86] Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *Imperial Boredom: Monotony and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 181; Sara Mills, *Gender and Colonial Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 119.

[87] MHS, Ms. N-156, John Murray Forbes to his father, 31 January 1868.

[88] Bradford, "Diary, 9 June 1862," 83; MHS, Ms. N-49, Francis Blackwell Forbes his sister, Hong Kong, 6 August 1858; MHS, Ms. N-49.30, Martha Green, 1 December 1863, Hong Kong, Journal.

[89] Robert Bickers, "Shanghailanders and Others: British Communities in China, 1843–1957," in *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas*, ed. Robert Bickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 269–301, 278, 280.

day's festivities. After the day's events, these discrete groups would retreat to their parties—foreign balls such as those Heard attended attracting well-to-do British and American men and women.

The segregated programme attending the races exposes the barriers dividing colonial society, and Americans' admission into exclusive white spaces helped further cement their acceptance among a homogenous elite. As a natural evolution of a process which had seen American elites move from the colony's mixed periphery to its centre, segregated spaces developed in Hong Kong that made race and class hierarchies more explicit. In reality the "demographic, political, and spatial circumstances" of the late-nineteenth-century treaty ports necessitated suppressing unpragmatic "segregationist inclinations," but Hong Kong's elite still aspired to demarcate spaces separate from the Chinese community.[90] These aspirations would ultimately be realised in Hong Kong with the settling of The Peak, first inhabited in the 1860s, which functioned as an elite bastion that enabled the colony's European elite to "insulate themselves from the Chinese community."[91] Its regulation would entrench the idealised segregation that American letters had rhetorically fabricated, with anti-Chinese ordinances passed in 1902, 1904, and 1918 and only repealed in 1946.[92]

Conclusion

If American traders in China were initially wary of their British peers and competitors, by the late nineteenth century they had come to see themselves as equal claimants to a "white" colonial elite status. This was a gradual process and one that did not entirely suppress Anglo-American tensions. It was liable to be disrupted by local and transnational disturbances in Anglo-American relations that periodically emerged. It required reconciling republican tenets of the American identity with the reality of mid-nineteenth-century American imperial aspirations and the socio-political and commercial exigencies of life in China. But a shared investment in Anglo-Saxonism, the growing purchase of whiteness, and the allure of colonial power assuaged American doubts about the British imperial project. If the First Opium War proved one thing to the Americans, it was that the British Empire was brutally efficient at protecting and extending the privileges of its citizens.

By the time Canton's American community relocated to Hong Kong, their interests had largely aligned with the British. The ongoing Second Opium War and proximity to a Chinese community perceived as threatening accelerated the process as colonial boundaries consolidated along racial lines. "Whiteness" and the fabrication of an oppositional Chinese "Other" worked together to facilitate the American community's identification with the colonial elite. They cemented their claim to elite status through efforts to relocate themselves within the boundaries of white society and through articulations of racist and culturally chauvinistic language that implicitly elevated the white community while denigrating the Chinese. Such efforts paid off, and by the 1860s American elites had become active, willing, and accepted participants in colonial society.

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[90] Ladds, "Educating the China Born," 199.

[91] John Carroll, "The Peak: Residential Segregation in Colonial Hong Kong," in *Twentieth-Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday, and the World*, ed. Bryna Goodman and David S. Goodman (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2012), 81–91, 83.

[92] John Carroll, *A Concise History of Hong Kong* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 74; John Carroll, *Edge of Empires: Chinese Elites and British Colonials in Hong Kong* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 90. See also Bickers, "Shanghailanders and Others," 292; Irene Cheng, *Clara Ho Tung: A Hong Kong Lady, Her Family and Her Times* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1976); Henry J. Lethbridge, *Hong Kong: Stability and Change: A Collection of Essays* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1978).

The colonial experience was integral to the consolidation of racial hierarchies and the American community's contingent interest in assimilating with Hong Kong's elite white community. In a colonial space marginal to metropolitan interests, the geographically and temporally remote American community leaned into their Anglo-Saxonist and imperialist proclivities as they courted the local British community. They did so both as a matter of exigency and as a deliberate strategy to advance their social and commercial standing in Hong Kong. Aspects of British culture could alienate American elites, and nostalgia for home encouraged the resurrection of metropolitan relationships within the colony that insulated Americans from wholesale participation in British colonial society. The overarching sentiment, however, was that it was expedient to mingle with the elite white British community. As American writers variously conceded, if one was to "make it" in China, one inevitably needed to identify with those one was living with.[93]

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[93] Heard, *An Account of His Life*, 118.