

Institution: University of Westminster		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Increasing Public Understanding of the History of the Chinese in Britain		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2007-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Anne Witchard	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Reader	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Jan 2009-ongoing
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 - December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Dr Anne Witchard's research on the history and representations of China and the Chinese in Britain has resulted in significant social, cultural and educational impact. This case study focuses on three examples of this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Contributions to developing a more diverse GCSE curriculum and support for teachers and students studying Britain's migration history (via work with the Runnymede Trust). (ii) Impacts on the success of UK theatre in representing the history of the Chinese in Britain and Europe for underserved public audiences. (iii) Advancement of public recognition and commemoration of significant diasporic Chinese figures in UK heritage, so integrating the contribution of people of Chinese origin within the narrative of British culture and history. <p>Through these activities, Witchard's work has led to greater public understanding and recognition of the impacts and benefits of migration and of the important Chinese contribution to British cultural life, and has significantly enhanced representations (in culture, education and heritage institutions) of the role played by this marginalised ethnic group within UK history.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Dr Anne Witchard is internationally recognised as one of the leading scholars of Sino-British interactions and of Chinoiserie in modern literature and culture. Profoundly interdisciplinary in its approach, her research has drawn upon, and had subsequent influence in, Chinese cultural studies, literary studies and postcolonial/diasporic research, as well as art, fashion and design history.</p> <p>Her 2009 book, <i>Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie</i> [1], was among the first substantial research projects in literary studies to consider the cult of Chinatown in turn-of-the-century London, situating Chinatown's Sinophobic representations within the context of both a racial demonology and societal concerns surrounding the notion of imperial degeneration in fin-de-siècle Britain. In doing so, as Eugenia Jenkins observed in a 2010 review for the journal The Space Between, Witchard's book 'makes a compelling case for the importance of Chinoiserie [as] an essential vein of modern British culture and identity'. More recently, this research has also been extended to Witchard's analyses of historical panics around the so-called 'yellow peril', as exemplified in early twentieth-century literature by Sax Rohmer's fictional Chinese supervillain Fu Manchu [2]. As such, Witchard's research has been able to advance greater understanding of historical responses to migration in the context of contemporary anxieties around immigration and multiculturalism.</p> <p>Research into historical British-Chinese interactions and transnational exchanges is also central to both Witchard's 2015 collection, <i>British Modernism and Chinoiserie</i> [3], and her 2012 monograph, <i>Lao She, London and China's Literary Revolution</i> [4], which elucidated, for the first time, Lao She's formation as a writer at the crossroads of global modernism. In this way, as Adele Lee wrote in The Literary London Journal, Witchard's research 'makes a valuable contribution to both the reconception/expansion of the Modernist literary canon as well as to the ethnic diversification of London's cultural landscape, which, we tend too often to forget, has since much earlier than the advent of Postcolonial theory, been home to and a source of inspiration for many migrant writers'.</p> <p>Such analysis of previously under-researched and relatively unknown parts of Britain's multicultural heritage and traditions led to Penguin Books commissioning Witchard to explore the often-neglected contribution of the Chinese to the British forces during World War I – and the</p>		

impact of the war upon Chinese communities in Britain – for a wider audience. The resulting 2014 book, *England's Yellow Peril: Sinophobia and the Great War*, shows how, as England suffered heavy casualties at the front, the nation simultaneously closed ranks against outsiders at home and sought to reaffirm its racial dominance at the heart of the empire [5]. The Chinese in London thus became, as Witchard demonstrates, the principal scapegoat for anti-foreign sentiment in the period. The then Managing Editor of Penguin Random House China identified Witchard's volume as a particularly 'important contribution to the [China Specials] series' as it 'was one of the first to take a nuanced look at the perception of China and the Chinese in England in the early twentieth century', and 'helped us market and promote the entire series in the UK'.

Witchard's research on the Chinese in Britain and Chinoiserie fed into the award of an AHRC grant to fund the project '[China in Britain: Myths and Realities](#)' (2012-2014; £32,918), for which she was the Principal Investigator. The project was selected by the AHRC as one of the key 'impact case studies' to showcase its Translating Cultures scheme. Under the heading 'Supporting Cultural Diplomacy Between Britain and China', Witchard's research was specifically highlighted by the AHRC for 'provid[ing] a platform to help the UK to understand its interactions with other cultures and countries', in the context of China's 'increasing strategic economic importance to the UK' and the need 'to support intercultural perceptions of China in the UK'. (See 'Impact of AHRC Research 2013-14' [report](#), p. 12.) Among the several outputs from the AHRC project was the 2015 collection, *British Modernism and Chinoiserie* [3]. Research for the project also led directly to the impact generated from her important contribution to, for example, the *Our Migration Story* project detailed below.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Witchard, A. *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009. Peer-reviewed monograph. Submitted to REF2014. Favourably reviewed in e.g. *English Literature in Transition* 54.3 (2011)
- [2] Witchard, A. 'Purple Clouds and Yellow Shadows: sickly vapours and perilous hues at the fin-de-siècle' in Phil Baker and Tony Clayton eds, *Lord of Strange Deaths: The Fiendish World of Sax Rohmer*. London: Strange Attractor, 2015.
- [3] Witchard, A. ed. *British Modernism and Chinoiserie*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015. Edited collection, also featuring Witchard's chapter "'Beautiful, baleful absurdity": Chinoiserie and Modernist Ballet'. Submitted to REF2021.
- [4] Witchard, A. *Lao She, London and China's Literary Revolution*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012. Peer-reviewed monograph. Submitted to REF2014. Positively reviewed in e.g. *Modernism/Modernity* 20.2 (2013). The text has been licensed for translation into Chinese by Lute Media (Beijing).
- [5] Witchard, A. *England's Yellow Peril: Sinophobia and the Great War*. London: Penguin, 2014. Subject of features in e.g. [Los Angeles Review of Books](#) and [Wall Street Journal](#).

Grant Award: Anne Witchard (PI), 'China in Britain: Myths and Realities'. AHRC Translating Cultures Research Development Network Grant, 2012-14, £32,918. Website: <http://translatingchina.info/>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Increasing diversity and inclusivity in British education: Our Migration Story

Drawing on her work for the AHRC-funded 'China in Britain' project and her 2012 book on Lao She, Witchard's research has resulted in significant pedagogical and cultural impact regarding the history of immigration and multiculturalism in Britain. One way in which this has occurred is through what Dr Halima Begum, Director of the Runnymede Trust charity, describes as Witchard's 'valuable and important contribution' to the 'success' of *Our Migration Story: The Making of Britain*, an AHRC-funded collaboration between the Runnymede Trust and academics at the Universities of Cambridge and Manchester [a-i].

The project takes the form of a high-profile [website](#) that features historical narratives of migration, specific case studies, study materials, and recommended source texts. This **supports**

teachers and students studying migration to Britain in line with the OCR and AQA GCSE History modules on migration to Britain, thus directly impacting upon secondary education in multiculturalism for a substantial number of students in the UK. In 2018, 3,468 pupils taking GCSE History studied the 'Migration to Britain' modules (OCR or AQA). The website also serves as a public resource on Britain's migration history. Since its launch, the website has had over 317,558 unique users [a-i]. Figures for January 2019 show this included 53% users from the UK and 47% from across the world (including North America, India, Australia, Canada, Europe and the Philippines) [a-ii]. The project has been central to ongoing campaigns to further embed histories of migration in the UK curriculum, and was the subject of a Westminster Hall debate on 18 June 2019 led by Helen Hayes MP [a-iii].

According to the most recent census (2011), British people of Chinese origin make up around 0.7% of the UK population. The significance of Witchard's research for the project is evident in the fact that she **wrote the sole contribution on the Chinese in Britain** to appear on the *Our Migration Story* site and in its accompanying study materials: '[Chinese Limehouse and Mr Ma and Son](#)', which features in the '20th and 21st Century Migrations: 1900-2000s' section of the project [a-iv]. The section is a particularly important one given that *Our Migration Story* was 'set up to meet demand from pupils for more diverse histories', and the fact that this period of migration most obviously reflects the heritage of many of those pupils (including those of Chinese origin) who will be studying these GCSE modules [a-v]. Witchard's commissioned contribution (which is also one of very few to focus on a literary text) is accompanied by a series of questions and student activities, specific to her research, including guidance for teachers on how to use it as a '**platform for students to investigate broader questions about the nature of Britain's historic relationship with China**', as well as the opportunity it provides to students of History 'to engage with literature as a historical source' [a-iv]. Witchard also secured the inclusion of Lao She's novel *Mr Ma and Son* as the source text for this section, the only Chinese diasporic source text in the GCSE History material provided by the project. As the publisher and translator have testified, Witchard played a 'vital role' in bringing this novel back into print in William Dolby's previously unpublished translation as part of the Penguin Modern Classics series in 2013 [a-vi, a-vii].

Our Migration Story was a joint winner of the 'Research Champions' prize awarded in 2017 by the Community Integration Awards. The project was described as 'an important intervention in the much-needed conversation on migration ... [that] disrupts and unsettles the unhelpful, binary narratives around "Them and Us", especially in the times of revival of nationalist sentiments in Britain' [a-v]. The site was also awarded the Royal Historical Society's 'Public History Prize' for online resources in January 2018 for the manner in which the project had 'taken original historical research into schools to **inspire young people and teachers to engage with family and community history** as a way of understanding the historical "roots" and "routes" of contemporary multicultural Britain' [a-v]. In 2019, *Our Migration Story* was the winner of *The Guardian's* 'Research Impact' award, which praised it for 'responding to demands from young people seeking to "decolonise" the curriculum' [a-ii].

In this way, Witchard's unique contribution to the Runnymede Trust project, deriving from her AHRC-funded research, has helped facilitate the **social and educational impact of helping to increase inclusivity and social cohesion** by representing and engaging the interests of previously marginalised students, in particular those of Chinese origin, along with the **pedagogical impact of assisting in the creation of an accessible resource for those studying GCSE History** as well as for the general public.

Impacts on the representation of minority histories in UK theatre

Dr Witchard is regularly invited to act as a historical advisor to the creative industries, including, for example, for the BBC2 documentary *Who Should We Let In? Ian Hislop on the First Great Immigration Row* (2017), which drew on research for her first book (output [1]), and the Showtime/Sky TV drama *Penny Dreadful* (2014-16). Her consultancy for the latter included expert advice on production design (for which the show won a 2014 BAFTA Television Craft Award), art direction (costumes, props, make-up), language, and elements of the storylines [b-i]. Her research has also had a particularly direct impact upon the representation and understanding of minority histories in the UK theatre sector.

Among the participants invited by Witchard to contribute to the AHRC-funded 'China in Britain' project (see section 2) was the British East Asian playwright and actor Daniel York Loh, a

participant in the Royal Court's Unheard Voices initiative and a former chair of Equity's Race Equality Committee. Writing of his participation in the 'China in Britain' project, York Loh states that his inclusion 'has been of enormous personal benefit as it has empowered me to go on and then tell these stories in my work with greater confidence and authority' [b-ii]. As York Loh has said of Witchard's research: 'Throughout the British East Asian theatre community, Dr. Witchard is known as a great resource and support' [b-ii].

Most specifically, Witchard's work with York Loh resulted in a very **direct impact upon the writing and production of two successful plays on China and the Chinese in Britain: *The Fu Manchu Complex***, staged over three weeks at the Ovalhouse Theatre, London in October 2013, and *Forgotten* 遗忘, staged in 2018 at the Theatre Royal in Plymouth and the Arcola Theatre in London, one of the capital's most important 'Off West End' venues (total combined audience: c.3900 people) [b-iii]. As York Loh testifies:

'Dr Witchard's work has been enormously helpful to me. **Her knowledge and writing around very specific aspects and periods of history regarding China and its diaspora has been invaluable**, particularly with regards to portrayal and interpretation in the West which is where so much of my work has centred. ... Both my produced stage plays, *The Fu Manchu Complex* and *Forgotten* 遗忘, leaned heavily on her books' [b-ii].

As York Loh has stated in an interview with *Banana Writers*, a website dedicated to Asian writers, the impact of Witchard's research projects also extended to 'develop[ing] an audience' for these plays, and thus further extending their reach, particularly through the inspiration and assistance they provided for several 'events organized around the topics in the play' [b-iv]:

'This idea came to me after I'd attended a couple of the brilliant China In Britain events that Anne Witchard organized at the University of Westminster ... If we could get a couple of discussion events organized it would both bump up the "in kind" funding (space, marketing, time) as well develop an audience and raise awareness of the issues in the play. The people at ... **the University of Westminster were unbelievably supportive and without them and Ovalhouse this play really wouldn't be happening**' [b-iv].

York Loh's second play, *Forgotten* 遗忘, is about the Chinese Labor Corps (CLC) of World War I, and '[t]he amnesia of the countries the labourers served' [b-v]. As the author testifies, the content of the play was directly inspired by discussions at a public event on '[China and the Great War](#)' organised by Witchard at the Imperial War Museum in May 2016, at which York Loh was a participant, as well as by her research in *England's Yellow Peril* (output [5]). The significance of the play is highlighted in a review in *The Guardian*: 'The story of the CLC is of immense, heartbreaking importance – the end reveals how these heroic men were painted out of history' [b-v]. *The South China Morning Post* further noted that the play is evidence that 'China's human contribution to the Great War is finally getting the recognition it deserves' [b-v]. In this way, the impact of Witchard's research on UK theatre has helped to **increase public recognition and understanding of Chinese contributions to British and European history**.

A secondary impact of Witchard's research and engagement activities in this regard - to which, as York Loh states, he was 'heavily' indebted [b-ii] - has consequently been in **successfully informing, and cultivating an audience for, new and still all-too-rare work by British East Asian writers and actors in contemporary UK theatre**. The majority of parts in both York Loh's plays were created for British East Asian actors, who are, as *The Stage* has noted, 'severely under-represented' in both theatre and television [b-vi]. Such representation has, in turn, generated engagement with otherwise underserved communities. As a review by Frey Kwa Hawking in *Exeunt Magazine* noted: 'There are more East Asians in the audience for *Forgotten* than I've seen in the audience for possibly anything else, and that feels significant even before we get into the play's subject' [b-v].

Through her research and engagement activities, Witchard has thus directly impacted upon the writing of, and building of an audience for, high-profile plays for an under-represented community, and significantly **'empowered' and facilitated artists in exploring their heritage** for diverse UK audiences [b-ii].

Increasing diversity within British Heritage

Deriving from her research into Chinese contributions to global modernism (see outputs [3] and [4] above), Witchard's impact on **public understanding of the particular contribution of the Chinese to UK cultural life** is further exemplified by her central involvement in the approval of a [Blue Plaque](#), unveiled on 29th June 2019, to commemorate the writer, painter and calligrapher Chiang Yee's residence in Oxford, which was widely covered in local, national and international media, including the *Oxford Mail*, *The Guardian*, BBC, and *South China Morning Post* [c-i]. The writer Paul French, a partner in the campaign, notes that individuals commemorated by a plaque 'must be proved to have made a worthwhile contribution to British life, art and culture' and, in this connection, that 'the application to erect a Blue Plaque to Chiang Yee was underpinned by academic research from the University of Westminster's "China in Britain" project' [c-ii].

The securing of this plaque, supported by Witchard's research, was a significant moment in the **representation of ethnic minorities in UK heritage** and in the integration of the contribution of people of Chinese origin within the narrative of British culture and history. The plaque scheme traces its origins back to 1867 and is the oldest and most high-profile commemorative scheme of its kind in the world. As an article in *The Guardian* highlighted, Yee is only the third Chinese figure to be recognised in this way in the UK (after Lao She and Sun Yat-Sen) and his 'plaque comes in response to a campaign launched by English Heritage in 2016, calling for a more representative celebration of history' [c-i]. According to [English Heritage](#), only 4% of the 900 plaques in London are, for example, dedicated to black and Asian figures. As a news item on BBC World Service radio put it: 'the overwhelming majority of plaques celebrate men – and white men at that, which is why the unveiling of a blue plaque [to Chiang Yee] in the university city of Oxford yesterday is so unusual' [c-i].

The unveiling of the blue plaque was preceded by a full-to-capacity symposium co-organised by Witchard at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, attended by c.100 delegates, including Chiang Yee's granddaughter. Asked what the unveiling of Yee's blue plaque meant to these attendees, the following selected statements from the completed feedback forms speak to the range of impacts generated by this recognition: 'provided the incentive to learn more about him, and the Chinese Community in the UK'; 'It means **including more diversity in a country where diversity can sometimes be overlooked**'; 'A triumph for acknowledging the contribution that he made to East/West understanding while he lived in Britain'; 'A rare acknowledgement of the important cultural connections between Britain & China' [c-iii].

Such feedback, along with the award's extensive media coverage, demonstrates how the impact of Witchard's research has successfully brought about wider recognition of the cultural contributions of figures like Chiang Yee to Britain, and of the importance of British-Chinese relations, as well as aiding, more widely, in the **diversification of the celebration of British history for one of the most high-profile heritage schemes in the UK**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- a) i. Dr Halima Begum, Director of Runnymede Trust, Letter, 4/1/2021; ii. *The Guardian* 'Research impact: award winner and runners-up', 10/4/2019 [\[link\]](#); iii. History Curriculum debate, Westminster Hall, Hansard, 18/6/2019 [\[link\]](#); iv. 'Chinese Limehouse and "Mr Ma and Son"', Our Migration Story [\[link\]](#); v. Portfolio of Prize Awards for Our Migration Story; vi. Correspondence with Penguin Books and William Dolby regarding publication of Lao She's *Mr Ma and Sun*, 2011-13; vii. Former Managing Editor, Penguin Random House China, Letter, 17/10/2019.
- b) i. Portfolio of example correspondence regarding advisory roles for *Penny Dreadful* TV series and *Who Should We Let In?* programme; ii. Daniel York Loh testimony, 1/11/2019; iii. Email from Daniel York Loh, 28/11/2020; iv. 'Daniel York Interview', *Banana Writers*, n.d. [\[link\]](#); v. *Forgotten* 遗忘 reviews: *South China Morning Post*, 11/11/2018 [\[link\]](#), *The Guardian*, 29/10/2018 [\[link\]](#), *Exeunt Magazine*, 27/10/2018 [\[link\]](#); vi. Giverny Masso, 'East Asian actors are severely under-represented...', *The Stage*, 9/10/2019 [\[link\]](#).
- c) i. Portfolio of media coverage of Chiang Yee blue plaque award, June 2019; ii. Paul French, 'This Day in History...', *that's* magazine, 29/6/2019 [\[link\]](#); iii. Portfolio of feedback from Chiang Yee event, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 29/6/2019.