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Britain and Asia

Political and literary encounters

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Editorial

Old relations anew

"China's century" is a phrase commonly heard among economists as well as social scientists predicting where world hegemony is likely to reside in the decades ahead. More broadly speaking, however, it is not only China that rises in prominence; the Asian continent hosts a number of emerging economic powers, and the implications of this development are visible in global politics as well as in the global economy.

Seen from Britain's perspective, the rise of Asia presents threats as well as new opportunities; and in both respects, a number of specifically British features make Britain stand out from other European states. The imperial past may be a handicap as well as a unique asset; likewise, while "Anglo-America" may be met with disdain in Asia, Britain is also a cultural superpower with exceptional resonance and with a mother tongue which is also the global *lingua franca*.

The quintessential British perspective today is that of Asia as an enormous venue of trade. Two contributions in the current issue reflect this dominance; David Scott's survey of "rediscovery and readjustment" and a recent speech held in Beijing by George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Both contributions however also testify to the historical complexity of Britain's presence in the East. Ventures into Asia were pivotal to what some scholars refer to as the second British Empire. After the loss of the American colonies - the first British Empire - British merchants and missionaries made Asia the chief arena of British imperialism. The many contradictions that ensued are reflected in some of the expressions used about the British presence there: "empire on the cheap", "free trade imperialism", and "the white man's burden". The imperial playing ground was an arena where trade met exploitation, idealism met realpolitik, and commercial interests clashed with Church and military interests. With the current issue of *British Politics Review* we seek to address how Britain and prominent Britons have engaged with Asia, historically and today. The role of history in the forging of British-Asian relations certainly merits further reflection beyond these pages, especially in light of the assumedly Asian century we have entered.

Øivind Bratberg and Kristin M. Haugevik (editors)

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Britain in Asia: rediscovery and readjustment for post-imperial times

In recent years the rise of the “East”, especially China and India, has been a significant international development reshaping the international system. This presents Britain, a gently declining power, with opportunities and constraints. Part of these opportunities and constraints are shared with other European states, but part of them reflect Britain's distinctive presence, experience and record as having the biggest overseas empire in Asia among European states.



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Britain's current role in Asia has been one of post-colonial rediscovery. Two hundred years ago Britain took the lead in occupying India, the so-called “jewel in the crown”, from where the Indian Ocean became a “British lake”. Britain also launched the first of the foreign wars in China's “century of humiliation”, which brought British occupation of Hong Kong in 1842 as a key economic trading port. Finally, Britain also held a central position in Southeast Asia based on its key naval airbase at Singapore and control of various Malay states around the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea. Britain's rivalry with Russia, the notorious “Great Game” than ran during the nineteenth century, was played out across Asia with privileged spheres carved out by Britain in the Gulf, Persia and Tibet. Migration from the Indian subcontinent was an important legacy of that imperial period. The 2001 Census recorded over 1 million people of Indian origin in Britain, 22.7 per cent of Britain's UK's ethnic minority population.

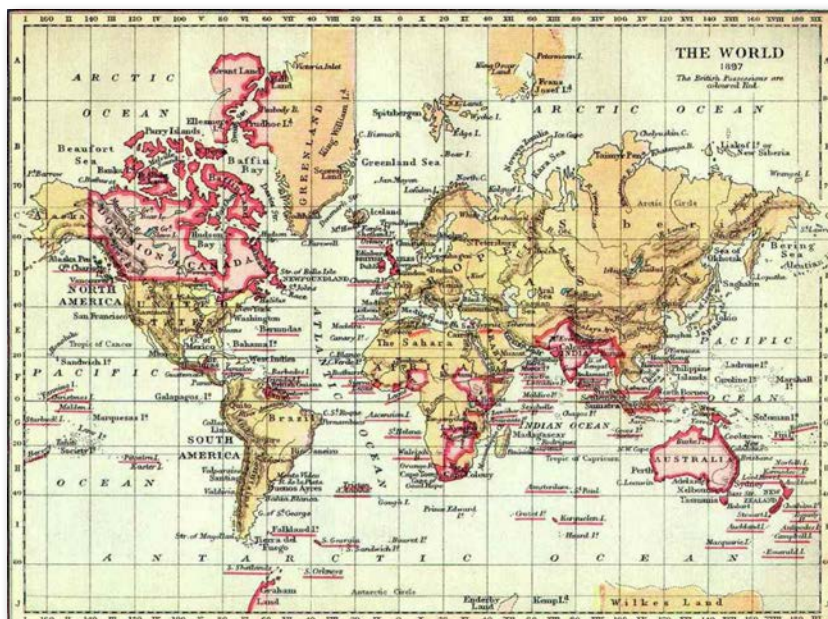
Yet from that position of leading power, Britain's own imperial contractions brought humiliation at the hands of Japanese imperialism. The fall of Singapore was a particularly humiliating debacle for Britain in 1940, as British troops in khaki shorts were led into detention camps by victorious

By David Scott

Japanese troops. This was ironic since Britain's own ending of “splendid isolation” had been the forging of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 which ran through to 1921. Although Britain finished World War Two as a notional Great Power victor; in reality it was greatly weakened, facing terminal “imperial overstretch”, was overshadowed by the United States and in little position to resist the growing forces of Asian nationalism. India and Pakistan gained independence in 1947 quickly followed by Burma and Ceylon. Malaya followed in 1957. The independence for Aden in 1967, the “East of Suez” announcement in 1968, and independence for Gulf states like Bahrain in 1971 signalled Britain's effective withdrawal from Asia. Britain's position in the Indian Ocean was in effect handed over through giving US basing rights at Diego Garcia in 1971. Hong Kong, the last remnant from Britain's victories in the nineteenth century, was returned to the PRC in 1997.

Where does this now leave Britain in relation to Asia, i.e. Japan, India, Southeast Asia, and China? With regard to Japan, their post-1945 setting has been one of two liberal democracies that were friendly but from afar. Japan's economic miracle resulted in Japanese business models were also seen as a panacea for British managerial styles. However that same Japanese economic miracle resulted in rising Japanese trade surpluses in the 1970s and 1980s, as Japanese exports penetrated the British market but British exports found it difficult to obtain similar entry into the Japanese market. However, the Japanese economic turnaround in the 1990s and 2000s (its so-called “lost decades”) saw this trade friction diminish. With their geopolitical regions being at opposite ends of Eurasia,

their respective common strategic interests are modest. It was typical that their Joint Statement in 2012 *A Leading Strategic Partnership for Global Prosperity and Security* had economic recovery as their first issue. Wider security convergence is evident on both countries wanting secure Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs), in particular in the Indian Ocean.



That was then. Map of the world with British imperial possessions in pink, 1897.

Britain's relations with India have been modest and a far cry from their previous colonial period levels of significance. In economic terms, trade with India shrunk in importance for both countries after independence in 1947. Britain's trade shifted much more towards Europe while India's trade shifted towards the United States, China, Southeast Asia and the Gulf. Politically India's decision to stay within the Commonwealth was seen as important by Britain for its continuance as a significant forum. However, frequent criticisms of British policy over South Africa by India, and other ex-colonial states, were a source of friction in the 1950s through to 1980s. India's was also very critical of Britain decision to maintain political control of the small islands in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and to allocate significant basing rights on them to the US at Diego Garcia in the 1970s. During the Cold War, British alignment with the United States contrasted with India's non-alignment stance in the 1950s to 1960s and its tilt towards the Soviet Union in the 1970s to 1980s.

"Although history leaves a powerful bond of English language between Britain and India, it does not necessarily translate into closer post-imperial relations, as India has looked elsewhere for political support and economic substance. Putting it another way, Britain needs (or wants) India more than India needs (or wants) Britain."

India's own economic rise in the post Cold War 1990s, part of the Eastern shift in economic weight, brought greater interest in Britain to access the Indian market. The government White Paper entitled *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities* (2006) emphasized the challenges and opportunities presented by the economic rise of India, and China. In March 2008, when Tata, India's biggest vehicle maker, bought the luxury brands Jaguar and Land Rover from British carmaker Ford, the £1.15 billion deal attracted the attention of British and international commentators as a significant illustration of the shifting relationship between a former colonial power and its former colony. Equally symptomatic was India's announcement in 2012 that it neither needed nor wanted any British overseas aid. The aftermath of the global recession saw the British Prime Minister David Cameron making a play for greater access to the Indian market, and indeed Indian foreign direct investment (FDI) in Britain. It was in such a vein that the House of Commons, Business and Enterprise Committee report in April 2008 on the development in UK-India economic relations was titled *Waking Up to India*. However the level of trade between the two countries has remained relatively modest. For example, in 2011-2012 Belgium (\$17.7 billion) conducted more trade with India than did the UK (\$16.3 billion).

Certainly the political rhetoric has warmed between Britain and India. A formal "strategic partnership" was announced in September 2004. Cameron's two trips to India in 2010 and 2013 brought further cooperation. The relationship was elevated to "Enhanced

Partnership for the Future" in 2010. The 2013 trip saw Cameron's delegation include the largest British trade delegation ever to visit India, leaders of the *India-UK CEO Forum*, members of Parliament, and University Vice Chancellors. A cyber-security pact was one outcome of the summit, at which it was agreed to have a "stronger, wider, deeper partnership". In strategic terms Britain is happy enough with the growing importance of this fellow liberal democracy India in the Indian Ocean, with joint *Konkan* naval exercises between the two countries running since 2004. Britain also supports India's case for permanent membership at the United

Nations Security Council. However, although Britain's history leaves a powerful bond of English language between the two states, it does not necessarily translate into closer post-imperial relations, as India has looked elsewhere for political support and economic substance. Putting it another way, Britain needs (or wants) India more than India needs (or wants) Britain.

With regard to Southeast Asia, decolonisation was a longer process than in India with independence gained by the Malay states in 1957; followed by Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah in 1963. During the 1950s Britain fought a long-running war against Malay communists. Britain also deployed troops from 1962-66; when the newly formed Malaysian federation between Malaya, Sarawak and Sabah was threatened by Indonesia. Britain remains a signatory to the *Five Power Defence Forces Agreement* (5PDFA) set up in 1974 with Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand, although now taking a minor role. A prickly relationship was noticeable during the time of Mahathir Mohammed as Prime Minister 1981-2003, whose Malay nationalism and strong criticism of Western powers in the international system made him an uncomfortable Commonwealth voice for Britain.

With regard to China, the United Kingdom recognised the People's Republic of China in 1950, and was the first major Western country to do so. Although Britain generally aligned with the US in the Cold War, and was ready to fight against Chinese military forces in the Korean War of 1950-1954; nevertheless there was a reluctance to confront Beijing too directly, given that British control of Hong Kong was something only made possible on China's sufferance. Both sides came to benefit from the economic growth of Hong Kong as one of the "Asian Tigers" (alongside South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) in the 1970s and 1980s.

The most important aspect of their bilateral relationship in the 1949-1989 period was arrangements for the fate of Hong Kong after the 100-year lease on Kowloon came to an end. What was striking was how British attempts to retain a post-1997 role were quickly crushed by China in the negotiations leading to handover in 1997, and how rapidly British influence in Hong Kong dwindled after 1997.

With Hong Kong out of the way, there has developed a broader bilateral relationship with China. Britain and China established a "comprehensive partnership" in 1998. This was upgraded to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" in 2004, which included a mechanism for annual meeting between the Premier and Prime Minister. Human Rights issues have become marginalised in their relationship, and in 2008 the British Foreign Secretary also dropped reference to "suzerainty" as an appropriate model for Tibet, reversing the position held by Britain since the Simla Convention of 1913.

The reason for this marginalisation of political matters is that economics is the most important aspect of the Britain-China relationship, in which growing volume of trade has gone hand in hand with growing Chinese trade surpluses. The need for Chinese financial stimulation, including foreign direct investment (FDI), to overcome the global recession of 2008-2009 has become an important feature of their relationship. Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Britain in 2009 saw the two sides signing a joint statement on *Strengthening Cooperation, and Actively Dealing with the International Financial Crisis*; with various agreements signed on trade, energy, and culture matters. Britain's Foreign Secretary William Hague describes the relationship as primarily a "partnership for growth". Typical of its thrust was the decision in 2013 by their two central banks to sign a currency swap agreement, the first between China and a major developed country.

If Britain's economic relationship with Asia has been a prominent theme with regard to these various Asian actors, it is an area

increasingly affected by Britain's membership of the European Union (EU). The EU has its own strategic partnerships with China, India and Japan. An important point is that trade matters and negotiations falls under the scope of the EU, whose competency in this area is part of European law and part of the supra-national institutional powers enjoyed by the European Commission. Environmental cooperation also comes under EU-level rather than British/national level arrangements. Some of the mechanisms for cooperation with Asia work through EU rather than national levels. At the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), though Britain is one of the European

members, it is significant that only the European Commission has permanent Coordinator status. It is also significant that it is the EU which is a Dialogue Partner with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), not Britain. Similarly, it is the EU not Britain that has observer status with the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Consequently, possible moves

towards British withdrawal from the EU would probably reduce Britain's weight and also interactions with those Asian powers.

Nevertheless, growing issues of piracy, terrorism and instability have brought something of a British return to West Asia, with modest British forces re-appearing in the Gulf. Britain also played an important role, alongside the bigger US deployment of troops, in Iraq and Afghanistan during the last decade, prompting some people to talk of a return to "East of Suez" on the part of Britain. The bigger trend facing Britain

is how the rise of the East is being better described as a re-rise or a return to the economic predominance that the East, i.e. China and India, enjoyed on the eve of European expansionism.

Britain, like other European countries is having to adjust to that basic fact of economics and of international relations.

"The rise of the East is being better described as a re-rise or a return to the economic predominance that the East, i.e. China and India, enjoyed on the eve of European expansionism."



Shanghai. Symbol of China's rapid economic growth and expansion as a global actor.
Photo: Pete Stewart.

The British "East of Suez" decision in perspective

By W. Taylor Fain

In June 1965, Britain's Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, spoke before an audience at London's Royal Festival Hall that included the last British viceroy of India, Lord Mountbatten, former Prime Minister Clement Attlee, and future Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi. In an address that both praised the life and career of India's first post-independence leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, and mused on Britain's contemporary world role, Wilson concluded improbably that Britain's strategic frontiers remained "on the Himalayas." A mere two and a half years later, Wilson's expansive vision of Britain's foreign policy interests and role as an Asian power was in full retreat. In January 1968 he was compelled to tell the House of Commons that his government had decided to hasten the withdrawal of British forces from their stations in East Asia and the Persian Gulf by the end of 1971. Britain, in other words, was relinquishing its permanent military obligations "east of Suez."

Britain's imperial presence and influence in Asia dated to the 17th century and loomed large in the nation's conception of itself as a global power with far flung interests and obligations. The choices made in the second half of 1967 to end Britain's permanent military role "east of Suez" culminated years of political soul-searching and economic crisis. They were clearly traumatic decisions for all involved. The Wilson government's "east of Suez" debate has also been frequently misunderstood and mischaracterized in terms of the political, economic, and strategic factors that shaped it as well as its immediate impact on Britain's posture in Asia and its relationship with the United States. Likewise, reports earlier this spring that the Cameron government might take steps to "reverse" the 1968 decision have been misconstrued in the media as somehow anticipating an attempt to restore Britain to its former stature as a major Asian power. It is therefore instructive to assess the reasons for Britain's departure from its traditional "east of Suez" role, its subsequent role in the Persian Gulf region and East Asia, and the prospects for a renewed British military presence in Southwest Asia.

Over the past decade and a half historians have availed themselves of the rich documentary record that has been declassified on both sides of the Atlantic to re-evaluate the motivations and means behind the Wilson government's "east of Suez" decision as well as the American reaction



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to it. They have done much to dispel the conventional wisdom that financial weakness primarily drove Wilson and his cabinet ministers. Rather, a potent mixture of partisan political and international concerns as well as the fragility of the British economy animated their actions.

Clearly, 1967 was an annus horribilis for Britain. A series of overlapping crises, domestic and foreign, confronted London that year aggravating political cleavages within the Labour Party. The resultant struggles, between members of the cabinet and between the government and the Parliamentary Labour Party, compelled Wilson's decision to withdraw from the Persian Gulf and East Asia by the end of 1971.

Britain's strategy "east of Suez," both in the Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia was determined in the 1960s by a blend of strategic and diplomatic concerns, none more imperative than to secure the transatlantic relationship and the support of the United States for British overseas interests. As Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart noted in November 1965, "The Anglo-American alliance is fundamental to British policy and interests. Our readiness to support and complement United States power in areas where we can play an effective part is a vital element in maintaining the alliance."

For its part, the Johnson administration believed that

Britain's presence "east of Suez" was critical to preserving the domestic political consensus in the United States behind continued American strategic engagement abroad. "Don't pull out Britain because we can't do the job of world policeman alone" Secretary of State Rusk told Foreign Secretary Stewart in May 1965. Johnson and his advisers found Britain's "east of Suez" role particularly reassuring in an era when U.S. resources were being consumed by its escalating war in Vietnam. A National Security Council staffer noted, "It is useful for us to have their flag, not ours, 'out front' in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf – in areas where they have strong historical associations....[W]e might be very much better off to pay for part of their presence – if they really cannot afford it – than finance our own." Consequently, the United States decided to underwrite the increasingly fragile Pound with the tacit understanding that this support was predicated upon Britain's continued commitment to back the U.S. war effort in Indochina and to remain engaged strategically in Western Europe and "east of Suez."

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By the end of 1967, though, the Labour government was forced to renounce this *quid pro quo*. Wilson not only appreciated his nation's deteriorating financial position but also found himself fighting off an insurgency within his own party and cabinet led by those who both found Britain's traditional role in Asia an embarrassing anachronism and who advocated a European orientation for Britain politically and strategically. Minister of Technology Tony Benn explained that he and his allies in the cabinet wished to see "imperial Britain" replaced by an "industrial Britain" within the European Economic Community. A "socialist insular offshore island solution" to Britain's problems not being feasible, EEC membership was a way to "cut Queen Victoria's umbilical cord" and move Britain toward a European future. Moreover, as public opposition grew in Britain to America's war in Vietnam, so did the aversion of many Labour politicians to supporting the American war effort. This translated to the further erosion of support for a permanent British military presence in Southeast Asia.

The sterling crisis of November 1967 led directly to the devaluation of the Pound and the Wilson government's painful decision to relinquish its permanent military commitments "east of Suez" in less than four years time. The American reaction was immediate and bitter. Foreign Secretary George Brown famously recounted to his cabinet colleagues his "bloody unpleasant" meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk in early January 1968 during which the usually gracious Georgian admonished him with the words, "For God's sake, act like Britain!" and thundered that he was "profoundly dismayed" that Britain appeared to be retreating to a "Little England" posture.

The last British warship steamed out of the port of Bahrain in December 1971, but it would be mistaken to conclude that because its permanent presence ended Britain's military and strategic role "east of Suez" also came to an end. Far from it. At American insistence, the British government committed itself to maintaining a capability to intervene in the Persian Gulf if necessary. British firms continued to sell advanced weapons systems to the Gulf Arab states, and British training teams accompanied them. British officers were regularly seconded to the militaries of the states along the periphery of the Arabian Peninsula and Gulf, and British special forces participated in the Sultan of Oman's campaign to suppress the Dhofar rebellion in the mid 1970s. In 1980, the Royal Navy re-established a permanent presence in the Persian Gulf when the Armilla Patrol began regular operations to protect British shipping and interests threatened during the Iran-Iraq War. Farther east, small numbers of British military personnel remained in Singapore through 1976, and Royal Navy refueling station still operates in the city-state. The last British military detachment did not leave Hong Kong until its 1997 turnover to China. Meanwhile, British Military Garrison Brunei continues its duties on the island of Borneo, and a Royal Marine detachment serves alongside U.S. military personnel on the British island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Of course, large British military contingents participated in the American-led wars against

Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1990-1991 and 2003-2007, and British forces have played a critical role in the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan. For a nation that is commonly understood to have abdicated its role "east of Suez" more than forty years ago this is surely a lengthy record of continuous military involvement.

In late 2012, the British government quietly reanimated its 1996 Defence Cooperation Agreement with the United Arab Emirates. An extended British campaign to sell advanced fighter aircraft to the UAE appeared to be paying off with the understanding that the sale would be accompanied by a recommitment of British military protection for the southern Gulf states. Iran's nuclear ambitions and truculent behavior in the Gulf had left the UAE and its neighbors feeling increasingly vulnerable at a time when the United States' attention appeared to be diverted by talk of a strategic "pivot" towards Asia and the Pacific. Last December the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, told an audience at the Royal United Services Institute, a think tank with close ties to the British military, that the government intended to move significant military assets to the Gulf and Jordan. The revelation led many in the British media to speculate breathlessly that Britain might be returning to its traditional "east of Suez" role. In an April 2013 Briefing Paper, RUSI analysts sought to temper such conjecture. They clarified that the British military intended "to build up a strong shadow presence around the Gulf; not an evident imperial-style footprint, but a smart presence."

Moreover, Britain's renewed role in Gulf security was based on more than the opportunity to establish a profitable partnership with the wealthy Arab emirates. Just as its "east of Suez" policies a generation earlier had been determined most importantly by the desire to secure its strategic relationship with the United States, the current move towards an increased role in Persian Gulf defense was being driven by Britain's desire to reinforce its transatlantic ties. Presumably, the United States would welcome an augmented British military role in the Gulf. As the RUSI report concludes, "There is a clear need to 'do something' if the strategy of being close to the Americans – in terms of political norms, military interconnectivities, and global influence – is to be maintained....[T]he UK is positioning itself at the heart of a region that will remain keenly important to the US in the future...In short, the UK is giving renewed emphasis to its position in the Gulf in order to maintain the special relationship with the US."

Parliament's refusal in late August to sanction the use of British military force to punish the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons left the Cameron government unable to intervene meaningfully in the Syrian civil war. At the same time, however, Britain's renewed strategic relationship with the Gulf emirates may offer it the opportunity to cooperate with the United States to reinforce stability on the conflict's southern periphery. As 2013 draws to a close it appears that the United States may yet again play an important part in encouraging and recasting Britain's venerable role "east of Suez."

Palmerston and Asia: playing the Great Game

By David Brown

Between 1830 and 1865 British foreign policy was dominated by one man in particular, Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, who held the seals of the British Foreign Office three times (1830-34, 1835-41, 1846-51) and was Prime Minister for most of the final decade of his life, serving two terms 1855-58 and 1859-65. While most often remembered as a European politician, his attitude towards Asia serves to shed valuable light on his political priorities.



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In 1829, a year before he first entered the Foreign Office in which he was to make his reputation, Palmerston wrote to his friend Edward Littleton about the Ottoman Empire. Influenced no doubt by a certain philo-Hellenism popular at the time and against the backdrop of Ottoman suppression of Greek nationalism, Palmerston seemed to offer a classic western view of an Eastern 'other'. 'I should not be sorry some day or other to see the Turk kicked out of Europe, & compelled to go and sit cross-legged, smoke his pipe, chew his opium, & cut off heads on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus,' he wrote, adding, 'we want civilization, activity, trade & business in Europe, & your Mustaphas have no idea of any traffic beyond rhubarb, figs and red slippers'. At about the same time, he had confided in a private notebook that the 'Mahometan religion seems like a parody upon Christianity by the Evil Spirit' in its injunction 'to commit criminal violence in this life, & promises a reward, the enjoyment of vicious indulgence in a life to come'.

And yet despite these vivid characterisations, in office Palmerston displayed no marked interest in Asia as a culturally-loaded site. Whatever prejudices might have informed his private opinions, as a minister he regarded Asia as significant primarily as it impacted on, or determined, the balance of power in Europe. That is, he was willing to play the 'great game' of mediating or contesting Russian influence in Asia, particularly as it affected Britain's position in India, but beyond that saw the continent within a Euro-centric strategic framework. It was why, for example, his late 1820s hostility to Turkish government was rapidly transformed in the early 1830s into a pro-Ottoman position when a serious challenge to the integrity of the Empire from within, from Egypt, seemed to risk wider instability in the Near East. If Mehemet Ali's attempt to bring Syria under Egyptian control succeeded, Palmerston reasoned, then the wider Ottoman Empire might become unstable; and when, in the event, Russia was able to draw the Ottoman

Empire further under its protective reach through the concessions it extracted by treaty in 1833 in return for securing the Sultan's position against the Egyptian challenge, then this seemed only to further underline the extent to which the Tsar was manoeuvring to disrupt the status quo in Russia's favour.

Palmerston's view of Asia, therefore, was conditioned to a large extent by his view of (and fear of) Russia. The first major test of Palmerstonian policy in the region occurred towards the end of the 1830s. In the spring of 1838 Persia seemed bent on conquest of Afghanistan. Although Britain had secured promises from Persia, enshrined in treaty from 1814, that no other European power would be allowed to gain access to India via Persian territory, Palmerston recognised that this remained a potential weak spot for Britain. 'Russia and Persia are playing tricks in Affghanistan', he wrote to Fred Lamb, his soon to be brother-in-law, and this, he said, must 'be put an end to'. When in the summer it appeared that Russia was engineering a Persian-Afghan settlement 'defensive against England', Palmerston worried that this was 'coming a little too near to our door in India'. To Palmerston, this was a deceit: Persia had reneged on earlier agreements 'to be our friend' and 'to promote our interest' and had deliberately, in consorting with Russia in Afghanistan, removed the protective barrier between India and Europe and was 'laying the road open for invasion up to our very gate'.

When proposals were put forward in September for a British invasion of Persia to re-assert Britain's position there, however, Palmerston saw this as a move fraught with danger: destabilising, even dethroning the Shah, he said, would simply push the Shah into the arms of Russia and bring with it a very real prospect of Britain losing further ground to Russia in this sensitive region. Rather than challenge Persia head-on, therefore, Palmerston preferred to check Persia via British intervention in Afghanistan – a country too far from Russia both geographically and politically for Russia to be able to justify direct involvement. Palmerston was therefore an enthusiast for British action in Afghanistan as a means of rebalancing the balance of power well beyond Asia. As he wrote to John Cam Hobhouse, President of the Board of Control for India, at the end of October 1838, establishing British influence in Afghanistan 'will do us the utmost service, in India in Europe and at home. We shall utterly defeat the Russian schemes in the East; that will tell upon Persia, & probably re-establish our influence there. That again will tell in Turkey, and give us a good footing there. That will tell again upon all other European questions now pending, and upon American ones too'.

Relations between Britain and Persia settled down after this: the 'warning' worked in the sense that Persian forces backed off from Afghanistan, until 1856 that is, when a renewed attempt on Herat provoked a British declaration of war on Persia in November of that year. While in certain quarters this was viewed as a *jihad*, for Palmerston it was about reasserting British influence in the region, important not least given that the Crimean War of 1854-6 had recently underlined the continuing friction between Britain and Russia and Palmerston was anxious not to risk Britain being again exposed close to India.

Yet while much of Palmerston's policy in Asia was framed in terms of protecting interests in India, India itself did not particularly excite Palmerston's imagination or overly pique his interest. Palmerston described India as a territory surrounded by a multitude of potentially hostile powers and interests and a country inhabited by a population that was 'scarcely half civilized' and which it was an important British duty to improve by education, justice, industry and prosperity.

The task of the British Governor General was made all the more difficult, he thought, because the 'religious prejudices' of Hindus and Muslims posed 'obstacles to the progress of European civilization'. Significantly, however, these notes on India were made only in response to difficulties in the 1830s and 1840s in Afghanistan and were part of a wider commentary on the problems faced by Lord Auckland as Governor General between 1836 and 1842. India, and the Empire more generally, engaged Palmerston's interest only when he perceived that it impacted on Britain's international security or generated domestic political problems. At all other times Palmerston was no doubt happy not to encourage too much reflection on British policy in India for fear that such attention would also reawaken debates about policy in neighbouring regions such as Afghanistan, Persia and China. Thus Palmerston's response to the rebellion in India

in 1857, for example, was conditioned primarily by his assessment of its ramifications for British power more than by any anxiety about an undermining of British imperial prestige per se. Many historians have been struck by his apparent lack of engagement with Indian affairs at this critical moment: he was, after all, now the British prime minister.

While in private Palmerston worried about the 'sickening' accounts coming out of India in 1857 concerning 'the numbers of people including women & children who have been the victims of these savage barbarians', he was perhaps more worried about (what in the end turned out to be unfounded) reports that the rebels were in receipt of Russian financial and political assistance. There were, furthermore, pessimistic assessments circulating in government circles in London

describing the detrimental impact events in India were having on Britain's commercial stability. In many ways, it can be argued, it was the vulnerability of British finances in a turbulent international context that drove the Cabinet to address the question of Indian government more than any great interest in the moral welfare of the Indian population. Winding-up the East India Company and establishing more direct government control from Westminster was for Palmerston about sending out a clear message to great power rivals, and in particular Russia, not only seeking to ward off threats to British geopolitical security, but also to protect British commercial interests. Palmerston was keen not to show a weak hand to Russia in playing the 'great game' in Asia and wanted to use this as an occasion to underline Britain's continued strong presence in the region.

"[I]t was the vulnerability of British finances in a turbulent international context that drove the Cabinet to address the question of Indian government more than any great interest in the moral welfare of the Indian population."



Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston. (1784-1865). Painting by Francis Cruikshank. Oil on canvas, circa 1855-1859.

One might argue that similar calculations of strategic and commercial interest shaped Palmerston's policy in another part of Asia, in his conduct of policy towards China. Britain's relations with China had for some years been sensitive, since the tensions provoked over the opium trade brought the two countries into conflict in the early 1840s. During this period, Britain's relations with China were intimately bound up with questions of trade, economics and empire. Palmerston had always made clear that in trading with China, largely in the opium market, he was far more interested in protecting the doctrine of free trade than he was about the moral and health arguments that surrounded discussions of the legitimacy and nature of that trade. Thus Palmerston had backed aggressive measures that led to the First Opium War (1840-42) and which terminated in the Treaty of Nanking (1842) that sought to regularise that trade: this had been a foreign policy success for Palmerston because it further secured Britain's commercial position in the region.

It was in this context that Palmerston subsequently viewed the bombardment of Canton in 1856: he was concerned above all with how this new crisis would impact on British trade and strategic interests in Asia (and by extension in the wider world). When a vessel, the *Arrow*, flying a British flag, was boarded by Chinese authorities in Canton in late 1856 on suspicion of piracy, and the crew arrested, the ensuing response placed relations between Britain and China under great strain. Sir John Bowring, Britain's plenipotentiary in China, decided to offer what he imagined would be a Palmerstonian response to the perceived 'insult' to Britain by ordering British naval forces to bombard Canton, an assault which lasted from October 1856 until February 1857 (and provoking a conflict that continued, on and off, until 1860).

Although press reaction

in Britain suggested a certain appetite for this kind of gunboat bullying, Palmerston and his colleagues feared that this sort of action would in fact do more to damage than to protect British interests in the region, specifically an important arm of British trade. Although Palmerston played up to popular chauvinism to some extent in Parliament, criticising the 'inhumanity' of the Chinese government's agents and discussing threats to British prestige and influence in alarmist tones (earning himself in the process the derision of many MPs among his own party and on the opposition benches), he had above all, and once again, treated the question in terms of Britain's material interest.

"Although Palmerston traded in patriotic rhetoric and was happy to exploit popular prejudices when discussing British policy in Asia, his attitude was always in the end framed by the rules of the so-called 'great game'."

Ultimately, therefore, although Palmerston traded in patriotic rhetoric and was happy to exploit popular prejudices when discussing British policy in Asia, his attitude was always in the end framed by the rules of the so-called 'great game'. It has done much to contribute to popular reputation of Palmerston as a (if not the quintessential) gunboat diplomat, subsuming all else to a forceful assertion of British interests and honour, understood in terms of the balance of power and specifically a rivalry with Russia. It was also a statement of his largely Euro-centric world view.

None of this is to suggest that Palmerston was uninterested in Asia, but it is important to point to the extent to which that interest was informed to a very large extent by realpolitik considerations and a perception that actions in Asia were to be measured largely by their resonance beyond that continent.



British troops taking fort in 1860, during the Second Opium War. The conflict saw relations between China under the Qing Dynasty and the British Empire deteriorate sharply.

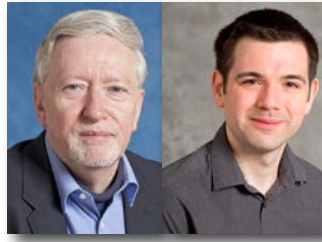
Postcolonial Britain? David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia* in history and memory

By Matthew Jones and Melvyn Stokes

When British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan told the South African parliament in February 1960 that 'the wind of change is blowing through' Africa, he not only signaled a policy shift towards decolonisation but stimulated debates at home about the purpose and legitimacy of Britain's entire colonial project. While disgruntled Conservative MPs formed the Monday Club to make the case for retaining what remained of the Empire, it became clear as the decade progressed and the pace of decolonisation increased that there could be no turning back. Public sentiment at home and abroad had largely shifted away from British possession of imperial assets and the nation began to carve out a new profile for itself on the international stage.

For film director David Lean during the 1960s, however, reflecting on the experience of British colonisation in earlier decades would prove profitable terrain. When Macmillan made his speech in Cape Town, Lean was already working on a film about T. E. Lawrence, a writer, scholar and British Army officer who aided the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. Released in 1962 as *Lawrence of Arabia*, the film presented an ambiguous view of Britain's former exploits in the Middle East through the figure of Lawrence, who finds himself torn between competing loyalties to his homeland and his Arab followers.

In its examination of divided loyalties, *Lawrence of Arabia* built on Lean's previous film, *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). Set during World War II, *Kwai* also focused on British military personnel abroad, telling the story of Lt. Colonel Nicholson (Alec Guinness), a prisoner in a Japanese camp in Burma. He and his fellow inmates are instructed to build a strategically important bridge for their captors. While some resist, Nicholson eventually collaborates in order to demonstrate British engineering expertise. The film has often been seen as inherently critical of the British military and their role in the world. In some



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ways, it can be framed as a product of and response to the initial impulses that would eventually lead to Macmillan's speech. However, it was also reissued in late 1962 to capitalise on the commercial success of *Lawrence of Arabia*. The two films were shown in neighbouring London cinemas, giving audiences and critics -- if they wished -- the chance to reflect on their parallel contribution to current debates about British influence abroad and the history of the British Empire.

Some British newspapers responded to this stimulus, using the films to make points about British attitudes towards the Middle East and Asia. There were, for example, objections to the representation of Arabs in *Lawrence of Arabia*, with the communist *Daily Worker* in particular noting that 'it could do without the ill-conceived and farce-like scene of petty squabbling among the Arab chiefs at Damascus'. This complaint would return to haunt the film in 1964, when *The Guardian* noted that '*Lawrence of Arabia* has been banned in Jordan.' According to the Amman regional office of the Committee for the Boycott of Israel, Arabs in the film were presented 'in a comic way and modern Arab history converted into ridiculous attitudes.' While few British reviewers went so far as to claim, as the *Daily Express* did, that this was a film that 'hits you hard both in the heart and the head', some elements of the British media were clearly aware of contradictions within the film's depiction of the Arab world, with *Lawrence* seen as much more than apolitical entertainment.

Kwai received an equally politicised response from some quarters, both at the time of its reissue and subsequently. In 1963, the *London Evening Standard* noted that both this film and *Lawrence* shared an uneasiness with violence, revealing 'the tenacity with which their makers, producer Sam Spiegel and director David Lean make the soldier's sword rattle in his scabbard with as guilty a sound as any civilian's skeleton in the closet'. This suggests that the films were understood by some as products of a period in which British military history was coming under scrutiny. However, this was not the only way in which postcolonial politics shaped the reception of *Kwai*. Images of Japanese cruelty, which might have been seen as uncontroversial in earlier periods, provoked a reaction. In 1965, for example, the *Daily Express* reported that 'a book giving the Japanese version of the Burma-Siam "Death Railway" comes out today ... The film *The Bridge on the River Kwai* ... was "far from the truth."'

Nevertheless, it would be overstating the case to say that political readings of *Kwai* and *Lawrence* dominated British commentary on these films in the 1960s. Writers were instead much more likely to focus on the beauty and scale of the images on the cinema screen. This was particularly true of *Lawrence*, which met with overwhelming praise for its visuals, while its political content was only briefly noted by a handful of reviewers. Sometimes these two aspects of the film's reception were connected, as when the *Daily Express* observed that 'for the first time from this film Western eyes will learn what it is like to live, and sweat, in the Arabian wastes'. Here the newspaper implicitly suggests that the film would encourage an unusual identification between British audiences and the film's Arab characters, but sees this connection as mediated by the film's spectacular cinematography. However, this is an atypically political reading of the film and other newspapers were simply so mesmerised by its visual splendour that its potential engagement with postcolonial discourse was largely ignored. The *Financial Times*, for example, focused on 'the overall grandeur of the film. The sun and the desert which mesmerises Lawrence are actors in the drama, and, aided by Fred Young's impeccable photography and by Maurice Jarre's admirable music ... David Lean has used them with a command which could hardly have been predicted'.

Perhaps the *Times* offered the best example of exuberant praise for the film's visual style when its reviewer, Dilys Powell, wrote that 'the sun rising on the rim of blood orange sand; dust-storms like the smoke-trails of a djin; the shapes of infinity, the colours of heat -- I think it is the first time for the cinema to communicate ecstasy.' For Powell, as for much of the British press, this visual ecstasy obscured the film's relevance to the unfolding age of decolonisation.

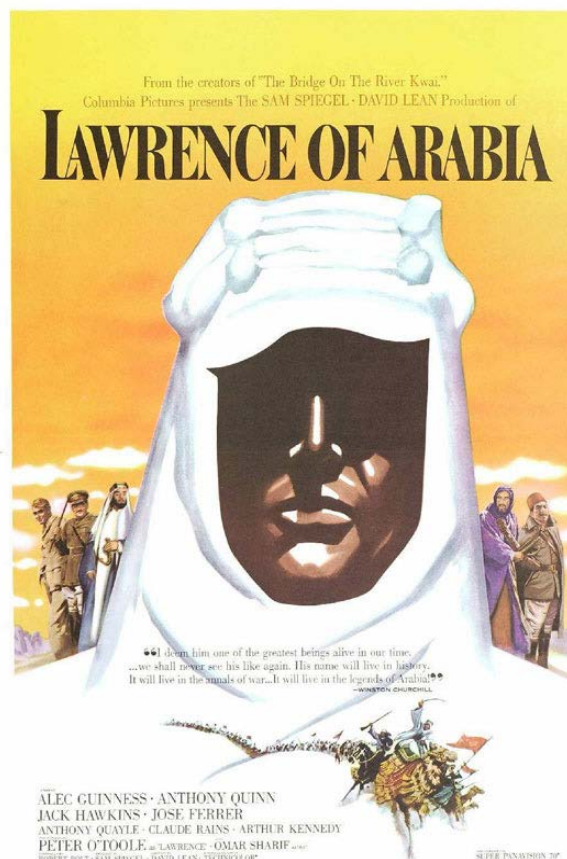
The fact that the film was distributed in a widescreen, high-resolution 70mm format, dubbed Super Panavision 70, certainly helped to enhance these

The tendency to emphasise the visual over the political was something that the British press shared with the British public."

images, with the *Financial Times* declaring that *Lawrence* 'achieves effects as spectacular as have been seen in an age of super-spectacular films.' Indeed, the concept of spectacle came up numerous times in British reviews and is frequently attached to the depiction of the Arabian landscape. Penelope Gilliatt, writing in *The Observer*, described how 'in F. A. Young's camerawork the sand seems almost sumptuous. Sometimes it is red, sometimes deep blue, with a ground mist of sand dust blowing across it; when the camels are running they look magnificent, like caparisoned ostriches', while the *Daily Express* described the film as 'three hours and forty minutes of gorgeous desert spectacle and bloodthirsty battle'.

This tendency to emphasise the visual over the political was something that the British press shared with the British public. The 'Cultural Memory and British Cinema-going of the 1960s' research project, which the authors of this article are running at UCL, has collected memories of sixties cinema-going from over 500 respondents. Their recollections of *Lawrence* and *Kwai* (which features in several of the memories despite being initially released in the 1950s) mirror the newspapers' focus on the films' imagery and scale at the expense of its politics. *Kwai* is described by one respondent as an example of cinema's 'big

spectacle adventures', while another cited the visually spectacular 'final pan-out' of the film as a favourite memory. *Lawrence of Arabia* is similarly described in these memories as 'a spectacle', a 'magnificent spectacle', 'sweeping, monumental', 'magnificent', 'epic', 'magic', 'mind blowing' and 'so BIG'. It is remembered as being 'one of the biggies – for sheer effect', an example of 'stupendous filming and scenery' and as an 'amazing film' that caused audiences to be 'blown away' or 'almost hypnotised'. As one respondent notes, the pleasures that the film offered were principally 'the scale and the scenery', while others ascribed this more precisely on the 'cinematography'. This sense of scale also extended to the film's soundtrack, which was described as 'amazing', 'sweeping' and 'thrilling'.

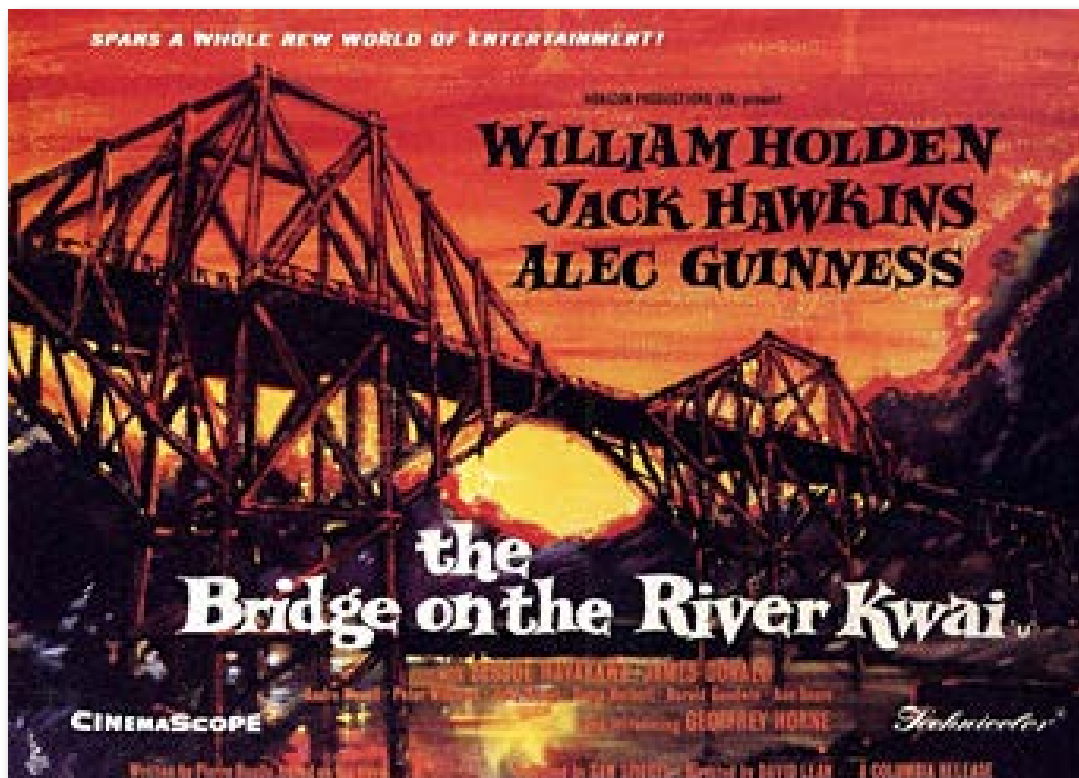


Theatrical release poster for *Lawrence of Arabia*, playing upon the mythical features of the protagonist.

Aside from spectacle, genre was another appeal of Lean's films. *Kwai* was categorised by respondents as a 'war' and 'action' film and seems to have appealed to the audiences who favoured these genres. David Lean himself was a further draw, with one participant recalling that 'I don't think I really knew what directors did or how important they were until I saw *Lawrence of Arabia*'. While the two films might have drawn crowds as a result of their spectacle, there were clearly other factors in play too. Indeed, in some cases the film itself was only a secondary attraction and the various pleasures offered by a family trip

to the cinema or even the darkened auditorium itself held a greater appeal. Many respondents remember seeing *Lawrence of Arabia* because of the people who accompanied them: one commented that it was 'the only time my father took us to the cinema on his own'; another noted that he 'saw *Bridge on the River Kwai* twice because I was double-dating at the time'.

Although significant emphasis is placed by respondents on the sheer spectacle of these films and their other attractions, relatively few note their implicit political commentary. For the small number who have made this linkage, however, their views are revealing. One recalls *Lawrence of Arabia* as an example of a particularly British 'bash the foreigner, defeat the Hun type of nonsense'. He contextualises *Lawrence of Arabia* within his own experience of growing up in Britain, explaining that 'I was under ten and World War 2 was still all around with parents and grand parents. I swallowed the Great British Empire story hook, line and sinker'. While this respondent probably did not recognise the ways in which the film negotiated discourses of Empire and decolonisation when he first saw it, he now locates his childhood experience of *Lawrence* in precisely this context, questioning the film's participation in and production of 1960s fantasies of constructed British nationhood.



The Bridge on the River Kwai, David Lean's 1957 masterpiece from the Burmese theatre of the Second World War.

There also is a suggestion of dissatisfaction with a historically-constructed British national identity in another respondent's answers when he describes *Lawrence* as a film that encouraged him to 'identify with outsiders', probably referring to Lawrence's identification and friendship with many of the Arabs he meets. If Lean's work served to suggest at least to some viewers that the world outside of Britain's borders was a place populated by people to be cooperated with, rather than 'bashed' or 'killed',

then perhaps their political content was not entirely lost amongst the spectacle and lavish cinematography.

"If Lean's work served to suggest at least to some viewers that the world outside of Britain's borders was a place populated by people to be cooperated with, rather than 'bashed' or 'killed', then perhaps their political content was not entirely lost amongst the spectacle and lavish cinematography."

At least one respondent was inspired by watching *Lawrence of Arabia* to read *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence's own account (and justification) of his involvement in the Arab Revolt. There were also signs of diminishing British insularity in the emerging postcolonial world: several

respondents remembered the excitement with which they first watched Egyptian actor Omar Sharif ride out of the desert to meet Peter O'Toole's Lawrence.

The business of sex in British imperial Asia

By Philippa Levine

"Constitutional crisis too grave for private correspondence". Thus read a telegram sent to the Secretary of State for India in London by a worried Viceroy in India in 1895. This warning was precipitated by a fear that members of his main advisory board, the Council of India, had indicated their refusal to back the government and would vote against him, and thus against the imperial government, in an upcoming policy decision.



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This was neither the first time nor the last time a colonial governor faced a rebellion within his inner circle, but what makes this an intriguing and an unusual episode is that the challenge to the government was not in such traditional political battlegrounds as defence spending or taxation and tariffs, but over the regulation of women involved in prostitution, a system similar to that which had been banned in Britain in the late 1880s. Faced with growing protests at home over the continuing use in the Empire of a regulatory system which registered and medically examined sex workers, the Colonial as well as the India Office had issued instructions for the disbanding of the system. It was not only in India that local and senior officials objected: in Hong Kong and in the Straits Settlements, colonial governors had faced equally strenuous objections from the European community who imagined (and it was indeed only in their imagination) a tidal wave of sexually transmissible diseases engulfing their colonies if women in the sex trade were freed from compulsory examination.

Just a handful of years earlier, and also in British India, the government had faced a rather different kind of rebellion, one which led them to avoid practical implementation of the controversial age of consent law of 1891. The tumult on this occasion came not from white officials but from Hindus affronted by what they saw as the needless and disrespectful incursion of the colonial government into private and religious life. Given that the Royal Proclamation of 1858 had guaranteed their religious freedom, the government of India, they argued, had severely overstepped its limits. On this occasion the

issue at stake was the age of sexual consent for Indian girls, which the new law aimed to raise from ten (set in 1860) to twelve years. Two high-profile legal cases precipitated the new rules. In the first, a woman who had been married aged eleven, was ordered by court mandate in 1885 to return to the husband with whom she refused to live and when she refused to obey, was threatened with imprisonment. As with the prostitution issue, the law in Britain had recently changed and in 1884 penal provisions of this sort had been removed by a new Matrimonial Causes Act. That the Bombay High Court, such a short time later, could rule in favour of the husband guaranteed the notoriety of the case in both India and Britain. The second case to help galvanise British action occurred in 1889 when a 35-year old man stood trial for the murder of his wife, a young Bengali girl, around eleven years old, who had died after he insisted on sexual intercourse. He was exonerated on the murder charge, but much of the scandal focused nonetheless on the fact that he could not legally be charged with rape since his bride was over ten years old and thus sexually competent and adult under Indian law.

While colonial officials and the European community found the circumstances alarming and supported raising the age of consent by two years, Indian men and women alike attended meetings protesting what they widely regarded as unwarranted interference in the private and religious spheres. Though the new law was passed it was never implemented, as the realisation of the ill-will it had produced sank in. The issue was not revisited until 1929 when the Sarda Act imposed fourteen as the minimum marriageable age for girls and sixteen for boys.

"[Q]uestions of gender, and perhaps most especially when they involved female sexuality, were central concerns of colonial governance, and the control and regulation of indigenous sexuality mattered for the stable running of empire."

My point here is to suggest that questions of gender, and perhaps most especially when they involved female sexuality, were central concerns of colonial governance, and that the control and regulation of indigenous sexuality mattered for the stable running of empire. Ideas about what colonial officials understood to be specific 'Asian sexualities' informed these policies, and in every case the British authorities assumed that European models were preferable and that these allegedly distinctive Asian sexualities were inferior, medically reckless and morally bankrupt. Thus, though we find this theme emerging throughout the British Empire, and at all stages of its existence, there were some distinctive Asian versions of the broader prejudices at work here.

Moreover, these readings of Asian sexuality often had an effect well beyond the confines of Asia. Concerns about the parlous moral conditions and the allegedly degraded lives of Indian indentured labour in plantation societies in the Caribbean, in Fiji and in Mauritius were common. After 1856 ships carrying indentured workers from India to these plantation colonies were required to include named percentages of women among those they shipped, a policy designed to calm tensions in previously homosocial conditions. The principle invoked was that a larger female presence would encourage the formation of family ties and family and curb the worst excesses of plantation living.

But it was not only on plantations that the presence of women required supervision and colonial management. In the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States, a network of "Protectors" interviewed single women entering the colony to ensure they were not being sexually trafficked. They also visited and inspected brothels, and worked to ensure that red light districts did not spill over into 'respectable' parts of the colonies. The presence of large numbers of poverty-stricken Japanese women working in the brothels of port cities such as Singapore and Penang alongside women of Chinese, Malay and Indian origin led officials to invent hierarchical classifications which understood Japanese women to be cleaner and more respectable than other brothel workers, a definition that also allowed them to charge higher rates to their customers. Wherever in the Empire women migrated, and especially where they remained single, the state stepped in to police their lives at a deep level of intimacy.

The historian-philosopher James Mill famously noted in the early nineteenth century that among what he termed 'rude people', women were degraded in contrast to their exaltation in civilised societies. The comment was made in his

monumental study of the history of British India, and though he intended it to apply more broadly as well, there is no doubt that he had Hindu customs in his sights.

"[Whether in the nineteenth century or today, many in politics have learned that it is but a thin line that divides the bedroom from the boardroom.]"

Spurred on by his comments, reforming colonial governments from the late 1820s, and especially in the Bengal Presidency, began to legislate on matters previously deemed beyond the scope of state control, and in particular around marital issues. The main thrust of these reforms was on upper-caste Hindu customs regarded as uncivilised, including the practice

of sati (immolation of widows) and the ban on widow re-marriage. The long reach of colonial governance in regulating sex is more than evident in these examples and suggests just how central an issue sexuality was perceived to be for the maintenance of a colonial stable order.

Of course, that ideal stability proved always unattainable. Whether it was Hindu protesters forcing the abandonment of the 1891 consent law or sex workers quietly avoiding the net of regulation, indigenous peoples frequently refused the sexual categorisations that a judgmental colonial state attempted to impose upon them.



James Mill (1773-1836), Scottish historian, economist and philosopher. Author of *The History of British India* (1817), which served as an authoritative account of Indian civilisation and contributed to a set of reforms in the colony, although the author himself never visited the colony. Mill's account of Hindu customs were particularly scathing and served to legitimate legislative intervention by the colonisers.

For the historian of colonialism, there is much to be learned here, perhaps most urgently that an understanding of political history cannot be confined merely to the corridors of power or to the traditional canons of policy. Beyond the world of high finance, of diplomacy, of taxation and war, lies another more quotidian world which could, on occasion, bring colonial government to its knees over issues politicians sought to control while simultaneously keeping concealed. Whether in the nineteenth century or today, many in politics have learned that it is but a thin line that divides the bedroom from the boardroom.

Beneath the skin: Kipling and contemporary British understanding of the colonial relationship

By Alexander Bubb

By the 18th of January 1936, when after several days' uncertainty the *Times* conveyed bad news from Middlesex Hospital, Rudyard Kipling already occupied a doubtful position in the national consciousness. Somewhat ambiguously, its obituary described him as among the most 'forcible' minds of the era, and conceded that 'as politician and as writer he has been called hard names'—a priority of terms the dead man would have resented. The mood had been different forty years before, when the *Times* had proudly carried Kipling's 'Recessional', 'The White Man's Burden' and other hawkish, prophetic appeals to the Anglo-American world.



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But the imperial enthusiasm which he sought to promote had enjoyed only a brief ascendancy, roughly coterminous with the years (1895-1903) in which Joseph Chamberlain headed the Colonial Office. In the aftermath of the Boer War Kipling had fought a grim rearguard action in British politics, becoming one of the most controversial—and most caricatured—public figures of the day. By 1936, therefore, the *Times* reserved judgment. Vaguely alluding to the poet's well-known convictions, the paper now told its readers that Kipling had pursued his imperialist goals 'single-heartedly' (avoiding the narrower 'single-mindedly'). Posterity will avert its eyes from these involvements, it is implied, but will continue to value his writings as a 'source of delight' and 'spur to duty'.

Today Kipling is ever-present but seldom heard; is dismissed, but continues to embarrass; is repudiated, but remains inescapable. In last year's *Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*, a comedy about British pensioners who stretch their pounds by retiring to India, one character's reference to Kipling foregrounds her stiffness and snobbery. She dates, perhaps, from a time when Kipling was still popular in schools, and her notions of India are insensitive and out-of-date. But if Kipling now occupies a marginal—or, it would be better to say, submerged—presence in English letters, we should not think of him as sinking to this depth from a position of relevance and centrality prior to the Boer War. Like many newspapers around the world, in 1936 *Aftenposten* doffed its hat to the Bard of Empire—'han som sang imperialismens nye sang høiere og mere virkningsfullt enn nogen annen'. But the *Times* chose a different headline: 'an Interpreter of Empire'. Born in India, Kipling had always considered himself an outsider, explaining to an insular and recalcitrant Britain the significance of the empire she

"The affinity for Empire which Kipling left under his readers' skin was sustained firstly by this seductive, though narcissistic, idea of British rule as sympathetic."

hardly knew she had. His critiques of the "Mother Country" could be bitingly resentful. 'There is no light in this place', he wrote to a friend on his arrival in London in 1889, 'and the people are savages living in black houses and ignorant of everything beyond the Channel'. Nor did he confine such views to private correspondence. His 1902 poem 'The Islanders' identifies each separate flaw he felt was contributing to national complacency and inaction, from the class system and love of money to—most sacrosanct of all—football and cricket.

Belated attention to this pessimistic, lifelong commentary has given rise to a misleading supposition: that imperial expansion was prosecuted by a clique of soldiers and capitalists, and imposed upon a sceptical and indifferent public. Popularised by Bernard Porter's book *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, this argument cloaks an attempt to rescue Victorian liberal values from the colonial adventures with which—as was indeed the case, up to a point—they were fundamentally in conflict. Unfortunately, this is much the same Whiggish, progressive story that the "Commonwealth of Nations" has been telling itself ever since the last sunburnt troops made their ceremonious departure from Indian soil.

The "good bits" associated with the British Empire, as David Cameron explained during a recent American TV appearance, are presumed to outweigh the "less than good bits". Among the latter, presumably, would be the brutal massacre at Amritsar in 1919 for which the Prime Minister,

on his state visit earlier this year, came as close as was diplomatically prudent to apologizing. The fruits of oppression, on the other hand, might be said to range from such lumpen things as the railway to the hybrid, bilingual genius of *The Jungle Book* (unfortunately Amritsar was not an opportune place to bring up Kipling, who notoriously approved the bloodshed). The British do not try to defend their conquests, but prefer to let historians or economists class them as a phase through which backward countries were destined to zig-zag—at various speeds—towards modernity, democracy and nationhood. Empire is justified because inevitable, and because at least it was not French.

But however ignorant of "Greater" Britain the Victorians may have been, they were not apathetic. In the first instalment of his trilogy *Memories of Empire*, Bill Schwarz listens with the utmost acuity for deep-set chauvinistic convictions, which murmur to the surface during such key moments of postcolonial tension as the Suez Crisis. Loath to acknowledge these sentiments, we remain chary of writers who can still evoke them.

What can tell us much more therefore about public understanding of the historical relationship with India, then and now, are the more infrequently quoted remarks in which Kipling explains his methods for inculcating an imperial consciousness. Overt propaganda and 'patriotic rot' he regarded as clumsy and counter-productive, favouring instead a gradual, ideological infiltration. 'You don't want to preach Imperialism', he once told a journalist who had invited him to edit a gung-ho magazine. 'It has to be sweated into the system or injected hypodermically'. Thanks to Kipling's efforts, this is where the British imperial sensibility found the home to which it still faintly clings: beneath the skin.

His choice of metaphor is characteristically pathological and racial. It is also strongly reminiscent of the terms in which he described one of his earliest Indian stories, 'The Phantom Rickshaw': 'it was my first serious attempt to think in another man's skin'. The man in question is white, but it was a talent for stepping out of his skin and into the voice of Indian characters that would earn Kipling renown, and enable him to get under the thickened skin of English readers who had been overexposed to substandard Indian romances. As with the Afghan brigand and his English enemy, who become 'brothers in blood' at the end of *The Ballad of East and West*, 'hypodermic' politics requires first pain and then healing. This process can be used to describe the development of Kipling's representations of India. The early work can be brutal, calculated to shock. Rifle butts crush the toes of rioters, suspects are tortured, missionaries (nearly) lynched; men die from cholera, apoplexy and opium. Exposing the incompetence and insensitivity of the Raj, but justifying its violence, Kipling purposefully dispels the romantic illusions of his parochial readership. Completed in 1900, ten years after these early poems and stories, *Kim* restores the innocence and wonder against which they often militated. It was a drawn-out, highly-personal project: a nostalgic and restorative vision realized long after Kipling had left India for the last time. Perhaps unconsciously—certainly without informing his reader—Kipling set the novel in the early 1880s, before the emergence of anticolonial politics. An ineffable peace reigns over the story. Communal discord between characters is dispelled by witty banter, murder repeatedly forestalled by the hero's ingenuity, and the retributive violence of earlier drafts was whittled down to the one moment of shocking cultural vandalism, when the Lama is betrayed into sin by the blow of a bigoted Russian spy. The bloody legacy of the Mutiny is also invoked and, more dubiously, exorcized by the monologue of an aged loyalist.

In marked contrast to the narrow locality of earlier stories, the picaresque journey of *Kim* advances panoramically through India. Its scope is enabled by the railway, and in particular by a cheap carriage within which the hero mingles with distinct castes and religious groups. The passengers converse in allusive, idiomatic speech which consciously preserves their distinctions but unconsciously binds them together. They seem to

bring to the journey a residual syncretism and common culture that is merely reinforced—not engineered—by the introduction of foreign technology. 'This thing is the work of the Government', says a burly Sikh. But the cumbersome bureaucracy of 'Supreme Government' is allowed to fade away in the novel, throwing into relief the masterful agents like Colonel Creighton who continue its work in the background. Overseen by such hands-off administrators, the 'native' world regulates itself, and the reader is privy to its transactions while ignorant 'islanders' like Father Bennett peer in stupidly. Ultimately, the novel anticipates all the myths most needful to nationalists envisaging a basis for Indian modernity, and it is unsurprising to find *Kim* among Nehru's favourite childhood reading.

The affinity for Empire which Kipling left under his readers' skin was sustained firstly by this seductive, though narcissistic, idea of British rule as sympathetic. It effected material progress while remaining culturally enlightened. The second 'memory' (for such ideas acted like memories even when still hot off the press) is the 'spur to duty' of which the *Times* spoke. In 1936, the Kipling of *For All we Have and Are* was about to enjoy a brief revival—not merely in response to his death, but because Hitler marched into the Rhineland seven weeks later. It is significant that the two men who led Britain out of the Second World War—and who, as the smoke cleared, negotiated the fate of India—had enjoyed Kipling at the high-point of 1890s jingoism. Churchill's diehard imperialism is well documented. Less so is that of the politician with whom all prime ministerial hopefuls currently seek to identify. Attlee's education in 'duty' at Kipling's old school, his selective forgetting of British errors leading up to Partition, and his sense of the continuity in imperial and post-imperial missions perfectly equipped him to oversee the transition from Empire to Commonwealth.

Acting as a sort of confessional figure, Kipling made the War generation not into imperialists *per se* but into apologists for Empire. Above all, it is the sense of cultural linkage he provides that sustains the murmuring, occasionally amplified, undertone of empire that accompanies our present-day approach to India. During the Cold War, old hands spry with the linguistic expertise and oriental *savoir faire* with which Kipling had credited his Stricklands and Creightons promoted Britain not as overlord but as 'interpreter', translating Asia for Washington. Today we find ourselves in the same quizzical situation, teetering between guilt and nostalgia, struggling to separate "good" from "less than good" histories. We go to India seeking cosmopolitan anecdotes to gratify our new national story of postwar immigration; some *Kim*-like redemption which will excuse us from looking too closely at the past; some expiation for the rapacity and intrigue of the East India Company, even as we pursue new contracts and lucrative deals.

Britain and China: a new partnership

By **The Rt Hon George Osborne MP**

In October 2013, Chancellor of the Exchequer, The Rt Hon George Osborne MP, embarked on a five-day trade trip to China, at the head of a delegation which also included the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson. The speech below was delivered to students at Peking University on 13 October, at the very start of the visit.

Presenting an overarching vision of British-Chinese relations, Osborne emphasised trade, investment and higher education and research as key pillars.



It is an honour to be here at one of the great places of learning in the world – and to be among you, the students who are going to shape the future of that world. This is my first visit to Peking University but not my first visit to Beijing. I came twenty years ago, when I was little more than a student.

That was twenty years ago – and I have been back to China many times, first as a young politician, and now again as my country's finance minister. What everyone says when they return again and again to China is how quickly your country is changing. And it's true. Each time I come back here, there are spectacular new buildings, new railways and new airports, exciting new companies to visit, and the prosperity of the people I see around me has grown and grown.

But let me tell you what I also see when I come back here. The things that haven't changed: The pride of the Chinese people in their country. The depth and sophistication of the Chinese culture. The value you place on consistency and stability and on friendship. And although with each visit I make I come to know more about your great country, I also, with each visit, realise that there is more and more I don't know and that I want to learn.

Two years ago, the then Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan came to London. He was, at the time, my opposite number in our two countries' economic and financial dialogue. We sat next to each other at dinner and spoke about the histories and the cultures of our two nations.

I come here at the head of a delegation of government ministers and business leaders to conduct our latest Economic and Financial dialogue. I look forward to meeting later today, your Vice Premier Ma Kai, whose reputation for economic reform and diligence impresses all. I come here at the same time as our Mayor of London, my friend Boris Johnson, who is here in Beijing also promoting our capital's economic

links. And over the next four days, we will work to conclude important commercial deals that will create thousands of jobs in both of our countries.

But I hope that this visit of mine is about much more than a collection of business deals. What I really want it to be about is strengthening the understanding between our two nations, deepening our friendship, and working out where, by working together, we can improve the lives of all our citizens. We are two nations on other sides of the globe – but we have much in common. We are two ancient and proud civilisations, each whose culture has spread far beyond our shores. We are two great trading nations, with a shared interest in keeping the trade routes of the world open and free. We are two countries that care about the world and want to influence its future direction.

Yes we have differences, different political systems, and attach value to different things. And we should not be afraid of pointing out where we disagree. But let us do it in a way that is respectful of each other, and tries to understand each other. And let us always try to overcome our differences and work together in peaceful cooperation. Because ultimately we want the same thing. A better life for all our citizens.

I will be candid with you. There are some in the West who see China growing and they are nervous. They think of the world as a cake – and the bigger the slice that China takes, the smaller the slice that they will get. I totally and utterly reject that pessimistic view. If we make the whole cake bigger, then all our peoples will benefit. That should be the basis of our relationship with China. I don't want Britain to resent China's success, I want us to celebrate it. I don't want us to try to resist your economic progress, I want Britain to share in it. And I want this week us all to take the next big step in the relationship between Britain and China. Because more jobs and investment in China mean more jobs and investment in Britain. And that equals better lives for all.

That is what this visit is all about: Britain and China, taking the next big step. What is so exciting at the moment is the sheer number of areas where we can work and collaborate together. As China reforms and grows we are more complimentary. In science, in finance, in urban redevelopment, in energy, in trade, in services and in our creative industries. That's why our leaders have called the relationship between Britain and China a "Partnership for Growth".

And as China becomes a knowledge economy, that partnership can only deepen.

Yesterday, I flew here directly from the Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund in Washington DC. Our two countries are both senior members of that important organisation. We heard in the presentations there in Washington that while many risks remain, the global economy is recovering.

Certainly, the UK economy is recovering - and that is because we have tackled our problems directly and consistently. The result is that there are now more people in work in Britain than ever before, and we are becoming one of the most competitive places in the world to do business. But as we recover, we in Britain need to make sure our recovery is more balanced than it was in the past; that we rely less on debt-fuelled consumption and more on investment and exports.

China too is striving under its new leadership to achieve more balanced and sustainable growth - and for you that means the opposite. Rebalancing from investment to consumption. This is part of President Xi's vision to achieve the 'China Dream'. I applaud what the President and Premier Li have already achieved on the path of reform. We're excited about the new idea of the Shanghai Free Trade Zone. That is all part of developing services and we in Britain want to be part of it because services is such a strength of our economy.

For working together as "Partners for Growth", we can achieve ever more. Long gone, thankfully, are the days when Western politicians turned up here and simply demanded that China open up its economy to Western companies. Long gone too are the days when all that Chinese companies appeared to offer was cheap, high volume and low quality manufacturing. One of my tasks this week is to explain to the British people just how far China has come, how sophisticated your businesses are, and how advanced you are in the fields of high tech and science. And one of my principal goals this week is not just to increase British investment in China. But to increase Chinese investment in Britain.

Here again, let me be quite candid with you. Not every country in the world is happy to see foreign investment - including Chinese investment. There are some countries, including some in Europe, who think the answer to the global race is to erect trade barriers and find all sorts of ways of making clear that Chinese investment is not welcome.

Britain isn't one of those countries. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that there is no country in the west that is more open to investment - especially from China. For your investment means jobs at home for us.

Who owns a large share of the London water supply - and a share of Heathrow airport? The China Investment Corporation. Some nations wouldn't want Chinese investment in critical infrastructure like water and airports. We welcome it. Just as you welcomed the British design partnerships that built Beijing Terminal 3. In fact, yesterday I announced a new partnership, involving Beijing Construction and Engineering Group that will see £800 million of investment into the new Manchester Airport City development and could contribute 16,000 jobs in the North West of England. That's good for Manchester. Good for Britain - and good for China too.

And take your great high-tech company, Huawei. There are some Western governments that have blocked Huawei from making investments. Not Britain. Quite the opposite. That is why I was pleased to welcome Huawei's opening of a flagship office in our country in June, and of £1.3bn of investment that came with it. And this week I will travel myself to visit the company's global headquarters in Shenzhen to see what more we can do together.

Indeed, one of the most exciting opportunities for collaboration between our two economies is in the field of high tech. For those in the West who still harbour outdated views of the Chinese economy as the home only of low cost, low quality manufacturing, I say come to see the new giants of the internet age, meet as I will companies like Tencent, with over 230 million users of WeChat, or Rekoo, Asia's largest social gaming company - born in China, nurtured in China and ready now to expand across the world.

We want to collaborate with China and Chinese businesses in areas like technology, bioscience, green energy and third generation nuclear power that are at the cutting edge of the world economy. In all these areas, let's take the next big step together. It is a partnership of growth and a partnership of equals. Last year, Britain became the most popular destination in Europe for Chinese investment. And last year, goods exports from Britain to China grew faster than any other European nation.

As your country and its people grow richer, I hope you will want more of the goods and services Britain can supply. Our modern pharmaceuticals. Our premier luxury brands like Burberry and Paul Smith. Our excellent cars from Jaguar Land Rover and Bentley. Our aero-engines from Rolls Royce and airplanes from Airbus. Our high quality film and television, from James Bond to Downton Abbey.

"One of my tasks this week is to explain to the British people just how far China has come, how sophisticated your businesses are, and how advanced you are in the fields of high tech and science."

One area where Britain excels is finance – and I want Chinese families to have the security that comes from British pensions and insurance and banking services. One of the most exciting developments in our Economic and Financial Dialogue has been the work we have done together on the internationalisation of the RMB. A great nation like China should have a great global currency. The pace at which you develop it must be a matter for Chinese policymakers, and later today I will meet with Governor Zhou of the People's Bank of China to discuss that. But it is my personal mission that as you develop an international role for the RMB, you develop that role through the international centre of finance – London.

Two years ago, we began that process from scratch at our last economic dialogue. Today, as a result, 62% of RMB payments outside of mainland China and Hong Kong are made in London. Tomorrow, in our latest dialogue, I look forward to taking further big steps forward in making London a home of Chinese banks, Chinese bonds and Chinese finance.

I've talked of friendship, of a global economic partnership and of the business our two nations can do together. But we are in a university – and I want to end where it all begins, with learning. For knowledge and understanding of our world is what makes us human. One of the greatest students of this university was the poet Xu Zhimo. He studied here, but he also studied at the great British University of Cambridge. He drew on China's rich heritage – and also on Britain's too. One of his most famous poems is called 'Farewell Cambridge' – *Zai bie Kang qiao*.

"There are some countries, including some in Europe, who think the answer to the global race is to erect trade barriers... Britain isn't one of those countries. I would go as far as to say that there is no country in the west that is more open to investment – especially from China. For your investment means jobs at home for us."

You are the students of today who will write the poems of tomorrow. And you will make the scientific discoveries of the future too. Let us do that together. The cooperation between Chinese scientists and British scientists is one of the strongest in the world – and I'd like it stronger still. This great university should be at the heart of that. So I am delighted to announce here the establishment of a new partnership between Peking University and Manchester University in the UK with the creation of a new joint centre for Genomic Medicine.

Here in the oldest and most prestigious medical school in China, let's work together on the medicines of tomorrow. This partnership will – I hope – give even more of you the chance to come to Britain and study there. Already 130,000 students like you do. I want more of you to come. And more Chinese visitors too.

Let me make this clear to you and to the whole of China. There is no limit to the number of Chinese who can study in Britain. No limit to the number of Chinese tourists who can visit. No limit on the amount of business we can do together.

For in the end what is a true dialogue? Not just a meeting between governments. Not just a conference of politicians. A real dialogue is where people get together, and talk, and learn, and understand and embrace the future together.

So let Britain and China take our next big step together – for the view of the future is worth it.

Thank you.

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Forthcoming edition of British Politics Review

2014 marks the centenary of the outbreak of the **First World War**, or the Great War as it is still referred to in Britain.

A true historical watershed, the war had a monumental impact on Britain and British society in a variety of ways: it affected Britain's standing as a world power, led to an increase in the size of the British Empire, but undermined that global

trade upon which the British economy relied. Moreover, the war left a lasting trauma in British society, as the nation struggled to get to terms with the horrors of the slaughter on the western front, and the loss of a whole generation of young men. On the other hand, the war also had the positive effect of bringing the long-winded Victorian discussions about the franchise to an end;

finally jerking Britain into becoming a full-blown modern democracy. The winter edition of *British Politics Review* explores the legacy of the "war to end all wars" for British society then and now, and asks the question: to what extent is the Great War still of importance for Britain today?

The winter edition of British Politics Review is due to arrive in February 2014.