

Gale Primary Sources

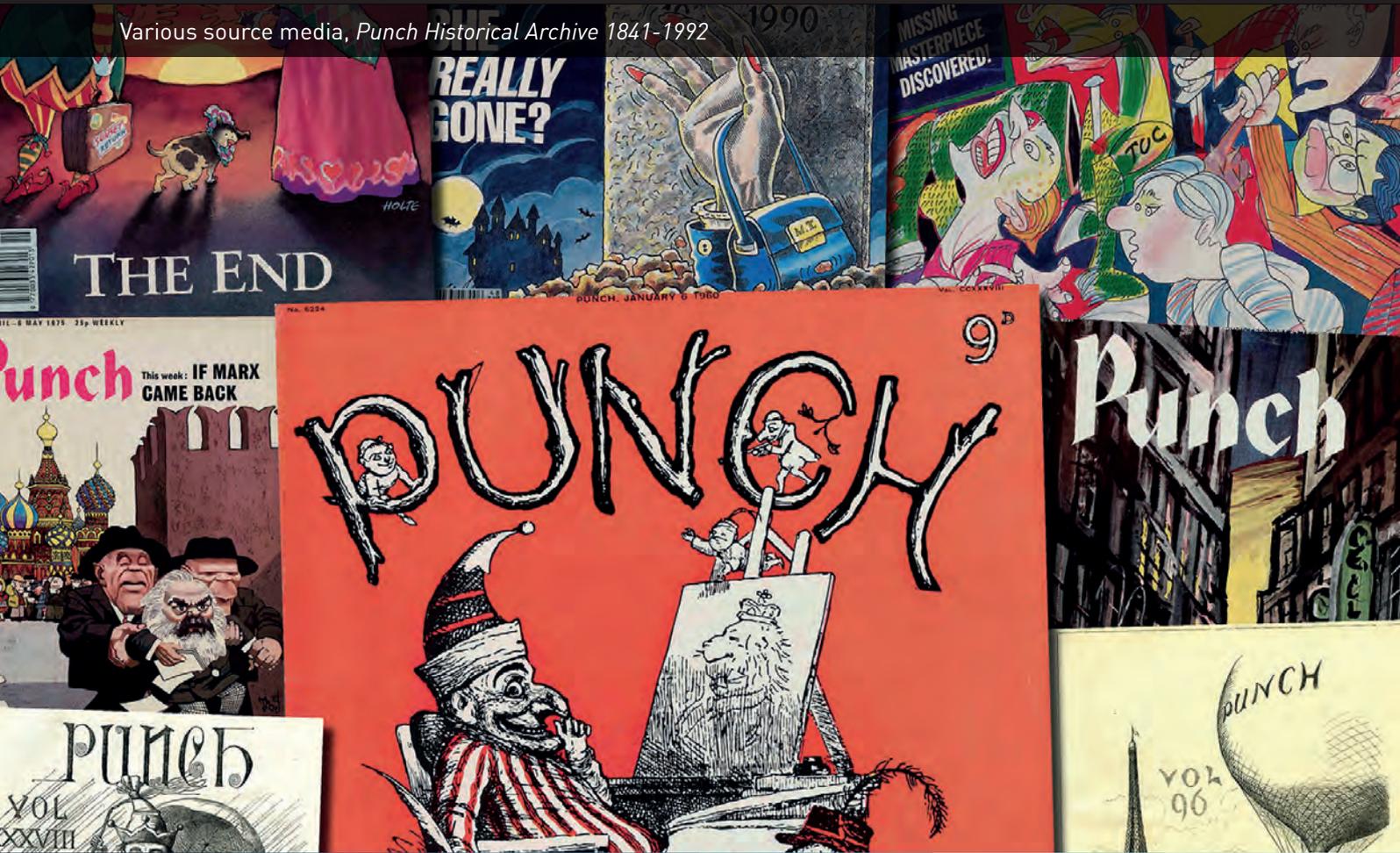
Start at the source.

# Representations of China in *Punch*

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Various source media, *Punch* Historical Archive 1841-1992



## Introduction

Relations between Britain and China, whilst increasingly fraught throughout the nineteenth century, generated both intense animosity and commodity desirability. A British desire to have agency in China and China's sustained independence proved to be highly problematic. China's representation as an admired nation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries transitioned to a nation that was frequently critiqued and ridiculed in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To these ends journalism referencing the Opium Wars of 1839-1842 and 1856-1860 became jingoistic, xenophobic and overtly critical of China. Chinese commodities such as tea, rice and silk, however, became frequently traded and desired markers of an aspirational, global lifestyle. The opening of the five ports after the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 meant that access to China and the Chinese became easier as trading and transport restrictions were eased. The presence of Chinese immigrants in Britain also gave rise to social anxiety. The miles that had once made social and cultural integration a significant boundary were gradually eroded through trading relationships elicited by the East India Company and these anxieties can be seen to extend to twentieth century representations of China with reference to key cultural and social moments. *Punch's* journalism therefore adds to this important discourse and reveals the ways in which Chinese physical characteristics became a writerly and pictorial frame of reference.

## Search Terms and the Advanced Search

In order to fruitfully mine these discourses utilising the *Punch Historical Archive*, certain terms are particularly helpful. It is important however to

recognise that these are not the only viable search terms that can be used; other searches will provide alternative selections and this is only a suggested listing and selection. The search term 'China' for example generates some 4,977 articles whilst the search term Chinese generates 4,643. If one explores the five recently opened ports, Canton generates 232 articles, Shanghai 351, Ningpo nine, Amoy nine and Foochow eight. Interestingly the Treaty of Nanking itself generates only four articles which, when considering the social and trading repercussions of the treaty, is surprising, although there are additional results found when searching under 'Chinese' and 'treaty', 126 results, or 'China' and 'treaty', 148 results. *Punch's* foundation in 1841 means that the first Opium War features nominally not under the heading of the Opium War but instead with articles entitled 'Peace with the Pig-Tails' (3 December 1842:238) and 'The Peace with China' (3 December, 1842:237). The second Opium War generates only one article under that search term. Indeed the Boxer Rebellion of 1899 - 1901 produces 14 articles presenting reflections on events between August 1899 and December 1901 although it is important to remember the Boxer Rebellion was not referred to by this name at the time.

This is significant in terms of generating new research areas within the *Punch Historical Archive* as it points to areas of particular interest to *Punch* which do not necessarily correspond to the interests of more mainstream newspapers and journals. When moving to consider twentieth century events search terms such as 'China and the West' produces 440 results, and 'China and Japan', 331 results; of which some are nineteenth century results. 'China and Communism',

provides 93 results, 'Manchuria', 121 results, 'Red China', 108 results, 'Tiananmen Square', eight results, and 'Chinese Cultural Revolution', three results. The names of key political figures also generate results with Chairman Mao generating 145 results, Mao Tse-Tung, 171, Chiang Kai-Shek, 84 results, and Chou En-Lai, 69 results. When researching physical stereotypes through the use of such terms as Pigtails and the Chinese, the advanced search generates 27 results. Another stereotypical term, 'Chinese dragons' generates 57 results.

When searching for Chinese commodities, the advanced search is particularly helpful in consolidating data. 'Tea' generates 14,270 results but when the advanced search is used, with the additional search term 'Chinese tea' it falls to 880 articles, which specifically refer to this commodity.

'Silk' generates 3,486 articles. An advanced search using the term 'Chinese silk' hones in on eight specific references. 'Rice' generates 1,998 examples, but with the advanced search this can be narrowed to 224. Such clear examples from the *Punch Historical Archive* ease the process of negotiating the resource and enable access to a wide and varied range of materials. Using the advanced search function one can also search the index pages under 'China' and this process produces 151 examples from index pages of *Punch*, allowing access to particular articles which might not be found as readily under conventional search terms.

The accompanying illustrations, as mentioned earlier, also form part of the dissemination of data relating to

representations of China. Whilst one can search for such illustrations using the search terms listed above, it is also possible to narrow this search by using the advanced search and requesting the illustrations tab. Using the search term of 'China', for example, one is then able to access 1875 cartoons within articles and 112 cartoons which stand alone.

These cartoons are especially valuable to the researcher as they generate nineteenth century socially stereotypical representations of China and enable another layer of reading to occur with the journal. The racial stereotyping present in *Punch* can be read from graphic evidence as well as texts. The advertisements featuring China are also hugely productive with 134 appearing; however, these advertisements do not begin to appear within the main body of *Punch* until 1969 [1]. The advertisements featuring China - both the nation and the product - appear between 1969 and 1992 and help to explore another aspect of *Punch's* remit.

### **Representations of China and the *Punch Historical Archive* in the Seminar Room**

With the rise of digitisation, projects such as the *Punch Historical Archive* allow an engagement with nineteenth and twentieth century materials, in ways that were not previously possible. The search terms that can be explored enable and encourage reflections on print culture and the digital humanities and the use of such materials in seminars is central to this. This case study provides a productive means of reflecting upon representations of China, which feeds into discourses surrounding globalisation, world literatures, geopolitical commodities and commodities more

broadly. Whilst *Punch* and other journals, in their original form, provide a physically tangible connection with the material, the ways in which searching for key terms - using both the basic and advanced search facilities - allows lecturers and students to instantly understand and visualise journalistic, social and historical trends. The resource could be used alongside critical theory texts especially with reference to post-colonialism as well as alongside nineteenth or twentieth century novels to construct a more nuanced understanding of the relationships between popular culture and history. By connecting the *Punch Historical Archive* with *Gale NewsVault* a rounded sense of representations of China can be achieved which gives rise to important analysis of the period and the ways in which such materials can be generative in terms of both nineteenth century and twentieth century historical moments, social mores and ideologies.

A course considering representations of China and the *Punch Historical Archive* might use a module plan along the following framework looking at the following areas:

- *Punch* and China
- *Punch* and Chinese Commodity Culture
- *Punch* and Racial Stereotypes
- *Punch*, Britain and China
- *Punch* and Politics
- *Punch* and China versus the Conventional Newspaper

All of these topics would encourage an increased awareness of the *Punch* brand as well as eliciting fresh responses to the materials. The representation of

China also throws new light on the representation of other nations that together build an exciting and fresh worldview.

### **Future Research on Representations of China and the *Punch Historical Archive***

The topic, 'Representations of China' is ripe for additional research as, whilst research is currently being undertaken on China and Chinese culture in relation to Britain, thus far *Punch* and China has remained untapped. This gives real scope for future studies and the exploration of the representation of China in this journal. Due to the satirical nature of *Punch*, consideration of the stereotypical representation of Chinese physicality alongside the representation of other nations could be hugely productive. The geopolitical commodities alluded to in *Punch* also warrant additional exploration as, indeed, would work looking not only at *Punch* but other nineteenth and twentieth century publications, exploring their contrasting approaches to ideas about the nation and identity. A digital Humanities resource of this scale and scope could also engender valuable reflections on the ways in which *Punch*'s relationship with China alters over the period of its publication. The ability of the *Punch Historical Archive* to build new understandings of China should not be underestimated. The ways in which new research might focus upon language, translation and popular culture in response, and in relation to *Punch* also provides a fresh new interpretation of both *Punch* and representations of China more broadly.

## NOTES

[1] Advertisements were removed from the bound volumes of *Punch* for the most part, making only a small selection available within the archive.

# CITATION

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