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‘A sink of thieves and prostitutes.’ To what extent did the notorious reputation of Merthyr Tydfil’s China district truly represent the people who lived there between 1851 and 1871?

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7675 Words

With thanks to the tutors of A329, most specifically Dr Matthew Griffiths, whose advice has been invaluable.

Special thanks to my Dad, Mum and sister for their belief in me and support throughout my degree.

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Introduction

*'Those wretched hovels which are now of lamentable notoriety.'*¹

The 'China' district of Merthyr Tydfil has been variously described as a 'centre of depravity'² and a 'sink of thieves and prostitutes'.³ It is largely remembered for its connections to criminal activity, but it was a poor area, full of 'house refuse, rubbish and filth'.⁴ This dissertation will investigate the people who lived there, and the perceptions of the area in newspapers between 1851 and 1871.

The historiography of China has tended to add to its extravagant reputation through studies of crime. Disagreements over the extent of criminality present the key research question of this dissertation: to what extent did China's reputation truly represent the people who lived there? This will be examined through two further questions. Firstly: who were the people of China? This exploration will expand on the limited historiography surrounding the population as a whole. Secondly: how were they represented in newspapers? Contemporary perceptions of China will be examined to see how the reputation developed alongside considering the issues and accuracy of reporting. This will allow us to better understand the people who lived in China, contemporary opinions, and its representation in historiography.

China was a small area with specific boundaries. It was enclosed by the Penyardarren tip and the river Taff near Jackson's bridge.⁵ The nickname 'China' has been linked to the Opium Wars as 'a land of undesirables and foreigners'⁶ but there is no definitive explanation for it. There are no indications Chinese immigrants lived in

¹ Anon, 'Local Intelligence', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 20 April 1861, pp. 2-3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072838/3072840/8/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

² Joe England, *Merthyr: The Crucible of Modern Wales* (Cardigan, 2017), p. 6.

³ R. W. W. Lingen, *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, (London, 1848), p. 115. Available at <https://books.google.je/books?id=f9UKAAAIAAJ&pg=PA61&dq=the+state+of+education+in+Wales+in+the+year+1847&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjWxrejqf2AhVqxYUKHejyDZoQ6AF6BAgEEAI#v=onepage&q&f=false> Accessed 11 April 2022.

⁴ Morning Chronicle Special Correspondent, 'Labour and the Poor', *Morning Chronicle*, 29 April 1850, p. 5. Available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/BC3207343313/BNCN?u=tou&sid=bookmark-BNCN&xid=3bda5eb7>, Accessed 11 April 2022.

⁵ Keith Strange, 'In Search of the Celestial Empire', *Llafur*, 3.1 (1980), pp. 44 - 45.

⁶ Carolyn Jacob, 'China', *alangeorge.co.uk*, Available at <http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/china.htm> Accessed 12 April 2022.

the area or other connections to the country. Other names associated with China include 'Pont-Storehouse', 'the cellars' and 'Pontystorehouse'.⁷

China existed before 1851 but our research begins here because the census returns of 1841 have low reliability and are not in a comparable form to later years.⁸ Continuing the study until 1871 allows us to see changes taking place over time within a manageable volume of data. China was demolished in the early 1900s and replaced by Dixon Street.⁹

Historians have suggested that there were groups of organised criminals in China from the 1830s.¹⁰ This has been linked to descriptions of Merthyr being a 'frontier settlement'¹¹ as it was a 'rapidly growing industrial town'.¹² There have been claims the police could not enter China before the 1840s¹³ and initially they would be regularly beaten by inhabitants with no one stepping in to help.¹⁴ Over time there was growth in governance, including policing,¹⁵ and there have been suggestions this contributed to the decreasing crime rates between the 1840s and the 1880s.¹⁶

China being considered a 'no-go area' has inspired research into it.¹⁷ There are two articles which focus on China itself: 'the Conquering of China' by Jones and Bainbridge and 'In Search of the Celestial Empire' by Strange. Jones and Bainbridge focus on criminal activity between 1840 to 1860. They describe the connection between

⁷ Strange, 'In Search of the Celestial Empire', p. 45. Strange suggests that some of these names were seen as synonyms at the time but that the area was actually smaller. Similar suggestion noted in Chris Parry, 'China' – Merthyr Tydfil', YouTube, Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL5YqHsVugQ&t=173s> Accessed 11 April 2022, 00:12:00.

⁸ John Williams and Dot Jones, 'Women at Work in Nineteenth Century Wales', *Llafur*, 3.3, (1982), p. 20.

⁹ This can be seen in a map from 1910: Ordnance Survey, *Merthyr Tydfil, Digimap Ordnance Survey Collection*, 1910, Lat/Long (Degrees) 51° 44' 55.4"N 03° 22' 59.0"W, Scale 1:1,800. Available at <https://digimap.edina.ac.uk/roam/map/historic>, Accessed 23 May 2022.

¹⁰ Strange, 'In Search of the Celestial Empire', p. 44.

¹¹ Bill Jones, 'Inspecting the 'extraordinary drain': emigration and the urban experience in Merthyr Tydfil in the 1860s', *Urban History*, 32.1 (2005), pp. 101 - 2.

¹² David Jones and Alan Bainbridge, 'The Conquering of 'China': Crime in an Industrial Community 1842-64', *Llafur*, 2.4 (1979) p. 11.

¹³ Strange, 'In Search of the Celestial Empire', p. 73.

¹⁴ Jones and Bainbridge, 'The Conquering of 'China'', p. 12.

¹⁵ David J. V. Jones, 'Crime, Protest and Community in 19th Century Wales', pp. 12 – 13.

¹⁶ Jones and Bainbridge, 'The Conquering of 'China'', p. 13. Jones, 'Crime, Protest and Community in 19th Century Wales', p. 12. Jones and Bainbridge suggest the decrease is between 1842 and 1864 whereas Jones suggests a decrease in the 1870s and 1880s.

¹⁷ England, *Crucible of Modern Wales*, p.6.

crime and poverty and look at different types of crime.¹⁸ Strange also connects poverty to criminal behaviour but adds that contemporaries considered China residents as a different class of people who wanted to be criminals.¹⁹ He describes subsections such as gangs of young boys, the Rodnies; ‘protectors’ of the criminal class who often intimidated clients of prostitutes, the Bullies; prostitutes (Nymphs), and ‘other characters’ such as brothel keepers, counterfeiters, and vagrants.²⁰ Both articles describe efforts to reform the area²¹ but suggest different reasons for the fall in crime.²² They both refer to difficulties in collecting data and to potentially large numbers of unreported crimes,²³ and argue that apart from professional criminals, people did not tend to live in China through choice.²⁴

Many of these elements are reiterated in Jones’ ‘Crime, Protest and Community in Wales’. He examines the criminal subsections and looks at the leaders of the area: the Emperor and Empress.²⁵

Jones argues that the high profile of crime in the mid-nineteenth century had more of a connection to ‘anxieties about change, dislocation and rebellion’ than an increase in offences.²⁶ His study of crime in Wales was based on criminal statistics and covered ‘mundane’ crimes alongside ‘offences against persons and property’.²⁷ More recent studies have focused on the connection between newspapers and crime such as Robinson’s study of Cardiff that looked at the theory of ‘moral panic’ and

¹⁸ Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, pp. 14 – 25. Committing crimes for a warm place to sleep p. 14. Stealing coal p. 18. Heavy drinking p. 21. Prostitution pp. 23 – 25.

¹⁹ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 44 - 46.

²⁰ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, page 45 - 68. (Rodnies pp. 45 - 49. Bullies pp. 50 - 54. Nymphs pp. 56 – 64. Others pp. 64 – 68.)

²¹ Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, pp. 29 - 31. Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 73.

²² Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, p. 12. Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, pp. 77 – 78. Jones and Bainbridge examined the changing influence of police officers and Strange links decrease in crime to mass emigration in the 1860s

²³ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p.44. Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, page 12.

²⁴ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 45. Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, page 7. Jones and Bainbridge describe the ‘most desperate’ moving across to China alongside ‘the rebellious and criminal’.

²⁵ Jones, ‘Crime, Protest and Community in 19th Century Wales’, p. 10. Empresses also mentioned in: Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 71 - 72. and: Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, p. 28.

²⁶ David J. V. Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth-Century Wales* (Cardiff, 1992), p. 244.

²⁷ Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth-Century Wales*, pp. xiii – xiv.

‘sensationalist, selective’ reports of crime published in an effort to support reform.²⁸ Others have aimed to consider crime in the ‘whole community’ not just industrialised areas such as Rachael Jones in her book on criminal courts in Montgomeryshire.²⁹ Crime studies often make use of court session records, local prison and police documents, government papers, and newspapers.³⁰

Although poverty is seen as a significant factor in examinations of China, the focus tends to be on crime and reasons for its lessening significance. The trend in Wales frequently saw ‘common assaults, petty thieving and many misdemeanours’³¹ and generally there was no ‘large criminal class’.³² The reputation of China puts it at odds with this trend, but although it has ‘captured public imagination’ as the part of Merthyr with the most crime it was ‘by no means exclusively inhabited by criminals’.³³

In contrast, Chris Parry’s talk on China argued that crime in the area was not statistically worse than the rest of Merthyr.³⁴ He suggests newspapers would incorrectly report that people lived in China when they did not³⁵ and one example where he contradicts previous historians is the suggestion that Rodnies were not an organised gang but were merely children stealing food.³⁶ He also indicates that references to Emperors and Empresses only occurred in the press and considers mentions of them as ‘very sarcastic’.³⁷ Strange argued that the *Merthyr Guardian* ‘constantly attacked China’,³⁸ but Parry adds that the reputation overshadows the non-criminal population.

This dissertation will investigate the under-represented general population of China, as research largely focuses on criminality. Chapter two will expand on the population by looking at trends in age, gender, employment, place of birth and number of people. This will be compared to the suggestion of a decreasing crime rate to

²⁸ Daniel J. Robinson, ‘Crime, Police and the Provincial Press: A Study of Victorian Cardiff’, *The Welsh History Review*, 25.4 (2011), p. 551.

²⁹ Rachael Jones, *Crime, Courts and Community in Mid-Victorian Wales : Montgomeryshire, People and Places*, (University of Wales Press, 2018), p. 3.

³⁰ Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth-Century Wales*, pp. xii – xiii.

³¹ Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth-Century Wales*, p. 239.

³² Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth-Century Wales*, p. 243

³³ England, 2017, p. 71.

³⁴ Chris Parry, ‘China’ – Merthyr Tydfil’, YouTube, Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PL5YqHsVugQ&t=173s> Accessed 24 May 2022, 01:15:35.

³⁵ Parry, ‘China’ – Merthyr Tydfil’, 00:56:00.

³⁶ Parry, ‘China’ – Merthyr Tydfil’, 00:33:50 – 00:37:30.

³⁷ Parry, ‘China’ – Merthyr Tydfil’, 00:16:00.

³⁸ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 73.

determine if any links can be seen using data gathered from the 1851, 1861, and 1871 censuses. The chapter will conclude that the population was largely young and Welsh with a small majority of women and conditions in China improved slightly over the period, but many people remained in economic hardship. These slow improvements could be connected to a decreasing crime rate.

Chapter three will expand on the perception of China presented in newspapers, endeavouring to see whether the press exaggerated the reputation of the area and looking at how accurate reports were. It will examine the descriptions of China, position of articles, the number of reports about crime in comparison to those that were not, and the people reported on. These people will be cross-referenced with the census data to see how many did live in China. Data will be gathered from newspaper articles published in 1851, 1861 and 1871. We will conclude there was a strong moral implication in newspaper reports and this bolstered the reputation by exaggerating the significance of the area. We will also find there is no denying crime took place, but many crimes did not have links to the inhabitants of China.

This dissertation will conclude that crime had an influence on China's reputation, but the picture of a criminal underworld is exaggerated. The people of China lived in bad conditions and were poor. Although there was some improvement in conditions over time, many people were still suffering, and this may have led them to crime. Newspapers played a role in building China's reputation, most significantly through their moral concerns implying a link with the area and crime, but many crimes cannot be attributed to the residents of the area. In conclusion, China's reputation of being a dangerous place of organised criminals can only be considered a true representation of the people who lived there to a limited extent.

Chapter One: The Population of China

The notoriety of China's reputation implicates the entire population but previous research into the community has been limited. This chapter will be examining the questions: who were the people of China; what conditions did they live in and did this change over time? We will examine the censuses of 1851, 1861 and 1871. Census records need to be considered carefully as valid evaluations rely on accurate data. There are some inconsistencies in these censuses; one example being China's name. In 1851 and 1871 it is called 'cellars' but in 1861 it is called 'China Pontysture'. To account for this, scans of the original records have been examined manually to ensure that the entire area is covered. Other issues such as mistakes in original recordings are not as easy to resolve and should also be a consideration. Despite this, censuses do enable us to build a picture of who the people living in China were. There are three main areas we will focus on: the conditions and environments of China, statistics about individuals, and occupations. The findings will also be compared to historians' claims of a decreasing crime rate to explore any connections. We will conclude that China was a poor area with majorities of young people, women, and Welsh nationals. It was heavily crowded at the beginning of our period and although this reduced, elements such as low unstable incomes persisted throughout. Poverty may have led some to crime and reducing crime figures could be connected to improvements in conditions.



Figure 1 – a map of China, 1875-76³⁹

³⁹ Great Britain Ordnance Society, *Merthyr Tydfil Glamorganshire, The National Library of Wales, 1875-76, XII.1.18*, Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10107/4715635>, Accessed 18 May 2022.

China was a small area, as can be seen in Figure 1, with 472 people living there in 1851. This number dropped at the next census (1861) to 312 people, but the number of households remained the same at 81 demonstrating the density of population.⁴⁰ The wider situation in Merthyr helps to explain this. Between 1831 and 1851 the town's population had doubled,⁴¹ but a 'significant section' migrated out in the 1860s.⁴² By 1871 the number of households had decreased to 43 and the number of people to 176.⁴³ This is likely because the large amount of emigration eased 'chronic housing shortages' and 'vacated unfit dwellings were removed'.⁴⁴ The reason people had to live in these conditions despite pay being 'generally' good in Merthyr was because 'prices and rents were often very high'.⁴⁵ An 1850 report adds that the rents in China were too high to justify 'the accommodation', which was usually poor.⁴⁶ Houses in China were not large, as they often consisted of two rooms⁴⁷ and Parry has suggested that the name 'the cellars' refers to a specific type of one room house.⁴⁸ As could be expected by the number of people living in the area in 1851, there were more houses which were considerably crowded. This included one house of 26 people.⁴⁹ In the subsequent censuses the largest household was 11. Large households usually had a significant number of boarders, lodgers and their families living within them. Many were lodging

⁴⁰ See Appendix 1 – Number and percentage of persons living in a household in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871. Data on number of households gathered from: *1851 Census of England and Wales*, The National Archives, Available at <https://search-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search-world-records/1851-england-wales-and-scotland-census>, Accessed 24 May 2022. *1861 Census of England and Wales*, The National Archives, Available at <https://search-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search-world-records/1861-england-wales-and-scotland-census>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

⁴¹ Jones, 'Inspecting the 'extraordinary drain'', p. 101.

⁴² Jones, 'Inspecting the 'extraordinary drain'', p. 112.

⁴³ See Appendix 1. Data on number of households gathered from: *1871 Census of England and Wales*, The National Archives, Available at <https://search-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search-world-records/1871-england-wales-and-scotland-census>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

⁴⁴ Jones, 'Inspecting the 'extraordinary drain'', p. 104.

⁴⁵ Jones and Bainbridge, 'The Conquering of 'China'', p. 9.

⁴⁶ T.W. Rammell, *Report to the General Board of Health on a Preliminary Inquiry Into the Sewerage, Drainage, and Supply of Water, and the Sanitary Condition of the Inhabitants of the Town of Merthyr Tydfil, in the County of Glamorgan.*, (London, 1850), p. 23. Available at: [https://books.google.je/books?id=8ARbAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA1&dq=T.W.+Rammell,%C2%A0Report+to+the+General+Board+of+Health+on+a+Preliminary+Inquiry+Into+the+Sewerage,+Drainage,+and+Supply+of+Water,+and+the+Sanitary+Condition+of+the+Inhabitants+of+the+Town+of+Merthyr+Tydfil,+in+the+County+of+Glamorgan+\(London,+1850\)&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwis8-fiyaf2AhWFzYUKHWHDCCKQ6AF6BAGKEAI#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.je/books?id=8ARbAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA1&dq=T.W.+Rammell,%C2%A0Report+to+the+General+Board+of+Health+on+a+Preliminary+Inquiry+Into+the+Sewerage,+Drainage,+and+Supply+of+Water,+and+the+Sanitary+Condition+of+the+Inhabitants+of+the+Town+of+Merthyr+Tydfil,+in+the+County+of+Glamorgan+(London,+1850)&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwis8-fiyaf2AhWFzYUKHWHDCCKQ6AF6BAGKEAI#v=onepage&q&f=false), Accessed 18 May 2022.

⁴⁷ Rammell, *Report to the General Board of Health*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Parry, 'China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 00:19:30.

⁴⁹ Also one of 22, one of 16 and one of 13. *1851 Census of England and Wales*.

houses used regularly by people who would come to Merthyr for temporary work.⁵⁰ They reduced significantly after 1851, with households of more than 11 being 26 percent of the population in this census but only 4 and 6 percent in the subsequent ones. A significant number of people lived in households of between one and five: 33 percent in 1851; 68 percent in 1861 and 53 percent in 1871, and slightly fewer in households of between six and ten: 40 percent, 29 percent, and 41 percent.⁵¹ The dramatic increase of households between one and five is linked to the movement of lodgers. In 1861 60 percent of lodgers lived in this size household, and in 1871 this rose to 79 percent.⁵² This is likely because the fewer people living in a household the less income there was and so a smaller household would need the extra money a lodger would bring. Most households of over five were family groups living together, occasionally with one or two lodgers. Cases of significant overcrowding, such as in 1851, tended to be rare later in the period but there were still many large families living in one or two room houses. The reducing number of lodgers suggests people were becoming better off but they still were not earning much. Reductions in general overcrowding and household sizes suggests that China's economic situation was improving over the period, but it remained a poor area.

In all three censuses most households in China were made up of immediate family members and the frequency of these groups only rose over time. In 1851 56 percent of people were immediate family, 79 percent in 1861 and 81 percent in 1871.⁵³ Extended family members never made up more than 6 percent.⁵⁴ The other significant group were lodgers, boarders, and their families. 38 percent of China's population fell into this group in 1851 but it reduced over time to 18 percent in 1861 and 11 percent in 1871 suggesting the area was becoming economically better off over the period.⁵⁵ There was always some demand for lodgers which shows there were some people who needed the extra money, but for the most part this was a much smaller business in China over

⁵⁰ Parry, "China" – Merthyr Tydfil', 00:59:30.

⁵¹ See Appendix 1.

⁵² See Appendix 2 – Number and percentage of lodgers, boarders and their families living in a household in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

⁵³ Immediate family to mean: Head of household, husband/wife, children and step-children. See Appendix 3 – Number and percentage of relationships between members of households in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

⁵⁴ Extended family to mean: grandparents, grandchildren, siblings, in-laws and their children. See Appendix 3.

⁵⁵ See Appendix 3.

time. Although emigration may have reduced the numbers, there would still have been lodgers in Merthyr. The fact that these people did not make up a significant proportion of the population by the end of the period suggests other areas were now worse off than China. There were also a small number of servants referred to in this category of the census. There is some connection to servants living in the large households of 1851, such as one living in the household of 26, but most lived in households of nine or under. There were six servants in 1851 and this decreased in each census.⁵⁶ This implies that there was some variation in income but as this decreased as time went on, it also indicates as people earned more, they decided to move away. China was largely made up of immediate family groups and this only increased as time went on. There is some suggestion of economic hardship decreasing over time, but those who could appeared to move out of the area. The evidence suggests as time went on China's economic position seemed to stabilise above the very poor area it had been, but it never became affluent.

Individual characteristics of the population show that most people were female, Welsh and young. In all three censuses between 55 percent and 57 percent of the population of China was female.⁵⁷ There were many households made up of women or where women were supporting themselves,⁵⁸ and this may be linked to cheaper rents as women's work did not pay as well.⁵⁹ The population was largely Welsh, and this increased incrementally from 55 percent in 1851 to 86 percent in 1871. The next largest was Irish, 39 percent, 31 percent, and 13 percent respectively. Although the English were the only other significant group, they were considerably smaller and never above five percent.⁶⁰ There were always people living in China who had migrated there from other areas but increasingly the Welsh dominated. This is partially due to the high birth

⁵⁶ See Appendix 3.

⁵⁷ See Appendix 4 – Number and percentage of gender in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

⁵⁸ An unmarried woman living alone in 1851: 'Mary Ann May' (1851) Census return, The National Archives, HO107/2459, Folio 558. Available at <https://www-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1851/0017025671>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

An 1861 household of two young, unmarried women: 'Susannah Edwards' (1861) Census return, The National Archives, RG09/4060, Folio 54. Available at <https://www-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/transcript?id=GBC/1861/0020427846>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

A widow in 1871 living with her three children (age 12 and under): 'Sophia Davies' (1871) Census return, The National Archives, RG10/5401, Folio 29. Available at <https://www-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/transcript?id=GBC%2F1871%2F0000012989>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

⁵⁹ Unknown, '19th and early 20th Century', Striking Women, Available at <https://www.striking-women.org/module/women-and-work/19th-and-early-20th-century>, Accessed 23 May 2022.

⁶⁰ See Appendix 5 – Number and percentage of persons by country of birth in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

rate at the time having an impact on the age of the population.⁶¹ Most people were under 40 years of age in all three censuses. Between 40 and 50 percent were under 20 years of age. The next biggest group were aged between 20 and 39 years of age representing 38 percent in 1851, 42 percent in 1861, and 30 percent in 1871.⁶² There were ‘appalling’ living conditions and death rates in China. Half of deaths were children under five years old and life expectancy was thirty-five years of age.⁶³ China had some of the worst housing and sanitary conditions in Merthyr.⁶⁴ Sanitary reports suggested between the houses there was only ‘stagnant pools of liquid and house refuse’ and the river Taff, which ran alongside China, was full of sewage.⁶⁵ These conditions often led to illness.⁶⁶ China’s largely young population has clear links to high birth and death rates and meant many were children. The high birth rate also explains the steady increase in the proportion of Welsh nationals and suggests that migration to the area had slowed down. With a consistent majority of women over men and occurrences of women supporting themselves China was a place they could afford to live despite having lower wages than men. This again reiterates that the people of China did not have much money and stayed there because they needed somewhere to live, not through choice.

The final element we will be examining is employment. We will be looking at occupations employing five or more people in at least one decade. This allows us to examine 418 of 472 people in the 1851 census, 270 of 312 in the 1861 census and 164 of 176 in the 1871 census. To allow for the fluctuations in numbers between censuses percentages will be used as a point of comparison.

The largest occupational group in each census was ‘unspecified’. In 1851 this was 51 percent, in 1861 it was 27 percent and in 1871 41 percent.⁶⁷ China’s reputation as a professional criminal underworld might be the first connection made to such a high number, but closer examination suggests there is more to this. Lots of people found

⁶¹ Linda Beresford, *Baby Graves: Infant Mortality in Merthyr Tydfil 1865-1908*, (Perth, 2006) pp. 264-265. Available at: <https://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/324/2/02Whole.pdf>, Accessed 18 May 2022.

⁶² See Appendix 6 – Number and percentage of persons by age in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

⁶³ Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, p. 10. Infant mortality in Merthyr also discussed in: Beresford, *Baby Graves: Infant Mortality in Merthyr Tydfil 1865-1908*.

⁶⁴ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 45.

⁶⁵ Rammell, *Report to the General Board of Health*, p. 23. Rammell, *Report to the General Board of Health*, p. 36.

⁶⁶ Rammell, *Report to the General Board of Health*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ See Appendix 7 – Number and percentage of persons by employment in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

themselves in communities like China because they did not have an income, but Parry argues this did not mean they were criminals.⁶⁸ He also suggests most prostitutes had labouring jobs that they would complete during the day.⁶⁹ This, and the poor conditions previously covered, would suggest that this could be the case for many other types of criminals. The evidence we can see from the census is largely in the fluctuations. There was a high proportion of children in China. Many were too young to be sent to school or work, but an increasing number of older children were becoming scholars. Their number rose from two percent in 1851 to 11 percent in 1861 and 15 percent in 1871.⁷⁰ At the same time the number of unspecified was falling. Another element affecting this number was women. Women's work was often not accounted for in census records, especially if it was seasonal, part-time, or unpaid.⁷¹ The 1861 census had a classification of 'Wife',⁷² and this made up 11 percent.⁷³ This can be accounted for in the lower figures of unspecified people in this year. Added to 'unspecified' it totals 38 percent, in line with 1871's 41 percent. This also does not account for daughters who may not have been deemed by census takers to be in a form of employment but were old enough to be working in some way. There is no reason to assume such people were criminals. There was a high proportion of unspecified people in each census of China, and this may have included criminals, but it was not a guarantee of criminality. Overall, the number did reduce, and this seems to be in line with the rise in schooling.

China's population worked in a variety of positions. The occupational groups that maintained similar proportions over the three decades were: labourer, puddler, miner, washerwoman, haulier and a combination of dressmakers, tailors and seamstresses. The consistency in the figures shows that people had to work to earn their living. The type of positions shows there was a range of poverty within the community.

⁶⁸ Parry, 'China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 01:04:45.

⁶⁹ Parry, 'China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 01:25:10.

⁷⁰ See Appendix 7.

⁷¹ Williams and Jones, 'Women at Work in Nineteenth Century Wales', p. 21.

⁷² One example being: 'Mary Griffith' (1861), Census return, The National Archives, RG09/4060, Folio 52. Available at: <https://search-findmypast-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/record?id=GBC%2F1861%2F4060%2F00282A&parentid=GBC%2F1861%2F0020427744>, Accessed 18 May 2022.

⁷³ See Appendix 7.

One example is puddlers who were highly skilled⁷⁴ and earned more than miners.⁷⁵ The largest of these groups were labourers at 16 percent of the population in 1851 and 1871, and 13 percent in 1861.⁷⁶ Some groups of labourers only had short-term work and were then unemployed for long periods. After the 1840s indications that the iron trade was struggling in Merthyr developed into a crisis which left children starving to death in China.⁷⁷ There were highly skilled workers there, but there were also a large number who lived with no security. This could be disastrous for many when the conditions were against them.

Two groups who saw a fluctuation in numbers over the period were ‘charwoman’ and ‘sand seller’. Charwomen were employed to do jobs in private houses, often cleaning.⁷⁸ They saw a significant increase of 11 percent between 1851 and 1861 but this dropped equally as dramatically in 1871 to one percent. In contrast sand sellers were not recorded at all in 1861 but were five percent in 1851 and four percent in 1871.⁷⁹ These jobs were largely unskilled roles held by women. This emphasises the area as working-class because women’s work was required to supplement men’s income. There were also several women supporting themselves. The fluctuations in numbers could be attributed to women working less as the period went on but more likely is that higher proportions in 1851 were due to female lodgers supporting themselves and the rise in family groups led to women’s work which was unaccounted for. Not every person who lived in China was working an inconsistent or unskilled job but there was a significant proportion of the population who were. Many people struggled to earn enough money, and this is perhaps reflected in the terrible conditions that they were forced to live in.

Conditions in China were not good, but they did seem to be improving in small ways. We can see this through the decrease in people and the smaller household sizes.

⁷⁴ Anon, ‘Puddlers, Shinglers & Rollers: the Story of Malleable Iron’, CultureNL Museums Collections, Available at <https://www.culturenlmuseums.co.uk/story/puddlers-shinglers-rollers-the-story-of-malleable-iron/>, Accessed 18 May 2022.

⁷⁵ Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, p. 9.

⁷⁶ See Appendix 7.

⁷⁷ Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, pp. 9 - 10.

⁷⁸ The Penguin English Dictionary (3rd Ed.), ed. by R. E. Allen, ‘Charwoman’, Credo Reference, Available at

<http://libezproxy.open.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/penguineng/charwoman/0?institutionId=292>, Accessed 13 May 2022.

⁷⁹ See Appendix 7.

Lodging houses became far less common and much smaller after 1851 suggesting China was not the cheapest area in Merthyr anymore. When conditions are considered alongside historians' suggestions of a decreasing crime rate it seems feasible that with these small improvements came less desperation and crime would have been a necessity for fewer people. In this way the censuses support the theory of a decreasing crime rate.

The people of China lived in difficult conditions. At the beginning of the period they were surviving in an overcrowded environment on top of persistent problems of sewage and filth. As Merthyr's population changed through emigration, reflections can be seen in the reduction of people and of lodgers and boarders. Consistently throughout the period there were more women than men and an overabundance of young people. There was also an increasing number of people who had been born in Wales rather than migrating to the area. The population were working-class but in a variety of positions, both skilled and unskilled, and the working world included women who had to support themselves and their families. There does seem to have been improvements in economic conditions, as fewer people were taking lodgers, and whilst this may have led to a falling crime rate the population of China remained poor and the instability in employment for many people could continue to have dire consequences.

Chapter Two: The Impact of the Press on China's Reputation

China's reputation as a no-go area full of organised criminals and run by an emperor and empress has inspired crime focused research. This reputation has naturally extended onto the people who lived there. Traditional studies into crime were challenged by Parry who focused on the exaggerated nature of China's reputation, and this has implications on our understanding of the population. This chapter will examine the newspaper coverage of China in 1851, 1861, and 1871 to investigate this. It will review the ways newspapers reported on China to see what perceptions there were of the area, as this played a role in developing the reputation, and whether the press promoted alarmist or selective reports. We will be looking at descriptions of China, positions of articles, the number of reports about crime in comparison to those that were not, and the people reported on. We will conclude newspapers did use China's name and reputation over-abundantly and moral concerns led them to build an exaggerated picture of the area, but they did not use blatant alarmist tactics. We will also conclude China's reputation was linked to crime, though this cannot be attributed wholly to the residents.

The newspapers we will be looking at are the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales* ('*Telegraph*') and the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* ('*Guardian*'). The *Telegraph* ran from 1855 until 1881 and published local news and information.⁸⁰ The *Guardian* published 'local and national news, foreign intelligence, railway timetables and extracts of literature' from 1845 until 1874.⁸¹ Both were weekly, English-language newspapers. There were 23 articles in the *Guardian* and 45 articles in the *Telegraph* despite the latter not existing in 1851.⁸² This suggests that there was an excessive focus on China from the *Telegraph*. Strange had argued that the *Guardian* 'constantly attacked China',⁸³ but the *Telegraph* seems to be a worse offender. Using two newspapers allows us to see any trends. It does mean that the crimes will often be reported on in both and counted more

⁸⁰ Unknown, 'The Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales', The National Library of Wales, Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/3071369>, Accessed 13 May 2022.

⁸¹ Unknown, 'The Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette', The National Library of Wales, Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/3088463>, Accessed 13 May 2022.

⁸² See Appendix 8 – Number of articles published referencing 'China' or 'the cellars' by newspapers in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

⁸³ Strange, 'In Search of the Celestial Empire', p. 73.

than once but this is a study of mentions of China and not on the volume of individual crimes so it should not impact. The highest number of articles on China were published in 1861 and this would insinuate historians' suggestions that crime rates were decreasing were inaccurate, but this included 27 articles in the *Telegraph*.⁸⁴ This was four more articles than the *Guardian* published on China in the entire period and indicates we cannot use these newspapers as a reliable source for crime rates. The articles have been gathered through the key terms 'China' and 'the cellars'. They were then filtered to the relevant 68 we will be examining.⁸⁵ The three years have been selected to coincide with the census records to assist with cross-comparison of people reported on in the articles.

Newspapers are 'gatekeepers and filterers of ideas.'⁸⁶ They cannot publish every story and better reflect what editors believe is most important rather than all the news happening at any time. This suggests that they are a good medium to examine contemporary perceptions of China. Smith has argued that claims to objectivity are 'highly dubious',⁸⁷ and Jones suggested that crime coverage in Welsh newspapers is problematic as they have an 'unabating' interest but 'patchy' coverage.⁸⁸ 'Respectable readers' are interested in crime because of a sense of 'binary opposition between good and evil'.⁸⁹ This has encouraged 'alarmist' journalism to boost newspaper circulation,⁹⁰ such as placing prominent articles on the front page or near advertisements, but it has been argued that many editors wanted to support 'law and order' as much as to sell copies.⁹¹ There is a strong background of moral bias in overzealous reporting of crime alongside a desire for increased circulation and we will be examining whether this has taken place in reports on China. There are also issues in reports about China specifically. At different times the police would focus on specific types of crime and

⁸⁴ See Appendix 8.

⁸⁵ Through removal of irrelevant articles such as those about China the country.

⁸⁶ Vella, 'Chapter 11 – Newspapers', p. 193. Also discussed in: Curtis and Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, p. 52.

⁸⁷ Stephen Vella, 'Chapter 11 – Newspapers', in *Reading Primary Sources – The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, ed. by Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (London, 2008), p. 192.

⁸⁸ Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth-Century Wales*, p. xiii.

⁸⁹ L. Jr. Curtis and L. Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, (New Haven, 2001), p. 51.

⁹⁰ Curtis and Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, p. 51.

⁹¹ Curtis and Curtis, *Jack the Ripper and the London Press*, p. 65.

this may skew the results of a study.⁹² There was a tendency for crimes not to be reported to the police which limits what newspapers can report on and suggests China may have been more criminal than we see in newspapers.⁹³ There are many issues in the accuracy of reporting on crime both in terms of newspaper bias and the limitations in what they can report on. We will be considering this alongside reports on China to help understand the accuracy of its reputation.

From the very beginning of the period China was described in a negative light. In 1851 it was called a ‘notorious district’⁹⁴ and an ‘infamous locality’.⁹⁵ China’s reputation had been built before our period started. Strange argues contemporaries saw residents as ‘a class apart from all others’.⁹⁶ They were believed to make crime ‘the object and business of their lives’, and ‘honest’ occupations made them ‘deliberately scoff’.⁹⁷ This shows the deep link between China’s reputation and its population. 1851 crime reports are far more likely to suggest their subjects were residents of China than in 1861 or 1871, but in all three years newspapers would often describe the area disparagingly. In 1861 it was called ‘disreputable’⁹⁸ and in 1871 ‘shocking’.⁹⁹ These types of descriptions are so common that it would be more surprising if people were shocked crime had taken place in China. Newspapers were also more likely to use China’s name than other areas in Merthyr. Most crimes would not state where the perpetrator lived but newspapers seemed to make an exception for China. Richard Matthias was described as an ‘inhabitant of China’ in one report, but the reports alongside him only used place names if the crime was committed in a specific area, or if

⁹² Jones and Bainbridge, ‘The Conquering of ‘China’’, p. 12. Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 44.

⁹³ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 44.

⁹⁴ Anon, ‘Glamorgan Spring Assizes’, *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 8 March 1851, p. 4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3089955/3089959/28/>, Accessed 23 May 2022.

⁹⁵ Anon, ‘Merthyr Police Court’, *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 8 February 1851, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3089935/3089938/33/>, Accessed 23 May 2022.

⁹⁶ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 44.

⁹⁷ Strange, ‘In Search of the Celestial Empire’, p. 45.

⁹⁸ Anon, ‘Merthyr Police Court’, *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 14 September 1861, p. 6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3092804/3092810/29/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

⁹⁹ Anon, ‘Merthyr’, *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 28 January 1871, p. 7. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3097206/3097213/58/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

it related to a beer house.¹⁰⁰ This extended to people who lived near China, such as in the case of two women in 1871 where the living situation of one was used to build a picture of her and the other's living arrangements were not described at all.¹⁰¹ This prevalence could be linked to the gathering of data in this study, as the name of China was often the requirement for consideration, but if newspapers were using the name at every opportunity this could have biased China's perceived frequency in the press. The constant disapproval from newspapers in reports on China does suggest moral bias was an element of standard reporting.

Despite newspapers' constant claims of concern, they did not overtly try to foster alarm surrounding the area. China was often mentioned within a wider report on crime which would usually be on page three of four¹⁰² or pages six or seven of eight¹⁰³ and they were not placed next to advertisements. The fact that China had not been put on the front page or near advertisements suggests it was not a key selling point for the newspaper. Within the articles crime would be reported in one of three ways: short reports of a few sentences, medium reports of one paragraph of varying lengths usually with a quote from within the court, or long reports covering multiple paragraphs with more than one quote. In 1851 the most common reports on China were short, and in 1861 and 1871 the most common were medium. The medium reports were similar to others around them, and China is not marked out in any way. There were very few long articles referring to China.¹⁰⁴ Although reports on China were clearly interesting to contemporaries, they were not interesting enough to justify an extended report. This in combination with where reports were situated would suggest that using alarmist tactics to report on China was not a good business model. The lack of a deliberate campaign to

¹⁰⁰ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 15 March 1851, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3089960/3089963/26/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹⁰¹ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 15 September 1871, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3075497/3075500/16/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹⁰² In the Telegraph. Data collated from the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales* in 1851, 1861 and 1871. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

¹⁰³ In the Guardian. Data collated from the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* in 1851, 1861 and 1871. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Data collated from the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales* and the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* in 1851, 1861 and 1871. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

use China to sell newspapers, suggests either that the area was not as alarming for contemporaries as its reputation would make it out to be or crime was incredibly prominent and frequent. Attempts to change China's 'culture, institutions and habits' by police, reformers, and evangelicals took place from the 1840s and 1850s.¹⁰⁵ Elements of this can be seen in 1861 as there are two reports of people preaching in China.¹⁰⁶ On more than one occasion China is shown to not be so dangerous people could not go there to challenge the residents. This does not suggest it was a no-go area. Although China was clearly perceived as a problem it seems to be more of a moral dilemma than a genuine concern of a criminal underground.

One of the unusual elements of China's reputation was in references to Emperors and Empresses running the district. Parry argued these were 'sarcastic', purely seen in the press and not reflective of reality.¹⁰⁷ There was only one article in our period that referred to this idea and it was because the sister of the ex-emperor had been arrested.¹⁰⁸ This is an element of China's reputation that appears to have been given far greater significance than it ever held in reality.

Most reports on China were about crime and were placed in the standard section. In 1851 and 1861 the crime reported on the most often was stealing. There were seven cases in 1851 and 26 in 1861.¹⁰⁹ This rise does suggest it was being targeted more by the police in 1861. A frequent crime in China was where prostitutes took men to their houses, had them undress, stole from them, and ran. This has been referred to as 'one of the ordinary cases from China'.¹¹⁰ This emphasises the regularity of stealing and suggests that many prostitutes were poor and needed money. They were not in such roles through choice. Stealing is also the joint highest crime reported on in 1871.¹¹¹ Plint has argued it was 'as poor and ill-paid a business as one could enter into'.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Jones and Bainbridge, 'The Conquering of 'China'', p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Anon, 'Local Intelligence', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 6 April 1861, pp. 2 – 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072828/3072831/5/>, Accessed 19 May 2022. And: Anon, 'Local Intelligence', 20 April 1861, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Parry, 'China – Merthyr Tydfil', 00:16:00.

¹⁰⁸ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', 15 March 1851, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix 9 – Number of references to 'China' or 'the cellars' alongside different types of crime in newspapers in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

¹¹⁰ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 9 February 1861, p. 4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072793/3072797/24/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹¹¹ See Appendix 9.

¹¹² Jones, *Crime in Nineteenth-Century Wales*, p. 243.

People were not stealing because they were, as China's reputation suggested, a part of a professional class of criminals. They were desperate. Stealing largely took place with a much higher frequency than violent crimes. Types of violent crime would rarely see more than one or two cases each year.¹¹³ One exception was stealing with assault or violence, but this indicates closer links to survival than a predisposition to disorder.¹¹⁴ The other exception was in the eight reports on wounding in 1871.¹¹⁵ Unusually, this was one of the most common crimes in this year. At first this suggests that the police were targeting this type of crime but in this case, it is linked to the people of China. Five of these articles refer to the same crime but this was not a case of excessive reporting by newspapers as they follow the case over several weeks.¹¹⁶ It was delayed repeatedly as the police could not find the victim, Elvira Powell, to bring in as a witness and each time there were reports the case had been delayed.¹¹⁷ Two other reports of wounding in this year refer to an earlier case of Powell being the perpetrator of a stabbing.¹¹⁸ This is a case where a resident of China might easily be linked to its criminal reputation. It also suggests over our period newspapers did not have a strong bias for reporting about violent crimes. They largely show that China was a poor area and many people resorted to stealing to survive. There were certain characters in the area who were prone to violent situations and in these cases China's reputation might not be totally uncalled for.

Far fewer articles referring to China are not related to crime. In 1851 there was only one article out of ten.¹¹⁹ The article was about an organised fight with an audience

¹¹³ See Appendix 9.

¹¹⁴ These cases were often linked to the prostitutes stealing from potential clients. After the woman had run some tried to chase her and her 'Bully' would be waiting for them. He would then attack the client to stop him from chasing the woman. See Appendix 9.

¹¹⁵ See Appendix 9.

¹¹⁶ Data collated from the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales* and the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* in 1871. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

¹¹⁷ When she eventually was found they had to arrest her to get her to court and threaten her with jail before she would testify. Anon, 'District News', *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 17 June 1871, p. 7. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3097386/3097393/57/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹¹⁸ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 10 February 1871, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3075342/3075345/10/>, Accessed 19 May 2022. And: Anon, 'Glamorganshire Quarter Sessions', *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 25 February 1871, p. 6. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3097242/3097248/53/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹¹⁹ Data collated from the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales* and the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* in 1851. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

of hundreds of people where a China Bully fought twenty rounds.¹²⁰ In 1861 there were 30 articles about crime in comparison to four which were not.¹²¹ These consisted of two articles about preaching in China in an attempt to reform the people who lived there, one description of Salt Lake City in the United States which described Native Americans with a disparaging comparison to a China Bully and one fictitious piece of writing that described the ‘filthy purliens’ of China having been ‘razed to the ground’.¹²² Although not about crime, none of these examples put China in a positive light. The only positive implication was in a description of awakening consciences of prostitutes after hearing the sermon.¹²³ In 1871, 22 articles covered crime and two did not.¹²⁴ One was a surveyor’s report on ventilation not having been installed in the cellars and the other was a letter to the editor about candidates in a school board election. The surveyor’s report placed the blame on the owners of houses in China who do not appear to have lived there themselves, but the letter suggested a connection to morality in China was ‘unblushing and grotesque hypocrisy’.¹²⁵ There does not appear to be any positive news coming out of China across the entire period. The only article which does not appear to make a moral judgement on China or the people who lived there was the surveyor’s report. It is worth considering that the people of China did not have much money and were probably unlikely to waste it on marriage announcements,

¹²⁰ Anon, ‘Merthyr and Neighbourhood’, *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 26 July 1851, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3090055/3090058/25/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹²¹ Data collated from the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales* and the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* in 1861. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

¹²² Preaching in China: Anon, ‘Local Intelligence’, 6 April 1861, pp. 2 – 3. And: Anon, ‘Local Intelligence’, 20 April 1861, p. 2. Salt Lake City: Faust, ‘News from Utah’, *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 15 June 1861, p. 4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072878/3072882/16/>, Accessed 19 May 2022. Fictitious piece: Anon, ‘Records and Recollections’, *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 7 September 1861, p. 4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072938/3072942/8/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹²³ Anon, ‘Local Intelligence’, 6 April 1861, pp. 2 – 3.

¹²⁴ Data collated from the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales* and the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* in 1871. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales>, Accessed 24 May 2022.

¹²⁵ Surveyor’s Report: Anon, ‘Merthyr Board of Health’, *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 3 November 1871, p. 2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3075532/3075534/7/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

School Board Election: Anon, ‘The School Board Election’, *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 15 December 1871, p. 2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3075562/3075564/12/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

but it does seem that the editors were uninterested in publishing any positive stories unless it was routed in reformation of the citizens. This ties in with the moral aspect of reporting. The narrative of China being a criminal area that needed saving appears to have been interesting to newspapers and their readership, and alternative viewpoints do not appear to exist. There are also no articles in either newspaper in our period where residents are asked to make a statement on where they live.¹²⁶ The fact that newspapers rarely reported on anything but crime in China (and that even other articles are negative) would have added to public perception and China's reputation. China was not given the opportunity to present as anything but criminal.

Crime clearly took place in China with some regularity, but this should not lead to automatic assumptions that the population were the perpetrators. There were reports where people living in China, or perceived to be, became the victims of crime. This could be as simple as an 1851 report of clothes having been stolen from a house, or the more harrowing case of Mary Williams who was assaulted and raped on her way home from work because the perpetrator saw her as an 'inhabitant of "China"'.¹²⁷ Suspicion has been placed on people who lived in China because of the reputation but this seems to be an unfair judgement. There was a link between China and prostitution and references in newspapers to "China' girls", "China' woman' or 'China lady' indicated that these women were prostitutes.¹²⁸ This did not necessarily mean they lived in China. An article from 1871 suggests four women were members of the 'China sisterhood' but also states that one of the crimes took place 'at High Street' and gives no indication within the article that the women lived in China.¹²⁹ In these cases there does not appear

¹²⁶ Parry does reference a case of this happening in the 1880s where someone had criticised China in the press and a letter was printed the next week by a resident of China who claimed the district was not 'full of criminals' and that housing and sanitation was not as bad as was often reported. Parry, "China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 01:17:15.

¹²⁷ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette*, 25 October 1851, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3090120/3090123/21/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹²⁸ "China' girls': Anon, 'Glamorganshire Spring Assizes', p. 4.

"China' woman': Anon, 'Epiphany Quarter Sessions, Cardiff', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 5 January 1861, p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072768/3072771/6/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

'China lady': Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 13 April 1861, p. 4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072833/3072837/17/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹²⁹ Caroline Smith and Elizabeth Davies: 'another pair of the China sisterhood'. Paragraph above refers to two prostitutes: Matilda Morris and Margaret Arthur who committed a crime on High Street. Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*,

to be any more connection to China other than the name the newspapers used to report on the crime. In total there were only three articles that referenced China and actual prosecutions for prostitution.¹³⁰ Most references to prostitution were merely implications. China's reputation was being expanded by these reports but there is no evidence any crime committed had a link to the area, and certainly not to the population. The total number of people referred to in relation to China in articles from 1851, 1861 and 1871 was 75 but only 29 were referred to as residents of China¹³¹ and only 23 can be found in the census records.¹³² This group includes Elvira Powell, linked to multiple stabbings in 1871, but she was not recorded on the census of the same year.¹³³ There was a significant proportion of people who came to Merthyr and worked temporarily and Parry has suggested that 10 to 15,000 more people could be added to the census on this basis,¹³⁴ but he also claimed many people were named by newspapers as living in China but actually lived in another area called Riverside.¹³⁵ This suggests that many crimes reported on as being committed in China had very few links to the residents of the area. There are discrepancies due to the changing reported boundaries of China but a large example of this was the wider area of Pontystorehouse which newspapers had shown no issues in recognising in the past.¹³⁶ It is worth noting Parry also believed many crimes were not committed in China itself and the population would leave the area to commit crime.¹³⁷ If someone was not reported as being from China, this would not have come up in the search and as such this research does not necessarily reflect the total number of crimes committed by residents of China. Newspaper reports built a picture of China largely based on crime but there were many occasions this could be

9 June 1871, p. 4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3075427/3075431/17/>, Accessed 19 May 2022.

¹³⁰ See Appendix 9.

¹³¹ Data gathered from: Reports referring to 'China' or 'the cellars' in the *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette* and the *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales* in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

¹³² Data gathered from: *1851 Census of England and Wales. 1861 Census of England and Wales. 1871 Census of England and Wales.*

¹³³ Anon, 'District News', 17 June 1871, p. 7. *1871 Census of England and Wales.*

¹³⁴ Parry, "'China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 00:59:30.

¹³⁵ Parry, "'China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 01:14:00.

¹³⁶ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', *Merthyr Telegraph and General Advertiser for the Iron Districts of South Wales*, 31 August 1861, pp. 2 -3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3072933/3072935>, Accessed 19 May 2022. Pontstorehouse under heading 'Another Defeat of the Philistines' (p.2) and China under subheading 'Stealing Trousers' (p.3).

¹³⁷ Parry, "'China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 00:26:00.

unfairly attributed to people who lived there. There were crimes committed against residents, illusions that prostitutes had a link to China where no such evidence existed, and crimes being committed in the area by people who were not residents. Although there is a good chance some residents committed crimes outside their home area, there is also a lot of evidence that crimes that took place in China should not automatically be attributed to the population.

Contemporary newspapers reflect public perceptions of China between 1851 and 1871. These perceptions developed China's reputation and show a sense of moral disapproval of the crime taking place in the area. Although they would not use overtly alarmist tactics, they did consistently use negative descriptions and made little reference to anything but crime. These representations of China exaggerate the criminal presence in the area. Although newspapers do not accurately reflect crime figures, their erroneous connections between China, its population and crime show that research into in the area needs to be carefully considered. Based on census records less than half of the crimes reported on were committed by someone who lived in the area. Crime was also more likely to be about stealing than violence. China's notorious reputation has led research into crime in the area but inaccuracies in the forming of said reputation suggests the focus of such studies is over-representative when regarding the population as a whole.

Conclusion

This dissertation has demonstrated that China's criminal reputation only represents its population between 1851 and 1871 to a limited extent. The people of China were poor and lived in dangerous conditions because they had no other option. Although they were represented in newspapers as 'shocking' and 'disreputable',¹³⁸ issues surrounding the accuracy of coverage show they were often stereotyped as criminals. Research into China should not assume everyone there was criminal unless proven otherwise. As with any other place, China was an area of individuals. Many struggled with unstable employment that could have dire consequences for themselves and their children. They lived in significant overcrowding at the beginning of the period and although this improved there was still evidence of large groups living in one or two rooms. They were increasingly Welsh due to migration to the area slowing down coupled with a high birth rate, and they were largely young. Almost half of the population being under 20. A small majority of women lived in the area and there were many occurrences of women supporting themselves or living together. To add to this, many families lived in China, and this only grew as time went on.

Newspapers reflect contemporary perceptions of China being shocking and immoral. There were issues surrounding reports on China such as occurrences of unreported crime but newspapers complicated matters further by referring to the area more regularly than other parts of Merthyr and claiming people lived there when they did not. Constant articles on crime and a lack of anything positive presents China as a dark place worthy of concern and intervention. Despite constant concern, newspapers did not attempt to focus attention to China by placing it in prominent positions and this indicates that the area was not as significant a problem as the rhetoric would suggest. The most frequent crime reported on was stealing and this demonstrates people were opportunistic rather than organised. This added to issues about the accuracy of articles calls into question links between the population of China and criminality which are reiterated to this day. Crimes were committed there but the reputation of a criminal population seems to have been built from contemporary opinions developing at the time

¹³⁸ Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', 14 September 1861, p. 6. Anon, 'Merthyr', 28 January 1871, p. 7.

newspapers were making inaccurate connections between the community and the crime taking place in the area. The emphasis on criminality seems to be exaggerated.

The focus on crime in the historiography surrounding China has reinforced its extravagant criminal reputation. Although historians suggest people did not live in China through choice unless they were professional criminals,¹³⁹ the emphasis on studying crime has implied that professional criminals were a disproportionately high number of the population. References build a picture of organised gangs, but evidence suggests that routine criminals were thieves. In combination with the poor conditions people lived in, this suggests that these people were as desperate as anyone else in China. Historians agree that crime was decreasing by the 1870s,¹⁴⁰ but this study shows that by 1851 to 1871 there is little evidence of elements that make up key parts of China's criminal reputation. One example is reference to Emperors and Empresses. The lack of evidence in this matter is overwhelming. There does not appear to have been a criminal overlord in this way and even Parry's claims that this was a concept only seen in the press is limited in our period because it was referred to in only one article.¹⁴¹ This dissertation challenges the historiography's tendency to lean into the grandiose elements of China's reputation and suggests that much of life in the area was more mundane in its struggle. However, past studies may better represent the lives of people in China before 1851 and in this way this dissertation adds to understanding of how the area changed over time. Parry suggested that the criminal reputation overshadowed the non-criminal population of China. This is true of contemporary reports on China as it can be seen in newspapers' attitudes of linking the area to crime.

China was both more complicated and less exciting between 1851 and 1871 than its reputation would suggest. There is no reason to believe that everyone who lived there had connections to criminal activity and as such its reputation is not wholly representative of the community. People in China were trying to survive on limited means and while this may have led some to crime the evidence does not support implications of a criminal underworld. This study cannot make judgements on the total

¹³⁹ Strange, 'In Search of the Celestial Empire', p. 45. Jones and Bainbridge, 'The Conquering of 'China'', page 7.

¹⁴⁰ Jones and Bainbridge, 'The Conquering of 'China'', p. 13. Jones, 'Crime, Protest and Community in 19th Century Wales', p. 12.

¹⁴¹ Parry, ''China' – Merthyr Tydfil', 00:16:00. Anon, 'Merthyr Police Court', 15 March 1851, p. 3.

level of crime in the area, or the amount of crime committed by residents, but it does suggest that links to crime in China were more strongly reinforced than other areas through the way it was reported in newspapers. This bias should be considered in reference to the population and assumptions that they were all criminals should be questioned. In conclusion, China's reputation only truly represents the people who lived there to a limited extent.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Number and percentage of persons living in a household in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Number in Household	Number of People			Percentage of People		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
1 to 5	157	211	93	33%	68%	53%
6 to 10	191	90	72	40%	29%	41%
11 or above	124	11	11	26%	4%	6%
Total	472	312	176	100%	100%	100%

Data collated from Census of England and Wales 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Appendix 2 – Number and percentage of lodgers, boarders and their families living in a household in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Number in Household	Number of lodgers/boarders/family			Percentage of lodgers/boarders/family		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
1 to 5	27	33	15	15%	60%	79%
6 to 10	57	16	4	32%	29%	21%
11 or above	93	6	0	53%	11%	0%
Total	177	55	19	100%	100%	100%

Data collated from Census of England and Wales 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Appendix 3 – Number and percentage of relationships between members of households in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Relationship	Number of People			Percentage of People		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
Immediate family ¹⁴²	266	246	143	56%	79%	81%
Extended family ¹⁴³	16	5	11	3%	2%	6%
Lodgers/Boarders and their families	177	55	19	38%	18%	11%
Orphans	2	0	0	0%	0%	0%
Servants	6	4	1	1%	1%	1%
Other ¹⁴⁴	5	2	2	1%	1%	1%
Total	472	312	176	100%	100%	100%

Data collated from Census of England and Wales 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Appendix 4 – Number and percentage of gender in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Gender	Number of People			Percentage of People		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
Female	258	177	98	55%	57%	55%
Male	214	135	78	45%	57%	55%
Total	472	312	176	100%	100%	100%

Data collated from Census of England and Wales 1851, 1861 and 1871.

¹⁴² Head of household, wife/husband and children including stepchildren.

¹⁴³ Grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, siblings and their children.

¹⁴⁴ Blank, visitors and 'Mother daughter'.

Appendix 5 – Number and percentage of persons by country of birth in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Country of Birth	Number of People			Percentage of People		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
Wales	258	190	151	55%	61%	86%
England	25	6	2	5%	2%	1%
Ireland	184	98	23	39%	31%	13%
Germany	2	0	0	0.4%	0%	0%
Jersey	1	0	0	0.2%	0%	0%
N/A	2	18	0	0.4%	6%	0%
Total	472	312	176	100%	100%	100%

Data collated from Census of England and Wales 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Appendix 6 – Number and percentage of persons by age in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Age Range	Number of People			Percentage of People		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
0 to 9	99	95	42	21%	30%	24%
10 to 19	101	41	45	21%	13%	26%
20 to 29	96	84	29	20%	27%	16%
30 to 39	87	47	25	18%	15%	14%
40 to 49	44	24	18	9%	8%	10%
50 to 59	18	9	9	4%	3%	5%
60 to 69	20	8	4	4%	3%	2%
70 to 79	7	3	3	1%	1%	2%
80 to 89	0	1	1	0%	0%	1%
Total	472	312	176	100%	100%	100%

Data collated from Census of England and Wales 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Appendix 7 – Number and percentage of persons by employment in China in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Employment	Number of People			Percentage of People		
	1851	1861	1871	1851	1861	1871
Unspecified	240	84	73	51%	27%	41%
Labourer	74	41	29	16%	13%	16%
Sand seller	23	0	7	5%	0%	4%
Puddler	14	9	7	3%	3%	4%
Scholar	11	33	26	2%	11%	15%
Dressmaker/tailor/ seamstress	11	5	3	2%	2%	2%
Miner	14	3	3	3%	1%	2%
Washer woman	7	7	6	1%	2%	3%
Sand pounder	6	8	0	1%	3%	0%
Servant (house and general)	6	8	8	1%	3%	5%
Pauper/pauper coal miner	6	0	0	1%	0%	0%
Charwoman	1	35	1	0%	11%	1%
Wife	0	34	0	0%	11%	0%
Haulier	5	3	1	1%	1%	1%
Other	54	42	12	11%	13%	7%
Total	472	312	176	100%	100%	100%

Data collated from Census of England and Wales 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Appendix 8 – Number of articles published referencing ‘China’ or ‘the cellars’ by newspapers in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Newspaper	1851	1861	1871
Guardian	10	7	6
Telegraph	0	27	18

Data collated from the Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales ('Telegraph') and the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette ('Guardian') in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Appendix 9 – Number of references to ‘China’ or ‘the cellars’ alongside different types of crime in newspapers in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

Type of Crime	1851	1861	1871
Assault	2	1	0
Assault and rape	1	0	0
Assault and stealing/stealing with violence	4	1	0
Assaulting and wounding a police officer	0	0	2
Breaking in	0	0	2
Cruel ill-use	1	0	0
Dangerous driving of sheep	0	1	0
Deserting the army	0	1	0
Drunk and riotous/challenging to fight	0	4	0
Failing to vaccinate children	0	0	1
Harbouring a thief	0	0	2
Keeping a brothel	0	0	2
Permitting thieves and bad characters	1	0	0
Playing pitch and toss in a public thoroughfare	0	0	1
Prostitution	0	0	3
Stabbing/wounding	2	2	8
Stealing	7	26	8

Data collated from the Merthyr Telegraph and General Advisor for the Iron Districts of South Wales (‘Telegraph’) and the Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian Glamorgan Monmouth and Brecon Gazette (‘Guardian’) in 1851, 1861 and 1871.

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