

China as Viewed by Two Early Bengali Travellers: The Travel Accounts of Indumadhav Mullick and Benoy Kumar Sarkar

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The writings of Indian travellers in Republican China have attracted limited attention. This article examines the travel accounts of two Bengali travellers who visited China in the early twentieth century. Indumadhav Mullick may have been the earliest Bengali to write an eyewitness account of China for Bengali readers in India. Mullick's account is noteworthy for its vivid record of the maritime route from the eastern coast of India to China and his descriptions of the southern Chinese port, Xiamen. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, on the other hand, provides detailed observations about the political situation in China and the vibrant intellectual life in Shanghai. Together these two works are important for understanding the interactions between India and China during the colonial period. They are also vital for examining the cultural links between Kolkata and China during the early twentieth century.

INTRODUCTION

Indumadhav Mullick's (1869–1917) Chin Bhramana (Travels in China) and Benoy Kumar Sarkar's (1887–1949) *Bartaman Yuge Chin Samrajya* (The Chinese Empire in the Present Age) are little known and rarely studied travel accounts of Indians who visited China in the early twentieth century. In addition to describing the social and political situations in China at a crucial period of its history, these two works, written in Bengali, offer valuable insights into Indian perceptions of the Chinese people and society during the colonial phase of India–China interaction.

Indumadhav Mullick and Benoy Kumar Sarkar undertook the arduous journey to China for different reasons. While the former intended to visit the country as a tourist, the latter had a keen academic interest in Chinese history and society. Mullick's visit to China was short and limited to the southern coastal region: Hong Kong,

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Macao, Guangdong and Amoy (Xiamen). Sarkar, on the other hand, lived in China for about a year and travelled through Manchuria, Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai and some other areas in the south. Because of the varying interests, aims and the duration of their travels in China, the topics covered in the two accounts differ significantly. Mullick's work is a simple narration of what he witnessed in, and on his way to, China. Its value is more for the fact that the author seems to have been one of the first Bengali tourists to pen an account of his travels in China. Sarkar was more than a mere tourist in China. His work is both a travelogue and a commentary on Sinology. And unlike Mullick, Sarkar continued to write about Chinese history, politics, religion and culture after the completion of his journey. In fact, it may not be an exaggeration, based on his in-depth understanding of Chinese society, to call Benoy Kumar Sarkar one of India's first Sinologists.

Indumadhav Mullick was born on 4 December 1869, in Burdwan, a district of West Bengal. After completing his undergraduate studies in law, Mullick successfully obtained masters degrees in philosophy, physics, botany, biology and physiology. All these he accomplished by the age of thirty. He also studied medicine and received his M.D. from the Calcutta Medical College in 1908. Between 1897 and 1900, he taught philosophy at the Bongobashi College in Kolkata. He even worked as a lawyer and a physician. He visited China in 1904–05 and travelled to England a few years later.¹ Mullick, who died on 8 May 1917 at the age of forty-eight, is best known for inventing a steamer, known in India as the Icmic cooker. The idea for this cooker may have come from observing Chinese food vendors. These Chinese vendors, as Mullick describes in his travel account, cooked and kept the food warm in circular wicker baskets, one on top of another, over a burning pot fuelled by charcoal and hung on the sides of their shoulder poles.

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was born on 26 December 1887 in the Malda district of northern Bengal. He was awarded double honours in English and History from the University of Calcutta. In 1906, he obtained a masters degree and acquired specialised knowledge in various subjects, including art, literature and political science. He was also fluent in French, Italian and German. In 1907, he was appointed Honorary Professor of History and Economics at the Bengal National College and School, which was established in 1906 by a nationalist organisation called National Education Council. It later became the Jadavpur University, one of the premier educational institutions in Kolkata.

In 1914, Sarkar embarked on his travels on a ship from Mumbai. During the next eleven years, he visited several countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas. During his travels, he met important personalities and gave lectures at renowned universities and institutes, such as Columbia and Harvard universities in the United States and the Royal Asiatic Society in England. After returning to India in 1925 and

¹ Account of his travels to England has appeared as *Bilet Bhramana* (Travels in England).

until 1947, Sarkar taught economics, sociology and political philosophy at the University of Calcutta. On 24 November 1949, Sarkar died in the United States at the age of sixty-two.

Sarkar was a scholar par excellence. His books entitled *The Science of History and the Hope of Mankind* and *Introduction to the Science of Education* were published in London in 1912 and 1913 respectively. Some of his other early publications include *Love in Hindu Literature* (1916) and *Hindu Achievements in Exact Science* (1918). On China, he authored three books, one in English (*The Chinese Religion through Hindu Eyes*, which was published in Shanghai in 1916 by the Commercial Press) and two in Bengali: *Cheena Sabhyatar A, AA, KA, KHA* (ABCD of Chinese Civilisation)² and *Bartaman Yuge Chin Samrajya*.³

INDUMADHAV MULICK'S TRAVELS IN CHINA

It takes a little investigative work to figure out when Indumadhav Mullick travelled to China because there is no mention of the year or the month of his journey in the book, which was first published in 1911.⁴ A clue to this comes when Mullick mentions the presence of foreign battleships in Singapore and comments: 'Battleships from various countries have assembled here due to the Russo-Japanese War. When needed they will join the war' (Mullick 2004: 39). Then, as he proceeded to Hong Kong, Mullick overheard some of his co-passengers on the ship discussing the Russo-Japanese War. 'People of all nationalities [on the ship]', he points out, 'supported Japan. Even an old French businessman, I found, was sympathetic toward Japan' (Mullick 2004: 75). In a note attached to this observation, Mullick writes,

The Russo-Japanese War ended by the time I completed this book. Due to the earnest efforts of the US President Roosevelt, the two countries have signed a [peace] treaty. The notoriety earned by Japan [because of the victory] is known to all. It is not my intention to deal with this topic in the present work. (Mullick 2004: 76)

It can be deduced from these passages that Mullick's journey took place between February 1904, when the war began, and September 1905, when the Treaty of

² Progressive Publishers published a new edition of this work in 2005. This edition includes an introduction by Jahar Sen.

³ For studies on Sarkar's life and his social and political thought, see Dass et al. (1939), Frykenberg (2001) and Ghoshal (1939).

⁴ The original date of publication does not appear in the new edition of Mullick's book. The date given here is based on a copy of the work available at the British Library in London. I am thankful to Jayani Bonnerjee for locating this information.

Portsmouth, which he is referring to, was signed by the two warring countries.⁵ We can further narrow the time of his departure from Kolkata to sometime between November 1904 and February 1905 based on his descriptions of the 'hazardous' China Sea. Mullick writes, 'Whatever may be the reason, cyclones occur throughout the year in the China Sea. But this time in the year, i.e., from November to February, it is extremely frightful' (Mullick 2004: 52).

Mullick set out from Kolkata on a British ship which first took him to Rangoon (now Yangon) in Burma (now Myanmar). It was in this city, it seems, that he first encountered people from China. He reports,

Rangoon is inhabited by many Chinamen. They are all engaged in business. The whole area west of the China Lane is a settlement of the Chinaman. Many of them have married local women. As a result, there are number of mixed people with Chinese and Burmese blood. (Mullick 2004: 11)

Upon reaching Penang in Malaya and again encountering local Chinese settlers, Mullick observes,

It can be said that the country of Chinaman starts from Malaya. In Rangoon, one-third of the population are Chinamen. Here, eighty per cent of the people are Chinamen. Almost every businessman is a Chinese; coolies, porters, labourers are all mostly Chinese.... Chinese are a peculiar people. In terms of [physical] features, customs, rituals, habits, behaviour and language—in every respect—they are very different from us. (Mullick 2004: 28)

Mullick's descriptions of the Chinese settled in Southeast Asia continue as his ship anchored at Swettenham (i.e., Port Kelang in Malaysia) for about six hours. 'Here, too', he writes, 'a majority of the people are Chinese. They are the shopkeepers. The opium-smoking shops [belonging to the local Chinese] are next to their hair-dressing stores. And next to these are gamblers' dens' (Mullick 2004: 38). In Singapore, Mullick was impressed by the skills of the local Chinese coolies. He writes, 'The Chinese coolies are very skilful, they work silently. Dropping or breaking of luggage is rare I learnt from the ship officials that one Chinese coolie does the work of four Indian coolies' (Mullick 2004: 43). Praising these industrious Chinese coolies, Mullick (2004: 44) says,

It is amazing when one notices their food intake and the amount of labour they perform everyday. It is difficult to understand how they remain healthy, nourished and strong by consuming only three cups of rice and vegetables and very little of

⁵ The Russo-Japanese war began on 10 February 1904 and ended with the Treaty of Portsmouth signed on 5 September 1905.

meat or fish in their daily meals...[Perhaps] they stay healthy because of the small servings, physical labour and mental happiness. All the signs of good digestive system can be seen in them.

Mullick also reports, somewhat exaggeratedly, that the Chinese coolies 'did not move their bowels everyday; they do it every third or fourth day as necessity arises...and they don't spare much time for this purpose' (Mullick 2004: 44).

Mullick notes that the Chinese coolies usually wear loose pyjamas and coats. Others, according to him, work without upper garments. 'The Chinese', he observes, 'are fond of blue colour. Their dress is blue, sampans are all blue-coloured, the houses are painted blue, and either the base or the characters on signboards are painted in blue' (Mullick 2004: 44). In spite of their good physique, according to Mullick, heart disease was rampant among the Chinese labourers because of the intense toil. Mullick also notes that:

While eating they never drink water, and never take sherbet nor cold water. When necessary, they drink green tea in small cups without adding sugar or milk. Since all their needs are supplied by vendors hawking nearby, they don't have to think about anything else other than their work. (Mullick 2004: 45)

Mullick also describes the high-handedness of Indian Sikhs in Singapore who were employed as police officers or guards. 'As if,' Mullick comments, 'without them the British government is unable to maintain peace' (2004: 47). 'Well-selected giant-like Sikhs have been brought here', explains Mullick, 'I find most of them are over six-feet tall. They stand in the middle of streets to maintain peace. Dwarf-sized Malayan police stand around and obey their orders' (ibid.). Mullick continues,

The people here are terribly afraid of the Sikh guards who instantly punish the culprits. Cursing, punching, slapping, beating by sticks and torture by pulling the pigtailed of the Chinese are common occurrences. Heavy punishments for light crimes are frequent. A mere yell by the Sikh guards make the [local] people tremble with fear. (ibid.)

Mullick reached Hong Kong seven days after he left Singapore. He found that there were no jetties for passengers disembarking from ships at this port. Instead, passengers had to take boats to go to the shore. Mullick writes, 'As soon as a ship anchors, hundreds of boats quickly surround the ship in the hope for ferrying passengers' (2004: 71). What surprised Mullick most was that Chinese women operated many of these boats. Struck by this stunning scene, Mullick writes,

The women steer and punt the boats. I've never seen such a scene, nor heard about it. The fact that they are content living day and night on the boats is evident

from the expressions of happiness on their faces and in their actions and behaviour. The reflection of their blue-and-white dress [on the water] looks like a scenic picture. In the early mornings, sunrays falling on their faces make them appear like clusters of fully bloomed lotuses on the transparent water of a lake. (Mullick 2004: 71)

Mullick continues, 'When I was in Hong Kong, my mornings began by witnessing this beautiful scene through the small window of the ship.' The 'boat people' in Hong Kong, according to Mullick, lived on the boats with their families for generations. Pointing out that 'Such boathouses are innumerable in China,' Mullick writes, 'In Hong Kong itself, out of its population of four hundred thousand, over twenty thousand people live on the water. There are many similar people in Canton as well' (Mullick 2004: 72).

During his stay in Hong Kong, Mullick had opportunity to visit some of the local aristocratic families. He describes, for example, a visit to the house of a Chinese acquaintance with whom he had cultivated friendship on the deck of his ship. 'No one was surprised', writes Mullick, when he and his friend arrived at the house without prior notice. 'Men and women present [in the living room] got up from their seats and greeted us with smiles', he notes (2004: 104-05). He then describes in detail the practice of opium smoking that he witnessed at the house:

It is now time for them (i.e., the members of the household) to smoke opium. There is a cot covered with a bamboo mat in one corner of the room. On this mat is a lamp with a smokestack that sits on a big tortoise-shell saucer. Homemade, and not kerosene, oil is used to light the lamp. A few porcelain marionettes are arranged around this lamp. (ibid.)

Next, Mullick reports, the master, lying on the mat with his head placed on a porcelain pillow, smoked opium through a hollow, three-foot long and half-inch thick, bamboo pipe. After the master finished smoking, it was the turn of the lady of the house. 'But her method', he points out, 'is different. She smokes through a brass instrument; the opium she smokes is not very strong; and she does not lie down on the mat....After smoking opium, she started a conversation and exchanged pleasantries' (ibid.).

In Hong Kong, Mullick says he acquired detailed knowledge about ancestral worship, marriages and other social customs of the Chinese. Writing on the Chinese women, Mullick notes, 'In China, the beauty [of a woman] is judged by her feet. The smaller the size of the feet, the greater is her beauty....One is considered the most beautiful if her feet are no bigger than three inches.' He also describes the painful process of footbinding (Mullick 2004: 106).

Mullick's next destination was the present-day coastal town of Xiamen, known to him as Amoy. Pointing out that it took five days to reach the coastal town from Hong Kong, he writes,

The condition of China Sea was so terrible that the ship that normally cruised at fifteen [nautical] miles an hour, could do only two miles. Strong winds from the front and huge waves that collide with the ship reduced its speed.... After five days, as I was nearing Amoy, I felt that I had come to proper Chinese kingdom after leaving the territory under British administration. (Mullick 2004: 111)

From the ship, Mullick observed the hills with terraced fields where grain was cultivated. The water to irrigate these crops, according to him, had to be fetched from the foot of the hills that was about five or six hundred feet downhill. As there was dearth of cultivable land, farmers worked for fourteen to sixteen hours a day for eight months to grow at best two crops a year. But, unlike Hong Kong, he writes, 'the Chinese here are free. The British and other foreigners are their subjects.'

Mullick reports that Xiamen was 'extremely dirty'. The streets, according to him, were less than seven feet wide and filthy because they were rarely cleaned. The row houses were made of bricks. 'There are large pots placed on roadsides for people to relieve themselves. They create foul smell and make it unpleasant to walk. The human refuse is dried and used as manure. Nothing goes wasted in a very expensive land like this' (Mullick 2004: 139). The nearby island of Gulang, on the other hand, was clean and well maintained. It was earmarked for foreign consulates and diplomatic representatives. The island, Mullick remarks, was 'as beautiful as a picture' and notes that:

there are all the essential amenities, gardens for roaming, a race course, a cemetery, a library, hotels and a theatre.... The whole island seems to be like a garden, beautifully arranged and decorated. People from various countries have formed a security association to protect themselves in this foreign land. (Mullick 2004: 114)

He visited several temples in the town and made friends with a 'clean-shaved yellow-robed English-knowing priest'. From this priest Mullick learned about the teachings of Confucianism and Taoism. On Confucian values, Mullick says,

Scholars are highly respected in China. Writing implements such as ink, pen, paper, etc. are all considered divine. Collecting papers and magazines littered on streets and depositing them into special roadside dumpsters are considered pious acts. These pieces of paper are taken to temples and burnt. The ash, considered auspicious, is bought by boatmen and sailors. The Chinese believe that if thrown in the water, the billowy sea would become calm. (Mullick 2004: 138-40)

Mullick was upset by some activities of the Chinese that he witnessed in Xiamen. 'At the port, one evening I witnessed something that I had never seen before', he writes. 'Groups of Chinese prostitutes wearing beautiful costumes came by sampans and boarded the ship. Not pretending to be passengers or on pretext of selling some things, they came in scores to hunt [for customers]. They were allowed to enter the ship without restriction.' Mullick explains that these girls were compelled to engage in prostitution because of the 'sting of hunger' (Mullick 2004: 115–16). Then, in a nearby village, Mullick remembers hearing the howling of a little girl whose feet were being fitted with 'iron shoes'. He also notes the harsh nature of punishments for petty criminals. One day, for example, Mullick witnessed an opium-addict beaten 'mercilessly' by a group of people as a punishment for stealing 'five cents worth of opium' (Mullick 2004: 136). 'Execution', he writes, 'is a common affair. There is no consideration of the gravity of the criminal act. Death penalty is given to repeat criminals who commit three or four crimes, irrespective of the nature of their crimes' (Mullick 2004: 137).

'The common people of China are mostly illiterate', Mullick writes. 'Very few people know English. Those who know little speak in "Pijin" (i.e., Peking) English. Most people do not know how to read or write Chinese. The language is extremely difficult... Though it is spoken differently, the written language is the same throughout China' (Mullick 2004: 122). Mullick writes that he was 'fortunate to have made acquaintance with a Chinese friend' in Xiamen.

Named Sui Jun, he was a man of my own liking. He was a shipping agent of many China-going vessels, rich, always cheerful, a young hospitable man. He spoke 'Pijin English' and was well conversant in English. He had visited many counties, including Kolkata.... He accompanied me to various places in Amoy, explained to me many customs and habits of the Chinese people. Without his help it would not have been possible for me to see anything in a distant place like Amoy. (ibid.)

Mullick was impressed by the handicrafts produced by the local artisans.

The artistry of articles made of wood or stone in Amoy is splendid. The Chinese carve on them different types of lively images with a few strokes of a chisel. I have brought with me three such images at a cost of ten dollars. (Mullick 2004: 140)

He also brought home with him two boxes of artificial flowers. 'Their colour and shape are so beautiful that they do not seem to be artificial' (ibid.). Mullick returned to India by the same route he had taken to Xiamen. But, his work does not include any record of his return journey.

BENOY KUMAR SARKAR'S CHINESE EMPIRE

Published in 1922, Benoy Kumar Sarkar's *The Chinese Empire in the Present Age* is dedicated to the leading Chinese intellectuals Kang Youwei (1858–1927) and Liang Qichao (1873–1929). 'You are', he writes in the dedication, 'the first architects of modern China.' In the Preface, dated 1921, Sarkar notes that five years had passed since he completed the first draft of his book. 'During this time', he continues, 'chaotic situation has prevailed in almost every part of the world. The impact of these developments cannot be included in this book. For that, it is necessary to have a new traveller'. On the nature of his travel account, Sarkar explains, 'In one sense this is just a diary of a traveller, but it also includes material for the study of the science of civilization and human nature.' Indeed, this brilliant book offers significant insights into Chinese society and the vibrant intellectual life of Sinologists in Shanghai during the colonial period.

Sarkar reached China in 1915, after visiting Japan and Korea. He entered China through Port Arthur (present-day Lüshunbou), from where he took a train operated by a Japanese company to the city of Mukden (present-day Shenyang). From Shenyang he boarded another train to Peking that was operated by the Chinese government. The trip to Beijing took about twenty-two hours. 'It seems I have returned to Cairo', Sarkar remarked upon reaching the International Hotel located on the 'Legation Street' in Beijing. This neighbourhood of Beijing, dotted with foreign settlements, was known as 'Legation Area'. Sarkar points out that such neighbourhoods of foreign settlements also existed in other large Chinese cities. 'Generally', he explains, 'these areas are in possession of foreigners and therefore called "concessions"' (Sarkar 1922: 4–5).

Later when he visited the British concession adjoining Hankou, in Central China, Sarkar observes that rickshaws operating within this area could not venture into the neighbourhoods inhabited by the Chinese. Similarly, rickshaws from other parts of the city were not permitted to enter the concession zones. The Chinese, Sarkar remarks, were like 'foreigners in their own land' (Sarkar 1922: 102–3). Seeing many Sikhs working in the Hankou concession area as guards, Sarkar comments that 'Indian guards with red turbans on their heads were also present in the British areas in Peking.' He continues,

The Chinese generally think that the Indians are footmen, gatemen or guards. These Indians often belittle the common Chinese. As a result, the Chinese generally express a feeling of dislike when they come across Indians. In fact, there is anti-Indian feeling [among the Chinese] within the foreign concession areas in China. (Sarkar 1922: 102)

Although he was concerned by the situation within the concession areas in Beijing and other cities in China, Sarkar was clearly impressed by the historical sites in the

country. 'China is a huge fossil', Sarkar says after his visits to the Lama Temple, the Bell and Drum towers, the Temple of Heaven and other Confucian temples in Beijing. 'The medieval era', he writes, 'pervades all over Peking through the overwhelming presence of religious monuments' (Sarkar 1922: 11–12). The Forbidden City, the entry ticket to which cost only 'eight annas', is described in detail in the work. Some rooms, Sarkar says, were used as museums, some as offices and others were rented out as hotels. 'President Yuan Shikai does not live here', he reports, 'But, the families of former Manchu rulers live in a small mansion inside this Forbidden City' (Sarkar 1922: 31).

Other sites that he visited in the city and its vicinity included the Summer Palace, Ming Tombs and the Great Wall. After setting his feet on the 2,500 mile long wall Sarkar muses,

Was it necessary to build such a huge wall? Couldn't they have used the money to build and protect the Wall to construct several strong fortresses? Moreover, couldn't the army be trained and equipped instead? In the long run, this wall was not able to protect the country....The gigantic wall stands today as a sign of gigantic madness. (Sarkar 1922: 48–49)

The most impressive part of Sarkar's travel account is his ability to incorporate information on contemporary Chinese politics, most of which he seems to have gathered from reading a wide variety of contemporary literature and by befriending some elite members of Chinese society. In the chapter on Beijing, which is subtitled 'The Future of China's *Swaraj* (Self-government)', he writes,

A serious political trouble is brewing in China. What I gather by reading the English language newspapers is that there are mainly three political groups. The group supporting the Manchu rulers from the very beginning is against '*swaraj*' or establishment of a Republic....They have floated ideas about the restoration of the throne to the descendants of the Manchu dynasty. (Sarkar 1922: 63)

The second group, he points out, consisted of the followers of Yuan Shikai, who advocated the establishment of a new monarchical regime. According to these supporters of Yuan, Sarkar (1922: 63–64) writes,

The republican form of government cannot survive. Instead, it is essential for the Chinese society to have a monarchical rule for a sustained period. Since the Manchu rulers failed to govern the country, Yuan Shikai, who is unmatched in his wisdom and skills, should succeed to the throne without any reservations.

Sarkar rejects Yuan's statement about disassociating himself with this group as 'trickery'.⁶

The third political group according to Sarkar consisted of the 'pro-self-government extremists', who wanted to eliminate Yuan Shikai even 'at the cost of their own lives'. Many members of this group, Sarkar points out, had been killed on orders from Yuan Shikai and others, like Sun Yat-sen, 'have fled the country and live in exile abroad' (Sarkar 1922: 64).

The foreign powers present in Beijing, Sarkar writes, were only 'adding fuel to the fire'. According to him, they did not care about the outcome of the political turmoil because they had nothing to lose.

Any trouble in the concession areas will give them greater opportunities to oppress China as masters. As a result, the Chinese will lose control of many other parts of the country to foreign powers. Therefore, these foreigners 'hunt with the hounds and run with the hares' (Sarkar 1922: 64–65)

He adds that 'I understand from newspaper reports that the foreign powers are more inclined to a monarchical rule [in China]. It is not clear, however, whether they will be happy if the Manchu rule is restored' (Sarkar 1922: 64–65).

Some of Sarkar's information about the Chinese political situation may have come from his two friends in Beijing, Yan Fu (1854–1921) and Gu Hongming (1857–1928). Sarkar describes them as 'great Chinese personalities'. Sarkar points out that Yan was 'famous for translating English language books into Chinese,' and Gu for translating Chinese works into English'. But, the two scholars belonged to different political camps. While Yan Fu sided with Yuan Shikai and served as a minister in the 'so-called independent government', Gu was a supporter of the Manchu rulers and a devout Confucian, who 'liked neither Yuan nor Sun'. Another difference between the two that reflected their political leanings was, according to Sarkar, 'Yan did not have a pig-tail, but the obedient Manchu supporter Gu still has it' (Sarkar 1922: 71).

Sarkar's own prognosis for the political situation at this early stage of his stay in Beijing is given in the beginning of the first chapter: 'It seems that the Republican

⁶ Sarkar is commenting on the following statement of Yuan Shikai that he cites in the book: 'From the very beginning, I have been under oath to the motherland that I won't allow the re-establishment of monarchical rule in this country. I'll try to make the republican rule a success. I don't want to sit on the emperor's throne and I'm very much embarrassed by those who want to make me the emperor. If I'm put on the throne by force, I'll be compelled to leave the country. I can't destroy the Republic.'

⁷ Among the works Yan translated into Chinese were Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. But when asked by Sarkar which of his translations had 'had special influence in China', Yan Fu replied that it was Thomas Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (Sarkar 1922: 71).

government is going to collapse. Many groups have emerged in China which are trying to [re-]establish monarchy. It seems the present President [of China] will become the emperor' (Sarkar 1922: 10). His prognosis proved true, when, on 12 December 1915, Yuan declared himself the 'Great Emperor' of the 'Empire of China'. Although Sarkar departed Beijing before Yuan's proclamation, he followed the extremely chaotic developments as he travelled across China. He reports, for example, the decision of the governors of Yunnan, Guangdong, Guangxi and other provinces to rebel against Yuan's imperial government. He also notes the criticisms levelled by Chinese intellectuals, such as Liang Qichao, who was then residing in Japan and Kang Youwei, who lived in Shanghai. Then, a few months later, Sarkar writes,

Today (i.e., June 7, 1916), a rumour has spread that President Yuan is dead. He died yesterday at ten in the morning. For the last few days, rumours originating in Peking suggest that Yuan would die in a day or two because he has either consumed poison or has been poisoned. But, now people are saying that Yuan's death was due to natural causes. It was neither a suicide nor assassination. It is up to people to decide which of these versions they want to believe (Sarkar 1922: 418–19).⁸

Reflecting on the rise and fall of Yuan Shikai, Sarkar writes, 'Today, Yuan is no more. In one sense, this is a blessing for the pro-independence propagators because if he had lived, Yuan would have either banished or executed them.... They would now be able to accomplish their goals without any hindrance' (Sarkar 1922: 435). He warns, though, in the concluding paragraph of the book that China's destiny was linked to the war taking place in Europe, which he calls 'European *Kurukshetra*'.⁹ Ending on a pessimistic, albeit remarkably farsighted note, he writes,

I do not see a resolution of China's problems any time soon. Perhaps the war drums in Europe will be silent in a couple of years. But, the effects of the *Kurukshetra* will linger on. After all, that is the *Kurukshetra* of the twentieth century. (Sarkar 1922: 435–36)

Most of Sarkar's time in China was spent living and researching in Shanghai. Before reaching Shanghai he visited a number of towns in central China, including Zhengzhou, Luoyang and Hankou. In both Zhengzhou and Luoyang, Sarkar toured Buddhist temples, such as, the famous White Horse Monastery and the Shaolin Temple. He found, as he passed through various villages on his way to Luoyang, that the people

⁸ Yuan Shikai died on June 6, 1916 from uremia.

⁹ The reference to 'the battlefield of the Kurus' is to the famous battlefield in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. Other writings of Sarkar suggest that he meant to use the term to imply Armageddon, brought about by the First World War.

were mostly Buddhist. Sarkar observes that some of the teachings of Buddhism influenced even those who were not followers of the religion. He cites what his friend Yan Fu had told him in Beijing,

It will not be an exaggeration to say that all Chinese are Buddhists. You can notice the impact of the great Indian sage even among those who are followers of Islam and Confucianism. From the Manchu rulers down to farmers in villages all are Buddhist-minded. (Sarkar 1922: 91)

He visited Hankou, an important industrial and commercial town, to meet an old acquaintance named Mr Wu. This gentleman was an engineer and director of China's 'only' iron and steel factory. The factory, according to Sarkar, had existed for twenty years and employed about 2,500 workers. But, Mr Wu, whom Sarkar had met in Honolulu, informed him that the factory had yet to make profit. It had procured loans from England or Germany, but the Japanese had emerged as the largest investors. As a result, the Japanese influence was perceptible in the management of the factory. 'The Englishmen', Mr Wu informed Sarkar, 'consider the Japanese a formidable competitor in the Yangzi area' (Sarkar 1922: 108–9).

In Hankou, Sarkar also witnessed the innovative system of collecting salt tax and custom duties through foreign agencies. Although the provinces in China were 'virtually independent', Sarkar explains, the itinerant traders were required to pay taxes for inter-provincial commerce. 'The fact that the provinces belonged to one country is yet to be fully realized', Sarkar writes, 'Laws and regulations vary from province to province and revenue collected in provinces do not always reach the government treasury.' For these reasons, Sarkar says, the Chinese government has given the responsibility of collecting taxes from sale of salt and commercial activities within various provinces to foreign agencies, especially to the British who had worked in similar agencies in India (Sarkar 1922: 103).

In Shanghai, Sarkar spent about eight months researching Chinese history, philosophy and culture. In fact, the last quarter of his book is mostly devoted to Sinology, the narration of intellectual life in Shanghai and making a case for Indians to engage in the study of China. He was clearly impressed with the activities of Christian missionaries in China, especially their contribution to Sinology. He visited the Christian Literature Society and found that many of its members had been living in China for decades and had published works that ranged from 'health and hygiene to trade and economics' in China.

One of the persons he met at the Society was its secretary Rev. Timothy Richard (1845–1919). Sarkar points out that Rev. Richard, who had lived in China for forty-five years, had authored two books, *A Mission to Heaven* and *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism*. While the former was the translation of the Chinese fiction *Xiyou ji* (Journey to the West), the latter work was a translation of Asvaghosha's *Awakening of Faith*. In his translation of *Awakening of Faith*, Sarkar writes, Richard advanced the

theory that 'Mahayana thought was neither Buddhist nor Indian. It was, instead, the oriental version of Christianity.' Richard argued that there were no similarities or cohesiveness between the 'Hinayana' ideas preached by Gautama Buddha and the 'Mahayana' teachings propagated by Asvaghosha and Nagarjuna. According to Rev. Richard, 'Mahayana teachings originated in Central Asia six hundred years after the death of Gautama Buddha, that is, when Christianity had entered the region.' Sarkar dismissed the whole argument by stating, 'Needless to say that the Indian pundits will laugh at Richard's arguments' (Sarkar 1922: 132).

Later in his work, Sarkar mentions that Rev. Richard took him to the Saturday Club in the city, which was established to facilitate exchanges between Western and Chinese intellectuals. The Club organised weekly symposiums at leading hotels. The programme usually included lectures by American and British speakers followed by lavish dinners. At one of these symposiums, Sarkar met the famous Chinese diplomat Wu Tingfang (1842–1922). Wu, as Sarkar points out, had served as China's ambassador to the United States, Cuba and Portugal and written a book entitled *America Through the Eyes of an Oriental Diplomat*.¹⁰ 'He can captivate the listeners with his speech skills', writes an impressed Sarkar, 'As an elderly person he is respected by others. He is also a very rich man.' Sarkar recollects that during their first meeting, Wu asked him, 'My boy, do you know about theosophy? I'm thinking of visiting Madras when the war is over.' When Sarkar enquired if the visit to Madras would be a 'pilgrimage', Wu laughed and said, 'Right. These days I'm studying (the concepts of) soul, the world beyond death, rebirth, etc. I've given up eating fish and meat. It's my desire to lead a solitary life on a mountain following the ideals of your Buddha.' Wu also told Sarkar that he had started a movement among the Chinese youth to reform their eating habits by becoming vegetarians. To promote this movement, he opened a restaurant that served only vegetarian food. 'But the customers were limited', the old diplomat told him, 'then one night some miscreants set fire to the restaurant...and that's why I am very disheartened.' Using his personal loss as a metaphor for the political uncertainties in China, Wu remarks, 'After all, in every reform movement in the world the pioneers or the pathfinders experience such maladies' (Sarkar 1922: 176–77).

Sarkar also narrates the research activities of the Royal Asiatic Society in Shanghai, which he considered 'China's only association for intellectuals'. In addition to meeting the president of the Society, Mr. Morrison, who was also the British Consul General and had lived in China for about twenty years, he developed a friendship with the secretary of the Society named Samuel Gu Ling. It was with Samuel that Sarkar visited various Buddhist sites in nearby Hangzhou. Sarkar was eventually elected as a life-member of the Society.

In Shanghai, Sarkar often frequented a place adjacent to the French concession, where, he notes, Christianity had entered almost 250 years ago 'due to the efforts of

¹⁰ The correct title of this work is *America Through the Spectacles of an Oriental Diplomat*.

French Jesuits and Chinese Christians'. 'This place', he writes, 'can now be called a Jesuit neighbourhood because the people here are all Christians.' He found that social welfare activities in the area were conducted under the supervision of the Christian clergymen. Sarkar also notes a special school for orphans, operated by the clergymen, and a printing press located within this area which published books on China written in French (Sarkar 1922: 142–43).

The cosmopolitan nature of the social and intellectual life in Shanghai and their impact on the local Chinese was evident to Sarkar. He points out that the city published a variety of newspapers and magazines in English, French and German languages. He takes note of a monthly journal that dealt with English grammar, literature, spelling, etc. The readers of this journal, according to him, were young Chinese who were interested in learning English. These young Chinese and some of the older intellectuals, Sarkar observes, wanted to propagate Western science and a new education system. Writing about a monthly journal called *Science* that was printed in Shanghai, Sarkar says that most of the articles were originally published in America. These articles were translated with funds donated by Chinese students studying in America. Sarkar comments that:

After the Japanese defeated the Chinese in the war of 1894–95, China has come out of a trance.¹¹ For the past twenty years it has emphasized a modern educational system. In reality, however, progress has only been made in the last ten years. Since the 1911 revolution, this movement has gathered great speed. (Sarkar 1922: 135–36)

An organisation called World Chinese Students Federation in Shanghai supported the young Chinese studying in foreign countries and trained those planning to go abroad. The founder of the Federation was Li Denghui (1873–1947), a graduate of Yale University. Li was also the principal of the Fudan College, which in 1917 became the Fudan University.¹² At this 'prestigious' college, then housed in a hall dedicated to General Li Hongzhang (1823–1901), Sarkar found about 300 students. They received training in English, German and French languages. According to Sarkar, the teachers at the College were all graduates of American universities. Moreover, there was an Englishman who instructed students about the 'Boy Scout' movement; and a German general who imparted military knowledge. Explaining the use of a German military instructor, Li Denghui told Sarkar, 'It is impossible for our national army alone to save the country. If our students cannot become experts on the art of war, then there is no hope for our country' (Sarkar 1922: 137–38).

¹¹ Earlier in the work, Sarkar had noted the Chinese dislike for the Japanese. When travelling from Hankou to Shanghai, Sarkar boarded a steamer operated by a Japanese company. Sarkar notes that his interpreter was upset by Sarkar's choice and pointed out that 'since the last several months the Chinese have launched a movement boycotting Japanese-made goods' (Sarkar 1922: 115).

¹² Li became the first President of Fudan University.

Sarkar also details the knowledge about, and interest in India, among the Chinese intellectuals residing in Shanghai. He writes, for example, about his discussions on Indian religions with 'two popular leaders of China'. The first person, whom he describes as an 'old Chinese', did not know any foreign language and lived in a 'beautiful house' in an area with mixed population. He was a high official under the Manchus and was an 'admirer of the monarchical system, yet he did not have the Manchu pig-tail'. His 'deportment, dress, and sense of courtesy, etc. all displayed traditional Chinese values'. Sarkar's conversation with him was through a friend rather than his usual interpreter. The old man, who was a Buddhist, told Sarkar about the popularity of Buddhism in China. He was also aware about the worship of Shiva in India and, noting the meditative postures, pointed out the similarities between the statues of the Buddha and Shiva. The two also discussed in detail the religious ideas prevailing in China before Confucius and those in India before the emergence of Buddhism (Sarkar 1922: 137).

The second 'popular leader' with whom Sarkar had in-depth discussions on India was Tang Shaoyi (1859–1938). Tang was a minister in charge of foreign affairs under the Manchus and in 1912 had served as the prime minister of Republican China. Tang, according to Sarkar, was an 'out-and-out modern man'. His 'house, furniture, drawing room, dress were all modern', Sarkar writes. After Younghusband's expedition to Tibet in 1903–04 created tension between British India and the Manchu government, Tang, in 1904, was sent to Kolkata to negotiate the Tibet problem with Lord Curzon. Sarkar points out that Tang stayed in India for eight months and took the opportunity to visit several other cities and towns. 'He intended to pay a second visit to India. But it hasn't materialized', notes Sarkar.

Tang eventually joined the anti-Manchu revolution and, according to Sarkar, was 'an extremist among the revolutionaries'. But, after the overthrow of the Manchus, Tang had a falling out with Yuan Shikai because of the latter's 'bullying behaviour'. Despite his disagreements with Yuan, Sarkar points out, Tang 'did not flee the country like General Huang Xing (1874–1916) and Sun Yat-sen. Now, he is no longer associated with political movements and remains busy with his own work.' In the course of conversation with Sarkar, Tang praised the 'excellence of the glorious mind of the Asians'. He told Sarkar that while 'it is true that America and Europe have developed in respect to the material world, there had been moral degradation among their people. It is the duty of Asians to preserve their glorious [culture]'. He also pointed out many similarities he saw between southern China and Bengal. The huts in Bengal, for example, reminded him of southern China. He also found Bengali children playing tipcart games similar to the games that Chinese children play. Tang revealed that he was a fan of Sourindro Mohun Tagore (1840–1914).¹³ Tang told Sarkar that he had

¹³ Sourindro Mohun Tagore wrote a number of books on classical Indian music and the history of music, including *Hindu Music from Various Authors* and *Universal History of Music*. He also authored a book entitled *The Caste System of the Hindus*.

met Sourindro Mohun when he was in Kolkata and showed him some of the Indian author's books he possessed (Sarkar 1922: 148–49).

Impressed with the knowledge of India among Chinese intellectuals, Sarkar immersed himself in the study of China. His book includes a list, along with brief summaries, of some of the important books on China written by European and American Sinologists. More importantly, he published a number of articles on Chinese religion and culture and some on the interactions between India and China in local newspapers and magazines. The collection of his essays, *Chinese Religion Through Hindu Eyes: A Study in the Tendencies of Asiatic Mentality*,¹⁴ with a foreword by Wu Tingfang, drew the attention of Chinese and foreign intellectuals. Gilbert Reid, the director of the International Institute of China, invited Sarkar to deliver lectures, some of which were chaired by Wu Tingfang and Tang Shaoyi. He also received invitations from Li Denghui of the Fudan College and from the principal of the Qinghua College in Beijing. These invitations seem to indicate that Sarkar was acknowledged as one of the leading Sinologists in Shanghai.

Sarkar observes that:

So far no Western pundit has endeavoured to compare China and India. They do not understand what I have to say [about the comparisons between India and China]. The Chinese, too, don't understand as they have never been to India. The Chinese, like we Indians, consider their country unique. (Sarkar 1922: 222)

Sarkar suggests that Indians working on various disciplines, such as natural sciences, humanities and the arts, should look into Chinese material for comparative studies. Indians, he says, will also find many points of comparison in the performing arts and religious traditions of the two countries (Sarkar 1922: 265–66).

Stressing the importance of Chinese studies, he regrets that not much work had been done on China by Indian scholars. He points out that only two Bengalis had written about China. The writings of Ramlal Sarkar, according to him, were the main sources of information about China for Bengalis. 'In his writings', Sarkar says, 'we receive descriptions about present-day China and also, occasionally, references to medieval China.' Sarkar also mentions Indumadhav Mullick's travelogue, which he notes has been read by many Bengalis. 'It may have been', he writes, 'the second book on China written in Bengali. It is doubtful that anyone else in other parts of India has written about China' (Sarkar 1922: 276–77).¹⁵ Sarkar points out that in India,

¹⁴ Sarkar finds the existence of "Buddha-brand" Hindu civilization' in China. According to Sarkar's own explanation, by the term 'Hindu' he means 'race and not the religion'.

¹⁵ Sarkar was certainly wrong about this. Thakur Gadhadhar Singh, for example, had already penned a work entitled *Chin meh Terah Mas* (Thirteen Months in China) that was published in 1902. For a detailed examination of this work, see Yang (2006). It seems Sarkar was also unaware of Satyendranath Datta's (1882–1922) work, in Bengali, on Chinese philosophers called *Chiner Dhup* (Chinese Incense) that was published in 1912.

scholars who worked on Tibet were considered Sinologists. In this context he mentions the names of Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917), most famous for his Tibetan–English dictionary and the work *Indian Pandits in the Land of Snow*, and Sarish Chandra Vidyabhusan (1870–1920). He agrees that at least Vidyabhusan's *Srida-pa-ho: Srid-pa-ho—A Tibeto-Chinese Tortoise Chart of Divination*, published by the Asiatic Society in 1913, could be 'included under Sinological studies' (Sarkar 1922: 280).

There were other Indian scholars who were interested in the study of China, including, Sarkar notes, the famous linguist Harinath De (1877–1911). De however died, Sarkar writes, 'before he could demonstrate his mastery over Chinese studies. I've heard that he promised to translate a Chinese book into English. He could have popularized Sinological studies in India.' Sarkar also mentions Mr. Kaliprasad Jaiswal, a barrister and archaeologist from Bankipur in Bihar, who knew some Chinese language, 'but how far his knowledge goes is not known' (Sarkar 1922: 277).

According to Sarkar, the reports on China appearing in contemporary Indian newspapers published in English or other provincial languages were 'mostly superficial'. 'We can no longer depend on these hints, conjectures, guesses, beckoning, etc. It is essential for us to penetrate China. It is also necessary that Indian scholars must try to master the Chinese language.' To accomplish this, Sarkar suggests, Indian scholars should spend at least five years studying Chinese 'in either Nanking (Nanjing) or Peking'. Sarkar is adamant about the five-year commitment that he suggests is required to master the Chinese language, 'One should not shudder at the duration of five years', he writes, 'In fact, five years is the minimum requirement. After five years, one might gain understanding of Chinese literary works, which should be followed by life-long research and deliberations.' Sarkar points out that Indian scholars interested in studying Chinese need only fifty rupees for their stay in Nanjing or Beijing (Sarkar 1922: 285).

CONCLUSION

The works of Indumadhav Mullick and Benoy Kumar Sarkar outlined in this article are important sources for the study of India–China interactions during the colonial period. Usually, studies on this phase of bilateral interactions focus on the opium trade, Indian participation in the British occupation of China or the visit of Rabindranath Tagore (see, for example, Thampi 2005a, 2005b). Recent studies by Madhavi Thampi have demonstrated the presence of large numbers of Indian traders in China. The works of Mullick and Sarkar (and Ramnath Biswas, whose travelogue is discussed in a separate article in this volume) supplement her work by underscoring the fact that the interactions between India and China during the colonial period were more vigorous than previously acknowledged. While this article focused on the writings of Bengali travellers, it is worth probing if similar works also exist in other regional languages of

India. These writings offer Indian perceptions of the Chinese not found in the statistical data on the trading activity between the two countries or even the lectures of Rabindranath Tagore. Indeed, in order to understand the intricacies of India–China relations during the colonial period, it is imperative to study the writings of ordinary Indians who visited China because of individual aspirations and approached the Chinese society from their unique viewpoint.

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