

"You go to Hong Kong for me": The colonial city in British imaginations

Abstract:

This talk discusses the significance of Hong Kong to British culture at home during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This talk has two main arguments. First, studying the presence of Hong Kong in British culture allows historians to understand how smaller colonies were made to matter to the metropole. New studies of imperialism have asserted that empire was part of everyday life in Britain, however, the majority of these studies examine only “blockbuster” colonies such as India, Australia, Canada, or Africa as a whole. This focus, while understandable, ignores the fluidity with which the Empire was discussed and paraded about. Hong Kong was, in many ways, an intersection of various conversations and representations of the British Empire. My second argument pertains to the means and methods of these representations. The colony was perpetually reduced to its climate and environment as an indicator of its perceived character, both positive and negative, revealing the paradoxical ways in which environments are inscribed with convenient assumptions.

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