



## “Possessions of Empire: The Construction of Imperial Identities in Britain and China”

**Olivia Holder**

Adviser: Michelle King

In the eighteenth century, both the British and Chinese Empires boasted imperial might through the possession of built environments that depicted the cultural other. While the artistic creations of both realms asserted the global reach of each empire, they demonstrated two different approaches to possession. This paper argues that the British owned through understanding and the Chinese possessed through assimilation. The British sought to project a mastery of Chinese culture through defining the Chinese aesthetic and cataloging China within the annals of British knowledge as seen in *The Chinese Bedroom at The Badminton House* and *The Chinese Pagoda at Kew Gardens*. China, on the other hand, was less concerned with forming an understanding of Europe but rather sought to assimilate representations of the West within China’s universal empire, placing Europe within the Empire’s China-centric global hierarchy as demonstrated in the *Western Palaces of Yuanming Yuan*. Again, in the nineteenth century, the material possessions of empire were used as proxies in a contest of imperial identities as Britain and China fought for their differing conceptions of the world order. Even in the twenty-first century, past the dusk of the imperial age, the continuing battle over the possessions of empire marks the lasting significance of the two powers’ imperial identities.