A Brief History of the Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoides*) under Domestication in the West.

The African and the Chinese Goose.

By Jonathan M. Thompson

© 2007 / With additions 2010 & 2016

*Anser cygnoides*

African Goose

Chinese Goose
PART I.

‘Let us grasp the situation; solve the complicated plot; quiet, calm deliberation disentangles every knot.’

W.S. Gilbert.

The Rev. E.S. Dixon was well aware of the tangle of information regarding domesticated Asiatic Geese when he wrote in 1848: “Confusion, therefore, and perplexity are the certain lot of whosoever attempts to trace this bird in our books of natural history.”\(^5\) How true; and ensuing writers on poultry helped to confuse the situation even further.

However, to start at the very beginning, it has been recently been established that the wild **Swan Goose** (*Anser cygnoides*) existed some 360,000 years ago.\(^{18}\) Time enough has elapsed for distinct, fixed types to become established and, in China today, there are now some twenty-six distinct domesticated ‘forms’ of the **Swan Goose**.

The earliest European account (the writer has found) is by Friar Odoric of Pordenone when, on returning to Europe from his travels through Asia (1316 to 1330), he recounts his experiences in a journal written in Latin.\(^{20}\) Although Odoric gives them no specific name, he describes seeing in the city of *Censcalan* (Canton, modern Guangzhou, China) large white geese having both a knob above the beak and a large dewlap on the throat. An early translator of the text interjects “[He meaneth Pellicans, which the Spaniards cal Alcatrarzi.]”, suggesting that, at that time, such birds as Odoric describes were unknown to Western culture. Since time immemorial, Indian and Arab traders have plied the South China Sea trading with the ports of Canton, Zaiton (Zaitun or Zayton, = Ts'ienen-chau or Chincheu, the present-day Quanzhou), Xiamen (modern Amoy) and Foochow (or Fu-chau). European sea-trading with China was underway by 1516; the Qing Dynastic Government at first allowed trade only through the port of Canton - where Odoric saw the white geese. The port of Amoy, a little further to the East, was opened to Europeans in 1541; Britain establishing practically a monopoly over the trade. America was allowed to join the trade in 1783 (after it became independent from Britain), the appropriately named *Empress of China* reaching China in 1784.
Along with other artists, Nicolas Robert (1614-1685), French painter and engraver was engaged in 1631 by Gaston d'Orléons (1608-1660), the younger brother of Louis XIII of France, to paint the collection of plants, animals and birds kept at Blois.

After the death of d'Orléons, Robert became miniaturist to Louis XIV (1638-1715), and was commissioned to paint Louis' collection at Versailles, where, between 1664 and 1674, he produced a folio of some two hundred remarkably fine and detailed ornithological paintings on vellum; which includes a study of a bird resembling a domesticated Swan Goose (Fig. 1.). It is captioned: "Anser ferus Sphaerorychus / Oie sauvage" = Wild Knob-billed Goose / Wild Goose.

Fig. 1. Attributed to Nicloas Robert (1614-1685) (Museum nationale d'Histoire naturelle, Paris.)
Later, long after Robert's death, the position was filled by Claude Aubriet (1665-1742), who held the post from 1707 to 1735.

It is clear Aubriet did not have the finesse of his predecessor. His painting (Fig. 2.), is captioned :- "Anser capite tuberoso / Oye d'Angleterre" = Knob-headed Goose / English Goose.

In comparison, it is a representation of a bulkier, erect bird shown in the engraving in Fig. 5. Whether Aubriet's painting was drawn from life, or copied from Albin is not known; and why the painting is titled as it is, allows speculation that the bird was thought to be found or originated in England.

In a folio of other paintings made for Louis XIV and Louis XV by Aubriet, is found another image (Fig. 3.), again captioned :- "Anser capite tuberoso / Oye d'Angleterre" = Knob-headed Goose / English Goose.

The figure is curiously drawn and exhibits a dewlap under its chin, as in Albin's print (Fig. 4.) of the male "Moscovian Gander".

Fig. 2. Attributed to Claude Aubriet (1665-1742)
(Museum nationale d'Histoire naturelle, Paris.)

Fig. 3. Attributed to Claude Aubriet (1665-1742)
(Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.)
In England, in 1676, Francis Willughby describes a bird that is recognisable as the Chinese Goose;¹⁹ and John Ray’s translation of 1678 states: “The SWAN GOOSE, Anser Guineus: notable for her lifted neck, girdled breast, crested head, and knobbed forehead. This was brought over from abroad, but is now grown common enough among us; as the Turkey and Peacock also were, which we reckon among our Domestics.” In the main text of the work “The Swan Goose” is retained, but the specific name is given as: “Anser cygnoides Hispanicus seu Guineensis.” = “Swan-like Goose of Spain or Guinea [Africa].” (Trans. JMT.). No-where in the description is there mention of a dewlap on the throat.¹⁶ These authors had some images re-engraved more to their taste and true likeness, and the image (Tab. LXXI.) titled “Anser cygnoides, The Swan-goose” is in fact a Canada Goose (Anser Canadensis. Will.), and is explained as such in the preface by John Ray.

Ray (1713), gives precedent to:-

“ANSER Cygneus Guineensis, nonnullis Anser Hispanicus. The SWAN-GOOSE.” = ‘Swan Goose of Guinea, known to some as Spanish Goose. . .’¹⁷ (Trans. JMT.).

It is uncertain which species the Comte Marsili describes in 1726, for although he gives “Anser Hispanicus seu Cygnoides” and the text follows Willughby, the accompanying figure resembles a form of Whistling Duck (Dendrocygna).¹⁴

Fig. 3.

In works published in England in 1731 and 1734, Eleazar Albin describes two distinct forms of ‘knobbled’ geese.¹ That the Anser cygnoides of both Willughby and Albin are one and the same species is certain. The descriptions, sixty years apart, are almost identical and Albin provides hand-coloured illustrations to endorse his text. Albin describes a bird under the title: “The Spanish Goose, or Swan Goose. Anser cygnoides” and illustrates a bird resembling the modern Chinese Goose, captioned “Anser Hispanus Oye Espagnol The Spanish Goose”
His description and illustrations for his “Moscovian Gander and Goose” (Figs. 4 & 5) appear to modern eyes as large cross-bred birds of possible African-type descent, complete with knob and dewlap – in the gander at least. Albin does not give, nor presumes to coin a Latin classification for this bird; possibly because it was something new to Western culture and unknown to the academics of the day, for he tells us: “These fine birds I had of a Moscovian Merchant, who sent for them to that Country with a Design to propagate them here, which he did and sold them at a great price.”

Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.

Albin’s ‘Moscovian Gander and Goose.” Photo-copy courtesy of Joseph Locke.

In 1746 Linnaeus (Carl von Linné) cites Ray and Willughby, and describes a single species as “ANAS rostro semicylindrico, basi gibbo”, giving the common names in Sweden as ‘Turkish Goose’ and ‘Siberian Goose’; stating its plumage colour varies and that it is ‘a large, loud and raucous domesticated goose, brought in from abroad.’¹² (trans. JMT).
Jacob Klein, of Lubec, writes of two forms in 1750. For his “ANSER HISPANICVS, an potious Guineensis” he gives the common name of ‘Spanish Goose’ and cites the ‘Swan-Goose’ of Willughby and Albin, naming Marsili as another source. Klein then coins a name new to the series – “ANSER RVSSICVS,” giving it the common names of ‘Russian’ and ‘Siberian Goose’, citing Albin’s ‘Moscovian’ geese, and adding he had seen “a variety of the Siberian goose, its throat larger, its bill and legs black, with a black depressed tubercle.”

By 1756 Dr. Patrick Browne lists the “China Goose” as established in Jamaica and states it has a different voice from common geese. From the 1650’s Sea trade between Jamaica and the western world, as well as the American mainland was prolific; therefore, it is probable, but not provable, these geese also made their way to the Americas around, or before, the 1750’s.

Linnaeus’ work of 1758, which has been taken by most scholars to be the definitive classification of known species (Brisson’s classification is now regarded by many to be the better format), gives two forms. The first is as given in 1746, with the added heading title of “Cygnoid. 2. australis.” The second type is given as – “Cygnoid. orientalis. β. Anser, rostro semicylindrico atro basi gibbo, minor.” – having a black (?) beak, smaller. Linnaeus cites “Anser Chinensis. It. Wgot. 145 of 1746, referring to this and Albin’s Moscovian Gander and Goose, saying “Varietas orientalis β, ab australi a, parum differ; imprimis quod illa minor.” = ‘There is little specific difference between the two varieties; especially the one (former?) is smaller.’ (Trans. JMT).

The names “Die Chinesische Gans oder Trompeter, Anser Chinesiensis, Oye de Chine” are given by Johann Frisch in his work published in parts, in Germany, between 1734 and 1763. The illustrations, Tab. 153(Fig. 6.) & Tab. 154, the first presenting a full page engraving of a bird which appears intermediate between the modern African and Chinese; the second is a head study with detail of the dentition of the beak. Frisch’s illustrations are superior to other works of this period – excepting Albin - in presenting the birds in a more natural style and setting.
Fig. 6
The Age of Enlightenment saw many scholars reaching for their quills in the race to document all known facts (and fictions) of Life. In France, Mathurin Brisson published descriptions of two types of knobbed geese in 1760. The first he names “L’Oye de Moscovie – Anser Moscoviticus,” and it is described from Albin’s ‘Moscovian’ geese, Klein’s ‘Russian’ geese and (surprisingly and, perhaps, perpetuating the confusion) Linnaeus’ second, smaller species, “Cygnoïd. orientalis. β. .. minor”, which is out of context beside the other descriptions cited; but the overall description relates to the larger, or ‘African’ type. The second description is derived from birds he saw in the collection of Louis XV (Madame de Pompadour assembled a vast collection of plants, animals and birds in the park at Versailles) and from earlier writers. He gives: – “L’Oye de Guineé . . . Anser Guineensis,” stating it to be smaller than the preceding species and, therefore, it may be taken to describe the precursor of the modern Chinese Goose. Although the text indicates the only live specimen seen by Brisson was his ‘Guinea Goose’, he comments that Albin’s illustrations of both species are badly coloured - “avec des figures mal coloriées,”; where-as to modern eyes, as stated above, Albin’s “Spanish, or Swan Goose” is representative of what is now known by the name ‘Chinese Goose’. Therefore, it is questionable as precisely which type and colour of birds Brisson saw at Versailles, and how he could legitimately comment on Albin’s illustrations without sight of the living, or dead, ‘Moscovian’ type.

In 1739 Georges Louis Leclercq, Le Comte de Buffon, was appointed Intendant du Jardin des Plantes du Roi (Head of the Royal Botanic Gardens) to Louis XV, some forty years prior to the publication of his volumes on the natural history of birds as part of his great collective work (One can but suggest a possible rivalry between Brisson and Buffon. Mme de Pompadour bequeathed her pet dog, parrot and monkey to Buffon). He was aided by all the specialists of his time; the greater part of the Histoire naturelle des Oiseaux was compiled by Philibert de Montbeillard & the Abbé Bexon. Whoever is responsible for the volumes on waterfowl, having swept everything into their net, amalgamates all earlier writers’ descriptions of the two forms of Swan Goose into a single species – L’Oie de Guineé, stating that both Linnaeus and Brisson were mistaken in giving two descriptions for what are, according to this author, one and the same creature.
The statement becomes even more curious on viewing the illustrations of Buffon’s ‘Guinea Goose,’ given as they are, in two forms. Buffon engaged Françoise Martinet (artist and engraver) to produce the lavish folio containing 1,008 hand-coloured plates, of which 973 are birds, known as the *Planches Enlumineés*. This was published in cahiers (parts or folders), appearing in 1765 to 1783/6 (authorities differ on the dates), and does not follow the classification or format of the text.

The hand-coloured representation of *L’Oie de Guineé* (Fig. 7.) is poor (in the writer’s opinion it is cartoon-ish) when compared with the other subjects, but
it is recognisable as a form of the **Swan Goose**; slight in frame and sporting a large wattle or dewlap under its black beak. The volume of text describing the bird was published in 1783 and is interspersed with heavier, un-coloured engravings, after the artist Jacques de Sere (Fig. 8). The de Sere illustration presents a more life-like image of a large, bulky bird after the form of the modern **African Goose**.¹¹ Buffon and/or his collaborators refused to acknowledge the marked differences between the two forms, believing them to be due more to the sex and/or age.

![Figure 8](image_url)
Captain Cook’s assistant surgeon, William Ellis, notes in his narrative of 1782, that while at Hawaii “the natives brought off several geese, which were quite tame; they are not unlike the Chinese geese; they called them Na-Na.” Ellis likens his “Chinese geese” to the Hawaiian Goose or Né Né (Branta Sandvicensis). Precisely where Ellis had observed his Chinese Geese to be able to make his association is not known; he was, most probably, aware of the smaller, lighter breed as being common in Britain in his time.

John Latham, in 1785, basically repeats Willughby from over one hundred years before; attributing his description to Brisson, he adds his own observations to his text, initially presenting two separate forms, but finally suggesting the differing descriptions are of the same, but variable subject, stating:

Such are the descriptions of Brisson, supposing the above birds to be distinct; but later observations inform us, they all belong to one species, the characteristic marks of which are the knob over the bill, and the loose skin under the chin. We are inclined also to think, that the bird often varies, with the bill, knob, and legs, black; as the major part which have come under our inspection have been of that colour.

In American, President George Washington gives the first mention of “Chinese Geese” on the American mainland in a letter when, in 1788, (America could openly trade with China from 1783) Gouveneur Morris sent him two Chinese pigs and with them “a pair of Chinese geese, which are really the foolishest geese I ever beheld: for they choose all times for setting but in the spring, and one of them is even now [November] actually engaged in that business.”

It has been shown that two forms of the Swan Goose became known in Europe from around 1734, and a form was common-place in England before 1676; the beak and feet of the birds being variously orange, red or black in colour; an occurrence found in the birds to the present day.

For the Americans, at least, their goose had landed; and it bore the title of ‘Chinese Goose’, a name retained for the lighter, slighter form of the domesticated Swan Goose. Such are the confusions in 19th century poultry literature, in Europe there was to be a further hundred years of confused evidence before the two forms are accepted, and yet another eighty years before both forms appear in the British Standards.
Bibliography to Part 1.

1  ALBIN, Eleazar [1713 – 1759]
   A NATURAL HISTORY OF BIRDS

2  BRISSON, Mathurin Jacques [1723 – 1806]
   ORNITHOLOGIA, ou methode...
   Paris, 1760.
   Revised edition, Lugduni Batavorum, 1763.

3  BROWNE, Patrick [1720?-1790]
   THE CIVIL & NATURAL HISTORY OF JAMAICA

4  DAUBENTON, Edme Louis [1732 – 1785]
   (Daubenton, Louis-Jean Marie & Martinet, Francois Nicolas)
   PLANCHES ENLUMINÉES [1008 plts.]
   Paris: s.n., 1765 – 1783?.

5  DIXON, Rev. Edmund Saul [1809 – 1893]
   ORNAMENTAL AND DOMESTIC POULTRY

6  ELLIS, William, Asst. Surgeon, R.N. [d. 1785]
   AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE OF A VOYAGE PERFORMED BY CPT. COOK/CLARKE

7  FRISCH, Johann Leonhard [1666 – 1743]
   DIE VORSTELLUNG DER VOGEL DEUTSCHLANDS
   Berlin, 1734-1763.

8  HAWORTH, Paul Leland [1876 – 1936]
   GEORGE WASHINGTON : FARMER

9  KLEIN, Jacob Theodor [1685 – 1759]
   HISTORIÆ AVIUM PRODROMUS....
   Lubecæ, 1750.

10 LATHAM, John [1740 – 1837]
    A GENERAL SYNOPSIS OF BIRDS

11 LECLERC, George Louis; Count de Buffon [1707 – 1788]
    with P.Guénéau de Monteillard & G.L.C.A.Bexon
    HISTOIRE NATURELLE DES OISEAUX
    De l’imprimerie royale, Paris, [1770] 1771-1786. [Tom. IX., 1783].

12 LINNÆUS, Carolus (Carlo von Linné) [1707 – 1778]
    FAUNA SVECICA SISTENS ANIMALIA SVECLÆ REGNI
    Leiden, 1746

13 SYSTEMA NATURA
   Holmiæ, impenis direct. Laurentii Salvii, 1758
14 MARSILI, A. F., Comte [1658 – 1730]
DANUBIUS PANNONIC-MYICS
Hagae, Comitum & Amsteroodami, 1726.

15 MITFORD, Nancy [1904 – 1973]
MADAME DE POMPADOUR

16 RAY, John, FRS., = main author [1627 – 1705]
THE ORNITHOLOGY OF FRANCIS WILLUGHBY, FRS.

17 SYNOPSIS METHODICA AVIUN & PISCIIUM
London, 1713.

18 SHI, X-W; WANG, J-W; ZENG, F-T; QULX-P
BIOCHEMICAL GENETICS, VOL.44, Nos.5-6, pp. 237-245(9)

19 WILLUGHBY, Francis [1635 – 1672], with RAY, John
ORNITHOLOGII
Royal Society, London, 1676.

20 YULE, Henry Sir, [1820 – 1889]
CATHAY AND THE WAY THITHER
Hakluyt Society, London, 1866.
A Brief History of the Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoides*) under Domestication in the West.

By Jonathan M. Thompson

**PART II.**

![Fig. 1.](image)

“Here’s a state of unity, Swan Geese divisible into three.”

With apologies to W. S. Gilbert

World events have been many and various during the ‘fledging’ of the Asiatic geese in the West. France had gone to War with its neighbours, and itself, suffered a bloody revolution in which Buffon’s son, having devoted himself to a purely hedonistic existence, perished at the guillotine; Buffon did not live to witness this, having died prior to the uprising. From the early 18\(^{th}\) century most European countries engaged in aggression toward each other, more on than off, until 1945. America had severed itself from British rule in 1783, becoming the United States of America and remained, internally, peaceful until the 1860’s.

In England, while the revolution in France was taking its bloody toll, William Smellie published his translation of Buffon’s voluminous collective natural histories. *The Natural History of Birds* appeared in 1793, Smillie giving a faithful translation of Buffon’s text, in listing one form only, and presenting an illustration of the “*Guinea Goose*” almost identical to that after De Sere.\(^{19}\) It is this text which many later authors have ceased upon as giving, in their estimation, the first evidence of the Asiatic geese in Europe; although they may have had
knowledge of, and discounted, the earlier writers.

The dawn of the 19th century saw a plethora of works on poultry, most of which reiterate the words of previous authors.

Thomas Bewick, the renowned wood-cut illustrator adds, to the 2nd edition of Water Birds (1805), a wood-cut illustration and description of a bird (Fig.1.) which could pass for a modern Chinese Goose. Bewick calls it “The Swan Goose. Chinese, Spanish, or Cape Goose.” and cites Linné’s “Anas Cygnoides [sic]” and Buffon’s “L'Oie de Guinée,” using Buffon’s description, saying: “. . a skin, almost bare of feathers, hanging down like a pouch, or wattle, under the throat § . . .” The footnote to this page states: “§The bird from which the above figure was taken, was without this appendage.” This author goes on to say: “Tame Geese of this species, like other kinds, vary much, both in the colour of the bill, legs, and plumage, as well as in size . . . and rarely want the pouch or wattle under the gullet.” 5 This statement indicates Bewick was acquainted with more than one form of the ‘Swan Goose’.

The confusion really starts for poultry literature when, in 1806, William Turton M.D., presents three varieties of “Chinese Goose.” The first describes a bird with a “Bill black,. . gibbous [having a hump],” and bearing a “wart on the chin blackish.” This, the writer suggests, refers to the tubercle on the bill, and describes the Chinese Goose as known today. In the second type the beak is non ‘gibbous’ and the legs are scarlet; and the third has a “Bill pale yellow; cere large, black; hind-head black; chin with a pouch; ” 22 The size of these birds is not given, but it is probable the two latter descriptions are of the abundant cross-bred geese of that time. These three forms re-occur in future writings of the mid 1800’s.

James Smith Barr (1808), a printer by profession, gives a description, compiled from descriptions by Buffon and earlier authors, of one large form and creates a text that is variously repeated by later authors. Following on from the descriptions of the swans, Barr writes of:

The Cygnoides, as following a middle line between the swan and the goose, has been, not improperly, styled the swan-goose. This species is the swan-goose of Ray, from Guinea, and is also often called the Muscovy goose. They are frequent in Britain, and unite so readily with the common goose, that their offspring will produce as certainly as if no such intermixture had taken place. They walk very erect, with the head much elevated; make an extraordinary harsh screaming noise; which they continue almost the whole day through, and without the least provocation or disturbance. 2
John Robinson (1924) presents an image (Fig.2.), which he quotes as circa 1810 (although it had been previously printed in 1805), which he takes to be of a Chinese Goose, although it shows a bulky bird sporting a dewlap. Robinson says: “The earliest description of the Chinese Goose in poultry literature is in the “Treatise on Poultry,” 1910. . . His description is taken from the Natural History of Buffon,” -which is then given. Robinson goes on to say: “The description of the size as coming near to that of the swan will fit the goose now [1924] called the African Goose.”

The Treatise could be, as Robinson suggests, the earliest reference to the “Chinese Goose” in poultry literature, although it describes a bird of the African type. The date is a misprint in giving “1910”. It is a translation of a section by Charles Nicolas Sigisbert Sonnini de Manoncourt, who edited Buffon’s manuscripts from 1798 - 1808, frequently inserting his own observations, and was published anonymously in 1810 and 1819.

Fig. 2.
Sonnini (1815):

The *Guinea* Goose, has been brought up in Sweden, Russia, and Germany: it is much larger than ours—it multiplies in the tamed state; and by crossing with the common goose, produces a mixed race of a very fine appearance. 19

In America, De Witt Clinton (1815) states: “The anas cygnoides orientalis, or Muscovy gander, breeds with the common goose.” 8

These statements indicate forms of the Asiatic goose, either pure-bred or mongrel, were known in continental Europe and America. Two forms are reported to be found in Staffordshire in 1817: “The French Goose, kept about Amerton near Chartley, called, from the blackness of its bill, Anser Guineensis, and Swan, are met with near Rugeley, with legs flesh-coloured, like those of a goose, and may be termed Anser Cygnoides.” 15

Of the numerous English accounts of these birds, few, if any, appear to be of an original nature. Even Bonington Moubray – one of the many pseudonyms of John Lawrence, a writer on horses and agriculture, and one of the first advocates of legislative enactments for the suppression of cruelty to animals; his writings were of eminence assistance towards obtaining those acts of parliament which were passed for their protection – adopted earlier text into his Treatise, which first appeared in print in England in 1815, and was revised and enlarged in editions – with varying titles - dating to 1854. The 1816 to 1842 editions contain a paragraph on the ‘*Cygnoides*’ almost identical to that in Barr (1808). 14

J. C. Loudon (1826), basically quotes Moubray/Barr; giving the ‘Muscovy’ goose as the larger of two forms and the smaller ‘Chinese’ goose as being little known in England at that time. He also mentions “Spanish White and Embden Geese.” Just how much of Loudon’s information is first-hand, and how much taken from other authors, it is impossible to say. 12

*The London Encyclopaedia*, (1829) chooses to confuse by stating: “It is the swan goose of Ray, from Guinea. There is likewise a variety of this species, of a less size, called the goose of Muscovy.”

Leonard Jenyns (1835) describes his *Cygnus Guineensis* as: “A domesticated species, common in many parts of England on artificial pieces of water. Native country somewhat doubtful.” The beak and feet black and possessing a dewlap. 11
By 1836 there are reports of the birds, varying in size and colouration “now well known in our own country [England] in the living state.” And three years later, Peter Boswell, writing on the varieties of geese, states briefly “the Chinese [goose], which does not appear to be an inhabitant of the Country whence it derives its name.”

The earliest mention of White Chinese Geese in England, the writer has found, is in the Magazine of Natural History (1840), presenting an article on the relevant number of vertebrae in the various geese. John Robinson (1924), hypothesising that George Washington’s geese could have been the white variety, cites the article in The Cultivator of 1857, in which William Barns of Orange Co., reports White Chinese Geese were imported direct from China by Wm. H. Murfeldt of Newburgh in 1855; the geese breeding in 1856.

In 1843, Micajah R. Cock (generally attributed to be a pseudonym of C.N. Bement, q.v.) penned the first truly American Poultry Book. He says:

I know very little of the stately, swan-like China Goose, distinguished by the horny knob on its bill. It is said to be very prolific, and its meat to be well-flavoured. From the very few that I have seen about farmyards, I should think it was not held in much estimation.

By 1844 Imperial China had been brought to her knees by the British, the Americas and the French, in quick succession. As far back as 1729, the Chinese Emperor, Yung Cheng, banned the smoking of Opium, except under licence for medicinal use. Then, in 1799, the Emperor Kia King imposed a total ban on the importation of Opium into the Chinese Empire. However, British merchants of the East India Company held the monopoly on the production of the drug in India and continued to blatantly smuggle it into China in order to balance their purchases of tea for export to Britain. By the 1830's, the British had become the major drug-trafficking criminal organization in the world; very few drug cartels of the twentieth century can ever touch the England of the early nineteenth century in sheer size of criminality. China’s addiction to the drug became so vast as to threaten its continuance as a major league nation.

When the Emperor learned his son had died of an overdose, he determined to end the trade; in 1838 the Qing government decreed that anyone dealing in Opium would be put to death and Chinese officials began to destroy any Opium
coming into their Empire. This led to the first ‘Opium War’ between Britain and China erupting in 1839. Great Britain, looking to end China's restrictions on foreign trade, responded by sending gun-boats to attack the coast of China, razing cities and villages to the ground, plundering peasants of cows, chickens, ducks, daughters and geese. Finally, in 1842, unable to withstand European military hardware, the Chinese were forced to agree an ignominious peace under the inequitable Treaty of Nanking, which reopened Canton, Shanghai, Foochow, Ningpo and Amoy under British control. 7 & 24

The Chinese were forced into similar treaties with France and the U.S.A. The Americans sent a diplomatic mission for the signing of the Wanghia Treaty in 1844. Fletcher Webster*, son of Statesman Daniel Webster, was appointed Secretary to the Mission, and it is reported he sailed from China in the August of 1844, returning to the United States in possession of Chinese Geese which were later kept on his father’s farm at Marshfield, Mass. 4

*Col. Fletcher Webster was killed at the 2nd battle of Bull Run in August 1862.

Fletcher Webster’s geese, however, were not the first of their kind to be recorded in America. Apart from Washington’s account, there are two differing accounts which, by sheer co-incidence, the writer believes, are related to the same event. Henry Mesier of Dutchess Co., New York, is twice reported in the October 1844 issue of The Cultivator to have exhibited “Four splendid Chinese Geese” at the ‘State Fair and Cattle Show,’ held 17th – 20th September 1844, at Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and on the following page “four geese of the China breed . . . these Geese are remarkable for layers and fine quality for the table; the mother of the geese shown, has laid nearly all winter, and has now the second brood of goslings raised this summer.”
The American Agriculturist, October 1844, reports on the ‘4th Annual Show of the New York State Agricultural Society, held 17th, 18th & 19th September at Poughkeepsie’:

**Poultry.**—When we consider the value of poultry in the United States, we can not express our astonishment that so few birds of any kind were exhibited. Mr. Bement of Albany was about the only person who showed anything in this line, and he confined himself to a few curious hens, and some beautiful China geese of a peculiar small breed.¹

Which account is correct, it is now impossible to state; for although the exhibitor is named as ‘Mesier’ in one journal and ‘Bement’ in the other, the editors of the February 1845 issue of The American Agriculturist, publish the image of the “Chinese Goose” (Fig. 3.) from Bement’s book, and make an intriguing request: “We saw a beautiful pair of these birds at the Agricultural show, at Poughkeepsie, last fall, and would be greatly obliged to the owner of them if he would sell us a few of their offspring the coming season.” To which they receive an interesting reply, published in the April issue, from A. & H. Mesier of Wappings Creek (variously given as: Wappinger’s Creek, Wappinger’s Falls.), Dutchess County:

**CHINA GEESE.**—In your last No. of the Agriculturist, we noticed a spirited cut of Chinese Geese, accompanied with an inquiry where they could be procured, and also who was the owner of those exhibited at the late State show at Poughkeepsie. In answer to the inquiry, we would reply, that we imported them about ten years ago from China [1835?], and have some of the original stock still on hand. We have kept our flock (which has
always been large) pure from any admixture. We know of no other flock of pure Chinas of this description. We ordered the first lot, and the Chinese sent us all males, and we had to wait another year before the second lot came, which, fortunately, proved to be all females— they probably not liking us “outside barbarians” to raise any progeny. Their superior qualities are, extremely delicate flavor, great hardiness of constitution, and unusual prolificness. They will lay, if well fed, all the year round; and generally hatch and raise two broods of goslings in a season, without any other feed but grass after they are hatched. We have now a brood which were hatched in September, at the time of the show, which are already full grown. Spring goslings frequently lay in the fall. They have extremely beautiful plumage, always alike; a wild, shrill cry, unlike that of any other geese; an erect, graceful carriage, and would be quite an ornament to any gentlemen's grounds. They are very correctly described in your article. You may insert this in your paper if you think proper. Although we have never sold any of these geese yet, still, if any of your friends would like to purchase them, we could part with two pairs in the spring, at $4 per pair, at our farm, or any quantity of goslings after they are full fledged in the summer, boxed up and delivered in New York at $5 per pair. This we do, believing them to be a valuable acquisition to the poultry-yard, and for the benefit of the community.

These articles show that Chinese/China geese, similar to those seen today, were known and exhibited in the U.S.A. at this time. The Mesier brothers adopted the name ‘China’ for their birds – signifying their place of origin, and Mr. Bement opted for the title ‘Chinese.’

Fig. 4.
The name ‘African Goose’ is brought to public attention in *The Cultivator*, May 1844, in an article (condensed from the *Boston Cultivator*, it informs us) reporting on the collection of livestock at Col. Thayer’s establishment at Braintree, USA: “He liked a cross of the wild with the Mountain geese, and he had sold these mongrels at three dollars apiece. They weighed eighteen pounds each. [We presume the "Mountain" geese spoken of are what is sometimes called the India, or African, or Swan goose.—EDS. CULT.]”

*The American Agriculturist*, October 1844, presents the image (Fig. 4.) and description, given below, from Bement’s book, the draft of which was with the printers at this time. Curiously, in the book, although the title “Guinea, or African Goose” heads the description, it is “African” alone which is given in the introduction to the chapter on ‘Aquatic Fowls’; and “African” is given precedent when used for comparison in the chapter relating to the Chinese Goose. Should Cock and Bement be one and the same person, he certainly has a change of opinion about the breed by the time the work was published later in 1845. He says:

GUINEA GOOSE.

THIS is the largest of the goose tribe which has fallen under our notice; it is of the size of the swan, and it often weighs more than 25 pounds. We have now in our possession one pair which we purchased for a gentleman in South Carolina, which will weigh in common ordinary condition, over 20 pounds each. We once owned a gander that weighed 24 pounds. They are a noble bird, quite ornamental about the premises, and add much to the scenery, particularly if a sheet of water be near. When floating on its surface they have a stately majestic appearance, and in their movements they much resemble the swan. They have a low, hollow, coarse voice, unlike that of any other variety.—[Bement's Poulterer's' Comp.]

A list of anticipated poultry prices is also given including:

- Small China geese per pair 3.00 – 4.00 $
- Guinea or African goose per pair 10.00 – 15.00 $

The small China geese priced above, are very fine and bloodlike, are as hardy as ducks, and said to be as great layers.

Bement’s description of the size and voice of these birds is indicative of the modern African Goose.

The above is the first instance, the writer has found in poultry writing, of a finite distinction between the two forms of Asiatic geese. Bement (1845) also describes the “Poland Goose” and the “Chinese Goose.” The first is described as resembling the Guinea Goose, though smaller, and is regarded as a probable cross between the Guinea and the Chinese Goose; the “Chinese Goose” is described
only in its grey/brown variety; with scant mention that “It is found sometimes entirely white. The variety from Guinea is known by its erect gait, and screaming, and is plentiful in this country. . . The specimen from which our portrait was taken, has been in our possession for several years. She was imported from China, and we obtained her direct from the ship.” No precise detail of this import is given, and the writer suggests Bement may have obtained this bird via the Mesier Brothers, as elsewhere he advertises having birds of their origin for sale.

Caleb Nichols Bement [1791-1868] settled in Albany, Albany County, New York State before 1825; and was proprietor of Bement’s Hotel, No.82 State Street, Albany in 1834. He purchased Three Hills Farm, some three miles from Albany, before 1836. On his arrival there he turned his attention to the breeding of blood-stock and the writing of articles and papers on all matters agricultural, while still retaining other business interests; in 1844 taking the lease on the American Hotel, No.100 State Street, Albany.

Bement was something of an entrepreneur – and ‘a bit of a goer.’ Following the death of his first wife, Harriet Holmes, in 1823, he did not “prick that annual blister – marriage with deceased wife’s sister,” and wed Caroline Holmes in 1824; she died at Three Hills in 1836. He married again in 1858, for the third and final time! Apart from the hotels, he had a small steam mill, milling grain for family use, and took advantage of every opportunity to promote the sale of his varied livestock through written articles, advertisements and exhibitions; and he was the person to permanently separate the forms of these geese. His son, George, appears to have had charge of the poultry and waterfowl, being regularly among the premium winners at shows and promoting the names of both ‘African’ and ‘Chinese’ geese as distinct breeds.

The year in which the first National Poultry Show was held at the London Zoological Society Gardens (This was not, as it has been claimed, the first Poultry Show in England, as there had been local Shows prior to this.), Bement exhibited a variety of fowls, ducks and geese at the annual New York State Fair. The Ohio Cultivator, October 1845 reports:

The display of Poultry was a novel and interesting part of this exhibition. Few persons were aware that so great a variety of domestic fowls could be found—and especially of such great size and beauty. There were six or seven exhibitors; Mr. Bement had eleven varieties of fowls, two of turkeys, three of ducks, and three of geese; Mr. Tucker had nine
varieties of hens, two of turkeys, two of geese, two of ducks, and twelve of pigeons. The improvement of the breeds of poultry is beginning to receive much attention among some farmers at the east, and more especially in England. This must have been a considerable improvement upon the exhibits of 1844.

*The Cultivator*, November 1845, differentiates between the **Chinese** and the **African** geese, presenting the previous image of the *Chinese Goose* (Fig. 3.):

**CHINESE GOOSE.**— There are probably several varieties of geese in the "Celestial Empire." We have seen two or three kinds which have been brought to this country. One kind were uniformly of a dusky white color, though in other respects resembling the grey variety, for one of which the above cut was taken. This grey kind are very prolific, hardy, and profitable. We know of none equal to them in these respects. They will rear two broods in a season, and though the last ones do not come out till autumn, and the nights are frosty, they get along and grow through the winter without any trouble—laying and rearing a brood for themselves the next season. At the Fair at Poughkeepsie in 1844, Messrs. A. & H. Mesier, of Fishkill, exhibited some of these geese, which attracted much attention. We had the pleasure of making a visit to Messrs. Mesiers' farm in August last, and there saw altogether the finest flock of these geese we ever met with. There were three or four broods of goslings which were hatched in May, grown up—apparently as large as the old ones—and the geese which hatched these were all then sitting for a second brood, which were expected out the first of September. The form of these geese is very handsome—their necks are long, with a graceful curve—their bodies round, and thickly covered with fine feathers. The upper part of the bill rises in a knob—a characteristic of all the Asiatic goose-tribe, so far as we know—and both the bill and legs are black. Their general color is almost as uniform as that of our American wild geese. Their flesh is considered superior. These geese should not be confounded with the large African variety, called by Cuvier *swan geese*, which are of enormous size, but rather unprolific. The above cut was taken for a Chinese geese belonging to Mr. C. N. Bement, to whom we are indebted for a loan of the cut.

In 1846 the Committee of the County Agricultural Societies and the American Institute decided: "After careful and serious deliberation we came to the conclusion to award the premium of $3, to George Bement, for his pair of African geese — one of which weighs 24 pounds on the hoof."

The English continued to follow Turton's three varieties. H. D. Richardson, a prolific writer on matters agricultural, was furnished with material provided by the Dublin dealer and importer, J. J. Nolan, and gives three sub-varieties of “The
**Chinese Goose** in 1846. Stating that it “Is another recently introduced variety or breed, of which there are three sub-varieties, each presenting striking points of difference, and yet being sufficiently alike to justify me in classing them together.” Richardson describes:

**I. THE HONG KONG.**

This bird has a large horny knob on the bill and forehead; its prevailing colour is grey, with a longitudinal stripe of a deep brown running above the back of the neck. The legs are of a red colour, whence it is sometimes distinguished as the "Red Legged China Goose." This is the same long known amongst us under the erroneous name of the "Poland Goose."

**II. BLACK LEGGED CHINESE GOOSE.**

Also knobbed, and usually with a white edging round the knob, somewhat similar to that of the wild breed called the "White fronted Goose."

**III. THE WHITE CHINESE GOOSE.**

A very handsome bird, knobbed as the rest, of a snow-white colour, and with legs of a bright orange red. These geese are inferior in size to the TOULOUSE, but, never-the-less, very fine birds, and worthy the attention of the breeder. The white variety especially, with red legs, is very beautiful, and would form an appropriate ornament on a piece of water. The flesh of the Chinese goose is also good. They feed well, fatten easily, and are very prolific.16

From his Norfolk rectory the Rev. E. S. Dixon gleaned a great deal of information through his correspondence with many like-minded persons with an interest in poultry and natural history; the Earl of Derby among them, from whom he received an Hawaiian gander. Writing in 1848, Dixon describes the “China” and the “White China Goose.” It appears the ‘Large’ form was unknown to him, although in concluding the chapter on the “White China Goose” Dixon says:

Some writers speak of a variety with a pouch, or, according to others, lappets under the chin. This I have never seen or heard of in any collection. One cause of the difficulty of recognising the China Goose from descriptions and synonyms seems to have arisen from the general similarity, yet fixed though slight distinctive marks, of the two dark varieties. It is possible that the pouched or lappetted sort may have been for some time lost to this country, and may now be recoverable only in China and its islands.10

Dr. J. C. Bennett, who instigated the formation of *The New England Society for the Improvement of Domestic Fowls* and their first Boston Show in the November of 1849, is the first to use the title “The African Goose” without including a synonym in the heading. In 1850, Bennett presents an engraving (Fig. 5.), taken from life it is stated, of which he says:
This beautiful plate, by Durivage, is a very successful representation of a fine specimen of this gigantic bird. By common consent, this goose is installed the head of his tribe, for size, and imposing appearance.

His description is taken from Buffon, to which is added:

Mr. Giles, an original importer of this breed, in a letter to the author, thus describes it:

“The Guinea goose shall stand forth first;— brown-gray on the back, light gray on the fore-front, brown on the head and upper neck, prominent black tubercle on the root of the bill, with pouch or dewlap under the throat. Weight will vary from twenty to twenty-five pounds each. It is a very rare and ornamental bird.”

Bennett describes “The Indian Mountain Goose” (Fig. 6.) which he declares, with Giles’ corroboration, to be a pure breed, and “The Poland Goose” (Fig. 7.) which he states to be a “hybrid” between the African and the Chinese Goose.
The section on “The Chinese Goose” is headed with an image (Fig. 8.) very similar to that in Bement (1845), both images bear close resemblance to that of Bewick (1805); Bement’s being an almost exact copy, but omitting the fence, and Bennett’s is reversed and includes the fence.

![Image of Chinese Goose](image.png)

Fig. 8.

He states: “Some beautiful specimens of this variety were brought out from China by Fletcher Webster, Esq., and are now on the farm of the Hon. Daniel Webster, at Marshfield.” and continues by listing descriptions of “three sub-varieties” which he attributes to Richardson, adding to the text on the “White Chinese Goose”: “it has sometimes been called the ‘Swan goose.’ The flesh of the Chinese goose is also good; they feed well, fatten easily, and are very prolific.”

J. J. Nolan was not entirely satisfied with the results of Richardson’s (1846) labours and published his own work in 1850. Presenting an image (Fig. 9.) that was to be copied by future writers, he says:

THE LARGE CHINESE, OR HONG KONG GOOSE,
Is perhaps, the largest of the tribe, and has been but recently known here. They were first introduced by the Ornithological Society of London, from China, and are found unusually prolific, breeding at all seasons of the year, and cross with considerable advantage on our
domestic geese. . . Their prevailing colour is gray, with a longitudinal stripe of brown, running above the neck, belly white, feet flesh colour. A bird somewhat resembling them has been long known to us as the Poland goose, but quite inferior in size and appearance. Nolan then mentions the White Chinese as being next in size to the above mentioned; and the "Black-Legged Chinese Goose" being:

somewhat smaller than the preceding, the markings similar to the Hong Kong, the knob rather larger, in proportion to the size of the bird, its standing is more erect, and its legs and feet black.

A "Pygmy Chinese Goose", the size of a Rouen Duck, is also mentioned. This in all probability is a runt.¹⁴

The Ornithological Society, mentioned by Nolan, was quite separate from Zoological Society of London, although both societies shared some of the same members. It was, in its way, the precursor to Sir Peter Scott’s Wildfowl Trust. This society was established in 1837, for the purpose of breeding and forming collections of water-fowl; first, to supply the royal parks; and, secondly, to distribute duplicates, gratuitously, among such members as may be desirous of acquiring a collection of
aquatic birds. The society endeavours to maintain a complete collection of water-fowl—swimmers, divers, and waders. The birds are kept as nearly as possible in a natural state, in St. James's Park, where the lake forms as it were a great natural cage. The birds are very tame, and being placed under the protection of the public, are great favourites, a large portion of their food being supplied by visitors. The president of this society is the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry.

The secretary was William Blythe, who later took a position in Calcutta. The Society was ambitious and its set-up most impressive. In 1841 Prince Albert became its patron.

Upon the eastern island is the Swiss cottage* of the Ornithological Society, built in 1841 with a grant of £300 from the Lords of the Treasury: the design is by J. B. Watson, and contains a council-room, keepers apartments, steam-hatching apparatus; contiguous are feeding-places and decoys; and the aquatic fowl breed on the island, making their own nests among the shrubs and grasses.

*Now the headquarters of the London Historic Parks & Gardens Trust.

The breeds of the Chinese and the African Goose had, for the first time, been defined and promoted as two distinct forms, and although confusion continued on both sides of the Atlantic, the American poultry writers, in the main, follow Bement’s text and present both types as separate breeds; Britain still had to overcome its uncertainty on the matter.

Bibliography to Part II.

1) ALLEN, A. B. [n.d.] (Editor), AMERICAN AGRICULTURIST. New York. 1842 et seq.
3) BEMENT, Caleb Nicholas [1791?–1868], THE AMERICAN POULTERER’S COMPANION. Saxton & Miles, New York. 1845 et seq.
8) CLINTON, De Witt [1769–1828], AN INTRODUCTORY INTERCOURSE. David Longworth, New York. 1815.


16.) RICHARDSON, H. D. [ - 1901]. DOMESTIC FOWLS. Dublin. 1846 et seq.


21.) TUCKER, Luther [n.d.]. THE CULTIVATOR. Albany, New York. 1834 et seq.


A Brief History of the Swan Goose (*Anser cygnoides*)
under Domestication in the West.

By Jonathan M. Thompson

Part III.

From the early 1840’s onwards, American exhibitions of poultry usually included classes and exhibits of both ‘African’ and ‘Chinese’ or ‘China’ geese.

In London in June, 1845, the Zoological Society’s ‘Exhibition of Domestic Poultry’ provided classes for geese to be shown in pairs, and included: “Q. Asiatic or Knob Geese.” Unfortunately, this class attracted no entries. 16

America in the 1850’s raged with ‘Hen Fever’; the development of breeds of large poultry and the attribution of credit for achieving such aims was closely contested, and exhibitions of poultry at the State Fairs were enormously popular.

An authorised American edition of Dixon’s *Ornamental and Domestic Poultry* was published, with additional material inserted by J. J. Kerr, in 1851. Introducing Dixon’s chapter on ‘The China Goose,’ Kerr says: “Of this variety, three beautiful specimens were exhibited at the late Agricultural Show, held in the county of Philadelphia. They were owned by a gentleman, whose name I forget, living in the vicinity of Tacony, near this city.” The image which accompanies the text (Fig.1.) appears to be taken from Nolan (1850), although reversed and grouped with ‘Bremen’ (=Embden) Geese. 12 The only reason Kerr could have had for copying Nolan’s illustration of the ‘Large Chinese, or Hong Kong Goose’ to illustrate ‘The China Goose,’ is that it best represents the birds he had seen at the Philadelphia Show.

---

Fig. 1. *Ornamental and Domestic Poultry*, 1851.
Also in 1851, in England, Lord Howe exhibited at the Birmingham & Mid Counties Show: “three good Brown China geese,” of which “The weights were extraordinary. The first prize geese (895), weighed 28¼ lbs., 17 lbs., and 15½ lbs. respectively.”

This report indicates such weights were unusual for the known breed at that time; suggesting the smaller form was the more common type.

![Image of Brown China geese]

**Fig.2. Domestic Poultry Book 1853.**

In America, the large form of ‘China’ geese had been bred in a pure state for some years prior to 1851; and “some fine specimens” are reported being exhibited by Mr. C. R. Belcher, of East Randolph, Massachusetts, in 1849. Mr. Belcher is stated to have been a successful breeder of “China (or Tchin Tchu) Geese” in T. B. Miner’s *Domestic Poultry Book* (1853), and furnishes a portrait of his birds (Fig. 2.) and details of their place of origin in a letter dated 13th December, 1852:

“The China Geese, which I have bred for some time past, are generally considered natives of Hong Kong, and are very often named after that place; but those who have been in that region, and have had inducements to observe the fact, concur in stating that there is no ground whatever for the assumption that Hong Kong is their native place. There are no descriptions of tame geese there, and no semi- domesticated or wild
varieties that answer the description, in any particular, of the China geese. The breed that I own, which possess great merit, were brought from Tchin Tchu, and have, therefore, the best right to the possession of the euphonious title associating them with the place of their origin. As the cultivation of hard names for fowls, has, of late, been greatly in vogue, the correction of this Hong Kong error may be a matter of consequence, entitling me to some credit as its discoverer. Let my deserts be what they may connected with this particular, I am willing to let them abide by the general title, China Geese, which is special enough to designate the variety in question, in my humble opinion, at least.”

The writer can do no better than quote John Robinson (1924) on the above letter:

“The writer can do no better than quote John Robinson (1924) on the above letter: “Here we have perfectly good evidence that the “large Chinese Geese” came from China. We also have in this case the only instance where the rural source of an importation of Chinese Geese is mentioned. Tchin Tchu, on modern maps Tsiuenchau [present-day Quanzhou, formerly Chuan Chow], is in the Province of Fukien, opposite the Island of Formosa. . . . Tsiuenchau is situated on the coast a little south of the middle of the coastline, and is about a hundred miles from Foochow, or Fu-Chau, which is one of the largest cities in China, and a great tea market.

. . . America in particular, New York, Philadelphia and Boston have all been headquarters for tea importers since colonial times. Mr. Belcher’s business is not stated, but he was evidently in close touch with representatives of tea importers visiting China, and in all probability he was in the tea business, in some capacity, in Boston, of which city East Randolph is a suburb.

The value of Belcher’s contribution to Miner’s book would seem to have been lost to poultry historians consulting it, because Miner himself did not appreciate it, and failed to differentiate properly the several Chinese types described by others in his book. He describes the large type both as “China,” and “Guinea, or African”; and both large and small types as “Chinese.” The illustration accompanying Mr. Belcher’s letter is of a heavy meat-type goose. Those of the Brown and White “Chinese” geese are of the small upstanding type.”

Professor Edmund Hoffmann refers to the Belcher letter in his paper (1991) on the African Goose; and also states Caleb Bement was responsible for naming it thus, in 1845. Hoffmann located large geese, African in type, in the same region as mentioned in Belcher’s account. He cites Smilie’s translation of Buffon’s work (q.v. Part I) stating: “Buffon’s 1793 illustration of an “African”-type goose, . . . is evidence for the presence of the African goose in England before the Chinese variety.” In this, Hoffmann is mistaken in assuming that either Buffon or Smilie refer to England in their text,
and is equally at error in assuming the Buffon illustration pre-dates others of its kind; regrettably the statement has been repeated in later works. Hoffmann’s manuscript does contain a typographical error giving both “Tze tau” and “Tse tau” for the phonetic spelling of the Chinese for “Lion Head”; but this is not so confusing as Fancy Fowl (1991)\(^{15}\) changing the spelling to “Tze tay” in their reproduction of Hoffmann’s paper; and thus beginning a series of ‘Chinese whispers,’ as this erroneous spelling has, unfortunately, also been repeated in later works, some of which contain different spellings of Hoffmann’s name.

Wingfield & Johnston, in their great work, The Poultry Book (1853), state:

**THE CHINA GOOSE.**

The characteristic features of this bird—the black tuberculated bill, and the dark brown stripe that passes down the back of the neck—are of common occurrence, from the result of crosses with Domestic English Geese. At least three varieties have been introduced into this country [England] for some years, —the Red-legged, the Black-legged, and the White Chinese Goose; the two former are identical in the colour of the plumage, and must also bear close affinity to the larger specimens, which, under the name of Hong-Kong Geese, have been more recently exhibited.”\(^{26}\)

The last sentence, again, suggests that a ‘pure’ form of the large Chinese Goose was not common in England before the 1850’s and, probably, such birds as there were, had existed primarily in a cross-bred state.

In the last edition of Moubray (1854), edited by Meall, much is added to the subject of Chinese Geese and concludes: “The so-called "Hong Kong" sub-variety appears to be nothing more than some extraordinarily large specimens of the Grey Chinese Goose, the product of either successful or accidental breeding.”\(^{17}\) This is, once again, evidence of a large form of Chinese Goose being known in England at that date.

Lewis Wright appears uncertain on the subject when he writes of the breed in 1873:

**THE CHINESE GOOSE.**—— This goose (\textit{Anser cygnoides}), called also the Hong-Kong Goose, the Knobbed Goose (from the protuberance at the base of the bill), and even Spanish Goose, occupies, . . , a somewhat debatable position between the geese and the swans, both the protuberance just mentioned, and its long neck, giving it a somewhat intermediate character. . . , it is very widely distributed, ranging over China, great part of Asia, and it is believed even of Africa. . . . In size it is midway between the common goose and the swan, whence it might probably be bred with care to very great
weight; and in one point it has a most decided advantage over all other breeds of geese—viz., in prolificacy.

This author also says: “This goose is found to vary somewhat in colour.” and describes the different colour forms, some of which are obviously cross-bred birds; the beak and leg colour varying. Having given size as a characteristic of his “Chinese Goose,” Wright’s final sentence adds further credence to the argument the breed he describes is derived from the larger, ‘African’ type—“Another distinguishing character of the Chinese Goose is a dewlap, or kind of feathered wallet under the throat.”

In Europe, by 1894, a Frenchman grasps the nature of the breed’s origin, although precisely which form he describes is left to speculation: “The Guinea Goose, or Swan Goose, also known under name China Goose, which should be its true name, because it comes from China and not from Guinea. It is grey with a white chest, the tail and the back brownish, the feet orange. It carries on the beak, like swans, a small red tubercle. (Trans. JMT.)

However, another Frenchman, the scientist and veterinarian, Charles Cornevin (1895)  gives a much wider field of distribution and describes three forms under the collective title = ‘Swan-, or carnuncled Goose’; giving synonyms of other authors as: “(Oie à bosse, Oie de Chine, de Hong-Kong, polonaise, muscovite)”. Cornevin does not include one of the most used synonyms – ‘Oie de Guinée’ = Guinea Goose – in this list, but states that his small Swan-goose with a black beak, is commonly known as the Guinea or Gambian Goose according to place of origin; and that he noticed variations in the colour of the birds beaks, carnuncle and feet, depending on the colour of their plumage. He states the ‘large Swan Goose’ also varies in much the same way, which would indicate mixed blood.

Cornevin gives Blythe’s statement (1849)  that the common domestic goose of India resulted from the inter-breeding of the Chinese Goose with the Grey-lag Goose; such birds tolerating warmer climates much better than any European goose might do, and were therefore distributed throughout many tropical regions. Be that as it may, the writer cannot concur with Mike Ashton’s (2008)  speculation of finding either evidence or documentation to link the continent of Africa to geese bearing that name. Cornevin’s report of the importation into France of geese from Madagascar, in 1887, cannot be taken as having any connection with the origin of the name “African Goose;” for although a form of the swan goose may have been found in French-governed Madagascar at that period (American and other pirates frequented the island between 1774 – 1824), it must be borne in mind that the name “African” had already been adopted and standardised in America some 51 years and 21 years, respectively, prior to Cornevin’s writings.
The illustration of African Geese (Fig. 3.) in George Howard’s *Ducks and Geese* (1897) was not popular at the time of its publication, as it was thought to be: “a course bit of work exaggerating the Toulouse lines in the birds.” The reader may judge for them-self. The original photograph, from which the illustration was made, is reproduced in the Reliable Poultry Journal’s *Ducks & Geese* of 1900. Howard’s sketch of a pair of African Geese is used by Lewis Wright to illustrate his “Chinese Geese” in the 1899 and later editions of *The Practical Poultry Keeper*, stating: “The appearance of the Chinese Goose will be seen from the excellent illustration.”

![African Geese, U.S. Bulletin 1897.](image)

The first edition of Wright’s *Illustrated Book of Poultry* (1873) expresses doubt that a goose of this type is a native of Africa. In the 1902 edition he treats the two Chinese types together under the heading, “The Chinese, or African Goose”; again giving Howard’s illustration, but on this occasion captioning it “African Geese.” Wright believes that persistent crossings with the ordinary domestic goose “in India and elsewhere, is the explanation of differences that seem to have puzzled some writers in America, between the “African” goose as there known, and their smaller Chinese.” This “smaller Chinese” he describes in both its Brown and White varieties; endowing both with a “heavy dewlap under the throat.” Wright further states: “All the known facts and circumstances point to the conclusion that this African goose of America is originally simply a cross of the Chinese with the domestic goose, and especially with the Toulouse.”

37
Following Wright in his speculations, Edward Brown (1906) published a photograph of **White Chinese Geese** and the image of **African Geese** from *Ducks and Geese* (1900). He goes one step further in muddling the history of the **African Goose**, when he writes: “Our opinion is that the African was originally the Brown Chinese, that it was taken to Africa by trading-ships, and afterwards to America. Whether the crossing to secure increased size and thicker body took place in Africa or America we do not know; probably the latter.”  

The statements of Wright and Brown where so highly regarded, that although neither presents one single shred of evidence, their words were accepted by most to be authoritative. In his early writing even John Robinson (1913) accepts this theory, but upon further investigation explodes it completely. However, Brown continued to propound his misguided theory in his publication of 1929.  

In addition to the evidence already put forward, where the **African Goose** is recorded in American literature in the early 1840’s, the **Toulouse Goose** did not enter into American poultry culture until much later; around 1856, when a few were exhibited at Albany, New York. Furthermore, the early descriptions and illustrations (Fig. 4.) of Toulouse geese relate to birds devoid of a prominent dewlap.  

![Fig. 4. The Poultry Book, 1853.](image)

In recent times numerous inaccuracies have continued to be published on the subject of these Asiatic geese, to which the writer responded in a letter (*Waterfowl*, Summer 2006, pp. 42-43) advising the BWA of these errors and
providing the earliest known records of Asiatic geese, giving sufficient information for further investigation and the publication of the correct facts. This appears to have gone unheeded, as evidenced by the continued publication of erroneous information.

The Standards

The first American *Standard of Excellence* (1874) recognised only the **White Chinese Goose** (as a light-weight bird), thereby placing all coloured birds in the **African Goose** class, giving the colour as “grey, darker on the back and wings than on the under-parts and neck,” and indicates that large size is preferred, with the carriage “upright and graceful.” In the revised edition of 1875, the **Brown Chinese Goose** is recognised as the original light-weight variety and placed before the White; in the African’s description the word “stately” is omitted, although the earlier specifications for **African Geese** are retained, and, to further distinguish between the two breeds the colour of the **Brown Chinese** is given as “greyish brown”; a dewlap is specified in the **African** and is prohibited in the **Chinese**.

The 1888 U.S. Standards give the first specific instructions as to the weights of both breeds; the **African Gander** 20 lbs; Goose 18 lbs. and the **Chinese Gander** 16 lbs., Goose 14 lbs. In 1905 the weights for the **Chinese Goose** are amended to 12 lbs. for the Gander and 10 lbs. for the Goose; the weights for the **Africans** are retained as in 1888.

It should be noted that the American Standards then, as now, do not include the place of origin for any breeds.¹

In Continental Europe the smaller ‘**Chinese Goose**’ appears in the descriptive breed lists from 1899 and the French published an illustration of the larger ‘**Oie d’Afrique**’ in the 1920’s.

Both **Chinese** and **African** geese are mentioned in the British Standards of the 1920’s and ’30’s as “other breeds of geese occasionally exhibited in this country.” The brown and the white varieties of the ‘**Chinese**’ goose eventually appeared in the British Poultry Standards of 1954; the place of origin being omitted. The omission is rectified in the revised British Standards of 1982, which gives; “**Origin: Asia**”, presumably with reference to the distribution of the breed’s wild ancestors. Following an American importation into Britain in the 1970’s, the **Brown** and the **White** varieties of the **African Goose** entered into the British Poultry and
Waterfowl Standards of 1982, which gives the place of origin as “Africa.” These Standards were re-printed in 1988 and 1994 containing the same imprecision as in the 1982 edition. The 1997 edition finally cites “China” as the place of origin for the African Goose; and retains “Asia” for that of the Chinese Goose.  

The buff variety of the African Goose was added by the British Waterfowl Association (BWA) to the Standards of 1999.

The historical content on the Asiatic breeds in the BWA Standards (2008) is, unfortunately, imprecise. In the section on the African Goose, the mis-spelled ‘Tze Tay’ is corrected to ‘Tze Tau’ in the errata. However, the text (p.8) infers Eleazar Albin’s illustration and description of his “Moscovian Goose” represent the African Goose, when Albin’s geese are clearly cross-bred specimens. The descriptions and illustrations of his ‘Moscovian Gander and Goose’ are first published in volume II, p.83, pls.91, 92, 1734; not 1738, as given in the Standards (p.18), where repetition of the term “Moscovian Goose” as a synonym for the Chinese Goose (p.18) is inappropriate. Albin describes and illustrates two separate forms, and gives ‘The Spanish Goose, or Swan Goose. Anser cygnoides,’ (volume I, p.87, plt.91, 1731) as a bird clearly bearing a close resemblance to the modern Chinese Goose (see ills. Part1.). Although the Rev. Dixon (1848) gives “Muscovy Goose” among a great many other synonyms, he was unacquainted with any large and dewlapped form of the Chinese Goose and groups all synonyms under the single title of ‘China Goose.’ Earlier writers keep the two forms separate – using the term ‘Moscovian’ for the larger ‘African’ type.

Also, there were not three varieties of Guinea, Chinese or China Goose at the Zoological Society’s gardens in 1848, as stated in the British Standards (p.18). Dixon (1848, pp.114-115) writes he sought the “White China Goose”, but none were to be located in any collection in London at that time:

“The Zoological Society had parted from their specimens in consequence of being overstocked with other things. Their head keeper seemed only to consider them in the light of a variety of the Cygnoides, but he spoke most decidedly of his experience of the permanence, not only of this variety, but also of that of the dark-legged, and the red-legged sorts of the brown kind, thus indicating three races, . . .”  

The above paragraph indicates three varieties had been known to the keeper in the Gardens at some time, but it cannot be stated that three were present in 1848.
There is further confusion where the Standard for the *African Goose* (p.8.) states Mr. C. R. Belcher’s ‘Tchin Tchu’ geese were “imported into America as early as 1852”; which is clearly a misunderstanding of the text, as Mr. Belcher had exhibited these birds in 1849, and his letter to T. B. Miner (1853, pp.232-235), dated 13th Dec. 1852, clearly states Mr. Belcher obtained his geese from “Tchin Tchu” – modern Quanzhou – and had bred them “for some time past”. This importation was, therefore, *prior* to 1852; and there were imports into America long before 1845, the year in which Caleb Bement adopted the name “African” for the large and dewlapped form of ‘Chinese Goose’.

John Lawrence (psued. Bonington Moubray, 1822) tells of live poultry being exhibited alongside dead stock and, therefore, the Poultry Show of 1845, although the first of its kind - being specifically for the display of live birds – was not necessarily the first show at which live birds were exhibited.

**Conclusion**

Asiatic geese, both of pure race and cross-bred origin, were to be found in Europe from 1676, and probably earlier. Two distinct races were known by 1738, and from that time the races were inter-bred between themselves and also with the common goose of *Gray Lag Goose* descent. The varying forms attracted individual names and this caused confusion in identification of pure-bred stock. The smaller ‘*Chinese Goose*’ seems to have survived in a more or less pure state throughout the ages, whereas, between circa 1738 – 1840, the large ‘*African*’ type was most commonly found in a cross-bred state. The opening-up of trade with China in the 1840’s gave the opportunity for both types of geese to be once again imported into the West in a pure state. America was first to acknowledge the presence of two forms of domesticated Asiatic geese, naming them by 1844, as we know then today, ‘*Chinese Geese*’ and ‘*African Geese*’. Not until 1902 did some countries of Europe consider these forms as ‘breeds’.

Footnote: The original draught of Part 1 was submitted to the BWA for publication in November 2007, and writer respectfully hopes this brief review of the documentary evidence pertaining to the two forms of *Asiatic Geese* – the *Chinese*
and the African – will go some way in presenting the true facts surrounding the mystery of their entry into European and American poultry culture.

Jonathan M. Thompson
October 2010.

**Bibliography to Part III.**

3. ASHTON, Mike, Domestic Geese from Asia in Waterfowl. BWA. Spring 2008, pp. 69-77.