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Chinesia

The European Construction of China
in the Literature of the
17th and 18th Centuries

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with love and devotion

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Preface

This book is not a study on China, but on the construct of China by European thinkers and literary authors of England, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands of the 17th and 18th centuries, using information provided by Jesuit missionaries and seafarers, including Portuguese and Spanish sources, as building blocks. These were modified to suit their master architectural plan – which we call Sinism in this study – and the completed structure is then Chinesia, the object of analysis in the present book. It is a study on aspects of European literature and, to a certain extent, of European intellectual history preoccupied with the idea and theme of China. Although the book is far from being a sinological study – I am using the term in the European tradition – it may also be of interest to the experts in this area. Those who are interested in the historical development of the image of China in the West before Sinology became an academic discipline and matured to what it is today may find this book useful.

Up to now, China's encounter with the West has more or less been exclusively researched under the perspective of Sinocentrism, both by Western and Chinese scholars. Seemingly, the Opium Wars and other transgressions of Chinese sovereignty are perceived as a result of China's xenophobia and its resistance to Western efforts to civilize it through trade and Christianity. Thereby, the West is usually projected as altruistic. It can be presented as a well-meaning doctor forcing a senile and stubborn patient to take medicine. The title of J. MacGowan's book, *How England Saved China* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913) may illustrate this sentiment which was particularly prevalent from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, e.g. during the zenith of European power. Generally, Americans shared this feeling to a certain degree; sometimes it is mixed with the presentiment that America saved China from European aggression.

Nobody, however biased, can deny the existence, historical and actual, of Sinocentrism, which I at one time called the Celestial Empire Syndrome. It is well known that China had considered itself as the centre of the world since the beginning of the written record until its utter humiliation brought about by the Opium Wars in the 19th century and the Boxers' Revolt later. It also cannot be denied that at that point in time, the Celestial Empire was rapidly declining and its eclipse was imminent. The encounter between China and the West can be seen as the clash between Sinocentrism (but weak and corrupt) and Eurocentrism (strengthened through the Industrial Revolution) in the modern

world. Of course, the latter carried the day (or the century). However, the perception that the altruistic West came to China only to bring prosperity and civilization to it, and that the former resorted to arms because the latter refused to be civilized is an oversimplification of history. At best, it is only one side of the coin. The present study attempts an analysis of the other side and thus to complement the picture. Because the perceived faults of Sinocentrism have been abundantly analysed and described in uncountable academic studies and popular books and are, in part, preserved in racial stereotypes and clichés such as the yellow peril or the inscrutability or proverbial dishonesty of the Chinese, the present analysis, while it does not deny the catastrophic consequences of Sinocentrism, concentrates its efforts to present the Eurocentric perceptions and its subsequent concepts of China.

Although the present study is primarily concerned with the literary works of European authors of the 17th and 18th centuries, its intellectual framework was inspired by the preceding research on Sino-European studies, especially in the realm of history. As each chapter in this book lists the works used, I would like only to mention those scholars to whom I feel particularly indebted. The four volumes of Henri Cordier's *Bibliotheca Sinica* (Paris: Guilmoto, 1904–1912) are useful. Both Nigel Cameron's *Barbarians and Mandarins: Thirteen Centuries of Western Travelers in China* (New York and London: John Weatherhill Inc., 1970) and Raymond Dawson's *The Chinese Chameleon: An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), but especially the latter, were eye-openers to me. They provided me with historical facts by which I concluded on a theoretical level, that namely, not only the perceived, but also the perceivers change with the advance of time. That this fact also applies to literary works is confirmed by William Leonard Schwartz's study, *The Imaginative Interpretation of the Far East in Modern French Literature: 1800–1925* (Paris: Librairie ancienne Honoré Champion, 1927).

In order to understand the logic of the change of concepts regarding China, I had begun a systematic study first of the 18th, then of the 17th century, the dawn of the Modern Age and the new beginning of Sino-European contact. I was guided by the monumental work of Donald Lach, namely the nine volumes of *Asia in the Making of Europe* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977–93). Professor Lach was later assisted by his former student Professor Edwin J. van Kley who co-authored the last four volumes. Also at the personal level I am indebted to both of them. Professor Lach invited me to present a paper on the image of China in German literature in Manila in 1984 where I also met with Professor van Kley; the latter gave me his articles on European historical and literary sources of the conquest of China by the Manchus. Gradually I became intrigued by the diverse publications on China by the Jesuit missionaries and began to read them extensively. In this context, I greatly benefited from many studies in this wide field, especially from Jacques Gernet's *Chine et christianisme*

(Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1982) and David E. Mungello's *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985). Last, but not least, I was also encouraged in my research by studies devoted to the images of the Chinese such as Mary Gertrude Mason's *Western Concepts of China and the Chinese, 1840–1876* (Westport, Conn.: Hyperion Press, 1973) and Colin Mackerras' *Western Images of China* (Hong Kong and London: Oxford University Press, 1987).

After continuous research over one decade, I finally rejected my former view of orthodoxy in which I believed that there can be only one true perception or concept of a phenomenon. I became convinced that any given truth must be studied within its own historical, i.e. spatial and temporal, framework, because we really do not see the world as it is objectively, but as we wish to see it. Placing ourselves in the centre, we construe an autocentered world view. Yet, others construct their own self-centered ones as well. If Charles Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest is correct, then all self-centered world views constitute an integral part of our armament. In the history of the human world, the stronger have not only subjugated the weaker and rule over them, but their world view has also dominated those of the vanquished and, given adequate time, has even replaced the objective world. It is in this sense that Karl Marx once said that Europe was reconstructing the world in its own image. But towards the end of the 20th century, the world is gradually becoming multi-centered. Consequently, we begin to see the historicity of formerly constructed and absolutized truths. One example of the debunking of such a truth is the categorization of the Chinese as belonging to the yellow race. The historian Walter Demel has recently proved (it will be discussed in the first chapter of this book) that this truth – or rather construct – was invented in the first quarter of the 19th century when Europe became the undisputed centre of the world.

Eurocentrism – one of many prevalent autocentric systems of which we are aware – did not sweep over Europe like a tidal wave. It had its periods of evolution, with both supporting and opposing forces. The present study perceives the China missionaries of the Society of Jesus as a force that retarded Eurocentrism. However, it also takes into consideration that the Jesuitic accommodation towards China was suppressed in the course of the 18th century; the order itself was even dissolved. By juxtaposing the views on China or rather the parameters of the Sinism of certain key philosophers of history (who interpreted history according to their contemporary position) and of imaginative writers of the 17th and 18th centuries, we have come to the conclusion that, on the whole, the philosophers of history were the mouthpieces and representatives of their contemporary *Zeitgeist*, while the imaginative writers attempted to harmonize the Eurocentric perspective with a higher humanitarianism. The latter tended to be more conciliatory and to dilute the concentrated dose of aggressive Eurocentrism that developed during this period.

Nevertheless, a complete examination also has to take into account that the gunboat commerce (including the opium trade) and diplomacy of the 19th century is a historical reality. Although this study terminates its analysis at the end of the 18th century, its theoretical perspective cannot ignore subsequent historical facts. The book also cannot turn a blind eye to the newest tendencies in the evolution of Eurocentrism. The European spirit, not the »world spirit« as Hegel would have us believe, is gradually leaving its »Storm and Stress« phase and is maturing. Especially during the last few decades, the world has begun to decentralize. Europe is no longer the centre, and the economic power of the West is no longer undisputed. Without this latest development, the present study would not have been possible, even though the concept of polycentricism, in which all centres are considered equal, is still more ideal than real. However, there is no reason why certain elements of idealism cannot be gradually realized – perhaps in a modified form – in a historical context.

The present book – particularly its theoretical framework – is a result of research and reflection over the last 15 years. In this connection, I wish to thank all the people who have been associated with my research activities in one way or another during this long period of time. If they had not invited me to give lectures in Austria, Scandinavia, Slovakia, Germany, China (especially The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the National Science Council, and Tamkang University), Korea and Japan, co-organized symposia with me, or answered my queries in the course of my research, the present study would not have reached its final stage.

I would specifically like to express my gratitude to three scholars whom I consider my mentors, even though I never received formal instruction from them: A. Owen Aldridge, University of Illinois; Wolfgang Bauer, University of Munich; and Günther Debon, University of Heidelberg. Professor Aldridge has read the whole manuscript and has offered many valuable comments. Professors Debon and Bauer are my life-long mentors. I also wish to thank Professor Sigfrid Hoefert, University of Waterloo, who has always lent a sympathetic ear to my professional joys and woes, and to Professor Lucie Bernier, National Chungcheng University, who has always been ready to discuss any theoretical and practical problems with me. I also owe gratitude to Mr. Stephen Ahearn who helped me edit this book at the same time he was completing his doctoral thesis. However, the fine-tuning was carried out by Ms. Cathrin Winkelmann to whom I am much indebted. It goes without saying that I am responsible for all remaining errors.

Professor Ling Yeong Chiu, University of Hong Kong, also deserves special thanks for his help in procuring the Chinese documentation for the chapter on the »Chinese Orphan«. Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge the vital financial help of the Social Sciences Research Council of Canada, which awarded me a research grant that enabled me to take an unpaid leave of absence for one se-

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Parts of some chapters in this book have previously been published. A slightly different version of the chapter »The Transplanted Chinese Orphan in England, France, Germany, Italy And his Repatriation to Hong Kong« was published as »The Orphan of the House Zhao. From its Germination and Bloom in China to its Transplantation in Europe« in the *Festschrift* for Wolfgang Bauer entitled *Das andere China*, edited by Helwig Schmidt-Glintzer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995, pp.601–622). Likewise has a part of the chapter »The Development from Jesuitical Fiction to Jesuit College Drama: The Transformation of Chinesia« been published under the title »The Transformation of Chinesia from Jesuitical Fiction to Jesuit College Drama. A Preliminary Survey« in *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal* (XVII/1995, pp.6–26). The author wishes to thank the Herzog August Bibliothek and the above mentioned journal for permission to reprint parts of the articles. The first three chapters of the book had been presented as Tamkang Chair Lectures at the Tamkang University, Taipei Hsien, in 1994. Subsequently, an unedited draft version was printed. However, the author has retained the copyright.

Montréal, 1996

Adrian Hsia

Theorizing Sinism: An Analysis of Chinesia

The word Sinism may not be found in any dictionaries; however, what it represents is very real. Perhaps it may also be called »Sinologism« which would seem to parallel Edward Said's notion of »Orientalism« described in his study, first published in 1978.¹ The lexicographical meaning of the word includes any characteristics pertaining to the Orient or scholarship in Oriental subjects, while Said uses it to indicate cultural traits of the oriental peoples as perceived and thus reconstructed by Occidentals. For him, the true nature of the oriental peoples is epitomized in the term Orient, e.g. the self-understanding of the Orientals as far as their culture is concerned. But both the Orient and Orientalism are imprecise terms. Originally, the Orient, as opposed to the Occident, included parts of North Africa, the Near East, Persia, and occasionally parts of India. Europeans still use the term in this sense today. In North America, however, the word »Orientals« denotes nearly exclusively the peoples of East Asia. Logically, moreover, from an Americocentric perspective, the Orient, i.e. the East, should be Europe, while Occident should be East Asia. It is apparent that the terms Orient and Occident are Eurocentric inventions. Cultural Europe, which began with the Greeks and Romans, required an opposite entity to define and strengthen its own identity. In this process, the Orientals became the aliens, the enemies, or at least the non-us, the Other.

With the inclusion of all of Asia and North Africa, the Orient is a conglomerate of different nations and cultures. Therefore, it does not have a definable identity. What do Arabs have in common with Indians or with the Chinese or vice versa? The only common denominator is that they are all human beings, but so are Europeans. North Africans do not even live to the east of Europe. It is a non-identity. If the Orient is merely a construct, then Orientalism must logically be a construct too. In addition, how can Orientalists study a non-identity constructed by their culture and remain objective? Can there be real scholarship without objectivity? The answer is obvious.

For my purposes, »Sinologism« would seem to be a more precise term than the Orientalism described by Said. China is a definable entity and, therefore, can be studied objectively. However, using »Sinologism« to denote the subjective interpretation of China seems to be a contradiction in itself. It would also imply

¹ By Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

that no Sinologist and no study of Sinology can be objective or without self-interest. Therefore I have chosen »Sinism« to indicate the study of the phenomenon of »Chinesia« – as opposed to China – constructed by Europeans to serve the interests of a dominant social or political group. These interests dictate the general framework of perception or cognizance of any entity on the other side of »us«. With the development of social forces which also cause the political structure to change, one dominant group will be superseded by another that is more in tune with the current political, social, and economic needs of the time. Accordingly, the framework of cognizance will change; the perception will also evolve with the development of the superstructure. Thus, Sinism is a signifier which characterizes a dynamic process. The concrete content of the term changes according to temporal and spatial evolution. Nothing is static. This rule is applicable not only to Sinism but also to the perception of any social group. Because of its fluid nature, it is also true when we study »Indism« or »Turkism,« sexism or ageism.

As a matter of fact, I am not the inventor of the word »Sinism.« As far as I can ascertain, it was first used in a doctoral dissertation in comparative religion at the University of Chicago in 1929,² but in an entirely different sense. The author, Herrlee Glessner Creel, used the term to encompass indigenous Chinese philosophy. Under this term he describes Confucianism, »Laoism« (i.e. Taoism) and Mohism. Creel thought his coinage met a »genuine need« and filled »an otherwise empty place in the lexicon«. However, history proved him wrong. To use Sinism in the sense he defined would impoverish Chinese philosophy, as he froze it at some point in antiquity. It would suit an earlier prevalent image of China as the land without change. Obviously, it was a construct with which no other Sinologist would agree. The opposite is true with Said's »Orientalism«; his work caused intense discussion which eventually led to the study of alterity. Sinologists also took part in exploring the features of Orientalism in connection with China. Said was invited to Michigan State University to meet with Sinologists. The results of this dialogue were published in a thin volume in 1983.³ The unanimous opinion of this colloquium was that the premises of Said's »Orientalism« are not applicable to China (and some other Asian countries). This opinion was based on the assumption that China had always been depicted in the West without a Eurocentric perspective. The only explanation for why such an erroneous conclusion could be reached was that these scholars knew little of the reception of China in Europe, of which, at least in cultural terms, North America is an integral part.

² Herrlee Glessner Creel, *Sinism. A Study of the Evolution of the Chinese World-View*. Chicago, The Open Court Publishing Co., 1929.

³ Warren I. Cohen [Ed.], *Reflections on Orientalism: Edward Said*. East Lansing, Mich. Asian Studies Center. Michigan State University, 1983.

Even if these Asianists do not read any Western languages other than English, they should have at least learned from the study by the British historian Raymond Dawson entitled *The Chinese Chameleon. An Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilization*⁴ that »East is East and West is West«: China is an oriental society«. This chapter alone should have told them that at some given moment in history, the Chinese were treated as Orientals. Dawson's study contains more suggestive facts. At some other epoch, the Chinese were regarded as »A people of eternal standstill« as the title of another chapter clearly states. Yet another chapter analyses a different construct, namely that China was considered to be »An example and model even for Christians«. This assessment was, however, downgraded again because »The heathen Chinese is peculiar.« From the descriptive titles of the eight chapters alone, a reader should have recognized that although China had once been taken as a role model for Europe, this idea was later repudiated, and China was considered to be as despicable as any other Oriental society populated by heathens. Incidentally, Dawson's study supports my notion of Sinism.

Long before the period that Said focuses on in his study of Orientalism, i.e. around the turn of the 20th century, both English and French literature had their phases of exoticism – actually we should say *exotisme* as the English term has a different nuance – and primitivism to perceive and describe the Other beyond the pale. Unfortunately, critics and theoreticians could not agree on a definition of either term, let alone their interrelation. The French tended to use subterms such as *couleur locale*, *image*, *mirage*,⁵ etc., to describe *exotisme*, a term which evokes »manners and sceneries of foreign countries.«⁶ However, local color, images, and mirages do not clearly draw the borderline between the self and the Other. A study by Louis Cario and Charles Régismanset entitled *L'Exotisme, la littérature coloniale* and published in 1911⁷ could serve to clarify this point. In Part One, which concentrates on the origin of *exotisme*, the first chapter presents travels beginning from the Phoenicians and the Greeks through Marco Polo to the Jesuit missionaries, while the second chapter describes »touristes«. The third chapter, though starting from the 16th century, concentrates on the 18th century and especially on the works of Bernardin de St. Pierre, while the last chapter of Part One studies romanticism. It treats romanticism as being in its entirety more or less exotic, discussing, among other things, the songs of the Scottish bard *Ossian* (which proved to be fake) and Madame de

⁴ London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1967.

⁵ Cf. Wolfgang Reif, *Zivilisationsflucht und literarische Wunschträume. Der exotische Roman im ersten Viertel des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Stuttgart: Metzler Studienausgabe, 1975, S. 1ff.

⁶ »... les mœurs ou les paysages des pays étrangers...« according to the authoritative French dictionary *Le Grand Larousse* of 1961.

⁷ Paris: Mercure de France, 1911.

Staël's account of Germany (interestingly, here Scots and Germans are supposed to be exotic for the French). This may be a very interesting phenomenon and may reveal features of the French national psyche; it definitely shows the state of confusion over the meaning of the term *exotisme*.

Nevertheless, *exotisme* influenced continental Europe, notably Germany and Italy; a flood of studies on imagology and influence ensued in the decades following the publication of Cario's and Régismanset's study. Primitivism, however, seems to have remained an Anglo-American affair. The best documentation of this approach to literature is undoubtedly the *Documentary History of Primitivism*, edited by Arthur O. Lovejoy and George Boas, published in 1935.⁸ In the introduction they distinguished between »chronological primitivism« and »cultural primitivism« while admitting that, in reality, these two forms are closely connected. Both primitivists and exoticists declared their counterpart as a subcategory of their own, but they were able to convince no one but themselves. As late as 1965, in the *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* published by Princeton University Press, »exoticism« is understood as a superficial primitivism, a »nostalgia directed toward the distant and the strange for the sake of novelty«. Even today, both definitions have their own group of followers. Nevertheless, *exotisme* helped to produce a large number of image and influence studies, especially in the 1930s.⁹

It should be noted that neo-*exotisme* and neo-imagology are still very much in vogue in Europe today. I call it neo-*exotisme* because it was rekindled after the Second World War by a kind of *exotisme*-critique. The article entitled »Victor Segalen. Un exotisme sans mensonge« (»An exoticism without deception«) by Princess Marsi Paribatra¹⁰ can serve as an example. After condemning the old *exotisme* – that prior to the turn to the 20th century – as being reveries fabri-

⁸ Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1935.

⁹ Here are some examples of studies in imagology and influences: Chen Shou-Yi, Fan Tsung-chung, and Chian Chung-Shu are three Chinese scholars who published extensively on China and English literature in the thirties and forties. Their essays on this subject matter have been collected and edited by Adrian Hsia in a volume entitled the *Vision of China in the English Literature of the 17th and 18th Centuries*. It shall be published by the Chinese University Press. In Germany, three studies can be mentioned: Chen Chuan, *Die chinesische schöne Literatur im deutschen Schrifttum*. Doctoral thesis of the Christian Albrecht University, Kiel, 1933, and Ursula Aurich, *China im Spiegel der deutschen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Berlin: Germanische Studien, 1935, and Horst von Tschärner, *China in der deutschen Dichtung bis zur Klassik*, München: Verlag von Ernst Reinhard, 1939. Part of Tschärner's book was accepted by the University of Berlin as *China in der deutschen Dichtung* in 1934. On China in French literature the following studies are relevant: Schwartz, William, *The Far East in Modern French Literature (1800-1925)*, Paris: Champion, 1927, Hung Cheng-fu, *Un siècle d'influence chinoise sur la littérature française. 1815-1930*, Paris: Les Éditions Domat-Montchrestien, 1934, and Tschang Tsong Mong, *Voltaire et la Chine*, Doctoral Thesis of the Université de Paris, 1935. Professor Meng Hua of the Beijing University also wrote a doctoral thesis at the Université de Paris IV by the same title in 1988.

¹⁰ *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 30 (1956), pp.497-506.