

The Chinese Chameleon Revisited

The Chinese Chameleon Revisited:
From the Jesuits to Zhang Yimou

Edited by

Zheng Yangwen 鄭揚文

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P U B L I S H I N G

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10 March 2013
Zheng Yangwen

Manchester

INTRODUCTION

THE “CHINESE CHAMELEON” REVISITED¹

ZHENG YANGWEN 鄭揚文

“How that in all this mightie kingdom there is no poore folks walking in the streets nor in the temple a begging, and the order that the King hath given for the meantayning of them that cannot worke.”² Juan González de Mendoza thus sang the praises of the Middle Kingdom in 1585, even though he had never seen the country. The world’s first comprehensive analysis of China became a must-read for many of those bound for the country, and many more who would never set foot there. It not only shaped but also grew European imagination of the Middle Kingdom:

The Political Government of China entirely turns on the Duty of Parents to their Children, and of Children to their Parents. The Emperor is called the Father of the Empire. ... One cannot help being surprised to see a People infinitely numerous, naturally unquiet, self-interested even to excess, and always endeavouring to be rich, nevertheless governed and kept within the Bounds of their

¹ Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon: an Analysis of European Conceptions of Chinese Civilisation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967).

² Juan González de Mendoza (1540-1617), *The History of the Great and Mighty Kingdom of China* (2 vols. London: Hakluyt Society, 1853-54), vol. 1, 66. Mendoza’s information came from Galeote Pereira, Gaspar da Cruz and Martin de Rada, *South China in the Sixteenth Century: Being the Narratives of Galeote Pereira, Fr. Gaspar da Cruz, O.P. [and] Fr. Martín de Rada, O.E.S.A. (1550-1575)* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953).

Duty by a small number of Mandarins at the Head of every Province.³

Like Mendoza, Jean Baptiste du Halde, in his eighteenth-century text, lauded a country he had never visited. Both grossly misrepresented the Middle Kingdom, and they were only two among many who wrote expertly about the country and came to dictate its historical image.⁴ Why did early generations of European visitors, the Jesuits in particular, pay tribute to China? Why did visitors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries criticise, and even criminalise, the country—as exemplified by the infamous character Fu Manchu? Raymond Dawson describes these two polarised views:

Thus China has at one time or another been thought to be rich and poor, advanced and backward, wise and stupid, beautiful and ugly, strong and weak, honest and deceitful—there is no end to the list of contradictory qualities which have been attributed to her.⁵

Dawson identifies the problem brilliantly, but the question remains: Why were representations of the Middle Kingdom “contradictory”? This is the key issue we probe in this volume. A simple answer is that they were “contradictory” because those who represented her were categorically different. In other words, we must first understand those who wrote about China if we are to fully understand their portrayal of the country.

If we reject European accounts as the product of a foreign gaze—even though some, the Jesuits in particular, lived and even died in China—what about the works of native artists like Zhang Yimou, who single-handedly launched Chinese film onto the world stage in the post-Mao era by exoticising the Chinese past to the

³ Jean Baptiste Du Halde (1674–1743), *The General History of China* (3 vols. London: John Watts, 1736), vol. 2, 32.

⁴ Joachim Bouvet, *The History of Cang-Hy, the Present Emperour of China* (London: F. Coggan, 1699); Mateo Ripa, *Memoirs of Father Ripa during Thirteen Years’ Resident at the Court of Peking in the Service of the Emperor of China* (London: John Murray, 1844 English translation); Louis D. Le Comte, *Memoirs and Remarks: Geographical, Historical, and Ecclesiastical. Made in above Ten Years Travels through the Empire of China* (London: John Hughs, 1738).

⁵ Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, 2.

taste and standard of Hollywood?⁶ To make the matter even more complicated, the criticism levied against Mendoza, du Halde and Zhang Yimou actually invites further criticism. Does there exist a single China that can be represented, given the very different geographies and peoples of the country, and its history of foreign rule under the Mongols and the Manchus? Representing a country as large and complex as China can be a daunting task: those who take it on are bound to be constrained by its enormity, as well as their own backgrounds and circumstances. The real question is: How should we read and digest the various representations of China left to us in order to derive a better picture of this diverse, complicated and even contradictory country? This question is important because the "production" of China has now become a profession and industry that influences not just political leaders and ordinary consumers in the West, but more significantly the thousands of students who undertake the study of China.

Literature Review

Although historians and scholars of China have written about Western representations of the country, there is no debate in the field; nor is there a basic framework upon which students and scholars can hang their reading and interpretation. This business was, and still is, dominated by those with access to China, with either the luxury or the opportunity to take an interest in the country, and increasingly those who research the country as a profession. The study of the Middle Kingdom has produced generations of sinologists and specialists. Some, Raymond Dawson and Colin Mackerras for example, provided general accounts for a broad audience, drawing on well-known works on the Middle Kingdom from the earliest times through Marco Polo to contemporary scholars such as John K. Fairbank.⁷ In other words,

⁶ Zhang Yimou (*b.*1951) is director of more than 20 films, many of which have won international prizes, such as *Red Sorghum*, *Ju Dou*, *Raise the Red Lantern*, and *The Road Home*. He was also the artistic director for the opening ceremony at the Olympic Games in 2008.

⁷ Colin Mackerras, *Western Images of China* (Oxford: Oxford University

they focus on those who made the Middle Kingdom visible or accessible to the world. Western images of China through Western eyes, these general works guide us into Chinese studies, but they are selective and for the most part narrative. Many, Nigel Cameron, Nicolas Clifford, Douglas Kerr and Elizabeth Chang to name a few, examine travel writings.⁸ Travelogues are extremely valuable, raw observations that often catch details that many take for granted. Like a snapshot, they capture a particular place, moment, character and event in history—even though in many cases they can be sketchy, superficial and opinionated. They tend to highlight differences in the land and people, not just validating but also reinforcing the exotic image of China which continues to persuade many today. However, few scholars have questioned why travel writers choose the snapshots they capture: is there a pattern to their choices? What might this pattern teach us about European attitudes towards China, and how did these attitudes influence historians,

Press, 1999). See also Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches on our Minds; American images of China and India* (Westport [CT]: Greenwood Press, 1958); J. A. G. Roberts, *China through Western Eyes: The Nineteenth Century: (a Reader in History)* (Wolfeboro Falls [NH]: A. Sutton, 1992) & *China through Western Eyes. The Twentieth Century (a Reader in History)* (Stroud [England] & Wolfeboro Falls [NH]: A. Sutton, 1992)

⁸ Nigel Cameron, *Barbarians and Mandarins: Thirteen centuries of Western travellers in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Nicholas Clifford, *A Truthful Impression of the Country: British and American Travel Writing in China, 1880-1949* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Douglas Kerr and Julia Kuehn, *A Century of Travels in China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007) and Elizabeth Chang, *British Travel Writing from China 1798-1901* (London and Brookfield [VT]: Pickering and Chatto, 2010). See also Mary L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992); Jeffrey Dupée, *British Travel Writers in China—Writing Home to a British Public 1890-1914* (Lewiston [NY] & Lampeter [Wales]: E. Mellen Press, 2004); Susan S. Thurin, *Victorian Travelers and the Opening of China 1842-1907* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999); Fan-ti Fan, *British Naturalists in Qing China: Science, Empire and Cultural Encounter* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Elizabeth Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye: Literature, Empire and Aesthetics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010)

whose work in return shaped the general image of the country?

Lord McCartney's visit to China in 1793 is a defining case in point. Great Britain's first embassy to the Middle Kingdom continues to generate scholarly interest.⁹ Although George Staunton and John Barrow tried to be as detailed and inclusive as possible, leaving us a rich mine of information about Qing China in late eighteenth century, historians have singled out the kowtow story and made much politics of out of it. Some have even linked it to outbreak of the Opium War four decades later, arguing it was a cultural clash that led to the first Sino-British conflict.¹⁰ This small episode in their protracted journey has nevertheless become synonymous with the embassy, through a kind of selective reading and analysis by historians that not only ignores other more important aspects of China found in the accounts, aspects which may better explain the origins of the Opium War, but also sensationalises and politicises an obscure event. This has distorted the real value and significance of these extremely valuable sources, and it exposes a fundamental problem in the representation of China. Though George Staunton clearly stated that Lord McCartney did not kowtow, the Chinese demand for this ritual has

⁹ George L. Staunton, *An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China* (3 vols. London: W. Bulmer, 1797); John Barrow, *A Voyage to CochinChina in the Years 1792 and 1793* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1806); J. L. Cranmer-Byng, *An Embassy to China; being the Journal Kept by Lord Macartney during his Embassy to the Emperor Chien-lung, 1793-1794* (Hamden [CT]: Archon Books, 1963); Robert A. Bickers, *Ritual & Diplomacy: the McCartney Mission to China, 1792-1794* (London: The British Association for Chinese Studies in association with Wellsweep, 1993); James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Carl Déry, *Diplomatie, Rhétorique et Canonnières: Relations entre la Chine et l'Angleterre, de l'Ambassade Macartney à la Guerre de l'Opium, 1793-1842* (Laval [Québec]: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2007). See also James St. André, "Travelling Towards True Translation: the First Generation of Sino-English Translators," *The Translator* 12, 2 (2006): 1-22.

¹⁰ Li Chien-nung, *The Political History of China, 1840-1928* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); Chang Hsin-pao, *Commissioner Lin and the Opium War*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Tan Chung, *China and the Brave New World* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1978).

become the centrepiece of the mission, highlighting the gap between primary sources and what historians can make of them. This is the politics and prejudice in reconstructing the past. The Opium War would have broken out regardless of whether the British kowtowed or not; why have generations of historians singled out an obscure story?

The problem of selective representation can be found in the works of Christian missionaries who wrote extensively about China, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and consequently in the works of historians who drew on their writings. Although the tradition began with the Jesuits writing about Ming-Qing China, analysis devoted to their representations of the country is surprisingly limited, and for the most part produced by European rather than Chinese scholars.¹¹ Scholars of China have studied and used the multitude of works produced by Protestant missionaries since the early nineteenth century, but they seldom question their representations of the country; in other words, they are taken as authoritative accounts. This is obvious in the case of opium: every missionary who wrote about his or her work and life in China mentions or discusses the evil of smoking, and these accounts have been used by generations of anti-opium campaigners, doctors and even historians. It cannot be denied that their portrayals of opium smoking educated the public in the West and helped speed up the abolition of the opium trade in theory if not in practice, but accounts of opium use are often small episodes in the missionaries' rich and long (sometimes multiple-volume) memoirs. Historians' selectiveness has ignored other more important stories in their works, helping to make late-nineteenth-century China almost synonymous with opium. Missionaries often exaggerated the destructive nature of opium smoking in order to justify their calling and mission to the country. The same can be said of disasters, which they often overstated to legitimise their

¹¹ Liam M Brockey, *Journey to the East: the Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007); Mary Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London: Faber, 2011). Chinese historians did write about the history of the Jesuit mission in China: see the works of Florence C. Hsia, David E. Mungello, and Benjamin Elman.

relief efforts, which as a result became an exclusive missionary enterprise.¹² Why do historians and scholars of China continue to dwell on the obsessions of missionaries? Perhaps they too are missionaries of a kind.

Another area that attracted European and American—and later scholarly—attention is Chinese women; they fascinated many even before the opening of China in 1842.¹³ Why were Chinese women so attractive? Here again the power—some would say malpractice—of selective analysis is even more obvious. Nearly all of the works produced focus on the oppression of Chinese women through the practice of foot-binding and other cultural institutions such as arranged marriage and polygamy. European and American men and women, Mrs. Archibald Little being a great example, took it upon themselves and championed the *natural feet* movement.¹⁴ Their works denied agency to Chinese women and influenced generations of scholars until the post-Mao era, when ethnic female scholars like Dorothy Ko and Wang Zheng rose to challenge them. Chinese women can also be found in a multitude of literary works

¹² Pierre Fuller, *Struggling with Famine in Warlord China: Social Networks, Achievements and Limitations, 1920-1921* (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California Irvine, 2011) & "'Barren Soil, Fertile Minds':

North China Famine and Visions of the 'Callous Chinese' circa 1920", *The International History Review* 33, 3 (September 2011): 453-72.

¹³ Mrs. Archibald Little, *A Marriage in China* (London: F. U. White, 1896); Agnes Smedley, *Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution* (Old Westbury [NY]: Feminist Press, 1976) and Florence Ayscough, *Chinese Women, Yesterday and Today* (London, 1938). For the debate, see Judith Stacey, *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983) & Phyllis Andors, *The Unfinished Liberation of Chinese Women, 1949-1980* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983) and Kay A. Johnson, *Women, the Family and Peasant Revolution in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1983). See also Rubie S. Watson and Patricia Buckley Ebrey, eds., *Marriage and Inequality in Chinese Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁴ Mrs. Archibald Little authored at least six books on China, among them *Intimate China* (London: Hutchinson, 1899). For analysis of her work, see Elizabeth Croll, "Like the Chinese Goddess of Mercy: Mrs. Little and the *Natural Feet Society*", in *China and the West: Ideas and Activities*, ed., David S. G. Goodman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), 41-56.

in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many were written by women themselves, Pearl Buck and Emily Hahn for example; this has resurfaced again, although now it is ethnic Chinese women such as Amy Tang and Jung Chang who have taken up the baton. Although analyses of their individual works have recently begun, one question demands our attention: why did women, both Western and ethnic Chinese, feel it was their job to represent China? Would men have seen and represented Chinese culture and society in a different way?¹⁵

If women wrote about China from a private or sentimental perspective, men represented the country from a public or even professional perspective, tending to focus on news-making events, history makers, politics and socio-economic change. The question is not a politically incorrect one; neither is it a generalisation, because men did write about Chinese women, and women, Agnes Smedley for example, did take on more “masculine” topics, even though she also studied women.¹⁶ Richard Tawney, John Buck and Edgar Snow are three among many who followed the footsteps of Thomas Wade and Arthur Smith, and who were followed by many more, Arthur Waley and H. B. Morse for example.¹⁷ Many went to China as

¹⁵ Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Jaime Harker, *America the Middlebrow: Women's Novels, Progressivism, and Middlebrow Authorship between the Wars* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007); Hilary Spurling, *Burying the Bones: Pearl Buck in China* (London: Profile, 2010)

¹⁶ J. O. P. Bland and E. Backhouse, Sterling Seagrave and Christian Henriot for example wrote about Chinese women. See also Agnes Smedley, *The Great Road: the Life and Times of Chu Teh* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1956) & *Portraits of Chinese Women in Revolution* (Old Westbury [NY]: Feminist Press, 1976).

¹⁷ Arthur H. Smith, *Village Life in China: a Study in Sociology* (New York: F. H. Revell, 1899); Richard Henry Tawney, *Land and Labour in China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1932) and John Lossing Buck, *Land Utilization in China: a Study of 16,786 Farms in 168 Localities, and 38,256 Farm Families, in Twenty-two Provinces in China, 1929-1933* (Nanjing: Jinling Daxue, 1937). See also Edgar Snow, *Red Star Over China* (London: Gollancz, 1937); Arthur Waley, *The Opium War through Chinese Eyes* (New York: Macmillan, 1958) and Jerome Ch'en, *China and the West: Society and Culture 1815-1937* (Bloomington,

journalists, an exclusively male profession until the early twentieth century, and they came to dominate the business of writing about China just as the Jesuits had done. The profession itself has produced generations of "China Hands", from H. G. W. Woodhead and Gerald Clark to Harrison Salisbury and Nicolas D. Kristof. The reports they filed from the field documented the Middle Kingdom as she transformed from empire to nation; they have left us a gold mine of raw materials.¹⁸ Their representation of the country was considerably enhanced with the advent of technology, photography being the prime example, as they reported on and historicised the country.

Photographic and visual histories have recently become the focus of several endeavours as academic institutions and scholars try to rescue old photographs, postcards, advertisements and propaganda artworks.¹⁹ The power of images can hardly be underestimated, bearing as they do the potential to be insightful and yet superficial at the same time. The significance of long-gone historical images is often not felt until decades later, as acutely demonstrated by the spring 2006 incident at MIT when Chinese students in Boston reacted strongly to images of a humiliated China

Indiana University Press, 1979).

¹⁸ Charles Taylor, *China Hands: the Globe and Mail in Peking* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1984); H. G. W. Woodhead, *Adventures in Far Eastern Journalism: a Record of Thirty-three Years' Experience* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1935) and Gerald Clark, *Impatient Giant: Red China Today* (New York: D. McKay, 1959). See also Harrison E. Salisbury, *Orbit of China* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967) and Nicolas D. Kristof, *Thunder from the East: Portrait of a Rising Asia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).

¹⁹ Bettina L. Knapp, *Images of Chinese Women: a Westerner's view* (Troy [NY]: Whitston, 1992); Régine Thiriez, *Barbarian Lens: Western Photographers of the Qianlong emperor's European Palaces* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1998); Massimo Quaini and Michele Castelnovi, *Visions of the Celestial Empire: China's Image in Western Cartography* (Genova: Il Portolano, 2007), and Grace Lau, *Picturing the Chinese: early western photographs and postcards of China* (South San Francisco: Long River Press, 2008). See also Historical Photographs of China, <http://hpc.vcea.net/> and Visualising China, <http://visualisingchina.net/>, both headed by Robert Bickers; and Stefan Landsberger's Chinese propaganda posters, <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/>.

in Japanese woodblock prints produced after the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-95.²⁰ Although many assume that we have moved beyond history in the twenty-first century, the nineteenth still comes back to haunt us. The past can be brought back to life despite the distance memory has travelled; selective representation can teach us the best lessons of history and politics.

One constant emerges from the existing literature, whether on the kowtow episode in Lord McCartney's embassy, opium smoking or women: the clear tendency to hunt for, emphasize and dwell on the distance and difference between self and the other. What does this obsession with highlighting self from the other really mean when seen in hindsight from our increasingly globalized age? Far from comprehensive and systematic, existing analysis on Western representations of China is sporadic, selective and largely uncritical. Worst of all, it does not include representations by the Chinese themselves. Jonathan Spence called those who went and worked in the Middle Kingdom "China Helpers", whereas Charles Taylor labelled them, himself included, "China Hands".²¹ Were they there just there to help China, or were they helping their own causes or even themselves? This volume probes this question; it also probes Chinese representations of their own country and culture. Scrutinising self-representation will shed light on that enduring human predisposition to seek out and prioritise, if not exaggerate, the differences between self and the other, rather than the similarities.

Our Contribution

"The Chinese Chameleon Revisited: from the Jesuits to Zhang Yimou" is a comprehensive study of Western representations of China from the time of the Jesuits to the Cold War; it includes self-representation furnished by the Chinese themselves in the post-

²⁰ The MIT Visualising Cultures project.

http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/home/vc01_about.html

²¹ Jonathan Spence, *The China Helpers: Western Advisers in China, 1620-1960* (London, Bodley Head, 1969) & *The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western minds* (New York: Norton, 1998); Charles Taylor, *China Hands*.

Mao era. It is multi-disciplinary, with chapters covering philosophy, history and music, and ranging from literature to gender and screen studies. Far from being hampered by this diversity, this volume aims at a systematic analysis of Western—and Japanese—representations of China as it transformed from an empire to a modern nation state in the Age of Extremes.²² By examining how foreigners portrayed the Middle Kingdom and how the Chinese themselves presented their country, this volume exposes the problems in historical as well as contemporary representations of the country. In doing so, it helps us delve deep into the circumstances under which these works were written, enabling us to see how they came to influence historians and scholars of China, and hence how we should read and interpret both primary sources and those written by historians and scholars.

First, this volume identifies major periods and classifies dominant trends. It begins with the Jesuits, who fashioned the tradition and monopolised the business of writing about the Middle Kingdom from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Their writings were predominately positive, despite a few criticisms mainly addressing China's lack of science and religion. As their influence waned by the late eighteenth century, their praise gave way to outright criticism, and even criminalisation, in the nineteenth century, as new powers America and Japan rose to compete with, and in some ways gradually replace, Europe. The nineteenth century marks the turning point where attitudes towards China changed dramatically: many of the criticisms centred on China's lack of reason and modernity, and the country came to be called the "Sick Man of Asia". The early twentieth century presents a complex case as women, both Western and Chinese, emerged in the field of writing about China. The complexity intensifies when a closed Maoist China suddenly appeared to inspire the global Left while the Cold War raged in the mid-twentieth century. The century ended with post-Mao economic reform, during which the Chinese rose to represent themselves on the global stage. Identifying periods and trends make it possible for

²² Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

us to see the long-term picture in a thematic fashion and enhance systematic analysis. These periods we have identified coincide with the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Empire and the Cold War; they also coincide with China's "last Golden Age", the "Century of Unequal Treaties" and the Mao Era.²³ Perhaps they are not coincidence at all, but rather what Victor Lieberman called "Strange Parallels".²⁴

We start with the Jesuits and their representations of China in Part I, but not just because they created the tradition and dominated the field for two centuries. As historians continue to debate whether Marco Polo really went to China, his famous account nevertheless seems to have been validated by the Jesuits. The only difference was that commercial interest was superseded and reinforced by religious zeal; how exactly this change came about is certainly worth investigating. If China's hustle and bustle was taken as a sign of prosperity by Marco Polo, then its seeming peace and stability were exactly what the Jesuits were looking for. The Middle Kingdom was an ancient civilisation with a people who practiced filial piety, which in the Jesuits' opinion made them the best possible potential Christians. This was a land of richness and opportunity, a well-managed empire with a unique tradition and excellence of governance. They praised the country and highlighted the pillars of its civilisation: its guiding political philosophy or Confucianism, the institution that upheld it, and the scholar-officials who practiced it in their administration of the large empire. Their writings inspired European thinkers and contributed to the Age of Enlightenment.²⁵ If China was "example and model even for Christians," as they themselves proclaimed, why did the country

²³ Charles Hucker, *China's Imperial Past: an Introduction to Chinese History and Culture* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 296.

²⁴ Victor B. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context c.800-1830* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

²⁵ David Martin Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought* (Houndmills [England] & New York: Palgrave, 2001); John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 190-218; Malcolm Crook, William Doyle, and Alan Forrest, eds., *Enlightenment and Revolution: Essays in Honour of Norman Hampson* (Aldershot [England] & Burlington [VT]: Ashgate, 2004).

need Christianity at all?²⁶ China was also seen as a land of aesthetic beauty, which Europe came to mimic in the vogue of *Chinoiserie*.²⁷ From Confucianism to cultures of consumption, Chinese philosophy enlightened Western Europe, and its goods forever changed the European way of life.

The "example and model even for Christians" would become "John Chinaman" and "Dr. Fu Manchu" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the focus of Part II. This was when Protestant nations and missionaries came to represent China; they saw a very different China from the Jesuits, one that lagged behind Europe, an overpopulated land afflicted by natural disasters and opium addiction. In their eyes, the same philosophy that the Jesuits found praiseworthy fostered despotic emperors and scholar-officials who were inept and corrupt, while the people they ruled were deceitful and unruly, as epitomised by the character Fu Manchu, created by Sax Rohmer.²⁸ Above all, the Chinese were heathens; Protestant nations and missionaries adopted different strategies, less accommodating and much more aggressive. They forced open the doors of China in 1842, and wider in 1860, in two opium wars; they used their military supremacy to suppress the Taiping and Boxer rebellions. They defeated, humiliated and criminalised China, by then the "Sick Man of Asia". This was particularly true in the case of Japan, a country which had

²⁶ Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, 35.

²⁷ William W. Appleton, *A Cycle of Cathay: the Chinese Vogue in England during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951) and Patricia Laurence, *Lily Briscoe's Chinese Eye: Bloomsbury, Modernism and China* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). See also David Beevers, *Chinese Whispers: Chinoiserie in Britain, 1650-1930* (Brighton: Royal Pavilion & Museums, 2008); Francesco Morena, *Chinoiserie: the Evolution of the Oriental Style in Italy from the 14th to the 19th Century* (Firenze: Centro Di, 2009); David Porter, *The Chinese Taste in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

²⁸ Sax Rohmer, *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (London: Methuen, 1913). This was followed by other works, such as *The Devil Doctor* and *The Si-Fan Mysteries*. See also Anthony E. Clark, *Beating Devils and Burning their Books: Views of China, Japan and the West* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 2010).

borrowed and learnt from China since earlier times. Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese war in 1895 saw the production of woodblock prints celebrating victory over its once-stronger neighbour. Protestant nations and their missionaries, and now Japan, had completely changed the image of the country. Were eighteenth- and nineteenth-century China so fundamentally different? Or was this a manifestation of the differences between Catholic and Protestant societies?

Part III comes to the twentieth century, the "Age of Extremes", presenting a new, challenging and above all complex pattern as "yellow turns red", in Raymond Dawson's vivid words.²⁹ The world marched into the river of modernity while China seemed unable to pull itself out of the mud of tradition. It was as if the rest of the world needed an antithesis in order to see how far they could travel into the future. China did make progress, and many rallied around it, some lamenting the fragility and loss of Chinese culture at the mercy of reason, and others championing its modernization. China had been the antithesis during the Jesuit era and nineteenth century: this role continued during the Republican Era (1912-1949), when the country was torn between tradition and modernity, and in a more compound fashion after the Second World War when it suddenly emerged to lead the communist offensive against capitalism. China had changed by that time, but maintained its opposition to the West by using ideology and even aid to unite others who had suffered similar fates. China now actively antagonised its former antagonists, in concert with the so-called Third World. It seems that China has finally decided to play the game of international politics as invented and dominated by the West. What can we learn from this change of heart, which continues to underpin China's international relations today?

Chinese self-representation is a topic few have undertaken, and Part IV of this volume seeks to fill that gap in scholarship.³⁰ Although historians and scholars of China can count several

²⁹ Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, 155.

³⁰ C. P. Fitzgerald produced an excellent but extremely short study of self-representation: *The Chinese View of Their Place in the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). See also Rupert Hodder, *In China's Image: Chinese Self-perception in Western Thought* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

episodes, Zheng He's voyages during the Ming dynasty for example, as evidence of Chinese self-assertion, its true beginnings lie in the mid-nineteenth century, when the Qing court sent diplomats to foreign countries and participated in international exhibitions such as the St. Louis Exposition in 1905. The Empress Dowager Cixi even commissioned a portrait of herself for the occasion.³¹ The "dragon lady" became the symbol of a dying civilisation, seeming to set a trend for individual Chinese to begin to represent China on the international stage, officially or unofficially. Raymond Dawson counted Lin Yutang as one of these, but there were others: revolutionary Sun Zhongshan (Yatsen), diplomat Wellington Koo, liberal intellectual Hu Shi, poet Xu Zhimo, Christian leader Watchman Nee, and many more. A pattern seems to emerge: a larger-than-life character would come to symbolize China, and thus represent the country. This pattern continues into the Second World War, when Madam Chiang Kai-shek campaigned for the war against Japan. She presented a people at the mercy of foreign invasion, and was able to secure not just loans but also compassion from many, especially Americans. She became the face of China and earned the country a place in the high table of nations.

The Communist Party of China would perfect the game during the Cold War, as Mao presented a progressive new nation-state that could lead the rest of the Third World, part of his effort to carve out a place for the country on the global stage. This can be seen in China's effort to aid Africa and Latin America, in the Non-Aligned Movement, in the ways in which they managed foreign presses and visitors, and in the propaganda artworks produced.³² The

³¹ Katherine A. Carl, *With the Empress Dowager of China* (London: Nash, 1906)

³² Mathew Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries: the Chinese Revolution in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: the Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), see chapter six by Thomas Burgess and chapter nine by Denis M. Tull; and Sally P. Wood, "Chou Gags Critics in Bandung or How the Media Framed Premier Zhou Enlai at Bandung Conference 1955," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, 5 (August 2010): 1001-27. See also Scott Watson and Zheng Shengtian, *Art of the Great Proletarian Cultural*

Communists were pro-active in image control; this intensified in the post-Mao era, when the regime and its artists courted the world's affection. This can be seen from the establishment of the Confucius Institution around the world, the hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games and 2010 World Exposition, and above all in the films of Zhang Yimou. But the irony is that this China they presented—represented to be more precise—is similar to that portrayed by Europeans and Americans. If foreigners had in the past exoticised China, the Chinese themselves seem to have validated that exoticism, as their self-portrayal reiterates the country's exotic heritage and difference. This reinforces what I highlighted earlier—the tendency to hunt for, emphasize and dwell on the distance and difference between self and the other. China's self-perception was undoubtedly shaped by five centuries of encounter and engagement with Europe and America, but it is clear to the observer that what China presents to the West is different from what it presents to Africa. In other words, post-Mao China treats old imperialists, and those who suffered at their hands, differently. This lays bare its ambiguity towards the outside world on the one hand, and its desire to maximise its heritage and past on the other. China's self-representation demands our attention because it exposes not only the dominant pattern but also the complexity of the Maoist way.

Identifying major periods and dominant trends inevitably leads us to more questions. Why did some see so much difference when looking at the same country? How could some arrive at similar conclusions after looking at China in very different periods? Why has China remained so fascinating to such a wide array of people, from the Jesuits in the sixteenth century to American Protestants in the nineteenth century, and from female writers in the early twentieth century to Parisian intellectuals at the height of the Cold War? If China could inspire such a range of characters from opposite ends of the political, social and religious spectrum over a period of five hundred years, surely the broader question must be:

Revolution, 1966-1976 (Vancouver: Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, 2002). Foreign visitors and journalists wrote much about Mao China, see for example Clark, *Impatient Giant* and Taylor, *Reporter in Red China* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1967).

what is it about China that is so attractive? Raymond Dawson furnishes us with a preliminary answer: "... our response to China (or to any other civilisation) is conditioned partly by the objective situation there and partly by the conscious interests and subconscious needs of our own personalities."³³ Our goal clearly would be to look for the "conscious interests and subconscious needs" of the Jesuits, Protestant missionaries, early twentieth century progressive female writers and 1960s Parisian left wing radicals. What do all these radically different foreigners have in common?

This question leads us to what we call "producers" and "presenters" of China, in our effort to advance a new perspective in our reading and interpretation of the Chinese past. By probing the ways in which they produced or presented China, this volume cross-examines their background and circumstances. Religious and political conviction dictates their gaze upon the Middle Kingdom; more so do the consumers of that gaze. Like an invisible hand, "producers" and "consumers" of China constrain the representation of the country. Delving deep into the circumstances of the producers, and the demands of their consumers, can help us decipher the literary, artistic and journalistic works produced. This volume argues that the producers themselves are more important than the texts, images and sounds they produced. They expose the politics and economics of representing China, and they are an integral part of the works they produced. To understand their representations of China, we must first discover who they are: missionaries of various denominations, explorers, writers (many female), artists of different genres, journalists, tourists and even scholars of different disciplines—a whole array of colourful characters. Taking their lives and circumstances into our reading and consideration will help us see why some sang the praises of China, some condemned it, and some were sympathetic while others were ambivalent.

The new perspective we propose in this volume contains numerous variables, but they all lead to the same constant. Sixteenth-century Jesuits and nineteenth-century Protestants saw

³³ Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon*, 2.

difference not just because they lived in different times, but also because they addressed different audiences at home. Protestant missionaries and progressive female writers, radically different as they were, came to similar conclusions because China had become both the hope for religious regeneration and a fountain of literary inspiration in a time of monumental change. From the Age of Enlightenment and the vogue of *Chinoiserie* to the height of the Cold War, China remained fascinating to French Jesuits and intellectuals alike because a remote and alien country on the far end of the Eurasian continent helped them imagine what they needed to see and hear. This new perspective works even better when we apply it to the Chinese themselves. Self-representation as seen in Zhang Yimou's award-winning films is designed to exoticise and promote China on the global stage. Western exoticisation and Chinese self-exoticisation are no different, because they share the common goal of highlighting self and the other.

Western representations of the East surely lead us to the framework of Orientalism, which is widely and often indiscriminately deployed in the general academic debate. Edward Said defined it as "the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery, and practice".³⁴ It would seem that this volume reinforces his proposition that representations of Orientalism in European culture amounts to "a system of opportunity for making statements about the Orient", and that:

It operates as representations usually do, for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting. In other words, representations have purposes, they are effective much of the time, they accomplish one or many tasks.³⁵

Professor Said clearly explained that his particular set of questions was limited to "the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam". He also pointed out "a large part of the

³⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 73. Many engaged with Said, see for example Lisa Lowe, *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 273.

Orient seems to have been eliminated—India, Japan, China and other sections of the Far East", and that "one could discuss Europe's experience of the Near Orient, or of Islam, apart from its experience of the Far Orient."³⁶ However, the problem is that he did mention China and the Chinese in passing a dozen or so times alongside "scheming Egyptians and half-naked Indians."³⁷ This may well have encouraged the indiscriminate use of orientalism. The two short discussions about the case of China not only suggest ambiguity but also lack of knowledge and context.³⁸ This did not escape the eyes of Chinese scholars. Nicholas Clifford points out that the case of China "does not fit well into the categories of Orientalism", whereas Ming Dong Gu even offers an "alternative".³⁹ This volume adds weight to their arguments by engaging fully with the Said paradigm and situating it within the actual context of Chinese history. We problematise Said's "contention" that "Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness."⁴⁰

Said's Orientalism was not derived from research based on China's encounter and relationship with the West; we should not use it indiscriminately in our study of European and American representations of the country. First of all, the Middle Kingdom neither was nor was seen as "weaker" than Europe until the opium

³⁶ Ibid., 17, see also pages 59 and 62.

³⁷ Ibid., 90, see also pages 104 and 139.

³⁸ Ibid., 251 & 254.

³⁹ Clifford, *A Truthful Impression of the Country*, 15 and Ming Dong Gu, *Sinologism: an Alternative to Orientalism and Postcolonialism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013). See also Shanyin Fiske, "Orientalism Reconsidered: China and the Chinese in Nineteenth Century Literature and Victorian Studies", *Literature Compass* 8, 4 (April 2011): 214-226. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00788.x/full>, accessed on 2 March, 2013 and Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: the Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁴⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 204. Said himself also acknowledged the limitations of his work. See his essay "Orientalism Reconsidered", *Culture Critique* 1 (Autumn 1985): 89-107 at <http://kdevries.net/teaching/teaching/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/said2.pdf>, accessed 10 March 2013.

wars in the mid nineteenth century. From the beginning of European encounter and engagement, whether seen through the eyes of the Jesuits or the Parisian intellectuals of the 1960s, European scholars of different convictions applauded China for various reasons. The country inspired and enlightened. Its difference was not weakness, but rather opportunity for many, from men of religion to men of commerce. This remained the case until the nineteenth century, when political opinions towards the Middle Kingdom began to change. Even then, China still had an army of admirers and supporters. The change of heart grew out of European—British in particular—frustration with China, precisely because it did not treat Europeans as equals but rather as “vassals”, as Lord McCartney’s mission was labelled. Other Europeans, and the newly arrived Americans, shared British frustration; this was best summed up by then American President John Quincy Adams:

The cause of war is the *Kotow*: the arrogant and insupportable pretensions of China, that she will hold commercial intercourse with the rest of mankind, not upon terms of equal reciprocity, but upon the insulting and degrading forms of relation between lord and vassal.⁴¹

The “political doctrine willed over the Orient” can be applied to the nineteenth century, when the West led by Britain passed “judgment” on the country and used “aggression” to open it for foreign penetration. As one hundred years of reform and revolution in the midst of the “Scramble for China” began in the mid-nineteenth century, the dying Middle Kingdom and the emerging new Republic commanded even more fascination. Generations of missionaries, writers and scholars devoted their life and career to the country.⁴² China’s encounter with the West and its transition to modernity continued to captivate many throughout the Cold War and into the post-Mao era. Western “aggression” beginning with the Opium War could not fundamentally change China, which today remains the antithesis, reflecting the aggressors’ inability to

⁴¹ Tan Chung, *China and the Brave New World*, Introduction.

⁴² Robert Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire 1832-1914* (London: Allen Lane, 2011).

impose their will on the country.

This volume also challenges Said's "preconceived archetypes", because Western representations of China, from the sixteenth century and earlier through the nineteenth century to today, do not conform to a single "archetype". Diverse backgrounds and convictions and shifting politics and economics make it impossible for any single "archetype" to dominate. This can be seen from the writings of generations of missionaries of various denominations who sought the same opportunity to convert China; from the artistic works and travelogues produced by Europeans and Americans from the eighteenth century; from the novels by female writers in the early twentieth century, and from the memoirs of Parisian intellectuals during the Cold War.⁴³ Not only were there several archetypes in the European/Western portrayal of China, but these also changed quickly with shifting global alliances, which were complicated by regional politics. The case of China as presented in the chapters herein pushes us to more closely examine the individual rather than general preconceptions. The "producers" and "presenters" of China were different; more so are their preconceptions and archetypes of the country. Their productions and presentations expose their convictions and circumstances, which must be taken into consideration if we are to better comprehend their work. China is better seen as a mirror reflecting the aspirations and anxieties of those who philosophised, composed, researched, reported, painted or filmed it.

This "mirror" cautions us about the multitude of representations of the Middle Kingdom left by generations of "China hands"; it also calls out scholars in Europe and America who seem to have ignored

⁴³ I have not been able to secure a chapter on artistic portrayal of the country and would like to point out that among artists, William Alexander and George Chinnery stood out. For more on Chinnery, see Robin Hutcheon, *Chinnery: the Man and the Legend* (Hong Kong: South China Morning Post, 1974) & Patrick Conner, *George Chinnery, 1774-1852: Artist of India and the China Coast* (Woodbridge [Suffolk]: Antique Collectors' Club, 1993). For more on Alexander, see Susan Legouix, *Image of China: William Alexander* (London: Jupiter Books, 1980) & William Alexander and George Henry Mason, *Views of 18th Century China: Costumes, History, Customs* (London: Studio Editions, 1988).

the impact of European and American writings on China. Their representations reveal more about Europe and America—Japan as well, as chapter five powerfully argues—than imperial, modern or contemporary China. The “mirror” reflected not just their own but their own country’s ambitions and frustrations, whether they saw it or not. To what extent, for example, did China give impetus to Catholic revival in the post-Reformation era, or to nineteenth-century Protestant expansion in a period of increasing secularisation in the Europe/America? What do the works by the multitude of female writers in the early twentieth century tell us about the dawn of female emancipation and the march from tradition to modernity? How could the works of Parisian intellectuals who visited China during the Cultural Revolution help us better comprehend the political and socio-cultural transformation of mid-twentieth-century France and Europe?

This peripheral-to-centre reflective trajectory not only challenges European and American scholars, but also places this volume at the forefront—or frontier—of global history research. European and American portrayals of China are not peripheral at all; they are deeply entrenched, not just within their historical processes but in the various phases of monumental change in global history. This could not be more obvious today, when many politicians, diplomats, journalists and even ordinary Americans see China as a threat.⁴⁴ This view reflects American insecurity on the one hand, and its desire to continue as hegemon on the other. American and European writings on China sit at the heart of their own histories, which demands joint efforts and systematic studies. The idea of “antithesis” is useful because it helps us see the connection between Western writings on China and events in Europe and America: in other words, how their own context shaped the ways in which they perceived and portrayed the country.

⁴⁴ For more, see “Investigating the Chinese Threat: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, Second Session (Washington DC: U.S.G.P.O, 2012) and Zhang Biwu, *Chinese Perceptions of the U.S.: an Exploration of China’s Foreign Policy Motivations* (Lanham [MD]: Lexington Books, 2012). See also Nancy K. Tucker, *The China Threat: Memories, Myths and Realities in the 1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012)