

Dreaming of China in Eighteenth-Century France

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Abstract

In eighteenth-century France, knowledge of the Far East improves while still remaining fragmentary and incomplete. The Jesuits' *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (*Edifying and Curious Letters*), and especially the great work by one of their members, Fr Du Halde, *Description de la Chine* (*Description of China*), 1735, contribute to the advance of knowledge, and the number of works on China and Japan grows constantly over the century, as can be seen in the tables of two periodicals, the *Année* and the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, which give a wide circulation to summaries of these texts.

Here is a significant continuity in this mass of material, which often extends a type of thought dating back to the previous century. What is at stake in treating the subject changes, however, in the eighteenth century. The Far East is no longer the prerogative of erudite circles but is used to provide an entire society with a critical scrutiny of Western institutions. In a sense, this tendency contributes to masking Asian realities rather than unveiling them.

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Montesquieu's *Persian* becomes Chinese for Voltaire (and later Indian). *De la gloire, ou Entretien avec un Chinois (Of Glory, or A Conversation with a Chinaman)*, 1741, invites the French to relativize their ideas on civilization, religion and history, while the *Dictionnaire philosophique (Philosophical Dictionary)* uses the Chinese to criticize the Catholic religion. Later, Ange Goudar's *L'Espion chinois (The Chinese Spy)*, 1773, is written in the same critical vein: inspired by Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* and Goldsmith's *Chinese Letters*, 1762, it represents a violent attack on Western society, its political régime and social organization. In the area of political or religious reflection, the Chinese world often seems like an almost Utopian model, heightening the denunciation of Europe as corrupt and in thrall to absurd traditions.

The Far East, if it is used above all in the context of largely religious and historical thought, also provides the matter to re-examine all of Western art over the century: literature, theatre, music, painting, gardens. Some examples will be studied, notably in the press, the theatre and the novel, with the aim of identifying the stereotypes present in these texts and of determining whether literature looks as favorably on the Orient as does philosophy.

Key concepts : 18th century France, China, Japan, 18th century Western Society

European knowledge of the Far East made great advances in the eighteenth century, with history of China being integrated into universal history¹ around the middle of the century. Travel literature,

commercialexchanges and cartography all accompanied a movement of familiarization that had begun in the previous century with the Jesuit missionary *Letters*. Du Halde, who was the author of some of these letters, wrote an important work *La Description de la Chine* (*Description of China*)², which reached a wide audience and greatly interested the philosophes, and Voltaire in particular. In religion, philosophy, politics and morality, the Chinese example overthrows all the old certainties. But in parallel to the interest of philosophers and historians, China is also in fashion in a way that has little to do with exactness or rationality.

Since Sung-Ching Song's thesis *Voltaire et la Chine* (*Voltaire and China*)³, we are well briefed on Voltaire's view of the country. In the preface to this book, Henri Coulet writes that "Voltaire's interest never weakened and concerned the most varied aspects of China, philosophy, religion, politics, commerce, morals and the country's past."⁴ In what is sometimes called the "China quarrel", turning on such questions as whether the Chinese were idolaters or a religious nation,

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1. François Moureau gives the example of the *Histoire moderne des Chinois, des Japonais, des Indiens [...] pour servir de suite à l'histoire ancienne de M. Rollin* (1755) in "Itinéraires jésuites en Chine ou les Lumières naissent à l'Est", *Studies on Voltaire* (SVEC) 2003:01, p. 437-454, p. 446.
 2. Du Halde, Jean-Baptiste, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise. Enrichie des cartes générales et particulières de ces pays, de la carte générale & des cartes particulières du Thibet, & de la Corée*. Paris, Le Mercier, 1735, 4 vol.
 3. Shun-Ching Song, *Voltaire et la Chine*, thesis, Université de Provence, 1989.
 4. Henri Coulet, "Préface", in Shun-Ching Song, *Voltaire et la Chine*, p. iii.

imitators of the Egyptians or the first civilized people on earth, whether the country was perfect or backward, Voltaire was the principal defender of China⁵ against such critics of China as Rousseau and de Pauw.⁶ The case of Montesquieu is different, as he took an intermediate position, as Walter Watson⁷ has shown. In the *Encyclopédie*, the article *Chine* is very short (especially when compared with the article on *Siam*), but the article *CHINOIS – PHILOSOPHIE DES CHINOIS* (China – Chinese Philosophy) provides a developed discussion, leaving a somewhat mixed impression, while insisting, like Voltaire, on the importance of not being restricted to the Jesuit relations. In the *Histoire des Deux Indes* (*History of the Two Indies*), Diderot observes that the Chinese are "a mature and rational people" with institutions that ought to make China "the country on earth where men are the most humane."⁸ The Physiocrat school of economists, like Voltaire, marvel at the image of the Emperor as a ploughman. China is primarily an utopian model.

This is of course well known.⁹ In this paper I should like to discuss a different subject, that of Far Eastern influences, and especially the

5. In later editions of the *Essai sur les mœurs* he even eliminated anything that did not show China in a favourable light.

6. See François Moureau, "Itinéraires jésuites en Chine ou les Lumières naissent à l'Est", p. 441.

7. Walter Watson, "Interprétations de la Chine à l'époque des Lumières: Montesquieu et Voltaire".

8. Quoted by François Moureau, "Itinéraires jésuites en Chine ou les Lumières naissent à l'Est", p. 447.

9. See *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France (1640-1740)*, thèse de Virgile Pinot (1932), Slatkine, Genève, 1971.

fashion for China, through examples drawn from different genres: the tale (conte), the epistolary novel and the theatre. The works I refer to are *Tanzai et Néadarné* by Crébillon fils (1734), *L’Espion chinois* (*The Chinese spy*), by Ange Goudar (1764), and two plays that are to be found in the Lyon City Library, where the Jesuit collection from their library at Chantilly is deposited, including an important Chinese collection. Less famous than Voltaire’s *L’Orphelin de la Chine* (*The Chinese Orphan*), these plays are entitled *Le Chinois poli en France* (*The Polite Chinaman in France*) and *Les Chinois ou Amour et nature* (*The Chinese, or Love and Nature*) (1800, year 8 of the Revolution). I shall conclude with some remarks on research opportunities in the press.

Tales

In French fiction publishing, the Far East is concretely present through the widespread practice of using false addresses of publication: books that are likely to be considered subversive, whether on account of their immorality or their political positions, and novels¹⁰ are often published in Paris with a fictitious address. Fictional works taking place in Asia claim to be printed in Nagasaki or Beijing, as in the case of the *Anecdotes secrètes pour servir à l’Histoire galante de la Cour de*

10. See by Francoise Weil, *L’interdiction du Roman et la Librairie, 1728–1750*, Aux Amateurs de livres, 1986, and *Livres interdits, livres persécutés, 1720–1770*, Voltaire Foundation, 1998.

Pékin (Secret Anecdotes of the Amorous History of the Court of Beijing), published in 1746 and in reality retailing very Parisian anecdotes, or *Tanzaï et Néadarné* by Crébillon fils, published in 1734. However, Palissot's *Zélinga, histoire chinoise (Zélinga, a Chinese Tale)* gave Marseille as place of publication in 1749.

The Far Eastern reference became more widespread in tales, even if Persia continued to dominate, following the example of the *Thousand And One Nights*, translated by Antoine Galland at the beginning of the century. Chinese examples include Madame de Villedieu (*Nouvelles et galanteries chinoises - Chinese Tales and Romantic Stories*, 1712), Gueulette (*Les Aventures merveilleuses du mandarin Fu Hoam, contes chinois - The Marvellous Adventures of the Mandarin Fu Hoam, Chinese Tales*, 1723), Chevrier (*Bi-Bi, conte traduit du chinois - Bi-Bi, A Tale Translated from the Chinese*), etc. I have chosen *Tanzaï et Néadarné* to establish what image of Asia appears in these tales and what role the Asian location plays in them.

Although it is entitled "A Japanese Story", Crébillon's contemporaries, such as Bouhier¹¹, describe this work as a "Chinese Tale". It does seem Chinese rather than Japanese, with the publication address "In Beijing by Lou Chou Chu La, His Chinese Majesty's Sole Printer for Foreign Languages". The question is raised at the beginning of the preface:

11. *Correspondance littéraire du président Bouhier, quoted by J. Sgard, in Claude Crébillon, Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 1, Garnier (Classiques Garnier), 1999, introduction to *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 243.

This work is undoubtedly one of the most precious monuments of antiquity; and the Chinese accord it such importance that they do not disdain to attribute it to the famous Confucius. Indeed, for the wisdom of its precepts, the soundness of its morality, the beauty of invention, the singularity of the events, and the order that reigns in the work, they have been unable to believe that he was not the author or at least not to wish that he was.¹²

At the beginning of the tale, we are told that it takes place in "Chéchianée, a country that has been lost through the ignorance of geographers"¹³, with Chéchian as its capital. The modern annotators of the text, Jean Sgard and Jean-François Perrin, tell us that these names suggest Cochin China, capital Cacciam, or Great Tartary, one of whose princes was called Che-Chin-Han¹⁴, according to *Prévost's General History of Travel*. The editors also write that, although Crébillon's geography is very unreal, "it could be considered that he situates the kingdom of Tanzaï at the northern frontiers of China, not far from Korea."¹⁵ The preface retraces the history of the manuscript and has it

12. «Cet ouvrage est, sans contredit, un des plus précieux monuments de l'Antiquité ; et les Chinois en font un si grand cas, qu'ils n'ont pas dédaigné de l'attribuer au célèbre Confucius. En effet, pour la sagesse de ses préceptes, la bonté de la morale, la beauté de l'invention, la singularité des événements, et l'ordre qui y est répandu, ils n'ont pu se dispenser de l'en croire l'auteur, ou du moins de souhaiter qu'il le fût.» (in Claude Crébillon, *Oeuvres complètes*, Vol. 1, Garnier (Classiques Garnier), 1999, (éd. Jean Sgard), p. 271-2).

13. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 275.

14. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 683.

15. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 679.

transit by Quang ton (replaced by Nankin in a 1740 edition)¹⁶, a name that could suggest either the port of Canton or the province of Quang ton on the Yellow Sea, not far from Korea.

All of that seems promising, but on reading the book one soon realizes that the setting is a pure convention. There is nothing Chinese in the story, but much oriental fantasy and indicators of the exotic. The heroine travels in a palanquin; one of the secondary characters has a Chinese hairstyle, "à la chinoise"¹⁷. There is a bizarre religion, which seems more Indian or Egyptian than Chinese. It is dominated by manipulative and corrupt priests, serving a divinity called the Great Monkey. All kinds of absurd rituals are mentioned, but this is more a criticism of Catholic religious quarrels than a description of Oriental rites.¹⁸

Although the principal characters have exotic names (the rare consonant Z for Prince Tanzai, the linking of vowels for Princess Néardané), the names are no more Chinese than those of the heroes of *The Chinese Orphan*. Other characters have names that are close to Latin or to the names of objects.¹⁹

16. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 271.

17. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 426.

18. The worship of the magpie's tail, the war over the establishment of square Moustaches, the worship of the sacred pumpkin. The High Priest received from the king a pair of bearskin breeches (the humorous equivalent of the Golden Fleece or the Order of the Holy Spirit) and from the Great Patriarch a marbled paper plume and a duckskin coat. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 332.

19. The High Priest is called Saugrenutio, a mixture of French (*saugrenu*) and Latin. Others are named after objects instead of having normal proper names: the fairy Cucumber, the fairy Moustache, Prince

However, some names are close to Chinese by spelling or sound; we have the "great Genie Chou Macha", or Hinhohu-Yalucha (note the large number of Hs), Onsucho, Rimachou.²⁰ Grouping these names one can try to see how the creation of Chinese names in the tale functioned. The characteristic of these invented names is the large number of Hs and CHs and the great variety of vowel sounds, the preference for contrasts (open vowels next to closed vowels) or vowel juxtapositions, as in Kilohe-ée, with its three successive closed vowels and a spelling that seems strange in French. The translator explains in the preface that he has changed some of the names, notably that of the fairy Hic-nec-sic-la-ki-ha-tipophetaf. He writes, «It was an unbearable name to pronounce, and I changed it."²¹ Apart from these few signs of exoticism, which show the amusement of the French at names that seemed strange and capable of every possible form, the story is not Chinese at all.

The first conclusion to be drawn, then, is that locating the tale in Japan, in China or in Korea is by no means a way of speaking about these countries but a way to obtain more freedom. The first freedom could be the freedom to publish, by attributing the story to somebody whom the police cannot track down. Thus the preface says that the tale could be by Confucius but in reality is by Kilohe-hée, "an illustrious personage who antedates Confucius by more than ten

Cormorant, the genie Daffodil.

20. When Saugrenutio describes the wars of his religion (*Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 333).

21. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 273.

centuries, First Mandarin of the Law, appointed to the noblest offices, who himself could not withhold the admission that he translated it from the ancient Japanese language, in a very old manuscript, and the Japanese Author had himself translated it from the language of the Chéchanians, a people who even in those times no longer existed."²²

Thus, at the origin of the tale are two anonymous authors, one Chechanian and one Japanese. The Japanese author is supposed to have written the tale more that fifteen centuries before Christ, and the manuscript is said to be "very old", which brings us far back into the mists of time.

Further on in the preface, Crébillon comes back through the ages and reaches the contemporary period through several intermediaries. A seventeenth-century Dutch author translates the Chinese text into Dutch²³, but badly. He gives it to a scholar from Leipzig who translates it into Latin and adds notes and commentaries to fill three folio volumes.²⁴ He dies, his heirs augment, complete and complexify the work to the point where it takes up five volumes. Their heirs sell it to a Venetian,

22. «personnage illustre antérieur à Confucius de plus de dix siècles, premier Mandarin de la Loi, revêtu des emplois les plus grands », qui lui-même « n'a pu s'empêcher d'avouer qu'il l'a traduit de l'ancienne langue japonaise, sur un manuscrit très vieux, et l'Auteur japonais l'avait lui-même traduit de la langue des Chéchanians, peuple qui, dès ce temps-là n'existait plus ». (*Tanzai et Néadarné*, p. 270).

23. "But very imperfectly, as he himself admitted" (*Tanzai et Néadarné*, p. 271).

24. This is a criticism of the editing of ancient works, weighed down with notes and comments and translated into different languages before reaching French (the Bible being a notable example).

who translates it into his language without having an adequate knowledge of Latin. And the French translator admits that he does not have a good knowledge of Venetian, and in any case has "adapted" the work and added in his own inventions.

The final version, which has passed through seven languages, has thus little to do with the original, especially as the French translator boasts of having adapted it to French taste by removing everything absurd or clumsy and by adding "in numerous places reflections that are both new and judicious."²⁵ This mixture of addition and subtraction is a way of criticizing the translators of Oriental works, and notably Galland the translator of the *Thousand and One Nights*.

It is also a means for placing the work at a distance. Nobody is taken in, of course, by what is more a game than a strategy: Crébillon was promptly arrested and imprisoned at Vincennes before obtaining his release through the intervention of a protector, the Princesse de Conti. But it is also possible to read between the lines of this imaginative preface. The work is a very daring erotic tale. The reference to Confucius is surprising, given how roughly virtue is treated in the story. The preface praises the tale for "the wisdom of its precepts, the soundness of the morality." We are told also that Kiloho-hée, the true author, "is known in China for a large number of historical, political and moral works."²⁶ This is an indication that there may be great historical, political and moral truths hidden within the tale²⁷ — or

25. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 273.

26. *Tanzaï et Néadarné*, p. 271.

27. This libertine tale is largely allegorical and deals with the main political,

perhaps that the tale is poking fun at all that, which would be another way of presenting history, politics and morals. If Crébillon was imprisoned, it was more for political than for moral reasons, as in most other cases, according to François Moureau.²⁸

Thus, the Far East in the eighteenth-century tale is more an exotic framework than a real place. It represents everything remote and fantastic, replacing other Oriental countries that had become too familiar. It also allows remoteness in time, with the invention of an ancient manuscript, creating an amusing gap between the supposedly venerable and serious text (with the mention of Confucius) and the actual content, which is libertine and fantastic. However, the humour can also be read as a philosophical position: the subjects include marriage and the equality of men and women, the different forms of virtue, dream and reality, the balance between political and religious power. Beyond fantasy and humour, the oriental setting opens the way to the freest kind of experimentation and invention, far from all taboos and established models.

Novels : *The Chinese Spy*

religious and moral questions (it refers to the quarrel between Jansenists and Jesuits and the bull *Unigenitus*), the question of pleasure, the role of women, etc. In his preface, Jean Sgard speaks of Crébillon's interest in treatises on the interpretation of *Holy Scripture* and allegorical readings.

28. See François Moureau *La Plume et le plomb, espaces de l'imprimé et du manuscrit au siècle des Lumières*, PUPS, 2006, p. 46.

Staying in the realm of prose fiction, I propose to examine another example, that of *The Chinese spy* by Ange Goudar, an epistolary narrative published in 1764 and instantly forbidden by the censor. The work uses the structure of the *Persian Letters* which had often been adopted, notably in the *Chinese Letters* of the marquis d'Argens (1739-1740). The mandarin Champ-pi-pi writes from Paris and then from London to correspondents in Beijing, and another mandarin, Sin-ho-ei writes to him from different towns (Lyon, Madrid, Genoa...). They describe the bizarre habits of the Europeans, which they judge very severely, often through striking or comic anecdotes. But the comical rarely hides the seriousness and the violence of the attacks on European civilization.

China appears as a model and corresponds to Voltaire's vision of the country:

- ♦ a rational religion first of all, corresponding to Voltaire's ideas on Chinese religion: "I wish those who founded religions had not confused all sorts of ideas and that one could be a Christian without abandoning reason" (first letter).²⁹
- ♦ a well-governed state where each person has his or her subsistence, corresponding to Voltaire's ideas on the causes of China's high population, contrary to the spectacle of the French provinces, which echoes La Bruyère's portrait of those areas in the seventeenth

29. Lettre 1, ouvr. cit, p.35.

century. Thus, after a visit to a poor household, "Imagine the portrait of indigence, the picture of poverty and the natural spectacle of misery. I left this tomb congratulating myself for being born under a government which protects its peoples from such suffering."³⁰

- ◆ a state where the mandarins, as the educated class, are in power and control everything: he writes to the head of "the religion of Confucius"(Confucianism being thus taken as a religion),to the "minister mandarin," to the mandarin who presides over the sciences, to the mandarin Cotaou-yu-sé, the "Imperial Censor," to the mandarin Kie-tou-na.
- ◆ a just state: "I congratulate myself every day on being born in a society where these inhumane and barbarous acts are corrected by the Constitution. The institution of our Censors protects us from such violence. the life of the most insignificant subject in China is as well protected as that of the most important personage; and if it happened that a prince of the blood royal took the life of any private individual, however unimportant, the censors would immediately instruct the Court so that proceedings against him could be instituted with the full rigour of the laws. And if the Court remained deaf to their voice, there would be only two possibilities: either the prince would be punished , or the emperor would be deposed."³¹ Voltaire insists both in the *Essai sur les mœurs* and in

30. Lettre 2, ouvr. cit, p. 39.

31. Lettre 33, ouvr. cit, p. 84. « je me félicite tous les jours d'être né dans une société où ces inhumanités et ces barbaries sont corrigées par la Constitution. L'établissement de nos censeurs nous met à couvert de

other works such as the ABC³², on the limits placed on the emperor's powers by the law and the courts.

- ♦ a state that oversees the morals of its subjects. Thus, on the subject of prostitution: "If we tolerated such depravity in China, our best laws would have no effect, and our government, which is said to be the wisest in the world, would be the first to perish. If there is something in our country that supports this classical order which is admired by the whole universe, it is the vigilance that we show in preventing debauchery."³³

However, beyond these clichés, characteristic of Voltairian sinophilia, it seems that China is also the home of the natural and quite close in the end to Bougainville's good savages. Thus, everything artificial is criticized, as if Asian civilizations did not possess elaborate codes,

pareilles violences. La vie du dernier sujet à la Chine est aussi en sûreté que celle du premier et s'il arrivait qu'un prince du sang royal la ravît au moindre particulier, les censeurs en instruiraient aussitôt la Cour, pour qu'il fût procédé contre lui suivant la rigueur des lois. Et si elle était sourde à leur voix, il arriverait de deux choses l'une : ou que le prince serait châtié, ou que l'empereur serait détrôné ».

32. Walter Watson, «Interprétations de la Chine à l'époque des Lumières : Montesquieu et Voltaire, in *Les rapports entre la Chine et l'Europe au temps des Lumières*, actes du 2^e colloque international de sinologie (CERIC) 16-18 sept. 1977, Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1980, 15-37, p. 28.
33. Lettre 43, ouvr. cit, p. 98. «Si nous tolérions à la Chine de semblables dépravations, nos meilleures lois seraient sans effet, et notre gouvernement, qui passe pour le plus sage du monde, périrait d'abord. Si quelque chose soutient chez nous cet ordre classique qui fait l'admiration de l'univers, c'est cette attention que nous avons de prévenir la débauche».

notably in the area of female dress and ornament. On women's cosmetics, the writer expresses the same opinion as the marquis d'Argens in his *Chinese Letters*: "you couldn't imagine the effect on a Chinese who is used to being with women in his country who are as Nature made them and who for the first time sees women produced by art."³⁴ The Chinese letter-writer seems to be looking for simplicity in fashion, criticizing vivid and numerous colours and varied motifs in the dress material of the time.³⁵ In fact, China is a pretext, chosen as the site of everything ideal, combining the simplicity of Nature and the harmony of just laws. Ange Goudar's character, like Montesquieu's Persian, is designed to show the absurdity of the French world. Unlike the *Persian Letters*, *The Chinese Spy* does not contain any exotic fiction, with the result that the portrayal contains no dark shadows corresponding to the harem novel in Montesquieu. Nor does the work contain any critique of the Chinese, unlike the marquis d'Argens's work, which depicts a calm that can dissimulate anger and the desire for vengeance, an excessive attention to business, or religious sects that are in conflict and are sometimes bizarre, etc.). China is an utopia in *The Chinese Spy*. To choose China is to choose perfection and allows the writer to give lessons in morality, religion and politics to Europe. But it is in a much more frivolous field that China is most in fashion,

34. Lettre 4, ouvr. cit, p. 41, «tu ne saurais croire l'effet que cela fait sur un chinois accoutumé dans son pays à être avec des femmes qui sortent des mains de la nature, et qui en voit pour la première fois de fabriquées par l'art».

35. Lettre 35.

in theatre, ballet and pantomime.

Theatre

In the César database founded by the late David Trott, the word "chinois" turns up in as many as thirty plays, showing how much China was in fashion. Many are ballets and pantomimes using the decorative aspects of the theme. Others imitate French classical theatre, like Voltaire, but mainly in comedy, as in the case of the plays I found in the Lyon City Library.

Le Chinois poli en France - The Polite Chinaman in France (1754) is the parody of a play that had enjoyed great success and was also imitated by Favart, *Le Chinois de retour - The Return of the Chinaman*. A father promises his serious daughter, Zaïde, to Noureddin (the names are more Arab than Chinese, as in Voltaire and Crébillon). Noureddin has come back from a three-year journey to France. He recounts being a man of fashion and describes seeing Chinese taste everywhere, in clothing, objects, lacquer and porcelain:

In all their jewels
 You will find our taste.
 To dance our ballets
 They show great haste.
 In France they have started

To follow Chinese style:
 Soon the French
 Will borrow our laws pile by pile.³⁶

Noureddin has himself acquired French habits of frivolity and triviality. "Love is just a joke", he says, to the horror of his fiancée, who prefers a more serious young man. Since this is a comedy, everything works out in the end. It is obvious that China represents virtue (in a slightly boring way) and that France represents corruption and gaiety.

Les Chinois ou Amour et nature – The Chinese or Love and Nature contains a standard plot of intrigues and amorous rivalry, with nothing specifically Chinese other than some characters: the villain, Aufrescar, appointed Regent of the Empire during the Emperor Zangti's absence, is a Tartar who is plotting with Genghis Khan. The woman he wants to rake from the Emperor is the wife of a Persian. But the Emperor's image is once again idealized: he possesses all the virtues, generosity, loyalty, gallantry in love (like Genghis Kan in *The Chinese Orphan*, he seeks only freely-consented love from a slave girl), and the play

36. «Dans tous leurs bijoux/ Ils ont mis nos goûts./ Pour danser nos ballets/ On s'y met en frais./ Puisqu'en France/ On commence/ A donner dans le Chinois/ J'imagine/ Qu'à la Chine/ Bientôt des François/ Nous prendront des loix. *Le Chinois poli en France, parodie du Chinois de retour, intermède italien en un acte, représenté pour la première fois sur le théâtre de la Foire Saint-Laurent, le samedi 10 juillet 1754*, par M. Anseaume, 24 s. avec la musique, Paris, 1754, chez Duchesne, rue Saint Jacques, p. 21-22.

depicts the famous ploughing ceremony which so attracted Europeans. China in the theatre is a theme that corresponds to what the French stage has always done, with however some renewal of the historical setting, the costumes, the decorations and even the acting. Mlle Clairon, the great tragic actress who performed in *The Chinese Orphan*, wore a special costume, which was unusual in itself, imitating Chinese costumes, without gloves, without hoops and without diamonds. She adopted a different tone and used unfamiliar gestures (such as placing her hands on her hips) in order to appear Chinese.³⁷

Thus, China and Europe draw closer. China is a fashionable setting, not very faithfully observed, in the theatre as elsewhere. The Chinese tapestries painted by Boucher in 1742 depict a "purely imaginary China,"³⁸ unlike the cartoons of the first tapestries, executed in the seventeenth century on the basis of documents brought back from China by travellers. China is more present than in the seventeenth century but more unreal: that is the price of fashion and popularity. However, China provides a new addition to the mythical gallery of characters who incarnate the virtue of the Ancients. An imagined China, a mythical China, finds its place in a shared imaginary world.

37. See Sylvie Chevalley, *L'Orphelin de la Chine*, Monograph, Comédie française, 1965, p. 12-13.

38. Madeleine Jarry, "The vision of China in the tapestries of the royal manufacture of Beauvais: the first Chinese tapestries", p. 173-183.

The press

One might think of turning to the press in the quest for the real China. Two kinds of journalism are interesting in this regard. The literary journals, which review recent book, and the gazettes, which are political and economic newspapers. In the first case, an index, such as that of the *Année littéraire* (Lénardon) makes it possible to measure frequency and themes, and to study journalists' comments. There is no index for the gazettes, but the hand-written tables of contents are reproduced on CD ROMs such as the *Gazette d'Amsterdam*, covering the entire eighteenth century, which has been digitized and published by the Lyon research group. A search shows up nine articles with the word "China" in the tables for the first half of the century. For more information one has to read the gazette in detail as the news is very dispersed. In 1720, news arrives from Rome (1720, June 28th, December 3rd) or from Constantinople via Vienna (1720, October 11th), or Madras (1720 May 31st). This variety of geographic sources is contrary to what occurs for the other continents. News from North America comes via London (American commercial affairs, Nov. 1st 1720), as does news from Africa (a new settlement in the Gambia, August 9th 1720).³⁹ The dispersion of Asian news is linked to the absence of major European colonization of the continent and to the presence of missionaries, whereas the semi-monopoly enjoyed by certain

39. News from south America is relayed as might be expected through Madrid (a French attack on the Rio de la Plata via Bahia, December 3rd 1720).

capitals for other places is linked to commercial monopoly. The link is obvious, since there have to be ships to carry the news, but it is not insignificant: news from afar follows the general movement of commerce, of colonization, of evangelization and of diplomacy, and the *Gazette d'Amsterdam* speaks of all those subjects.

In the *Gazette d'Amsterdam*, as in most other gazettes, the practice for the years I have examined is to speak only of what will interest the readers. Thus, for Macao⁴⁰ or China, the Jesuits are the main subject. For those who are not fortunate enough to have the Jesuits among them, the moments recorded by the *Gazette d'Amsterdam* are quite different. The arrival of an ambassador is a good opportunity. A Chinese prince visiting Moscow is described as "still very young, extraordinarily handsome, and in no way inhibited in his way of life," with a taste for parades and music. (June 27th 1775). Manners and tastes are a way of recognizing a common code, and the reference to the prince's good looks assimilates him to a norm accepted by all Westerners.

News of the great cataclysms that seem to typify Asia also attract interest: storms, famines and earthquakes. In 1783, the year of the Italian earthquake in Sicily and Calabria, a letter from China announces that "an island almost as large as France has disappeared under the sea with the loss of eight million souls. We await details of this terrible convulsion for the next ordinary" (GC, August 15th, 1783). But there is

40. Death of Cardinal Tournon and appropriation of his house in Macao and all the documents it contained (June 28th, December 3rd).

no follow-up: mail is received with difficulty, and interest fades. We have in fact only fragments of news, and it would be a vast undertaking to reconstruct the image of China in the gazettes.

In Lyon we have undertaken the digitization of another European gazette, the *Nouvelles extraordinaires de divers endroits* – *Extraordinary News from Several Places*, published in Leyden. I am hopeful that through a link-up with a computer science laboratory we shall soon be able to perform word searches in the newspapers, something that is as yet impossible. When the project is complete (in a year?), we shall be able to offer researchers all over the world, and especially at Sogang University, exceptional documentary sources. We shall be able to compare the Far East of the philosophers, found in their novels and tales (a world marked by a Utopian dream) with the Far East in the press. Will it be closer to the real Asia of the eighteenth century? Perhaps not, but it will give us a more complete idea of the image and influence of China in the European world of the eighteenth century.

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