

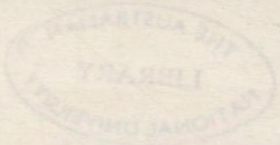
The Forty-eighth George Ernest Morrison Lecture in Ethnology 1987

CHINA IN THE EYES OF THE FRENCH INTELLECTUALS

JEAN CHESNEAUX

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The Australian National University
Canberra



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To be invited to give this lecture in memory of George Ernest Morrison, that remarkable Australian, is not only a pleasure and an honour, it provides a very appropriate occasion to review the unusual position China has held for more than three centuries in the eyes of French intellectuals. Morrison, himself quite fluent in French and well-versed in French literature, was very familiar with some distinguished members of the French intelligentsia who visited China during those 'Morrison years', such as Paul Pelliot, the great Sino-French sinologist, and other great names of the earlier period, such as the Jesuit missionaries who had taken an interest in the country as early as the sixteenth century. Morrison was fully aware of it, that a major intellectual encounter had taken place between France and China. For the *Philosophes*, by Voltaire, Diderot and other contributors to the *Great Encyclopedia*, China was a powerful war machine which they directed against the backwardness, the tyranny, the impotence of the Versailles monarchy. As seen in Morrison's well-known French Ph.D. dissertation, China played a major role in the formation and growth of the *esprit philosophique* in eighteenth century France.

China, in the view of these philosophers, was an empire ruled by an intellectual elite, namely the Confucian hierarchy. In our subsequent Western political culture, our universities being no exception, 'mandarin' has become a symbol of bureaucratic rigidity, almost a dirty word. But such was not the case in the eighteenth century. Voltaire praised very highly the Confucian degree holder he called *lettré* - a strange word which has since vanished entirely.

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1. Virgile Pinot, *La Chine*, Paris, 1932.

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To be invited to give this lecture in memory of George Ernest Morrison, that remarkable Australian, is not only a pleasure and an honour; it provides a very appropriate occasion to review the unique position China has held for more than three centuries in the eyes of French intellectuals. Morrison, himself quite fluent in French and well versed in French literature, was very familiar with some distinguished members of the French intelligentsia who visited China during those 'Morrison years', such as Loti, Segalen and Claudel. He also knew well how prestigious China had been in the eyes of French intellectuals of an earlier period, namely French Jesuits and French *Philosophes* of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century. Their writings occupy a distinctive position on the shelves of Morrison's own library, once in Peking and later transferred to Japan. These early French books with their old-fashioned print and leather binding indicated, and Morrison was fully aware of it, that a major intellectual encounter had taken place between France and China. For the *Philosophes*, for Voltaire, Diderot and other contributors to the *Great Encyclopedia*, China was a powerful war machine which they directed against the backwardness, the tyranny, the impotence of the Versailles monarchy. As seen in the very title of a well-known French Ph.D. dissertation, China played an essential role in the formation and growth of the *esprit philosophique* in eighteenth century France.¹

China, in the view of these *philosophes*, was an empire ruled by an intellectual elite, namely the Confucian literati. In our subsequent Western political culture, our universities being no exception, 'mandarin' has become a symbol of bureaucratic rigidity, almost a dirty word. But such was not the case in the eighteenth century. Voltaire praised very highly the Confucian degree holders he called *Talapoints* – a strange word which has since vanished entirely. China was seen as

¹ Virgile Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France, 1640-1740* (Paris, 1932).

being ruled by men of wisdom, and this was an obvious contrast to the practices of the French monarchy and its corrupt, incompetent, uneducated officials. China was supposed to be at least as advanced as France, on the way towards Enlightenment, towards *l'Age des Lumières*.

These peoples [said Diderot], gifted with a '*consentiment unanime*', are superior to all other Asiatics in antiquity, intellect, art, wisdom, policy, and in their taste for philosophy; nay, in the judgment of certain authors, they dispute the palm in these matters with the most enlightened peoples of Europe.²

Pierre Poivre, one of the very few *Philosophes* who actually visited the Far East, was even more lyrical in his praise of China:

China offers an enchanting picture of what the whole world might become, if the laws of that empire were to become the laws of all nations. Go to Peking! Gaze upon the mightiest of mortals; he is the true and perfect image of Heaven.³

The *Philosophes* also praised China, and accordingly condemned the French *ancien régime*, on a more specific issue which they considered of cardinal importance, namely free trade and free circulation for wheat and other cereals throughout France. The philosopher Quesnay⁴ and other leaders of the *Physiocratique* School, for whom agriculture was the foundation of prosperity, contrasted repeatedly the free movement of rice in China, and the tedious bureaucratic formalities imposed then in

2 From Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. English translation from A. Reichwein, *China and Europe, Intellectual and Artistic Contacts in the Eighteenth Century* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1925), p.92. Reichwein offers the best comprehensive treatment of China at the Age of Enlightenment, together with L. Maverick (see note 10).

3 Pierre Poivre, *Voyages d'un Philosophe* (English translation by Reichwein, loc. cit.)

4 François Quesnay, *Le Despotisme de la Chine* (Paris, 1767). His friends had dubbed him 'the Confucius of Europe'.

France on the trade in wheat, formalities they held responsible for the high prices of food and the frequent famines in the French countryside.

More generally, they saw China as a model government, interfering only lightly with society at large – in contrast to the over-intrusive *Service du Roi*. They took at face value the traditional Confucian precept of *jimi* – governing light-handedly – a precept not quite in conformity with the actual practice of the Confucian bureaucracy at that time. But this did not matter so much, for China was used, to quote from a previous Morrison Lecture devoted to the China-watcher tradition, ‘as a proxy to fight what was in essence a local European and more specifically a French battle’.⁵

Yes, China was a genuine intellectual battlefield. Ironically enough, the China which proved to be such a powerful war-machine against the Catholic monarchy had been introduced into the French intellectual scene by the Jesuits, who had established themselves in Peking as technical advisers to the last Ming and the early Manchu emperors. The Jesuits’ basic strategy was to establish the compatibility of a conversion to Christianity with the continuation of the Confucian ceremonies of respect to the Emperor and to family ancestors. They had to defend this strategy against other influential church lobbies in Rome, especially the Dominicans. The Jesuits were defeated, eventually, but they had produced in the course of this epoch-making controversy – *La Querelle des Cérémonies Chinoises* – an enormous wealth of material highly favourable to Chinese culture and society, among which the standard collections of Father Lecomte⁶ and Father Du Halde⁷ are best known. After these Jesuits’ memoirs had lost their polemical value

5 Lo Hui-min, *The Tradition and Prototype of the China-watcher*, 1976 G.E. Morrison lecture (Australian National University, Canberra, 1978), p. 9.

6 Louis Lecomte, *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine* (Paris, 1969)

7 Du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie Chinoise* (Paris, 1735).

within the Church, they found a new lease of life with the *Philosophes*, who turned them against the whole *ancien régime*.

China's position in this Age of Enlightenment is well-known. Rather than chart it in greater detail, I should like to emphasise that for the French *Philosophe*, China was a perfectly abstract entity, an ideological construct, an intellectual artefact. Needless to say, almost none of them had ever visited China or had contemplated doing so. The *Philosophes*, and the Jesuits before them, knew nothing of the deeply rooted dissatisfaction of the Chinese people with foreign Manchu rule, of the rampant peasant unrest, the bureaucratic control of the economy, the atmosphere of intellectual rigidity, or the repression against dissidents. In their eyes, China was not so much idealised, but rather completely reprocessed, reconstructed so as to fit into French intellectual and political controversies.

Yes, China was an abstraction, and this was not considered a handicap. For China as reconstructed by the *Philosophes* was an essential prerequisite for the achievement of a genuine philosophical universality, for a universal and world-wide approach to human nature and human society. China enabled these *Philosophes* to break away from a Eurocentric view of world history, founded only on Greek and Roman cultures and on earlier Hebrew traditions. To include China in their views on modern progress, to appeal to China as much as to Greece and Rome, was a major intellectual and philosophical advance towards universality. Voltaire was most concerned with this generalising approach to world history. His famous essay, 'The Century of Louis the Fourteenth', concludes – and this was a logical step – not with an assessment of the state of French affairs, but with a chapter which had apparently nothing to do with France, a chapter entirely devoted to the Manchu Emperor Kangxi, whose reign almost exactly corresponds in China to the equally long years of Louis XIV in France. Long before UNESCO, Voltaire compiled under the misleading title *Essai sur les Moeurs* – an essay on human manners and ways – a long and detailed comparative history of the world as it was known to him, making a point of keeping a proper balance between the chapters dealing with Europe, the Arab civilisations, India and of course China.

China had enabled the French *Philosophe* to approach the problems of mankind at the highest possible level, and in most general terms. China had indeed been the occasion of a major intellectual advance, but probably at the expense of China itself. One should wonder whether the Westerner ever gave up this attitude, namely dealing with China as an abstraction, almost as Utopia. The French eighteenth century intellectuals may well have a responsibility for this major incapacity of ours, even today, to face China as a more complex and more concrete reality, not an abstract construction.

For French intellectuals, China was indeed a philosophical abstraction. But it was also a cultural fashion, almost a cultural gadget. *Chinoiseries* were very popular, through tapestries, lacquers and silks, porcelains and ceramics.⁸ Pagodas were built in many aristocratic gardens and parks. China was a popular theme for aquatint engravings. The success of the rococo style in architecture and decoration had a distinct Chinese flavour, the shady and gracefully vanishing colours and shapes of Watteau's landscapes displayed a remote but definite Chinese influence. China was everywhere, even on the stage with a play by Voltaire, *L'Orphelin de la Chine*. The monarchy itself had engaged in the Chinese fashions. The ageing Louis XIV celebrated the first New Year of the eighteenth century with refined, if fake, Chinese-style festivities. Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV's mistress and a declared supporter of Voltaire and Diderot, was keen to give the Chinese touch to her banquets, feasts and dances *à la chinoise*. This Chinese affectation is a well-known chapter of our eighteenth-century cultural history, and it is also a political paradox. For those aristocrats and nobility who had been indulging in Chinese art and Chinese festivities were to meet their fate in 1789 and 1793. They were to be crushed by a major revolution to which China had contributed through the intellectual battles waged by the

⁸ Hugh Honour, *Chinoiseries, the Vision of Cathay* (John Murray, London, 1961).

Philosophes against the monarchy. And this was no longer a dinner party *à la chinoise*.⁹

A major intellectual and cultural encounter had definitely taken place between China and France. But was it France alone? The addiction to *chinoiseries* was equally popular with the English nobility and gentry. German *Philosophes* were as keen as their fellow Frenchmen to achieve genuine universality through China. Such was the message of Leibniz's 'Chinese latest news' (*Novissima Sinica*), an essay advocating the dispatch to Europe of Chinese Confucian missionaries so as to balance the impact of Christian missionaries to China. Yes, China was then valued as a model for the whole of Europe, to quote the title of a suggestive essay by Louis Maverick.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there is something definitely French in the magnitude, in the style, in the rhetoric of France's encounter with China. France was more deeply committed to China than any other European country in the eighteenth century, and this reflects the specifically acute crisis of French society and the French political regime at that time: a crisis in which French intellectuals were most actively involved. The attraction of China, eccentric and artificial as it was, was part of the French ideological upheaval which contributed so decisively to the French Revolution.

The concern for China was also very French in its claim to achieve theoretical universalism, to think and to reason for the whole of humankind in the grand Cartesian tradition. From fashionable *chinoiseries* to high-level intellectual achievements, such as those of Voltaire, Diderot and Gournay, the whole thing was conducted with a

⁹ In 1951, at the Lycée de Chartres where I was teaching history, the bicentenary of Diderot's *Encyclopedia* was celebrated at the initiative of left-wing teachers who were keen to stress the connection between the *Encyclopedia* and French Revolutionary traditions. I gave a public lecture: 'China and the Encyclopedists', of which the present Morrison lecture might be considered the direct descendant.

¹⁰ Lewis A. Maverick, *China, a Model for Europe* (Paul Anderson Company, San Antonio, Texas, 1946).

typical French sense of sensationalism; it was a well-staged intellectual play lasting for almost a century, with the whole cultural elite in the cast. Other peoples simply act; the French always like to perform, and to find a public for it.

One must always take into account this French addiction to performing and making an impact on their public, whether dealing with the intellectual fireworks in honour of China in the eighteenth century, or on the occasion of more recent and far less pleasant pyrotechnics, somewhere in Polynesia...

So the *Philosophes'* encounter with China had, at its own level, contributed to the fall of the French monarchy. And for more than a century, French intellectuals were to be concerned with a completely different range of issues: political revolutions and counter-revolutions, France's position in Europe, industrial development and its social fallout, freedom of speech and of thought, as well as colonial expansion. China had very little to do with these French-centred debates of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It had by then become a target for Western imperialism including France, and its cultural prestige was accordingly declining. China only mattered for a few isolated if not eccentric French intellectuals. China in this period was a very marginal feature in French intellectual life.

Some of these marginal Sinophiles of the nineteenth century were belated admirers of an ideal and abstract China in the grand philosophical tradition. In a little-known novel by Balzac, *L'Interdiction* – a legal measure depriving a spendthrift of control over his estate – a Marquis d'Espard spends all his fortune on reprinting old Jesuit memoirs on China. He is a devoted right-wing monarchist; he admires the Chinese imperial monarchy for allegedly maintaining a social order the French kings had been unable to maintain. His wife, a typical Balzacian *marquise*, has a legal interdiction passed on him.

The Marquis d'Espard is a lonely figure in Balzac's little world – the *Human Comedy* – and equally solitary was the young Baudelaire, who was at college when Balzac was flourishing. In one of his strongest poems, *Le Voyage* (or 'the trip', also with the colloquial connotations of this word), his concern for China is expressed through brief but

extremely challenging verses – a concern he must have developed in his college years:

De meme qu'autrefois nous partions pour la Chine
 Les yeux fixés au large et les cheveux au vent
 Nous nous embarquerons pour la Mer des Ténèbres
 Avec le coeur joyeux d'un jeune passager.¹¹

Just as in the old days we would leave for China
 Our eyes looking out to sea and our hair streaming in the wind
 We shall sail henceforward for the Sea of Darkness
 Cheerful and lighthearted as a young traveller.

This is a major reversal, from the China 'trip' into the Sea of Darkness. This is a remarkable and prophetic insight on the part of Baudelaire, a poetic formulation which is most relevant to our present-day intellectual crisis. We shall refer to it again a little later.

As the nineteenth century went on, as French political involvement in China and Vietnam became more effective, it was not unusual for French intellectuals to visit China and to empathise with her – but always as isolated individuals. Such a one was Father Huc,¹² a Catholic missionary whose minority voice, uncertain as it was, insisted on the specific values of Chinese culture and habits. China was a source of inspiration for diplomats posted there, such as Eugene Simon, whose book *La Cité chinoise* is a minor classic¹³ – modelled on Fustel de Coulanges's standard essay *La Cité grecque*, – and later Paul Claudel, a young consul in Tianjin, expressing his emotions in *Connaissance de l'Est*, a collection of poems in the Symbolist manner.¹⁴ French visitors

11 From *Les Fleurs du Mal* (my translation).

12 Evariste Regis Huc, *L'Empire chinois* (Paris, 1854). For a more severe evaluation of Huc, see Simon Leys, *The Burning Forest* (New York, 1986), pp. 47-94 ('Peregrinations and perplexities of Père Huc').

13 Eugene Simon, *La Cité chinoise* (Paris, 1885).

14 Paul Claudel, *Connaissance de l'Est* (Mercure de France, Paris, 1908).

to China included naval officers such as Pierre Loti, who had witnessed approvingly another sack of Peking by Western Allied forces after the Boxer Rebellion, or Victor Segalen, poet and archaeologist. Later still, intellectuals turned into revolutionaries, such as the young André Malraux who was involved in the 1926-27 Communist revolution in Canton, and who drew on this experience for his two major novels, *Les Conquérants* and *La Condition humaine*. Huc, Simon, Claudel, Segalen, Loti and Malraux had indeed very little in common except that they were somehow marginal figures on the French intellectual scene of their time. Even for those who were later to achieve international fame, such as Claudel and Malraux, China had not been much more than an *aventure de jeunesse* – as had been the case of young René Leys, the intriguing adventurer, the mythomaniac hero of Segalen's best novel, the secret lover of China's last Empress.

Segalen's novel may allow me to say one more word on his unusual cultural itinerary, which began in Polynesia where he was searching for old Polynesian myths and also for Gauguin's manuscripts, and which ended up in China with René Leys and his cryptic poems *Stèles*. China and the Pacific probably fascinated Segalen because of their mutual irreducibility. They utterly contrast one with the other, one in its historical as well as geographical compactness, the other in its marine immensity and its tiny, highly diversified societies. It is hardly surprising that so few Western intellectuals have combined an active interest in both. My own intellectual detours between Chinese studies and the problems of the Pacific have probably brought me closer to Segalen's rather unique position.

All these lively but isolated figures have left us with highly valuable literary contributions. However they expressed little interest in China's historical fate and political plight.¹⁵ They were concerned with

15 The novel by Jules Verne, *Les Tribulations d'un Chinois en Chine* (1879), is quite unique in its concern for the politics of nineteenth-century China. The hero, Kin Fo, is torn between his fascination with modern technology and his loyalty to his teacher Wong, who is an ex-Taiping leader. It is to my knowledge the only appearance of the Taiping rebellion in French literature.

China's essence. China for them, or most of them, was a kind of cultural and aesthetic curiosity. And I am not sure that Malraux does not fall into this category, whatever the political setting of his novels. The powerful voice of Victor Hugo, combining artistic concern and political involvement and condemning from his Guernsey exile the sack of the old Summer Palace in Peking in 1860, has remained distinctly isolated:

Somewhere in a dark corner of the world, there was a marvel of the world and this marvel was named the Summer Palace... It was a kind of frightening unknown masterpiece of Asian civilisation on the horizon of European civilisation.

All the treasures of our cathedrals would not match this formidable Museum of the East.

Two bandits once entered the Summer Palace... One of the victors filled his pockets, whereas the other filled his treasure chests... In the face of history one bandit will bear the name of France, the other the name of England... I hope that some day, France once freed and cleansed will send back to China the booty she has plundered.¹⁶

Incidentally, the Summer Palace of Peking, sacked and burned by French and British vandals, had been restored in the time of Emperor Qianlong (eighteenth century) by Jesuit architects and painters such as the famous Castiglione. The very contribution of European culture to China was smashed down by European militarism in China.

That French intellectuals concerned with China not only were very few, but also showed little interest in the political China, is supported by the non-committed attitude of that strange Jesuit, palaeontologist and philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. His Chinese years in the 1920s and 1930s were most productive intellectually. He elaborated his partly mystical, partly anthropological views on man's fate and future. Yet, he was utterly indifferent to the complex developments of the Chinese

¹⁶ V. Hugo, *Lettre au Capitaine Butler*, Hauteville House, 25 November 1861 (my translation).

revolution at that time, epoch-making as they were. He was living in a China almost without Chinese – except fossils.

Teilhard de Chardin was an intellectual explorer, almost an adventurer, and so was the energetic Pelliot, one of the founding fathers of modern French sinology. He had established his reputation with his expedition to the Dunhuang Buddhist caves in the Gobi Desert, had not hesitated to bribe and to steal, brought back to France a unique Chinese library and became a Professor at the Collège de France at the early age of 27.

French sinology then was still entirely oriented towards classical China. Just as British sinology was a by-product of missionary studies on China, French sinology was a distant replica of Latin and Greek studies in the Jesuit tradition. The teaching aids which the Jesuits had prepared for classical Chinese often used Latin. Classical Chinese studies did not have to pay attention to the China of that time, any more than Latin and Greek studies did to the Italy and Greece of modern times. And classical sinology remained quite marginal in French academic life, just as much as China-inspired novels and poetry in French literature. Yet, the nineteenth-century sinologists had laid the foundations for modern China in studies in the West.

But this long episode of almost total neglect of China was to come to an end with the unexpected ascendancy of Communist China. French intellectuals were caught completely unprepared, all the more since there was strictly no equivalent in France to the sympathetic writings of Snow, Smedley and so many other reporters who had prepared at least some sections of British and American public opinion for the Communist takeover. The French intellectual scene was a blank page – a very Maoist feature – and this was a decisive contributing factor to what has since been described – and branded in some quarters with utter contempt – as the ‘love affair’ between Maoist China and French intellectuals.

This love affair is a very complex story, and requires a much closer look. It had first of all to do with the rejection on the part of the French intellectuals of Soviet-styled communism, once so popular with them. China and Maoism provided ex-Communist Party members with an occasion to settle their accounts with Moscow. Chinese communism was also considered a valuable experiment in Marxist economic theory, and

noted economists, such as Charles Bettelheim¹⁷ always made this point. For Jean-Paul Sartre, who was in the late 1960s at the peak of his cultural and political prestige, Peking was definitely different from Moscow.

China also met a basic aspiration among French left-wing intellectuals, which I would describe as political exoticism, that is, the tendency to look for a political homeland and model of reference in distant, exotic countries. At times in Cuba, at one time in Algeria, in Vietnam, then in China; each provided a substitute for the ideal society France was unable to develop at home, especially after the failure of the May '68 movement – which had been so popular with most intellectuals, and not only with students. The radical young intellectuals of the May '68 generation, such as André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy, who were later to establish themselves as trendy 'new philosophers', were among the most devoted Maoists.

But it would be just too easy to restrict the love affair between Maoism and French intellectuals to such radical groups. At least two completely different factors come into the picture, namely Gaullism and Italy.

A hidden but deep correspondence had always existed between Gaullists and Maoists. Both emphasised the importance of historical roots and long-term perspectives, for *France de toujours* as well as for the Sons of the Han on their everlasting Yellow Earth. Both had refused to align their nuclear policies with the strategies of the superpowers. André Malraux's visit to China in the 1960s, both as a former activist in the 1926-27 revolution and as a prominent Gaullist intellectual, was a symbolic episode, much publicised in France. Had General de Gaulle not died suddenly in 1971, he most probably would have paid Mao Zedong the visit already arranged by his old companion Etienne Manach, then French Ambassador to Peking. It would have been an

¹⁷ Charles Bettelheim, *Cultural Revolution and Industrial Organisation in China: Changes in Management and the Division of Labor*, trans. by Alfred Ehrenfeld (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974). See also *China Since Mao*, by Neil G. Burton and Charles Bettelheim (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1978).

extraordinary performance, in both the grand French and Chinese traditions.

Italy was also very influential. There has always been a special connection between Italy and China. Chinese intellectuals have always felt very much at home in Italy, and the active sympathy for Maoist China of such prominent Italian intellectuals as Malaparte, Alberto Moravia and Maria-Antionietta Macchiocchi certainly made an impact on Parisian literary circles. Altogether, many influential French intellectuals were in those years very keen on visiting China and – however brief their visit – publicising their sympathy for China. Be they Claude Roy, Etiemble, Roland Barthes, Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva¹⁸ or many others, their individual approaches may have differed one from another, but they were all indulging in China as if their commitment to China was more important than China itself. They also affected a definitely revivalistic attitude, as if they were the new sinophiles in the grand eighteenth-century tradition.

By and large, Maoist China was very chic in French cultural life of the 1950s and 1960s. The theatres were packed full at every Peking Opera visit, the books of Han Suyin sold very well, Chinese exhibitions of art at the Grand Palais were a must, the veteran film-director Joris Ivens, Dutch by birth but settled in France, embarked on a 12-hour film on Yu Gong and People's China's achievements, and the well-established literary publishing series *La Pléiade* was wide open to classical Chinese literature, which benefited from the Maoist vogue.

The Maoist mirage met nevertheless with reservations and condemnations from various quarters – from the conservative Catholic right-wing and also from the pro-Moscow French Communist Party, which was hardly surprising, but also from two more specific groups, rather influential among intellectuals. The academic sinologists on one hand were very critical of the pro-Maoist fashion, with very few exceptions they were well aware of the simplistic naivety of the new

¹⁸ Claude Roy, *Clés pour la Chine* (Paris, 1954); Etiemble, *Le Nouveau singe-pelerin* (Paris, 1957); Philippe Sollers, *Tel quel* (a literary magazine edited by Sollers), *passim*; Julia Kristeva, *Des Chinoises* (Paris, 1974)

sinophiles. Yet, one should wonder whether their open hostility towards the fashionable intellectuals was not after all a kind of defensive reaction against what sinologists considered to be trespassing on their professional estate! On the other hand, pro-Maoist intellectuals were harassed pitilessly by a radical and very vociferous group, the young situationists, whose overall attack against established cultural values of every kind had been an important contribution to the May '68 movement. Thus an unexpected anti-Maoist alliance was formed between respectable sinologists and sniping situationists, which was to make a lasting impact in France and in which the Canberra academic scene also became involved.

Looking at this strange, erratic, very emotional love affair at a distance, some fifteen or twenty years later, how should we react – including myself? The whole affair was certainly a strange combination of affectation and naivety, of misinformation and self-complacency, which deserves blame and regret and nothing else. We were definitely lacking intellectual rigour, caution and integrity. Not only did we satisfy ourselves with a rosy picture of China, which was conveyed to us by visitors on short-term and carefully controlled tours, but we made this rosy picture an essential ingredient of our social prestige, our publishing careers, our popularity with the media. We failed completely to assess properly our responsibility towards French public opinion and especially towards those for whom China understandably meant hope, determination, the ability to shape one's own future. I am not sure that self-criticism was something George Ernest Morrison was quite familiar with. But I am pleased that the present Morrison Lecture gives me a convenient occasion for expressing such regret.

Yet I have no regrets whatsoever for the basic motivations which led so many French radical intellectuals to side with Maoism in the turbulent 1970s. Some of the trendy Maoists may have been concerned most of all with the image of China they were propagating for their own satisfaction and prestige. Yet others, as I can testify, had more sincere and far-reaching motivations. We took seriously the 'mass line', in contrast to politics set at the top. People's communes appealed all the more to us, since uncontrolled urban growth had become a cornerstone of the French Fifth Republic overall economic strategies. 'To rely on

one's own strength', *zili gengsheng*, made sense to us, against the prevailing trends towards cultural banalisation of French daily life on the American model. 'Bombard the headquarters' was a slogan well-received among those who, after the failure of the May '68 movement, had experienced the backlash of the established political parties regaining their monopoly over French political life. We were certainly wrong in our simplified approach to the complex realities of Chinese politics and Chinese society. But looking at it from a distance, we were not necessarily wrong in advocating Maoist analyses and Maoist thinking so as to approach critically what we probably knew better than China, namely France itself.

The major intellectual encounter between China and France in the eighteenth century belongs to the past; the solitary French sinophiles of the nineteenth century have remained marginal in French literary history, and the Maoist love affair of the 1960s and early 1970s has ended pathetically, as most love affairs do. What next? One should perhaps consider, by way of conclusion, the relevance China may still have, in relation to the French intellectual crisis of the 1980s.

To describe present-day France in terms of an intellectual crisis may just be too easy, for genuine intellectual life is by nature a crisis in itself, a clash between the world of ideas and the real world, a clash between the old and the new. Every generation is involved in such crises. But the problems French intellectuals are facing in the 1980s go much deeper and much further, they encompass our very model of development all over the world, namely modernity. The present-day French intellectual crisis accordingly develops at two distinct levels. It still concerns French intellectuals and their role in their own society. But our French crisis is also, in much broader terms, a crisis about France itself and not only its intellectuals, it is an ideological dilemma about the validity of our privileged position in the world of today. And at both levels, China is still part of our intellectual horizon.

How should intellectuals stand in relation to politics? Should they be involved? The prevailing trend in today's France is almost total rejection of the *intellectuel engagé* figure, of the politically committed intellectual in the tradition of Voltaire and Hugo, of Emile Zola, Romain Rolland and Jean-Paul Sartre. Here China has certainly played an

indirect yet influential role; for the simplistic excesses of the pro-Maoist rhetoric of yesterday and the bitter, almost overnight realisation that the Maoist mirage was just a mirage, greatly contributed to the discredit of the *intellectuel engagé*. Ironically enough, the same ex-radicals who are presently disavowing their Maoist past have not altogether given up their incorrigible tendency to look abroad for an ideal society. The New Philosophers have turned far away from China to a completely new direction, namely the United States and Reaganism. This is the New Libertarian Right, campaigning in France for economic deregulation and military solidarity with Washington.

Another critical question for present-day French intellectuals deals with their own position in society at large. With the present-day tendency towards elitist professionalisation of academics, doctors, architects and engineers, the 'barefoot doctor' of the Maoist era appears more and more remote. But did the barefoot doctor just represent a Utopian dream, a Rousseauistic image? Interestingly enough, in many developing countries of Asia and Africa, people who probably never read a line of Mao Zedong in their lives commonly refer to 'barefoot architects', more familiar with local building materials than with reinforced concrete, and more concerned with the needs of the ordinary people than with the tastes of high-ranking business executives in their luxury hotels.

More generally, the relevance of the Western model of development for most African, Asian, South American and also Pacific countries is vigorously debated today among French and other Western intellectuals, and this brings us back to China. How to balance heavily centralised technologies, 'white elephants' such as giant dams, expressways, large-scale forestry felling, with 'appropriate technologies' better adjusted to the natural and social environment? How to check the power and influence of foreign technicians indifferent to local problems? How to control the abysmal growth of destitute shanty towns? These basic problems of China have become the problems of Amazonia, South Asia, Black Africa, Melanesia. The interests of some Parisian intellectuals may have shifted elsewhere, but other intellectuals have remained deeply concerned with the relevance, or the irrelevance, of our Western model of development for less affluent countries. In a recent

book dealing with the problems of development,¹⁹ Edgard Pisani, a French intellectual who is also a former French High Commissioner in New Caledonia, has compared the energy gains offered by a large-scale modern dam with the energy savings of 5,000 peasant earthenware stoves. His point is this: these 5,000 stoves are very cheaply produced and they save the heat otherwise wasted when the kettle was just put on stones; these stoves compare very favourably in terms of energy gains with the expensive dam built by transnational corporations under the supervision of highly-paid foreign experts. Pisani is a moderate social democrat. He never indulged in radical Maoism. Yet his argument clearly amounts to a posthumous and quite unexpected validation of some basic themes of the Great Leap Forward thirty years ago.

From Watteau paintings and the Pompadour festivities to peasant stoves in Black Africa, from the Confucian mirage of the eighteenth century to the Maoist mirage of the twentieth century, from Victor Hugo's maledictions against Anglo-French vandalism in Peking to the Gaullian joint celebration of *France de toujours* and *Chine de toujours*, from the *Philosophes'* appeal to China against the tyranny of the old monarchy to the New Radicals' appeal to China against the tyranny of the Western model of development, the story of Sino-French intellectual relations for the last three centuries has been extraordinarily rich and diversified.

From this kaleidoscopic sequence, possibly the most sensitive, the most radical and the most disruptive image is that of Baudelaire:

Just as in the old days we would leave for China
 Our eyes looking out to sea and our hair streaming in the wind
 We shall sail henceforth for the Sea of Darkness
 Cheerful and lighthearted as a young traveller.

We were departing for China with our hair streaming in the wind, and here is the Sea of Darkness. The worldwide ecological environment is in mortal danger in soil and sea, forests and atmosphere. The Third World is facing insoluble indebtedness, suburban youth is threatened with mass dereliction, our uncontrolled agricultural surpluses are unable to cope

19 Edgard Pisani, *La Main et l'entil* (Paris, 1985).

with hundreds of millions of famine-stricken people. Such is the Sea of Darkness before us. Some people, in Baudelaire's own words, may nevertheless be sailing for Darkness and Chaos with the light heart of a young traveller, fascinated by the achievements of computers, space technologies, high-tech communications and the like. I have met such people and they do exist, in China itself as well as in the West. But others are more careful, more demanding, more realistic in the long run, and not only among French intellectuals.

Long ago, the French Catholic radical thinker Pascal was, just like so many of us, fascinated by the unique position of China in world history. He wrote in his sundry notes, his *Pensées*:

Histoire de Chine... Il y a de quoi aveugler et de quoi éclaircir...
Mais la Chine obscurcit, dites-vous. Et je répons: la Chine
obscurcit mais il y a clarté à trouver. Cherchez-la.²⁰

There is in China enough to blind us and enough to illuminate us.

But China makes things obscure, wouldn't you say! And I reply:
China makes things obscure, but there is light to be found. Seek it
out.

Yes, there is light beyond the Sea of Darkness. I thank you.

²⁰ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 822, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, Le Seuil, 1963), p. 605.

THE GEORGE ERNEST MORRISON LECTURE IN ETHNOLOGY

The George Ernest Morrison Lecture was founded by Chinese residents in Australia and others in honour of the late Dr G.E. Morrison, a native of Geelong, Victoria, Australia.

The objects of the foundation of the lectureship were to honour for all time the memory of a great Australian who rendered valuable services to China, and to improve cultural relations between China and Australia. The foundation of the lectureship had the official support of the Chinese Consulate-General and was due in particular to the efforts of Mr William Liu, merchant, of Sydney; Mr William Ah Ket, barrister, of Melbourne; Mr F.J. Quinlan and Sir Colin MacKenzie, of Canberra. From the time of its inception until 1948 the lecture was associated with the Australian Institute of Anatomy, but in the latter year the responsibility for the management of the lectureship was taken over by the Australian National University, and the lectures delivered since that date have been given under the auspices of the University.

The following lectures have been delivered:

Inaugural: W.P. Chen, *The Objects of the Foundation of the Lectureship and a Review of Dr Morrison's Life in China*. 10 May 1932.

Second: W. Ah Ket, *Eastern Thought, with More Particular Reference to Confucius*. 3 May 1933.

Third: J.S. MacDonald, *The History and Development of Chinese Art*. 3 May 1934.

Fourth: W.P. Chen, *The New Culture Movement in China*. 10 May 1935.

Fifth: Wu Lien-teh, *Reminiscences of George E. Morrison; and Chinese Abroad*. 2 September 1936.*

Sixth: Chun-jien Pai, *China Today: With Special Reference to Higher Education*. 4 May 1937.

Seventh: A.F. Barker, *The Impact of Western Industrialism on China*. 17 May 1939.

- Eighth: S.H. Roberts, *The Gifts of the Old China to the New*. 5 June 1939.
- Ninth: Howard Mowll, *West China as Seen Through the Eyes of the Westerner*. 29 May 1949.
- Tenth: W.G. Goddard, *The Ming Shen. A Study in Chinese Democracy*. 5 June 1941.
- Eleventh: D.B. Copland, *The Chinese Social Structure*. 27 September 1948.*
- Twelfth: J.K. Rideout, *Politics in Medieval China*. 28 October 1949.
- Thirteenth: C.P. FitzGerald, *The Revolutionary Tradition in China*. 19 March 1951.
- Fourteenth: H.V. Evatt, *Some Aspects of Morrison's Life and Work*. 4 December 1952.
- Fifteenth: Lord Lindsay of Birker, *China and the West*. 20 October 1953.
- Sixteenth: M. Titiev, *Chinese Elements in Japanese Culture*. 27 July 1954.
- Seventeenth: H. Bielenstein, *Emperor Kuang-Wu (A.D. 25-27) and the Northern Barbarians*. 2 November 1955.*
- Eighteenth: Leonard B. Cox, *The Buddhist Temples of Yun-Kang and Lung-Men*. 17 October 1956.*
- Nineteenth: Otto P.N. Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, *The Chinese Civil Service*. 4 November 1957.
- Twentieth: A.R. Davies, *The Narrow Lane: Some Observations on the Recluse in Traditional Chinese Society*. 19 November 1958.
- Twenty-first: C.N. Spinks, *The Khmer Temple of Prah Vihar*. 6 October 1959.*
- Twenty-second: Chen Chih-mai, *Chinese Landscape Painting: The Golden Age*. 5 October 1960.*
- Twenty-third: L. Carrington Goodrich, *China's Contacts with Other Parts of Asia in Ancient Times*. 1 August 1961.*

- Twenty-fourth: N.G.D. Malmqvist, *Problems and Methods in Chinese Linguistics*. 22 November 1962.*
- Twenty-fifth: H.F. Simon, *Some Motivations of Chinese Foreign Policy*. 3 October 1963.
- Twenty-sixth: Wang Ling, *Calendar, Cannon and Clock in the Cultural Relations between Europe and China*. 18 November 1964.
- Twenty-seventh: A.M. Halpern, *Chinese Foreign Policy – Success or Failure?* 9 August 1966.*
- Twenty-eighth: J.W. de Jong, *Buddha's Word in China*. 18 October 1967.*
- Twenty-ninth: J.D. Frodsham, *New Perspectives in Chinese Literature*. 23 July 1968.*
- Thirtieth: E.A. Huck, *The Assimilation of the Chinese in Australia*. 6 November 1969.*
- Thirty-first: K.A. Wittfogel, *Agriculture: A Key to the Understanding of Chinese Society, Past and Present*. 6 April 1970.*
- Thirty-second: I. de Rachewiltz, *Prester John and Europe's Discovery of East Asia*. 3 November 1971.*
- Thirty-third: Eugene Kamenka, *Marx, Marxism and China*. 6 September 1972.
- Thirty-fourth: Liu Ts'un-yan, *On the Art of Ruling a Big Country: Views of Three Chinese Emperors*. 13 November 1973.*
- Thirty-fifth: Jerome Ch'en, *Peasant Activism in Contemporary China*. 22 July 1974.
- Thirty-sixth: Yi-fu Tuan, *Chinese Attitudes to Nature: Idea and Reality*. 3 September 1975.
- Thirty-seventh: Lo Hui-Min, *The Tradition and Prototypes of the China-Watcher*. 27 October 1976.*
- Thirty-eighth: Roy Hofheinz, *People, Places and Politics in Modern China*. 17 August 1977.

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- Forty-seventh: Pierre Ryckmans, *The Chinese Attitude Towards the Past*. 16 July 1986.*
- Forty-eighth: Jean Chesneaux, *China in the Eyes of the French Intellectuals*. 24 June 1987.*

* Available from Contemporary China Centre, Research School of Pacific Studies.

