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RAS SHANGHAI – PAST AND PRESENT

Members of the Royal Asiatic Society participate in a long history of inquiry into all aspects of Asian culture. Founded in London in 1823, the Society was granted a Royal Charter the following year. The vision of advancing western knowledge of Asian countries led to the founding of associated societies, which now include branches in India (Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, and Bihar), Sri Lanka, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, China (Shanghai and Beijing) and Hong Kong.

The Shanghai-based society had its beginnings in 1857, when a small group of British and Americans seeking intellectual engagement in a city dedicated to commerce established the Shanghai Literary and Scientific Society. Within a year the organisation was granted affiliation with the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, and the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society was born. The ambitious aims of this fledgling society—to investigate subjects connected with China, the publication of papers in a journal, and the formation of a library and a museum—were realised largely through the dedication of spirited volunteers. The completion in 1933 of the architecturally progressive headquarters, at today's 20 Huqiu Road, crystallised their achievements.

Although it no longer belongs to the RAS, this building, with its impressive mix of Art Deco form with classical Chinese ornament, is a landmark structure in Shanghai's architectural landscape. Its architect, George Leopold Wilson (1880-1967) was senior partner of Palmer and Turner architecture, and in his role as a member of the RAS Council he spearheaded the campaign to raise funds for the building. Adapted from a lion carving on the building, our logo is named 'Tug', as Wilson was familiarly known, in appreciation of his contribution to the city.

The RAS continued its work in difficult straits for a few years after the war, but acknowledged that these were its 'twilight' years. It ceased to function in 1952. However, during its long and honourable history, it richly contributed to the intellectual and cultural life in Shanghai through its valuable research and spirited public service. In the belief that China can again benefit from its presence, the RAS was resurrected in Hangzhou in 2006, before moving to Shanghai in 2007 where it reconvened the activities of the North China Branch.

The Society continues to develop aims formulated over a century

ago, and has revived its Journal and established a new Library. The North Branch China Library initially consolidated with the acquisition of over 700 books from the collection of noted sinologist Alexander Wylie in 1858, grew into one of the finest foreign language libraries in China. It eventually comprised nearly 40,000 books covering such subjects as Chinese history, travel, biography, sciences, and language, and also included many rare volumes. After the RAS departed Shanghai, its library was absorbed into the Shanghai Municipal Library and housed in the Bibliotheca Zikawei, part of a mission complex created during the 19th century by French Jesuits. It is now open to the public and may be visited by anyone with a Shanghai Municipal Library card.

Our new RAS library, containing private loans and donations from members and scholars, is now housed in the Sino-British University College in Shanghai in the former French Concession. An almost complete run of formal journals, dating back to 1859, is to be found there, alongside documents and images related to RAS history and a range of books that are available for loan by members. Opening times are given on our website.

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR READERS, RAS MEMBERS, AND FRIENDS,

It is my great pleasure to present the third edition of the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society China in Shanghai in its modern iteration. With the weight of the publication's long history as inspiration, I have gathered what I hope will prove to be a compelling and stimulating collection of essays, musings, and creative pieces from our membership and from further afield.

For this edition, a theme presented itself naturally as the submissions came in: China and its interactions with the rest of the world. With the nation now standing at the forefront of global politics and economics, there seems no better time to ponder how its history and future intertwine, and how its culture is influencing the wider world.

In *Peking is Like Paris*, Paul French investigates American artist and landscape architect Isamu Noguchi's encounter with Peking's international milieu in 1930, while in *Lady Precious Stream Returns Home*, Da Zheng considers the reception of Shih-I Hsiung's groundbreaking play in the West.

Liliane Willens presents a vivid portrait of Washington DC's Chinatown, Didier Pujol makes a survey of Shanghai's historic and modern relationship with music, and Richard de Grijps looks to the stars in his study of *The Human Face of Early Modern Astronomy in China*.

Moving closer to the present day, Julie Chun presents a poignant picture of tragic contemporary artist Datong Dazheng, whose work was recently brought to a wider audience at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai, while Barnaby Powell and Alex Mackinnon take on *China's Challenge: Using its Culture as an Instrument of Soft Power*.

Next comes my own biography of French missionary Henri Simonin told through a series of antique postcards, followed by a reprint of an article by Lin Yutang from the RAS Journal's 1931 edition on *The Technique and Spirit of Chinese Poetry*.

The issue concludes with original poems from Shelly Bryant and Alex Liebowitz, and book reviews of Susan Barker's *The Incarnations* and Maisie J. Meyer's *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews*.

This publication also serves as my personal swan song, after four

years on the RAS Shanghai Council—three as Programme Director and one as Journal Editor. It has been my great honour to carry forward the traditions of the organisation while adding fresh perspectives, and I leave with the certainty that the fine work of the Council and its supporters will continue.

Sincerely, and with many thanks,

SUSIE GORDON

“PEKING IS LIKE PARIS”

Isamu Noguchi and his Encounter with Peking’s International Milieu in 19301

BY PAUL FRENCH

ABSTRACT

Isamu Noguchi (1904-1988) was a prominent Japanese American artist, sculptor and landscape architect whose career beginning in the 1920s spanned six decades. Known particularly for his sculpture and public works, Noguchi also designed stage sets for various Martha Graham productions and some iconic pieces of 20th century furniture and lighting design, still in production today.

Noguchi’s interest in the art world, Modernism and the avant-garde began in New York City in the early 1920s. He travelled to Paris in 1927 on a Guggenheim Scholarship where he became an assistant to Constantin Brâncuși, the Romanian pioneer of Modernist sculpture. From Brâncuși, Noguchi learned to appreciate the older artist’s reductive forms and turned to Modernism, but also became interested in traditional Asian art forms and styles, travelling to London to study Eastern sculpture. Eventually returning to New York, his abstract style developed and his reputation grew, partially through his collaborations with the futurist architect Buckminster Fuller and the modern dance choreographer, Martha Graham. In 1930 Noguchi intended to visit his father in Tokyo (who had been mostly absent during his childhood) but, at the last minute, travelled to Peking instead.

Noguchi spent six months in Peking from June 1930 to January 1931. As a committed Modernist, Noguchi, then 26, explicitly rejected the ideology of Realism and in doing so sought to make use of the artistic styles of ancient traditions. He wanted to better understand classical Chinese style and was fortunate enough to be introduced to Qi Baishi (Chi Pai Shih), the then 66-year-old water colourist, calligrapher, and woodcutter, with whom he arranged to study brush-painting techniques. Noguchi’s Peking experience was to greatly affect his creative vision.

While Noguchi’s time with and relationship to Qi Baishi has been relatively well documented, the wider cultural and artistic international milieu in which he mixed while resident in Peking has not. This paper seeks to survey the other individuals whom Noguchi encountered while

in the city and the effect of its hybridised atmosphere on his artistic development. I will argue that Peking's cross-cultural fertilisation between native and foreign artists, Chinese political activists, Orientalists, collectors, members of the international avant garde and assorted sojourners from Europe, America, and Japan, were highly influential on his Modernist outlook and subsequent work.

“PEKING IS LIKE PARIS”

When Isamu Noguchi arrived in Peking (Beijing) in June 1930 he had not been planning on a trip to China. His original idea had been to travel from Paris to Japan on the Trans-Siberian Express in order to visit his father, the poet and writer Yone Noguchi (1875-1947), who was living in Tokyo. Isamu had only seen Yone intermittently since his father's separation from his mother, the American writer and editor Léonie Gilmour (1873-1933). Despite spending some of his boyhood in Japan he had returned to America in his teens. However, in 1929, Yone Noguchi wrote to Isamu expressing his wish that he did not visit Japan using his family name. Isamu, shocked at this seeming rejection by his father, cancelled his plans to visit Tokyo and instead, at the last minute, travelled to Peking.

This sudden change of plans by the artist meant that he arrived in Peking having made no advance preparation and with few formal contacts in the city. However, those people with whom he did make contact in Peking were to be highly influential on him and his emerging Modernist aesthetic. His most significant encounter was with the traditional Chinese calligrapher and woodcut artist Qi Baishi (Chi Pai Shih, 1864-1957)—a pupil-teacher relationship that was to revolutionise Noguchi's work. He also came into contact with a number of foreigners, either working or sojourning in the city, during that time who were to be equally important to him. While Noguchi's six months spent studying and working with Qi are well recorded, the interactions he had with others in Peking have been somewhat overlooked but are worth noting.

In 1973, in an interview with the American art historian Paul Cummings for the *Archives of American Art*, Noguchi, looking back on 1930 and his visit to China observed: 'Peking is like Paris. It's a city of great antiquity, you know, a thousand years. I mean you find the Yuan walls there. It's a culture that is so embedded in the place that it has a life of its own.'² This paper seeks to recover some of the 'life' that Noguchi experienced in Peking in 1930 and early 1931.

FIRST CONTACT

Noguchi's major contact in Peking was Sotokichi Katsuizumi (1889-1985), a Japanese national who was a senior manager with the Peking branch of the Yokohama Specie Bank (Yokohama Shokin Ginko), based in the bank's impressive headquarters in the heart of the Legation Quarter and close to the Japanese Legation on the rue Meu³. Katsuizumi was international in his outlook and very well travelled; he had received his Masters in Economics from the University of Michigan in 1922. For a time, when younger, in the earlier 1920s, he had held fairly reactionary views. He had been a Japanese delegate to the 1922 Washington Disarmament Conference, publishing his views of the conference in a book entitled *Critical Observation on the Washington Conference*⁴. Katsuizumi had joined the Yokohama Specie Bank, effectively Japan's national bank, in Peking as an economist in 1925 and was to remain in the city until 1932.

How exactly Noguchi came to know Katsuizumi is something of a mystery. It is likely that Katsuizumi knew of Isamu's father, Yone, from Tokyo and made contact knowing his son was in town. Noguchi based himself in Peking not too far from where Katsuizumi worked in the Legation Quarter. He rented a traditional courtyard property (*siheyuan*), which he described as 'splendid living'⁵, (complete with a houseboy who spoke French, a cook, and a rickshaw boy) at No.18 Dayangmao Hutong (Great Wool Alley). It was close to the ancient observatory and within the boundaries of the old Tartar Wall, a short walk to the eastern edge of the Legation Quarter⁶. It was through Katsuizumi that Noguchi met Qi Baishi. Impressed by the collection of Qi's scrolls that adorned the walls of Katsuizumi's home he requested an introduction to the artist. Katsuizumi was happy to oblige.

Katsuizumi had come to know Qi Baishi through his friendship with Tanso Ito, another Japanese national resident in Peking. Ito (who was known to Qi Baishi by his Chinese name Yiteng) also worked for the Yokohama Specie Bank in Peking. He had worked for them previously in Dalian (or Dairen, as the Japanese termed the city) in the 1920s, and was to return to work there again in the 1930s. Ito was an art lover who had chanced upon the work of Qi and had made contact with him, subsequently introducing many of his fellow Japanese in Peking, including Katsuizumi, to the artist. Both Ito and Katsuizumi were to acquire many works directly from Qi (or from Qi's wife) and form fairly impressive personal collections. Additionally Qi gave signed and

personalised calligraphic scrolls to Ito indicating their close friendship despite the mounting tensions between China and Japan at the time on the eve of the Japanese annexation of Manchuria (1931)⁷.

Qi was himself a conduit for Noguchi to several other Chinese artists and teachers. Primary among these was Lin Fengmian (1900-1991), a pioneer of modern Chinese painting that blended Chinese and Western painting styles. Lin, a native of Guangdong province, had moved to Europe in 1920 to study painting in France. In 1923, he relocated to Berlin and then, in 1925, returned to China, where he became principal of the Beijing State Vocational Art School. Several years later, in 1928, Lin helped to found the National Academy of Art, the country's first comprehensive art academy (originally based in Hangzhou and colloquially known as Guomei⁸), becoming its first principal. When the Academy moved to Beijing it was Lin who had hired Qi Baishi. Lin and Noguchi would have been attracted to each other given Lin's European experiences and his advocacy of a more Expressionist and Modernist approach to painting among Guomei's students.

THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Qi's work was of interest to a number of European Chinese art aficionados and collectors in the 1920s and 1930s as well as the Japanese collectors. Most notable perhaps, among those foreigners in the city who collected and championed Qi's work, was the Czech artist-turned-dealer Vojtech Chytil (1896-1935) who collected a number of Qi's paintings and calligraphic scrolls during his prolonged sojourn in Peking⁹.

Another long-term foreign resident of Peking of interest to Noguchi for his personal collection and knowledge was Jean-Pierre Dubosc. How Noguchi came to know and be in contact with this Frenchman is uncertain, though the two may have come to know each other during Noguchi's time in Paris during the 1920s while on his Guggenheim Scholarship assisting the pioneer Modernist sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (1876-1957). Additionally, Dubosc was married to Janine Loo, a painter and sculptor and the daughter of Ching-Tsai ("C.T.") Loo (1880-1957), the Chinese-born owner of the C.T. Loo Gallery on the rue de Courcelles in Paris. Loo had arrived in France around the turn of the century and started commercially dealing Asian art and *objets* under the business name C.T. Loo et Cie. By around 1910 Loo had expanded into other European countries and the USA (with a gallery on New York's Fifth Avenue). Loo eventually

became prosperous enough to found, in 1926, a large antiques and curios emporium, a quite amazing pagoda-inspired structure (though designed by a French architect) adjacent to the Parc Monceau in Paris's well-heeled VIIIth arrondissement. Inside were *Chinois* style ceilings, a moon gate, and a gallery carved in 18th and 19th century Indian woods. It is quite possible Noguchi visited Loo's establishment while resident in Paris¹⁰.

C.T. Loo was Paris's first major private collection of Asian art, supplying museums in Europe and America and including artefacts and artworks from Japan, Siam (Thailand), Burma (Myanmar), and Tibet, as well as China. C.T. Loo's connections to the Republican government and cultural elite in China were excellent (and helped his business enormously) and he also founded branches in Peking and Shanghai, both to buy and sell. According to Yiyou Wang, Dubosc was not only C.T. Loo's son-in-law but also one of his business partners¹¹.

Dubosc was attached as a diplomat to the French Legation in Peking¹² and lived in the city with his family. He was a renowned connoisseur of Chinese art, and an avid collector of Chinese lacquer ware and ceramics, writing extensively on Ming and Qing ceramics and organising exhibitions in China, Europe, and America. Dubosc and Janine lived outside the Legation Quarter in a large traditional courtyard property in the western part of the city close to Qi Baishi's residence and studio on Kuache Hutong (Getting on a Cart Lane). Both Dubosc and Qi had lived in this area since the mid-1920s and presumably knew each other well. Dubosc, through a combination of his own collecting, his diplomatic contacts, and his relationship with the daughter of France's premier Chinese art dealer, was extremely well connected with both Peking's artistic and cultural elite as well as the Republican government. His home was a centre for many visiting or sojourning European expatriates visiting Peking and interested in Chinese art. As well as his friendship with Noguchi during his time in Peking, Dubosc was to become good friends, slightly later, with Hedda Morrison (1908-1991), the German-Australian photographer who resided in Peking from 1933 to 1946.

Dubosc was a habitué of the antique and curio shops of Peking from which he sourced various treasures for European and American museums (most notably the Guimet Museum in Paris, a specialist collection of Asian art) as well as for C.T. Loo's dealership business (whose customers included the Morgans and Rockefellers as well as

institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and his own substantial personal collection. Between the two World Wars the main art, antique, and curio dealers were grouped in several areas along Hatamen Street (Chongwenmen Street), Morrison Street (Wangfujing), various smaller clusters in the Tartar City as well as around the pawn shops on the lower part of Chi'en Men Street (Qianmen East Street). Additionally occasional bargains were to be found at the Thieves Market (now the Hong Qiao, or Red Bridge, Market) as well as the various bazaars and temple fairs, though fakes abounded and a good eye was required. Hedda Morrison wrote that Dubosc's reputation as a discerning collector was such that Chinese art dealers often came to his house with items on offer¹³. Shortly after the First World War the American sojourner in Peking, Ellen Newbold LaMotte, noted these dealers that came to the houses of known collectors and would, 'bow themselves in with such ingratiation, comments that we couldn't resist, and then stoop over and exhibit such treasures that there's no withstanding them.'¹⁴

Dubosc was keen, both from an intellectual standpoint and as a sales pitch, to accentuate the relationship between Chinese works of art from the Ming and Qing Dynasties and modern European art. In the catalogue for a 1949 exhibition of Ming and Qing paintings in New York, organised jointly by C.T. Loo and Dubosc, the Frenchman wrote, '...Vollard, after looking at the landscapes by Wang Yuan-chi remarked, "But I see Cézanne in them."¹⁵ Here Dubosc was referring to his earlier conversations regarding Chinese art with Ambroise Vollard (1866–1939), regarded as one of the most important dealers in French contemporary art at the beginning of the twentieth century. It can safely be assumed that Noguchi was keen to hear such cross-cultural references expressed as he moved between the European and American modern art he had so recently left in Paris, London, and New York, and the traditional Chinese styles he was now seeing on a daily basis in Qi Baishi's studio in Peking.

THE AMERICAN COLONY

As an American citizen Noguchi naturally made contacts within the American community in Peking at the time. Perhaps primary among these was Carl Schuster (1904-1969). A key element of Noguchi's reason for visiting Peking had been to extend his practise of Modernism through a greater understanding of classical Chinese artistic techniques

and forms. Schuster was, at the time, in the early stages of becoming America's foremost authority on Chinese folklore and symbolism. Originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Schuster had independent means to fund his scholarship. He had graduated from Harvard in 1930 with an MA and immediately went to Peking as a Harvard-Yenching Institute fellow. There, for three years, he studied Chinese language and art with Baron von Stael-Holstein (1877-1937), a German-Baltic aristocrat from Estonia, an Orientalist, and a scholar of Sanskrit and Tibetan Buddhism. Von Stael-Holstein had studied Oriental languages at Berlin University and had been appointed head of the Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, the German Orientalist Society. When the Bolshevik Revolution broke out in 1917, he effectively lost his estates in Estonia and so decided to remain in Peking, becoming a professor at Peking University and helping establish the Sino-Indian Institute in the city in 1927. Von Stael-Holstein had also worked in helping the Harvard-Yenching Institute to collect books for its library. During 1930 he was moving between Harvard and Peking. It is not known whether Schuster and Noguchi actually met, though they shared a taste for minority folk crafts. Schuster collected examples of folk textile pieces with blue and white cross-stitches from southwestern China. Noguchi also found these traditional Chinese and ethnic minority crafts intriguing.

THE 'PIRITICAL' NADINE HWANG

Perhaps the most mercurial and fascinating character with whom Noguchi spent time socially while in Peking was Nadine Hwang (born 1902-date of death unknown). Hwang is something of a mystery and, while this is partly due to her life not having been fully researched as yet, it may also be due to her own purposeful obfuscation of her background and life. For a variety of reasons Noguchi would have felt drawn to Hwang and been comfortable in her company.

Even Hwang's birth is shrouded in some mystery. It seems she was born in March 1902, making her a contemporary of Noguchi, either in Madrid, Spain (as she later told the Swedish Red Cross) or Chekiang (Zhejiang), China as she appears to have told the authorities of occupied Paris in 1944. She may, like Noguchi, have been of mixed race. Claiming to be a qualified lawyer, in the late 1920s it appears she was briefly a lieutenant in the army of the northern Chinese warlord Chang Hsueh-Liang (Zhang Xueliang), the son and successor of Chang Tso-lin (Zhang Zuolin)—respectively the 'Young' and the 'Old Marshal'. Both

were effective rulers of Manchuria and much of northern China as well as intermittently controlling Peking. The Old Marshal was assassinated by a Japanese bomb in 1928 near Mukden (Shenyang). The Young Marshal had studied military techniques in Japan, was a surprisingly effective successor to his father despite his reputed womanising and opium addiction, and remained in power until his abortive kidnapping of Chiang Kai-shek in 1935. It appears that, for about four years, and wearing a male uniform, Nadine Hwang performed some sort of press relations role for the Young Marshal and may well have been brought onto his staff by his adviser, the Australian William Henry 'W.H.' Donald (1875-1946), a.k.a. 'Donald of China'. It may also have been with the Young Marshal that Hwang adopted a taste for a rather more bohemian lifestyle – she was described as looking 'piratical'¹⁶, regularly performed a swirling swords dance and shockingly smoked in public! Certainly Chang Hsueh-Liang's circle was a louche one—one of Donald's actions was to send the Young Marshal to Brighton, England for a period to overcome his opium addiction after many years of notorious drug- and alcohol-fuelled parties.

It is known that Nadine Hwang spent time in Paris at various points from the early 1930s where she was a known avant gardist and lived as an open lesbian. In the mid-1930s, after running out of money in France, she became an integral part of the salon and circle around Natalie Barney and was Barney's lover (calling Barney her 'darlingest own'¹⁷) and part-time chauffeur. Barney's Friday afternoon salons at her apartment at 40 rue Jacob on the Left Bank had been legendary since before the First World War¹⁸ and while in Paris studying with Brâncuși it is possible Noguchi either attended one of these events or first met Hwang there¹⁹. Hwang's wide range of interests (her open sexuality, taste for the avant garde, and Modernism) also included the theatre. She organised amateur theatricals at Barney's salons along with the French writer, dandy and James Joyce translator, Valery Larbaud (1881-1957). Hwang moved in Parisian literary circles too and was close to the journalist and essayist André Germain (1882-1971), who encountered her at one of Barney's salons on the rue Jacob wearing a man's suit and rather fancied her, though was shocked to discover that she was indeed a woman!²⁰

However Noguchi and Hwang met, they were certainly good friends during his sojourn in Peking and Hwang was able to integrate him into Chinese radical circles and political discussions. They clearly became

close and he described her as ‘beautiful’²¹. It has been suggested that Noguchi, via an introduction from Hwang, also met Chang Hsueh-Liang and was offered the post of General in his warlord army²². More likely it was Hwang herself who suggested he might like this job—presumably in jest.

MOVING ON

At the end of January 1931, Noguchi finally decided to move on and travel to Japan. He went to Kobe and then slightly later to Tokyo where he did eventually meet with his father before moving on again to Kyoto to study ceramics with the well-known potter Uno Jinmatsu (1864-1937) for four months before eventually returning to America in 1932. Though Noguchi spent only a relatively short time in Peking, most of his contacts spent considerably longer in the city.

Sotokichi Katsuzumi left Peking in 1932 and returned to Japan. During his China years and afterwards Katsuzumi became decidedly more pacifist in his outlook and wrote a book on parliamentary democracy for Japanese students²³.

After the outbreak of war in 1937, Jean-Pierre Dubosc and his wife Janine vacated their courtyard house, though their friend Hedda Morrison continued to live there alone and look after it for some years. Dubosc did return to Peking after the war though was eventually forced to leave after the Communist takeover in 1949 when he subsequently settled in Switzerland.

Carl Schuster left Peking in 1932 to undertake collecting trips in the western and southwestern provinces of China. Then, in 1933, he took his collections to Vienna where he continued his study of art, pursuing a doctoral degree in Art History from the University of Vienna in 1934 with the prominent art historian Dr. Josef Strzygowski (1862-1941) and wrote a dissertation entitled ‘Chinese Peasant Embroideries’²⁴. He worked briefly as Assistant Curator of Chinese Art at the Philadelphia Art Museum returning to China in 1935 until 1938, based in Peking again, undertaking another three trips to southwestern China. During the war he was a cryptanalyst for the US Navy. His collection of Chinese textiles is now housed at Chicago’s Field Museum²⁵ and many of his prints at the New York Public Library²⁶.

Nadine Hwang worked for the Republican government for some time in the 1930s, moving between Europe and China. As well as remaining a key part of Natalie Barney’s by now long-lived salon in

Paris (and remaining her on-off lover) and an open lesbian (she once propositioned the writer Colette who claimed she refused out of loyalty to Barney²⁷) she was also close to many key French literary stars. In 1936 she travelled to London on behalf of the Chinese government and, at the instigation of her old friend and mentor W.H. Donald, lobbied for greater trade links between the British Empire (especially Australia) and China. During her time in London she lived with Helen Normanton (1882-1957), the first woman to practise as a barrister in London and the second only woman ever to be called to the Bar of England and Wales. Normanton was an outspoken supporter of the Indian National Congress, an ardent feminist, pacifist, and French speaker. It then appears Hwang was in Paris for at least part of the Nazi occupation of the city and in May 1944 was rounded up by the authorities and transported to Ravensbrück camp (unusual in that it was a camp primarily for women and children). She survived the experience and was rescued by the Swedish Red Cross and brought by ship to Malmö, Sweden in 1945.

“WITHOUT DOUBT THERE IS NO GREATER CITY THAN PEKING”²⁸

Ultimately the question is to what degree Noguchi's relatively brief time in Peking influenced his later work. At this early stage of his career Noguchi was clearly seeking influences and training from a variety of sources after studying art and sculpture in America and then spending time in Paris with Brâncuși and meeting other Modernist artists such as Jules Pascin (1885-1930), Alexander Calder (1898-1976) and Arno Breker (1900-1991). While studying in Peking Noguchi applied Qi's single-stroke calligraphy-influenced brush painting techniques to his own subjects using traditional Chinese calligraphic techniques to find abstraction in the human form. Though adopting the style, Noguchi broke with Qi's more traditional subject matter and drew a sequence of portraits including several nudes (then almost unknown in Chinese brush art) from live models. Noguchi was later to declare that, 'all Japanese art has roots in China.'²⁹ Though Noguchi's later work, in both drawing, ceramics, and sculpture as well as theatre set and furniture design, evinced a variety of influences he appears to have constantly sought to adhere to Qi Baishi's basic principle of balancing the real and unreal that he had learnt working alongside the artist in Peking for those crucial six months. Qi Baishi declared that, "The excellence of a painting lies in its being alike, yet unlike. Too much likeness flatters the vulgar taste; too much unlikeness deceives the world." He painted in the Xie Yi

style, focussing on expression, and painting one's feelings and moods. From Qi, Noguchi was to learn how to use brush-stroke to represent the real (i.e. we can recognise the form drawn as human, animal, plant etc.) yet it is not strictly "realistic". The balancing of the real and unreal was to be a recurrent theme in Noguchi's work until the end of his life.



Endnotes

- 1 This paper is an extended version of a lecture given by the author entitled "Peking 1930" at The Noguchi Museum, Long Island City, NY on 13/10/13.
- 2 Oral History interview with Isamu Noguchi, conducted 1973, Nov. 7-Dec. 26, by Paul Cummings, for the Archives of American Art.
- 3 Diplomatic presences in Peking were referred to as "legations". However, in 1930 the Japanese legation was officially the Japanese Consulate as the capital of China was, from 1927, located at Nanking (Nanjing). The Legation was on rue Meu, now Zhengyi Road (East).
- 4 Sotokichi Katsuizumi, *Critical Observation on the Washington Conference*, Ann Arbor: MI, 1922.
- 5 Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- 6 Dayangmao Hutong still exists running north-south from Janguomenwai Street to Beijing Station East Street. This latter street was not there in 1930 and the hutong ran further south into the network of hutongs close to the Fox Tower (Dongbimen) where many foreigners lived in courtyard properties including the British Sinologist E.T.C. Werner and, slightly later in the 1930s, Edgar and Helen (Foster) Snow.
- 7 Qi letters to Ito - <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/qi-baishi-letters-to-tanso-ito-5515332-details.aspx>
- 8 The antecedent of the current China Academy of Art.
- 9 Now numbering approximately 100 and part of the collection of the National Gallery of Prague.
- 10 Now the museum La Maison Loo.
- 11 Yiyu Wang, 'The Louvre from China: A Critical Study of C. T. Loo and the Framing of Chinese Art in the United States, 1915-1950'. (A dissertation presented to the faculty of the College of Fine Arts of Ohio University)
- 12 Then situated on Legation Street, now Dong Jiangmi Xiang.
- 13 Hedda Morrison, *Travels of a Photographer in China, 1933-1946*,

- Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- 14 Ellen Newbold LaMotte, *Peking Dust*, New York: The Century Co., 1919.
 - 15 Yiyou Wang, 'The Louvre from China.
 - 16 Judith Thurman, *Secrets of the Flesh: A Life of Colette*, London: Bloomsbury, 2000, p.401.
 - 17 Diana Souhami, *Wild Girls: The Love Life of Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks*, London: Phoenix, 2004, p.178.
 - 18 And perhaps best recalled in Joan Schenkar, *Truly Wilde: The Story of Dollie Wilde, Oscar's Unusual Niece*, London: Virago, 2000.
 - 19 It does seem that Brâncuși knew Barney even if Noguchi did not formally meet her.
 - 20 This anecdote about Hwang appears in George Wickes, *The Amazon of Letters: The Life and Loves of Natalie Barney*, London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1976. Some caution should be exercised regarding Wickes's account of events surrounding Hwang as he misspells her name as "Hoang" and claims she served in the Chinese Communist Army rather than that of the Young Marshal and then, later, the National Republican Guomindang (KMT) Army.
 - 21 Dore Ashton, *Noguchi: East and West*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p.28.
 - 22 Ibid
 - 23 Sotokichi Katsuizumi, *Kaigi no shikata – The Principles of Parliamentary Practice*, Tokyo: Kofukaku, 1934.
 - 24 For a version of this see, "Some Peasant Embroideries from Western China," *Embroidery Magazine*, London, September 1935, pp. 88–89.
 - 25 Field Museum, Chicago: Schuster Chinese Textile Collection.
 - 26 New York Public Library: Chinese Prints collected by Carl Schuster including a group of Chinese prints, including some important early Buddhist woodcuts and some 250 Chinese popular prints.
 - 27 Judith Thurman, *Secrets of the Flesh*, p.401. Thurman suggests Colette may have been being diplomatic in her memoirs so as not to upset Barney.
 - 28 Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*, New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
 - 29 Amy Hau & Heidi Coleman (Editors), *Isamu Noguchi/Qi Baishi/Beijing 1930*, Milan: Five Continents Editions, 2013.

LADY PRECIOUS STREAM RETURNS HOME

BY DA ZHENG

ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1935, *Lady Precious Stream* (王宝川) was staged at the Carlton Theatre in Shanghai. It was an English adaptation of *Wild Horse with Red Mane* (红鬃烈马), a famous classical Peking Opera. The play had enjoyed spectacular success in London's West End since its debut in late 1934, and it was subsequently brought back to its home country.

Lady Precious Stream is a fascinating case of cultural circulation, adaptation, and reception. Shih-I Hsiung (熊式一), the playwright, made substantial changes in regard to the form and content in order to make it more accessible to audiences in the West. When *Lady Precious Stream* was staged in Shanghai, it aimed to entertain an audience that consisted of Westerners and educated Chinese social elites. The fact that the play returned to its country of origin, but in a completely new format—language, style, and content—makes the case extraordinarily compelling. My paper studies this cultural event, with a focus on the English adaptation, stage presentation in Shanghai, and public reception. While this study sheds light on the dynamic cultural exchanges in the metropolitan city of Shanghai in the 1930s, it aims to underline the travelling aspect of the cultural production, and the complex conflicts resulting from the returning of the new production to its cultural origin.

INTRODUCTION

Culture travels regionally, nationally, and globally. As it travels, culture experiences encounters and clashes; it evolves and transforms. It accelerates or decelerates in the process of replication and dissemination (Clifford 101; Urban). Yet what happens when a cultural production returns home from abroad but in a new form? How would it be perceived and received? Would it be accepted or marginalised or even rejected?

Such was the case for *Lady Precious Stream* (王宝川) (hereafter referred to as *LPS*), a play adapted into English from *Wild Horse with Red Mane* (红鬃烈马), a traditional Peking Opera that had been popular in China for over a thousand years. After achieving spectacular

success in London, *LPS* returned in a modernised form to Shanghai, staged in the Carlton Theatre in 1935. While it enjoyed an enthusiastic response from the media and the public, the play also stirred up some fierce resistance from the camp of traditional culture, and it was never staged in China again, although its reputation overseas continued to soar. This paper studies its English adaptation, stage presentation in Shanghai, and public reception. This historical episode may shed light on the dynamic cultural exchanges in a vibrant cosmopolitan setting in the East in the 1930s, and it may enable us better to understand not only the traveling aspect of the cultural production but also the complex conflicts that resulted when the new production returned home.

Shih-I Hsiung (熊式一, 1902-1991) grew up in China and left for England in 1932 to pursue graduate study in English drama. Professor Allardyce Nicoll, his advisor at East London College, suggested that he write plays on Chinese subjects since there was a growing interest in Chinese culture, and there “had been no genuine Chinese drama on the London stage.” With a strong literary background, a solid command of the English language, and an extensive knowledge of both Chinese and English drama, Hsiung had a very good chance of excelling (Zheng 20). After careful deliberations and selections, Hsiung decided to adapt *Wild Horse with Red Mane*, which, he was confident, would appeal to a broad audience in the West. He completed the writing project in six weeks.

Wild Horse with Red Mane was a love story about the maiden Wang Baochuan, who gave up her high social status to marry Hsieh Pingkwei, originally a homeless beggar. Shortly thereafter, Hsieh was conscripted to serve in the army to fight barbarians in the Western Regions. After being captured by the enemy, he was fortunate enough to survive and marry Princess Dazhan. Eighteen years later, Hsieh returned home with the princess, and was reunited with his wife Wang Baochuan.

Substantial changes were made in Hsiung’s adaptation, turning this new English-language version into a “modern play,” easily “acceptable” to those in the West not familiar with Chinese cultural tradition. The original play consisted of eight short acts. Traditionally, only one or two of those acts would be staged on any night, but Hsiung condensed all eight, eliminated the singing element, and reduced them to a two-hour English-language play—a dramatic change that made it

consistent with theatrical conventions in the West. He used the main character's name for the title, rendering it as *Lady Precious Stream*—a free translation that he proudly proclaimed to be more poetic and elegant than simply *Wang Baochuan*.¹

Aside from formal changes, significant alterations were made to the content as well. Hsiung created a new opening scene for *LPS*. It was set on New Year's Day in Prime Minister Wang Yun's family garden, where a feast to celebrate the snow was arranged, to discuss the marriage plan for his youngest daughter, Precious Stream. In this new play, Hsiung eliminated all supernatural and fantastic elements. For example, in the original play, Hsieh was a homeless beggar whom Wang Baochuan found outside her family garden. Baochuan presumed that he must be a man of superior eminence, as he was wrapped in a fiery aura. Coincidentally, the night before, she had dreamed of a red star falling in her bedroom, so the man in front of her must have been what the dream had prophesied. Hence, she fell in love with Hsieh at once. In *LPS*, Hsiung changed Hsieh into the Wang family's gardener. He was shown to be a decent and intelligent gentleman, so the subsequent love between him and Precious Stream appeared logical and convincing to a Western audience. In addition, in the original play *Wild Horse with Red Mane*, Wang Baochuan dropped an embroidered ball from a pavilion in the garden to the crowd on the street as a means of selecting her future husband. It was the God of Marriage who intercepted the ball and handed it over to Hsieh. In Hsiung's play, however, the detail of the ball dropping was preserved but with a twist, to turn it into a deliberate choice that defied social conventions. Through her clever manoeuvring, Precious Stream distracted the crowd and dropped the ball, which landed in Hsieh's hands. Therefore, it was neither an arrangement by the "will of God" nor a coincidence; rather, it was an outcome of human volition and endeavour. The most important alteration was the revision to Hsieh's relationship with Princess Dazhan of the Western Regions. In *LPS*, Hsiung found a pretext for Hsieh to postpone his marriage to the Princess before escaping back to his homeland. The change dramatised Hsieh's wisdom as well as his loyalty to Precious Stream. Hsiung's play also eliminated the bigamy element, thus circumventing a potentially thorny moral issue that could have provoked fierce criticism and alienated Western audiences.

Soon after the play was published by Methuen, Nancy Price, manager of the Little Theatre in London, staged it, in November 1934.

Unexpectedly, *LPS* turned out to be one of the few highly profitable productions in the West End. The play instantly attracted the attention of producers and theatres in England and abroad. After first being staged in Dublin and Amsterdam, it was scheduled for productions in the U.S.A., Norway, Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Australia, Hungary, and France, as well as Hong Kong in 1935 and 1936.

In Shanghai, *LPS* was produced by the International Arts Theatre (also known as IAT) headed by Bernardine Szold-Fritz. Born in Illinois, Szold-Fritz went to Asia in the late 1920s and established the IAT in 1933, “with the purpose of experimenting with new forms and a new theatrical technique, and encouraging all types of creative, original work in this line, including singing, dancing, stage setting, amateur cinemas and allied forms of entertainment”. It was to exert an “emphatically Sino-foreign effort” to “create [an] intellectual and cultural centre” (*Lady Precious Stream*, Playbill). In 1933, the IAT produced *Soul of the Ch’in* (琴心波光), which was said to have successfully created “a synthesis of Chinese musical elements and Western techniques of orchestral composition” (Melvin and Cai 26-44). Szold-Fritz then went away to study Little Theatre methods in other countries. After returning to Shanghai, she quickly brought the dormant IAT back to vibrancy, acquiring office and studio space at 50 Nanking Road in March 1935 and starting preparations for the production of *LPS*. The IAT’s membership grew to as many as 250, of which 50 were Chinese and the rest foreign nationals (*Lady Precious Stream*, Playbill).

A major port city for trade and commerce, Shanghai was known for its cosmopolitanism. It was identified as “the Paris of the East” (*All about Shanghai* 1). Since the late 1920s, about 30 multi-story buildings had emerged on the Bund, mainly bank buildings, hotels, apartment houses, and department stores. In December 1934, the newly constructed 24-story Park Hotel on Nanking Road, designed by the famous Czech-Hungarian architect Ladislaus Hudec, became a landmark there as the tallest architecture in Asia for a quarter of a century (Lee 10). *The Little Book of Shanghai*, published in 1931, declared that no city could rival Shanghai for the diversity of nationalities that made up its cosmopolitan society (Zhang, et al. 83; *All about Shanghai* 39). It had nearly 70,000 registered foreign residents by 1932, and a decade later the number soared to over 150,000, representing 58 countries, including Britain, America, France,

Germany, Russia, and India. The city received and entertained cultural luminaries from all over the world, including Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Rabindranath Tagore, Charlie Chaplin, and Albert Einstein. These exchanges brought Shanghai an “enhanced local attention and awareness of world culture” (Zhang, et al. 93).

In this cosmopolitan setting, East and West mingled and interacted, and the boundaries between the two often seemed blurred. Numerous theatres, coffeehouses, dance halls, jazz clubs, department stores, public parks, and race clubs became popular urban spaces where foreign and Chinese nationals congregated, mingled, and loitered. Many fashionable movie theatres were established, several of which had exclusive contractual rights with Hollywood to show their first-run films (Lee 84). In 1933, the newly renovated Grand Theatre, known as “the No. 1 cinema in the Far East”, opened its doors as the first air-conditioned picture house, showing exclusively Western films (Zhang, et al. 79). Chinese theatres were also prevalent, screening Chinese movies and staging traditional plays, such as *Emperor Qianlong Went to the South* (乾隆下江南), *Mulan* (木兰从军), and *Yutangchun* (玉堂春). Signs of mutual influence were noticeable. While foreign movie theatres frequently showed Chinese films and even performances, Chinese theatres began to shed their “old conventions”. For example, women took part in modern plays, stage setting began to adopt Western styles, and refreshments were served in theatres along with hot towels for cleaning the face and hands (*All about Shanghai* 66-67).

Staging an English-language play in a metropolitan city in China was not uncommon, but it was unprecedented to produce a play adapted from a very popular local opera in a foreign language. Unlike the productions in London, which had been presented by well-known—often professional—English casts, the Shanghai version was to use an all-Chinese cast, again a first-ever phenomenon, and all the performers were amateurs. Ing Tang (唐瑛), who played the lead role, was one of the most famous actresses in China. Brought up in a wealthy family, she attended McTyeire School for Girls in Shanghai—a Methodist school famous for its education in English, dancing and music, and etiquette. She had extraordinary talent in drama, especially Chinese *Kunqu* (昆曲). At only 25 years of age, she had already established a solid reputation in the theatrical world. Henry H. Lin (凌宪扬), the actor who played Hsieh Pingkwei, grew up in a Christian family. After graduating from Shanghai University in 1927, he went

on to the University of Southern California to pursue an MBA. After stints in the aviation industry, academic fields, journalism, and military service, he was eventually appointed president of Shanghai University in 1946. Tall and handsome, he was an excellent choice for the role of Hsieh Pingwei. All the other cast members had various degrees of Western education or cultural contact, as indicated by their Anglo-Saxon names, such as Florie Ouei, Philip Chai, Lily Wu, Wilfred Wong, Doris Lui Chen, and Daisy Kwok Woo.

The production team included both Chinese and foreign personnel. The two directors, Aline Sholes and S.Y. Wong, along with 20 other members, oversaw costumes, music, scenery, lights, and stage management. Sholes, who was Szold-Fritz's sister, managed the production of the play and the daily operations of the organisation. She brought with her "extensive experience in Little Theatre work, a keen understanding of the intricate task involved and a charming personality," which were complemented by the talents of S.Y. Wong, who possessed "a deeply rooted knowledge of Chinese theatrical technique" (International Arts Theatre). Both were committed and dedicated, although neither was professional. Wong, in fact, had a day job at the Asiatic Petroleum Company. During rehearsals, Grace Liang was also present and offered her advice. She had just returned from England where she had studied drama and directed several successful plays, including *LPS* at The Garrick Playhouse in March.

The Publicity and Program team did a magnificent job in promoting the play. The 11-member team—all foreign nationals except for Alice Chung—landed 20 prominent luminaries on the patrons' list, which included government officials, eminent figures, and cultural heavyweights, such as Mayor Wu Tie-cheng (吴铁城), Florence Ayscough, Victor Sassoon, Sun Fo (孙科), Lin Yutang (林语堂), and Mei Lanfang (梅兰芳). It secured donations from 45 firms and individuals in Shanghai, mostly foreign nationals—enough to cover the production cost with a surplus for use in future IAT activities. There was frequent news coverage about the play in the media, especially English-language newspapers, keeping the public up to date with the preparation and progress of the production. There were also introductory articles about *LPS*, reports on Queen Mary's attendance at the show in London, and news about the performance of *LPS* in London. The North-China Herald, the North-China Summer Supplement, and other major newspapers in China printed

photographs of the cast and rehearsals just days before the opening night to attract public attention. “Actors and actresses in elaborate embroidered costumes appeared charming and graceful” (“The World”; “Lady Precious Stream,” 6 June 1935; “Shanghai Entertains”).

It is worth noting that the promotion of the play went beyond simply publicising and spreading news, because it also aimed to advise the public to stay open-minded and prepare for an eye-opening experience. The producers requested that the public be fair in their judgment, because *LPS* was a modernised version of a Chinese classic, and should not be compared “with anything new, creative, original and rebellious in the modern theatre in any country” (“Patrons”). A news reporter predicted that, while the play would likely be of special interest to Shanghailanders, “cultivated Chinese” would embrace it as well, since “everything about the production is a rebellion against the endless tradition of the Chinese theatre” (“Patrons”).

The Carlton Theatre on Park Road was centrally located behind Bubbling Well Road, with the Park Hotel, Grand Theatre, Metropole Cinema, Great World Entertainment Center, Race Ground, and Public Recreation Ground in the vicinity. It was listed in the 1934-1935 Guide Book as one of the eight “first class cinemas” in Shanghai (*All about Shanghai* 94). The Carlton was a symbol of modernity, with its British management, air-conditioning, foreign films, and regular performances by the Fourth U.S. Marines Regimental Band. On both June 25 and 26, the Carlton was packed with fashionable and prominent luminaries, both Chinese and foreign, who came to attend the show.

The playbill was ingeniously designed, reflecting the hybrid nature of the play and the diverse target audience. The front and back covers had a vertical red stripe, 1½ inches wide, containing basic information about the play, topped with the initials “IAT” and images of two theatrically masked heads. While the information at one end was in English, running horizontally, the words on the other end were in Chinese, running vertically. The playbill was bound with red thread in a traditional Chinese manner, containing 12 sheets of paper, all folded, 5¼ x 7¾ in size. As no page number was provided, it seemed to suggest that either end could be the beginning. In other words, it could be read either in an English way from left to right, or in a traditional Chinese way from right to left.

In fact, the content of the playbill had both Chinese and English

versions. Nevertheless, the two versions did not always match. The discrepancies therein underlined the varying needs of the audience. Lin Yutang's one-page introduction was a good example. Its Chinese-language version at one end of the playbill was coupled with its English version on the other end, with an endnote explaining that it was "a literal translation". In reality, the English version was substantially expanded with explications. The following is a quote:

时至今日，世异境迁，西洋戏剧之影响，戏院环境之不同，处处促吾人力求改进。

(Today, with the changes in time and circumstances, with the influences of Western drama and evolution of theatre conditions, we are constantly urged to innovate and improve. [Author's translation])

Its English counterpart seemed to have been transformed into a manifesto of modern drama, providing an elaborate explanation of the traditional Chinese theatrical environment and differences in aesthetic taste between then and now.

Today it is just [as] important to experiment on a new theatrical technique as to preserve the characteristic charm of the old theatre. The peculiar forms of the Chinese opera were the direct results of the then existing social environments. When the theatre was in the open, and actors had to compete with the pedlars' [sic.] cries, barbers' tuning-forks, salt sellers' gongs, the crying of children and the barking of dogs, only a shrill falsetto voice could have been heard above the general din and commotion. The gongs and drums, too, served very largely the purpose of attracting the audience from a distance. With the change of theatre conditions and the influence of Western dramas, it is inevitable that the Chinese theatre of today should evolve a new technique. Modern audiences will no longer sit through a programme of six or seven hours, and this fact alone must produce a change in the tempo of acting.

It was obvious that the English version, with many specific details, aimed to inform Shanghailanders about the theatrical tradition in China. Likewise, Lin's brief concluding remarks, a typical Chinese courteous expression was converted into a lengthy exhortation to

justify the theatrical experiment of the IAT and to direct the audience to a viable critical stance.

The indulgence of critics is asked not only because the directors have had to work with the material on hand, but also because the whole character of the work is experimental. It is rather in the spirit of an experimental amateur play than as a perfect copy of traditional Chinese theatrical technique that the producers wish to be judged, for only by this method of trial and error can something new be created.

Nevertheless, not all details in the playbill were bilingual. One such example was the long essay “As I See It,” dated June 22, 1935, by Percy Chen (陈丕士). Percy was the son of Eugene Chen (陈友仁), former Foreign Minister of the Republic of China. Brought up in Trinidad and educated at Cambridge, Percy was socially and politically savvy. He had just returned from the Soviet Union, where he accompanied Mei Lanfang’s theatre troupe during their visit to the country. With his stellar status and political influence, Percy could serve as an effective medium for communications with non-Chinese nationals. The essay began with an acknowledgement of the sweeping changes in Chinese theatre across the country under the influences of Western drama and culture. It lauded the IAT’s production of *LPS* as a “laboratory experiment”: a Chinese play with old, traditional content; text in English by a Chinese writer; all Chinese actors; and collaborative direction from Western and Chinese experts. Percy believed that the play, “unique in the history not only of the Chinese theatre but also in the history of the world theatre”, was an “initial venture” for a “mixed audience of high mental calibre”. The essay highlighted some key aspects of the play as guidance for the non-Chinese audience, such as “Gesture and Movement”, “Pantomime”, and “Tempo and Rhythm”. Like Lin’s introduction and its English version, this essay focused exclusively on theatrical form and technical aspects, without mentioning the content change in relation to the original play *Wild Horse with Red Mane*.

Two minor details are worth noting, as they indicate the audience’s diverse backgrounds and the experiential nature of the play and theatrical environment. The playbill included a note advising the audience that the curtain would not be lowered at the close of all scenes

in accordance with the practice of Chinese theatre. It also stated that the illumination of the auditorium lights indicated a change of scene, so the audience should remain seated. There was also an insert in the playbill, topped with the word “Important” in bold type, reminding the audience not to smoke in the auditorium during the performance, as tobacco smoke could impair the voices of the performers on the stage and could cause coughing in the audience.

In the Shanghai production, the role of the Honorable Reader was eliminated. This character was actually one of the significant features of the play *LPS*. It was a character Hsiung created to narrate the connecting sequences of events or scene changes, to explain the symbolic representations of the stage, and to comment on essential technical and theatrical aspects for the audience. In other words, it helped to bridge the gap between the play and its non-Chinese audience. The Honorable Reader was likely deemed unnecessary in the Shanghai production because the Chinese and many of the Shanghailanders in the audience already had varying degrees of cultural exposure in China.

The Shanghai production was “a most enjoyable performance” before a crowded and enthusiastic house (“Lady Precious Stream”). The actors and actresses won rounds of applause for their splendid stage presentations. Ing Tang, in particular, enchanted the audience with her radiating charm and delightful personality, which was evident in her poise and movements. Szold-Fritz could hardly contain her pride and amazement in her letter to Shih-I Hsiung, relating the comments of those who had seen the play in both London and Shanghai: “...it was so infinitely more delightful in Shanghai BECAUSE of the atmosphere, grace, charm and *style*, all so CHINESE, . . . that Westerners of course could not possibly imitate.” Szold-Fritz praised Ing Tang profusely: “Just to see Tanging [sic.] glide across the stage, and hide her face in her sleeve was an experience!” (Szold-Fritz).

Since the shows on June 25 and 26 sold out, an extra performance had to be hastily arranged at the Lyceum Theatre on June 28 to meet the demand. The play garnered unreserved praise in the media. The IAT was commended for having “abundantly fulfilled the purpose of an International Theatre in an international community” (“Shanghai Notes”). This success was seen as representing a future trend, and some predicted with full confidence that more would follow (“Lady Precious Stream,” China Press; “Shanghai Notes”). Some even pleaded

that more plays be translated and adapted from traditional Peking Opera and *Kunqu*, so long as they were “not academic and servile but adaptable to the modern stage” (“Interest”). In addition, the central government in Nanking invited the IAT to stage the play in the capital city (“Nanking”). The IAT was indeed planning a tour with Ing Tang to Nanjing, Tianjin, Beiping, and then Hangzhou in early 1936. In reality, however, *LPS* was never staged anywhere in China after the Shanghai production, and its splendid glamour never recurred, while the London production continued from 500 shows on to 700 and 800.

LPS in Shanghai enjoyed a brief meteoric ascension. What was the main cause of its ephemeral existence? How can we assess its short-lived success in its own home country? Was this English-language play too modern for its audience and unacceptable to the Chinese people? There were surely several factors that may have contributed to this sudden fall, such as Ing Tang’s marital problems, the Japanese invasion, and Szold-Fritz’s return to the U.S. in 1936. Personal woes, the war situation, and administrative issues aside, language and cultural setting were probably the two major reasons why the play suffered such a short lifespan in its original home.

China was at a crossroads in the 1920s. The New Culture Movement challenged traditional values and systems, and called for reform and changes toward modernity. In the field of drama, Western plays had been introduced to China in the form of *wenmingxi* (文明戏) – innovative new dramas intended to replace traditional theatre in the 1900s. In the 1920s, when the New Culture Movement was sweeping the nation, there came a renewed call for the establishment of new drama. Many drama troupes and schools were established to train actors and produce new plays. With the introduction of Hollywood movies, Western plays, new forms of staging, and modern concepts of theatrical performance, traditional drama was deemed out-dated in both form and content (Wang and Wang 227-31). In 1926, Yu Shangyuan (余上沅), along with some fellow critics and writers, launched the “National Drama Movement” in China, aiming to bring about theatrical reform and to establish *guoju* (国剧), or “National Drama,” which was defined as “Chinese plays composed of Chinese material by Chinese playwrights for the Chinese audience” (Yu “Guoju” 196). It was an overtly and unambiguously radical departure from traditional drama, which had been widely and vehemently condemned.

Not all critics opted to abandon traditional drama, though. There was a strong Nationalist sentiment among those who supported traditional drama, which had been deeply rooted in Chinese consciousness for thousands of years. Qi Rushan (齐如山), a highly outspoken theatrical theorist, strove to preserve and promote Peking Opera, which in 1931 he also named *guoju* (国剧), or “National Opera”, an identical term to the one Yu had applied to modern drama. Qi stated that the term *guoju* could be applied to any kind of local drama in the country, yet his study exclusively focused on Peking Opera—a branch generally and historically deemed the quintessence of Chinese culture (Shen 85-103; Liang 105). To promote Peking Opera, Qi conducted a comprehensive study of its tradition, history, and performing techniques, presenting it as a profound and unique system of theatrical art (Liang 3-102). Unlike Yu Shangyuan and other modern playwrights, Qi believed that Peking Opera could not, and should not, be mixed with Western opera. In other words, it was the “National Opera,” and its essential elements—singing, dancing, music, or even its use of a ‘Props Man’ who handled props and assisted actors on stage during the show—should be kept as is. He insisted that performers should retain these original elements to ensure an accurate presentation of the “spirit and form” of the national treasure, even when entertaining an overseas audience unfamiliar with Peking Opera (Liang 216-17).

These two schools, both named *guoju*, searched for ways to bring vitality and energy to theatre in an increasingly international and modern setting: one attempted to innovate and create a new drama, and the other tried to preserve the tradition. It should be stressed that they were not entirely mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. While Yu and his fellow dramatists advocated and promoted translations and productions of foreign drama, they recognised the symbolic Peking Opera as the “purest art” and a “superior art of superior value”. They stressed that new drama should “contain substantial pure art elements” like Chinese traditional drama (Yu “*Jiuxi*” 150-55; Yu “*Guoju*” 196-200; Yu “*Zhongguo*” 205-06). On the other hand, Qi, who played a key role in organising Mei Lanfang’s performance tours in Japan, the U.S., and Europe, painstakingly prepared programs, modified plays, and engineered technical and theatrical innovations to enable audiences outside of China to appreciate Mei and Peking Opera better. These tours established Mei’s unparalleled reputation and won Peking

Opera international recognition. Even Qi conceded that in some cases it was necessary to allow modifications in order to appeal to Western aesthetic tastes (Liang 216-17). Likewise, other famous Peking Opera actors openly called for reform through acquiring useful techniques from *Huaju* (话剧), film, and various other art forms (Gong 350-51).

There is no question that *LPS* was revolutionary and innovative in transforming an ancient Chinese play into a modern one. It preserved some significant aesthetic and technical elements of Peking Opera, making the play more accessible and enjoyable to a Western audience, such as simple stage settings, abstract and symbolic acting, Chinese music, and Chinese costume. However, most significant was its content change, through which an ancient love story was introduced to its modern audience in the West. *LPS* promoted a new understanding of Chinese culture and brought about a more favourable view of modern China, especially in relation to women. It constructed a new type of courageous female character, and presented a different gender relationship. Wang Baochuan from the original play, who was elated to receive her bigamous husband after a separation of 18 years, was virtuous by traditional Chinese standards. Hsiung's play highlighted Precious Stream's perseverance, faithfulness, courage, and self-reliance. It also presented equality in gender relationships through its portrayal of the love between Hsieh and Precious Stream, where marriage was a union of two loving souls that were mutually appreciative and affectionate. In other words, Precious Stream was a modern woman—decidedly humane, compassionate, intelligent, and decisive rather than submissive and dependent.

Yet all was not celebratory. Although it was a ground-breaking experiment in the “history of the Chinese theatre” that was to “revolutionize the stage art of China” (“Shanghai Notes”), *LPS* provoked resistance and offense from those who regarded Peking Opera as a superior art form that should not be tainted by hybridisation. Less than a month after the show, The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette published a long letter written by K.T.L., who vehemently defended the quintessential art form of traditional Chinese drama. To him, the success of *LPS* on the foreign stage resulted from nothing more than curiosity, since it provided something new and extraordinary to an eager audience in the West. He argued that since Peking Opera was essentially opera, it should be performed with music and singing. In other words, if Westerners wanted to see

Peking Opera or other types of local opera, “they should see it on a Chinese stage and given in the Chinese language”. To eliminate the highly significant singing elements in Peking Opera and to present a Chinese drama in the English language would “twist” the play “out of shape”, giving the English audience “wrong ideas”. It could be “a comic travesty”, which could increase misconceptions and prejudices and “do more harm than good”.

A week after the staging of *LPS* in Shanghai, a local drama group called International Dramatic Research Associates announced its decision to present the original Chinese version of the play on July 10 at the Crystal Palace Theatre—a new playhouse founded by Huang Jinrong (黄金荣), a powerful Shanghai gangster. “‘Lady Precious Stream’ Becomes ‘Wild Horse with Red Mane’”, the title of one newspaper report, succinctly underscored the intrinsic connections and discord between the two plays. The report stated that *LPS* had aroused the interest of many, who were “anxious” to compare the Chinese-language play with the new English version. With the staging of this authentic Chinese play in its original version, non-Chinese audiences would enjoy an opportunity to appreciate some genuine Chinese theatrical principles, such as facial designs and opera masks in relation to characterisation (Fisher). The IAT, which had produced the English adaptation, urged its members to attend the show, emphasising that the Chinese version could be just as interesting.

Staging the original play in its “authentic traditional manner” functioned, in a rather oblique manner, as an attempt to deter and marginalise the hybrid form of *LPS* (“The Chinese-West”). Its professional cast included Zhou Xinfang (周信芳) and Hua Huilin (华慧麟) in the two lead roles. Zhou was a highly respected Peking Opera actor in the south, comparable to Mei Lanfang in the north, and Hua was a rising star. The play was about two hours in length. It eliminated some of the longer songs and speeches, and left out some of the “usual characteristics of the Chinese theatre,” such as bananas, peanuts, tea, or hot towels for the audiences, and replaced them with foreign-style refreshments, served on the balcony foyer. The theatre was air-conditioned for the comfort of the audience (“Play”). Patrons included Sir Victor Sassoon, Baron d’Auxion de Ruffe, Bernardine Szold-Fritz, Mr and Mrs A.J. Hughes, Wang Shao-lai, K.P. Chung, and Huang Jinrong. To celebrate and promote the show, and to introduce the leading Chinese actors to their audience, a tea party

was arranged on July 6 in the garden of Huang Jinrong, who was the honorary president of the Research Associates. *Wild Horse with Red Mane* received sensational reviews. One proudly claimed that it was such an extraordinary performance that, to the many foreigners in the audience, the “alien language proved no barrier” to their understanding and enjoyment. It even proclaimed that, in comparison with the recent *LPS* show at the Carlton, “this performance must have been a triumph of the traditional over the modern in its dignity, force, and beauty” (“Lady Precious Stream” 17 July 1935).

The staging of *Wild Horse with Red Mane*, coming right after *LPS*, underlined the importance of the language and content of cultural productions in relation to the acceptance of their cultural origins. In *Metaculture: How Culture Moves through the World*, Greg Urban observes how culture adapts and changes as it moves through geographical locations, and how new cultural productions are generated and evolve. Urban believes that, for the cultural production in a “new form” to be acceptable and to grow in its original home, it “cannot be identifiable as a ‘faithful copy’” of its earlier model. In other words, the new object “cannot look or sound or taste or smell or feel too much like something that has come before it” (241). *LPS* was certainly not a “faithful copy” of the original. With its foreign sound and modern appearance, *LPS* appeared like a brand new product. Paradoxically, the English language and the content alterations, which had made *LPS* accessible and acceptable to audiences overseas and had won it an enviable reputation abroad, were what ultimately caused its downfall in its home country. In other words, it was these very differences that made it impossible for audiences in China to appreciate and accept the play.

Hsiung’s English translation of *LPS* was masterfully executed, nuanced, humorous, and smooth to read. It effectively reduced linguistic and cultural barriers for audiences in the West (Zheng 19-32). When the play returned to its home country, however, its audience was drastically limited to Shanghailanders and a small faction of educated Chinese intellectuals. The problem with the English rendition, regardless of its accuracy or finesse, was the inevitable loss of the original flavour and most key elements of the play. In Peking Opera, performers use dialogue, singing, acting, combat, and acrobatics that are stylised, symbolic, and suggestive, rather than realistic. Take speeches for example. Peking Opera features conventionalised stage speeches, which have rhythmic

and musical elements, achieved through the “stylized articulation of monosyllabic sound units” and the “stylized pronunciation of speech-tones” (Wichmann 25, 47). Aside from speeches, songs in Peking Opera are stylised by a set of common aesthetic values and patterns. Performers make extensive use of vocal vibrato in a way that is slower and wider than the vibrato used in Western performances. These stylised speeches and songs, which depend on the unique rhyme and rhythm patterns of the Chinese language, are nearly impossible to retain and represent in English. Besides, it is often emphasised that Peking Opera speeches are musical, and that songs are accompanied by dance. Layers of meaning within each movement must be expressed in time with music and in the form of dance (Liang 245-46, 310-14). When *Wild Horse with Red Mane* was converted into *LPS*, the medium of the Chinese language was replaced with English, eliminating the tonal qualities, rhyme, rhythm, and couplet elements of the original. Local Chinese audiences, except for a small number who were curious or intrigued about *LPS* as a novelty, would likely have preferred the original for its rich variety of colourful presentations and aesthetic elements, if given a choice. *LPS*'s failure to be accepted by the general public and to become a popular play in its native land was unavoidable.

With regard to the content, there was no question that the changes in *LPS* were revolutionary. However, these changes lost their edge in the Shanghai production, and few people paid attention to them. The promotional material and media coverage of *LPS* focused almost exclusively on the technical aspects, offering hardly any reference to the new image of Precious Stream. Audiences in China seemed so used to the original play *Wild Horse with Red Mane* that Hsieh's bigamous relationship with Dazhan, the death penalty, even mysterious elements such as the monster-turned horse or Hsieh's dazzling aura, did not evoke any unease or discomfort. When Hsieh returned home after 18 years, the audience accepted him as a “nice person,” as Eileen Chang acridly condemned, even though he had abandoned his wife who lived in a cold cave, “like a fish in the freezer” (23).

Although this oversight may seem puzzling, it resulted from China's strong cultural and theatrical tradition. Indeed, the New Culture Movement had sparked a women's crusade and resulted in widespread conscious strides for gender equality and freedom for women. Female writers used their pens to advocate the value of freedom, independence, and equal gender relationships. The

character of Nora in *A Doll's House* had served as an inspiring role model for many young women who chose to take a path of self-discovery, rebelling against Confucian tradition and leaving home in search of a new self. Yet despite these changes in the socio-political arena and literary representations, Chinese theatres seemed to be venues where traditional morals and values in historical narratives continued to be re-enacted. Peking Opera, as Eileen Chang observed, was “deeply rooted and popularised in China,” and it was a relentless stronghold of traditional values in the collective consciousness of the nation. History, which represented the public memory, was actively perpetrated in daily life through Peking Opera and many other local styles. These plays, combining the sublime and the ridiculous, presented timeless, standard situations—a kind of moral system that was distant from reality yet could be connected with the present day (21-27). Even though the world in those traditional plays was not present day China, local theatre audiences found it thoroughly pleasurable to appreciate a familiar cultural and historical narrative to which they could relate. They enjoyed the marriage between the righteous beggar and the beautiful daughter of the prime minister, the triumph of justice over evil, the reward of virtue and valour, the pain of separation, and the joy of reunion. Many Chinese people would relish the same play over and over as a way to re-experience pathos and cultural history, and to re-immense themselves in the aesthetic pleasure of costumes, music, singing, acting, and memory. To them, political and ideological elements often became secondary to aesthetic pleasure. That is why *Wild Horse with Red Mane* and many other traditional plays continued to be prevalent and popular in China. This fits with Leo Lee’s observation about Shanghai Modern in the 1930s—a city that welcomed modernity and Westernisation, but retained its own tradition and cultural identity through clinging to its art forms and traditional practices, such as Peking Opera. It was thus able to “embrace Western modernity openly, without fear of colonization” as well as maintaining its Chinese identity, that is, with their unquestioned Chineseness (Lee 312).

Even though *LPS* did not achieve a long lasting streak of success in China, it left some noticeable marks on its cultural history. First of all, it led to the staging of *Wild Horse with Red Mane* and brought about an acute awareness of tradition and modernity. Indeed, through *Wild Horse with Red Mane*, Zhou Xinfang and other actors seized the

opportunity to showcase the beauty of Chinese traditional theatre. They retained the traditional manner yet reduced the length and presented the scenes in rapid succession without interfering with the action of the story. In its attempt to innovate, the play *Wild Horse with Red Mane* had somewhat departed from tradition, just as *LPS* had done. In fact, *Wild Horse with Red Mane*, which was occasionally referred to as *LPS* in news reports (“Play”; “Lady Precious Stream” 10 July 1935), could not separate itself entirely from the English-language *LPS*, since both demonstrated a spirit of innovation. Secondly, *LPS* surely stirred up excitement about Chinese cultural tradition and the value of Peking Opera in a global context. Following the production of *LPS*, more amateur actors lined up to audition for future IAT plays; other theatrical institutes, such as the Shanghai Theater Arts Academy, strove to present plays “rivalling in interest and popularity” with *LPS*. Over the next two years, the IAT staged numerous full-length and short plays, including *The Dream of Wei Lien*, *Lysistrata*, *Dragon and the Phoenix*, *Hamlet*, and *Much Ado about Nothing* (“Exhibition”). However, *LPS*, as rightly credited, was not simply “a drama and a spectacle”; it was significant in the history of Chinese theatre, as it represented “a pioneering attempt to revolutionize the stage art of China” (“Lady Precious Stream” 26 June 1935).



Endnotes

1 Shih-I Hsiung believed that “Precious Stream” (*Baochuan* 宝川) was far more elegant than the literal translation of the original name “Precious Bracelet” or “Precious Armlet” (*Baochuan* 宝钏). Besides, “Stream” is monosyllabic and sounds poetic (Hsiung, *Bashi huiyi* 115).

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CHINATOWN, WASHINGTON, DC

Then, Now, and its Survival

BY LILIANE WILLENS



The history of Washington's Chinatown begins on the West Coast of the United States. During the Gold Rush in California in the mid-19th century, thousands of workers from China seeking better lives arrived on the West Coast. They were detained and interrogated by officials who checked their entry documents while health officers submitted them to a cursory physical examination. The latter decided on the spot whether an individual was healthy enough to enter the country or, if sickly looking, needed to be deported. Many of the Chinese immigrants had false identification papers stating that their relatives were legal residents of the United States. These "paper sons" documents were sold to Chinese desperate to reach America since at that time China was ravaged by famine, floods, battles among various warlords, and a weak and corrupt Manchu government indifferent to the plight of its people.

In the United States the Chinese labourers worked in agriculture, cigar making, and other backbreaking jobs. Most importantly they helped build the Transcontinental Railroad. Although they were paid much less than their white, mainly Irish counterparts, the latter resented

the presence of the Chinese, fearing they were taking jobs away from them or might even replace all of them. When work on the railroad ended, the Chinese workers fanned out across the United States, to small towns in Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, and Wyoming, and eventually to the East Coast. There they opened small grocery stores, laundries, hotels and restaurants, and usually sold their services and goods cheaper than their white counterparts. Anti-Chinese incidents erupted, led by vigilante labour groups to “cleanse America” of Chinese residents. The cry was “Chinese must go” as fear and hatred of the Chinese increased. In October 1871, a mob of white hoodlums entered Los Angeles Chinatown and attacked and lynched 17 Chinese men and boys. Because of continued harassment on the West Coast, many Chinese moved to cities on the East Coast—New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC—keeping a low profile in their respective Chinatown enclaves where they felt safe from attacks and racism by the white population.

Chinese men were separated from their families in China—some for a lifetime—and often from their wives who could not always accompany them to the U.S. after 1875, when Congress passed the Page Act. Women from any “Oriental country” were banned from entering the United States, with the exception of merchants’ wives. This law was based on fear that the “low bred” Chinese women would likely become “public charges” or engage in prostitution. Many Chinese men subsequently remained bachelors since they were not allowed to marry women of a different ethnicity because of the prevailing miscegenation laws in the United States.

Under pressure from labour unions in an era of the so-called “Yellow Peril”, the U.S. Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, signed by President Chester A. Arthur, which banned Chinese immigration to the United States. Chinese residents in the United States were obliged to carry resident certificates, otherwise they could be deported. The Chinese were the only ethnic group that could not become U.S. citizens until 1943, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was rescinded during the height of World War II, because China, an ally of the United States, was fighting the Japanese.

Chinatown in Washington, DC has grown in size from its beginnings in the early 20th century when Chinese immigrants lived in their own community along a stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. In the early 1930s these residents were relocated to a downtown enclave after their row houses and small stores were torn down and replaced

by an imposing cluster of U.S. Federal government buildings. This new Chinatown in northwest Washington stretched from G Street north to Massachusetts Avenue, and from 9th Street east to 5th Street. At that time most of the immigrants came from the Toisan region near Guangzhou (Canton). Some villagers had the means to go to America thanks to remittances they received from their relatives or friends in the United States. They and other villagers may have believed rumours that the roads in that far-off foreign land were figuratively paved with gold. However, the newly arrived immigrants discovered very quickly that this was not the case, because once they found a job, they worked very long hours, often seven days a week, and were always very poorly paid. They were in the same category as indentured servants, since they had to pay off their transportation fare from China as well as repay the cost of their false identity documents. These men lived with several others in one room, sparsely furnished with only beds, a table, and chairs, located in run-down row houses with no cooking facilities and only one bathroom on each floor. Those who found work toiled in restaurants and small shops—usually in the many “mom and pop” laundry and grocery stores catering to the Chinatown residents. Despite the fact that these men received very low wages for their work, they still managed to send remittances to China to enable family members to survive in their oftentimes famine-stricken villages.

Before World War II, there was no need to learn English since the Chinese residents rarely left their Washington, DC Chinatown for the nearby “white” world, which discriminated openly against them. Nor did they interact with adjacent minority neighbourhoods, especially the very poor black enclaves where gang warfare often prevailed and shootings could sometimes be heard. The Chinese kept a low profile, not wanting to confront the racist world outside Chinatown, living in a self-contained community where the language, tradition, and customs were similar to their villages in China. Family associations were formed to help relatives who had come in droves before the enactment of the anti-Chinese immigration acts. Births, engagements, and marriages were joyous events for families, who decked themselves out in their finery.

There were no schools in Chinatown, so the children took buses or streetcars, or walked to elementary and secondary schools outside of their community. Before the desegregation of schools in 1954 by the Federal government, children from Chinatown attended schools for

whites only and not the nearby schools for black pupils. Understandably, the Chinese parents did not object, since education in the former was far superior to the underfunded schools attended by black children. It is ironic that children of Chinese parents, who could not acquire U.S. citizenship until 1943, received a superior education to black pupils whose parents were American citizens¹.

Tourists, Washington, DC residents, and out-of-towners ventured into Chinatown to eat at inexpensive eateries or to buy trinkets in gift stores. Perhaps they could imagine that this was the real China transplanted on American soil. The public's knowledge of the Chinese was generally based on Hollywood films, such as the Charlie Chan series, in which the Chinese detective was played by a British white actor, trying to look somewhat Chinese with slanted eye-makeup and a moustache. He spoke in short, stilted English sentences interspersed with so-called sayings by Confucius, a derogatory image to the white audience of how educated Chinese spoke English. Anna May Wong, the well-known Chinese-American actress of the 1930s, played sultry and often demeaning roles, not flattering to her ethnicity. She had sought the lead female role in "The Good Earth" (1937) based on Pearl S. Buck's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, but the prevailing moral code would not allow a white actor to kiss a non-white person. In this movie, the actors, Paul Muni and Luise Rainer, in their roles as Chinese farmers, were made to look Chinese. This was known in Hollywood parlance as "whitewashing".

The women in Chinatown—the wives and daughters who had managed to come to America before they were barred—helped out in family businesses, worked long hours all week long, side by side with their husbands or other family members, in grocery stores, or in small restaurants. However, whenever they could, the women worked as seamstresses for the German-Jewish immigrants who owned several department stores on 7th Street in Chinatown, which no longer exist. Although these Jewish merchants did not live in Chinatown and had no contact with the Chinese except at work, these two ethnic groups, equally discriminated against by Anglo-Saxon Americans, respected each other's very different cultures. In the 1930s and 1940s the Sixth and I Synagogue and the Chinese Community Church were always crowded during the Jewish High Holy days and during Christmas. After World War II, these two houses of worship moved out of Chinatown, but in 2004 the Sixth and I Synagogue moved back to the corner of 6th and I

streets, and two years later the Chinese Community Church became its neighbour once again on 5th Street and I Street.

The non-denominational Protestant Chinese Community Church, established in 1935, was and still is a gathering place for its parishioners. Besides religious services it offered Bible classes, lectures, sports, and social activities for children and adults, and basic English language classes for newly arrived immigrants. However, the latter may have felt that it was not necessary to learn English—an alien language—since where and when would they use it? Their English-speaking children attending American schools could read and translate for them if need be. On the other hand, parents wanted their children to read and write the Cantonese they spoke at home or in the street, and had them attend classes to learn it after their regular school day. When Madame Chiang Kai-shek came to Washington, DC in July 1958, soliciting aid for Taiwan, she was invited to give a lecture at this Chinese Community Church. She spoke in Mandarin, but fortunately for many of the congregants, the church had arranged for simultaneous translation into Cantonese.

More anti-discrimination laws were enacted against the Chinese and Asians generally in the early decades of the 20th century. In 1917, the U.S. Congress passed the Asiatic Barred Zone Act, which banned Asians from immigrating to the United States². President Woodrow Wilson had vetoed this law but the Congress overrode his veto. Ironically, Chinese men residing in the United States were drafted to the U.S. armed forces during World War I, and later World War II, fighting and dying for a country that denied them citizenship. To limit the continuous flow of immigrants arriving from various countries to the United States before and after World War I—approximately 15 million had come to the U.S. between 1900 and the early 1920s—Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act), signed by President Calvin Coolidge. This Act restricted the number of immigrants to the United States through a National Origins quota system based on race and place of birth. Immigration visas were then allocated to 2% of the total number of people of each nationality in the U.S. based on the 1890 national census. Numerically, this favoured Western and Northern Europeans who had immigrated in large numbers to the United States in the mid-19th century. This would keep America “white”.

Because of World War II, and very soon after Pearl Harbor, the Magnusson Act (also known as the Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act) was

passed by Congress on December 17, 1943, and signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This Act removed the various anti-Chinese statutes, allowed the naturalisation of ethnic Chinese residing in the United States, and enabled Chinese people to immigrate to the United States, however in very limited numbers. Because the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act had barred Chinese immigration to the United States for half a century, the quota allocated to that ethnic group under the 1890 census was only 105 visas a year. This low number enabled America to remain “white”.

However, twenty years later, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Amendment Act (known as the Hart-Celler Act and signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson) abolished the National Origins Act of 1924. This new Act was based on an immigrant’s skills and family relationships in the United States; subsequently ethnic Chinese were finally treated the same as all other potential immigrants to the United States. Once this Act went into effect, a wave of Chinese immigrants arrived from Hong Kong and Taiwan, many of whom had earlier fled from Mainland China, before and after it became the People’s Republic of China. These new immigrants were no longer poor villagers, but were mostly city dwellers, many with university degrees. Because of language barriers, their first stops were the Chinatowns on the West Coast and later the East Coast.

The event that reduced the population of Washington, DC’s Chinatown were the riots by black residents in April 1968, following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Angry and very frustrated African Americans went on a five-day rampage, burning buildings and shops owned by whites in downtown Washington. However, Chinatown was spared. In the eyes of the African Americans, the white establishment was a symbol of present *de facto* and past *de jure* discrimination, but not discrimination by the Chinese in the adjacent enclave. Nevertheless, Chinatown was caught between the black and white struggle. When the National Guard and soldiers were finally able to stop the rioting, many white families living in the burned down part of Washington began their exodus to the nearby suburbs of Maryland and Virginia. At that time, the Chinese residents in Washington, DC did not consider leaving Chinatown, since their businesses had not been affected by the riots.

However, within a few years Chinese families started moving to the suburbs for one very important reason: they wanted to enrol their children in schools where the level of education was far superior to the one prevailing in Washington, DC. Discipline in the elementary

and secondary schools in the city had deteriorated with the departure of highly qualified teachers to the suburbs. The new, less experienced teachers who replaced them had a difficult time controlling their pupils in and out of class, where bullying and fighting on school grounds occurred too often. Although children of Chinese families in the suburbs now received a better education in the white schools, their parents nevertheless had to commute daily to Chinatown where they still had their shops and businesses. On weekends, Chinese Christian families returned to Chinatown to attend religious services at the Chinese Community Church where they could also participate in various social activities offered by the church. Their Americanised children continued to study Chinese language and culture since their parents wanted to instil in them an affinity for their ethnic roots. When Mandarin became the official language of Mainland China and Taiwan, it replaced Cantonese classes taught in the Chinese Community Church.

It was in the late 1990s that the architectural aspect of Chinatown began to change radically. Many of the row houses along 7th Street—the heart of Chinatown—were torn down and replaced by office and retail buildings. A 14-screen multiplex movie theatre, Gallery Place, was built, as well as a large arena for sports and entertainment—the Verizon Center. All of these buildings replaced Chinese-owned small businesses and pushed more residents to the suburbs. The Gallery Place-Chinatown subway stop at the corner of H Street and 7th streets with its three different lines from Maryland and Virginia, disgorges hundreds of people daily, especially sport fans in the early evening. These tourists congregate on a couple of streets before and after sports and social events, walking to Chinese restaurants on H Street or to a cluster of non-Chinese-owned high-end stores, restaurants and bars around 7th Street. While staff at the Chinese restaurants are all Chinese with perhaps a smattering of other Asian ethnicities, nearly all the employees in the stores and businesses are African Americans, Latinos, and whites. Signage at these establishments is in Chinese characters, which suggests a certain “foreign” flair and perhaps assures the non-Chinese visitors that this is Chinatown.

Nowadays, tourists from the suburbs and out-of-towners, who spend the day touring Washington’s many museums and historical sites, enjoy coming to this colourful part of the capital. They and many Washingtonians and suburbanites who may be walking with ear buds glued to their ears, or texting on their iPhones, are generally oblivious

to their surroundings. It is doubtful that, engrossed as they are in their electronic world, they would notice or take the time to read an historical plaque on the outside wall of a Chinese restaurant at 604 H Street. This marker states that the building (then numbered 541 H Street) was the Mary Surratt Boarding House, where Surratt and her “co-conspirators plotted the abduction of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln in 1865”. If pedestrians were to ask who Mary Surratt was, they would learn that she was found guilty of planning the assassination of the president and was executed by hanging on July 7, 1865, three months after the death of Abraham Lincoln.

Chinatown is rapidly gentrifying due to the construction by developers of 10-storey office buildings and expensive condominiums. The latter are purchased or rented by young professionals but surprisingly not by ethnic Chinese of the same financial class. Today the core of Chinatown, with its remaining Chinese restaurants and a couple of hardware/grocery stores, is concentrated on four blocks adjacent to H and 7th streets. The numerous “mom and pop” stores of a bygone era have disappeared. Most of the pedestrians or patrons who frequent the restaurants in present day Chinatown are non-Chinese.

However, in 1982, the 10-storey Federally-subsidised housing complex, the Wah Luck House on 6th and H streets, with its bright red panelled balconies, was built as a retirement home for the remaining elderly Chinese residents of Chinatown. A social gathering organisation, the Chinese Community Cultural Center offers lectures, tai chi, calligraphy, various crafts, and Chinese language classes to the community in Chinatown as well as to the general public. On Chinese New Year, usually in early February, onlookers fill the sidewalks to watch the parade of gyrating dragon and lion dances accompanied by the crackling of bursting firecrackers, and the very loud music of drums and cymbals played by musicians in colourful outfits. Interestingly, a number of children wave the Guomintang flag, not that of the People’s Republic of China, since their grandparents or parents had come to America at a time when Generalissimo and President Chiang Kai-shek ruled Mainland China and later Taiwan. The Chinese New Year celebration is the only time one sees a large crowd of Chinese who come from the suburbs.

The striking “Friendship Archway”, with its two monumental 50-foot-tall columns and 75-foot-wide arch designed by the Chinese—American architect Alfred Liu, was built in 1986 over 7th and H streets—

the heart of Chinatown. This structure was financed by the People's Republic of China to honour the relationship between the "sister" cities of Washington, DC and Beijing. The archway is a symbolic gateway to Chinatown with its colourful roof tiles, numerous decorative dragons, and gold leaf adornments in the style of the Qing Dynasty. On one side of the stone base are engravings in English and on the other side are etchings in Chinese, stating that this Friendship Archway was erected by the District of Columbia and the Municipality of Beijing. The names and signatures of the then-mayors of the two capital cities are carved into the stone base.

Thanks to the efforts of a non-partisan grassroots Asian association named the "1882 Project Foundation", U.S. Congressional Resolutions were passed first by the Senate on October 6, 2011, then by the House on June 18, 2012, "expressing their regret for the passage of laws that adversely affected the Chinese in the United States, including the China Exclusion Act of 1882". Now, the aim of the 1882 Project Foundation is to educate school children and the American public about the history of Chinese immigration to the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries.

Despite gentrification and a reduced Chinese population in Washington's Chinatown—from 3,000 residents to a little over 300 presently—the ethnic Chinese identity is managing to survive thanks to the efforts by various organisations such as the Chinese Community Cultural Center, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, the Chinatown Service Center, and the Chinese Community Church. They are all trying very hard to preserve Chinatown's heritage and culture for its residents, for Chinese-Americans, and more generally for tourists.

What lies ahead for a sustainable Chinatown in Washington, DC? Due to a building boom throughout Washington, developers are waiting to purchase and replace the remaining Chinese-owned town houses and small stores with modern office buildings and condominiums. They are eyeing the Wah Luck House building with its ageing retirees, since the developers are aware that newly arrived elderly Chinese immigrants will not live in Chinatown but will go to the suburbs with their families. Perhaps in the not too distant future, the imposing Friendship Archway, the street signs in Chinese characters, the Chinese-style lampposts, the Chinese restaurants, and buildings with decorative curved eaves may be the only reminders of a Chinatown in Washington, DC, where a vibrant Chinese community once lived and worked.



Endnotes

- 1 A child born in the US, whose Chinese parents could not become US citizens, was automatically a US citizen by virtue of the 1st clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.
- 2 Filipinos could immigrate to the United States because the Philippines was a U.S. colony at that time.

THE INFLUENCE OF HISTORY ON SHANGHAI'S MUSIC

BY DIDIER PUJOL

INTRODUCTION

Shanghai's music scene is one of the most active in the world. From numerous jazz venues to some of the world's largest techno dance-floors, there are many ways to listen to live music in Shanghai. Even in the city's parks, local people will form choirs and dance groups all year round. Then there are the karaoke clubs, where young revellers hang out. Even people in the street and taxi drivers like to sing popular songs or traditional Shanghainese tunes. But why is music so popular in Shanghai? Are there cultural and historical explanations? What is the impact of history on today's music scene in Shanghai?

KUNSHAN OPERA

To understand the relationship between Shanghai and music, it is necessary to go back to the origins of the city. During the era of the foreign Concessions, an entertainment industry was urgently needed in a city beset by wars and conflicts. However, the culture of music was actually implanted in the region far earlier. Kunshan Opera (*kunqu*) is one of the oldest entertainment traditions, and it started just a few miles from Shanghai. In fact, the more famous Beijing Opera is an evolution of the *kunqu* invented in the 14th century. It later spread across the rest of China. Not surprisingly, the famous *Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan Ting*) Kunshan Opera is now regularly performed in the very modern Shanghai Oriental Art Center in Pudong, in a new adaptation by Taiwanese director Bai Xianyong. It is a must see.

Opera has always been performed in Shanghai, even during the Cultural Revolution, although the official "new operas" had to be approved by the authorities. Some of them were written by Mao's Shanghainese wife, Jiang Qing. A recent performance of *The Red Detachment of Women* at the new Culture Square Opera, designed by American architects, saw crowds of 50-year-olds singing the lyrics by heart.

THE RUSSIAN INFLUENCE

Of course, the main characteristics of Shanghai music as we know it

came with an unprecedented confrontation with Western culture when the Concessions were established, especially during the 1920s and '30s. At that time, thousands of White Russian refugees made the city into a melting pot of international musical influences. Professional musicians from St. Petersburg introduced classical music along with entertainment orchestras. Along Avenue Joffre (Huaihai Lu), where the largest community of Russians developed, Russian musicians performed in restaurants, nightclubs, and dance halls. The section between Route du Père Robert (Ruijin Lu) and Route Pichon (Fenyang Lu) was known as Little Russia, and the corner of Route Paul Henry (Xinle Lu) and Route Doumer (Donghu Lu) was nicknamed Little Moscow. Places like DD's and Arcadia were among the most popular venues for the Russian community but there were dozens of other places where Russian musicians played. At the corner of Rue du Cardinal Mercier (Maoming Lu) and Rue Bourgeat (Changle Lu), the Lyceum Theatre was the home for the first Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra, which had a Russian conductor. Western-style operas such as *Rigoletto* were performed there in the 1930s. Famous British ballet dancer Margot Fonteyn lived in Shanghai for several years, during which time she studied ballet under a Russian master at the Lyceum Theatre. At hotels like the Astor, next to the Bund, or the Majestic on today's Nanjing Lu, all of the musicians were Russian. When the city grew richer under the regime of Chiang Kai-shek, Russian musicians would play jazz and Charleston to entertain the bourgeois and upper classes.

SHANGHAI'S DANCING WORLD

By the end of the 1920s, Shanghai's dancing culture was at its height, akin to Europe's "crazy years". The city created its own style called *haipai*. Among the best-known symbols of these years is the *qipao* (cheongsam) that the *wunü* (dancing hostesses) would wear. This dress comes from the Manchu garb worn during the Qing Dynasty, and was modified to fit the female figure, with a thigh-slit and a high collar. Zhang Ailing (Eileen Chang) and Mu Shiyong portrayed these *modeng* (modern) women curling their hair and smoking Chesterfield cigarettes.

This was also the time of taxi dancing—a new way for modern women to make a living. A dance would cost a few cents or a few dollars depending on the place and the fame of the dancer. Many Chinese movie actresses would make ends meet by dancing in addition to acting, appearing in advertisements for soap or cigarettes. There were

also many Russian women who danced or had a wealthy sponsor. Since they had lost their privileges during the October Revolution, there was an urgent need to find a rich husband or lover to reclaim their former status. In the French Concession, many French professionals, lawyers, and doctors, would have Russian mistresses.

The most popular dance halls were the Cercle Sportif Français and the Canidrome (dog racing track). There were around thirty of them in the city. The area around today's People's Square was labelled as the 'Entertainment District' on maps of the period, as it contained more than half of the bars and dancing venues in Shanghai. The most dangerous place was probably the infamous Blood Alley (today's Xikou Lu), near the Quai de France. There, sailors from various countries would drink and dance away their money, and have knife fights in the early morning before returning to their ships.

SHANGHAI SONGS

Shanghai's song-girl culture also comes from the *haipai* years. One of the most famous singers of the period was Yao Li, who sang, "Rose, Rose, I Love You" at the Yangtze Hotel near the Race Course. Famous too was Zhou Xuan, singer of "Ye Shanghai" ("Shanghai Nights"), which almost became Shanghai's anthem. The lyrics tell of lightness and insouciance—the core spirit of the 1930s clubbing world. As the rest of China was undergoing wars and troubles, the Shanghainese saying "Ma zhao pao, wu zhao tiao" (horses still run and dancing goes on) implies that the city's residents preferred to ignore them.

SHANGHAI TODAY: A MODERN CAPITAL OF JAZZ IN ASIA

Many places from the 1930s still exist in Shanghai today. One of them is the Paramount in Jing'an district—an area that used to be called the 'Badlands' due to it being dangerous at night. Among the places connected with jazz music, the Peace Hotel is one of the most famous. This building was erected in 1928 by real estate magnate Sir Victor Sassoon, and is home to the oldest jazz orchestra in the world: the Peace Hotel's Old Jazz Band. The musicians in this unique band represent the history of jazz music in Shanghai. In the movie "As Time Goes By In Shanghai", Sun Jibin, the band's handsome 80-year-old saxophonist, says that he learnt music with the American jazzmen who played along the Race Course (now People's Square) in the late 1940s. The city had been liberated from Japanese occupation, and Americans soldiers and

sailors could be found all over town. It was then that Sun Jibin started playing, and he has never stopped.

“It was a way to seduce girls,” he says, and explains how during performances he used to wink at his numerous admirers.

During the Cultural Revolution, jazz and all kinds of Western music were, of course, banned in China. Sun Jibin and his fellow musicians had to listen to their favourite tunes in secret on magnetic tapes. Only when Chairman Mao died could they play the 1940s classics like “Ye Lai Xiang”, or more recent American songs such as “Fly Me To The Moon”. As current Peace Hotel director Georges Wee puts it, “Our musicians might not be the best in the world, but they are definitely unique”. Their dignity is poignant—a symbol of Shanghai’s spirit and longevity.

THE NEW JAZZ AND ROCK SCENE

For jazz lovers, Shanghai’s music scene is in no way limited to the Peace Hotel and its classic band. There is indeed a whole group of talented young musicians in town who play and compose a brand new type of jazz—a new *haipai* style. For instance, Shanghai-based composers like Alec Haavik and his friends play year-round at the new jazz haunts like JZ Club, Cotton Club, and the House of Blues and Jazz. This new generation of Chinese and foreign musicians is celebrated every year at the renowned Shanghai JZ Music Festival.

The Shanghai rock scene is vibrant as well. Places like MAO Livehouse and indie music bars regularly give a stage to many Chinese and foreign artists. All year round, jam sessions bring Chinese culture together with varied world influences. Mongolian singers sometimes share the scene with percussionists from the West Indies, or African rap singers. Popular venues include Wooden Box, Limbo, and Karma, to name but a few.

DANCE FLOORS—SYMBOLS OF MODERN HAIPAI

What has come out of the dancing world of the 1930s? In 1947, the Chiang Kai-shek regime decided to close down most of the entertainment venues including dancing and music bars, in the name of moral order. Two years later, Mao’s Communists took power. They condemned the former ways of entertainment, believing that they embodied a capitalist way of life.

However, during the Cultural Revolution, political messages were promulgated in the form of revolutionary ballets, sometimes performed

by young Red Guards in rural factories to “educate” the working masses. This offers tangible proof that music never lost its appeal to the Shanghainese people. Even today, the lyrics and tunes of “Red songs” can still be heard in Shanghai parks every morning. Somewhat ironically, elderly people sing lyrics like “tomorrow China will pave the way for the world”, which carry a different meaning now, with China on the verge of leading the global economy.

With China’s “Reform and Opening”, dance halls began to reappear. Since Deng Xiaoping’s renaissance (*fixing*), Shanghai started to entertain once again. The world’s best DJs now flock to play at some of the biggest parties imaginable. Chinese House, Hip Hop, Mashup, and Electro DJs perform in dance temples such as M1NT or M2 for the golden children of the new Shanghai generation. The spirit of the 1930s is rekindled with the mixing of Westerners and local people. Ephemeral pleasure is the order of the day. Fashion rules, and unlikely places become popular, like The Shelter—a Cold War-era atomic bunker transformed into a club. Among the most famous venues is Bar Rouge, known for its spectacular Bund view.

THE KARAOKE PHENOMENON

It is impossible to talk about music in China without discussing karaoke. KTV parlours are legion in Shanghai, and every weekend hundreds of young people get together at famous chains like Haoledi or smaller singing rooms. They like to belt out the latest popular songs, escaping their family environments in the process. Since bars tend to be expensive or too Western in style, karaoke offers an intimate space in a country where the concept of privacy is almost non-existent. Clients can eat and drink or even sleep there, which can be convenient for young people living far from the centre, especially as the Metro stops running early. It is the perfect place for dates, especially if couples are reluctant to express affection publicly.

For companies, karaoke is an excellent team-building activity—a way for managers to get to know their employees. As hierarchical codes are strong in China, along with the Confucian respect for superiors, singing karaoke offers an opportunity to have fun together as equals. In the business world, the Japanese and Korean way of closing deals by taking clients out for heavy drinking is common in China as well. As Shanghai is a major economic centre, “business-type” karaoke halls are popular. They are luxurious, and many provide “escorts”, even

though prostitution is officially banned in China. Many of these “leisure palaces” are located on the periphery, but a few can be found right in the middle of Shanghai, near Xintiandi or the former “Entertainment District” (People’s Square).

POP SONGS AS CULTURE

Popular television shows like “Voice of China” (“Zhongguo Hao Shengying”) or “I am a Singer” (“Wo Shi Geshou”) command exceptionally high audiences every Friday evening all over China. They have led to the discovery of many talented young artists, using the same model as other countries but on a far larger scale, since China contains one quarter of the world’s population. One of the most popular television channels is Shanghai Dragon TV (Dongfang Weishi), which is unsurprising, as Shanghai has always positioned itself as one of the first cities for entertainment. One star of “Voice of China” rose to fame singing Shanghai jazz. His name is Coco Zhao, and he now performs in the city at jazz venues like JZ Club.

CONCLUSION

Shanghai’s music has far deeper roots than is generally believed. To a large extent, the city’s historical background explains why its music scene is so vivid. From Kunshan Opera of the 14th century to the jazz bands of the more recent Concession era, we can find many clues and important components that have been added to the soul of Shanghai music through the years. However, the new karaoke culture, TV shows, and modern types of music like rap or rock have enriched Shanghai’s present music scene. As an international city, it keeps evolving, integrating influences from the rest of the world with a rare flexibility and ability to generate its own personality.

A journey through Shanghai’s nightlife shows how the city’s fast pace is conveyed by its music. Dance floors, music bars, and concerts are found everywhere, and new talent continues to emerge. In Shanghai, the music has never really stopped. It evolved from the origins of the city to create a unique mix of influences, found nowhere else in the world.

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THE HUMAN FACE OF EARLY MODERN ASTRONOMY IN CHINA

BY RICHARD DE GRIJS (何锐思)

Ask anyone in a Western country what they know about Chinese astronomy, and the chances are that you may not get an answer or—at best—a reference to Chinese “record keeping”¹ or the discovery of a supernova explosion (an exploding massive star) in 1054, which was visible with the naked eye for about two years. Yet, there is so much more to the early days of modern science in China. While in Europe new ideas were suppressed by the Church (think of Giordano Bruno’s ideas of an infinite Universe, and also of Galileo Galilei), Chinese science made rapid advances. The early history of modern science in the Far East is replete with fascinating personalities, politics, and discoveries. This is poorly known internationally—certainly not to the “general public”—except to a handful of dedicated scholars, but it is a story of discovery and perseverance worth telling.

Chinese astronomers have observed, recorded, and interpreted celestial events since ancient times, as far back as the 13th century BCE. Making astrological/astronomical predictions—which were linked at early times, just like in Europe—was the purview of Emperors and their advisors. In the 16th century AD, China was of great interest to Europeans. The arrival of the Jesuit (Catholic) missionaries opened



Figure 1: Kunyu Wanguo Quantu (坤輿萬國全圖), *A Map of the Myriad Countries of the World*, by Matteo Ricci, printed on request of the Wanli (萬曆) Emperor in 1602. (Source: *Wikimedia Commons*)

¹ In ancient times, Chinese astronomers at the Imperial courts collected very complete records of celestial phenomena, such as solar and lunar eclipses.

a cultural window that permitted Europeans the first truly accurate accounts of the Chinese empire. They introduced to the Chinese things that were new, and things that were not really new, but had been forgotten. As an area of mutual Chinese–European interest, science became an important tool for evangelisation in China.

The early Jesuits realised that the Ming empire was a very different place than other mission areas they were engaged in, such as in South America. China was vast and historically ancient, with a highly developed and complex society, government, culture, and language. In many ways, China was technologically equal or superior to European society. Chinese respect for books and scholarship had been noted since Marco Polo's day, in the mid-13th century AD. Jesuits were required to learn to read, write, and speak Chinese. The most illustrious of the early Jesuits was Matteo Ricci (利玛竇), widely regarded as the founder of Western Sinology. His linguistic talents, prodigious memory, and skills in cartography, mathematics, and music, plus his personal qualities, kindly demeanour, and respect for Chinese culture allowed him unprecedented access to a wide range of people and places. He made the first world map in Chinese and introduced the Western system of longitude and latitude to his Chinese counterparts. Many of the foreign place names used by the Chinese today trace their origin to his maps.



Figure 2: Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi
(Source: *China Illustrata*, Athanasius Kircher, Amsterdam, 1667).

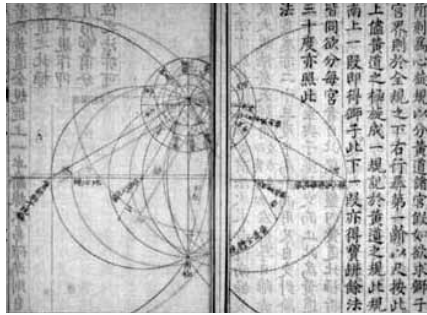


Figure 3: Matteo Ricci's technical explanation in Chinese of European astronomy. (Source: US Library of Congress)

He went on to do much more to introduce Western ideas to China, including fixing Beijing's latitude at 40° North.

Ricci travelled to Macau via Goa (India). In 1583, he obtained permission to settle in Zhaoqing (肇庆; Mainland China), because its governor had heard of his skills as a mathematician and cartographer. Ricci became a much sought-after figure by officials and local gentry. He noted the great curiosity his visitors expressed about the unusual items in his rooms and their fascination with maps. In particular, on display at Zhaoqing was a world map of which he made copies in Chinese. He wrote his famous *Treatise on Friendship*, translated the first six books of Euclid's *Elements* into Chinese, and wrote influential texts on memory techniques, East–West ethics, mathematics, catechisms and discourses using classical Chinese examples; he created the first Chinese–Western dictionary and built musical instruments. His letters and notes back to Europe became the foundation for the field of Chinese studies. He stayed in Zhaoqing from 1583 to 1589, when a new viceroy decided to expel him. Eventually, he ended up at the Imperial court in Beijing as the first Westerner to be allowed almost unrestricted access to the Forbidden City, the Emperor's palace. He was particularly instrumental in establishing the ancient astronomical observatory in Beijing as well as Sheshan Observatory near Shanghai.

Although Ricci was a pivotal early scientist, his efforts and breakthroughs are hardly known outside of scientific circles, yet he has had an unsurpassed influence on the development of early modern science—including astronomy, mathematics, and cartography—in the Far East. He was, perhaps, the first scientific ambassador from Europe during the Renaissance to an increasingly open China, which

at the time already had a long history of scientific achievements. This fresh European influence gave a boost to Chinese science, leading to a newly dominant position for the Middle Kingdom. Matteo Ricci was a flamboyant personality with an interesting personal story, trained by the famous mathematician Clavius.

His work was followed up by his two important successors, Johann Adam Schall von Bell (汤若望) and Ferdinand Verbiest (南懷仁).

Although the importance of Ricci's contributions is generally understood, the stories of his successors are less well known. To remedy this situation, my team (based at Peking University, Beijing Planetarium, and the Beijing Ancient Observatory) was awarded 'Public Understanding of Science' funding by the National Natural Science Foundation of China to produce a documentary focusing on the human aspects of Chinese astronomy. The first part of this documentary will, we anticipate, focus on the early Jesuit missionaries. In order to inform our script-writing efforts, I interviewed two leading scholars on the life and work of both Schall von Bell and Verbiest. My list of questions emphasised the personality aspects of these early modern European scientists in China. I talked with Dr. Noël Golvers ("NG") from Leuven University (Belgium) about Ferdinand Verbiest, and with Dr. Claudia von Collani (University of Würzburg, Germany; "CvC") about Johann Adam Schall von Bell. I also exchanged emails with Dr. Jean-Claude Martzloff (formerly of the Research Centre of Asian Civilizations in Paris, France; "JCM") about the reliability of the ancient Chinese astronomical records. Here, I would like to share a selection of their responses.

1. JOHANN ADAM SCHALL VON BELL: THE MAN STRADDLING SUPERSTITION AND SCIENCE

Q: What motivated Schall von Bell to emigrate to China? Were there any personal reasons involved?

CvC: Schall's main motivations were both scientific and religious: he was interested in converting the Chinese population, in his role as missionary.

As a young man of about 14 years old, he was educated at the Jesuits' headquarters at the Collegio Romano in Rome (Italy). His main mentor was Christopher Grienberger, who worked with him over the course of some 10 years. After Matteo Ricci's death in 1610, the Flemish Jesuit

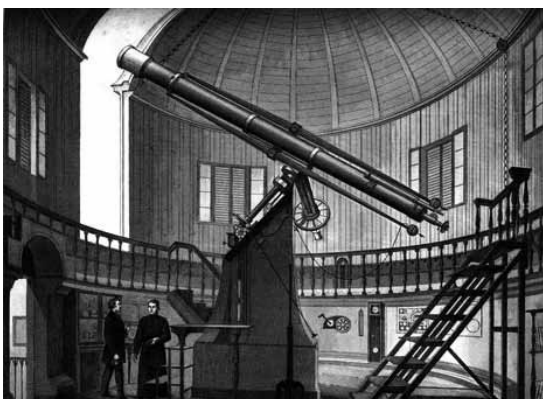


Figure 4: The internal dome at the Collegio Romano, 1854 (Source: *Historical Archives of the Italian Astronomical Observatories*).

priest Nicolas Trigault (金尼閣) was sent back from China to Europe by his “Superior General” Niccolò Longobardo (龍華民), who had been appointed as successor to Ricci, to look for the next generation of Jesuits in China. At the time, few Jesuits were left in China, so the mission needed new staff, funds, books, and other materials.

The Jesuits also wanted to separate their missionary activities in China from those in Japan. They needed to get authorisation from the Pope in Rome to have the Eucharist (a Christian rite also known as the Holy Communion or the Blessed Sacrament) translated into classical Chinese, wear the *Jijin* (祭巾; the traditional Chinese hat) during Mass where the Eucharist was used, and also to translate the Bible into classical Chinese. Trigault applied for several of these permissions in Rome; he obtained most. He then set off on a tour of Europe, visiting different princes’ courts in Madrid (Spain), Munich, Würzburg and Cologne (Germany), the Jesuits’ mission headquarters in Antwerp (in what was then called the Southern Netherlands), as well as the book fair in Frankfurt (Germany), where he bought many scientific books. Meanwhile, he tried to recruit new missionaries with scientific backgrounds. One of the latter was Johannes Schreck (邓玉函), also known as Terrenz, who had links to Galilei and to other Jesuits, and who was interested in going to China. Trigault next went to Rome and met Schall, who had almost finished his education at that time. Schall became interested in the China mission. He was interested in calendar reform, which was only possible with permission from the Emperor, so they needed to wait until the dynasty change in 1644, when the new Manchu Emperor, Chongzhen (崇禎), was inaugurated.

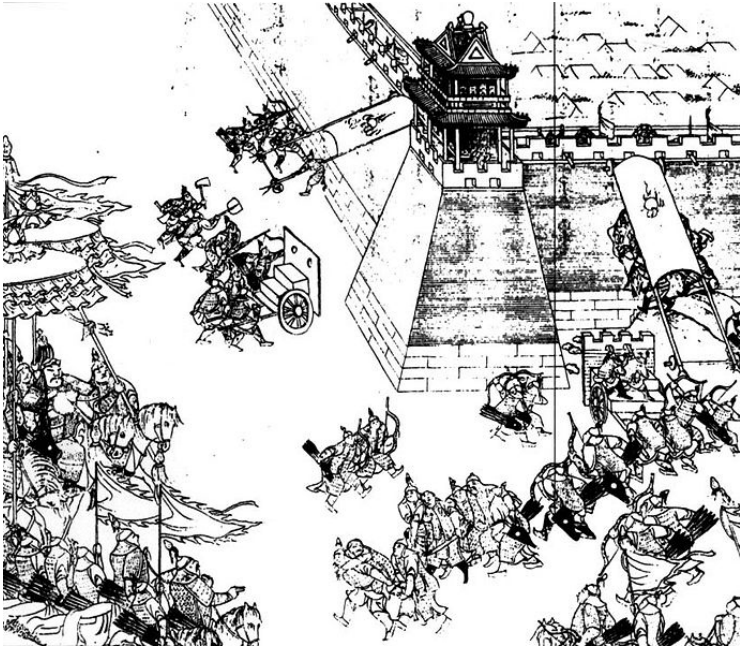


Figure 5: Battle of Ningyuan (宁远), located just north of the Great Wall, during the Manchu conquest (Source: Wikimedia Commons).

Q: How did he feel about the historical astronomy records accumulated by that time in China?

CvC: Schall saw his role as astronomer as his heavenly calling. When Beijing was conquered by rebels and the Manchus, most of the city was burnt. However, the mission was spared and the house containing the astronomical tables survived, so he took this as an omen from heaven.

He became director of the newly founded Imperial Bureau of Astronomy (Qintianjian; 钦天监). However, his acceptance of this office sparked long quarrels with his Jesuit colleagues, for two reasons. First, in Christianity, work on calendar reform in China was seen as linked to superstition. Christians were permitted to engage in certain astrological tasks, including “natural astrology”, navigation, and medicine. However, they should refrain from engaging in “bad superstition”, which included the use of horoscopes and which was seen as interfering with free will. Examples of bad astrology include assigning special days for special rites, as well as observing heavenly phenomena and using them for certain earthly purposes. Schall actually did the latter, but used these observations for educational purposes, as we will see below.

Second, Jesuits were not allowed to take certain offices of high status; they had to ask for permission from Rome. However, at the time he was offered this position, there was no one around to ask for permission, so he just accepted the appointment. He asked for permission at a later stage, which was granted because the authorities in Rome thought that this would be good for the mission.

JCM: The question about the methods used by the ancient Chinese is tremendously difficult to answer. Jesuit texts do not contain much information about Chinese traditional astronomical methods. Overall, the Jesuits believed that the predictive methods used by the Chinese astronomers were poor. An objective comparison between Chinese, Chinese–Muslim, and Western astronomical predictive methods would be needed. The easiest and most straightforward way to get a first and solid appreciation of the situation would be to use the results of the predictive competitions organised by the Chinese (predictions of eclipses and the like): in all cases, the Western methods were demonstrably better and this is precisely why Western methods were deemed better by the Chinese. Various other isolated results are known. For example, we know that the ephemeris tables (which list the positions of astronomical objects) of a Danish disciple of Tycho Brahe, Longomontanus (Christian Severin), were used in China. Very important is the fact that in the Chinese methods the winter solstice—which marks the shortest day and the longest night of the year—was not distinguished from the solar perigee (the shortest distance between

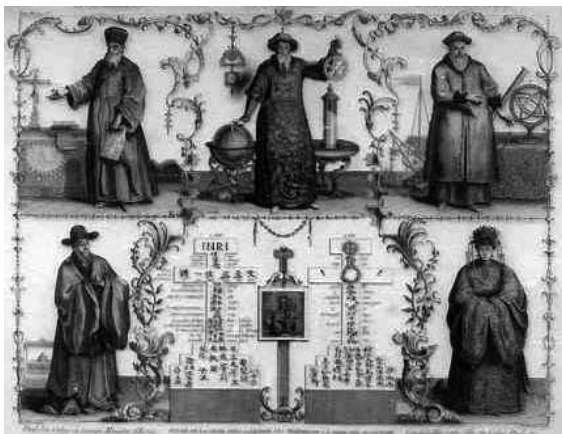


Figure 6: Xu Guangqi (bottom left) and Candida Xu (bottom right), along with three Jesuits (Ricci, Schall von Bell, and Verbiest – top row). (Source: Wikimedia Commons)

the Earth and the Sun) because of a belief in the *yin yang* structure of astronomical phenomena. Hence, unavoidable inaccuracies resulted. It is well known that, overall, the Jesuits stuck to Tycho Brahe's system during the whole of the 17th century AD and beyond.

Q: What can you tell us about the period between Matteo Ricci's death and the arrival of Schall von Bell?

CvC: Ricci died in 1610. Matteo Ricci's successor, Niccolò Longobardo (龍華民), was not as cautious as Ricci in his attempts to convert the Chinese population, which aroused the suspicion of Chinese officials. As a consequence, Jesuits were locally persecuted and often expelled. Nevertheless, Xu Guangqi (徐光启) continued Ricci's efforts in the background; he later became Prime Minister. Schall arrived in Macau in 1619, but he had to wait until the persecution of European missionaries had ended before he could enter Mainland China. Longobardo was obsessed with maintaining the purity of the Christian faith, but he had a strange attitude towards Chinese terminology related to religion. He collaborated with Schall on his calendar reform. Terrenz died in 1630 or 1633; Schall was called to Beijing upon his death. In 1633, Xu Guangqi died, at which time only Schall was versed in astronomy, so he was the only person capable to take over the astronomical duties.

Q: While in China, did Schall von Bell keep in touch with the order back in Europe? Did he send any personal reports? Did he interact with the common Chinese population?

CvC: He wrote letters to Europe, in which he reported on his adventures. These were written in the third person, so the prose was impersonal. Other Jesuits describe him as a complicated person with a strong personality; contemporaries saw in him either a bad or a good person. He lived in Beijing on his own, did things in his own way, and did not give people an easy time. However, he maintained good relations with the Emperor, so he had some power. There was some interaction with common people, mostly before his move to Beijing, but likely also while he was based in Beijing. He established the first Jesuit church in Beijing, at Nantang (南堂), the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (圣母无染原罪堂).

Q: What about his interactions with the high officials of the court and the Emperor?



Figure 7: Shunzhi, third Emperor of the Qing Dynasty (*Source: Palace Museum, Beijing; Wikimedia Commons*).

CvC: During the time of the last Ming emperor, Chongzhen (崇禎), Schall had indirect contact with the court through eunuchs who baptised some ladies of the court. Later, he is known to have been “friends” with the first emperor of the Qing Dynasty, Shunzhi (順治; who was very young; he became Emperor at the age of six), which probably implied that he could access the ruling elite fairly easily. As an astronomer, he was included among the official “Mandarin” offices at the Imperial court.

Schall used his influence partly indirectly to help the mission and to educate the Emperor. The Emperor was often involved with mistresses, which landed him in trouble with his mother, so Schall tried to admonish him (although not very successfully). It is thus likely that Schall was in direct contact with the Shunzhi Emperor. Rumours abound that Schall



Figure 8: Schall von Bell in Mandarin robes (Source: *China Illustrata*, Athanasius Kircher, Amsterdam, 1667).

might have been a grandfatherly figure to the Emperor, who did not grow up in the presence of a father. The Emperor was very young, so Schall's influence was greatest during his childhood and early teenage years.

In 1649, the Emperor's uncle, Dorgoon (多爾袞), wanted to build a new palace; in essence, he wanted to take over power. Schall helped the young Emperor by saying that the location chosen for the new palace was affected by bad *feng shui*, so it did not get built. This is an example where he used "bad astrology" for a good purpose.

Q: Where there any other people (Chinese or Western) he confided in?

CvC: Schall was a difficult person, who often quarrelled with his Jesuit brothers. Later in life, he may have confided to some extent in Verbiest. Verbiest shared Schall's prison and defended him at the legal court, but he was also groomed as Schall's successor. In my understanding, their relationship was friendly.



Figure 9: Ferdinand Verbiest (based on a French wood carving from the 17th Century).
(Credit: *China Daily*)

NG: This is actually a “modern” question: no one would have asked such a question in the 17th century AD. At that time, hierarchical relationships were most important. Therefore, we don’t know much about personal relationships except by reading “in between the lines” in the original sources. Verbiest wrote extensive “apologies” for Schall, but that was normal given the hierarchical nature of their relationship. He also remained on his side during Schall’s physical difficulties, including his imprisonment, and wrote his obituary—all of this could be seen as merely duty-bound. However, from our 21st century perspective, I cannot imagine that he would have done all this to the full extent if their personal relationship hadn’t been good, although “order discipline” also played an important role. Verbiest didn’t leave any negative records about Schall, however.

CvC: Schall had a servant who played an important role in the household. Schall adopted the servant’s son as his own son or grandson. He was accused by other Jesuits of maintaining homosexual relations with the servant, which eventually turned quite ugly. For more than 15 years, he was involved in several legal cases against him, related to him having taking up the formal office he had been offered by the Emperor. It was eventually decided in Rome that this was fine, but he didn’t get that message before his death...

From about 1664 (under the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, 1662–1722; 康熙), he was accused of delivering poor work, thus causing bad *feng shui*, by a Chinese Confucian scholar, Yang Guangxian (楊光先). The latter was concerned that Europeans had too much power in China, because they held the office of calendar making. Verbiest defended him. Heavenly omens, including earthquakes and fires, sustained this defence and should prove that he was innocent. The grandmother of the Emperor, a Mongolian princess, also intervened on his behalf.

Q: *Can you think of any other personal stories, reports, exclamations, or anything else related to the personal life of Schall von Bell that reveals him as a person?*

CvC: He was very proud to be from Cologne. He is reported to have said, “We people from Cologne don’t believe in hell; that’s nonsense”.

2. FERDINAND VERBIEST: IMPERIAL ASTRONOMER WHETHER HE LIKED IT OR NOT...

Q: *What motivated Verbiest to emigrate to China? Where there any personal reasons involved?*

NG: Verbiest originally wanted to go to South America—the area was known as “Nueva Granada”, currently roughly coincident with Peru—not to China. In fact, he made two attempts to go to South America. The first time he got as far as Cádiz (southern Spain), but he didn’t receive a passport to allow him passage to South America. The second time he spent a significant amount of time in the Jesuits’ centre in Seville (Spain), but his departure to South America was again delayed. Consider his drive to go to South America from a European perspective. Verbiest’s native Flanders (at the time known as the Southern Netherlands) was part of the Spanish empire, so it seemed natural to go to an overseas Spanish outpost. However, the Spanish didn’t like northern Europeans, because they didn’t really trust them to serve their faith truthfully.

When his attempts to be sent to South America didn’t work, he requested a move to China. In fact, he made many attempts in the period 1630–1640, just like hundreds of other young Europeans who wanted to escape the situation in Europe, which was suffering from the 30-Year War. Only eight (including Verbiest) were given permission to go. Although he didn’t want to go to China originally, he was fully committed to his task once he was sent out. This showed that he was a strong person, with a strong character.

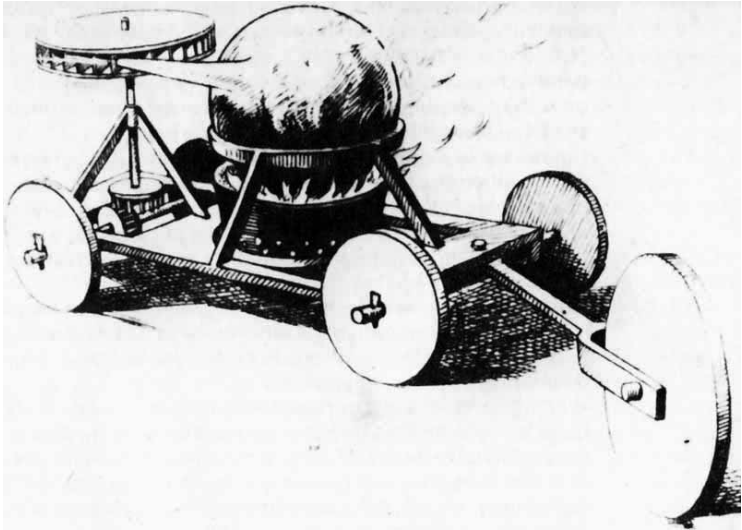


Figure 10: Verbiest's steam machine, 18th century print (Source: Wikimedia Commons).

The overall change in focus from the West Indies to China was dictated by the circumstances, and happened sometime between mid-1654 and June 1655. Unfortunately, we don't know what caused this change. It is very important that it happened during the presence of Martino Martini in the Southern Netherlands, who had a large impact on the young Jesuits in places like Antwerp and Leuven. They consequently sent application letters to be sent to China “en masse” to the Jesuits' Superior General. My guess is that Verbiest—through correspondence with some of his fellow fathers in Brussels or Leuven—was inspired by this model.

Q: How did Verbiest feel about the historical astronomy records accumulated by that time in China?

NG: He didn't like the *contemporary* calculations (note, he doesn't refer explicitly to any records): he didn't consider them sufficiently accurate, because many were based on wrong or out-of-date ephemeris tables. In fact, these calculations were demonstrably poor owing to incorrect underlying assumptions. Chinese astronomers relied on old Arabic tables, but there were many more recent observations, obtained with telescopes, that were better. Verbiest also said that Western observations (e.g. those of Tycho Brahe) were not always good enough. In fact, Verbiest was a caretaker at the astronomical observatory: he only did

the record-keeping as required for his job, adding nothing of scientific merit; he showed no scientific creativity. He was, in fact, the Emperor's engineer rather than the Emperor's astronomer. He built many devices and instruments, and designed hydraulic systems. He was a man who was looking for new applications of known techniques. He is often credited with designing an early predecessor of the modern car, but his description is not very useful for actually constructing such a contraption!

Q: Verbiest was the successor to Schall von Bell. Did the men know each other well? Did they get along or was there rivalry?

NG: Let us first briefly sketch Verbiest's career. In April 1654, he obtained his doctorate in Seville (Spain). He was subsequently sent to Genoa (Italy) and arrived in Macau in December 1658. Next, in 1659, he spent up to a year in Xi'an (西安), where he engaged in missionary work with common people. Schall called him to Beijing in 1660. The Emperor needed a successor to Schall who could meet his requirements regarding Western insights in mathematics.

Schall, who hailed from Cologne (Germany), had been working with his Portuguese predecessors and found that he couldn't work with southern Europeans. When a successor was called for, he was probably given a selection of candidates to choose from. More probably, he based his choice on "oral information" on the background of some of the small number of possible candidates circulating in China. We know indeed from François de Rougemont, a contemporary Jesuit also based in China, that Verbiest's reputation as a "good mathematician" had been spread in China when he arrived, perhaps intentionally. Since southern Europeans followed the Church's doctrines more closely than the northern Europeans Schall was used to, he probably felt that he might get along better with Verbiest.

Q: While in China, did Verbiest keep in touch with the order back in Europe? Did he send any personal reports?

NG: The only documents we still have from Verbiest's hand are official documents he sent to his superiors in Rome. There are no personal letters anymore, and nothing he may have sent to his family. Upon the death of a Jesuit priest, their personal papers were usually burnt. We know that he kept a diary, but this no longer exists either. We depend on the old sources, which are, of course, coloured by his own perspective;

there are no unbiased sources to complement his writings.

Jesuits were “Europeans” not Sinologists; they took that attitude to China. They reacted as late-humanist, European intellectuals, and they adapted their approach to the Chinese situation, but they were never fully “assimilated”. Obviously, one should differentiate according to the individual, but as a rule they acted as an “intermediary” between West and East, despite the sincere interest of several of them in some aspects of Chinese culture and society.

Q: What did he like most about his life and work in China? What least? What did he miss most from his former life in Europe?

NG: From 1660, he dealt with interactions with the Imperial court only. He was locked into the rituals of the court, although he said at one point that he would have preferred to deal with the common people, as he did while based in Xi’an. The source of this latter statement is a letter of 23 January 1670 to François de Rougemont, written in Latin and Dutch since this was kind of a “secret language” for communicating feelings and opinions that should not be circulated widely.

A rough translation of this passage from Old Dutch reads as follows:

“My dear Father Franciscus, be assured that although the Emperor has honoured me greatly, and although I have been appointed to the office of Great Mandarin, in my heart I would have much preferred to live the life of our late father Xaerius Faber (= ?unidentified), who dealt directly with the mission and engaged with poor Christians as well as Mandarins. However, I have now taken this path and I cannot and may not backtrack from this direction.”

This is clear enough: he was part of the Imperial court whether he liked it or not, with all of its prescribed rituals, but he would have much preferred to be a simple missionary. However, his position at the Imperial court was of great importance for the long-term future of the Jesuit mission in China, so he could not refrain from his court duties.

He often wrote that he was overburdened with work. He needed to teach astronomy, and check calculations using the prevailing tables. The Emperor asked him to do many public jobs, mostly related to engineering. He also acted as intermediary to other religious orders. We know that the methods employed by the other orders were to his disliking. For instance, the Franciscans preached to convert by shouting

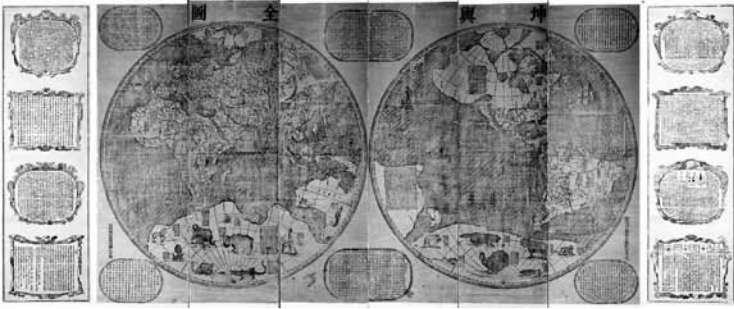


Figure 11: Kunyu Quantu (坤輿全圖) developed by Verbiest, 1674 (Source: Wikimedia Commons).

their proclamations out on the streets and in public; they didn't know much about the cultural background of the population with which they worked, he felt. This jeopardised what the Jesuits had built up. Verbiest was in desperation about this—he felt that emphasis should be placed on diplomacy. This interpretation of his feelings is also a matter of combining many short sentences and implications “read between the lines”: we rarely find explicit warnings in his letters.

Q: What about his interactions with Emperor Kangxi?

NG: In his missives, he described interactions with the Emperor in a Western way to convince his audience that there was closeness, but given the court rituals that ruled life in the Palace, this was unlikely to have been realistic. In 1675/1676, during a period of 10 to 12 months, he was tasked by the Emperor to explain Western mathematics, including Euclidean geometry, surveyance, and calendar science, which were strictly controlled by the Emperor. Verbiest likely understood what drove the Emperor, so he could deal most appropriately with him—the Emperor was only 18 years old when he took office. Given Verbiest's high appointment as a Mandarin official, as director of the Bureau of Astronomy he likely had a shorter line to the Emperor, but he was unlikely to have talked to him regularly (or at all) in person.

Q: Were there any other people (Chinese or Western) he confided in?

NG: His personal [spiritual] annotations were found by Antoine Thomas (from Namur, also in the Southern Netherlands, in current Wallonia) in Verbiest's room, which Thomas occupied after Verbiest's death, as his temporary successor. Thomas used these annotations to compose Verbiest's obituary. Afterwards, they were burnt according to

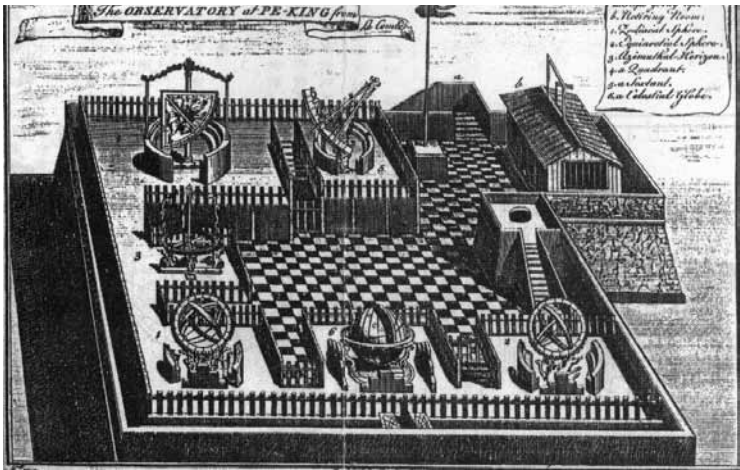


Figure 12: Ancient Observatory in Beijing, designed and built by Verbiest.

the Jesuits' customs.

Antoine Thomas wrote several letters that were dictated and signed by Verbiest after his arrival, acting as his private secretary. We also have many of Verbiest's astronomical documents, in Chinese and Manchu, addressed by [in the hand of] Antoine Thomas, which means that he was also concerned about the public relations of Verbiest's works and strategy. Finally, it appears from careful research that he was responsible for Verbiest's "opening up" to Paris and the French Jesuits, which definitely gave the development of the mission another direction. In my appreciation, Thomas was, in the last five years of Verbiest's life (since his arrival in Beijing), a strong dynamic power behind Verbiest. This was a crucial period for the mission.

Q: Is it correct to say that Verbiest didn't have a true single successor, but that Fillipo Grimaldi more or less shared the duties with Thomas Pereira and Antoine Thomas? Can you tell us anything about their personal relations to Verbiest?

NG: In 1686, Fillipo Grimaldi was earmarked as Verbiest's successor. In fact, already in the mid-1670s Verbiest pleaded unequivocally for Grimaldi as his successor. However, since he was in Europe in January 1688 when he should have been ready to succeed, the Emperor requested Thomas Pereira (from Portugal) as temporary successor, given that the Emperor apparently felt that he could rely on him. However, Pereira was not well versed in mathematics or calendar science, which was reason to give him an "adjunct" who was familiar with the matters of

the Astronomical Bureau: this was Antoine Thomas.

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ATTEMPTING TO FIND CLOSURE

Datong Dazhang

BY JULIE CHUN

“My final aim is also to shock awake the good in people...”

—Datong Dazhang¹

The opening night of an exhibition signifies the starting point of an end. It marks the end of the hours of labour and thought expended on the production of exhibition making. The ideas generated and artistic objects produced converge onto the museum or gallery space. Statues are secured and paintings mounted, whilst projectors activate sharp rays of images upon formerly silent white walls. Very often, in a solo show, the artist takes centre stage as the author, the creator, and the superstar of the visual empire s/he has just constructed. Ironically, such an experience was frequently denied to the artist Zhang Shengquan (1955-2000). Had he been alive today and wandered into the opening night of his own retrospective curated by Zang Honghua and Xiang Liping at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai on December 30, 2015, he might have been surprised and possibly even bemused at the commotion that was taking place, of which he was the main focus. How would he have responded to the crowd of museum directors, curators, artists, and the art community who were admiring and speaking openly about him and his conceptual ideals that ultimately came to define his art? The fuss is highly paradoxical, because during his lifetime, Zhang was shunned by the very likes of the present company, who had relegated him to the margins of the Chinese contemporary art world. In fact, only a few artists and curators even knew of Zhang until he broke all associations with the world by hanging himself at 00:00 on January 1, 2000.

To view Zhang Shengquan as a tragic hero is to know only half of the story. His devastatingly short life, devoured by the invisible ghosts that roamed in his mind, sheds a profound glimpse into an alternate narrative of the promising yet complex emergence of contemporary art in China.

Zhang Shengquan was born on November 18, 1955 in Datong, a city located in north Shanxi Province, known chiefly for its coal mining industry. Information about his personal life is scant, and far

less available than facts about the city that became a part of his identity. Standing above the average Chinese masses at a height of over 1.9 metres (6.2 feet), he was known as “Datong Dazhang” to those around him. We know very little about his family or his childhood except that in 1970, at the age of 15, he enlisted in the army as a signaller on the border between China and Burma during the Vietnam War. According to the curator Zang Honghua, “he witnessed the brutality of the war, and the spectre of death carved a deep scar into the heart of his youth, which slowly permeated the rest of his life.”²

He was discharged from the military in 1974 and, in 1980, gained employment as an audit clerk working the night shift at the Datong Construction Bank, which helped finance his art. An intense autodidact, Dazhang immersed himself in books in his spare time, whence he amassed his knowledge of music, philosophy, literature, history, and art until the driving passion for these subjects eventually overtook the concerns of his physical life. He is noted for being attired in the same khaki army uniform, which he wore daily, washing the pants and jacket occasionally. He replaced the old outfit with an exact replica only after the former became badly shredded.³ Despite his complete disregard for outer appearances, he was noted as a “germaphobic”, and was insistent on maintaining his hygiene. The curator Xiang Liping comments that Dazhang wrapped his hands in his pockets to open doors so as to avoid touching the doorknobs.⁴ Vignettes that seek to provide substance and volume to the artist indicate the polarities of tension Dazhang constantly sought to negotiate; yet his life was ultimately guided by his innermost passion that pushed him to the limits of extremities. Like a moth drawn to a candle, he relinquished himself to the attracting forces that drove his need for self-expression, which found concrete embodiment in art.

Perhaps the refusal to change his attire and cut his long hair served as a visual proclamation of defiance against societal norms. While standing up to the status quo in Western cultures has long been associated as individual virtue, in China it has traditionally been admonished and not condoned. It is likely that Dazhang’s identical quotidian appearance escaped scrutiny because he came from the working town of Datong, where most members of the mining community were covered from head to foot in layers of black soot, day in and day out. There must indeed have been a certain look of sameness that permeated the town in which Dazhang was embedded.



Zhang Shengquan
Celestial Burial, 1992
Mixed media
180 x 150 cm
Image courtesy of the Power Station of
Art, Shanghai



Zhang Shengquan
*From the Past to the Present, from the Present
to the Future*, 1992
Mixed media
180 x 150 cm
Image courtesy of the Power Station of Art,
Shanghai



Zhang Shengquan
Untitled, 1991
Charcoal on paper
47.5 x 35 cm
Image courtesy of the Power Station of
Art, Shanghai



Zhang Shengquan, circa 1980
Image courtesy of the Power
Station of Art, Shanghai

Coal, the ubiquitous fossil fuel mined in Datong, was not only used as a source for generating heat for the vast nation of China; its abundant availability induced Dazhang to apply it generously to his paintings. We find pulverised coal dust as well as shoe polish (another inexpensive and ubiquitous product) affixed as expressive gestures on the tabula rasa of Dazhang's canvases. Coal was the prominent fixture that defined the city of Datong because, despite its ill effects, it served as the livelihood for the city's inhabitants. Why should it not be acknowledged as the central medium and subject matter for its contribution to Datong's community? On Dazhang's painted canvas, the dead substance of coal enlivens the surface of the flat plane with its subtle glistening effects.

As if attempting to resuscitate what lay dormant, Dazhang's paintings in mixed media as well as his charcoal drawings also emanate a sense of raw energy that borders on a violent gesture. Dazhang had stated, "The artist must always be a violent countercurrent".⁵ His arms had to have swung the entire width and length of the canvas, while his body swayed in perpetual motion to achieve these expansive renderings. It was as if he was attempting to instil into the two-dimensional format the emphatic movements of his three-dimensional body. Dazhang's wildly executed paintings can thus be compared to Jackson Pollock's anachronous action paintings for their dynamic similarities, but to better understand Dazhang's paintings it is more useful to compare them with the synchronous paintings developing in China.

China has had a prolonged legacy (from 1949 to 1976) of art as the official construct for forming and disseminating the political messages of the state to the masses. Moreover, the stifling mandates of the Soviet Socialist Realist style throughout the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) gave artists an impetus to locate an alternate visual language in its aftermath. Thus, when schools and universities reopened in 1977, a few graduating art students boldly embraced the challenge of marking a departure from the paradigm of officially sanctioned art. Self-expression, to the extent that it bordered on no expression, as exemplified by *wuming* or "no name" artists, became the new ideal for art.⁶ The calm and detached formalism of the paintings by the members of the Northern Art Group, founded in July 1984 in Harbin, Heilongjiang, sought to reflect the frozen climate of its geography. The artistic production by the members of the group, especially Wang Guangyi (born 1957), was rooted in the "rational spirit" of the northern

culture that was marked by the cold, solemn, faceless figures that dominated the subject matter.⁷ These paintings by the Northern Art Group provided a dramatic contrast to the forcefully jubilant Worker-Soldier-Peasant images of the Cultural Revolution by foregrounding the ethos that was resolutely devoid of human emotions. The cold and detached stylistic features initiated by the Northern Art Group found their way south to Hangzhou, where throughout the mid to late 1980s, artists of the Pool Society, most notably Zhang Peili and Geng Jianyi, also painted their subjects in this numb and frigid state.⁸

Conversely, Dazhang's painted series entitled *Crematorium*, begun in September 1986, is a breach of the stylistic trends preferred by the artists of the 85 New Wave Movement, many of whom happened to be graduates of China's prominent art academy—Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou (the present day China Academy of Arts), including the members of the Pool Society and the Northern Art Group. Despite the moribund name of the series, there is a paradoxical exuberance of life-force in Dazhang's paintings that engulfs, like a tsunami, any trace of the aloof and emotionally absent features that formed the prevailing artistic style of the period. Dazhang's paintings brim over with a sense of immediacy dominated by a vitality that crosses over as vehement passion.

The notably consistent feature in the photographs of Datong Dazhang in the retrospective is the image of the artist, not as a melancholy figure marked by the trauma of war but as an artist embracing the joys of artistic freedom and creativity. In 1987, Dazhang formed an artistic collective in Datong called WR Group. The acronym stemmed from the initials of the pinyin *wu ren* or five people, composed of Dazhang, Zhu Yanguang, Ren Xiaoying, Zhang Zhiqiang, and Yao Lin. They exhibited their paintings in an "open air salon" on the grounds of one of China's most famous monumental Buddhist stone grottoes at Yungang. Moments of idyllic stasis—to paint, exhibit their works, lounge, and discuss art out of doors—must have been innately liberating for these grown men. The liberal atmosphere brought about by market reform provided the space for the emergence of alternative art, as exemplified by the formation of *wu ren*. According to art historian Martina Koppel-Yang, "The liberalization therefore caused the regionalization of the art scene with the founding of numerous regional artists' groups and the organization of numerous regional events, exhibitions and symposia."⁹ As such, the relational space to



Zhang Shengquan
Image courtesy of the Power Station of Art, Shanghai

engage and experiment with art from the mid 1980s proved to be a catalyst in fostering experimental art throughout China in urban centres and smaller and remote cities.

Such intense creativity across China converged and took centre stage in Beijing on February 5, 1989, at the National Museum of China. A Chinese contemporary art exhibition of unprecedented scale and format came to be mounted at the official museum institution under the direction of curator Gao Minglu and art critic Li Xianting. Many of the artists who later went on to achieve internationally critical and commercial acclaim were invited to take part in the 1989 *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition. Yet then, as now, the selection of artistic works was determined by leading art industry insiders from authoritative spheres of influence, which at the time belonged to Beijing and Hangzhou. Prominent exhibition spaces for displays of paintings and installations were given over to the graduates as well as those with connections to the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou and the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. This left out many artists who worked in the outer provinces and thus lacked professional or personal connections (*guanxi*) with key organising members of the exhibition.

The documentary film entitled *The Seven Sins* from the Wen Pulin Archive shown in a continuous sequence at the Datong Dazhang exhibition at the Power Station of Art provides one of the best pieces of historical footage from the famous 1989 *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition. With interviews from artists, curators, and critics who participated in the iconic exhibition, interwoven with scenes of

actual events, the 50-minute documentary highlights the seven live performances that took place, which were not planned or written into the program of the exhibition. With history coming alive before our eyes, we witness *Mourning* (1989) where Datong Dazhang, Zhu Yanguang, and Ren Xiaoying cloaked themselves in white sheets and walked amongst the crowds through the museum. Dazhang later wrote, “The three of us wrapped ourselves in white cloth in the courtyard of the museum. We lined up like ghosts and entered the east lobby of the ground floor.” Perhaps for the uninvited artists, such as Dazhang and his colleagues, they did appear like wandering ghosts or lost souls, left for dead on the doorstep of a significant exhibition.

The simple performative execution of *Mourning* profoundly reveals the frustration many marginalised artists felt from being dismissed and excluded from *China/Avant-Garde*. In Dazhang’s copious notes, he wrote, “It’s a pity that we ourselves did not take any photographic documentation. I heard of publications referring to our happening as the work of artists from Taiyuan.”¹⁰ The three members of the *wu ren* group were from the city of Datong, not the neighbouring town of Taiyuan. It seemed no one cared to know where the uninvited artists even came from. Yet, the live performances by Dazhang’s three man group, Wang Lang, and others who received no mention in the canons of Chinese art history succeeded in having drawn attention to themselves precisely because live performance was formally banned from the official exhibition space.¹¹ Without given spaces to situate and exhibit their works of art, many marginalised artists had no choice but to use their bodies as the instrument and platform for their art to engage with the audience. While direct engagement was the aim of all artists who exhibited in the *China/Avant-Garde* exhibition, the urgency was far greater for artists from China’s periphery who lacked a large audience of viewers.

Art historian Wu Hung defines an “experimental artist” (*shiyan yishujia*) in post-Cultural Revolution China as one who has the “determination to place him/herself at the border of contemporary Chinese society and the art world.”¹² Wu also claims that “this determination is often sustained by a sense of mission to enlarge frontiers and open new territories in Chinese art.” He uses this identifier to describe many of the canonical Chinese contemporary artists. Yet the term “experimental artist” should be broadened to encompass alternative artists, such as Dazhang’s group, Wang Lang

and other uninvited artists, who managed to place their unsanctioned art through unrehearsed accidental clashes as much as from their determinist sense to intervene.

Incidentally, the Chinese civil society of the 1980 and 1990s that was expected to embark on a quest for modernisation driven by the newfound quest for consumerism was none other than the generation that emerged from the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese populace that formed the core of the Red Guards, like Dazhang, was born in the late 1940s up to about the mid 1950s. They were encouraged to dissent. As Koppel-Yang asserts, “The legacy of the Cultural Revolution is evident not only in the assimilation of elements of its artistic practice, creative methods, [and] aesthetic imagery, but also in the adoption of a subversive attitude best described with the Cultural Revolution slogan ‘It is right to rebel.’”¹³ Performance thus emerged in China as an intuitive counter-response in the similar sense as the performance art that arose in Europe with the Dada and Surrealist artists. Historian of performance art Roselee Goldberg writes, “Live gestures have constantly been used as a weapon against the conventions of established art.”

Although Dazhang and his group neglected to take photographs, the brief attention they garnered did lead to a short video clip of *Mourning*, which was later converted into still photographs. The visual impact of Dazhang’s retrospective is derived from the power of the trace, which is comprised of reprinted archival photographs, overwhelming quantities of original sketches, and accompanying textual documentations left by the artist. Like the documentary film, *The Seven Sins*, the photographs provide unique access to an antecedent time that otherwise could not be revisited. Yet, even the offering of these reprinted images cannot possibly relay the comprehensive enormity of the events that have elapsed. The retrospective can only strive to provide a glimpse into fragments of Dazhang’s artistic life for which the viewers are left wanting more with questions awaiting answers that regrettably remain unanswered for the time being.

After holding a painting exhibition at the Concert Hall Gallery in Beijing in 1992, the *wu ren* group disbanded a year later. Thence, Dazhang began his mail art project in 1993, which lasted until 1998. According to Xiang, Dazhang’s series of mail art was composed of two parts: one included drafts of installations and performances, which he called “things,” and the other consisted of poems, notes,

and proposals, which he called “The Right Guard.”¹⁴ Each edition of the hand-made journals was compiled into about 13 pages of text, run off in 50 copies and mailed to artists, art critics, and museum institutions in cities throughout China, including clusters of artists’ villages in Yuanmingyuan, Dongcun, and Songzhuang near Beijing. Each issue was an endeavour by Dazhang to create awareness of his art that could reach beyond the parameters of Datong. He sent sketches and designs of installations with clear instructions to anyone in the art industry whose attention he hoped to capture. Dazhang claimed in his Confessional Declaration that “Starting from July 1, 1997, all of my artwork drafts and ideas can be carried out by anyone or they can be altered arbitrarily by anyone (of course including myself.) The right of authorship belongs to whoever does it first.”¹⁵ In his mail art, Dazhang also included his own poems, which he is known to have produced in a great quantity of over a thousand.¹⁶ Not only being confined to a small town, but also with the disintegration of *wu ren* (perhaps the only close community he had known), Dazhang sought a way to connect with the outside art world and the postal system served as his way out.

The concept of disseminating artistic ideas via mail art was not Dazhang’s invention, nor was it a novel phenomenon. In East Asia, it has a precedent with the Japanese contemporary art collective Gutai (1954-1972) who formulated their eponymous journal into a “mobile exhibition.”¹⁷ According to art historian Ming Tiampo, artists located in the peripheral regions had to respond to the situation of their removed distance as a challenge and an opportunity. The opportunity was in opening up the possibility of art from “material to concept.”¹⁸ By mailing sketches and installation designs through the routes of domestic and international post, the creation of art could be “wholly conceptual and did not require the presence of the artist for their execution.”¹⁹ Dazhang may or may not have been familiar with the successes of Gutai’s mail art, but it had been 39 years since the inception of the form in East Asia, which would have alerted Dazhang to the convenient and cost-effective possibilities that existed with mail art. In his “Integration Declaration,” Dazhang wrote: “I hate those immobile forms of exhibition.... Why don’t we take an approach that is more active, more effective, more colourful, more eye-catching, and more stimulating for ourselves and for everyone else, and at the same time more economical?”²⁰

It is likely that it was through mail art that Dazhang came to the



12 Covers of Mail Art, 1993-1998
Image courtesy of the Power Station of Art,
Shanghai

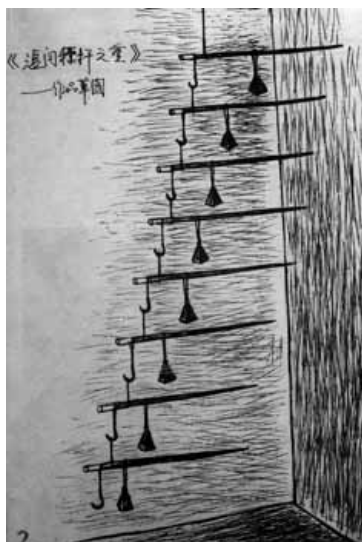
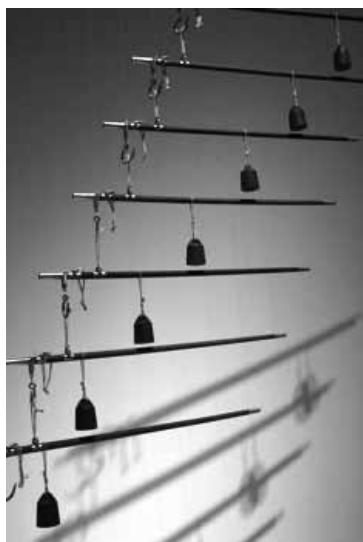
attention of the Chinese scholar Zhu Xiaofeng at the China Academy of Social Sciences. Zhu had, with the American artist Betsy Damon, organised the collaborative event *Protecting the Waters*, held in Lhasa from August 18 to September 3, 1996. This artistic event was an expansion of their *Preserving the Waters*, the first part of the *Living Water Park* project that took place in Chengdu a year earlier. Officially hosted by the Lhasa Bureau of Environment Protection, the 1996 event consisted of three artists from the US and 25 from China, as well as Tibetans.²¹

According to Dazhang's note for his Lhasa performance entitled *Soul-Releasing (Crossing)*, he had planned to carry a sheep upstream from the Lhasa River Bridge on the afternoon of August 29, 1996. This act was to signify "universal salvation."²² Then he planned to kill the sheep, which according to Dazhang, was to be a metaphor for the "release [of] the soul" to produce "transmigration." Yet due to an "accident" of a "forced intervention" by the Beijing artist Song Dong, who protected the sheep with his body, Dazhang ended up setting the sheep free.²³ Curator Xiang points out that the Chinese character 渡 (*du*) can mean crossing (salvation) and transgression at the same time. She states, "The connotation of 'crossing over' and the act of killing simultaneously form a conflicted meaning and thus mercy and violence [became] unified in this act."²⁴ As Xiang notes, Dazhang's employment of double entendre played "a key role in his projects," which is revealed in his poetry and notes as exhibiting a "keen attention to language as the expression of ideas and thoughts throughout his artistic life."²⁵ His fascination with text and language can be traced to several of the titles that are puns and plays on words. As Dazhang wrote, "Because we have extracted that which is imperative

from the existence of the artwork, what remains is only language and text. This is the most powerful weapon of the modern artist.”²⁶ Text was why poetry was an essential element of Dazhang’s mail art, which he scribed under the pen name “Shit Man.”²⁷ Xiang indicates that his poetry was greatly influenced by Sylvia Plath, another poet who ended up taking her own life at the young age of thirty.

Both curators Zang and Xiang recognised that there is a parallel obsession with death in Plath’s and Dazhang’s written work. The concept for *73 Kg of Human Flesh, Performance Project* (1996, to be “carried out in 1997”) consists of Dazhang mailing his own body in a box as a casket to himself. Sketches for conceptual works are suffused with hand drawn images of bodies in abject bondage such as *Sleeping in the Same Direction as the Slogan, Performance Project* (1996) and *Cleaning the Floor, Work Sketch* (1996), to name but a few. Self-immolation also runs as a dominant trope in his conceptual rendering of *Cupping Glass, Performance* (1997) and notes from *Drainage or Blisters on the Head, Pus on the Feet* (not dated) in which Dazhang’s own body is conceived to be put under duress for the sake of art. Whilst Dazhang claimed he had no mental illness,²⁸ there is plenty of evidence that points to his obsessive compulsion for coprophilia. Terms regarding vomit, urine, faeces, and toilet are ever-present in Dazhang’s vocabulary, and embedded in his poems, notes, and sketches. Buckets used for scooping night soil are incorporated into his installation and performance *The Dragging Game* (1997) while the concept of a pre-used rectal thermometer was conceived for *Scarlet Fever* (unrealised) and Chinese squat toilets as the chief display for *Gold Room* (unrealised).

Dazhang was very aware that photography was just as important as text for reaching the outside world. It was precisely the visual impact of photographs that brought some of the early Chinese performance artists, most notably Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming, to the attention of foreign curators and collectors. Yet, the network of corresponding systems that linked artists to decision-making curators and officials continued to underscore the closed circuit within the art community, which left those not linked to the system languishing on the side-lines. This begs the question, is it the work of art that qualifies its entry into the centre, or an artist’s association and connection to it? Obviously both play a significant role. Then why were Dazhang’s paintings and performances completely



Zhang Shengquan
 Questioning the Weight of Scales, 2015
 (Conceptual sketch, 1996)
 Image courtesy of the Power Station of Art, Shanghai

disregarded during the artist's life, to be ordained as important only after his demise? Xiang uses the term “born posthumously”, which she borrows from Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.²⁹ Inevitably, the nature or the quality of Dazhang's artwork has not changed. It has only been granted the space of time for review. Then, should Dazhang's works and notes be considered more worthy for their artistic merit or as historical artefacts?

While further research awaits for greater clarity, the Datong Dazhang retrospective at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai deserves recognition for its renewed presentation of art historical content and for placing an artist whom Zang calls “an extremely rare outlier” into acute focus. For the present exhibition, the curators produced three of Dazhang's unrealised installations. The simplest, yet most profound, is *Questioning the Weight of a Scale Beam* (conceived 1996). These interlocking hooks on wooden dowels support measuring weights. It is, as Zang notes, “a series of inquiries that unceasingly call the standard, fairness, and justice of determined values, and even truth, into question.”³⁰

Living a life that was consumed by art, Dazhang sought to find a sense of balance, which nonetheless seemed denied to him. He was a

germaphobic, yet his living quarters were a filthy dumping ground for trash, which he took to calling the “Garbage Palace.” He strove for engagement with the art community through his mail art, yet not a single visitor came to his *Coal Yard Performance* of 1996. Dazhang was a man of discrepancies and contradictions, but one aspect that remained constant and stable in his life was his honest and single-minded dedication to the creation of his art. Whether his artistic ideals were realised or not was secondary for Dazhang. For him, it was about the release. As long as the concepts were released from the abstract grips of his thoughts and transferred over to materiality through painting, drawing or bodily performance, he was able to find solace.

In November 1997, Dazhang offered his own critique about the state of Chinese contemporary art. “[In 1989] when we were creating something, we could speak with confidence and composure, but now [in 1997] we have become that something, exhibiting ourselves to each other. Any careless behaviour would look like a separation between the head and the body.”³¹ He continued, “Art has become a pretence. Culture has become a mere strategy. We have deviated from being ourselves.”³² Dazhang alerted us of the disconnect he felt with the art world. In 1997, he halted all his performances, and in 1998 he mailed out his final work *I See Death* (1998)—a ghastly vision of the artist pointing an accusing finger at the viewer while white toothpaste foam frothed from his mouth as if he had been transformed into a mad dog. On January 1, 2000, Dazhang penned his final note, which appears as simple bullet points.

To those connected to me:

1. This step I take is completely predestined. In 1992 I said, “My forty-fifth year is the year of my death.” I am just keeping my promise.
2. My behaviour is completely personal. It has nothing to do with anyone else.

Xiao Quan:

1. Money and my work unit wage card are in the pockets of the green military uniform on top of the steel wire (next to the white shorts).
2. You can take away the TV and VCR. But as to the apartment and other things, please let it be like this forever.
3. I’ve already paid the gas fee until summer of this year. I

imagine it's unlikely you can get that refunded.

4. Every year when the central heating comes on, please come over and open the backwater valve on the cistern and let the cold air out. This will keep the people downstairs from complaining.

5. Please take care of my father in the future. I leave my money to my father.

6. I don't want you to change my clothes, and I don't want a cinerary casket. Just dump me outside the crematorium. Following a dirt road for transferring sand, heading further and further in, you will see a large sand pit.

Zhang Shengquan

1/1/2000³³

Dazhang was not the first artist in Chinese history to have committed suicide. Scholar Silvia Fok mentions Qi Li having killed himself on December 19, 1992, at the age of 23, and another artist known as Tao Tao from Songzhuang Artist Village who took his own life on May 1, 2005.³⁴ Qi Li died during a public display in which he slowly froze his body while performing the *Ice Burial*. Dazhang's final act of art was not a performance in the literal sense, for no one was present to witness his death. True to self, Dazhang's last work of art was a devout personal self-expression in which he released his soul for his greatest passion. On April 22, 2000, curator Li Xianting included Dazhang as the only non-living artist in the group exhibition



Zhang Shengquan

I See Death, 1998

Image courtesy of the Power Station
of Art, Shanghai

Infatuation with Injury held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Feng Boyi and Ai Weiwei also included Dazhang in their infamous *Fuck Off* anti-establishment counter-exhibition in Shanghai on October 2000, in protest of the Shanghai Biennale. On January 1, 2009, a *wu ren* exhibition was held at the Wall Museum in Beijing, where a considerable portion of the exhibition was dedicated to Dazhang. The current retrospective at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai is an expansion of the 2009 Wall Museum exhibition. Mining the wealth of the artist Wen Pulin's important archive, the Datong Dazhang retrospective seeks to redress and pay respect to a much forgotten artist, who despite his frailties and idiosyncrasies was nonetheless a significant figure who, in his own way, contributed to the formation of Chinese contemporary art in the 1980s and 1990s. Dazhang's retrospective additionally serves as an important move away from art exhibitions in Shanghai for which museums have fallen into the trap of promoting the commercial forces of the prevailing art market trends. The Datong Dazhang exhibition offers a contemplative, informative, eerie, and poignant glance, stirring the intellect and the senses as it attempts to draw one step nearer to finding closure for Zhang Shengquan.



Endnotes

- 1 Zhang Shengquan, "Inside the page of the Mail Art 96, Note from the sketch," in *Datong Dazhang* (Shanghai: caapress, 2015), 103.
- 2 Zang Honghua, "Reading Datong Dazhang," in *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 2.
- 3 Biography in *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 47.
- 4 Xiang Liping, conversation with the author, Shanghai, March 21, 2016.
- 5 Translated in Zang Honghua, "Reading Datong Dazhang," 13.
- 6 According to the art historian Gao Minglu, "the No Name group... rejected the politics of the day and instead advocated 'art for art's sake.'" See Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 85.
- 7 Lu Peng, *A History of Art in 20th-Century China* (Milano: Charta, 2010), 836.
- 8 Regarding artistic production by "Pool Society," see Lu Peng,, 865-874.

- 9 Martina Koppel-Yang, *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989, A Semiotic Analysis* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2003), 184.
- 10 Zhang Shengquan, "Untitled Manuscript," in *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 295.
- 11 In the documentary *The Seven Sins*, it indicates that the only way performances could be exhibited at the 1989 China/Avant-Garde exhibition was through the format of pre-printed still photographs.
- 12 Wu Hung, "Introduction: A Decade of Chinese Experimental Art (1990-2000) in Wu Hung with Wang Huangsheng and Feng Boyi, *The First Guangzhou Triennial Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990-2000)* (Guangzhou, China: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002), 12.
- 13 Martina Koppel-Yang, *Semiotic Warfare: The Chinese Avant-Garde, 1979-1989, A Semiotic Analysis*, 189-190.
- 14 Xiang Liping, "The Birth of Superman: On the Solo Exhibition of Datong Dazhang," in *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 26.
- 15 Zhang Shengquan in "Honest Manifesto manuscript," in *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 285.
- 16 Although out of print, Dazhang's younger brother Zhang Xiaoquan had privately published *Gudu de shengyin – Zhang Shengquan shixuan* (孤独的声音 - 張盛泉詩選) [A Voice of Solitude – An Anthology of Zhang Shengquan Poetry], no imprint, May 2002.
- 17 Ming Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 63.
- 18 Ibid, 66.
- 19 Ibid, 69.
- 20 Translated in Xiang Liping, "The Birth of Superman: On the Solo Exhibition of Datong Dazhang," 24.
- 21 Information regarding the 1996 *Protecting the Waters* project in Lhasa remains scant and inconsistent. According to Yin Shuangxi, "From August 18 to September 3, 1996, the collaborative event *Protecting the Waters*, organized by US artist Betsy Damon and Chinese scholar Zhu Xiaofeng, was held in Lhasa. Participants included Dai Guangyu, Li Jixiang, Liu Chengying, Song Dong, Yin Xiuzhen, Zhang Xin, Zhange Shengquan, Zhang Lei, Ruan Haiying and artists from the US and Sweden." Yet, information about this same event reads inconsistently in the "Chronicle: Experimental Chinese Art, 1990-2000," of the same book. It is written "August 31-September

- 2: The second section of American artist Betsy Damon's, *Preserving the Waters* takes place in Lhasa. This is a broadening and expansion of the first *Preserving the Waters*, activity that took place in Chengdu a year earlier. Participating artists from China, the U.S. and Switzerland create works around the theme of water, which are then installed near the Lhasa River." See Yin Shuangxi, "The Periphery and Cultural Concerns: Making and Exhibiting Installation and Experimental Sculptures in the 1990s," p. 68 and "Chronicle: Experimental Chinese Art, 1990-2000," p. 501 in Wu Hung, Wang Huangsheng, and Feng Boyi, *The First Guangzhou Triennial Reinterpretation: A Decade of Experimental Chinese Art (1990-2000)* (Guangzhou, China: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2002). See also Betsy Damon artist website which has a brief information about the 1995 Chengdu project. <http://www.keepersofthewaters.org/Proj06ArtP2012.cfm> (accessed April 3, 2016).
- 22 Zhang Shengquan, "Inside page of the Mail Art 96, Note from the sketch," in *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 103.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Xiang Liping, "The Birth of Superman: On the Solo Exhibition of Datong Dazhang," 28.
- 25 Ibid, 30.
- 26 Translated in Xiang Liping, "The Birth of Superman: On the Solo Exhibition of Datong Dazhang," 32.
- 27 Xiang Liping, "The Birth of Superman: On the Solo Exhibition of Datong Dazhang," 28.
- 28 Dazhang wrote, "Is my idea a symptom of mental illness? Because, I can never make sense of what a normal person is supposed to be like!" Zhang Shengquan, "Honest Manifesto manuscript," 285.
- 29 Xiang Liping, "The Birth of Superman: On the Solo Exhibition of Datong Dazhang," 36.
- 30 Zang Honghua, "Reading Datong Dazhang," 10.
- 31 Translated in Xiang Liping, "The Birth of Superman: On the Solo Exhibition of Datong Dazhang," 30.
- 32 Zhang Shengquan, "Taking it to be True," in *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 297.
- 33 Zhang Shengquan, "Suicide Note of Datong Dazhang," *Datong Dazhang* (Hangzhou: caapress, 2015), 313.
- 34 Silvia Fok, *Life and Death: Art and the Body in Contemporary China* (Bristol; Chicago: Intellect, 2013), 70 and 74.

CHINA'S CHALLENGE

Using its Culture as an Instrument of Soft Power

BY BARNABY POWELL & ALEX MACKINNON

The Chinese have either looked down on foreigners as brutes or up to them as saints, but have never actually been able to call them friends or speak of them as equals

—Lu Xun

ABSTRACT

This article sets out to explain the difficulty the Chinese have in making use of their culture as an instrument of soft power and public diplomacy in seeking to influence other countries. The very nature of their value system and their modes of behaviour in business and social life, leisure and the arts means that this culture is not easily adaptable or exportable. Acceptance of a culture depends on the intrinsic appeal and attraction of the cultural 'products' on offer. In China's case, this is fragile or even impenetrable in some areas. Given the language barrier—a major bottleneck, since the essence of cultural strength may be lost in translation—and the depredations of the Cultural Revolution, access to understanding and appreciation can be highly demanding, if ultimately rewarding. As the philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, remarked, "to restore a broken culture is to try to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers".

The early 19th century brought not a clash of civilisations but a rupture in China's settled way of life, sense of supremacy and imperial security. The Western impact was a rude awakening to the power of logic to form pathways to modernity. The West's advantage over China stemmed from the Industrial Revolution, hastening the migration of people off the land into cities and providing the panacea of social democracy. The Chinese had no Greek roots, of course—no Aristotle, Socrates or Plato, neither Magna Carta nor rule of law, but they did have a civilisation based on moral codes: Confucian obligations rather than statutory rights. What are the odds on balancing the European Convention on Human Rights with a Human Obligations Code?

Faced with having to deal with each other for the first time, the Chinese and Westerners viewed one another with shock and disgust. Each must have struck the other as absurd. To the Chinese, Westerners

were simply rude and hairy interlopers who had strayed in from the nether regions of the earth with nasty habits—an impression quickly reinforced by the odious opium trade. The Chinese called them “raw”, while those who had bothered to immerse themselves in a little local custom were called “cooked”. The West found China caught in a curious kind of time warp, apparently hidebound by ritual, elaborate attire and highly affected manners and forms of address.

The Chinese come at life from a different angle—almost another dimension. They have felt battered over most of the past two centuries. Today they are anxious to join the global club as equals, not associates. They live out the old virtues of self-esteem and patience with such diligence that strident vanity in a man-centred world is made an honorary virtue and strict morality almost a vice. In our common confusion over the mystery of life, they remain one step ahead on the ascent to enlightenment: while the English-speaking world talks of being “at sixes and sevens”, the Chinese talk of being “at sevens and eights”.

Much of this cultural clash arose from the teachings of Confucius in the form of a set of moral or ethical obligations applied to hierarchical members of a state, to patriarchal members of a family, and across networks through trustworthy friends. Confucius, like Christ, worked to lower the prevalence of enmity and strife, helped stabilise society, and brought peace. China’s stabilisation, resulting in a more structured state, also brought an increase in penal law and acknowledgement of the Emperor’s ‘Mandate of Heaven’. The mandate was, in effect, a right to rule with the rights liable to forfeit. The people would accept the Emperor’s mandate from on high provided he was just and fair. Acts of injustice would be countered with opposition to that mandate through riot and rebellion. Repression often followed with coercion its natural successor.

Confucius can come across as an enigmatic snob, going on as he does about “the superior man”. He is particularly down in his *Analects* on misbehaviour in public: “Respectfulness, without civilised behaviour, becomes laborious bustle; carefulness, timidity; boldness, insubordination; straight-forwardness, rudeness”. Hints of incivility from the West, as interpreted by the Chinese, will thus take on hues of cheek, cowardice, truculence and insincerity. The philosopher Bertrand Russell admitted to a fondness for the “humorous and hairless Chinese”. While the British shun seriousness, the Chinese shun levity—in business. Where ribbing, joshing and “poking Charlie” at people and problems

are a great emollient in British dealings, the Chinese prefer the poker face of gravitas. That spontaneous snort of laughter you may sometimes hear will have burst out of deep cover for extreme embarrassment or confusion, never on account of a cunning pun or the wicked enjoyment of another's misfortune. For what is laughter but the dislocation of a mind suddenly ambushed by surprise? The Chinese language does not permit such dissolution in serious discourse.

In Chinese eyes many Westerners still deserve the epithet "foreign devil". Indeed, a common Chinese appraisal of Western character traits remains remarkably shrewd and constant: straightforward, principled at the expense of pragmatism, proud of academic credentials (but often less than competent), morally casual, dogmatic with little tendency to listen, trouble making, naïve and privileged. Some of our snobbery rubs off on them too: "*It's such a pity Mr Wang became so fluent before he learnt the language*", as one Chinese was heard to say of another's English. The way the Westerner is never perceived to be an equal means that trust can never quite be the same for a Westerner as for a networked Chinese. Friendship in this context is honorary and trust is thus utilitarian. There's not much room for mateship.

The twin pillars of wisdom in the West have been law and religion (with a stout buttress of philosophy). The absence of both such pillars in China appears to have caused Western concern and some dismay. Western legal process enables governing controls over society—as does religion with its commandments and strictures. China also has controls, substituting a confrontational, dichotomous, legal process with an opaque bargaining system based on arbitration and reciprocity, two constructs not unusual in Western legal systems. The opacity is created by bargaining (which can be corrupt and manipulative) within closed networked connections (*guanxi*) to ensure "a very present help in trouble". This explains their preference for the collective over the individual, the relational over the contractual and for accepting duties, obligations and responsibilities to family before country. Society in China is ordered by identity as a network: regimental honour over individual life. This is their Gordian knot: dry, locked, and a tie that binds.

Rights and obligations separate West and East. The West's failure is to conflate freedom with democracy resulting in crises created by open capitalism challenging democratic mandates. China's primary clash is between communism and culture. *The Communist Manifesto*

directly contradicts traditional Chinese family networks in practice: the abolition of land ownership with rents going to the public purse; graduated income tax; no rights of inheritance; property belonging to 'outlaws' such as rebels—and those who have fled the country—to be confiscated; a central state-owned bank with a monopoly on savings and loans; state control over communication and transport; state control over factories and agriculture; work for all through army style organisations; equal dispersion of rural and urban populations; free education and abolition of child labour. With the passable exception of point 10, the *Manifesto* challenges the integrity of the family, the bedrock of the Chinese value system, and destroys the networks that protected the individual from Imperial oppression. Riots and rebellions in China are not anti-government protests but 'backs against the wall' families fighting for network survival to retain the brittle fabric of trust among themselves.

Leaders after the imperial Mao Zedong, such as Deng Xiaoping and many like him in the Party, were not really Marxists but revolutionary nationalists wishing to see China on equal terms with the great global powers. Deng's Reform and Opening Movement from 1978 began to erode much of the Marxist argument for a classless and stateless society. The 10 *Manifesto* requirements are going, if not gone; China is allowing private property ownership to rise; income tax is universal but needs private enterprise to make it work; more banks are being incorporated; some privatisation of communications and transport is occurring; private manufacturing and family agriculture are quite common; national army service is compulsory but limited; the *hukou* system (of household registration, a form of domestic passport) is restrictive, with the poor desperately heading for the cities but some rich cunningly heading for the country; and children enjoy greater protection. But these reforms are not Engels' return to capitalism—they are back to a future of traditional family values and bedrock beliefs. For all Mao's attempts to persuade Chinese workers of the dignity of labour and Marx's labour theory of value, we now know that this was a load of cobblers, since value is determined purely by supply and demand. Productivity is a capitalist not a socialist notion.

China's great thrust and progress to modernity have been usurped by Western and Russian revolutionaries. China's own revolutions have drawn strength from core Chinese values (as in the Lotus, Taiping, and Boxer Rebellions), but were often fettered by basic hierarchical systems

with a male dominance. This has kept leading China towards autocratic structures. On a national level, it has been a bar to altering hierarchical and obsolete employment practices and organisational policies. There is now uncertainty as to the speed and direction of transitional reforms—especially when Western capitalist systems are globally concentrated in the U.S. Even if the cap fits, who will want to wear the Emperor’s cast off clothes?

The rise of China will be unstoppable unless it fails to acknowledge the need for the restoration of a traditional mandate from the people. This mandate must permit participation by the people in the organisation of their affairs and the true representation of their legitimate interests in an increasingly plural society. Accountability will need to be reversed—from people to government, to government to people—if growing dissent and disaffection are to be averted. The current younger generation will be unstoppable because so many of them have been emancipated by foreign study, travel, and the Internet. They understand the importance of method, technique, and critical thinking over philosophy and ideology as practical means of advancement in the modern world. What this indicates is that the closed *guanxi* networks of power and influence at both national and local levels need to open up and interconnect. This would mobilise graduates and workers to seize the initiative at home and abroad. It would also galvanise citizens and government into forging a civil society.

The *guanxi* system is unique to China. It is not based—as networks of influence are in the West—on clubs, schools, colleges and regiments, and other institutions like the law and the church. Its function is not so much to secure advantage and privilege as to protect the secrecy and anonymity of networks established to ensure survival of core interests and to hold people safe from harm and arbitrary victimisation. Thus, *guanxi* networks are as vital to peasant farmers as they are to members of the Communist Party, closed as they are in networks set against each other to enforce “harmony” and “security”. In time, the Chinese will be able to divest themselves of these expensive insurance policies. They will speak to each other as free agents and stakeholders in the same mighty enterprise.

Of equal if not greater importance are the choices of appropriate behaviour governed by the Chinese notions of *qing*, *li*, and *fa*. The first approach in dealing with or judging others is prompted by kindness, sympathy, compassion and fellow feeling. This is the spirit of *qing*. The

expression of these feelings is dictated by *li*—good order, logic or reason. Only finally and often as a last resort do they have recourse to seek *fa*—law or justice—to settle matters. There is thus a strong preference for resolving difficulties or disputes through personal negotiation or mediation rather than impersonally, as in the West, where the quality of mercy and justice is strained through the sieve of the courts. It is this factor weighting in favour of the milk of human kindness or *renqingwei* that is a distinguishing feature of the Chinese approach to human relations. Thus, it is not a person's action that is to be judged, but the root cause and intention of the action.

Both East and West are concerned with the perfectibility of man and the institutions of humankind. In a perfect world, the ideal European would perhaps combine the endearing honesty of the Italians, the artless charm of the Germans, the engaging modesty of the French, the rapt spontaneity of the English and the world political outlook of the Belgians—in short, a Swiss. The ideal Chinese, on the other hand, would perhaps combine the patent sincerity of the Shanghainese, the old world courtesy of the Guangdongese, the cultural integrity of the Hongkongers, the reflective calm of the Uighurs, and the unflappable cool of the Sichuanese—in short, a Mongolian.

Whether their thoughts and aspirations are of and for this world or the next, whether earth-bound or transcendental, for Confucius or Christ, the question remains the same for both China and the West: who's really the daddy? Whose ideas and example have left a lasting influence? Who has reconciled us most and best to the business of living? Of the famed philosophers in our own “Land of Thinkers” (as the Chinese have been wont to call us), do Locke and Hobbes still have resonance today? Or that other cuckoo in the nest after Karl Marx, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who engaged quite forcefully with the Aristotelian logic of Karl Popper. None of the above, we contend; if anybody, it was that old Scottish moraliser, David Hume, with his “Impressions” and observations of how people actually behave and what moves them to action. Indeed, as some of our Chinese friends confirm, it is Hume whose work most closely chimes with their own outlook on life.

Unlocking Chinese culture is the best means of understanding the country and its people. China is actively seeking to open its culture to the world and to achieve what it believes to be its rightful standing. A decade after entering the WTO, the People's Daily Online declared on March 11th 2010, “*China needs to take all kinds of measures to educate*

the world about China so that they can love it". Data quoted by the same People's Daily Online shows that the U.S. culture industry has 43% of world market share, while the Asia-Pacific region enjoys only 19%, of which only a very meagre 4% is China's. The country's cultural influence index ranks seventh among 131 countries worldwide, behind the U.S., Germany, the UK, France, Italy and Spain. It is debatable whether this data interpretation is accurate or entirely meaningful. What have modern Chinese cultural values been based on and have they been modified to fit an official line?

The wellspring of the Chinese spirit is the written word. It is the touchstone of their memory, imagination, and inspiration. Momentous events and instances in human experience are captured in single characters of calligraphy, which have today the force and power of scripture. They remain abiding reminders of both identity and purpose, lighting the Chinese mind in triumph and adversity. Only two civilisations on earth have enjoyed unbroken continuity. While those of Egypt, the Middle East, Persia (Iran) and India are no less ancient, it is the culture and traditions of the Jews and the Chinese alone that have survived intact as spiritual phenomena throughout recorded history. The writings of the Jews have been passed down in an almost unbroken line through the Torah and the Talmud. Those of the Chinese originate in forms of script that have undergone remarkably little transformation—only deviation with the Mongol (Yuan) and Manchu (Qing) dynasties—over several millennia.

Central to the Chinese conception of life is the Theory of Five Elements (*wu xing*). *Wu* (five) stands for the essential material things—metal, wood, water, fire and earth—while *xing* means movement and changes. This theory links the human body with the universe around us, and the rhythms of nature to be followed in maintaining the balance of a healthy life. With the *yin* (cold) and *yang* (hot) energies, which correct imbalances, the five elements are the basis of traditional healing. These ideas also inflect the qualities and properties of musical notes, colours, flavours, senses, and directions. The theory remains, of course, as deeply mystical and unfathomable as the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity.

In numerology, the Chinese see trends and wish to change them. In 2007 President Hu Jintao made the enigmatic statement that China had a massive trade surplus, but also a vast cultural deficit with the rest of the world. What did he mean exactly? It seems that he was reflecting the view of his Government Information Office that the levels of cultural

interpenetration and influence were heavily weighted in favour of the West. Much more should be done, in short, to extend and communicate the charms and virtues of Chinese culture and arts to a wider world. This would represent a strong, countervailing force to balance undue Western influence.

The initiatives set in train by the campaign of Chinese cultural dissemination overseas have aroused no little suspicion. Are the Confucius Institutes mere propagandistic stalking horses, established to present the smiling face of friendship and China's peaceful ascendancy? The acid test, of course, and the proof of cultural and artistic integrity is the degree to which foreigners may find some intrinsic appeal and attraction in the cultural "products" on offer. In this regard, the Chinese language is a barrier and bottleneck; the essence of its cultural strength may be lost in translation.

If this process is reversed, the problem becomes much more readily apparent: popular attempts that have risen to the challenge of breaking the sound and sense barrier include *pitousi* (literally 'the unkempt hair four') for The Beatles and *maowang* (literally 'Cat King') for Elvis Presley. The internal martial art of *taiji* (literally 'ultimate or boundless fists') can, by contrast, really only be understood by doing it. Indeed, it is popular culture that proves to be the key to unlocking some of the treasures in store within. Japan has its foreign fans of 'cosplay' (costume + play or dressing up and pretending to be fictional or actual characters) and *manga* magazines, the lurid and often violent comic books and print cartoons beloved of Japanese commuters. China draws attention chiefly with its *kung fu* films and its cuisine.

Not to be outdone, the Chinese are planning to introduce their first comic book champion of retribution and meter out of justice, The Annihilator, to rival the U.S.'s Captain America and Batman. But he does rather seem to be emulating The Terminator, The Governator, and other heroes of virtual reality. Surely The Transformer, The Leveller, or even The Regulator would better signal their non-violent, soft power intent.

The Chinese language is a major challenge, but the initially indecipherable strokes of the formal script are common to all dialects of spoken Chinese. This is why you will see speakers of *Putonghua* (Mandarin) gesticulating and tracing elaborate characters with a finger in the palm of their other hand to indicate their meaning to a Cantonese or Hokkien speaker. Although quite foxing to a foreigner, the baffling

code of these same characters may still be cracked by means of *pinyin* (literally ‘spell-sound’), a system of writing Chinese using a Romanised or phonetic crib for the pronunciation of words.

The next challenge is, of course, the four different tones for each written character, which need to be mastered to distinguish their meaning and to avoid sounding silly. This is not as daunting as it sounds, as, with practice and growing familiarity with the spoken language, the natural stress, fall and rise of these tones becomes almost second nature. The common sequences of words, phrases and questions—like the flights and cadences of musical notes or even a kind of Morse code—slowly make up familiar patterns of speech.

The sounds of Mandarin, of Chinese *Putonghua*, are rounded, and its *pinyin* written version is a useful guide, once the puzzling ‘q’s and ‘x’s and ‘zh’s, have been mastered. Vowels are pure or single, not diphthongs or double as in English. This means that *Putonghua* is much less taxing for an English-speaker to pronounce than, say, French or German with their heavy articulation. It is more like Spanish in the light immediacy of its simple vowels and solid consonants. Conversely, it is also somewhat easier to follow in conversation, since its grammar is very much less complex and more flexible.

The written language is also the root of the Chinese spirit in that the script is treated as an art form. Chinese calligraphy is endlessly expressive and instructive of both their literacy and philosophy, as is their brush painting of traditional subjects like plum blossom, lotus flowers, and small figures in a landscape at one with nature. The written word in its finest calligraphic form is the one great constant thread that links the present with the remote and ancient past of prehistory. In the millennia BC, it was the crude, runic inscriptions on the flat shoulder-bones of cattle carcasses and the shells of tortoises that first served to record the mind and magical invocations of the earliest Chinese (on their so-called ‘Oracle Bones’). From this developed a form of script that is, with Arabic, one of the highest of the human arts in the beauty of its precision and execution. The cultivation of this art demands an intensely rigorous discipline in self-control and mental equilibrium. It is as if, with every brush-stroke, an attempt must be made to live up to the spirit of the original word-character.

Music is always a mainstay of any society, and the first strains of Chinese music that are likely to be heard by foreigners are probably from the Chinese opera. These sound to the Western ear for all the world like

snatches of the British radio comedy *The Goon Show*, with a crashing cymbal accompaniment. They strike the ear and mind as distinctly odd, much as Mahler's symphonies must sound to the Chinese—hauntingly unfamiliar and strange. As with so many cultural phenomena, an appreciation of these arts depends very much upon context. Once a full opera performance has been experienced, the charm and significance of the playing with the acting is much more easily enjoyed. The extraordinary costumes, the heavily stylised singing and the music become all of a piece. An initial stunned bemusement turns gradually to awkward appreciation of an enthralling entertainment.

Their classic musical instruments are ancient and very versatile, particularly those that most resemble the woodwind, string, and percussion members of the Western orchestra. The most visible and popular are the plucked lute (the *pipa*) and the harp (the *guzheng*), played cradled in the lap, the bowed two-string 'spike fiddle' (the *erhu*), also played upright, and the bamboo flute (the *dizi*). These can produce a beguiling and often magical sound when played, to heighten the drama of the opera or to simulate birdsong or the ripple of running water in a stream. The power and resonance of the Chinese drum (the *dagu*)—the great red drum that struck terror into the hearts of the Emperor's enemies—were best exemplified in its synchronised playing by hundreds of drummers at the Beijing Olympic Games. China's great affinity with music—as more than accompaniment to song and dance—is witnessed by its musicians' awesome mastery and interpretation of most of the Western canon. It is music and its related mathematical disciplines that are the true international languages.

The traditions of many countries rest in their tales of olden days—their mythmaking. China's fabled mythology is a rich source of wonder and fascination, fit to rival the Greek Myths with their pantheon of gods and goddesses, heroes and sages. The creation myth that forms the centre of its cosmology—the world born of an immense cracked black egg, whose yolk became heaven and whose white became earth—is every bit as fanciful and implausible as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Eight Immortals may correspond to the Company of Saints, while an omniscient monkey performed something akin to the Labours of Hercules and superstition made Household Gods as significant as the *Lares* and *Penates* of the Roman Empire. The checking of the local *feng shui* (literally, 'wind and water' conditions) on siting new buildings has become as routine as the

structural assessment work of a chartered surveyor.

The literature too is one of highly inspirational fantasy and romance. The Four Books and the Five Classics, based on the teachings of Laozi and Confucius with later embellishment by Mencius (Mengzi), have become a kind of secular Bible. The Yi Jing or *Book of Changes*, one of the oldest books of all, codifies the science of divination or fortune telling, based on the changing conjunction and permutation of the different elements that make up matter. But it is the high romance of the most famous classical stories that reveals the Chinese love of heroism and make-believe. The epic *Journey to the West* tells the story of how Buddhism was brought back from India by an itinerant monk with a clever pig and a wily monkey for companions.

The Romance of the Three Kingdoms is the legendary tale of the struggles of military commanders to unite China towards the end of the Han era in the third century, while *The Dream of the Red Chamber* is the favourite novel to this day of high-born family life in the eighteenth-century capital, a virtual compendium of lifestyles detailing intrigues, cuisine, the arts, proverbs, love affairs, matchmaking and courtship with a vast number of characters from top to bottom of the social spectrum. Its dramatisation today would certainly give *Downton Abbey* a run for its old money.

The Tang poets Li Bai and Du Fu immortalised Chinese history and poetry in their hundreds of evocative verses. In the 20th century, Lu Xun revolutionised the language of storytelling with his famously demotic tales like *The Real Story of Ah Q*, and Western-educated writers like Lin Yutang did much to bring China alive to the outside world. Modern documentary writers like Xinran open and illuminate Chinese lives to Western understanding. China celebrated its first Nobel laureate, the novelist Gao Xingjian, in 2000, and Mo Yan—a kind of national court jester—was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2012. Chinese writing is becoming a clearer windowpane for the world to look in.

The role of drama is essentially taken up with Chinese opera, which is a heavily stylised form of sung and danced storytelling with an entertaining amount of acrobatics and martial arts. A Western-inspired spoken theatre also took root with the New Culture Movement from the 1920s with adaptations of foreign classics like Alexandre Dumas' *La Dame aux Camélias* and John Galsworthy's *The Silver Box*, and in the 1930s with Cao Yu's famous family tragedy, *Thunderstorm*. Shakespeare has been successfully adapted and performed in the country for over

two hundred years—in *The Merchant of Venice*, for example, a Saracen (Muslim) replaces the Jew Shylock, like a recalcitrant Uighur from Xinjiang.

But it is in cinema that Chinese culture comes into its own with its stunningly harsh realism and magical fantasy. Films like *The Blue Kite* and *Farewell, My Concubine* provide an authentically searing portrayal of events in the Mao years. Later extravaganzas like *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, *House of Flying Daggers*, and *Curse of the Golden Flower* give full vent to the Chinese passion for superhuman *kung fu* fighting and fantastic imaginary feats of levitation and flitting flight like wind-assisted sequences of free-running (parkour), as practised by stars like Jackie Chan. Serious historical dramas like *Confucius* and *1911*, commemorating the anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution, document the glorious events of the past in high romantic style. New animated films reach a new level of escapist phantasmagoria. Puppetry and ‘cross-talk’ comedians prevail as the commonest *vox populi* diversions even as the country talks to itself without restraint on Chinese Twitter Weibo.

East and West are often literally poles apart in their representation of life in both literature and drama. Comedy and action-fantasy apart, the plot lines of Western and Chinese novels and dramas tend, respectively, towards the up-beat and down-beat. While the stories of Western books and films are generally optimistic or at least stoically realistic, those of the Chinese are often imbued with a certain tragic sense of life, as if it were driven by the cruelty of fate. Perhaps this is no wonder, given the misery and suffering that they have had to endure over the last century. It is almost as if the “bitterness” they have had to “eat” has become bittersweet, part of a staple diet. Even if read only in translation, it is a country’s literature that speaks most clearly to foreigners in its disarming directness.

The Chinese have always enjoyed games of chance as a mainstay of their culture. Gaming and gambling are major recreations. The best known parlour games of skill and chance are *mah-jong*—a board game for four players who compete in strategies to outwit and outflank opponents to achieve a winning hand or set of tiles—and *weiqi* (probably better known by its Japanese name, *go*)—a board game for two players who compete with black and white counters in a more complex and variegated version of chess. Both these pastimes are said to be over 2,000 years old and form the backbone of the Chinese love of “strategising” and winning through a combination of brazen risk-taking and luck.

Outlawed under Mao on the grounds of “capitalist corruption”, these games are now firmly back in favour for both betting and socialising as alternatives to bridge—which Deng Xiaoping played at international level. The simpler, popular game of *pai gow* (dominoes) is the common leisure pastime of rural Chinese and a major draw at Chinese casinos worldwide. Horseracing (*pao ma*) is wildly popular in places like Hong Kong, as it satisfies the Chinese craving for the “lucky chance” of a vast win. But the insatiable appetite and potentially ruinous instinct for gambling is currently channelled and contained in Macao (as an Oriental Vegas) like a quarantined virus so deadly that its contagion could spread like wildfire amongst the mainstream populace.

The Beijing Olympics brought together many traditional sports in a competitive age, but the martial arts remain singularly Chinese. *Kung fu* and *taiji* now have a worldwide following. *Kung fu* (or *wushu*) is a fighting art associated with military training and the mystique of its monkish development at places like the Shaolin Temple. Its appeal lies in the discipline it offers to strengthen the external physical capacity of the body mentally, as it trains stance and reflex for unarmed combat and self-defence.

Taiji or *taijiquan*, by contrast, which looks at first glance like slow-motion shadow-boxing with spin kicks, focuses on the strengthening of the internal aspects of heart, mind and spirit to control breathing, balance and concentration. It has the effect of meditation in its trance-like following of a continuous sequence of flowing movements somewhat like a mantra. Chinese acrobatics, on the other hand, are not designed as sport or recreation for the individual. They are simply the best known and most entertaining of Chinese arts and spectacles, whether performed by a circus troupe or as part of a theatrical show. Trained from a very early age, the acrobats perform amazing feats of tumbling, balance, strength and agility as well as juggling with both hands and feet.

Although the West relies on evidence-based medicine and large drug companies for its health, China has a tradition of effective healthcare going back millennia. The cure and treatment for all manner of ailments and diseases in China is based on herbal remedies, extracts and compounds of plants and flowers, which may often defy scientific analysis, in spite of their undoubted effectiveness. They represent an alternative form of treatment as a complement to Western patented medication and drugs, somewhat akin to the gentler homeopathic

remedies sought out by those who dislike the side effects of the stronger antibiotics. Acupuncture retains its ancient mystique as a cure for many ills with its use of needles to pinpoint and relieve pressure and pain. Moxibustion continues to intrigue as a therapy using the burning of mugwort against the skin to prevent cold and ‘dampness’ in the body and as an aid to acupuncture. Massage and reflexology (foot massage) bring a whole new dimension to the means of soothing away stress and soreness from a tired body. The art of *qigong*, the practice of breathing exercises to raise the *qi* or the body’s vital spirit or energy, is another example—like the invention of gunpowder—that resulted from Daoist experiments in alchemy.

The Western world is well used to Chinese food but not to Chinese eating traditions. Eating together is the primary focus of family life and also the prime recreational activity. Food has been in the front line of Chinese cultural advance with restaurants or ‘takeaways’ in cities and towns throughout the Western hemisphere. The importance of the culinary arts is, as in France, of a different order of magnitude to that of the rest of the world. The preparation and enjoyment of food is the source of the greatest pleasure and satisfaction. Going for *dim sum* (well-known now in the West) and *yum cha* (tea drinking) are major Sunday pastimes.

Apart from the staple of steamed or glutinous rice, the main dishes are based on a variety of *jiaozi* (dumpling), *baozi* (steamed bun) and *mian* (noodle) with pork and chicken pieces in the south, beef and lamb in the north, and seafood all along the eastern coast. Fish in both freshwater and ocean variety seals the meal like a palate cleanser. The vegetable garnish of cabbage, spinach, bean shoots or sweet corn is steamed to conserve the flavour perfectly. The soups are delightful natural additions. The teas and tropical fruits are a great tonic for the digestion. Rice wine, red and white wine, and the harder liquors, *gaoliang* and *maotai*, are rarely dispiriting. As original ingredients become available in more outlandish places, the Chinese kitchen gains ground worldwide at a time when *nouvelle cuisine* does not quite know which way to turn. Porcelain dinnerware is the most exquisite and delicate of Chinese designs. The distinctive shape, colour and glaze of cups, plates, dishes and bowls over the millennia help you tell your Qing from your Ming and your Tang from your Song, even as your supper rice bowl of today fails to shatter when it falls.

Are the *balinghou* and *jiulinghou* (post-’80s and -’90s generations)

interested in life beyond their family dinner table? Are they too individualistic to appreciate the benefits of teamwork? The playing of team games for fun, fitness, competitive prestige, and even for money has brought a new recreational dimension to a nation used to regarding such activity as a time-wasting indulgence and potentially injurious to health and well-being. For a leader so used to violence as a primary means of persuasion, Mao was still oddly indifferent to the lessons of sport as a channel for revolutionary energies, well demonstrated by the Russians and the East Germans. He may, nonetheless, quite possibly have read the following account of an Australian Rules football match watched by a 19th-century Chinese visitor:

The game was the same as a battle; two groups of men in struggling contention... They run like hares, charge each other like bulls, knock each other down rushing in pursuit of the ball and send it through the enemy's pole... It is a violent game and men are often injured. But to make them bold and hardy it passes ten thousand games, for it is like fighting... Men thus brave will make very good soldiers. We must adapt this game in the eighteen provinces... We sons of Tang do not like violent things. But on earth many things are obtained by force. So we must learn some violence.¹

For the Chinese New Year in 2010, enigmatic invitations were sent out to an event at the Chinese Cricket Club in London. Was this place named after the Emperor's favourite pet insect? No, apparently not. China fielded a national cricket team for the first time in 2009. Although it was defeated by every single Asian nation, including the Maldives, by large margins, there are cricket clubs springing up in several major Chinese cities. Asked what he most liked about the game, the captain of one team said it made him feel part of a family. Glory glimmers—a distant speck on the far horizon of the future—just as it did for their athletes, shooters, and canoeists years ago before the Beijing Olympics was even a distant pipedream. So it is with their football, which is currently being championed to transport the nation to glory. Shanghai's *Shen Hua* and Beijing's *Guo An* team stables will not rest until they achieve this ultimate breakthrough onto the world stage.

¹ Extract from the writings of a 19th-century Chinese visitor to Australia's account in Hilda Hookham's *A Short History of China*, p. 345 (Mentor Books, New American Library, 1972)

A painful national joke runs thus: the Chinese fervently pray to God for a chance to win Olympic Gold at football and God answers dismissively, “Not in your lifetime!” They then beseech him to grant them an eventual win at the World Cup, no matter how long it takes, and God answers with hardly a moment’s hesitation, “Not in my lifetime!” In the meantime, a less stressful path to international prestige and route out of poverty will be the ancient game of golf, previously reviled as one of the most bourgeois of pastimes. But the lesson of a lifetime is nonetheless learnt: that international sport is the world’s greatest substitute for warfare. While winning at ping pong is still regarded as something of a Pyrrhic victory (since the Chinese enjoy such predominance when opponents can barely see the ball on the first service), to win an Olympic track or football title would cover them with an honour and glory of the kind once only accorded to a successful candidate in the Imperial examinations.

The Chinese take pride in their culture as it is exported, with 5.5 million Chinese now working overseas (up from 3.5 million in 2005). Sixty million Chinese travelled abroad for tourism in 2011 but now, according to China Tourism Research Institute, China had 120 million outbound visitors in 2015 and they spent 104.5 billion U.S. dollars, increases of 12% and 16.7% compared with 2014. The main driving forces for the increases included personal income rise, favourable policies, and appreciation of the RMB. This widens their purview of the world and deepens mutual understanding on a people-to-people basis. Chinese property investment in the West is a further vote of confidence, as they bank their gains against future uncertainties. China’s role as a major player on the world stage is evidently widening: in 2003, it chaired the six-party talks on North Korean nuclear disarmament; in 2009, it joined the anti-piracy force policing the shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden—good training for defending the Spratlys in 2016; in early 2012, Jinhai Lin was appointed Secretary of the IMF, making him a pivotal figure in easing co-ordination with China and liaising with member countries for Chinese assistance to the Euro-zone and other crisis-ridden areas of the world.

The world is slowly working towards a rules-based international order, ostensibly based on “universal values”, which are still anathema to the Chinese. The main stumbling block to its achievement is the challenge of reconciling differing value systems, particularly in areas such as human rights, the rule of law and the Separation of Powers (with

its independent judiciary). The task is nonetheless unavoidable for, as the historian Tony Judt argued, it is essential to rediscover “the politics of social cohesion based around collective purposes”. These collective purposes extend from clean energy, environmental protection, food security, a regulatory framework for banking, investment and trading, legal and dispute resolution, particularly in matters of IPR, technology and innovation, to population control and space exploration. In a word: collaboration.

China is understandable through our common humanity and is neither a threat nor an enemy: it is a companion. As with many companions, there is also a problematic side to the relationship. Just as one might try to neutralise an annoying idiosyncrasy with a joke or a diplomatic comment, so China must be humoured to minimise misunderstanding. We have been blunt in asserting that the government must obtain a mandate from its people, one that will not yet take it down the democratic road but nonetheless a stronger mandate than presently held by many political parties of the West. We may thereby offend only those who will not understand that China’s ‘internal affairs’ are exactly that. Let it get on with fixing itself without external pressure. Let he who is without sin cast the first stone.

If you feel that the wishes of people, and the propaganda of government, are substantially different between East and West, then the following excerpts from a speech by President Xi may help demonstrate that the world is actually much closer than many believe:

During the modern era (from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century), our nation underwent untold hardship and suffering, and its very survival hung in the balance. Since then, numerous Chinese patriots rose up one after another and fought for the renewal of the Chinese nation, but failed one time after another.

Our people have an ardent love for life. They wish to have better education, more stable jobs, more income, greater social security, better medical and health care, improved housing conditions and a better environment.

because that is exactly how the U.S. President Obama argues. In his speeches, Obama mostly recounts American history and thereby the history of the American Dream; but he also updates the dream to the

current situation in the U.S.

It is a Chinese Dream on which the Chinese have now set their hearts. Not the pie-in-the-sky held out to the people of Soviet Russia nor the American Dream of migrant communities for a completely new life, but something much simpler: the dream of a free, stable and prosperous homeland where people may live in expectation of a national rejuvenation and much improved livelihoods. To turn the old Chinese saying about partnerships on its head, far from sharing the same bed but with different dreams, they are in different beds but sharing very much the same dream held out to generations of Americans: all people are born equal (if they did but know or feel it) and may prosper by their own efforts. For China, the problem is large but simple: how much of their own efforts will be allowed to bear fruit by Beijing?

MAN ON A MISSION:

Discovering the Life of Henri Simonin Through a Pair of Antique Postcards

BY SUSIE GORDON

It is said that history is a tapestry. If this is indeed the case, it stands to reason that the threads will oftentimes unravel. What a pleasure it is, then, to chance upon these errant threads and hold them in one's hands to study—to lift them to the light like a curious botanist, and then finally to weave them back together.

I count among my friends the antique map collector Vincent Ungvary. Based in Australia, Vincent visits Shanghai frequently and is a regular fixture on the RAS lecture programme. Along with his vast horde of cartographical gems, Vince collects postcards. Last summer he sold me a generous selection, mainly depicting Old Shanghai and Peking. When they arrived (neatly packaged, bearing a Sydney postmark) I opened them eagerly. My plan was to hang them, framed, above my desk as sources of inspiration as well as decoration.

I leafed through the postcards. Most were early photographs of Chinese cities, coloured in those unnatural sweetshop hues of blush-pink and egg-blue. The temple of the Western tombs, Siling. Shanghai, Whangpoo River. Shikinjo Tawaden, Peking. Some, rather enchantingly, had been written on. A postcard of a Peking street view held a message for a Dorothy Wang, c/o Tsing-hua Wang, of Pei-pei, Chungking. *They want to write to someone in your country*, the sender said. I was quietly intrigued. Who were 'they'? And who were *they*—this Tsing-hua and this Dorothy?

However, the Wangs were soon forgotten as I came to two postcards penned in French, in a child's handwriting. The first bore an image of Shanghai's Bund:



and was addressed (in that delightful, slanting Gallic cursive) to a Master Henri Simonin in Russey, France.

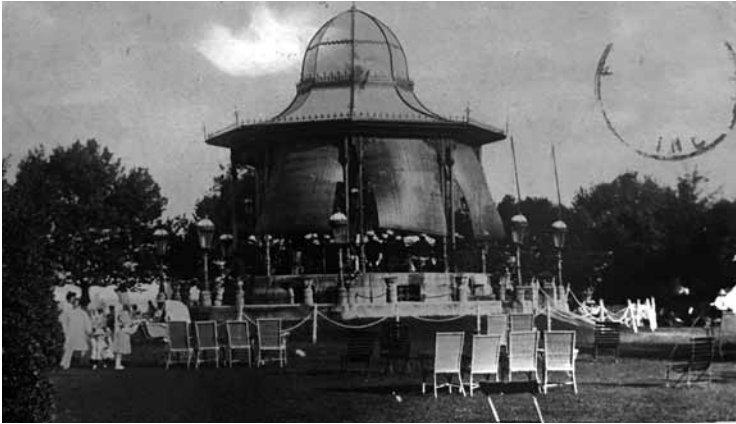


*'Bonjour à toute la famille et meilleurs amitiés à Henri de Paul Taulier
Chine, le 15/11/13'*

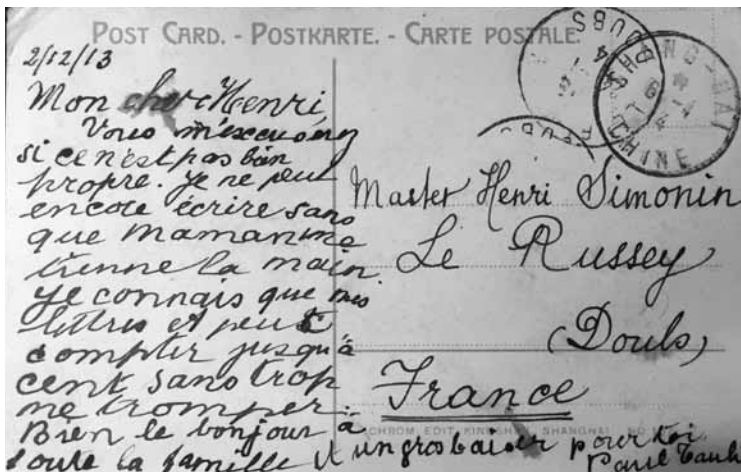
(‘Hello to all the family and best wishes to Henri, from Paul Taulier, China, 15th November 1913’)

The card bore no postmark, implying that it was never sent. The second one held two franking marks, one from Frenchtown,

Shanghai, and the other from the receiving post office in Doubs.



It was addressed, once again, to Master Henri Simonin, but the message was less cheerful:



'2/12/13

Mon cher Henri,

Vous m'excusez si ce n'est pas bien propre. Je ne peux encore écrire sans que Maman me tienne la main. Je ne connais que mes lettres et peux compter jusqu'à cent sans trop me tromper. Bien le bonjour à toute la famille et un gros baiser pour toi.

Paul Taulier'

(‘My dear Henri,

Please excuse me if this isn’t clear. I cannot write [any more] without Mama holding my hand. I know all my letters, and can count to one hundred without making mistakes. Anyway, hello to all the family, and a big kiss for you.

Paul Taulier’)

I found something uniquely poignant in these words, penned in their shaky script, presumably with Paul’s mother at his elbow—a vague snapshot of an unknown childhood.

With the postcards in front of me I looked up the names ‘Paul Taulier’ and ‘Henri Simonin’ online. I wasn’t sure what to expect. Paul Taulier brought no results, but for Henri Simonin there were several matches. I trawled the links and eventually came across a page from the archives of the Missions Étrangères de Paris—a society dedicated to the history of foreign missionaries.

On the screen, a small head-shot of an adult Henri Simonin appeared. In a dark cassock, he smiled at the camera with a calm, measured jollity that belied the sternness of his holy rank. His eyes were kind—hooded above and below. A long beard grew in two bushy columns from his chin to his chest.

Henri Charles Simonin. 1908 – 1990.

I scanned his biography to the best of my abilities in French. It seemed he had been a missionary. Born in Hankou. A man of many interests. Schooled in English and Chinese. A botanist, as well.

I wrote an email to the webmaster of the site, asking for more information. Days passed and nothing came, so I set about translating Simonin’s biography, keen to know more about the man who had held my postcard in his hands.

What emerged from my pen was a version of a rather fusty history—dates and names in dreary syncopation, wrought from the queer, Latinate dirge of the French past historic tense. *Il naquit... Il fut... Il y décéda...*

In my daily work I read countless histories, directories, and biographies. Very often the names I meet are simply words on the page, inspiring nothing but idle imaginings that last only as long as the eyes’ pause upon them. But here, I was pulling new life from the page, glancing from time to time at the postcards, picturing a young Henri before the events his life unfolded like a Chinese scroll.

When I had finished, I studied Paul Taulier's missives more closely, tracing the ragged lines his fountain pen had made, counting each blot of the nib where he'd lifted it—like long-dried blood from now-still veins.

Henri Charles Simonin was born on June 23rd, 1908, in Hankow (Hankou)—an inland port on the Yangtze river, a thousand miles into China's interior. His father was a merchant trader, who had married an Elizabeth Rendelmann. From infancy, the young Henri learned Chinese, English, and French, laying the foundations for his future cosmopolitan outlook.

After a stint in Hankow, the Simonins returned to their homestead, Russey, in the department of Doubs on the eastern French border. After completing his primary education there, the young Henri went on to the junior seminary at Maïche in 1919. In 1925 he obtained the first part of his baccalauréat.

On September 19th, 1925, Simonin enrolled at the Foreign Missions Seminary, where he struck up friendships with intellectuals such as Maurice Quéguiner, future Superior General of the Society of Foreign Missions. However, after receiving his sub-deaconate on June 29th, 1931, Simonin fell ill, which delayed the start of his missionary work.

Claiming his deaconship on June 29th, 1933, and ordained as a priest on September 23rd, Simonin was assigned his destination on July 1st, 1934: the Apostolic Vicariate at Mukden (Shenyang), for which he embarked on September 16th, 1934.

After a short stop in Osaka, he sailed for Kobe on November 6th, 1934, with a man named Monsieur Piou. Both were bound for Manchuria—a region that had been known as the State of Manchukuo since March 1st, 1932.

Piou and Simonin arrived at Mukden in the morning of November 11th, 1934. Piou went on to Kirin the next day, while Simonin made contact with the bishopric of Mukden. In early December he set off for the home of a Monsieur Toudic in Kao-shan-tun to continue his studies of the Chinese language, while pursuing his interest in botany in the forests of Heilongjiang.

In 1936, after a year and a half of language study, Simonin was appointed head of the mission at Ying-kow (Yingkou)—a well protected port city of 120,000 people. In May 1937 and between June 3rd and 9th, 1939, he aided the retreat of the missionaries who were preaching at

Mukden, on the P. A. Valensin.

When war broke out, Simonin was called to Tianjin. He departed on September 8th, 1939, but was halted by a flare-up of the health problems that had beset him in childhood. He returned to Mukden on September 20th, 1939. Soon after, the signing of the Mandel Decree meant that missionaries could remain in their jobs. Simonin returned to Ying-kow, where he worked until 1944.

April 3rd, 1944 saw the death in Leao-yang (a city of around 100,000 people) of the incumbent head of the mission, a Monsieur Chanel. The mission's vicar, Jean-Marie Blois, selected Henri Simonin to replace him. Simonin worked there until 1946.

On May 18th, 1946, Monsieur Blois died in Mukden. A Monsieur Vérineux was appointed in his place. Between September and October 1947, Vérineux withdrew 25 seminaries and 90 Chinese devotees from Peking, Nanking, and Formosa. By December 1948, the Communists controlled the whole of Manchuria.

On March 17th, 1946, Blois had asked Henri Simonin to replace Pierre Cambon at the Mukden mission. It was a time of political unrest and upheaval—one of the toughest periods of Simonin's life. After just seven months, Monsieur Vérineux replaced him in the role. On October 16th, 1946, Simonin was placed at the head of the Parish of St. Francis Xavier in Mukden, which later fell under Japanese and then international control.

Mukden became Shenyang in April 1946, and was elevated to the status of an arch-diocese. It was administered by Vérineux until July 1949, when it was taken over by a Monsieur Pi. The diocese of Ying-kow included the eight prefectures of the former Vicariate Apostolate of Mukden. Simonin was invited to work there, but was stymied by continuing unrest and the eventual expulsion of all missionaries from Shenyang.

Henri Simonin left Manchuria for Bethany, Hong Kong, in March 1951. He sailed on the HMS *Granville* on April 11th and arrived in France on June 8th. On June 30th he was appointed Professor of Natural Sciences at the junior seminary of Théophile Vénard in Beaupréau, where he taught for two years.

In early 1953, Simonin became an assistant to Monsieur Monjean in the archives of the Société in Paris. Throughout his stay in the capital, he held the chaplaincy of the Soeurs Clarisses on the Avenue de Saxe, replacing Monsieur Paul Gros.

Towards the end of 1970, on the advice of Maurice Quéguiner, Simonin accepted the chaplaincy at Soissons hospital, beginning on March 1st, 1971. He remained there until 1977, and was able to indulge his interests in botany, entomology, mineralogy, mycology, philately, and photography. He was an active member of the Geographical Society, the Paris Association of Naturalists, and the Friends of the Museum. His collections of stamps, fossils, and butterflies were second to none.

Simonin was taken ill in late October 1990. He was taken to Montbeton, where he died on the morning of the 27th.



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THE TECHNIQUE AND SPIRIT OF CHINESE POETRY

BY LIN YUTANG

I.

Poetry occupies a very high place in Chinese culture and life. It is cultivated more generally and more assiduously than in the West. I think I may say that poetry has entered more into the fabric of our daily life. For instance, all Chinese scholars are poets, or pretend to be, and fifty per cent of the contents of a scholar's collected works usually consist of poetry. The Chinese imperial examinations, ever since the T'ang times, always included the composition of poems among the important tests of literary ability. Even parents who had talented daughters to give away, and sometimes the talented girls themselves, often chose their bridegrooms on the strength of a few lines of really good poetry. For the theory was one could tell a man's character from his poems. Captives often regained their freedom or received extra courtesy for their ability to write a few good lines which appealed to the men in power. For poetry is regarded as the highest literary accomplishment and the surest and easiest way of testing a man's literary skill. Moreover, Chinese painting is closely connected with Chinese poetry, being akin to it, if not essentially identical with it, in spirit and technique. Whence came this high place of poetry in Chinese life?

To my mind, poetry has taken over the function of religion in China, in so far as religion is taken to mean a cleansing of man's soul, a feeling for the mystery and beauty of the universe, and a feeling of tenderness and compassion for one's fellow-men and the humble creatures of life. Religion cannot be, and should not be, anything except an inspiration and a living emotion. The Chinese have not found this inspiration or living emotion in their religions, which to them are merely decorative patches and frills covering the seamy side of life, having largely to do with sicknesses and deaths. But they have found this inspiration and living emotion in poetry. Poetry has taught the Chinese a view of life, which through the influence of proverbs and calligraphic scrolls, has permeated society in general, and given them a sense of compassion, an overflowing love of nature, and an attitude of artistic acceptance of life. Through its feeling for nature, it

has often healed the wounds in their souls, and through its lesson of enjoyment of the simple life, it has kept a sane ideal for the Chinese civilisation. Sometimes it appeals to their romanticism and gives them a vicarious emotional uplift from the humdrum workaday world, and sometimes it appeals to their feeling of sadness, resignation and restraint, and cleanses the heart through this artistic reflection of sorrow. It teaches them to listen with enjoyment to the sound of raindrops on banana-leaves, to admire the chimney smoke of cottages rising and mingling with the evening clouds nestling on a hillside, to be tender towards the white lilies on the country path, and to hear in the song of the cuckoo the longing of a son on travel for his mother at home. It gives them a kind thought for the poor tea-picking girl or for the mulberry maiden, for the secluded and forsaken lover, for the mother whose son is far away in army service, and for the common people whose lives are harassed by war. Above all, it teaches them a pantheistic union with nature, to awake and rejoice with spring, to doze off and hear time visibly flying away in the droning of the cicada in summer, to feel sad with the falling autumn leaves, and “to look for lines of poetry in snow” in winter. In this sense, poetry may well be called the Chinaman’s religion. I hardly think that without their poetry, the poetry of living habits as well as the poetry of words, the Chinese people could have survived to this day.

Yet Chinese poetry would not have achieved such an important place in Chinese life without definite reasons for it. First, the Chinese artistic and literary genius, which thinks in emotional concrete imagery and excels in the painting of atmosphere, is especially suitable to the writing of poetry. Their characteristic genius for contraction, suggestion, sublimation and concentration, which unfits them for prose within the classical limits, makes the writing of poetry natural and easy to them. If, as Bertrand Russell says, “in art they aim at being exquisite, and in life at being reasonable”, then it is natural for them to excel in poetry. Chinese poetry is dainty. It is never long, and never very powerful. But it is eminently fitted for producing perfect gems of sentiment and for painting with a few strokes a magical scenery, alive with rhythmic beauty and informed with spiritual grace.

The whole tenor of Chinese thought, too, encourages the writing of poetry as the highest crown of the literary art. The Chinese mind is as distinguished for aptitude in art as it is backward in science. There is a reason for it. Chinese education emphasises the development of

the all-round man, and Chinese scholarship emphasises the unity of knowledge. Very specialised sciences, like archaeology, are few, and the Chinese archaeologists always remain human, capable of taking an interest in their family or in the pear-tree in their courtyard. Now, poetry is exactly that type of creation which calls for man's faculty of general synthesis, in other words, for man's ability to look at life as a whole. Where they lack in analysis, they achieve in synthesis.

There is yet a more important reason. Poetry is essentially thought coloured with emotion, and the Chinese think always with emotion, and rarely with their analytical reason. It is no mere accident that the Chinese regard the belly as the seat of all their scholarship and learning, as may be seen in such expressions, "a bellyful of essays" or "of scholarship". Now, Western psychologists have proved the belly to be the seat of our emotions and as no one thinks completely without emotion, I am ready to believe that we think with our belly as well as with our head. The more emotional the type of thinking, therefore the more are the intestines responsible for one's thoughts, as in the case of women and the Chinese. What Isadora Duncan said about women's thoughts originating in the head and travelling upwards, while men's thoughts originate in the head and travel downwards, is true of the Chinese. This corroborates my theory about the femininity of the Chinese mind. Whereas we say in English that a man "ransacks his brain" for ideas during a composition, we say in Chinese that he "ransacks his dry intestines" for a good line of poetry or prose. The poet Su Tung-p'ó once asked his three concubines after dinner what his belly contained. The cleverest one, Ch'ao-yun, replied that he had "a bellyful of unseasonable thoughts." The Chinese can write good poetry, because they think with their intestines.

Further, there is a relation between Chinese language and poetry. The Chinese language is crisp, and poetry should be crisp. Poetry should work by suggestion, and the Chinese language is full of contractions which say more than what the words mean. Poetry should express ideas by concrete imagery, and the Chinese language revels in word-imagery. Finally, the Chinese language, with its clear-cut tones and its lack of final consonants, retains a sonorous singing quality, which has no parallel in non-tonal languages.

II.

By what inner technique did Chinese poetry enter that magic realm

of beauty? How did it throw a veil of charm and atmosphere over an ordinary landscape and, with a few words, paint a striking picture of reality, surcharged with the poet's emotion? How did the poet select and eliminate his material and how did he inform it with his own spirit and make it glow with rhythmic vitality? In what way was the technique of Chinese poetry and Chinese painting really one? and why is it that Chinese poets are painters, and painters, poets?

To begin with elementary things, *viz.*, the art of producing a picture with five or seven words, as Chinese painters paint a horse with a few swift and sure rhythmic strokes. The analogy between Chinese poetry and painting is almost complete. Let us begin with perspective. Why is it that when we read the lines of Li Po (701-762)—

Above the man's face arise the hills;
Beside the horse's head emerge the clouds,

we are presented with a picture in bold outline of a man travelling on horseback on a high mountain path? The words, short and sharp and meaningless at first sight, will be found, with a moment's use of the imagination, to give us a picture as a painter would paint it on his canvas, and conceal a trick of perspective by using some objects in the foreground (the man's face and the horse's head) to set off the distant view. Entirely apart from the poetic feeling that the man is so high up in the mountains, one realises that the scenery was looked at by the poet as if it were a piece of painting on a flat surface. The reader would then see, as he actually sees in paintings or snapshots, that hilltops seem to rise from the man's face and the clouds nestling somewhere in the distance form a line broken by the horse's head. This clearly was not possible if the poet was on horseback and the clouds lying on a lower level in the distance. In the end, the reader has to imagine himself on horseback on a high mountain path and view the scene from the same perspective as the poet did.

In this way, and really through this trick of perspective, these pen-pictures gain a bold relief impossible with other methods. Hundreds of examples might be cited, although it cannot be said that the Chinese poets were conscious of the theory of this technique. They had in any case found the technique itself. With this technique of perspective, Wang Wei (699-759), probably China's greatest descriptive poet, said:

In the mountains a night of rain.
And above the trees a hundred springs.

Of course it requires a little effort to imagine “springs on tree-tops” (which are the exact words in the original), but exactly because such a perspective is so rare and can only be found when high mountain gorges, forming, after last night’s rainfall, a series of cascades in the distance, appear above the outline of some trees in the foreground, the reader gains a clear perspective otherwise impossible. As with the former example from Li Po, the art lies in the selection of an object in the foreground to set it off against the objects in the distance, like clouds, cascades, hilltops and the Milky Way, and then paint these together *on a flat surface*. Thus Liu Yü-hsi (772-842) wrote:

(For an) autumn scene: several dots of hills over the wall.

The picture technique here is perfect: the hilltops appearing as several “dots” over the wall give one a stereoscopic sense of distance from the hills. On the other hand, the sense of elevation is conveyed in the following manner by Ch’en Ts’an (middle of the eighth century):

Low appears the Ch’in Peak beyond the railing,
And small the River Wei before the window.

The poet could obtain this perspective only by staying in some high mountain loft, where as he looked out over the verandah, even a mountain peak appeared a few inches below the top of the railing. The use of a window or a door as a convenient set-off in the second line, common with photographers, was quite popular with Chinese poets. Thus wrote Shen Ch’üan-ch’i (latter part of the seventh century):

Near appears the mountain moon by the window,
And low the Milky Way within the door.

Here the word “low” should be taken to refer literally to the position of the Milky Way on the canvas, if a painter were to paint it.

This technique was carried still further when the poet Li Ch’ün-yu (middle of the ninth century) spoke of:

A whole screenful of spring water, a windowful of hills.

Here both the river and the hills in the distance enter the poet-painter's mind like objects strictly on the perpendicular surface of the bamboo screen, which was the poet's canvas. In this sense, we can understand Li Li-wêng (17th century), when he says in one of his dramatic works:

First we look at the hills in the painting
Then we look at the painting in the hills,
The poet's eye is the painter's eye, and painting and poetry
become one.

This affinity between painting and poetry is all the more natural and apparent when we consider not only their similarity of technique, but also their similarity of themes, and the fact that the title of painting is often actually a line taken from some verse. In any case, the painter after finishing his painting usually writes a verse at the top in those vacant spaces characteristic of Chinese paintings. Poetry and painting are but expressions of the same human spirit. If the poet learns perspective from the painter, the latter learns impressionism, suggestion and atmosphere from poetry. This is their striking similarity. Both are impressionistic in method, both use suggestion, and both have as their aim the achieving of a certain atmosphere.

The impressionistic technique is a technique which gives a series of impressions, vivid and unforgettable, and leaves merely a flavour, an indefinable feeling behind, which awakes the reader's sense, but does not satisfy his understanding. Chinese poetry is consummate in the art of sublimation, suggestion and artistic restraint. The poet does not try to say all he has to say. His business is but to evoke a picture, making a pen sketch by a few swift, clear strokes.

Hence arose the great school of pastoral poets, specialising in landscape paintings and using the impressionistic technique. Such masters in pastoral poetry are T'ao Yüan-ming (372-427), Hsieh Ling-yün (385-433), Wang Wei (679-759) and Wei Ying-wu (740-830), but the technique is practically universal with Chinese poets. Of Wang Wei (perhaps better known as Wang Mo-ch'i), it is said that "there is poetry in his painting and painting in his poetry," because Wang was a great painter himself. His *Wang-ch'uan-chi* is nothing but a collection of pastoral landscapes. A poem like the following can only be written

by one inspired by the spirit of Chinese painting:

Amidst the mist-like autumn showers,
Shallow the stony rapids flow;
Its sprays besprinkle one another,
Up and down the egrets go.

—*The Luan-chia Rapids*

The evoking of a mood is best seen in the following song describing a night in a houseboat in the outskirts of Soochow, by Wei Ying-wu:

The moon descends, the birds are crowing,
and there's frost in the sky;
Some maples on the river, some fisherman's
lights, and facing Sorrow I lie,
As from the Han-shan Temple in the suburbs of
Soochow at midnight,
Floats the sound of temple bells to the travel-
ler's boat darkly by.

Here the word sketch differs from a pen-and-ink drawing only in the intrinsic superiority of the poetic art in suggesting sounds.

And here we come to the problem of suggestion. Some modern western painter has attempted the impossible by trying to paint “the sound of sunshine going upstairs”, but the problem of artistic limitations has been partly overcome by Chinese painters by the use of suggestion, really developed by the poetic art. A Chinese painter would paint the sound of temple bells without showing the bells at all on the canvas, but possibly by merely showing the top of a temple roof hidden among trees, and the effect of the sound on men's and children's faces. Interesting is the Chinese method of Chinese poets in suggesting smell, which lends itself to pictorial handling. Thus a Chinese poet describing the fragrance of the open countryside would write:

Coming back over flowers, fragrant are the horse's hoofs.

Nothing would be easier than painting a flock of butterflies flitting after the horse's hoofs, which is what a Chinese painter actually did.

By the same technique of suggestion, the poet Liu Yü-hsi wrote about the fragrance of a court lady:

In her new dress she comes from her vermilion towers;
The light of spring floods the palace which Sorrow
embowers.
To the court she comes, and on her carved jade hair-pin
Alights a dragon-fly, as she is counting the flowers.

The lines suggest to the reader the beauty and fragrance both of the carved jade hair-pin and of the lady herself, a beauty and fragrance which deceived the dragon-fly.

From this impressionistic technique of suggestion arose that method of suggesting thought and sentiments which we call symbolic thinking. The poet suggests ideas, not by verbose statements, but by evoking a mood which puts the reader in that train of thought. Such thoughts are as indefinable as the scene which evokes them is clear and vivid. A picturesque scenery is then used to suggest certain thoughts very much in the same way as certain chords in the Wagnerian operas are used to suggest the entrance of certain characters. Logically, there is little connection between the scenery and the man's inner thoughts, but symbolically and emotionally, there is. This method, called "*hsing*" or evocation, is as ancient as the *Book of Poetry*. In T'ang poetry, for instance, the passing of a fallen dynasty is variously expressed by such symbolic method, without mentioning the thoughts themselves. Thus Wei Chuang sang of the past glories of Nanking in the following manner in his poem "*On a Painting of Chin-ling*":

The rain on the river is mist-like, and the grass on the banks
is high.
The Six Dynasties passed like a dream, and forlorn's the
birds' cry.
Most heartless of all are the willows on the Tai-ch'eng bank,
Even now in a three-mile green, lurid resplendour they lie.

The scene of the three-mile-long willow-overgrown embankment was enough to remind his contemporaries of the past glories of Ch'en Hou-chu in his most glorious days, and the mention of the "heartless willows" strikes a contrast between human vicissitudes and nature's

serenity. By the same technique, Po Chü-yi (772-846) expressed his sadness over the past glories of T'ang Ming-huang and Yang Kwei-fei by merely drawing a picture of white-haired, old imperial chambermaids gossiping in a deserted palace, without of course going into the details of their discourse:

Quite empty is the country palace, empty like a dream,
In loneliness and quiet the red imperial flowers gleam.
Some white-haired palace chambermaids are chatting,
Chatting about the dead and gone Hsüan-chuang regime.

In the same way, Liu Yü-hsi sang about the decay of the Blackgown Alley, which once was the home of the great Wang and Hsieh families:

Now by the Redsparrow Bridge wild grass are growing,
And on the Blackgown Alley the ev'ning sun is glowing,
And the swallows which once graced the Wang and Hsieh
halls.
Now feed in common people's homes... without their
knowing.

I come now to the most important point of Chinese poetry, its pantheism. Its technique lies of course in the investment of natural objects with human actions, qualities and emotions, not by direct personification, but by cunning metaphors, like "idle flowers", "the sad wind", "the chaffing parrot", etc. The metaphors in themselves are nothing: the poetry consists in the poet spreading his emotion over the scenery and compelling it by the force of his emotion to live and share his own joys and sorrows. For this is the most central problem of poetry, as of all art, the *Einfühlung*, or investing a dead picture with the poet's own emotion, or casting a halo of emotion over the material reality. This is clearest in the above example, where the three-mile long gay and green willows are referred to as "heartless" because they did not, as they ought to, remember Ch'en Hou-chu and share the poet's feeling of poignant regret. Once travelling with a poet-friend, our bus passed a small secluded hillside, with just a single cottage, with all doors closed and a solitary peach-tree in full blossom standing idly in front, apparently wasting its fragrant glory on a deserted valley. I still remember the last two lines of the quatrain which my friend sketched

in his note-book:

The farmer couple to the fields have gone,
And dead bored are the flowers outside its doors.

What is achieved, then, is a poetic feeling for the peach-tree, supposed to be capable of being “bored” to death, which borders on pantheism. The same technique, or rather attitude, is extremely common in all good Chinese poetry. So did, for instance, Li Po begin one of his best poems:

Late at twilight I passed the verdant hills,
And the mountain moon followed me home.

Or, in one of his best-known poems, “*Drinking Alone under the Moon*”:

A pot of wine amidst the flowers,
Alone I drink *sans* company.
The moon I invite as drinking friend,
And with my shadow we are three.

The moon, I see, she does not drink,
My shadow only follows me:
I'll keep them company a while,
For spring's the time for gayety.
I sing: the moon she paces about;
I dance: my shadow swells and sways.
We sport together while awake,
While drunk, we all go our own ways.
An eternal speechless trio then,
Till in the clouds we meet again.

This is more than a metaphor: it is a poetic faith of union with nature, which makes life itself pulsate with human emotions.

The expression of this pantheism or fellowship with nature is best illustrated in Tu Fu's “*Quatrains on Sundry Moods*”, showing successively a humanising of nature, a tender feeling for its mishaps, a sheer delight in its contact, and finally a complete union with it. So goes the first stanza:

I see the traveller's unawaking sorrow.
The vagabond spring's come in a clatter.
Too profusely rich are the flowers,
Too garrulous the parrots' chatter.

The words "vagabond", "garrulous", and "chatter" here indirectly invest the spring and the parrots with a human quality. Then he lodges a complaint against the brutal winds of last night, which "bullied" the peach and pear-trees in his yard:

My hand-grown pear-trees are not orphans,
The old man's low walls are like their house!
But the spring wind thought fit to bully them,
Last night it broke some of their boughs!

This tender feeling for the trees is repeated in the last stanza:

Weak and tender is the willow next door,
Like a fifteen-year-old maiden's waist.
Who would have thought this morning that it happened,
The wind did break its longest bough, its best!

Once more, the willows dancing gayly before the wind are referred to as *abandonée*, and the peach-blossoms which carelessly drop and float on the water wherever it might carry them are regarded as women of fickle character in the fifth stanza:

I deeply rue the passing of spring,
And on a cane I pace the scented isle.
Before the winds dance the wanton willows,
And on the water the petulous petals smile.

This pantheistic outlook sometimes loses itself in a sheer delight in contact with worms and flying insects as in the third stanza. But we may take an example from a Sung poet, Yeh Li, who wrote on "A Scene in Late Spring":

Pair by pair, little swallows on the bookshelves they hop.
Dot by dot, little petals on the ink-slab they drop.

Reading the *Book of Changes* I sit near a window,
Forgetful how much longer will spring with us stop.

This subjectivity of outlook, coupled with an infinitely tender feeling for the birds and animals enables Tu Fu to speak of the “clenching fists” of white egrets resting on the sand bank, and of the “striking fins” of jumping fish near his boat. The use of the word “fists” for the egret’s claws is then not merely a literary metaphor, for the poet has so identified himself with them that he probably feels the clenching himself and wishes his readers to share this emotional insight with him. Here we do not see the scientist’s minute observation of details, but rather the poet’s keenness which comes from love, as sharp as a lover’s eyes, and as unailing and correct as a mother’s intuition. A man must be indeed more or less intoxicated with nature to write the following lines (by Ch’ên Ngo) about the lotus flower, suggestive of Heine:

Lightly dips her green bonnet,
When a zephyr past her has blown;
Red and naked she shows herself,
When she is sure of being alone.

III.

This review of the two sides of the poetic technique, regarding its treatment of scenery (*ching*) and emotion (*ch’ing*) enables us to understand the spirit of Chinese poetry and its cultural value to the nation. This cultural value is twofold, corresponding to the broad classification of Chinese poetry into the two types: (1) *hao fang* (豪放) poetry, or poetry of romantic abandonment, carefree, given to a life of emotion, and expressing a revolt against the restraints of society and teaching a profound love of nature, and (2) *wan yüeh* (婉约) poetry, or poetry of artistic restraint, tender, resigned, sad and yet without anger, teaching a lesson of contentment and the love of one’s fellow men, especially the poor and downtrodden, and inculcating a hatred of war.

The first type is best represented by Li Po, China’s prince of vagabond poets, with his drink, his dread of officialdom, his companionship with the moon, his love of high mountain scenery, and his constant aspiration:

Oh, could I but hold a celestial sword
And stab a whale across the seas!

Tu Fu says of Li Po:

With a jar of wine, Li makes a hundred poems,
He sleeps in an inn of Ch'ang-an city,
The emperor sent for him and he'd not move,
Saying, "I'm the God of Wine, Your Majesty!"

Li Po's romanticism ended finally in his death from reaching for the shadow of the moon in the water in a drunken fit and falling overboard. Good, infinitely good, that the staid and apparently unfeeling Chinese could sometimes reach for the shadow of the moon and die such a poetic death! The second type is best represented by Tu Fu, with his quiet humour, his restraint, his tenderness toward the poor and oppressed, and his unconcealed hatred of war. Among the first type may be classified Ch'ü Yüan-ming (343-290 B.C.), the pastoral poets like T'ao Yüan-ming, Hsieh Ling-yün, Wang Wei, Méng Hao-jan (689-740), the crazy monk Han-shan (around the year 900), while nearer Tu Fu are Tu Mu (803-852), Po Chü-yi, Yüan Chên (779-831) and the greatest poetess of China, Li Ch'ing-chao (1081-1141?). No strict classification is of course possible, while there was a third group of sentimental poets, like Li Ho (Li Ch'ang-chi, 790-816), Li Shang-yin (813-858) and his contemporary Wên T'ing-yün, Ch'en Hou-chu (ruler of Ch'en in 583-589) and Na-lan Hsing-teh (a Manchu, 1655-1685), most distinguished for their love lyrics.

Well it is that the Chinese have poets like Li Po who teaches us this love of nature which constitutes the poetry of their existence, and which overflows from the fullness of their hearts into literature. It has taught the Chinese a more widespread love of birds and flowers than among the common folk of other nations. I have seen how a Chinese crowd got excited at the sight of a caged bird, which made them childish and good-humoured again, and broke down the barriers, as only an object of common delight could. A Chinese crowd seeing a caged bird have a common feeling of gay irresponsibility. The worship of the pastoral life has coloured the whole Chinese culture, and today officials or scholars speak of "going back to the farm" as the most elegant, the most refined and most sophisticated ambition in life

they can think of. The vogue is so great that even the deepest-dyed scoundrel of a politician will pretend that he has something of Li Po's romanticism in his nature. Actually I suspect even he is capable of such luxurious feelings, because after all he is a Chinese. As a Chinese, he knows after all how much life is worth, and at midnight, gazing through his window at the stars, the lines he learned at childhood will come back to him:

I was drunk, half asleep, through the whole livelong day.
Hearing spring 'd soon be gone, I hurried on my way.
In a bamboo courtyard I chatted with a monk,
And so leisurely passed one more half-day away.
To him, it was a prayer.

Well it is, too, that the Chinese have poets like Tu Fu and Po Chü-yi, who portray our sorrows in beauty and beget in us a sense of compassion for mankind. Tu Fu, who lived in times of political chaos and banditry and soldiery and famine like our own, wrote:

Meats and wines are rotting in the mansions,
And human bones are rotting outside their doors.

A similar note was struck in the "*Song of the Mulberry Maiden*," by Hsieh Fang-teh:

When cuckoos cried fourth watch in the dead of the night,
Then I rose, lest the worms, short of leaves, hunger might.
Who'd think that those dames weren't yet through with
their dance?
The pale moon shone through willows o'er their windows
bright.

Note the peculiarly Chinese ending, where instead of driving home a socialistic thought, the poet contents himself with drawing a picture. Even then, this poem is a little too rebellious for the average Chinese poetry. The usual note is one of sadness and resignation, as in so many of Tu Fu's poems, describing the harassing effects of war, of which the following, "*The Bailiff of Shih-hao*," is a good example:

I came to Shih-hao village and stayed that eve.
 A bailiff came for press-gang in the night.
 The old man, hearing this, climbed o'er the wall,
 And the old woman saw the bailiff at the door.
 Oh, why was the bailiff's voice so terrible,
 And why the woman's plaint so soft and low?
 "I have three sons all at the Nieh-ch'êng post.
 And one just wrote a letter home to say
 The other two had just in battle died
 Let those who live live on as best they can,
 For those who've died are dead for evermore.
 Now in the house there's only grandson left;
 For him his mother still remains—without
 A decent petticoat to go about.
 Although my strength is ebbing weak and low,
 I'll go with you, bailiff, in the front to serve.
 For I can cook congee for the army, and
 To-morrow I'll march and hurry to the Ho-yang front."
 —So spake the woman, and in the night, the voice
 Became so low it broke into a whimper.
 And in the morning with the army she went;
 Alone she said good-bye to her old man.

That is characteristic of the art of restraint and the feeling of sadness in Chinese poetry. It gives a picture, expresses a sentiment, and leaves the rest to the reader's imagination.

For Tu Fu has a sad and resigned humour, which smiles at sorrow itself, like the falling autumn leaves which, while falling to the ground and destruction, can yet sing a gay song in praise of the keen, cool autumn air, a sentiment so well expressed by a Sung poet, Hsin Ch'i-chi:

In my young days,
 I'd known only gladness,
 But loved to mount the top floor,
 But loved to mount the top floor,
 To write a song pretending sadness.
 And now I've tasted
 Sorrow's flavours, bitter and sour,

And can't find a word,
And can't find a word,
But merely say, "What a golden autumn hour!"

That is the very best and highest form of Chinese poetic humour,
the humour of sadness.

RANK AND FILE

BY SHELLY BRYANT

In Imperial China, the ranks of those who had passed the imperial exams were denominated by birds, while military ranks were given the names of beasts associated with protection

- 1 -

New Year's fireworks —
the crane takes wing
from Nanyang's shores

—

domesticity kept
safe under *qilin's* horn
— instrument of peace

- 2 -

golden pheasant feather
— in last night's last pot
oolong leaves soak

二

guardian pair
underfoot her cub lies
his flower of life

- 3 -

sunbeams on workshop grease
— the hues of the peacock's half-closed eye

三

unchanging spots
brought to a sheen
— the flick of its tongue

- 4 -

black arrowhead

wild geese point the way
home for Christmas

四

flame thief ghost
fly upon seeing
his crowned brow
— tiger's princely mark

- 5 -

through cedar limbs
a silver pheasant flits
— our startling laughter

五

caves of the immortals
opened for the summer
— honeyed bear paws

- 6 -

mandarin ducks at dusk —
which fork of the river will he swim

六

wheels slipping on black ice —
in the brook's flow, a panther stalks

- 7 -

mangrove swamp —
the egret unwavering
in monsoon torrents

七

highways diverted
reopened for business
rhino breeding grounds

- 8 -

a nest

of pine needles and dew
the quail rests
atop his eggs

八
a fever quelled
by the rhinoceros horn
its aged luster

- 9 -
sparrows, puddle
droplets pattering
on my umbrella

九
broadened nostrils and flowing mane
— the surf's crash on the sand

Koi

a walled garden
hidden solitude
in an urban space
at its center, a koi pond
halved by a rock path

at noon, sleeping carp
are roused by a child
his bag of feed unloaded
delighting his entourage
of caregivers

the fish rage
each striving to crest
the others' dorsal fins
in the heat of the day
in the heart of the garden
the hearth of the city

STONE DRUM SONG

69. 石鼓歌（韩愈）

BY ALEX LIEBOWITZ

张生手持石鼓文，劝我试作石鼓歌。(1)
少陵无人谪仙死，才薄将奈石鼓何。

Recusatio. Mr. Zhang [Zhang Ji, 767-830] held in hand a stone-drum [kind of stele on which letters were inscribed] script, advising me to try and write a stone-drum song—but no man [Dufu] resides in Shaling now—the banished god [Libai] is dead—and what can my own paltry talents work out for these stone drums?

周纲凌迟四海沸，宣王愤起挥天戈。
大开明堂受朝贺，诸侯剑佩鸣相磨。
蒐于岐阳骋雄俊，万里禽兽皆遮罗。(5)
镌功勒成告万世，凿石作鼓隳嵯峨。
从臣才艺咸第一，拣选撰刻留山阿。
雨淋日灸野火燎，鬼物守护烦搗呵。

Stones. On the wane of the regime of Zhou the four seas [China] boil over, and King Xuan [Zhou Xuanwang, 828-728 BC] is stirred to brandish heaven's host—the Splendid Hall is opened to receive the court's encomiums; the princes' swords upon their waists ring out in their clamoring—in spring the hunting heroes gallop through the southern slopes of Qi, and for a thousand li the birds and beasts are strung in nets: engravings wrought and carvings fine declare ten thousand centuries with rock chiseled from ruined mountains into drums, works principle of vassals in their skill, composite carvings tucked into the tombs of hills; through drench of rain and scorch of sun and prairie fire's singe have spirits vexed to guard them lest they split or scowl.

公从何处得纸本，毫发尽备无差讹。
辞严义密读难晓，字体不类隶与蝌。(10)
年深岂免有缺画，快剑斫断生蛟鼉。
鸾翔凤翥众仙下，珊瑚碧树交枝柯。
金绳铁索锁钮壮，古鼎跃水龙腾梭。

Script. Where did you, Lord, obtain the lithograph, on which you took the utmost pains to guard against the slip of but the slightest hair, the words so pointed and the sense so thick that the intelligence of what is read is fraught, the body of the words like neither Clark nor Tad [two forms of ancient script]? How could the depth of years escape faults in the strokes, which jab and cut the crocodile live [the cracks made in the script by the year resemble a flayed crocodile]? And yet the crowd of gods descends from wheeling luan and soaring feng; the branches of a coral shrub course through a tree of jade; golden rope and iron chains are braided into burly knots; from the shuttle tripods leap and water dragons race [obscure allusion meant to describe sudden changes in the style of the calligraphy].

陋儒编诗不收入，二雅褊迫无委蛇。
孔子西行不到秦，掎摭星宿遗羲娥。(15)
嗟余好古生苦晚，对此涕泪双滂沱。

Neglect. The anthologies of schoolmarms don't take in [these songs], and for that their "Two Graces" [part of the Classic of Poetry] are merely clumsy guile. Confucius went west but not as far as Qin [where the stones were set out]; he gathered up the stars but left the starlet out [羲—rather like Apollo in the role of Phaeton's father. 娥—Lady in the Moon]. It is bitter to love the classics and yet have been born late – at which the tears flow down from both sides [of my face].

忆昔初蒙博士征，其年始改称元和。
故人从军在右辅，为我度量掘臼科。
濯冠沐浴告祭酒，如此至宝存岂多。
毡包席裹可立致，十鼓只载数骆驼。(20)
荐诸太庙比郟鼎，光价岂止百倍过。
圣恩若许留太学，诸生讲解得切磋。
观经鸿都尚填咽，坐见举国来奔波。
剜苔剔藓露节角，安置妥帖平不颇。
大厦深檐与盖覆，经历久远期无佗。(25)

Plea. I recall when I first met the doctors on campaign, that year was the first whose name was changed to be "Chief Peace" [name for the reign of Tang Xianzong, 806-820, making this 806]. A friend enlisted in the Western District [Fengxiang in Shaanxi, one of the

three administrative districts around the Han capitals] drafted me an excavation plan. I washed my hat, my hair, then bathed, to the libationer [head of scholars] made my request, “Could there be many treasures such as these? Send felt sacks and burlap bags forthwith, to bear ten drums away some camels would suffice. Compare Gao’s Tripods in the Great Temple deposited, if we set their [the drums’] price at one hundred-fold, how could it be too much? If His Wise Grace should deign to keep them at our institute, all doctors will, expounding them, refine their views. Those who come to see Hongdu [imperial school where were deposited the Xiping steles] still make a great din – the whole country [then] will throng to come see [these]. We’ll scoop the fur and brush away the moss to show the ridges and the horns [of the characters]; we’ll set them up firm and flat, no tilt. A grand tower with high eaves we’ll give to cover [them], so through a long age they will expect no other [harm].”

中朝大官老于事，诤肯感激徒嬖嬖。
 牧童敲火牛砺角，谁复著手为摩挲。
 日销月铄就埋没，六年西顾空吟哦。
 羲之俗书趁姿媚，数纸尚可博白鹅。
 继周八代争战罢，无人收拾理则那。(30)

Complaint. The high officials of the court are all men of affairs—how could they deign to stir themselves? They simply vacillate. [And while they do] the shepherds strike their fires [on the stones], the bulls sharpen their horns—who again will stretch his hands in a caress [i.e. who will take care of the monuments]? With melting sun and waning moon they soon are covered up; in the sixth year [of Chief Harmony] I look west [the author is near Luoyang, looking west towards these lost monuments] and chant [my complaints] in vain. The wanted scrolls of Xi [Wang Xizhi] rely upon their charm, but a few of them might still be changed for some white geese [according to the story, Wang Xizhi loved geese so much, he traded a few sheets from a copy he made of the Dao De Jing to a Taoist priest for some of his birds—here the meaning seems to be that we might give up some of the customary classics in exchange for the newly discovered ones]. The wars of the eight dynasties that followed Zhou have ceased; if no one comes to clean [the mess] then what is to be done [obscure—the sense that now we can recover antiquities from the wreckage]?

方今太平日无事，柄任儒术崇丘轲。
安能以此尚论列，愿借辩口如悬河。
石鼓之歌止于此，呜呼吾意其蹉跎。(33)

Despair. Now is great tranquility without affair; Confucians are appointed, Qiu and Meng [Confucius, Mencius] esteemed. How is it we use this leisure up in moot debate? Would that I could borrow the loquacity of waterfalls—but the song of the stone drums must end here. Oh, but my suggestions have simply wasted time.

THE TRADITION OF INCARNATIONS AS A LITERARY DEVICE

A review of the novel *The Incarnations*

BY SUSAN BARKER

MIHO KINNAS

The Chinese guardian lion illustrating the cover of the U.S. edition of Susan Barker's *The Incarnations* is an excellent visual rendering of this ambitious novel. Every cavity—the mouth, the eyes, and the ears; in and behind the mane, or around the head-ornaments—is occupied with numerous objects and scenes of the marvellous land of China, both present and past. China—the country and the civilisation—makes every one of us, whether a visitor, a temporary resident or a native, wonder: ‘How did China get here, and to this?’ As Barker’s ‘watcher’ writes: *History taps you on the shoulder, breathes its foggy thousand-year-old breath down your neck*. And the tap is a frequent occurrence in China.

How did Susan Barker, a remarkable young writer, deal with all these objects and scenes? She went ahead and put everything in. The book contains every China keyword conceivable: civilisation, greed, pollution, corruption, bound feet, opium, eunuchs, the Cultural Revolution, famine, Communism, Capitalism, deserts, traffic, massage parlours, Sichuan cuisine, and on and on. The device that enabled this packing is reincarnation. It intertwines the narratives and lives of the contemporary and the historical. It is not mere convenience or an afterthought, however. There is a fundamental pull between the book and the idea of reincarnation.

Reincarnation is a strange idea. Despite some enthusiasts claiming evidence for rebirth or the cycle of life, it basically cannot be proven. Yet, it is prevalent in our daily idioms. In the book, for example, an exasperated mother laments, *Barrenness is what I wish for in my next life!* and a sailor recounts, *I had enough of the sea for this life*. This is how we (those of us with Asian training, think of Larry Darrell’s experience of seeing the queue of figures as his past lives in *The Razor’s Edge* by Somerset Maugham) often speak, and each utterance is a subtle reminder that there is more to life than this. Whether it is impossible, highly unlikely, unscientific, or nonconforming, we apparently accept—or at least are prepared to entertain—the idea of

reincarnation. This review reads *The Incarnations* based on the system of reincarnation put forward by the author.

1. **How do we know who has been incarnated?** In a time travel story, the protagonist will remain who he/she originally is, but reincarnations involve moving targets. The incarnated characters in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and Mishima Yukio's *The Sea of Fertility* bear identical physical marks on their bodies-birthmarks and moles. Barker's characters do not. We are told who incarnates into whom by the biographer-a narrator invented by author. This invention made it necessary for Barker to clarify the modus operandi of reincarnation.

2. **Incarnations don't necessarily occur serially.** The present-day taxi driver Jun Wang is the sixth life of the soul whose first appearance dates back to AD632. Four more stories about the soul are told, taking place in 1213 (Jin Dynasty), 1542 (Ming Dynasty), 1836 (Qing Dynasty) and 1966 (PRC). These stories, each about 30 pages long, are the gems. Millions of Chinese tales exist in the literary canon, but it is rare to read well-constructed stories that are not about a well-known battle or figures, or lessons on the origin of the world, or the teachings of Confucius. Each intense and thrilling story (six, including the present-day main story) is written in a tone just different enough to distinguish the era and setting. David Mitchell's writing of very original stories ranging from the 17th century to the future were experimental and archival. Mishima's story stays within the lifetime of the witness, and each of the four incarnations is book-length. Colourful incarnates appear like actors on elaborate, often ornate stages.

3. **The incarnates don't meet during the in-between periods in the other world.** The story begins with the biographer's return to Beijing from a place that is not described, but is apparently dark and low. The biographer has the ability to identify all those who have been incarnated in the past. Throughout the book, various characters ask one another *Who are you?* not asking each other's name or occupation, but with the thought: *You are not who I thought you were.* Barker artfully inserts the uncanny feeling of *déjà vu* for those with previous mutual experiences.

4. **Not everyone incarnates.** Incarnations are privileges and punishments. All the incarnated characters are small people, operating outside of formal history; they keep being born into horrible lives. It seems that the author is asking why so many of them hold on to their miserable lives? *How's it some men attain mastery over others*

while the vast majority live and die as minions, as livestock? (From David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*) At the end of his book, Mishima seems to have denied the concept of reincarnation. The thought of life and death couldn't have been closer to the author, considering that the day he completed the book was the day he killed himself in spectacular fashion. Barker and Mitchell, meanwhile, do not express their personal opinions about incarnation.

5. **They don't necessarily incarnate into humans.** Yida (Jun Wang's wife)'s previous lives were as worms. Barker seems to treat Yida with uncharacteristic cruelty. All three authors' human-to-human incarnations cross nationalities, races, and genders. This is liberating or humbling, depending how each reader regards his or her position in the current situation. I grew up being told that even if I were reborn into something else, I would always be female. As we all hold on to different values, the schools of reincarnation initiate various assumptions and rules.

6. **Biographers dream about the past and write it down.** Dreams also play a major role in the work of both Mishima and Mitchell. The value of incarnation as a literary device lies in the conceived interrelatedness of incarnation with subconscious and memory. Some comments by Barker's characters display how closely her imagination plays with the subliminal of the incarnated. For example, to his surprise, an Englishman is made to realise that *Even the lawless men of the Scourge hated the British Devils!* while a young Tanka man mutters: "I am sorry, Ah Qin," you said. But not that sorry, I could tell; A Tanka ends up on the Scourge—well, that's a pity; British devils like you and Ah Hack end up here, it's a tragedy.

7. **Biographers also incarnate—perhaps not by necessity, but they sometimes live with the knowledge of their incarnations.** This is where things get really messy. However, without giving away the end of the novel, it can be said that the extra energy Barker poured to the design of the incarnations is richly rewarded by the way she was able to end the story. It adds another layer of intrigue, and blends the independent sections into a powerful saga.

“How did China get here, and to this?”

Although an attempt to portray a nation is an ambitious project by any standard, it comes down to each life, each cause and effect, that constitutes its history just as each grain of sand composes the endless

desert. Barker's approach of connecting small, arduous lives succeeds to paint a landscape that is much larger. The epigraph, *I ask, in this boundless land, who is the master of man's destiny?* is a couplet from a poem Mao Zedong wrote in 1925. The poet Mao stood on a hill overlooking a vast expanse, observing the struggles of every living soul in sight or imagined. The two Chinese characters Mao used for the word destiny are not 命運 (*mingyun*, directly translated as 'destiny' or 'fate') but are 浮 (*fu*, meaning 'float') and 沈 (*shen*, meaning 'sink').

SHANGHAI'S BAGHDADI JEWS

BY MAISIE J. MEYER

SUSIE GORDON

When considering Old Shanghai in all its many iterations, the presence of the city's Baghdadi Jewish denizens forms an integral part, from the business interests of the Kadoories and the Harpoons, to the boisterous social scene helmed by Sir Victor Sassoon, through to the more anonymous strivings of less-vaunted figures such as accountant Reuben Moalem and company clerk Moses Cohen.

In any conversation about this vibrant and far-reaching community, the work of Dr Maisie J. Meyer will no doubt be mentioned. Her *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Whangpoo: A Century of Sephardi Jewish Life in Shanghai* (University Press of America, 2003) is a go-to source, and her more recent tome, *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews* (Blacksmith Books, 2016), is a fine companion piece.

While *From the Rivers* charts the overall history of the community, *Shanghai's Baghdadi Jews* delves deeper into the lives of the individuals who made their mark.

Dr Meyer is generous with background material, providing a concise and highly valuable overview of the Baghdadi Jewish community of Shanghai from its origins (“if it were not for the pioneering foresight of David Sassoon and members of his family, the Jewish community in Shanghai might never have existed”) to its place within the British colonial context—the “pragmatic, or perhaps opportunistic, alignment with all-powerful imperial Britain”. She also considers the Baghdadis' links with other Jewish groups of the era—those at Kaifeng, and the Central and Eastern European Jews who sought refuge in Shanghai during the Second World War.

Meyer draws from a vast range of sources, which she explains in a short chapter devoted to her methodology. The biographical reflections themselves (27 in total) are treasure troves of detail and atmosphere. The majority are written by descendants and relatives of the figures in question. Interspersed with photographs, the book is a compelling compendium of Sephardi life and culture. “The robust Baghdadi Jewish identity,” Meyer writes, was “reinforced by religious traditions, kinship, common history, endogamy, close commercial ties and, not least, distinctive cuisine.”

One of the many joys of this book is its dual function both as a narrative to read from cover to cover, and as a resource to “dip into”. A masterful collation of research as well as an archive of biographical recordings, *Shanghai’s Baghdadi Jews* cements Dr Meyer’s position as a bona fide spokeswoman for this hugely interesting community.

CONTRIBUTORS

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LIN YUTANG (1895-1976) was a Chinese writer, translator, linguist, and inventor. His informal yet polished style in both Chinese and English made him one of the most influential writers of his generation, and his compilations and translations of classic Chinese texts into English were bestsellers in the West.

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